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THE GRANDEE

ARMANDO PALACIO VALDÉS

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Translated by Rachel Challice

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THE GRANDEE

ARMANDO PALACIO VALDÉS

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Edited by EDMUND GOSSE.

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THE GRANDEE

A NOVEL

BY

ARMANDO PALACIO VALDÉS

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH

BY

RACHEL CHALLICE

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LONDON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1894

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INTRODUCTION

According to the Spanish critics, the novel has flourished in Spain during only two epochs—the golden age of Cervantes and the period in which we are still living. That unbroken line of romance-writing which has existed for so long a time in France and in England, is not to be looked for in the Peninsula. The novel in Spain is a re-creation of our own days; but it has made, since the middle of the nineteenth century, two or three fresh starts. The first modern Spanish novelists were what are called the *walter-scottistas*, although they were inspired as much by George Sand as by the author of *Waverley*. These writers were of a romantic order, and Fernan Caballero, whose earliest novel dates from 1849, was

at their head. The Revolution of September, 1868, marked an advance in Spanish fiction, and Valera came forward as the leader of a more national and more healthily vitalised species of imaginative work. The pure and exquisite style of Valera is, doubtless, only to be appreciated by a Castilian. Something of its charm may be divined, however, even in the English translation of his masterpiece, *Pepita Jiménez*. The mystical and aristocratic genius of Valera appealed to a small audience; he has confided to the world that when all were praising but few were buying his books.

Far greater fecundity and a more directly successful appeal to the public, were, somewhat later, the characteristics of Perez y Galdos, whose vigorous novels, spoiled a little for a foreign reader by their didactic diffuseness, are well-known in this country. In the hands of Galdos, a further step was taken by Spanish fiction towards the rejection of romantic optimism and the adoption of a modified realism. In Pereda, so the Spanish critics tell us, a still more valiant champion of naturalism was found, whose studies of local manners in the province of Santander recall to mind the paintings of Teniers. About 1875 was the date when the struggle commenced in good earnest between the schools of romanticism and realism. In 1881 Galdos definitely joined the ranks of the realists with his *La Desheredada*. An eminent Spanish writer, Emilio Pardo Bazan, thus described the position some six years ago: "It is true that the battle is not a noisy one, and excites no great warlike ardour. The question is not taken up amongst us with the same heat as in France, and this from several causes. In the first place, the idealists with us do not walk in the clouds so much as they do in France, nor do the realists load their palette so heavily. Neither school exaggerates in order to distinguish itself from the other. Perhaps our public is indifferent to literature, especially to printed literature, for what is represented on the stage produces more impression."

This indifference of the Spanish reading public, which has led a living novelist to declare that a person of good position in Madrid would rather spend his money on fireworks or on oranges than on a book, has at length been in a measure dissipated by a writer who is not merely admired and distinguished, but positively popular, and who, without sacrificing style, has conquered the unwilling Spanish public. This is Armando Palacio Valdés, who was born on the 4th of October 1853, in a hamlet in the mountains of Asturias, called Entralgo, where his family possessed a country-house. The family spent only the summer there; the remainder of the year they passed in Avilés, the maritime town which Valdés describes under the name of Nieva in his novel *Marta y Maria*. He began

his education at Oviedo, the capital of Asturias. From this city he went, in 1870, up to Madrid to study the law as a profession. But even in the lawyer's office, his dream was to become a man of letters. His ambition took the form of obtaining at some university a chair of political economy, to which science he had, or fancied himself to have, at that time a great proclivity.

Before terminating his legal studies, the young man published several articles in the *Revista Europea* on philosophical and religious questions. These articles attracted the attention of the proprietor of that review, and Valdés presently joined the staff. In 1874 he became editor. He was at the head of the *Revista Europea*, at that time the most important periodical in Spain from a scientific point of view, for several years. During that time he published the main part of those articles of literary criticism, particularly on contemporary poets and novelists, which have since been collected in several volumes—*Los Oradores del Ateneo*, ("The Orators of the Athenæum"); *Los Novelistas Españoles* ("The Spanish Novelists"); *Un Nuevo Viaje al Parnaso* ("A New Journey to Parnassus"), sketches of the living poets of Spain; and, in particular, a very bright collection of review articles published in conjunction with Leopoldo Alas, *La Literatura en 1881* ("Spanish Literature in 1881"). These gave Valdés a foremost rank among the critics of the day. He wrote no more criticism, or very little; he determined to place himself amongst those whose creative work demands the careful consideration of the best judges.

Soon after he took the direction of the *Revista*, Valdés wrote his first novel, *El Señorito Octavio*, which was not published until 1881. In 1883 he brought out his *Marta y Maria*, a book which, I know not why, is called "The Marquis of Peñalta" in its English version. This novel enjoyed an extraordinary success, and had more of the graphic and sprightly manner by which Valdés has since been distinguished, than the books which immediately followed it. Spanish critics, indeed, remembering the wonderful freshness of *Marta y Maria*, still often speak of it as the best of Valdés' stories. In this same year, 1883, he married, at the seaside town of Gijon, in Asturias, on the day when he completed his thirty years, a young lady of sixteen. His marriage was a honeymoon of a year and a half, of which *El Idilio de un Enfermo* ("The Idyll of an Invalid"), a short novel of 1884, portrays the earlier portion. His wife died early in 1885, leaving him with an infant son to be, as he says, "my allusion and my fascination." His subsequent career has been laborious and systematic. He has published one novel almost every year. In 1885 it was *José*, a shorter tale of sea-faring life on the stormy coast of the author's native province. About the same time appeared a

collection of short stories, called *Aguas Fuertes* ("Strong Waters").

It was not until 1886, however, that Valdés began to rank among the foremost novelists of Europe. In that year he published his great story, *Riverita*, one of the characters in which, a charming child, became the heroine of his next book, *Maximina*, 1887. Of this character he writes to me: "My Maximina in these two books is but a pale reflection of that being from whom Providence parted me before she was eighteen years of age. In these novels I have painted a great part of my life." A Sevillian novice, who has helped to care for Maximina in Madrid, reigns supreme in a succeeding novel, *La Hermana San Sulpicio* ("Sister San Sulpicio"), 1889. But between these two last there comes a massive novel, describing the adventures of a journalist who founds a newspaper in the provincial town of Sarrió, by which Gijón seems to be intended. This book is called *El Cuarto Poder* ("The Fourth Power"), and was published in 1888. To these, in 1891, was added *La Espuma* ("Froth"), of which a translation has already appeared in the "International Library." In 1892 Valdés published *La Fé* ("Faith").

In *La Espuma*, his best-known novel, Valdés reverted from those country scenes and those streets of provincial cities which he had hitherto loved best to paint, and gave us a sternly satiric picture of the frothy surface of fashionable life in Madrid. From the illusions of the poor, pathetic and often beautiful, he turned to the ugly cynicism of the wealthy. With his passion for honesty and simplicity, his heart burned within him at the parade and hollowness which he detected in aristocratic and bureaucratic Madrid. One conceives that, like his own Raimundo, he was invited to enter it, took his fill of its pleasures, and found his mouth filled with ashes. His talent for portraiture was never better employed. If he was occasionally tempted to commit the peculiarly Spanish fault of exaggeration—scarcely a fault there, where the shadows are so black and the colours so flaring—he resisted it in his more important characters. The brutality of the Duke de Requena, the sagacity and urbanity of Father Ortega, the saintly sweetness of the Duchess, the naïveté of Raimundo, the sphinx-like charm of Clementina de Osorio, with her mysterious sweetness and duplicity, these are among the salient points of characterisation which stand out in this powerful book. *La Espuma* was a cry from the desert to those who wear soft raiment in king's palaces. It was the ruthless tearing aside of the conventions by a Knox or a Savonarola. It was stringent satire, yet tempered with an artist's moderation, with a naturalist's self-suppression.

The latest novel which Valdés has published is that which we here present

under the title of *The Grandee* ("El Maestrante"). Here, as it will be seen, the author is no longer engaged in the jarring notes of satire, but, with more lightness and a greater effusion of humour, he dissects the quaint elements which make up old-fashioned society in a provincial city of Spain. This is one of those books which peculiarly appeal to the foreign reader who desires to enter into a phase of life from which his own experience absolutely excludes him. We may suppose that a limited number of Englishmen can penetrate to the palaces and the club-rooms of Madrid, and see something, however superficially, of the life described in *Froth*. But the grim and ancient mansions which look down through ancient mullioned windows on the narrow streets of such a town as is brought before us in *The Grandee*—what can the most privileged Englishman possibly know of the manners and customs of their stately inhabitants?

In the second half of the book, the gaiety and grotesqueness of the pictures of life sink before the solemnity of the terrible and tragic corruption of Amalia, and the martyrdom of Josefina. The last pages of *The Grandee* are, indeed, tinged with almost intolerable gloom, and in a society comparatively so civilised as our own, the revenge of the unnatural mother may seem almost overdrawn. The author contends, however, that in the cryptic and cloistered provincial life which he describes, where the light of censure can hardly reach a powerful criminal, such wickedness as is perpetrated upon Josefina is neither improbable nor unprecedented. Nor do the reports of Mr. Benjamin Waugh permit us to question that such horrors are daily committed at our own doors. Whether these maladies of the soul are or are not fit subjects for the art of the novelist is a question which every reader must answer for himself.

In the pages of *The Grandee* we have a singular transcript of Spanish pride and picturesqueness, of a narrow society absolutely fortified against public opinion by its ancient prejudices, a society, nevertheless, in which the primitive passions of humanity stir and interact with as much dangerous vivacity as in freer and more democratic conditions. I may perhaps mention, on the authority of the author, that by Lancia Valdés intends us to understand Oviedo, the capital of the province of Asturias, where he spent many years of his childhood and early youth. The story opens between thirty and forty years ago, and represents Oviedo and its social customs at an epoch a little earlier than the time when the novelist was forming his freshest and most vivid impressions of life.

Of the author of so many interesting books but little has yet been told to the public. In a private letter to myself, the eminent novelist gives a brief sketch of his mode of life, so interesting that I have secured his permission to translate and

print it here:—"Since my wife died," Señor Valdés writes, "my life has continued to be tranquil and melancholy, dedicated to work and to my son. During the winters, I live in Asturias, and during the summers, in Madrid. I like the company of men of the world better than that of literary folks, because the former teach me more. I am given up to the study of metaphysics. I have a passion for physical exercises, for gymnastics, for fencing, and I try to live in an evenly-balanced temper, nothing being so repugnant to me as affectation and emphasis. I find a good deal of pleasure in going to bull-fights (although I do not take my son to the Plaza dressed up like a miniature *torero*, as an American writer declares I do), and I cultivate the theatre, because to see life from the stage point of view helps me in the composition of my stories."

EDMUND GOSSE.

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THE GRANDEE

CHAPTER I

THE GRANDEE'S HOUSE

IT was ten o'clock at night, an hour when the number of those who frequented the streets of the noble city of Lancia was always of the scantiest, but in the depth of winter, when our story opens, with a bitter north-east wind and drenching rain, one would find it difficult to stumble upon a living soul. Not that all had surrendered themselves into the arms of Morpheus, for Lancia as capital of a province, albeit not one of the most important, had learnt to sit up late. But the people used to resort at an early hour to parties, whence they only sallied forth to supper and to bed at eleven o'clock. At that hour many noisy groups could be seen passing along under the shelter of umbrellas, the ladies enveloped in warm woollen cloaks, holding up their petticoats, and the gentlemen all wrapped in their cloaks, or *montecristos*, with their trousers well turned up, breaking the silence of the night by the loud clack of their wooden shoes. For at the time of which we speak there were few that despised this comfortable shoe of the country, unless it were some new-fledged medical student from Valladolid, who considered himself above such old-fashioned things, or some fanciful young lady, who pretended that she could not walk in them. But these were the exceptions. There were no carriages in the town, for only three existed in the place, belonging respectively to the Quiñones, the Countess of Onis, and to Estrada-Rosa; the last-mentioned being the only one that did not date from the middle of the last century. When either of these conveyances appeared in the street, it was followed by a crowd of little urchins, whose enthusiasm at the sight knew no bounds. The neighbours inside their houses could tell by the sound of the wheels, and the clink of the horseshoes to which of the above-mentioned

magnates the carriage belonged. They were in fact three venerated institutions which the natives of the city had learnt to love and respect. So umbrellas and wooden shoes were the only protections against the rain that falls more than three parts of the year. India-rubber shoes came in later, as well as hooded waterproofs, which at certain times transform Lancia into a vast community of Carthusian friars.

The wind blew stronger at the crossing of Santa Barbara than in any other part of the town. This uncovered passage, between the bishop's palace and the walls of a courtyard of the cathedral, just by the chain which regulates the lightning conductor, leads finally under an archway, a murky corner where the blast, confined within a narrow space, howls and moans on such infernal nights as this.

A man, muffled up to the eyes, crossed with rapid steps the little square in front of the archbishop's house, and entered this recess. The force of the hurricane stopped him, and the rain penetrating between the collar of his coat and the brim of his hat, almost blinded him. He made a few seconds' stand against the violence of the whirlwind, and then, instead of uttering any exclamation of impatience, which would have been more than excusable under the circumstances, he merely gave vent to a long-drawn sigh of distress:

"Oh! my Jesus! what a night!"

He cowered up against the wall, and when the wind had somewhat abated, he resumed his course. Passing under the archway that connects the palace with the cathedral, he entered the widest and best-lighted part of the passage. An oil-lamp fixed in the corner served as its only light. The wretched thing, seconded by a tinfoil reflector placed at the back, made ineffectual attempts to pierce the gloom of the farthest corners.

Ten yards off nobody would have thought it was there, and yet to our muffled traveller it must have seemed an Edison lamp of ten thousand candle-power, from the way he drew his coat-collar higher about his face, and from the haste in which he avoided the pavement, and crept along by the wall where the shadows were deepest. In this way he arrived at the Calle de Santa Lucia, cast a rapid glance around him, and renewed his course on the darkest side of the way. Although one of the most central streets, the Calle de Santa Lucia is solitary to an extreme. It is closed at one end by the base of the tower of the cathedral, a graceful, elegant structure like few to be found in Spain, and so it is only used as a thoroughfare by canons going to the choir, or devotees on their way to early

Mass. In this short, straight, narrow street, the palace of Quiñones de Leon was situated—a large, dreary, uninteresting-looking building with projecting iron balconies. It was two storeys high, and over the central balcony there was an enormous roughly carved shield, supported by two griffins in high relief, as rudely carved as the quarterings.

One side of the house looked on to a little, damp, melancholy, neglected garden, enclosed by a wall of regular elevation; and the other on to a dull, even damper, narrow street which ran between the house and the black, discoloured wall of the church of San Rafael. To pass from the palace to the church, where the Quiñones had a private pew, was a little gallery, or covered way, smaller, but similar to that of the archbishop, over the passage of Santa Barbara.

By the bright light shining from the crevice of a half-opened window on the balcony, it was evident that the people of the house had not yet retired to rest. And if the light were not sufficient proof, the fact was confirmed by the strains of a piano heard occasionally above the roar of the storm.

Our muffled friend, with a rapid step, keeping as much in shadow as possible, arrived at the door of the palace. There he stopped again, cast a furtive glance down both sides of the street, and entered the portico. It was large, and paved with stones like the street; the bare, discoloured, whitewashed walls were dimly illumined by an oil-lamp hung from the centre. The man quickly crossed it, and before pulling the bell-cord, placed his ear to the door, and listened long and attentively. Convinced that nobody was descending the staircase, he gave one more look down the street. At last he decided to undo his cloak, and drew from under its folds a bundle, which he placed with a trembling hand near the door. It was a basket, covered with a woman's mantle, which hid the contents from view, although they could be pretty well guessed, for from the time of Moses, mysterious baskets seem destined for the consignment of infants.

The man, being now free of his burthen, pulled the bell-cord three times, and the door was immediately opened from above by means of another cord. The three pulls of the bell showed that the visitor to the aristocratic mansion of the Quiñones was a nobleman on a par with the Señores. This was an old-established custom of unknown origin. A menial, a servant, an inferior in any degree, only rang once, ordinary visitors rang twice, and the half dozen, or more, persons that the important Señor of Quiñones considered his equals in Lancia, rang three times. If those in the town, who had never been admitted to the sacred precincts of the mansion, joked with the habitués of the place on the subject, their

witticisms fell flat; but even if the shafts did go home, the feudal custom was so universally respected, that none but the privileged few dared to give the three signals pertaining to the highest rank. Paco Gomez once ventured to break the rule for a joke, but he was received so coldly when he entered the drawing-room that he never cared to repeat the experiment.

So the man of the basket entered quickly, shut the door, crossed the hall, and ascended the wide stone staircase, where holes, worn by long use, retained the damp.

When he reached the first floor, a servant approached to take his hat and cloak; so without further delay, and as if avoiding pursuit, he darted with hasty stride towards the drawing-room door, and opened it. The light of the chandelier and candelabra dazzled him for a moment. He was a tall powerful man, between thirty and thirty-two years of age, with a pleasant expression of countenance and regular features, short hair, and a long, silky beard of reddish hue. His face was pale, and betrayed extreme anxiety. On raising his eyes, which the excessive brightness of the room at first obliged him to lower, he turned them on the lady of the house, who was seated in an armchair. She, on her side, cast an inquiring anxious look at him, and the glance caused him a shock which gave instantaneous repose to his face like the neutralisation of two equal forces.

The gentleman remained at the door waiting for five or six couples, who were pirouetting to the strains of a waltz, to pass him, whilst his pale lips wreathed into a smile as sweet as it was sad.

"What an evening! We did not think you would be here so soon," exclaimed the lady as she gave him her delicate nervous hand, which contracted three or four times with intense emotion as it came in contact with his.

She was a woman of about twenty-eight or thirty years of age, diminutive in stature, with a pale, expressive face, very black eyes and hair, small mouth, and delicate aquiline nose.

"How are you, Amalia?" said the gentleman, without replying to her remark, and trying to hide under a smile the anxiety which, in spite of himself, the trembling of his voice betrayed.

"I am better, thank you."

"Is not this noise bad for you?"

"No; I was bored to death in bed. Besides, I did not wish to deprive the young people of the one enjoyment they can get occasionally at Lancia."

"Thank you, Amalia," exclaimed a young lady who was dancing and overheard the last remark, and Amalia responded by a kind smile.

Another couple from behind then knocked against the gentleman, who was still standing.

"Always devoted, Luis!"

"To no one more than yourself, Maria," replied the young man, affecting to hide his embarrassment under a laugh.

"Are you sure that I am the only one?" she asked with a mischievous glance at the partner who held her in his arms.

Maria Josefa Hevia was at least forty, and she had been almost as ugly at fifteen. As her means were not equal to her weight, no one had dared redeem her from the purgatory of solitude. Until quite lately she still entertained hopes that one of the elderly Indian bachelors, who came to pass their declining years in Lancia, would ask her hand in marriage; and these hopes were founded on the fact that these gentlemen frequently contracted alliances with the daughters of distinguished people in the place, portionless as they generally were.

On her father's side, Maria Josefa was connected with one of the oldest families, being related to the Señor of Quiñones, in whose house we now are.

But her father was dead, and she lived with her mother, a woman of low degree, who had been a cook before marrying her master. Either for this reason, or on account of the indisputable ugliness of her face, the Indians fought shy of her; although her exaggerated idea of her position exacted a certain respect in society. Her face was hideous, with irregular features, marked with erysipelas, and disfigured by red patches about the nostrils. She only retained one feminine taste, and that was for dancing, which was a real passion with her; and she felt it dreadfully when she was left a wallflower by the careless young men of Lancia. But, possessing a sharp tongue, she revenged herself so cleverly on both sexes when thus neglected, that the majority of the youths willingly sacrificed one dance on the programme to her at all the balls; and when they failed to do so, the girls would remind them of their duty, so great was their fear of the spiteful old maid. Thus, by dint of the wholesome terror she inspired, she danced as much as

the greatest beauty in Lancia.

She was conscious of the reason of her success, and however humiliated she might be in the depths of her heart, she did not fail to make use of the power, as she considered it the lesser evil of the two.

Witty and malicious, she was particularly alive to a sense of the ridiculous in things, and whilst not lacking in the power of narration, she was, moreover, endowed with the peculiar knack of wounding everybody to the quick when she had a mind to.

"Has the count come yet?" asked a sharp voice from the next room, which made itself heard above the sounds of the piano, and the feet of the dancers.

"Yes, here I am, Don Pedro; I am coming."

Whereupon the count made a step towards the door, without removing his eye from the pallid-looking lady; and she riveted another steady gaze upon him, which conveyed the impression of a question. He just closed his eyes in affirmatory reply, and passed on to the next apartment, which, like the drawing-room, was furnished without any regard for luxury.

The highest nobility of Lancia despised all the refinements of decoration so usual nowadays. They scorned every innovation both within and without their dwellings; and this not from feelings of avarice, but from the inborn conviction that their superiority consisted less in the richness and splendour of their houses, than in the seal of ancient respectability.

The furniture was old and shabby, and the carpets and curtains were faded; but the master paid little heed to such matters. Indeed, Don Pedro Quiñones showed an indifference, bordering upon eccentricity, on the point. Neither the entreaties of his wife, nor the remarks which some bolder spirit, like Paco Gomez, who was always ready to be facetious, dared to make, ever induced him to call in the painters and upholsterers.

With regard to size, the drawing-room was superb, being both lofty and spacious, and including all the windows of the Calle de Santa Lucia, with the exception of that of the library. The chairs were antique, not a mere imitation of those of bygone ages, as is now the mode, but made in times past, according to the fashion of the period, and covered with green velvet, worn old by time. In many places the floor was visible through the holes in the carpet. The walls were

covered with magnificent tapestries, which constituted the one adornment of the house, for Don Pedro had a very valuable collection; but he only exhibited it once a year, when the balconies were draped on the day of Corpus Christi. It was said that an Englishman once offered a million pesetas^[A] for their possession.

The count had also several very valuable pictures, but they were so discoloured by time that, if not restored before long by some skilful hand, they seemed likely to disappear altogether. The only new thing in the drawing-room was the piano, bought three years ago, soon after the second marriage of Don Pedro.

The library, also of large dimensions, with a window looking on to the Calle de Santa Lucia, and two on to the garden, was furnished still worse. It had heavy damask curtains, two mahogany presses without mirrors, a sofa upholstered with silk, a few leather chairs, a round table in the centre, and some seats to match the sofa, all old and shabby.

Seated round the table, lighted by an enormous oil-lamp, were three gentlemen playing at tresillo.^[B]

The master of the house was one of them. He was between forty-six and forty-eight years of age. For the last three years he had been quite unable to move from the effects of an apoplectic stroke, which left him with both legs paralysed. He was stout, with a red face, and strong well-marked features; his thick curly hair and beard were streaked with grey, and he had keen, piercing black eyes. His face was remarkable for an expression of pride and fierceness, which the kind smile with which he received the Conde de Onis could not entirely hide. He was sitting, or rather reclining, in an armchair constructed especially for facilitating the movement of his body and arms; and it was placed sideways at the table, so that he could play, and keep his legs raised up meanwhile. Although there were logs burning on the hearth, he had a grey cloak round his shoulders, fastened at the throat with a gold clasp. Embroidered on the left-hand side was the large red cross of the order of Calatrava.^[C] The Señor of Quiñones was rarely seen without this cloak, which afforded him a fantastic, somewhat theatrical, appearance. He had always been eccentric in his dress. His pride impelled him to try and distinguish himself from the vulgar in every way. On ordinary occasions he wore a buttoned-up frock-coat, a high-crowned, wide-brimmed hat, and his hair was long, like that of a cavalier of the seventeenth century, whilst his clothes were generally of velvet or velveteen, with riding-boots of a fashion beyond all recollection, and his wide shirt-collars were turned back over his waistcoat in imitation of the Walloon style. There never was a man

prouder of his high degree, nor more retentive of the privileges enjoyed by those of his rank in times gone by. People grumbled at his eccentricities, and many turned them to ridicule, for Lancia is a place not wanting in a sense of humour. But, as usual, unbending pride had ended by making an impression. Those who were the first to joke at Don Pedro's peculiarities, were those who were the most punctiliously respectful in doffing their hats when he appeared almost half a mile off. He had lived some years at Court, but he did not strike root there. He was one of the gentlemen in office, and curiously jealous of every prerogative and distinction due to his fortune and birth. But there was no satisfying a heart so corroded with arrogance, and he bitterly resented the amalgamation of people of birth with those of money. The respect afforded to politicians, which he in his position also had to accede to, perfectly enraged him. Was a son of a nobody, a common fellow, to take precedence of him, and merely give an indifferent or disdainful glance at him?—at him, the descendant of the proud Counts of Castille! Not being able to put up with such a state of things, he resigned his appointment, and took up his abode again in the old-world palace in which we now are. His pride, or maybe his eccentric character, made the rich bachelor at this time of his life do a thousand odd and ridiculous things, to the great astonishment of the town until it became accustomed to him. Don Pedro never went out in the street without being accompanied by a servant, or majordomo, a rough sort of man who wore the costume of the peasants of the country, which consisted of short breeches, woollen stockings, a green cloth jacket, and a wide-brimmed hat. And he not only went out with Manin (he was universally known by this name), but he also took him to the theatre with him. It was a sight to see these two in one of the best boxes: the master stiff and decorous, with his eyes roaming carelessly round; whilst the servant sat with his bearded chin resting on his hands, which clasped the balustrade, staring fixedly at the stage, occasionally giving vent to loud guffaws of laughter, scratching his head, or yawning loudly in the middle of a silence.

Manin soon became a regular institution.

Don Pedro, who scarcely deigned to converse with the wealthiest people of Lancia, talked familiarly with this servant, and allowed him to contradict him in the rude rough way peculiarly his own.

"Manin, man, be careful not to give these ladies too much trouble," he would say to the majordomo when they entered some shop together.

"All right," returned the rough fellow in a loud voice, "if they want to be at

their ease, let them bring a mattress from home and recline upon it."

Don Pedro would then bite his lips to keep from laughing, for such coarse and brutal remarks were just to his taste.

When they repaired to a café, Manin drank quarts of red wine, whilst his master only sipped a glass of muscat. But although he left it almost full, he always asked and paid for a whole bottle.

An apothecary of the place, with whom the count sometimes condescended to have a chat, once evinced some surprise at this extravagance, but he returned with chilly arrogance:

"I pay for a whole bottle because I think it would be unseemly for Don Pedro Quiñones de Leon to ask for a glass like some ink-stained clerk in a government office."

The whole town was impressed with his manners, for when he met any clerics in the streets, he kissed their hands in accordance with the custom of noblemen of bygone centuries. But, like all the rest of his ways, this respect was nothing but a wish to appear different to other people, and to show that he belonged to the old *régime*; because, although he kissed the hand of his own chaplain in public, he treated him like a servant in private, and, in fact, accorded him far less consideration than he did Manin.

But what most astonished the place, and gave rise to no end of remarks and jokes, was what Don Pedro did with a certain religious solemnity soon after his arrival from Madrid. He appeared at church in the white uniform trimmed with twisted cords pertaining to the office of *Maestrante de Ronda*.

Just before the elevation of the Host at the Mass, he advanced with a solemn step to the empty space in the centre of the edifice, unsheathed his sword, and made sharp, firm passes in the air, in the direction of the four cardinal points. The women were frightened, the children ran away, and the majority of the congregation thought he had suddenly gone out of his mind. But those who were better informed, and more intellectual, understood that it was meant to be a symbolical ceremony, and that those thrusts in the air signified Don Pedro's resolution, as a noble member of a military Order, to fight all the enemies of the faith from every quarter of the globe. The one little periodical published at that time in Lancia (now there are eleven—six dailies, and five weeklies) devoted a whole page to a humorous account of this event.

But in spite of the eccentricities of his public and private life, the prestige enjoyed by the illustrious nobleman in the town was by no means affected.

He, who in perfect good faith considers himself superior to those about him, is in no danger of humiliation. In spite of his affectations, Don Pedro was a man of culture, fond of literature, and endowed with a taste for poetry. He had been known occasionally to celebrate events pertaining to the kingdom, or the royal family in several stanzas of a classic, somewhat pompous, style. But although people had tried to persuade him to publish them, he never would consent to do so.

Periodicals were one of his particular aversions, for he considered them a sign of the democracy of the times. So he preferred to keep his poems in manuscript, known only to a select circle of friends.

He also had a reputation as a man of valour. He had fought a few duels in Madrid, and in Lancia he had one with a certain political chief, sent by the progressionists to the province through the intervention of the archbishop and Chapter of the cathedral. When he was about forty years of age, our friend married a lady of position who lived in Sarrió. But his wife died within the year, just when he had hopes of an heir to his name and estates. Three years after, he contracted another marriage—this time with Amalia, a Valencian lady, who was a connection of his. They scarcely knew each other, for Don Pedro had not seen her since she was fourteen. The alliance formed ten years later was arranged by letters, and an interchange of photographs. There was no doubt that the bride's will was coerced in the matter, and it was said that for many months she had a separate room to her husband. And the story was told in Lancia, with no lack of detail, how Don Pedro, in pursuance of a canon's advice, managed to overcome these scruples. But in spite of the success of the suggestion of the church dignitary, and the subsequent concession of conjugal rights, Heaven did not see fit to bless the union.

Not long after, Don Pedro was seized with the dreadful apoplectic attack which paralysed the whole of the lower part of his body, and the poor man was much tempted to curse his affliction, although no doubt it was ordered for the best.

"We are in want of a fourth," he said, warmly shaking hands with the count.

"Yes, yes, and we will see if the luck will change, for Moro is winning all our money," said a little old man with a strong Galician accent. He had a fresh, clean-shaven, round face, white hair, and clear, kind eyes. His name was Saleta,

and he was a magistrate of the Court of Justice, and a constant visitor at the Quiñones' house.

"Not so much as that, Señor Saleta, not so much! I have only two hundred counters, and I want three hundred to make up for what I lost yesterday," returned the man referred to, who was a youth with a genial frank expression of countenance.

"And why did you not call upon Manin?" asked the count with a smile as he glanced at the celebrated majordomo, who in his short breeches, woollen stockings, and green cloth jacket, was sleeping in an armchair.

The other three turned and looked at the man.

"Because Manin is a brute who can play at nothing but *brisca*,"[A] said Don Pedro, smiling.

"And at *tute*,"[A] returned the fellow, opening his mouth and yawning loudly.

"All right, and at *tute*."[A]

"And at *monte*."[A]

"Very well, man, and at *monte*, too."

And the friends went on with their cards without paying further attention to Manin, but presently he began again by saying:

"And at *parar*." [A]

"And at *parar*, too?" asked the count in a joking tone.

"Yes, señor, and at *los siete y media*."[D]

"Get along!" said the other, absently, as he opened his hand of cards and examined it attentively.

Then they went on playing with much interest, absorbed and silent. But the majordomo interrupted them again by saying:

"And at *julepe*."

"All right, Manin, be quiet and don't be a fool," said Don Pedro, crossly.

"Fool, fool," muttered the peasant, surlily; "there are a good many fools about,

but as they have money there is no one to call them so."

He then re-settled his broad shoulders in the seat, stretched out his legs, closed his eyes, and began to snore.

The players turned their eyes on Don Pedro in surprise, and some anxiety.

The master looked wrathfully at his majordomo; but seeing him in such a comfortable position he changed his mind, and, shrugging his shoulders, he turned his attention to his cards, merely remarking with a pleasant smile:

"What a barbarian! He is a regular Sueve."

"But, Señor Quiñones," said Saleta, "the Suevi only settled in Galicia. You are nothing but Cantabrians, and I have reason to know it."

"What! you have reason to know it!" said a gentleman who was not very old, for he would have passed for fifty, who came in at that moment.

It was Don Enrique Valero, also a magistrate of the Court, a man of an agreeable presence, with a fine expressive face, albeit somewhat marked by the fast life he had lived. As shown by his strong accent, which was mincing and lisping, he was Andalusian, of the province of Malaga.

"I don't quite know that," returned Saleta, calmly, "but I perfectly well know the history of my country, and the particulars regarding my family."

"And why do you mention your family in connection with the Suevi, my friend?"

"Because, according to various documents preserved in my ancestral archives, my family is descended from one of those brave commanders, who penetrated Pontevedra at the time of the invasion."

The players exchanged an amused smile of intelligence with Valero.

"Ah!" exclaimed the latter between amusement and irritation, "so my friend is a Sueve like a cathedral! Who would have thought it to see him so dwarfish and so small!"

"Yes, señor," said the other, speaking with firmness and deliberation as if he had not heard the last remark. "The captain to whom our family owes its origin was named Rechila. He was a man of ferocious and bloodthirsty presence, a

great conqueror, who extended his dominions immensely, and, from what I understand, his expeditions took him as far as Estremadura. One day, when I was a child, a crown was found buried in the foundations of the old chapel of our house."

"Really, my man, really!" exclaimed Valero, looking at him with such comic indignation that all the others burst out laughing.

But Saleta, quite unperturbed, went on to describe the treasure-trove, its form, weight, and all its embellishments, without omitting a single detail.

And Valero, without taking his eyes off him, continued shaking his head with increasing irritation.

The same thing went on every night. His colleague's unblushing lying propensity aroused in the magistrate an indignation that was sometimes real, and sometimes feigned. It was so seldom that a Galician dared to boast and exaggerate before an Andalusian, that he, wounded in his *amour propre* and respect for his country, sometimes wondered whether Saleta was a fool, or whether he considered his audience as such.

Really the magistrate of Pontevedra lied with so much ease, and in such a serious way, that it became a question whether he was an artful rogue, who delighted to upset his friends.

"Did you say that this ancestor of yours got to Estremadura?" asked Valero at last in a decided tone.

"Yes, Señor."

"Then it seems to me you make a mistake, for this Señor Renchila——"

"Rechila."

"Well, this Rechila got farther still, for he got as far as the province of Malaga; but there a company of Vandals went out to meet him: the leader was one of my ancestors. His name is difficult to recollect—wait a bit, he was called Matalaoza. Well, then, this Matalaoza, who was a rough, brave sort of fellow, completely routed him, took him prisoner, and kept him drawing water from a well till his death. And a piece of the machine is still to be seen in the cellar of our house."

Don Pedro, Jaime Moro, and the Conde de Onis stopped playing, and roared

with laughter.

"It cannot be so. Rechila never went farther than Merida, which he took after a short siege," said Saleta, not one whit put out.

"Excuse me, friend, in the archives of my house there are documents which show that this Señor Renchila took a company of soldiers through the province of Malaga, and that the Señor Matalaoza, my grandfather on my mother's side, prevented his advancing any farther."

"Excuse me, friend Valero, but it seems to me you are in error. This Rechila must be another one; there were many Rechilas among the Suevi."

"No, sir, no, the Rechila that my ancestor conquered was an ancestor of yours; I am certain of it. He came from the province of Pontevedra; that was clear from his accent."

These remarks were made with great gravity, and the players were more and more amused. As Saleta was accustomed to his companion's chaff, he was not the least put out, neither would he modify any of his boasting assertions. The man was perfectly shameless in the way he invented lies and then stuck to them.

When he saw it was useless to discuss the matter farther, he turned his attention to the game, and the others did the same, although they could not repress an occasional chuckle of amusement.

Jaime Moro went on winning, and he was cheerful and talkative, making tedious remarks at every turn of the game. He was a good-looking young fellow, with a short black beard, regular features, large expressionless eyes, and a delicate pink complexion. His father, who had been parochial administrator of the province, had died the previous year, leaving him an income, according to report, of between 70,000 and 80,000 reales,^[E] and this money gave him a certain position in the place. Needless to say, he was considered a prize in the matrimonial market, and he was the golden dream, and the ideal of the girls, who contemplated marriage; but unfortunately Moro was little attracted by the opposite sex. He liked Mercury much better than Venus; and indeed he was so fond of every kind of game, that one might almost say he was born to play, for his whole life was devoted to it.

He lived alone with his housekeeper, man-servant, and cook. He got up between ten and eleven in the morning, and after making his toilette he repaired

to the confectioner's shop of Doña Romana, where he found congenial spirits, who told him all the current gossip of the place, and when this was exhausted, he withdrew to the dark, greasy-looking little room, pervaded by an overpowering smell of pastry, at the back of the shop, and there seating himself at a table, which matched its surroundings in dinginess, he indulged in a glass of sherry, and a game of dominoes with Don Baltasar Reinoso, who was one of the many who lived in Lancia on an income of four or five thousand pesetas. At three o'clock he repaired to the Mercantile Club, where, with three of the Indians, who formed the nucleus of that social gathering, he indulged in the classic game of *chapo*^[F] until five o'clock, when, if we went to the house of the dean of the cathedral, we should come across this gentleman enjoying his daily game of *tresillo* with the dignitary of the church, and the rector of San Rafael. When the *chapo* went on longer than usual, an acolyte appeared at the club to tell him that his friends were waiting. Then Moro hastened to give the three or four final strokes, the boy, between them, helping him on with his coat to save time; then, after paying or receiving the balance of his account with trembling hands, he ran in breathless haste to the house of the dean. There the *tresillo* lasted till eight o'clock. Then home to supper. At nine he repaired to Don Pedro Quiñone's house to spend an hour or two in the same sort of way, and if he did not go there, he went to Don Juan Estrada-Rosa's for the same thing; and at twelve to the Casino, where a few night-birds met for a game of *monte*, or lottery. Finally Jaime Moro retired to rest at two or three in the morning, quite tired out with such a hard day's work, to wake to another exactly the same.

It must not be thought that he was a covetous young man, for the whole town knew, and lauded his liberality. He was not incited to play by a passion for gain, but by a devotion to the pastime, which extinguished all better feelings.

His was an excessively active temperament, without the intelligence or the wish for any serious aim in life. In his short moments of idleness he looked like a quiet, careless, lymphatic man, but directly he had the cards, billiard-cue, or dominoes in his hand, he evinced an interest which utterly changed his expression, as his eyes brightened and his hands showed more power.

He was a universal favourite, and there never was a man more suave and gentle in manner. He was never heard to speak ill of anybody, and those who see only the dark side of things and the weak point of people's characters, said that he never grumbled because he did not know how to, and that he was as good as he was, because he could not be otherwise. But there must always be some perverse fools!

However, Moro had one fault, begotten of his playing propensity, he considered he was invincible in every game. It could not be denied that he was a great expert at them, but there is a great difference between that, and being utterly unrivalled, which was the case with Moro. This gave rise to those tedious, eternal commentaries, which seasoned every game, until they became quite a byword in Lancia.

When, after making a stroke on the billiard-table, the balls did not go as he wanted, he struck his head in despair:

"A little less ball and mine would have gone into the pocket! But I was obliged to strike well on the ball so that the red ball should go down, because if the ball does not go down, you know how it would be."

If things went according to his ideas, he did not mind how much he lost; the money was nothing to him as long as he saved his professional honour. He talked unceasingly, making a running commentary upon every stroke he made; and he went on just the same at cards. However, he never blamed his companions, or lost his temper when his plan of action was defeated. He certainly talked incessantly, but it was always to explain or to palliate some point in the game, and the eternal repetitions, delivered in the same eloquent and persuasive tone, provoked a smile from the onlookers.

"If I had only had a king then! If I had but had another trump! I did not dare give the lead because I thought that Don Pedro—Why could not this three of hearts have been three of diamonds? With the deuce of spades this trick was once got."

He was a noisy fellow, but very polite and kind.

"I say, it is your play now, is it not?" said Valero to our friend as he looked over the players' shoulders and had a glance at their cards.

"Do you think that can be done?" said Moro, vacillating.

"Yes, I think so."

"There is too little of this and not enough of that," returned Moro, discreetly pointing at the cards with his finger.

"Nevertheless, nevertheless, I think——"

"Well, well, let us play," replied Moro, with his usual politeness.

That game was lost. Moro gave a look at his companions, and shrugged his shoulders; then as Valero turned away, he said in a low tone:

"I did not want to vex Don Enrique, but I knew that that play could not win."

And having thus vindicated his reputation, he was as pleased as if he had won the game.

The Conde de Onis seemed absent when he came in, and as time went on, he became more and more thoughtful and gloomy; and he played so carelessly that his friends called him to book several times.

"But, Conde, what has come to you?" said Don Pedro, at last, "you seem so very preoccupied."

"Yes, you have actually trumped my trick," added Valero, in distress.

Seeing himself thus taken to task, the count looked as confused as if his companions had read his thoughts.

"Nothing particular is the matter with me," he replied; and taking refuge in an innocent excuse, he added, "I am only suffering from toothache."

"So the poor fellow is ill!" said Valero.

Whereupon they all began pitying him, and asking him particulars about his complaint.

The count being now at his wit's end, answered the questions at random.

"Well, for that pain, Señor Conde," said Saleta, "there is no finer remedy than iron. You will find that it is so. When I was a student I suffered dreadfully from my teeth. I never dared have one drawn, but the landlord I had in Santiago told me the best thing to do was to take a thread, and tie one end to the tooth, and the other to the back of the chair, so that it was gradually drawn out without any pain. I sat myself in a chair, and when the tooth was well tied I got up from the chair and left it hanging behind me. You see I had nothing to do but jump up."

Valero shook his head in despair, and the others looked at him and smiled. But Saleta did not notice, or pretended not to notice it, and continued his story in the quiet matter-of-fact way and the strong Galician accent peculiar to him.

"Afterwards I quite overcame my fear of tooth-drawing. The dentist of Corunna extracted five, one after the other; and when I was judge at Allariz I was in dreadful pain, and as there was no dentist the *Promotor*^[G] pulled out three for me with his wife's curling tongs; but do you know this gave me inflammation of the mouth? I was then at Madrid, and Ludovisi, the queen's dentist, burnt my gums with a red-hot iron, and then extracted seven good teeth."

"There went fifteen!" murmured Valero.

"Yes, and I had no further trouble until four years ago, when, whilst I was staying with a friend in a little place in the province of Burgos, the pain came on again. There was no doctor, no surgeon, nobody. But a charlatan happened to come along who extracted teeth whilst on horseback; and I was in such distress that I was obliged to have recourse to him, and he took out two with the tail end of a spoon."

"Oh! my man, what humbug!" exclaimed Valero in utter indignation, "and may I ask if you have a tooth left in your head?"

Manin at this moment, with his usual want of manners, opened his mouth wide with a loud guffaw, to the astonishment of the party. Then the great giant turned round in his chair and composed himself to sleep.

"You have never suffered from your teeth, have you, Manin?" asked the Grandee, who could not be a quarter of an hour without appealing to his majordomo.

"What?" asked the fellow without opening his eyes.

"He is like a rock!" said the nobleman with real enthusiasm.

Then Manin sat up a little, and rubbing his eyes with his fists, he said:

"I never had anything worse than a stomach-ache: It came on as I was loading a cart with hay, and it lasted more than a month. I could not touch a morsel of food, and it was just as if I had a fox continually gnawing at my inside. My ribs felt as if they would break in agony, and I leant against the wall, bowed down with pain, and showed my teeth like a serpent. I became as yellow as corn in harvest time. One day the señor priest said to me: 'Manin, you have no heart.' 'I have no heart, señor curé!' said I. 'You don't know me well if you say that, for it is beating here for its very life. I have more heart than what you would think!' 'Then there is nothing to be done, Manin, but to send for the doctor,' said he. 'No,

indeed, señor curé; I want none of their drugs and plaisters.' 'Well, if you don't send for him, I shall,' was his answer. At last there was no help for it, and although I was still against it, Don Rafael, the doctor of the mines, arrived. He made me undress as far as my shirt, and then forced me by the shoulders on to a trough. Then he set to giving me blows on the chest with his knuckles, as if he were knocking at a door. He thumped me here, and he thumped me there, and listened with his ear pressed against my body. 'Nay,' I cried. 'Gently! gently my good fellow! Find the truant!' And he went on for half an hour longer, knocking with his knuckles and listening with his ear. At last he got tired of hearing nothing. 'Ah! friend of my soul!' he said, making the sign of the cross, 'you have a liquid heart. I never saw anything like it in my life!' 'Yes, I knew that before, Don Rafael,' said I."

Having got so far in his relation, Manin stopped suddenly, turned an angry glance on the audience, and muttered under his breath: "And what do these asses find to laugh at?"

Then, throwing his shaggy head back in the armchair, he closed his eyes in great disgust.

The Grandee's guests resumed their game, laughing all the while, but the count became more and more thoughtful and absent.

At last no longer able to control his upset state of nerves, he rose from his seat saying:

"I say, Don Enrique, will you kindly take my place; this pain is so tiresome that I must move about?"

CHAPTER II

THE DISCOVERY

WHEN the count went back to the drawing-room, he found the young people preparing for a *rigodon* (a country dance). The seat at the piano was occupied by one of the daughters of the *Pensioner*; for such was the name given in the town to Don Cristobal Mateo, as he was an old government official, who, after serving many years in the Philippines, had retired some time ago on an income of 30,000 reales.^[H]

He had a military bearing and quite a martial aspect, with his white moustache, large rolling eyes, thick eyebrows, and powerful hands. Nevertheless, there was not a kinder man in the Spanish dominions. His career had been cast in Exchequer offices, and he always expressed strong opinions against the power of the army. He maintained that the blood-suckers of the State were not those employed in civil functions, but the army and navy. The fact was demonstrated by the production of figures and notes on the subject, when he would quite lose himself in bureaucratic divagations. He said that war was caused by the thirst for blood emanating from the superfluous energy of the nation. This was a phrase he had read in the *Boletin de Contribuciones Indirectas* and appropriated as his own with marked effect. He said soldiers were vagrants, and his aversion to all uniforms and epaulettes was extreme. When the Corporation of Lancia talked of applying to the government for a regiment to garrison the city, he, as councillor, opposed the measure most resolutely.

What was the good of bringing a lot of spongers into the neighbourhood? Instead of having the comfort of being at some distance from a regiment, they would have all the disadvantages of harbouring one. Everything would get dear, for the colonels and officers liked to live well and have the best of everything, "after all the hard work they did to earn it," he added, ironically. Then they were all gamblers, and their bad example would contaminate the youths of the place, who never indulged in such licence except on times of holiday making. As they were such an idle lot (Don Cristobal firmly believed that a soldier had nothing to do), one could imagine what a set of rogues they were! In short, the regiment

would be a corrupting element and a source of disturbance in the place. So Mateo got his way, not merely because it was his way, but because the Minister of War did not consider it necessary to send soldiers to Lancia, considering the peaceable condition of the inhabitants.

With his income of 30,000 reales, the Pensioner might have lived very comfortably in such a cheap place, if his daughters had not been possessed with the silly fancy of preferring the hats of Madrid to those that were made by the milliner of the Calle de Joaquin, and eight-button gloves to four-button ones. Such superior tastes gave rise in the Pensioner's house to many an upset, with all its accompanying tears, hysterics, regrets, disinclination for food, &c. In these terrible conflicts it must be confessed that Don Cristobal did not always comport himself with the dignity, firmness and courage befitting his large moustachios and strongly marked eyebrows. Certainly he was always alone in the fray. Never by any chance did one of his girls side with him, unless it was on a question apart from the domestic arrangement of the house, when some of the daughters joined with papa against the others. But whenever a problem of economy came to the fore, the Pensioner was sure to have all four children against him. Then Don Cristobal, like an experienced general, tried every means to rout the enemy, or to capitulate under fair terms.

One day the girls were suddenly seized with a fancy for morocco-leather shoes like those of some young lady in the town, who proved to be Fernanda Estrada-Rosa. Then Don Cristobal became pensive and turned the matter over in his mind, with the result of casually mentioning, in the course of conversation at supper, that he had heard at *la Innovadora* (the best bootmaker's) that morocco boots were considered very dangerous in Lancia on account of the damp; and that Don Nicanor, a local doctor happening to be there at the time, observed that morocco was fatal in such a cold rainy climate; in fact, catarrhs, sometimes developing to galloping consumption, were frequently caught from cold feet. But long before the poor old man finished his diatribe against morocco, his daughters burst in with such ironical laughter, and sarcastic speeches that he was quite crushed.

Another time the girls were bent upon having parasols from Madrid like Amalia's. Don Cristobal held out for some time until finally, having the worst of it, he had to give in. But fertile in resources like Ulysses, he conceived a plan by which the expense would be halved. He went to Amalia, and begged her to lend him her parasol for two or three days, so that one of the local milliners could make him four others exactly similar; and this, at his request, the Señora de

Quiñones promised to keep a solemn secret. But the poor parasols were not up to the mark, and when they arrived properly packed through the post, and ran the gauntlet of the sharp, anxious eyes of his four daughters, the old man was soon called to task for the poorness of the trimmings and the coarseness of the work.

"These parasols were not made at Madrid!" said Micaela in a tone of decision, for she was the sharpest of the four.

"For goodness' sake, don't be so absurd! Where then do they come from?" returned Don Cristobal with assumed surprise, whilst he felt the colour mount to his face.

"I don't know, but I am perfectly sure they were not made in Madrid."

And the four nymphs turned them over, felt them with their experienced fingers, and studied and analysed them so minutely, that their father was plunged into a fearful state of suspense. They exchanged significant glances, smiled scornfully, and spoke in whispers. In the meanwhile the Pensioner was a martyr to such an extreme state of nervous anxiety that his very moustachios were affected.

At last the fanciful beings left the purchases in scornful disdain upon the drawing-room chairs, and ran and locked themselves in Jovita's room, where they remained half an hour in secret conclave, whilst Don Cristobal waited in anxious trepidation, as he walked up and down the corridor like a criminal expecting his sentence.

At last the door opened, and the guilty creature stood awaiting the verdict of the judges. But they maintained a cautious reserve, whilst an enigmatical smile wreathed their white lips. Then two of them put on their mantillas and gloves, and darted into the street, to return in a short time to the domestic hearth with blazing eyes, agitated faces, and in a tremor of indignation.

The pen is powerless to portray the subsequent scene in the Pensioner's peaceful dwelling. What cries of rage! what bitter sarcasm! what hysterical laughter! what wringing of hands! what banging of chairs! and what exclamations of woe! And in the midst of such a scene, terrible enough to strike terror into the heart of the most serene, the four parasols, the innocent cause of all the fray, lay on the ground in ignominious ruin.

With the exception of these periodical disturbances which upset the somewhat

weak nerves of the Pensioner, his existence was very calm and peaceful, for the numberless, but valuable, little attentions which make life pleasant were never wanting. His daughters were careful about having everything in order, and in its place. His shirts and underclothing were kept in perfect order, his cravats, made from old material, looked as fresh as if straight from the hosiers, his slippers were always ready when he came home, the water put for his foot-bath on Saturdays, his cigar before going to bed, his glass of water with lemon for his morning draught, &c., all went on with the sweet and regular mechanism so pleasing to the aged.

It was true that with four daughters it did not represent much trouble, especially if they were not under the dominion of some fancy or desire. But the sight of some new-fashioned hat, the news of the arrival of a dramatic company, or the announcement of some party at the Casino, would be enough to cause the wildest excitement, in which every other consideration went to the wall, and they were seen flying off to the dressmaker, glove-shop, and perfumer. As these wild freaks of fancy did not harmonise very well with the prosaic details of existence, a slight disorganisation ensued; but Don Cristobal bore these disturbances with composure. After a short time of chaos, order returned, and his life resumed its usual peaceful course. The names of these daughters, in order of age, were as follows: Jovita, Micaela, Socorro, and Emilita. In appearance, they were four insignificant beings, neither beautiful nor ugly, graceful nor ungraceful, young nor old, sad nor vivacious. There was nothing remarkable in any one of them, and yet by the domestic hearth the character of each was quite distinct. Jovita was sentimental and reserved, Michaela was quick tempered, and Emilita was the liveliest of the party. Don Cristobal was greatly exercised on two subjects, one was the reduction of the army and the other was the marriage of his four daughters, or at least two of them. The first project was in a fair way to success, for political opinion inclined in its favour, but as for the other, I am sorry to say that there seemed no likelihood of its realisation. In spite of sacrificing many comforts to dress expenses, and frequenting the promenades, and the Quiñones' balls with a regularity deserving success, the precious gifts of Hymen were not attained.

When some imprudent fellow ventured to pay them any attention he was told that they would be quite grieved to marry in their father's life, for it seemed cruel to think of abandoning a poor old man, who loved them so dearly, and had sacrificed so much for them; and these protestations were followed by the warmest eulogy on their father's character.

But the Pensioner was quite anxious to repudiate these too filial sentiments, and his desire of experiencing the cruelty of being abandoned was so evident that it was quite a joke. As if the daughters did not make themselves sufficiently ridiculous, Mateo made the situation worse by throwing them at the heads of all the marriageable young men of the town.

But the praises sung by the old man on the cleverness, economy, and good management of his daughters, were all without effect. Directly a stranger arrived at Lancia, Don Cristobal took care to strike up an acquaintance with him. He invited him to coffee at his house, took him to his box at the theatre, showed him the beauties of the surrounding country, went with him to see the reliques of the cathedral, visited the natural history museum, and, in short, did all the honours of the place.

People smiled at the little play which had been acted so many times without success, for Jovita was the only one who arrived at the dignity of having a lover for three or four years, which fact made her feel far superior to her sisters. The young man had been a foreign student who had courted her during the latter courses of his studies; but when they were over, he returned to his country, and, forgetting his engagement to Jovita, he there married a lady of property. The others never even attained to this degree of love-making, they never got farther than fancies, or flirtations of a fortnight's duration. Trifling attentions were paid, but nothing serious ensued.

By degrees the girls assumed a colder demeanour, for although they had not given up hope, they were tired, and the one all-absorbing idea made a line of care on their brows. But Cristobal did not think of giving in. He firmly believed in the husbands of his daughters, and he propounded the fact with as much assurance as the prophets of the Old Testament announced the coming of the Messias.

"When my daughters marry," he would say, "instead of spending the summer in Sarrió, where the etiquette is as strict as in Lancia, I shall go to Rodillero to breathe the fresh air and fish for perch. Listen to me, Micaela; don't be so sharp, woman. You will find a husband won't put up with those frivolous ways; he will expect to be answered in a proper manner."

"My husband will have to put up with what he can get," returned the pert girl, with a disdainful toss of her head.

"And if he gets tired of that?" asked Emilita, mischievously.

"He will have double work then, for he will get tired, and get tired of getting tired."

"And suppose he took the stick to you?"

"He would have to be careful, for I should be quite equal to poisoning him."

"Goodness! what a horror!" exclaimed the three nereids, laughing.

So that hypothetical husband, that abstract being, figured as constantly in conversation as if he were of flesh and blood, and lived in the next house.

The daughter now playing the piano was Emilita, the most musical of the four sisters. The other three were standing, each hanging on the arm of a young man.

The count crossed the room to Fernanda-Rosa, who was arm-in-arm with a girl friend. She did not seem to care for the dancing, albeit she was a young lady renowned in the town for her beauty, elegance, and fortune. She was the only daughter of Don Juan Estrada-Rosa, the richest banker and merchant of the province. Tall, moderately stout, with a dark complexion, regular, striking features, large, very black, scornful looking eyes, and a graceful figure, embellished by the elegant toilettes, that were the despair and envy of all the girls of the town, she did not look as if she belonged to the place, but as if she had been transported from one of the most aristocratic court *salons*.

"How charming you are looking, Fernanda!" exclaimed the count, in a low voice, with a bow of admiration.

The beauty scarcely deigned to smile, but made a little scornful pout.

"How do you do, Luis?" she said, giving him her hand with marked displeasure.

"Not so well as you are, but I am pretty well."

"Only pretty well? I am sorry. I am perfectly well—you have not forgotten me, then?" she returned in the same displeased tone, without looking him in the face.

"Why, no, how could one forget the star Sirius?"

"I do not understand astronomy."

"Sirius is the most brilliant star in the heavens, everybody knows that."

"Well then I did not know it. You see how ignorant I am."

"I certainly do not; but you have modesty united to beauty and talent."

"No, I know I have no talent, but you do not like to tell me so."

"My girl, I have but just told you the contrary."

There was a touch of bitterness in the displeased tone of Fernanda, whilst that of the count was calm and ceremonious, although slightly dashed with irony.

"Very well, then I have misunderstood you."

"That is what you always do."

"Caramba, how polite!" exclaimed the young girl, growing pale.

"You always think something disagreeable is meant," quickly added the count, as he saw by the change in her face what idea had crossed her mind.

"Many thanks. I take your words for what they are worth."

"You will be wrong in not thinking them sincere. Besides, there is no need my telling you how worthy you are of admiration, for everybody knows it."

"Thank you; thank you! So you are tired of playing?"

"My teeth hurt me a little."

"Have them out."

"All of them?"

"Those that hurt you, man. Ave Maria!"

"With what indifference you say it. I suppose nothing would affect you?"

"I am always affected by the sufferings of a neighbour."

"A neighbour! What a horror! I had not heard that I was put in the category of neighbour."

"What do you want, sir? Honours come when least expected."

In spite of the vexed, almost aggressive, tone of her voice, Fernanda did not move away, but stood holding the arm of the little friend, who never opened her

lips. The rich heiress was evidently very nervous. She gave little taps on the ground with her foot, crushed up her handkerchief in her hand, her lips trembled almost imperceptibly, and round her dark Arab-looking eyes there was a paler circle than usual. The argument evidently interested her.

Her engagement with the Conde de Onis had lasted longer than any previous one.

When Fernanda first appeared in society, and earlier still, when she was a little maiden going to school with a servant, her figure, her elegance, and, above all, the six millions she was to inherit, created quite a sensation. There was not a youth with any pretensions to manners or money, who did not determine, either of his own accord, or at the instigation of his family, to walk down the street with her, send her little notes, and whisper pleasant nothings in her ear.

De Sarrió, de Nueva, and other places also furnished admirers, who came under the pretext of taking a holiday. The girl, pleased and intoxicated with the incense of admiration, never thought of keeping faith with anybody, for she was continually breaking one engagement and entering into another. A young man seldom remained in her good graces more than a couple of months. In fact, there was no one in a position to marry her, and in Lancia and the rest of the province, there was nobody possessed of property equal to her *dot*. If, perchance, such a one existed, he was not of fitting age to enter into matrimony with such a young girl, for he would be some Indian worn out by tropical heat, or the elderly owner of some remote, grand, country mansion.

It was not necessary for her father to mention the matter, for the girl perfectly understood that there was no one to suit her; but she enjoyed flirting all round and making the youths of Lancia adore her. There was one young man, however, whom no girl of the town had ever dared to think of marrying, and that was the Conde de Onis. He was deeply respected on account of his old family in the province, where the abject worship of aristocracy sinks the burgess beneath the level of the servant and the agricultural labourer; and his retired style of life and the mystery and silence of his old palace, added to his handsome income, seemed to exalt him to an atmosphere aloof from the darts of all the local beauties.

But it was for this very reason, that there arose in Fernanda's bosom a desire, at first vague, and then strong, and overwhelming, to make a conquest of him. This is a very natural wish, and being especially a feminine one, it requires no

explanation. In the bottom of her heart the daughter of Estrada-Rosa felt herself inferior to the Conde de Onís. Nevertheless, she had heard so much flattery; and the glitter of her father's money seemed so irresistible, that she thought she could well aspire to making him her husband. If she did not really think so, she pretended to do so when speaking of the count behind his back, and affecting a certain familiarity in his presence.

In Lancia, as in all the little capitals, the young men and women adopt the fashion of *tutoyant* each other, and this was authorised from their having known each other and played together as children. But for a long time the Conde de Onís never exchanged a word with Fernanda, although they constantly met in the street. Nevertheless, when they first met at a little party at the De Meré's, the young beauty immediately addressed him as *tu*, and dropped his title. It was Luis here, and Luis there, as if she were quite accustomed to his name. The count was surprised without being displeased. No one is sorry to find himself *tutoyé* by a lovely girl, and a naturally shy and timid man, like the count, was not likely to be the exception.

Fernanda at once tried to enlist him as an admirer, or at least to make him appear as such in the eyes of the public, who looked upon it as a proper state of things. There was no other husband for Fernanda, and no other wife for the count in the province.

The distance that separated them was retrospective: it existed only in Fernanda's lack of ancestors, and it was generally thought that the young girl's beauty, money, and brilliant education, would make the count overlook this drawback.

These relations lasted about a year.

The two met at a party of the Señoritas de Meré, which was always considered a pleasant occasion. She had often hinted to the count that he might go to that house, but he had either not understood, or pretended not to understand her. But one day Fernanda openly made the suggestion. He tried to get out of it as well as he could. Was he timid? or was he proud? Fernanda could not make him out; however, this reserve increased his attraction for her, and made her like him all the more. But suddenly, when the public least expected it—when, in fact, it had begun to ask the reason of the delay of the marriage, the engagement was broken off. It was done diplomatically and secretly, so much so that it had been over for a month, and yet people were still joking them, not knowing there had been a

break. The fact when revealed, produced a great sensation, and became the subject of ceaseless conversation at all the parties. No one could say what had happened, or who had given the initiative in the matter. If the count was asked, he stoutly maintained that Fernanda had given him up; and so much stress did he lay upon the statement, that nobody doubted his sincerity. The heiress, Estrada-Rosa, corroborated her lover's assertion without going into particulars, and this in the off-hand tone she always adopted when speaking of, or to, the count, for they went on seeing each other pretty frequently, albeit not quite so often, although they attended parties at the houses of mutual friends. Moreover, Fernanda soon after became an *habituée* at the dances at the Quiñones' house. But the past relations were never renewed, and when the two former lovers met and talked a little as now, the guests looked on with bated breath and interested eyes.

"They will go on as before; they will end by marrying!" they thought.

But they were disillusioned at the sight of the indifference with which they parted.

Just as he was going to reply to the last words of the proud heiress, the glance of the count wandered absently round the room and fell upon a pair of eyes fixed upon him with a sharp and jealous gaze, whereupon he gave his hand to his friend and said with a forced smile:

"How badly you treat me, Fernanda! It will ever be so, I suppose, but I, you know, am always your devoted admirer. *Au revoir*."

"I am sorry that this devotion neither pleases nor displeases me," she returned, without moving a step away.

Then the count went off shrugging his shoulders resignedly and saying:

"And I am still more sorry."

Passing by the couples, who had commenced the *rigodon*, he returned to the lady of the house, who was at that moment with Manuel Antonio, one of the persons most worthy of note in this period we are recording.

He was known as much by the nickname of the Chatterbox, or Magpie, as by his own name. This fact is sufficient to give us an idea of his moral and physical characteristics.

Manuel Antonio was not young—he was certainly fifty; and all the artificial means not distinguished for refinement, then in vogue in Lancia, were brought into play to hide the fact.

He had an unmistakable wig, several false teeth badly put in, a little black on his eyebrows and red on his lips; there was a strong scent of patchouli about him, and there was a dash of originality in his whole get-up befitting his reputation for former splendour. He really had been a rare combination of face and figure: tall, slender, and well-built, with regular delicate features, fine auburn hair falling in graceful curls, a smiling countenance, and gentle voice. There now only remained a faint trace of all this beauty. The straight shoulders had become bent, the beautiful curls had vanished like a dream that was past; unwelcome wrinkles furrowed the smooth brow; and the rows of pearly teeth, so ornamental to his mouth, were substituted by ugly gaps which time had made, and the dentist had failed to replace satisfactorily. Finally, his slight, delicate, silky moustache had become white, bristly, and shaggy, and neither dye nor cosmetic could keep it presentable.

What a trial this was for the handsome young man of Lancia and for the friends who had known him in the palmy days of his beauty! But his mind kept as youthful as when he was eighteen. He was the same impassioned, affectionate creature, sweet one moment, irascible and terrible another, following the bent of his caprices and living in quiet idleness.

He enjoyed the pleasures of the bath so intensely that he would have it three or more times running, until the water was as clear as when it left the spring. He loved flowers and birds, but no delight equalled that of trying on different articles of adornment before the glass to see which suited him best. He considered that a dash of the feminine made his costume more fetching, so in winter he liked to wear a short cape with a gold clasp and a wide brimmed hat which suited him to perfection. In summer he dressed in white flannel, very well cut to show off the graceful lines of his figure. His neckerchiefs were nearly always of gauze, his shoes low, and the collar of his shirt cut sailor fashion. On his wrist he wore a bracelet; it was certainly only a bright gold band, but this detail caught the eyes of all his fellow citizens. Whenever Manuel Antonio was spoken of, the bracelet was sure to be mentioned, as if there was nothing about his interesting person more calculated to excite attention. But if years had not materially changed this kind creature, so eminently created for love, they had nevertheless made him more cautious and more reserved. He did not show his preferences in the ingenuous fashion of former years, and he did not give play to

the impulsive fancies of his susceptible heart until he had proved the worthiness of the object of his affection. Many were the disillusionings he had suffered in his life, and it was particularly sad when he was getting old to meet not only coldness from his old friends, from those to whom he had been lavish in marks of kindness, but to find that he was an object of derision, in fact the laughing-stock of the youths of the new generation. The young people of the present day made a regular butt of him.

As they had not witnessed his triumphs, nor known his past radiant beauty, they were far from professing that respect that the last generation had had for him. They never lost an opportunity of worrying and teasing him cruelly. When he appeared in the Calle de Altavilla, or entered the Café de Marañón, he was surrounded by a crowd of *gamins*. Cristo! the remarks that were made; and, sad to say, they passed from using their tongues to using their hands. This was what Manuel Antonio could not put up with. They could talk as much as they liked, for he had the gift of repartee and could well hold his own with his turn for sarcasm and his sense of the ridiculous; and years, and long practice had made him such an adept in this art of repartee, that his retorts were terrible; and those who tried to get a rise out of him generally got the worst of it, and were staggered by the words they brought on themselves. But when these shameless fellows passed from speech to touch, patting his face and pulling his beard, he entirely lost his self-control, and gave vent to expressions which were neither intentional nor rational. Needless to say that as this was known to be his weak point, the teasing always terminated in this way. Nevertheless, apart from the pardonable desire to retort on those who hurt him, he was not naturally malignant, but really a most useful and serviceable being. His talents were many, and various. He could crochet most perfectly, and his coverlets were unrivalled in Lancia. He decked an altar, or dressed the images as well as any sacristan. He could upholster furniture, make wax flowers, paper walls, embroider with hair, and paint plates. And when any of his female friends wished to have her hair well dressed to go to some ball, Manuel Antonio gallantly went to the rescue, and did it as cleverly as the best hairdresser in Madrid. If any of his friends were ill, then was the time to see the unfailing care and attention of our old Narcissus. He immediately took up his post by the sick bed, he kept count of the draughts, made the bed, and put on poultices as cleverly as the most practised nurse. Then, if the illness became serious, he knew how to suggest the idea of confession with so much tact, that instead of the patient being offended, he accepted it as the most natural thing in the world. And when he saw that death was imminent, he prepared for the reception of the solemn guest, and no lady could have taken

greater pains to receive some most important personage:

There was the little altar with the embroidered cloth, lighted with candles, the staircase adorned with pots of flowers, the ground covered with rose-leaves, and the servants and relations at the door, holding lighted tapers in gloved hands. Not a single detail was forgotten. The Chatterbox, in his glory, assumed the manners of a general at the head of his troops. Everybody obeyed and seconded him as if he were a chief. Then, if the patient died, it is hardly necessary to say that his power was still more omnipotent. From the laying-out of the corpse to the final function of burial, there was nothing but what he had a hand in. And as there were generally sick people to nurse, images to dress, friends who wanted their hair dressed, or flowers to be arranged, Manuel had rather a busy life. In performing these offices, or in going from house to house fetching and carrying news, the days and years slipped by. He lived with two sisters, older than himself, and they looked after him, and cared for him as if he were still a child. They paid no heed to their brother's wig, wrinkles, or false teeth, and the hours he spent on his toilette, and his baths provoked a compassionate smile. Whilst they bitterly deplored the ravages made by time on their own faces and figures, they seemed to think that their brother had arrested the course of the common enemy, and that he had in fact some elixir for keeping himself eternally young. Manuel Antonio was methodical in his visits: he had several houses at which he called every day at the same time. He went to Don Juan Estrada's at three o'clock, the coffee hour; he took chocolate with the Countess of Onis every afternoon, and he was a regular *habitué* at the evening receptions of the Señora de Quiñones. There were several other families that he frequently visited. He dropped into the houses of Maria Josefa Hevia and the Mateos in the morning for a little while, just to hear any news that was going, or to inspect their work, and sometimes of an evening, he went to the Señoritas de Meré.

"Look, here is the count!" he exclaimed in his peculiarly effeminate tone. "Ah! what a cunning fellow the count is!"

"How?" said the count, approaching.

"Ask Amalia."

Then the smile suddenly left the lips of the nobleman.

"What? What do you mean?" he exclaimed with undisguised confusion.

Amalia also looked upset, and her pale cheeks grew red.

"We have been grumbling at you, my man, and a pretty character we gave you. Yes, Manuel Antonio has been saying that you are a dog in the manger," said Amalia.

"No, you were the one who said so."

"I?" exclaimed the lady.

"And why am I the dog in the manger?" said the count. "Let us hear."

"Because Amalia says you do not want to eat the meat yourself, and you will not let Don Santos eat it."

"Get along! Hold your tongue, you rude fellow!" said the lady half-laughing, giving him a pinch.

"What is being said of Don Santos?" asked a short, broad gentleman, with a fat purple face, who approached the group.

The count and Amalia did not know what to answer.

"They were remarking," said Manuel Antonio, with his ready tongue, "that Don Santos thought of taking us up to his place, the Castañeda (Chestnuts)."

"No, no, it was not that," returned the stout man with a forced smile.

"Yes it was, and Amalia maintained that you were not up to taking us to the Castañeda for the day."

"But, my good fellow, you seem bent on painting me in very black colours," said Amalia.

"Because I am a real friend. How pale you have been looking lately.... You must credit me, Santos, for having a higher opinion of your generosity than the majority of people. 'You don't know Don Santos,' I often say to those who declare that you do not like spending money. 'If Don Santos does not spend and does not entertain his friends, it is not from avarice but from indolence, and from want of a fitting occasion. The man is self-distrustful, and incapable of proposing banquets or festivities; but let anybody start the idea, and you will see how gladly it will be followed up.'"

"Thank you, thank you, Manuel Antonio," murmured Don Santos, with a rabbit-like smile.

The poor man was indeed continually haunted by the fear of appearing mean. Like many of the Indians, the fact of his being immensely rich gave him a reputation, not utterly unfounded, of being mean. He arrived a few years ago from Cuba, where by dint of first packing cases with sugar and then selling them, he amassed an immense fortune. He was like a Bedouin, without any regard for what went on in the world; he could not speak a dozen words correctly, nor comport himself like other men. The thirty years he had spent behind a counter had caused his legs to swell, which had given him the gait of a drunken man. The high colour of his complexion was so characteristic, that in Lancia, where few people escaped a nickname, he was dubbed *Garnet*.

In the midst of his misery he enjoyed making some show with his riches. He built a most magnificent house: the steps were of marble from Carrara, the furniture from Paris, &c. Nevertheless, when he came to pay the large bills contracted in its construction, he was careful to see what could be taken off for the value of the paper and cord, used for packing the things for their transit from Paris. With this object in view, he would carefully examine these wrappings accumulated in a heap in a corner. When the house was finished, he took possession of the ground-floor, and let the other two. And then began his martyrdom—a martyrdom long and terrible. The servants and children of the second and third floors were his torturers. If he heard the floors of the second storey being rubbed, he was put in a bad humour, for he said that sand was bad for boarded floors. If he saw a mark made on the stucco by the careless hand of some little child, he was very angry and muttered words of dread import. If he heard a door shut violently, the sound seemed to go to his heart, and fears filled his mind lest the hinges should be loosened, and the bolts displaced. At last the continual excitement threw him into such a highly nervous state that his health visibly declined. A friend of his, who was quite as miserable, although endowed with more spirit, suggested that he should leave the house and live in another one. And so he did, for he returned to the hotel where he had put up during the building of his palace.

But Santos was remiss in the performance of the duty considered incumbent on all those who make large fortunes from the sugar trade in America—he failed to enter into matrimony with any lady, young or old, pretty or ugly.

None of his friends ever took a tradesman's daughter for a wife, and Garnet could not do less than they. On the contrary, as he was richer than any of them, it was natural that he should expect more social advantages. And so it came about that he fixed his prominent, bloodshot eyes upon the prettiest, richest, and most

charming girl in the town—on nobody less than Fernanda Rosa. The fact aroused the astonishment and derision of the neighbourhood. For highly as money was esteemed in Lancia, it was not thought equal to the accomplishment of a feat like this. The pride of the province marry a fellow of his caste! The girl was angry and indignant. At first she considered it a joke; then she became annoyed, and finally she ridiculed the idea. At last she became used to Garnet's attentions, and it pleased her self-love to be a subject of adulation, which she unmercifully snubbed in return. But Santos was pertinacious in his courtship. With the persistence of a fly which dashes against glass, trying a hundred times to pass through the obstruction, neither repulses, ridicule, nor rude remarks rebuffed him for long. He returned the next day, metaphorically speaking, to break his head against the cold disdain of the proud heiress. He really thought that the real obstacle to the realisation of his hopes was the Conde de Onis. He acknowledged that Fernanda was somewhat attracted to him, or, as he thought, to his title, and he seriously considered going to Madrid to buy one of the same rank as that of his rival. But when he was told that the papa set no store by such things, he gave up the idea. In the meanwhile, he vowed revenge on the gallant count, and hated him with a deadly hatred, which he showed by never losing an opportunity of making fun of his ugly, old-fashioned, dilapidated house. The count was rich in land, but his income could not be compared with that of the opulent Garnet.

"And if not, you will see the day that he marries what a change will be effected in the place," continued Manuel Antonio; "we shall have banquets, and balls, and *fêtes champêtres* every day."

"But suppose Fernanda does not like balls?" said Emilita Mateo, who was dancing with Paco Gomez, and had her back to the group.

"I do not know that I have mentioned Fernanda," said the Chatterbox severely.

"I thought you were talking of Don Santos marrying, and I supposed you meant with her."

"Then do not suppose any more, but attend to your dancing with Paco, for I reckon he has been waiting five minutes."

Paco was a very slender young man, so tall that he reached the lintels of the doorways, with a head about the size of a potato, and such a thin face that he really only seemed to walk about by permission of his undertaker. And with these physical peculiarities, he was the wittiest person of the place.

"Well, my child!" he exclaimed, standing in front of the Chatterbox. "The only thing for which I should regret dying would be to be deprived of the pleasure of seeing such bewitching creatures as yourself."

With this he gave his beard a derisive sort of touch.

We know that Manuel Antonio could not bear anybody's hands near him in public.

"Be off, you jackdaw, be off!" he returned, with visible irritation as he pushed him away.

"But are you not fetching? Why, my man, if this were lost to view! Look what a mouth! Goodness alive, what shaped eyes! Did you ever see such a texture of the skin?"

And as he touched him again, Manuel repulsed him with a hard push of real anger.

"Caramba! how cross you are to-day!" said the Conde de Onis.

"It does not matter," returned Paco with a sigh, "white hands never offend."

At that moment it was his turn to figure in the *rigodon*, and he went off with Emilita.

Maria Josefa, who had been dancing a little way off, now came up with her partner, a lieutenant of the battalion of Pontevedra.

"Why, Don Santos, you are cruel! Why do you not go and keep Fernanda company? She is quite alone."

This was true, for the little friend of the rich heiress having found a partner for the dance, Fernanda was sitting by herself.

"Yes, yes, you ought to go, Santos," said Manuel Antonio; "see, the girl has left an empty chair by her side; she could not give a stronger hint."

So saying, he winked at the count, who confirmed his statement by saying: "I think it would only be polite."

Garnet cast a sharp glance at the speaker and surlily returned:

"Then why don't you go yourself and sit by her side?"

"For the simple reason that we have nothing to talk about. But with you it is quite different."

"That is understood, Señor Conde. I am not a child," he murmured very crossly.

"Although you are not a child in age," said Amalia, intervening to prevent discord, "you are one in the frankness and spontaneity of your sentiments, and in the freshness of heart, that other people younger than you are remiss in. Children love with more simplicity and fervour than men."

"But men do something more heroic—they marry," said Paco Gomez, who was again standing near with his partner.

"There are occasions when they do not marry either," returned Manuel Antonio, making an imperceptible grimace, by which it could be seen that he was thinking of Maria Josefa.

"Very well," returned that gentleman, abandoning the argument; "but it must be allowed that there are cases when such an act would require a heroism beyond human nature."

The old maid who overheard this last remark, cast a withering look at the speaker.

"Human nature, indeed!" she retorted with displeasure, "human nature sometimes assumes such eccentric forms that heroism would appear out of place."

However, Paco Gomez was not a whit confused, and merely touched his face with comic gestures, feigning a dumb submission, which made the others laugh. Amalia, seeing the conversation was getting dangerous, changed the subject by exclaiming:

"Look, see what Don Santos has been doing whilst we have been busy talking!"

And, in fact, the Indian had quietly left his seat and glided into a chair by Fernanda's side.

She glanced at him coldly, and hardly deigned to respond to his ceremonious and pompous greeting. Nevertheless, the red face of Garnet shone like that of a

god sure of his omnipotence. With his large, broad, fat hands spread out on his knees, his body bent forwards, and his head raised as much as the fat nape of his neck would permit, he disclosed a row of large teeth as his lips wreathed in a beneficent smile. Trying, according to his wont, to make conversation, he said:

"Have you noticed in what quarter the wind is?"

The young lady made no reply.

"It does not signify now," he continued, "as all the fruit is gathered in, but if it had come sooner, we should not have had a chestnut nor a grain of maize left, he! he!"

To judge from the expression of pleasure which shone in his eyes, Garnet delighted in giving utterance to this remark.

"But it is not cold here, eh? I am not cold, he! he! On the contrary I feel hot. It is because your eyes are two coals—they are burn——"

Another time he would have finished the word burning without any hesitation, but to excuse his confusion, he feigned a cough which made his purple face look as if he were suffering strangulation.

The beauty, who had kept her eyes fixed on space, now turned her head towards her adorer, and looked at him with a vague, absent expression, as if she did not see him. She then got up, and without vouchsafing a word, took a seat a little way off. So the Indian was left with the same stereotyped smile on his face, like the petrified grimace of a satyr. But when he saw the eyes of the others fixed derisively upon him, he suddenly became cross and peevish.

"What has this Garnet to do with the ladies?" said Paco Gomez to the count. "As I was saying the other day, you do not need to go to America for rich women. Your face is your fortune."

"Look, my dear count, you ought to go and sit by her side. You will see she won't get up then," said Manuel Antonio.

"Yes, yes, you ought to go, Luis," said Maria Josefa, "we shall be able to see then whether she is in love with you or not. Really, Amalia, ought he not to go?"

"Yes, it seems to me that you ought to sit by her side," said the lady in measured, trembling tones.

"Do you think so?" asked the count, looking earnestly at her.

"Yes, go," returned the lady, with perfect serenity, avoiding his eyes.

"Then you must allow me to disobey you, as I do not wish to expose myself to a rebuff."

"What do rebuffs signify when you are in love?... Because from what I hear, you are in love with Fernanda. It is known for a mile round."

"Certainly for a mile round, for that is not saying much," interposed Manuel Antonio.

And Maria Josefa, and Emilita Mateo, and Paco Gomez all corroborated the remark with a smile.

Amalia insisted effectually. Luis had tried his best to avoid suspicion; but as all efforts are ineffectual to exclude every ray of light, she had guessed for some time past that the count nourished in the depths of his heart an affectionate regard for Fernanda.

"Listen to me," she said; "a few days ago somebody happened to say to Moro that he had two false teeth. You cannot think how put out the poor man was; a little more and he would have beaten him who told him of it."

"I am not as bad as that," said the count, "but I expressed myself somewhat emphatically, as injustice always annoys me," and he smiled shamefacedly.

"Oh! excitement in such cases is always suspicious. When one feels no interest in anybody, one is not so vehement in denying it. Caramba! I never saw you so put out as you are now. One can see that the girl has a valiant champion ready to break lances on her behalf."

The lady did not leave the joke. She seemed to wish the count to think that his love for Fernanda was a foregone conclusion. In spite of the kind smile on her face, there were certain strange inflexions in her voice that were only noticeable to one person present at that moment.

But the *rigodon* was over and the little group was augmented by the arrival of several other couples. Some came, and others went, until at last the lady found herself surrounded by fresh people. Another waltz was danced, and another. Then twelve o'clock struck from the cathedral clock. And as the young people

showed no sign of dispersing, Manin, according to the custom of the house, appeared by Don Pedro's order at the drawing-room door with an armful of wraps belonging to the ladies. This was the signal for withdrawal adopted by the Señor de Quiñones at his parties. It was not very courteous, but nobody was offended; on the contrary, it was received in good part and considered a pleasant sort of joke.

After they had all shaken hands with the Grandee, they formed a group in the middle of the drawing-room, and Amalia in the centre bade farewell to her female friends, as she kissed them affectionately. She was pale, and her eyes looked anxious and feverish as she gave her hand to the count; she turned her head aside, feigning inattention; but she pressed his fingers firmly three or four times as if to inspire him with courage, for indeed the poor man was in want of it. He was so nervous and trembling that Amalia thought that he would collapse entirely.

And then the guests quickly passed into the passages and down the damp stone staircase. A servant was there to open the street-door.

"Ah! Who left this basket here?" said Emilita Mateo, who was the first to come across the obstruction.

"A basket?" asked several ladies as they came up to her.

"Perhaps some poor creature asleep about here," said the servant, who had not yet closed the door.

"There is nobody to be seen," said Manuel Antonio, who had quickly surveyed the portico.

Curiosity then prompted one of the ladies to raise the cloth which covered the basket. Whereupon the same exclamation was heard that Pharaoh's daughter uttered when she saw the celebrated basket of Moses floating on the river.

"A child!"

Then ensued a moment of amazement and curiosity among the guests. They all rushed forward, all wishing to see the foundling at once. For no one doubted for an instant but that the child had been purposely left there. Paco Gomez picked up the basket and uncovered it completely, so as to show the sleeping child to his friends.

Then followed a storm of exclamations.

"Little angel! Who could have been so wicked? Poor little soul! What stony-hearted creatures! Oh, my goodness! Look how beautiful he is! Has he been left in the cold long? The little thing must be perished. Paco, let me touch it."

The basket was passed from hand to hand. The ladies, who were very interested and trembling with emotion, pressed so many tender kisses on the cheeks of the newly-born that it was aroused from its sleep.

A feeble cry from the little pink creature filled every heart with pity, and some of the ladies burst into tears.

"Let us take it upstairs so that it may be warmed a little."

"Yes, yes; let us take it upstairs."

And forthwith the chattering crowd rushed into the hall and up the staircase of the mansion of the Quiñones, carrying the mysterious basket in triumph.

Amalia was standing pale and motionless in the middle of the drawing-room when the doors were re-opened. Don Pedro had been taken to bed by Manin and another servant. The fresh sudden invasion seemed a great surprise to the lady of the house.

"What is the matter? What is this?" she exclaimed, in an agitated voice.

"A baby, a baby!" was the simultaneous cry of many voices.

"We have just found it in the doorway," said Manuel Antonio, putting down the basket which he had carried upstairs.

"Who left it there?"

"We do not know. It is a foundling. Look! See how beautiful it is, Amalia."

"Perhaps some poor person, who will come and fetch it, just left it in the doorway."

"No, no; we have inspected the doorway, and the street is deserted."

The little creature, who was disturbed by all this excitement, now stretched out its two little rosebud fists, and the compassion of the ladies was evinced in passionate exclamations. Each one wished to kiss it and press it to her bosom. At

last Maria Josefa managed to get possession of it, and taking it from the basket she tenderly wrapped it in the cloak with which it had been covered, and pressed it to her bosom. Then a paper which had been in the child's clothes fell to the ground. Manuel Antonio picked it up. On the paper was written in large awkward-looking characters, evidently with the left hand: "The unhappy mother of this baby girl commends her to the charity of the Señores de Quiñones. It is not baptised."

"It is a girl, then!" exclaimed several ladies in one voice.

And in the tone of this remark it was evident that the discovery was somewhat disappointing. They had been so certain it was a boy.

"What mystery is this?" asked Manuel Antonio, whilst a malicious smile curled his lip.

"Mystery? There is no mystery," returned Amalia with some displeasure. "It is evidently some poor woman who wants her child to be maintained."

"Notwithstanding, there is a *je ne sais quoi* strain of mystery about the matter, and I would wager that the parents of this baby are well-to-do," replied the Magpie.

"Well, now you are getting foolish!" exclaimed the lady, with a nervous smile. "Well-to-do people do not leave their children dressed in rags."

Certainly the baby was dressed in miserable clothes and covered with a scanty, dirty cloak.

"Gently, Amalia, gently," interposed Saleta in his clear, quiet voice. "Many years ago I found in the doorway of my house in Madrid a child enveloped in very old clothes, and at the end of some time we ascertained that he was the son of a very important personage, who shall be nameless."

All eyes were now turned to the Galician magistrate in surprise.

"It was a very important personage, it was——" he continued, after a pause, with the same cool impertinence: "well, it was very easy to guess who it was; the features of the face showed him to be a perfect Bourbon."

The audience was quite taken aback. They looked at each other with the slightly amused smile prevalent on such occasions, and Saleta was quite

unconcerned.

"Hurry up!" exclaimed Valero; "won't you have your umbrella?"

"The child died when he was two months old," continued the imperturbable Saleta; "and it was a fact that when we went to the cemetery, a carriage joined the funeral cortège, and nobody knew to whom it belonged. But I knew it, for I had seen it in the royal stables; however, I held my tongue."

"Will the babbler never cease?" murmured Valero.

"All right, Saleta; you must tell us this story by day, at night such things are rather boring," said the Chatterbox intervening and winking at the others. "What we have to think of now, Amalia, is what is to be done with the baby."

The lady shrugged her shoulders with indifference.

"I don't know. We will leave her here to-night, and to-morrow we will look for a nurse for her, for it is really quite an upset."

"If you do not care about keeping her in the house, I shall be very pleased to take charge of her, Amalia," said Maria Josefa, who had stood a little apart cooing to the baby to keep it quiet.

"I did not say that I did not wish to," returned the lady, somewhat sharply. "I will take the child, because it concerns me more than anybody, since it is confided to my care. But, as you can understand, before doing so I must consult my husband."

The guests greeted these words with a murmur of approbation.

Just at that moment Manin appeared, to ask the meaning of all the excitement. It was explained to him. Then the Señor de Quiñones had himself brought back into the drawing-room in his wheeled chair; and when he saw the baby, he at once interested himself in her behalf.

He immediately declared she should not leave the house, and he told a servant to find a nurse in the morning. In the meanwhile the little creature had a little milk and tea in a flask with an india-rubber top; and it was then enveloped in better wraps. The guests watched these operations with the keenest interest. The ladies uttered cries of enthusiasm, and their eyes overflowed with tears when they saw the eager way the baby sucked the top of the bottle.

When all was done, they said good-bye again; but they did not leave without each one pressing a kiss on the cheeks of the poor little foundling baby.

All this time the Conde de Onis did not open his lips. He stood in the third or fourth row, following with eager eyes all the attention and care bestowed upon the infant. But when he was about to depart without again taking leave, Amalia stopped him with an audacity which almost petrified him.

"What is this, count? Do you not wish to kiss my charge?"

"I, yes, Señora."

This was the finishing stroke. And pale and trembling he approached, and put his lips on the little creature's forehead, whilst the lady watched him with a provoking triumphant smile.

CHAPTER III

THE TOWN

THIS was the third night that the Conde de Onis could hardly close his eyes. Nothing was more natural than that he should be agitated and feverish the last two nights; but now, wherefore? All had happened as it had been arranged. The undertaking had succeeded well, he had nothing to do but sleep on his triumph. But it was not so. In spite of his strong robust figure, the Conde had an excessively nervous and impressionable temperament. The slightest emotion upset him and excited him to an indescribable extent. Such intense sensibility was the result of heredity as well as education. His father, Colonel Campo, had been a self-centred sensitive man, of such keen susceptibility that he was quite a martyr to it the last years of his life. Everybody in Lancia recollected the interesting touching episode which closed the life of the single-minded gentleman.

The colonel had had to send forces to defend a place in Peru during the insurrection of the American colonists; but the place was taken by surprise in an underhand way. By a false report the colonel was accused of treachery before the Government at Madrid, it being asserted that he had been in collusion with the

enemy. With severe precipitancy, without impartial evidence of the facts, and without taking into consideration the Conde of Onis' brilliant career in the Service, the king deprived him of his commission, and all the crosses and decorations in his possession. The punctilious old soldier was completely crushed by this unexpected blow. His comrades snatched the pistol from him just when he attempted his life. Accompanied by a faithful attendant, he left Madrid and came to Lancia, where his wife and son of tender age were awaiting him. The family life was a sedative for the wounded heart of the soldier. But the brave man who had so often defied death, had not the courage to face the curious eyes of his fellow-citizens. Instead of rebelling against the injustice that had been done him, instead of trying to convince his compatriots of his innocence, which would not have been very difficult, as they all esteemed his character, and knew his bravery, he was so conscious of his disgrace that he avoided the sight of people and retired to his house, and he never walked farther than the garden at the back of the house, bounded by high, crumbling walls.

The palace of the Counts of Onis deserves especial mention in this story. It was a very old building; some remains of the original edifice which were still extant, were the oldest part of the town. Nothing else was saved from the dreadful fire which destroyed the city in the fourteenth century. It was more like a fortress than a mansion. There were a few narrow windows fitted with stone columns, scattered capriciously over the façade, a bare stone wall blackened by time, with several square holes like ventilators near the roof, and a large door in the middle studded with heavy nails. Inside it was immense, and more cheerful. The courtyard was broader than the street.

The sun came in at the window at the back at midday, and its rays were tempered by the branches of the garden-trees which formed a pleasant curtain.

There was a great deal of mystery and enchantment about this old house for the Lancians, who were endowed with imagination; more especially for the children, who are the only beings who are open to weird fancies in this prosaic age.

The façade, if such a name can be given to the aforesaid wall, faced the Calle de la Misericordia, one of the most central streets of the town.

One of the windows, perchance the largest, overlooked the Calle de Cerrajerías, and from it could be seen the cathedral in the distance.

Here it was that the ex-colonel buried himself; for neither the entreaties of his wife nor the few relations who came to see him, prevailed on him to change his

habits.

But his retirement was useful to the house, for he put the garden in order, had balconies placed at the back of the house, furnished various rooms, had the courtyard paved, &c.

Thus, without losing its character of mystery, the dismal old house was transformed into a pleasanter abode.

But the old soldier having fallen into disgrace, seemed to wither up within its walls like a tree in want of air and water.

A profound melancholy sapped his constitution: his skin became wrinkled, his hair turned white, his legs grew feeble, and his hands shaky.

At fifty-eight he looked as old as if he were seventy, but this change was unnoticed in the house.

He glided about the corridors like a ghost. Whole days went by without any one hearing the sound of his voice. But he was not disagreeable to anybody, and there was a sweet pleasant smile always on his lips.

He never courted caresses from his child, but when he met him by chance in the passages he would lay his hand on his head, kiss him fondly, murmur tender words in his ear, and then turn away, sometimes with tears in his eyes. He thought it a blot on the life of that little boy, ruddy and beautiful as a cherubim, to have been born of a disgraced father, and the unhappy man seemed to ask his pardon for his existence. It was the year 1829; four years had elapsed since the colonel arrived from America, and he looked a very spectre. He slept well, ate well, and nothing seemed to worry him; but his life seemed slipping away, in a slow but sure consumption. His wife sent for a doctor, and then another and another. But they all said the same: it was necessary for him to amuse himself and to associate with people. And these were just the particular remedies which the count declined to adopt. By degrees he stayed longer in bed, he rose later, and retired to rest earlier. He lost all inclination to work in the garden, never went outside the four walls of the house, and indoors he gave up looking after the things which used to interest him, being generally handy, such as attending to the aviary and other manual occupations. The few hours that were not passed in bed were spent in an armchair, or in walking through the corridors in silence, until at last he left off getting up altogether. Luis recollected all this perfectly. When he used to go into his father's apartments he saw him with his eyes fixed

on the ceiling and an expression of terrible distress upon his face. He would turn his head when his son entered the room, smile, call him to him by signs, and after giving him a kiss would seem to want him to go.

One day the boy saw much coming and going in the house; the servants were running about in distress, exchanging rapid words with each other. The few available friends and relations were summoned, and frightened the child by their long faces. On entering his father's room he saw that an altar was being erected. Having been placed in a corner by one of the servants, he was told not to be afraid, but his father was about to confess, and partake of the Holy Communion when the Divine Majesty would be present. The injunction not to be frightened, which was repeated several times, produced a contrary effect. The boy understood that something serious was going on. In fact, the Count of Onis was dying; he was certainly taking his departure, as his relations said. The doctor said he was to be prepared.... At six o'clock in the evening the doors of the palace of Onis were thrown open to receive the priest, who had come in the carriage of the house bearing the Sacred Host. The servants and relations were waiting in the doorway with lighted torches. A large file of people of all classes, also bearing lights, came behind. Many of them came out of real regard and devotion for the patient; but the majority came out of curiosity to see one who had lived so long apart from the world under such solemn, critical circumstances.

All those that wished to, came right into the presence of the dying man. No obstacle was put in anybody's way, so a strange and motley crowd filled the count's room: well-to-do people, poor people, and children, were all anxious to see the fallen man, now that he was about to fall into the dark bosom of death, the oblivion of eternity. The dean of the cathedral, his friend and confessor, approached with the elevated Host. The people present fell on their knees, a solemn silence reigned. At that moment the sick man, who had been propped up in bed, said in a loud voice, addressing himself to the kneeling assembly:

"I swear by the Sacramental God about to enter my body, that I have never been a traitor to my country, and that in the American war I always behaved like a loyal and honourable gentleman."

His voice, which appeared to come from a corpse, sounded clear and sharp in the room. There was a repressed murmur among the people. The dean, with tears in his eyes, replied:

"Blessed are those that hunger and thirst after righteousness;" and he put the blessed Sacrament in the colonel's mouth. The news of the old soldier's affirmation ran through the town. The strange and terrible oath, which was repeated from one to the other, made a profound impression on the public. The relations and friends of the count made a great parade of the matter. One of them thought of presenting a petition to the king, signed by all the neighbours, begging him to revoke the colonel's sentence. But the dean had anticipated him, and being an energetic, eloquent man, he got the archbishop and the Chapter of the cathedral to favour his mission to Madrid for the intercession for the re-installation of the friend of his infancy in his military rank. Meanwhile the patient slightly improved, the illness did not seem to get worse; but, although it was not externally noticeable, the consumption was gaining ground.

Nothing was said about the deputation to the king. However, the dean had time to get to Madrid, gain an audience of his Majesty, appeal to his pity with the account of the solemn statement made in his presence, obtain a royal commission restoring the count all his honours with all the accompanying crosses and decorations, and return to Lancia mad with anxiety. How delightful it was to find his friend had not expired! He ran from the boat in which he had travelled, to the palace of the Onis, and with the greatest precaution, to avoid over-excitement for the patient, the good news was communicated to him. The colonel remained motionless for some time with his face hidden in his hands.

"What time is it?" he said at last.

"It is just two," was the reply.

"Let me have my uniform at once!" he exclaimed with unusual energy, raising himself up without anybody's help.

"Rayo de Dios! Quick, my uniform," he repeated more emphatically, seeing that no one moved.

At last the countess went to the wardrobe, and brought it out. He had himself quickly dressed; the ribbon of Carlos III. put across his breast, and all the crosses he had won. There were so many, that he could not put them all on the left side, so some had to come to the right. In this attire he had himself led to the window looking on to the Calle de Cerrajerías, and there he stood. It was not long before the faithful, repairing home from Mass, which was the best attended of the Sunday services, saw this strange, corpse-like figure, dressed in his grand uniform, at the window. And with a feeling of sadness, respect, and compassion,

they all filed by the house with their eyes riveted upon him.

For three consecutive Sundays the colonel made a point of getting up and going through the same ceremony. He stood for half an hour displaying his signs of honour, with his eyes ecstatically fixed on space, without seeing or hearing the crowd which collected before the palace with manifestations of the gravest interest and concern. On the fourth Sunday he wished to do the same, and peremptorily insisted on being dressed, but he at that instant fell back on the pillows, never to rise again. So that night God took the brave, punctilious soldier unto Himself. Poor father! The count could never think of that scene, so deeply graven in his mind, without tears rising to his eyes. He had inherited from him the exquisite delicacy of feeling, and a susceptibility that almost amounted to weakness, without the serenity, power of taking the initiative, and the unbending will that had characterised Colonel Campo. The present count had an excessively sensitive and affectionate disposition, together with the integrity and modesty peculiar to the Campos. But these qualities were counteracted by a weak, fanciful, moody character, which was doubtless inherited from his mother's family.

Donna Maria Gayoso, the widowed Countess of Onis, daughter of the Baron de los Oscos, was a very original person; so exceptionally original that she bordered on the eccentric. In her whole family for the last three or four generations there had been some exhibition of eccentricity that in some members had passed into madness.

Her grandfather had been a hardened atheist and a follower of Voltaire and the Encyclopædia; then he became a victim to drunkenness in his last days, and, according to the general report, he was carried off by devils to the infernal regions. He had really died of spontaneous combustion, which fact gave rise to such a fabulous story. Her father was a weak-minded man, and her mother, a woman of uncommon energy, had him completely under her thumb. Of his uncles, one had gone melancholy mad; another distinguished himself in mathematics, but he was so eccentric that his curious ways were retailed as amusing anecdotes in Lancia; and another retired to the country, married a peasant, and killed himself with drinking. She had only one remaining brother, the present Baron de los Oscos. He was an original and an eccentric creature. At the commencement of the civil war he put himself under the banner of the Pretender, and entered his army, but only on condition of serving as a common soldier. This resolution made a great sensation.

But all the persuasions of the grandees about Don Carlos, and even those of the king himself, were powerless to make him accept an officer's commission. He was wounded several times, and in one case he was so seriously injured in the face that he was deeply scarred; and as his face was already as ugly as it could well be, the deep red seam finished by rendering his appearance ghastly to a degree that was terrible.

He was younger than his sister Maria, not being yet fifty, and he lived alone and celibate in the dreary old house belonging to the los Oscos in the Calle del Pozo, which had certainly nothing grand about it. He rarely went to see his sister, not from any antipathy, but from the unsociability and crustiness of his disposition. He seldom left his house, particularly in the daytime. He had very few friends, and his most intimate one—in fact, the only one who might be said to enjoy his friendship—was an uncloistered friar, who before taking orders had served as an officer in the army. This Fray Diego was his constant companion. The baron inspired universal terror with his gloomy character, his eccentricities, and more especially by the fearful appearance of his face. The children were quite panic-stricken in his presence. Parents and nurses used him as a bugbear to make them obedient:

"I will go and tell the baron about you! The baron will come! I saw the baron to-day, and he asked me if you were obedient," &c.

And the baron, with his strange gestures, and rough, loud voice, became a very ogre to the poor little innocent things. He constantly went about armed with a pair of pistols; and the handle of his stick was a veritable club. It was said that he once made an end of a servant merely for having opened a letter, and that on several occasions he seized hold of children who dared to make faces at him in the street, put them in the stable, undressed them, and thrashed them soundly with the bridle of his horse. True, or invented, these stories were calculated to make the infant minds of Lancia regard him as a monster of ferocity from whom they fled as fast as their trembling legs would carry them.

One of the things which inspired the terror of the little ones, and caused respect not devoid of fear in the grown-up people, was the horse that the baron had. It was a creature with a fiery eye, and so fierce that nobody but he and his friend Fray Diego, who had served in the cavalry, dared to mount him. He had to be most cleverly managed when taken to drink, and even then the ungovernable brute reared and kicked to the alarm of all the passers-by. When the baron mounted and left his house, striking about him, and laying into the horse with his whip, the neighbours rushed to their windows, the children took refuge in the bosoms of their mothers, and everybody gazed in terror at the fearful centaur. Certainly the Baron de los Oscos presented at such times a formidable aspect, with his scarred face, bloodshot eyes, waxed, fierce-looking moustache, and his figure looking like part of the horse.

One's imagination had to go back to the invasions of the barbarians to find anything equal to it. Neither Alaric, Attila, nor Odoacer could have looked more strange and sinister, nor could they have inspired more terror than he. Judge, then, of the effect upon the timid neighbours when one day he took it into his head to parade the streets of the town at midnight, accompanied by a servant, a man very like him, on another charger.

The Countess of Onis was as strange in her way as her brother. She was short and stout, with a pale, round face, dull black eyes, hair plastered down with quince-juice gum, and constantly dressed in the mournful garb of a nun. She lived as secluded in her place, as a nun in a convent. She was absolutely absorbed in devotion, but it was a capricious, fantastic devotion, in no way similar to that practised by really mystic souls. All her life she had shown a

tendency to eccentricity, but after the count's death it became so marked, that her strange ways assumed the form of rather serious manias. When she was young, her modesty was so extreme that it became ridiculous. The ears of the Señorita de los Oscos were so chaste that the conversation of an English "Miss" would seem like a serjeant's in her presence. She could not tolerate her brother's under-linen being put with hers when the laundress took it away or brought it home. If she was asked to sew a button on his underclothes, she ran to her room when the task was over, and washed her hands, when, it was said, she sprinkled them with holy water. She compressed her figure to a hurtful extent, and the height of the collar of her dresses was contrary to the regulations of fashion; her undergarments were only changed in the dark, and she never shook hands with a man unless she had gloves on. The history of her marriage was truly curious, full of funny incidents which were for a long time the talk of the town, and the account of the first night of her marriage, whether true or false, was worthy of figuring in a novel of Paul de Kock. One need hardly say that during her marriage this virtue of chastity became somewhat modified. But as soon as she became a widow, she resorted to her eccentric ways to a remarkable degree, and in her latter years they assumed the aspect of madness. When she told her beads, which was twice a day, she sent a servant to the poultry-yard to separate the cock from the hens; then the forks had to be separated from the spoons, and the hooks from the eyes. One day the coachman came to tell her that one of the mares had foaled, and she was so angry that, after having sharply rebuked him for his audacity in acquainting her with such a fact, she gave orders for having it sold. One day she came upon a lad giving a kiss to the cook, and she became ill with disgust, and both parties were immediately dismissed from the house.

She liked to have a party at an early hour in the evening, when she only invited clerics. On these occasions she used to sit in an armchair where, intentionally or unintentionally, probably intentionally, there were put two cushions so that she seemed to be in a valley. Soon after the arrival of the company, when the conversation became animated, she would fall into a deep sleep, and thus remain until nine o'clock, when the cassocked gentlemen retired, presumably, without shaking hands. As there was a chapel in the house she seldom went out, and when she did so, it was in the carriage. She kept all the money that came to her hands hidden away in secret places in the garret or the garden. Sometimes this avarice or, as it may be more correctly termed, this mania for hoarding, brought them into difficulties, and she preferred to let her son borrow money to disinterring her treasure. She was very greedy, and fond of dainties; and she could consume a quantity of sweets with no signs of indigestion. But such things

were not made for nuns, and so, in strange contradiction to her pious inclinations, she hated all that savoured of the convent.

And it was by this eccentric, one may almost say mad, woman, that the present Count of Onis was brought up, and his character was much affected thereby. To counteract his excessive sensitiveness, his weak and vacillating temperament, and his imaginative and gloomy disposition, of which sad signs were shown at times, he ought to have been brought up in the open air under an intelligent and energetic master, who would have known how to inspire him with manly strength and resolution. But, unfortunately, it was just the contrary. The countess would not hear of any career which would take him away from Lancia; so he went to the local university, where he followed a course of jurisprudence, after which rich young men think they are entitled to pass the rest of their days in idleness. During his college career the countess kept him under her authority in a way that became ridiculous. He never left the house without permission, he came in at dark, he told his beads, and went to confession when she bade him to. Whilst his body developed to a marvellous degree, so that he became a fine athletic young fellow, his mind remained as submissive and childish as that of a ten-year-old child.

His retired effeminate life increased the natural timidity of his character, his sensitiveness became weakness, and his gloomy nature secretive. And the most lamentable thing was, that without being a shining light, he was gifted with clear intelligence, and possessed a penetration frequently found in reserved and timid men. He was wanting in self-confidence and experience; but he showed a great deal of tact in conversation; shortcomings of his neighbour never escaped him and, as with most weak characters, he took a mischievous delight in drawing attention to them. It is the revenge taken by characterless people upon those who have a vigorous and spontaneous one. Nevertheless, these outbursts of irony and malignity were not very frequent. He generally appeared a prudent, reserved, melancholy young man, with courteous gentlemanly manners, a feeling heart, and full of affection and respect for his mother. After his college career was over, his inclination and plans were in favour of leaving Lancia, going to court, and travelling for some time. But the countess's disapproval was enough to make him give up the idea and remain at home. So he spent his days in idleness without feeling in anyway obliged ever to glance from time to time into his books of jurisprudence. He amused himself occasionally with certain manual occupations, and in reading the works of romance much in vogue at the time. He became a clever carpenter, but not so clever as his father; and then he took up watch-

making. Finally, he developed an interest in a little property in the suburbs of the town, and set about making great improvements there. It was called the Grange, and it was situated a little more than a mile from Lancia. It was a large old rambling house, with a beautiful wood of oak trees behind, and fertile meadows in front. The count took to going there every afternoon after dinner; he bred black cattle, and horses as well; he planted trees, cut canals, and raised banks. The house he hardly touched. He gained physically by this new interest, which made him more active and hardy, and his character improved at the same time. The melancholy which had been so distressing to him decreased, and he became more cheerful, his self-confidence increased, as he had more intercourse with people, whilst the fits of anger, rage and despair which used to come over him without any cause, making him seem like an epileptic to the servants, grew rarer and rarer until they left him altogether. He thus reached his twenty-eighth year when he began to frequent the house of the Quiñones, and it was then that his life underwent a complete change.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when his servant woke him from an exciting unfinished dream to give him a letter. With feigned indifference he dropped it on the night-table, but scarcely had the servant left the room when he seized it, and opened it with visible agitation.

Although his connection with Amalia was of about two years' standing, he never opened a letter from her without his hands trembling. They certainly did not often write to each other; and it was probably the rarity of the occurrence which accounted for its affecting him so much, as in truth a deep love for her had taken root in his timid, sensitive nature.

"This afternoon. By the pulpit," was all that the note conveyed, but his mind was much agitated by the communication. Such appointments were extremely dangerous. In the midst of his happiness they overpowered him with a feeling of dread he could not overcome. He had begged Amalia to give them up, but she paid no heed to his wishes, and he was perfectly incapable of opposing her will. All the morning he was nervous and upset. He took a ride to calm his nerves, and went as far as the Grange, only to return as unsettled as when he left.

At the hour named he left home and went to the Calle de Cerrajerías. It was the time of day when scarcely anybody is about. It was three o'clock, and so people were either at table or resting. At the end of Cerrajerías, at the corner of Santa Lucia, is the church of San Rafael, and the principal entrance is on that side. The count entered the building, after taking holy water, like one about to say his

prayers. He was quite alone, or at least he seemed so at first sight. In a few minutes his eyes became accustomed to the semi-darkness, and he saw two or three kneeling figures scattered about. He knelt down in the dark near the little door of the staircase leading to the pew of the Quiñones, and pretended to pray for a few moments. This was very repugnant to him. He was a sincere believer, and his strictly pious education made him have a horror of such sacrilege. The fanaticism of his mother had left its mark upon him, and he had a fearful dread of hell. Amalia was also a believer, and she had a reputation for piety in the place: she belonged to several confraternities, she was patron of several asylums, she frequently made presents to the images, and she was generally seen with the clergy; but this profanation she regarded with the greatest indifference. Religion was for her a thing of respectability, but her own pleasures and wishes seemed the thing to be most respected. After a few minutes the count cautiously rose, and pushed the little door, which had been purposely left open, then he went in and mounted the narrow winding staircase. The little pew of the Quiñones was even darker than the Church. He felt for the door of the passage and opened it, but as it had glass windows looking on to the street, he crossed it like a cat. At the door communicating with the house, Jacoba was waiting for him. She was a woman of more than fifty years of age, of portly form and demeanour. She moved with difficulty, for her breath was short, from her extreme fatness, and she always spoke in a falsetto voice. She was discretion itself, a sealed book. The count and Amalia had never had any other confidante. Nobody else in the world was acquainted with their love affair, and she had served them wonderfully through its course. Acting as sentinel, she had often saved them from discovery, for she had constituted herself their guardian angel. She was not a servant in the house, but the señora was one of her patrons. Her occupation was to run errands to the shops for different houses, and the perquisites made on the purchases formed the staple of her livelihood. This was not, however, sufficient for her maintenance, but she was alone and a spinster, and in many houses presents were made her, and she was helped in a hundred ways. The Señora de Quiñones was her especial patroness, and when she became her confidante, it was like coming upon a mine of wealth, for Amalia paid lavishly for services which certainly deserved great compensation.

The go-between put her finger on her lips as a sign of silence directly the count entered the door, but as he was already holding his breath to avoid making a noise, this warning was quite unnecessary. Then going a little way first, to see how the ground lay, she made him a sign to follow her. They crossed a corridor, passed by the principal staircase without going up it for fear of meeting some

servant, and went into the library where there was a little staircase that led thence to the second floor. The count proceeded on tiptoe with a beating heart. Although this was not the first time he had been like this to the Quiñones' house, it always seemed to him the height of temerity, and he inwardly cursed his lover's boldness and disregard of consequences.

At last they came to the señora's room. The door opened without any one being seen, Jacoba gave the count a gentle push, and remained herself outside.

Amalia withdrew her hand, which she had mechanically held out, and with a sudden impulsive gesture, she threw her arms round the neck of her beloved and kissed him with tenderness. The grave man, being still upset by the manner of his arrival, remained quiescent, and did not reciprocate these demonstrations of affection. The lady then gave him a maternal tap on the cheek.

"Calm yourself, coward, nobody will eat you here."

Luis made an effort to smile and sank into a French chair upholstered with bright blue.

Amalia's room with its luxurious furniture was a contrast to the neglect that reigned in the rest of the house. The walls were covered with rich tapestry, the best of the collection in the possession of the family; the bright furniture, of Louis XV. style, was brought from Madrid, with the magnificent ebony bedstead inlaid with marble in the alcove, when Don Pedro was making futile efforts to win the heart of his wife. There was a perfumed sensual atmosphere about the place, showing the refined tastes that the foreign lady had brought from other lands to the severe mansion of the Quiñones. She seated herself on the count's knee, and pulling his beard, she exclaimed with a joy that could scarcely be restrained and emanated from her whole person:

"See now, see how we have conquered. See how we have got over all those difficulties which came into your head and prevented your seeing clearly. Only a little audacity was necessary for God to help us."

"God!" said the count, with a shudder.

She felt she had been wrong in referring to the Divinity, and she hastened to say with unconcern:

"Well, then, fate, if you like. Come, don't make yourself wretched and sad. This is a moment of happiness for us. She is really here, and it seems too good to be

true. My daughter, the daughter of my love living with me; being able to see her and kiss her at all hours! How beautiful she is! I could not look at her comfortably until this morning, but to-day I did so to my heart's content. She is like you—particularly about the forehead between the eyebrows. Jacoba says that the mouth is mine. I am not sorry, for it might have taken after me in something worse, is it not so?" she added, with a coquettish smile.

"I think you are beautiful all round."

"That is right!" exclaimed the lady with an affectionate look. "You have at last recovered the power of speech. Well, then," she added in a serious tone, "you do not know the trouble we had this morning to find a nurse. Three were brought to me, and neither of them suited. At last I settled on the fourth. And how beautifully my angel took to her food. I could hardly help jumping for joy, and I can hardly help it now. But I must be grave and solemn, like the señor count. Tell me, how did you manage to get her here? Tell me about it. How your face looked when the drawing-room door opened last night!"

"The thing was not easy. At nine o'clock I went to fetch her from Jacoba's house. But she will have told you about it. I had to spend two hours there, for the devil seemed in the business, and the child screamed incessantly."

"Yes, yes; I know all that. And then?"

"What a night it was! The gusts of wind were incessant, especially in those out-of-the-way suburbs. I turned up my trousers to the knee, for how could I come into your drawing-room covered with mud? I wanted to carry the basket on one arm, and the open umbrella in the other hand, but it was impossible. After a few steps, I came back and left the umbrella with Jacoba. What a walk! Holy heaven, what a business! The wind kept blowing down the collar of my coat, the rain dashed in my face and down my neck. I was frightened the baby would get wet. I went along fearing to breathe. Supposing I had slipped just then! The wind blew at times so strongly that I could hardly get along. You can easily believe that I was tempted to go back and leave it for another day."

"I can easily believe it. I know that a plate of water would be enough to drown you."

He gave her a sad, reproachful look, and then Amalia began to laugh, and embracing and kissing him effusively, she exclaimed:

"Don't be cross, poor little dear! Do not think I do not feel for you. The journey was very difficult. You bore it like a hero."

The count coloured at these praises. His conscience told him he did not deserve them; and he recollected the terrible ordeal that Amalia had herself passed through, and said:

"But you! What you must have suffered on your side! How are you? It was imprudent to go downstairs so soon."

"Oh! I am as strong as a horse, although I appear weak."

"So you seem to be. To suffer what you did without uttering a sound!"

"Pray, what can you know about it, stupid?" she said, putting a hand on his mouth.

"Then only four days in bed," continued the young man, gently taking her hand from his mouth and kissing it at the same time; "and on the fifth to go down to the drawing-room."

"But, then, nothing was supposed to have happened, and if I had not gone down yesterday, Quiñones would certainly have sent for the doctor! On the second day he was worrying for me to go down. But what do you think? He is in love with the baby—quite mad about it! All the morning he has had the nurse in his room. And he has such strange ideas. He says, 'God has sent us this child to console us for having no family.'"

Then the count relapsed into sadness and gloom, whilst a smile of cruel irony played on the lips of the lady.

"And all this time you have never asked for her, you unnatural father!" she said, as she passed her delicate white fingers through her lover's thick, curly, reddish beard. "For you *are* her father—yes, her father. That you can't deny," she added, fondly putting her face against his so that her lips were close to his ear. "I will go and fetch her."

"But will the nurse come, too?" he asked in terror.

"No, man, no!" she answered, laughing; "she will come alone. You will see that can easily be managed."

The count opened his eyes with an expression that made her laugh more. She

got up and, opening the door, she whispered a second with Jacoba who was stationed as sentinel outside. In a few minutes the stout go-between re-opened the door and brought in the sleeping child. Amalia sat down, and told her to put it on her lap. And then, for a long time, they both gazed in ecstasy at the little delicate creature as it softly breathed in its sleep. It was a moment of happiness. The count forgot his fears and became quite calm, whilst a smile of real pleasure illuminated his gentle, melancholy features. The minutes passed, and neither cared to break the blissful silence, nor disturb the intense absorption in which their minds were one. That tiny, unconscious being, that atom of rosy flesh riveted their gaze equally, and bound their souls and lives to her with invisible threads.

"How beautiful she is! She is like you," murmured the count so softly that the words hardly reached the ears of his lover.

"She is more like you," she returned in the same subdued voice.

And by a simultaneous movement, they both turned and looked at each other with a long intense look of love.

"I adore you, Amalia," he said.

"I love you, Luis," she replied.

Their hands met and pressed affectionately, and their heads were bent in the interchange of a chaste kiss.

CHAPTER IV

THE HISTORY OF THEIR LOVE

CHASTE, yes, and perhaps it was the first kiss that had been so in that long love affair. All that was tender and poetic in their affection seemed to rise like a perfume, and transport them with raptures of delight. The remorse that had hitherto weighed so heavily on the sensitive soul of the count was gone. The mad agitation that had tormented them both, the ardour, violence and bitterness which, like the hidden worm in the bud of a rose, had poisoned their wicked love

passages, had passed away. Nothing remained but pure love—love satisfied, love consecrated by the holy mysterious force of nature's mysteries.

If only they had met earlier! How often has this been said by people in similar circumstances! And if they had met earlier, they would probably have parted without the slightest feeling of attraction.

Love flourishes on difficulties and takes root on shifting sand, in fact they seem to be the most propitious circumstances for its cultivation.

The report in Lancia was true about Amalia having been forced into a marriage with Don Pedro by her family who were in great straits. Don Antonio Sanchiz, the lady's father, was a Valencian gentleman of means, but gambling and dissipation swallowed up three-fourths of his property. His eldest son, who had the same tastes, spent the remaining fourth by the same means. Amalia was the youngest of the family, which consisted of four girls and one boy. Her eldest sister, who had come in for a little of the decaying splendour of the house, managed to marry a rich banker. Nobody approved of the connection, especially as neither Don Antonio nor his son Antonito managed to see the colour of the money of their respective son, and brother-in-law. The other two married men of good family but without money. Amalia grew up in the midst of the total ruin of her house. Neither her elegant figure nor her high birth brought her admirers. The well-known misfortunes of the house, and her father and brother's bad reputation, constituted an unsurmountable barrier around her. Her feelings were often touched by those who only paid her attention out of idleness, or love of flirtation. She was certainly not a typical beauty: she was wanting in gracefulness of figure, plumpness of form, and brightness of complexion. But in spite of her slight, and not at all well formed figure, and the constant pallor of her cheeks, there was something attractive about her, which grew upon one the more you saw of her. Perhaps this charm lay in her large expressive dark eyes, which reflected every emotion: now they shone with a fire that breathed a deep and passionate nature, now they looked quiet, ecstatic and limpid in a sort of mystic rapture, now they were merry and mischievous, now they were dreamy and melancholy, now tender and tearful, now sparkling with fun or shining with anger. Perhaps her charm lay in her versatility, in the keenness of her intellect, in her sympathetic and insinuating voice. She was, in short, an interesting, charming woman. I do not know whether it was owing to her pride or her naturally tempestuous mind, but scorning the young men of her own rank, who courted her without resolving to ask for her hand, she lost her heart to a modest young man, a poor government clerk with an income of forty thousand reales,^[1]

son of a schoolmaster. The blue blood of the Sanchiz in the veins of Antonio, Antonito, her sisters, and the banker, her brother-in-law, in whom it was conspicuous by its absence, boiled in indignation.

She was the victim of active, fierce persecution. But as she was not wanting in spirit, and was moreover possessed of a mind fertile in resources, she certainly managed to defy the family for some time; their entreaties and threats were of no avail and her time of enforced retreat in a convent was equally ineffectual. If the clerk had not happened to die of phthisis, which killed him in a few months, it is almost certain that the very noble and straitened house of the Sanchiz would have had to see itself allied to the son of a schoolmaster.

After this adventure Amalia lost caste in the place. But she well knew that if she had retained her prestige, it would have been the same. Men do not marry for prestige, but for money. It never occurred to her to feel remorse for the past. She lived sad and resigned for two years, showing an utter indifference to the pleasures belonging to her position, and without making any effort to gain the good graces of the young men so as to get a husband. It was when she was about twenty-four years old and she had given up all thought of matrimony, that Don Pedro Quiñones, her third or fourth cousin, began to think about her. She rebelled against marrying this gentleman, whom she had only seen two or three times as a child, and who had been a widower for a short time, and whose eccentricities she had heard her father and brother relate with fits of laughter, and now they were the very ones to press her acceptance of him as a husband! She was not very firm in her resistance. She was so disillusioned, she lived in such a state of deep dejection and apathy, that as soon as her father became angry about the matter and pressed her to accede to his entreaties he extorted a consent. They all said that the marriage would be the salvation of the family. She did not trouble to find out if that were the truth or not. After she was married, she found that all that they could get out of Don Pedro was a little allowance, which gave them hardly enough for food.

So the noble descendant of the Quiñones of Leon was hopelessly in love with a statue. On the journey that they made from Valencia to Lancia the bride was so cold and circumspect, but at the same time polite, that Don Pedro was kept at the same distance as at the beginning of his suit. In Lancia we know what the public version of the story was. The persistent coldness and the infinite contempt with which she treated him for some time, far from repelling him, only increased his passion. Quiñones was, as we know, of a strong, tenacious, indomitable will. The obstacles which at first merely irritated him, finally enraged him. He wanted to

conquer the heart of his wife, and he spared no means in the attempt: he overwhelmed her with attentions, he gratified her slightest wishes, and lived for several months in perpetual anxiety, in a perfect fever of alternate hope and despair. He would, however, never have attained his end without the astuteness of his friend the canon, who advised him to take a journey in the mountains, which, rife with frights and dangers, drew them together in closer intimacy. During the first two years of her marriage Amalia led a retired life, without ever hardly leaving the gloomy old palace of the Calle de Santa Lucia. She lived alone in her depression, and made her life more sad than it need have been, by nursing a dumb rebellion against a fate that threatened to drive her insane. To all outward appearance she was resigned, treating those that were about her with studied courtesy. The dreadful illness which happened to her husband distracted her a little, and a sentiment of pity touched her heart. For some time she thought she was destined for the vocation of a nursing sister, and she tried with assumed affection to make his life more bearable to him. By degrees she grew to like the little gatherings of friends round her husband, and she began to interest herself and take part in the local political conversations.

Don Pedro was the arbiter of the province whilst the Moderate party was in power. Now that it was out, he still retained great prestige and influence, from people not knowing how long it would be before it was in again. It was to augment this prestige and this influence, and to add to the dignity of the house, that Amalia opened her drawing-rooms to the Lancian society that she had hitherto kept at a distance, doing nothing but pay a few complimentary visits. She now gave concerts, organised sociable gatherings, and had large state balls, by means of which she regained her lost energy, and the gracious and sympathetic versatility which had characterised her; the light returned to her eyes and the smile to her lips. Nobody could better do the honours of her entertainments. She was a model of gentleness and courtesy, and she made herself adored by the young people of the place to whom she afforded the means of killing interminable winter evenings.

Fernanda Estrada-Rosa was one of the most beautiful ornaments of her concerts and parties. The Count of Onis, her admirer, came in her train. The count had long been on visiting terms at the house of Quiñones, but until lately he only went occasionally in the evening for a formal visit, or at the new year, &c. Notwithstanding, he had a profound sympathy for Quiñones. It was enough for him to belong to the nobility, for the young noble to consider him superior in all respects to everybody else in the place. Amalia, who hardly knew him, began

to observe him with much curiosity. She had heard so much said about his affection and respect for his mother, his melancholy temperament, his habits and his exaggerated piety, that she wished to cultivate his acquaintance, she wanted to gauge the depths of the soul of such a superior and high-minded young man. She was not long in seeing that he was not yet in love. Noting his attention to Fernanda with interest, she perceived a coldness on his side which was certainly not on that of the rich heiress. She knew that the count was deceiving himself, making efforts to fall in love, or at any rate, to seem so. He seemed to look upon love as an obligation pertaining to his age and position. The chief young man in Lancia ought to love the richest, most beautiful girl of Lancia. Besides, it seemed as if he also wanted to show the place that he was neither eccentric nor a maniac, as he had heard that he was reported to be. He therefore went in for being a recognised lover; he spent a couple of hours in the morning in the Calle de Altavilla, where his young lady lived, he sat at her side at the parties of the Señoritas de Meré or de Quiñones, and he danced with her at the balls of the Casino. But at the same time Amalia did not fail to see, with considerable interest, that his conversation was cold, and that the count was often silent and distraught until she took part in the conversation and made it more lively.

The love affair interested her more and more, she courted the girl's confidence as well as his. It was not long before her ardent, sagacious, strong-willed soul sympathised with that of Luis, which was so timid, childlike, pitiful, and affectionate. More proficient in the art of love-making than the Estrada-Rosa girl, she soon won the count's confidence and affection and she drew from him a number of confidences, not only about his feelings, but the whole of his life. No clever Jesuit could have made a better confessor. Luis, delighted at such a show of interest, completely opened his heart to her, at first telling her his habits, then relating things of his past life, and finally confiding secret feelings which are only told to a brother. But Amalia expressed no surprise at such original and morbid thoughts; she gave her opinion on them, and told him affectionately that he might confide in her and count upon her counsel in difficult matters of life, of which complicated mechanism the count was totally ignorant. This clever game advanced her scheme, and he confided in her more and more, happy in the opportunity of unbosoming sentimental ideas, and confessing the strange unhappy timidity to which he was a victim.

Amalia knew how to avoid arousing Fernanda's jealousy by posing as the confidante and protectress of her love. If she had long and interesting conversations with the count, she had equally long and interesting ones with her.

She would have great pleasure in giving them assistance in the form of finding them opportunities of seeing and talking to each other, and when they understood each other, &c. &c. But, without the innocent girl suspecting it, without even the count realising it, the Valencian lady rapidly gained the affections of Luis. If in youth, beauty, and elegance, she was inferior to the rich heiress, she was much superior in expressive grace of countenance, power of conversation, and fine intelligence. The count soon came to telling her what was the true state of his heart with regard to Fernanda. The astute Señora knew how to turn such confidences to her own advantage by making him see that what he felt was only admiration for the beautiful works of nature, a vain desire to make himself beloved by the prettiest and richest girl in the town, the necessity of distraction from depression—anything, in short, but real love. That was shown in great sadness, ineffable joy, sleepless nights, anxiety, and agitation, both sweet and bitter, by which the breast is constantly consumed.

Luis was soon won over to her opinion. Then she added that his coldness was unjustifiable; she did not understand how a man of such good taste had not fallen hopelessly in love ere this. She joked him, she laughed at him, and she praised the qualities of the gentle heiress up to the clouds.

But whilst she said this with her lips, her eyes belied her words: the black pupils, so full of fire and intelligence, were fixed on him with an expression somewhat languid, somewhat malicious, which ended by fascinating him. At the same time her small, delicate, aristocratic hands took hold of his on every occasion; and on parting she pressed them with nervous tenacity. If sometimes, in bending to look at anything, their heads touched, Amalia did not move hers, and the count was not loth to inhale the subtle perfume which entered his veins like poison. She took a great interest in his clothes, and told him what she liked: he was not to wear a frock-coat, the blue jacket suited him admirably. Why did he like dark gloves?

"I forbid you," she said, laughing, "to wear them any more."

She professed a great taste for cravats, and she told him that those in a bow suited him better than those in a knot.

"Why do you not get your hats from Madrid?" she asked. "Those that you get in Lancia are so old-fashioned and ridiculous."

And the count was pleased to follow her suggestions, and gradually let himself be ruled by the woman who was so weak in body and so strong in will.

One night on arriving at the Quiñones' house before anybody else, the lady said to him sharply:

"Who gave you that button-hole? Fernanda?"

The count smiled and coloured, as he gave a sign in the affirmative.

"Then you must excuse my saying it is a very ugly colour. Look here, I will give you a prettier one."

So saying, she went straight to a flower-stand in the room, and took out a magnificent pink clove. She then turned to where the count was standing, and with great boldness, although with a certain affectation of one who is showing her power, she took away the flower he was wearing, and replaced it by the fresh one. He suffered this substitution in silence, upset and surprised. She, feigning not to notice his surprise, took a step back, and said with interest:

"Yes, I think that is better!"

Then ensued a few minutes of embarrassed silence. She then began to play with Fernanda's clove, pulling the petals, whilst darting frequent glances at the count, who stood confused, not knowing what to say, nor where to look. At last their eyes met with a smile. There was a spark of malice in hers, and in the sudden scornful gesture with which she threw the flower she held in her hand under a chair.

The count instantly became serious, and his cheeks coloured. At that moment Manuel Antonio came in.

The count could not regain his equanimity.

When Fernanda arrived, and, with visible displeasure, asked him for her clove, he was in a very awkward position. The gardener's little boy was said to have pulled it from him when he stooped to kiss him, and so he had taken another from his mother's room. But Amalia, who was implacable, made matters worse by saying in a loud voice with a malicious smile:

"Who gave you that beautiful clove? Fernanda?"

"No, no," he hastily replied.

And then the count, quite red and upset, had to proceed to give in a loud voice the explanation he had been giving in an undertone to Fernanda. That little act of

treason was a bond between them; it established a peculiar relation which the count did not dare to define in his thoughts, for he trembled as though an abyss yawned at his feet. He continued paying attention to the heiress of Estrada-Rosa with the same, if not more, assiduity, but he could never talk with the Señora of Quiñones without feeling agitated; her glances were long and earnest, the pressure of her hand was full of affection, and yet they both acted before Fernanda as if she were already his affianced wife. And yet they had not uttered a word of love! But Luis knew he was not treating the lady he was courting fairly, and that he was acting criminally with regard to Don Pedro, his friend. He did not know how, or why, but his conscience told him that he was. Sometimes he tried to persuade himself that he had not taken one step in the direction of crime, that he was involved in a train of circumstances in which love, intelligence, treason, all played a part without one's knowing how it had happened.

More than a month passed by in this way. Amalia not only discoursed to him of love with her eyes, but she made him carry out all her most capricious fancies whilst sometimes sharply calling him to task.

If, for example, he caught a glance from Amalia when he was going for a walk telling him to stay, he would stay. If he was about to dance with Fernanda, a severe look would prevent him doing so.

One day he announced his intention of going for six or eight days to his property in Onis; but Amalia made a negative sign with her head, and he gave up the idea. What right had she thus to cross his wishes and direct his line of conduct? He did not know, but he felt very pleased to obey her. He lived in a state of pleasant, exciting unrest, sometimes hoping for something so ineffably delightful, that he hardly dared to formulate it even to himself.

In the meanwhile she quietly watched him with her sphinx-like smile, strong in the conviction that the something would happen when the time was ripe.

One afternoon in June the count was at The Grange inspecting the operations of some workmen he was employing in opening a wider aqueduct for the mill, when the boy who minded the cattle, came to tell him that a lady wanted him.

"A lady?" he exclaimed, surprised; "do you not know her?"

The servant stared stupidly without replying. How could he know her, when he had passed his life among the cattle and only went to Lancia on some market-

day to buy or sell a cow? The count recollected this, and proceeded to inquire:

"Is she short?"

"No, she is very tall, Señor."

"Eyes very black and bright, pale colour? her gait graceful and elegant?"

And before the servant could answer these questions that he had not understood, he began running in the direction of the house with his heart beating with excitement at the presentiment that it was her.

"Where is she?" he cried, without ceasing running.

"In the courtyard by the garden door," shouted the boy in reply.

He arrived breathless at the courtyard, but before opening the door he stopped for an instant to check his presumption. How could he have thought of such a thing? What devil could have put it into his head?... Notwithstanding he could not dismiss the idea. It was she, it was she—he could not doubt the fact.

He raised the bolt of the large wooden door, painted green, and went in. The courtyard was large. Several outhouses for working purposes were built against the wall. Tied up to a roughly made wooden kennel was an enormous mastiff, who pulled at his chain as if he would break it in his attempts to get near his master.

There at the other end, near the iron gate communicating with the garden, he actually saw her looking through the bars at the flowers. She had her back to him. She was dressed in a light pink and white striped dress, with a little straw hat trimmed with roses. In her left hand she had a sunshade which matched her dress, and in her right she held some silk gloves.

How these details became engraven in his memory! They were indelibly fixed in his mind!

"You here?" he said, feigning a calmness he was very far from feeling. "Who would have thought that you were the señora whose arrival the servant just announced to me?"

"Did you really not think it was me?" she asked, looking at him fixedly.

"No, no, Señora."

But he coloured even as he said it, and the lady smiled kindly.

"Very well; now show me the Malmaison roses you told me about."

The count opened the gate, and they both went through to the garden, which was very large and somewhat neglected.

Since the countess had almost entirely given up coming to the Grange, the servants hardly touched it. Luis was more interested in making experiments with new modes of agriculture, breeding cattle, and draining ground, than in gardening. But there were many kinds of flowers, put there when his mother used to tend them every afternoon, and there were great bushes which time, combined with the fertile soil, had transformed into thick trees.

Whilst they passed along the walks, which were over-grown with moss, the countess explained in high, clear tones how she came to be there.

She had wished to drive to Bellavista, but passing by the little road that led to the Grange, she recollected the beautiful roses, and gave orders to the coachman to go that way. She had never seen the place before, she said; and she became quite enthusiastic over the thick foliage and the intense green of the place. In her country the vegetation was much paler.

"But more fragrant—like the women," said the count with gallantry.

The lady turned to give him a smile of thanks, and went on praising the beauty of the rhododendrons, the azaleas, and the gigantic camellias.

As soon as they had seen the roses, and the count had made her choose some to have sent to her the next day, they directed their steps towards the entrance-gate.

"And are you sure that I only came to see the roses?" said Amalia, suddenly stopping and fixing her eyes upon him.

The count's heart gave a bound, and he commenced to stammer in a lamentable fashion.

"I do not know—this visit, certainly. I should be so pleased if the rose-trees _____"

But the lady, taking pity on him, did not let him proceed.

"Well, besides the rose-trees, I came to see the whole place, particularly the

wood. And so you can show it to me," she added resolutely, taking him by the arm.

Whereupon the count was conscious of a new and violent emotion, at first painful, and then pleasurable, as he felt the lady's hand upon his arm. And moved to his inmost being at the honour conferred on him, he showed everything of interest on the estate: the beautiful large meadows, the stables, the new machinery for working the mill, and finally the wood.

She watched him out of the corner of her eye. Sometimes a smile of amusement played about her lips. She entered into everything with interest, praised the improvements he had made, and suggested fresh ones. And, in going about, she sometimes let the count's arm drop, and then took it again, which inspired the count with many diverse sensations, all intense and exciting. When she noticed he was getting more at his ease, she made some little sudden mischievous remark which plunged him into fresh confusion and made him blush to the roots of his hair.

"Now, count, when you caught sight of me just now, you said to yourself: 'Amalia has fallen in love with me and she cannot resist the desire to come and see me.'"

"Amalia, *por Dios!* What can make you say that? How could I ever have dared ——?"

But the lady, without seeming to notice his distress or to lay any importance on her own words, passed immediately to another subject. She seemed to like shocking him, and keeping him agitated and trembling. And in the furtive glances she cast at him there was the touch of superiority and irony of one, who was sure of the game.

The count turned grave under that enigmatical smile. He saw he was playing an awkward part, and, feeling that she was laughing at him, he made heroic efforts to recover his equanimity.

The lady admired, and was more enthusiastic about the wood than anything. It was a mass of ancient oaks, where the sun never penetrated. The ground was carpeted with thick turf and quite free from caltrops. No other private property was so richly wooded; it was, perhaps, due to the primitive forest where the monastery had been founded which was the origin of Lancia.

The lady found it pleasant to rest a little under the green bower where the light hardly penetrated. A peace, a pleasant calmness sweeter than the silence and calm of a Gothic cathedral, pervaded the place. She leant her back against a tree and gave a long look at the thick foliage around her.

The count stood near. Both were silent for some time. At last the man felt, without seeing it, that the lady's gaze was fixed upon him. He resisted the magnetic attraction of the look for some minutes. When at last he raised his eyes, he saw that her expression was so merry and daring that he dropped them again. Amalia gave vent to a mischievous laugh, which surprised, confused, and somewhat irritated him; and then seeing that her merriment did not cease, he said with a forced smile:

"At what are you laughing, my friend?"

"Nothing, nothing," she returned, putting her handkerchief to her mouth. "Take me to see the house."

And then she took his arm again. The house was a large, very old building of yellowish stone, worm-eaten by age, with two little square towers at the sides. Everything about it was shabby or worn out. Some bars were wanting in the stair-rails as well as in the balconies; the ceilings of the rooms were discoloured, the partition walls cracked, the plaster in holes; the looking-glasses, so much thought of in bygone days, were so covered with dust that they reflected nothing; the walls were damp and dirty, and the pictures hung thereon were so discoloured that one could not see what the artists had intended to depict; the scanty furniture of the rooms was worn out by the use of past generations. The things were all quite done for. Amalia liked the look of past grandeur. How many different beings had lived in that house! How they must have laughed and wept in these large rooms. Each one had its particular name: one was called the cardinal's room, because in times past a cardinal of the family occupied it when on a visit to the Grange; another the portrait-room, because a few pictures hung on the walls; and another the new room, although it looked as old and even older than the rest of the apartments. Everything bore traces of the private life of a family of bygone ages.

"This is the countess's chamber," said Luis, as he took his friend into a moderate-sized room, which, in spite of the dust and ravages of time, looked better furnished than the others. It was an elegant style of apartment, bearing evidence that past generations had not been destitute of a love of decoration.

There was a Pompadour escritoire, some chairs of the Regency, several pictures in pastel; and painted on the ceiling were cherubs floating in an atmosphere which had once been blue.

"Is this your mother's room?" asked Amalia.

"No," replied the count, smiling; "my mother sleeps on the other side. It has been called the countess's from time immemorial. Perhaps some old ancestor of mine chose it for herself. I often take my siesta here when the fatigue of going about the estate makes me want to have a sleep."

In one of the corners of the apartment there was a splendid bedstead of carved oak, grown black with age, one of those beds of the fifteenth century that antiquaries go perfectly mad on. The hangings were also very ancient, but there was a modern damask counterpane spread over the mattress.

"So it is here that you retire to think of me to your heart's content, is it not?" said Amalia.

The count looked as stunned as if she had given him a blow on the head.

"I! Amalia! How?"

Then with a sudden assumption of courage he exclaimed:

"Yes, yes, Amalia, you are quite right! I think of you here as, for some time past, I think of you everywhere I go. I do not know what has come to me: I live in a constant state of excitement, which, as you told me, is a sign of true love. I am in fact madly in love with you. I know that it is an atrocity, a crime, but I cannot help myself. Forgive me."

And, like one of his noble ancestors of the Middle Ages, the gentleman fell on his knees at the feet of the lady.

She was terribly angry at first. What? Was he not ashamed of such a confession? Did he not understand that it was an insult to address such words to her in his house? How could he suppose that she could quietly listen to such words? It seemed impossible that the Conde of Onis, such a perfect gentleman, could be so wanting in the respect due to a lady and to himself.

The count remained prostrate on his knees under such a storm of invectives. He knew his words had been of grave import, but the anger that they provoked in

the lady was not what he had most feared.

At last Amalia was silent. She regarded him for some seconds with eyes blazing with fury, but a happy smile soon suffused her expressive face. She approached him with a slow, majestic step, put her hand upon his shoulder, and bending down to bring her lips to his ear, she said in a loud voice:

"You are quite right not to be ashamed of anything of this, for I love you at least as much as you love me."

Then the young man seemed to go mad with joy. The terror was over, and he clasped and kissed her knees in a frenzy of delight, breaking into a torrent of incoherent, passionate words, full of fire and truth; whilst she, so short and diminutive, gazed at the adoring Colossus with her mysterious Valencian eyes glowing with passion and love.

It was thus that the Conde of Onis accomplished the difficult task of winning the affections of the elegant Señora of Don Pedro Quiñones de Leon.

The first months of their connection, fraught with poignant remorse and fascinating delight, were very agitating to the count. Amalia went occasionally to the Grange. At the social gathering in the evening she would give an account of her visit in a high-pitched voice; and he was in an agony of confusion, anxiety, and distress, whilst she with perfect *sang froid* told all that she could tell; spoke of the garden, scolded him for its state of neglect; and she amused herself with bringing home some plants every time she went there, so as to clear the ground, as he did not care for them; in short, her audacity became almost farcical.

"Would you believe it?" she said one day; "there is no bearing with this gentleman since ladies have taken to visiting him. You cannot think what airs he gives himself. I am afraid that the next time I go to the Grange he will make me wait in the hall."

The guests laughed, and said really some notice ought to be taken about it; and as Fernanda smiled she cast an affectionate glance at the count; Don Pedro even relaxed his severe expression and burst into a roar of laughter. At such moments it was indeed a superhuman effort for the count to keep his countenance, when an abyss seemed to open at his feet. When alone with Amalia he reproached her for her audacity, and implored her by all that she held sacred to be more cautious; whilst she, perfectly unmoved, seemed to take a pleasure in his anxiety,

and her lips curled in a disdainful enigmatical smile.

As they could not often meet at the Grange, Amalia managed other interviews, by admitting Jacoba into her confidence. In this person's house they met two or three times a week. The count entered by a little door opening on to a certain little street at one o'clock in the day, when people were dining. He had to wait at least two or three hours, and Amalia at last managed to get there under the pretext of having some commission for her *protégée*. But not being satisfied with this arrangement, she conceived the idea of his entering her house by the pew of the church of San Rafael. The count was horrified at such a manoeuvre; all his religious scruples revolted at the idea; he was terrified at the possibility of the discovery of the intrigue and the profanation of the sanctuary. What a scandal it would be! But Amalia laughed at his fears as if the terrible consequences of retribution did not concern her. She was a woman who had absolute confidence in her star. As first-rate toreadors consider themselves quite safe under the very horns of the bull, as long as they keep their presence of mind, so she set danger at defiance, and even went out of her way to court it with a coolness that was foolhardy.

And it must be confessed that her supreme calmness and incredible audacity saved her more than once. The Conde de Onis, the colossal man with a long beard, was a mere puppet in the hands of the bold, unprincipled little woman.

A mad passion had taken possession of them both, especially of her. By degrees she became so accustomed to not living without him, that a day was not bearable without seeing him alone, and to this end she brought incredible efforts of ingenuity and skill into play. If the combination of circumstances was such as to render it impossible for three or four days to have a *tête-à-tête*, her temper revolted against the restraint like an impatient prisoner, and she was ready to commit the greatest imprudence: she squeezed his hand and gave him little pinches in the presence of guests; she embraced him behind the doors, when under some pretext or another she escorted him into another room; and more than once she kissed him on the lips in the very presence of the Grandee, when he happened to turn his head, whilst Luis trembled and turned pale as a catastrophe seemed imminent.

By the expiration of some months his engagement with Fernanda gradually cooled, and it ended by being broken off altogether. This was all a preconcerted plan of Amalia's, arranged from the beginning with consummate art: she began by telling him how long he might be with his *fiancée*, notified the number of

times he could ask her to dance, and finally it was she who suggested what he was to say to her. And as she had foreseen, the heiress of Estrada-Rosa, being proud, could not brook her lover's coldness, and so gave him back his liberty and his word.

The poor girl confided her trouble to Amalia, who was the only person who knew the cause of the much-talked-of broken engagement. She expressed great indignation at the count's behaviour, and spoke in strong terms of disapprobation of his conduct. In fact, she took the young girl's part and launched into praises on her behalf and spoke most flatteringly of her eyes, figure, discretion, and amiability; and she even went so far as to take ostensible measures for their reconciliation. In the bosom of confidence, particularly among the friends of Don Juan Estrada-Rosa, she was not contented with saying that Fernanda was superior to her ex-lover in every feeling, but she proclaimed Luis as an arrant impostor, hypocrite, &c. And when she saw him the next day in Jacoba's house, she embraced him, choking with laughter, saying:

"What a character I gave you yesterday before the various friends of Don Juan! You don't know! pincers would not get the words out of my mouth again!"

What with all this, and the remorse continually preying on him, the count was in a perpetual state of agitation. How far he was from being happy! But it was a way strewn with flowers, compared to what was coming. Five months after entering into this *liaison*, Amalia informed him that she believed she was *enceinte*. She told him this with a smile on her lips, as if she were mentioning that she had drawn a good ticket in the lottery. Luis felt giddy with terror, turned pale, and looked as if he were about to fall.

"*Dios mio!* what a misfortune!" he exclaimed, covering his face with his hands.

"Misfortune?" she returned in surprise. "Why? I am very happy."

Then seeing his eyes dilate in stupefaction, she laughingly explained that she was glad to have a pledge of their love, and that she had no fear because she would have everything so arranged that nothing would be discovered. And in truth she laced herself so tightly that nobody would have thought another creature's life was bound up in hers. The anxiety and distress of the count during this time of expectancy was awful! If any one looked at her attentively he trembled, and if, in the course of conversation, any guest made a casual allusion to some act of dissimulation, he turned pale as he thought they were speaking of him. He imagined smiles and meaning glances in every face, and the most

innocent remarks were fraught in his mind with the deepest and most compromising insinuations.

In the meanwhile, Amalia ate and slept with composure, and her constant cheerfulness astonished the count, whilst it excited his admiration. Time went by, the seven months passed, and then the eighth. And hide as he would the fact from himself, there was no denying that the figure of his beloved was no longer slight; but when he made the remark to her in a great state of anxiety, she burst out laughing:

"Be silent, you foolish creature! You notice it because you know about it. Who is going to suspect anything because I am a little stouter? Sometimes one likes a loose corsage."

When the critical time arrived, she evinced a courage bordering on heroism. Luis wanted her to have a doctor.

"But why?" she said; "Jacoba's services will be quite sufficient, and it would be dangerous to trust the secret to anybody else."

The first symptoms came on in the early morning, so she kept her bed; but it was not until eight o'clock that she sent for Jacoba, who had been sleeping for some days in the house on pretence of making curtains. Then they were both locked in the room where everything in the way of linen was prepared; and without a groan, without an unnecessary movement, this brave woman went through the ordeal. The little creature was subsequently taken away by Jacoba in a bundle of linen after the servants had been sent out on various pretexts.

The count wept with joy and admiration at the happy solution of the difficulty. But when Jacoba told him that he was to take the child to the Quiñones' door, he was quite overwhelmed. However, although his lover's plan quite took him aback, he did what he was told, and the crowning audacity of the lady turned out as she had foreseen. So now that the child was safe for ever, their love not only seemed strengthened and purified, but they felt the delightful flush of victory over unheard-of dangers before finally arriving in the port of safety.

With their heads bent over the child, and sometimes touching its forehead with their lips, they sat with their hands clasped in one another's, and talked, or rather wove dreams in their efforts to gain a glimpse into the unfathomable abysses of the future.

"What was to be the fate of the lovely little creature? How was she to be educated?" Amalia said she would undertake to have it treated like her own daughter, she would have her brought up as a perfect little lady, and she was sure Don Pedro would not oppose her in the matter. And as he would have no sons, what was more likely than that he would take a fancy to it and leave her a lot of money at his death.

But the count repudiated this idea with scorn. The child should have nothing from Don Pedro. He would leave her all his own money.

"But perhaps you will marry and have children," returned the lady, glancing at him with a mischievous smile. Then his fingers were laid on her lips in protest.

"Silence! silence! You know I can't bear anything of that; I am for ever united to thee."

Whereupon she kissed him with effusion.

"That's a compact, is it not so?"

"It is a compact," he replied, in a tone of decision.

"But do not trouble about leaving her your property in a will, because it would give rise to the suspicion that she is your daughter."

This difficulty absorbed them both for some minutes. Both were busy devising some means of eluding it. The count wanted to leave it to some confidential person in trust; but this idea also bristled with drawbacks, and they thought it would be better for the money to accumulate in his name in some bank until she came of age, and then a father could be invented who had fallen from the skies.

At last Amalia concluded by saying: "We shall talk for ever of this. Leave it to me."

And he was only too pleased to leave it to her, as he had unbounded confidence in her inexhaustible imagination, power of will, and limitless audacity.

When tired of talking of the future, they turned their attention to the present. The child had to be baptised, and the ceremony was fixed for the following day.

"Yes, and we have settled that I am to be the godmother, and you the godfather."

"What! I?" he exclaimed in astonishment. "But, my dear woman, do you not understand that it will give rise to suspicions?"

But the lady was obstinate. She had set her heart on his being godfather. If it gave rise to suspicions, well and good. She would do it without the least fear.

Then, seeing that he was really distressed at the idea, she changed her mind.

"Do not vex yourself, man, do not vex yourself," she said, giving a little pull at his beard. "It was only a joke. It would be fun to see you hold it at the font. I believe you would call out: 'Señores, here! come every one of you and see the father of this child.'"

It was finally settled that the godfather was to be Quiñones, with Don Enrique Valero as his proxy, and she was to be the godmother, with Maria Josefa as her representative; and the count was quite satisfied with the arrangement. All that was cleverly and prudently arranged in a way to secure the welfare of his child. But just when he was feeling more comfortable, a noise in the passage made him jump from his armchair, and turn perfectly livid.

"What is the matter, man?"

"That noise?"

"It is Jacoba."

But seeing he was still uneasy, and his eyes looked scared, she got up, and holding the child in her arms she opened the door and exchanged a few words with Jacoba, who was in fact still there. After giving her the baby and locking the door, she came back and sat down again.

"How could you be such a coward, eh?"

"It is not cowardice," he returned, blushing. "It is being so constantly upset. I don't know what has come to me. Perhaps it is conscience."

"Bah! it is because you are a coward. What is the good of having such a powerful body if you have no spirit in it?"

Then, noticing the expression of pain and distress that overshadowed his face, she turned and embraced him with enthusiasm.

"No, you are not a coward, but you are innocent, eh? And it is that that I love

you for. I love you more than my life, and you love your little girl, don't you? I am all yours. You are my only love. I am not really married."

Then she caressed him in a kitten-like way, passing her delicate white hands over his face, and kissing him several times; then she put her arms round his neck, and gave him little mouse-like bites. And at the same time, she, who was generally so grave and quiet, let flow a perfect stream of affectionate words which calmed and charmed him to a wonderful degree. The fire which shone in her mysterious, large, treacherous-looking eyes, now broke forth in veritable flames. Passion had taken possession of her being, but it was also fraught with the malicious pleasure of a satisfied caprice, vengeance and treachery.

The Conde de Onis felt himself more in her power with every day that dawned. The caresses of his lover were tender, but her eyes, even in the moments of greatest abandon, retained a cruel cat-like look; and his love was strangely mingled with fear. Some times his superstitious mind would make him wonder if this Valencian woman were an incarnate devil of temptation.

After saying three or four times that he must go without being able to break away from her, he at last got free from her arms, and rose from the armchair. The farewell was long as usual, for Amalia would not leave him until she saw he was quite intoxicated with the power of her caresses.

Jacoba was expecting him outside the door. After taking him along several corridors, they came to the place of the secret staircase leading into the library. Here she signed to him to wait whilst she reconnoitered to see that nobody was about the passages. Then she came back again to tell him all was right, and the count went down with as little noise as possible.

The intermediary left him at the passage after opening the door. Then he bent down with his hands on the ground to prevent any one seeing him from the street, and so crossed the passage to the pew. He opened the door and entered. The darkness blinded him. He made a few steps forward, when he felt a sudden blow on his shoulder, and a rough voice said in his ear, "Die, wretch!"

The blood froze in his veins, but he gave a spring forward and saw a dark heap blacker than the darkness. Quick as a dart it threw itself on him, and he would soon have done for it with his enormous strength if he had not heard a stifled laugh, and the voice of Amalia said:

"Take care, Luis, or you will hurt me!"

He was dumb with astonishment for some minutes.

"But how did you get here?" he said at last.

"By the front staircase. I popped on this black cap and ran down."

Then, seeing that he looked cross and disgusted at a joke in such bad taste, she stood on tiptoe, put her arms round his neck, and after pressing a long and passionate kiss upon his lips, she said, in a coaxing tone:

"Now I know that you are not a coward, but I wanted to prove it."

CHAPTER V

THE JOKES OF PACO GOMEZ

IN spite of all the efforts of Paco Gomez, Garnet could not be made to believe that he was acting in good faith. His jocose nature and the practical jokes he had been known to perpetrate had made an unfavourable impression on the Indian. It was in vain that he put on a grave and circumspect manner and held long conversations on the rise and fall of stocks, besides praising his house above all modern buildings, and giving him valuable hints in the game of *chapo*, the dandy of Lancia saw that there was no dissipating the look of distrust in the old bear's bloodshot eyes. In this dilemma he appealed to Manuel Antonio for help, for he had such a delightful joke in his head that any assistance seemed better than giving it up.

"Don't be so foolish, Santos," said the Chatterbox to him one evening, as he was walking through the Bombé with Garnet. "You see that as you have passed the half of your life behind a counter you don't understand these Lancians. I won't say Fernanda is deeply in love with you, but she is going the way to be so. I tell you, and I say the same everywhere, for I have remarked it for some time. Women are capricious and incomprehensible; they reject a thing one day, and want it the next, when they are then disposed to stretch a point to get it. Fernanda began by snubbing you——"

"In every possible way, in every possible way," returned the Indian sullenly.

"Pure fancy, my man; she is a very proud girl who will never make herself cheap. But proud as she may be, she will marry either the Conde de Onis or you, the only two matches there are in Lancia for her: the count with his nobility and you with your money. But Luis is a strange sort of man; I think he is quite incapable of marrying, and I am sure she thinks so too. You are the only one left, and you will be the one to get the prize. Besides, whatever women may say, they admire great strong fellows like you; why you are a perfect oak, my man," he added with a look of admiration.

Garnet gave vent to a grunt of assent, and the Chatterbox passed his hands over

his body, as if he were a learned connoisseur of the human masculine form.

"What muscles, my boy! What shoulders!"

"Yes, these shoulders have earned many thousand pounds."

"How? Carrying sacks?"

"Sacks!" exclaimed Garnet smiling scornfully. "They are for the common herd. No, great cases of sugar like waggons."

The Bombé was deserted at that hour. It was a large promenade in the form of a drawing-room, which had been recently built on the site of the famous wood of San Francisco, from which there was a fine view. This wood of large, old twisted oaks, some of which formed part of a primeval forest, was where the monastery was founded which gave its origin to Lancia, and it served as a place of recreation and amusement to the town until the first houses were built there. Then it fell into a state of neglect, until the last municipal corporation carried out certain improvements which won the hearts of all reforming spirits. They made a promenade with little rustic gardens and a road among the trees that led to the town. On weekdays there was no one there but a few priests in long black cloaks and large felt hats; the secular element was represented by two or three little parties of Indians discussing in loud voices the price of shares, the value of certain plots of ground in the Calle de Mauregato just opened, or some valetudinarian come to get an hour's sunshine before the chill of the afternoon.

And where were the ladies?

Oh! the ladies of Lancia know perfectly well what is due to themselves, and they had far too great a regard for the laws of good form to appear on days that were not fête days; and even then they did not do it without taking proper precautions.

No lady of Lancia would think of being so vulgar as to go to the Bombé on a Sunday before the arrival of others of her class; and it was a superhuman effort to arrange for all to appear simultaneously. So after three o'clock in the afternoon they were waiting about, gloved and bonneted, peeping at each other out of the windows.

"The Zamoras are coming now!"

"There go the Mateos!"

And so they finally sallied forth in due dignity to the promenade where the band had been performing different fantasias on airs from "Ernani" or "Nabuco" for the edification of the children and a few appreciative artisans. It must not be thought that the distinguished society of Lancia went with one rush to the open-air salon. Nothing of the kind. Before putting foot there, they took a few turns in a little walk a short way off. From thence they took a survey, and ascertained whether anybody had yet ventured as far as the promenade.

At last, by the time the shadows were falling amid the old oaks, and the fog was gathering from the mountains, and getting up the nostrils, in the throats, and down the bronchial tubes of the people of high degree, all the local beauties had assembled in crowds at the promenade. What was a catarrh, a cold, or even inflammation of the lungs compared to the disgrace of being the first at the Bombé!

What a wonderful example of fortitude! What an instance of the power that self-respect exercises over the minds of superior beings!

This exquisite sense of duty which Nature has written in indelible characters on the hearts of the worthy, was shown in a still more remarkable fashion at the private balls given by the Casino of Lancia every fortnight during the winter.

It will be easily surmised that none of the high-born señoritas who demurred at appearing at the promenade when it was empty, were likely to be the first to arrive at the salon of the Casino. But as there was no side walk here, from whence they could take a bird's-eye view, and they could not keep a watch from the windows at night, these clever young ladies, as high-born as they were ingenious, hit upon a means of saving their honour.

Soon after ten o'clock, when the ball was supposed to begin, they sent their papas or brothers on a little voyage of discovery. They went in in a careless sort of way, sat down in the armchairs, cut a few jokes with the raw youths in buttoned up frock-coats who were impatiently standing about, fastening each other's gloves, and then, making some excuse, they soon retired to tell their families that nobody had arrived yet.

Ah! how often did those young men in the frock-coats wait the whole night in vain for the arrival of their beautiful partners!

The candles burnt low, and the orchestra, after futilely playing two or three dances, became quite demoralised; and the musicians laughed and joked in loud

tones, walked about the room, and even smoked.

The maids and men-servants yawned and made allusions to the blessing of sleep, and at last the president gave the sign of dismissal, and the youths retired to their respective homes as sad as they were conventional.

That was indeed a touching spectacle to see those heroic young girls sacrifice their great desire to go to the ball rather than outrage the fundamental principles on which the happiness and comfort of society are founded!

Paco then came in with the Pensioner.

"They will tell you the same as I," continued Manuel Antonio, shading his eyes with his ivory white hand.

In the distance Paco really looked like a perch crowned with a cucumber, for his head was so unusually small that all his hats came down over his ears. Walking by his side was Señor Mateo with his enormous white moustachios and proud military bearing, although we know he was the greatest civilian that Lancia had known for centuries.

Garnet gave a few grunts to express the profound contempt with which the two persons inspired him, the one for his want of conventionality, and the other for not having even a paltry investment in the Three per Cents.

"Come, my dear fellows, and do me the favour of making this stupid fellow believe that he is a good match for any girl, although he will not believe it."

"Certainly; for if Don Santos is not a match with five or six million reales, I don't know who is," exclaimed Mateo feelingly, as befitted the father of four marriageable daughters who did not marry.

"Draw it mild, Don Cristobal; draw it mild!" said the Indian, with a stern look.

"What? Have you more, then? I am glad of it. I only speak according to report."

"I have five hundred thousand dollars, and not a *lapiz*^[J] less."

The three friends exchanged a significant look, and Manuel Antonio, not being able to keep from laughing, embraced him, saying:

"All right, Santos, all right! But this about the *lapiz* quite affects me."

Garnet was a man who was continually tripping in his vocabulary. He really was ignorant of the proper way of expressing many colloquial terms, and the result was often very funny. Doubtless it was due to his not hearing well; it was some years since he had left America, and consorted with people of culture. His dreadful solecisms were quite proverbial in Lancia.

"But this unhappy fellow surely does not think," continued the Chatterbox, regardless of Garnet's resentful look, "that because Fernanda Estrada-Rosa is a bit coquettish, that he is not taken with her little set-up airs like every other man! Fool, fool, more than fool!" and so saying he gave him a few taps on the large red nape of his neck. "Besides she is a daughter of Don Juan Estrada-Rosa, the greatest Jew in the province!"

"But, man, Fernanda is quite different," said the Pensioner, who was not in the plot. "She is a very rich girl, and there is no need for her to marry for money."

Then the others came down upon him with a vengeance: Where there is money more is wanted. Ambition is insatiable. Fernanda was very proud, and she would never stand being outdone in show by any other girl in Lancia. Now if Don Santos chose a wife in the town she would find her such a formidable rival that it would be a continual annoyance to her. The only person Don Santos had to fear was the Count of Onis, but he seemed to have gone off, for his eccentric character, and the strange attacks to which he was frequently subject, had ended by disgusting the young girl.

Won over by these arguments, backed up by nods of intelligence from Paco, the Pensioner saw the wisdom of the idea, and went over to their side, and then the three tried their best to persuade the Indian that no young girl would hold out long against him, if he once laid siege to her.

Paco alluded mysteriously to certain information in his possession, which was the strongest evidence that the girl's treatment of him was nothing but little airs of vanity put on to make herself more valuable. But it was a secret, he said, which could not be revealed without a breach of the confidence and regard due to the friend who had revealed it.

In spite of all this Garnet would not give in. He was like a mastiff under the caresses and turbulent treatment of children, for he only cast angry looks at his tormentors, and every now and then gave vent to ominous growls.

Manuel Antonio repeated the list of his subtle arguments, enforcing them with

sundry embraces, pats, and pinches, for he was eloquent and plausible to a degree. Paco let Manuel go on, taking care to give him many a sly corroborative wink, for he was certain that Garnet had no confidence in his remarks. But he came in with the final stroke. After having had himself implored and entreated by his two allies, who promised eternal secrecy by the nails of Christ, he finally drew a letter from his pocket. It was from Fernanda to a friend at Nieva. After casually explaining how it came into his hands, Paco read with the bated breath of mystery:

"There is no foundation in what you say of Luis. I have not renewed, nor do I wish to renew, my relations with him, and this for reasons too many to be given, and some of which you know. The suit of Don Santos, as there is nobody else, has a far better chance. He is certainly old for me, but very conventional and affectionate. I should not be surprised if I ended by having him."

Garnet listened with great attention, opening his eyes unusually wide with astonishment. When Paco finished, he said in a deep voice, "This letter is *ipocryphal*."

The three friends turned round in surprise, and great was their difficulty to keep from laughing, whilst Manuel Antonio improved the occasion by giving Don Santos another embrace and saying:

"Go to, you rude, mistrustful thing! Show him the letter, Paco. Do you not know Fernanda's writing? Emilita is constantly having letters from her. You are too modest, Santos. I will not say you are a perfect gentleman, but you have a certain grace and a certain *je ne sais quoi*."

"Yes, I should think so!" exclaimed Paco; "and you take what Manuel Antonio says, for he is a judge."

"There are some who can tell at once, my dear fellow," continued the latter, in a quick voice. "They have only to cast their eyes on a face and they know whether it is handsome, ugly, or mediocre."

But not wishing to waste any more breath in forwarding Paco's plans they left Garnet in peace, and the Chatterbox changed the conversation.

"Ah! here come some friends of yours, Don Cristobal!"

And raising his head the Pensioner saw eight or ten soldiers approaching. They were officers of the battalion of Pontevedra, which, to his disgust, had recently

arrived for the garrison of the town.

Mateo gnashed his teeth, and gave utterance to sounds indicative of his hatred of the armed force, and then exclaimed in an ironical tone:

"How delightful to see warriors in time of peace!"

"You are quite cracked about them, Don Cristobal. Soldiers are very useful."

"Useful!" exclaimed the Pensioner, in a rage. "What use are they I should like to know? How are they useful?"

"They keep the peace, man."

"They keep war, you mean. The Civil Guard can keep us from rogues, but they foment dissensions and cause the ruin of the country. Directly they see the enemy appear, they take care to go off in another direction, and then they get appointments, crosses, and pensions. I maintain that as long as there are soldiers, there will be no peace in Spain."

"But, Don Cristobal, supposing a foreign nation attacked us?"

The Pensioner gave an ironical smile and shook his head several times before replying.

"Get along, silly; why the only country that could attack us by land is France, and if France should ever do so, what good would these stupid little officers in uniform be to us?"

"Well, apart from that, soldiers are good for trade. The shops profit by them, and the hotel-keepers benefit also."

Manuel Antonio only defended the military to aggravate Mateo, but there was a shade of irony in his present remarks that was excessively aggravating.

"That is just what it is! And it is that which annoys me so, for where does the money come from that they spend, you foolish fellow? Why, from you and from me, and from that gentleman; in fact, from every one who pays anything to the State in one form or another. The result is that they spend without producing, and so set a bad example in the towns; for idleness is a corrupting influence to those that are inclined to be lazy. Do you know what the army costs? Why, the naval and military Ministers take between them half of the national grant. That is to say, justice, religion, the expenses of the maintenance of our relations with other

countries, and the working of all material interests, do not take as much to keep as these scarlet trousered young gentlemen. If other nations of Europe have a great army, what is that to do with it? Let them have it. Besides, they can allow themselves this luxury because they have money. But we are a poor little nation with only outside show. Besides, in other countries there are international complications, from which we are fortunately free. France is too afraid of the intervention of other countries to attack us, but if perchance it did attack us, it would conquer us just as much with an army as without one."

The Pensioner was very emphatic in his arguments, which, with his eyes blazing with anger, he enforced with vehement gesticulations of the hands.

Manuel Antonio was delighted at seeing him get into a rage; and at that moment the little company of officers passed near with a polite "Good-day," which they all returned excepting Don Cristobal, who took no notice of the greeting.

"I really think you go too far, Don Cristobal. Now what do you think of Captain Nuñez who has just gone by? Is he not a perfect gentleman with courteous, pleasant manners?"

"He would be better with a pickaxe in his hand, and more useful to his country," returned the Pensioner crossly.

"But what is the good of putting yourself out when, according to report, he is going to be your son-in-law, as he is going to marry Emilita?" said the Chatterbox with mischievous delight.

Paco and Don Santos burst out laughing, for Don Cristobal was quite crushed, and with great difficulty he said:

"Whoever heard such nonsense!" and then relapsed into silence, for the news was a dreadful blow, as it put him in the most awkward position.

The silence was noticed by the others, who winked and smiled behind his back.

But Paco was also pre-occupied, for when he had a practical joke in that little knob of a head of his, he was as restless and full of thought as a poet or painter with some great work on hand; and it was only after working hard for some days, that he all but won over the Indian to his plan; and the question of his going formally to ask Don Juan Estrada-Rosa for his daughter's hand in marriage was actually under discussion. According to Paco and his supporters, that was

considered the most direct way, and best calculated to succeed, for any other seemed round-about. The day that Don Juan should see him come forward with his ten millions and an offer of marriage, he would spare no means to make his daughter consent, and she herself would not be averse. For as they could not have the Conde de Onis, who could she marry better than a man so rich, so proper, so robust, so *illustrious*? This last epithet, gravely suggested by Paco, nearly spoilt the whole thing, as he was splitting with suppressed laughter. Garnet noticing this fact cast an angry glance at him, and as his confidence was again shaken, a delay of some days ensued.

Nevertheless, the moment arrived when the Indian gave credence to his words through overhearing him from a neighbouring room speak plainly to the Conde de Onis. From that day he put faith in him, and consulted him as to how to bring about his purpose. Paco said it was better not to mention it first to the girl.

As good generals surprise the enemy and conquer by a bold, unexpected stroke, it was the unanimous opinion that the best course would be to call on Don Juan, ask for a private interview and go straight to the point. There was no fear but what the banker would jump at the idea; the girl would probably be somewhat surprised, but under the influence of her father she would soon give in. The important things of life were generally decided by a bold stroke—"nothing venture nothing have."

Finally, Garnet gave in, and commenced proceedings with all due solemnity. The first thing to be considered was the hour at which it would be best to call, and twelve o'clock was finally decided on. His costume was also a subject of deep discussion; and Paco maintained that he would look most imposing in uniform, such as that worn by an honorary chief of the civil administration. It would not be difficult to get a nomination if he paid handsomely for it, but it could not be done under a month's delay, so the uniform had to be given up, and it was settled he was to wear a black frock-coat with his medal as town-councillor; the day was the last thing to be arranged, which was fixed for Monday. In the meanwhile the traitor Paco lost no time in letting out in conversation with Don Juan Estrada-Rosa that Garnet was hoping and wishing to be accepted as his son-in-law. Don Juan, who was rich as well as proud, and so adored his daughter that he thought a duke at least would come from Madrid to ask her hand in marriage, was furious, called him an impudent fellow, and swore that sooner than let her marry such a boor he would rather she remained unmarried.

"Well, then, take care, Don Juan," said Paco smiling maliciously, "for the day will come when least expected when he will appear at your house to ask for Fernanda's hand."

"He will do nothing of the sort," returned the banker, "he knows too well that he would be kicked downstairs."

Having taken all these precautions, the terrible practical joker of Lancia felt he was quite secure. With the exception of the three or four friends who helped him to persuade Don Santos, nobody knew about his plot. But the Sunday afternoon preceding the event, he and Manuel Antonio went round and told people about the joke, and said that they had better be at the Café Marañón the next day if they wanted to see it out. In the provinces, where there are not many amusements, these practical jokes are made quite a business, and much time and thought are given to their conception and organisation.

The youths of Lancia were delighted at Paco's project, for it presented especial attraction, the victim not being a poor fellow whom they might feel for, but a rich man; and in the depth of every heart there is always a grain of hatred for any one who has much money. So the news got bruited about, and on the following day there were more than fifty young fellows at the Café Marañón. But they did not make themselves conspicuous until Garnet appeared. The café was situated on a first floor (for the ground floors were never used at that time for such a purpose) in the Calle de Altavilla, almost opposite Don Juan Estrada-Rosa's house, which was large and sumptuous, although not so much so as the one that Don Santos had recently built, and that where the café was, was old and dilapidated. The resort of customers was a room, where there was a billiard-table, and two little side rooms furnished with little wooden tables for refreshment, all dirty, murky and shabby. How different were those times to the magnificent Café Británico of today in the same street, with marble tables, colossal mirrors and gilded columns like the finest in Madrid!

Spying through the little windows the gay assembly of youths, eager for excitement, saw Garnet pass by correctly dressed, balancing his colossal body on legs that looked too small for it. They saw him enter Estrada-Rosa's house, and heard the sound of the door being shut upon him. Nothing more was seen, but the windows of the café were simultaneously opened and filled. Those who could find no place got up on seats behind their companions. Every eye was fixed on the opposite door, and thus they waited for a quarter of an hour. At the end of that time the purple face of Garnet reappeared. It was indeed a fearful

sight. It looked just as if the man had been nearly strangled, and his ears were the colour of blood. A perfect storm of coughs, shouts and howls greeted his appearance. The Indian turned his head and gave an astonished look at the excited crowd who were laughing for some unknown reason at him. But he was not long before he saw that he was the victim of a practical joke. His eyes glared fiercely round, and he burst out in a fit of intolerable rage:

"Liars!"

And he then fled like a wild boar pursued by a pack of hounds, amid the hisses and laughter of the youths, only turning his head from time to time to repeat the strong expletive.

CHAPTER VI

THE SEÑORITAS DE MERÉ

So Emilita Mateo had really won the heart of a captain of the battalion of Pontevedra. But it had not been done without several days' hard work, in the way of coy glances, aimless laughter, childish pranks, mincing ways and numberless little tricks. She had, in short, called all her forces into play, being by turns straightforward and malicious, kind and rude, reserved and teasing, grave and frolicsome, like a wild thing, like a silly irresponsible child, but none the less adorable.

Finally Nuñez, Captain Nuñez could not resist such a provoking mixture of innocence and guile; he was first taken with her, and ended by falling in love. He was a man with a wide face, lean, grave, and bilious looking, having a moustache and imperial, and languid, dull looking eyes, very conscientious in his duties, and very fond of taking long walks. This type of silent, conventional man is most susceptible to the charm of cheerfulness and vivacity. Emilita won his heart by calling him grumpy, giving him pinches by way of teasing him, saying that his words had to be drawn out with a corkscrew, and letting him have the full benefit of her chaff.

The family of Mateos was quite upset by this wonderful success. Jovita, Micaela and Socorro, being elder sisters of the happy maiden, were both jealous

and flattered. They felt that the preference of such a gallant infantry officer was an honour which was reflected over the whole family, and placed them in a superior position in the eyes of their friends and acquaintances. But at the same time, considering that Emilita was the youngest, they did not like her having a lover, or being married before themselves. It was decidedly premature for her to be engaged, as she was not more than twenty-four, and a smile of scorn and surprise contracted the lips of the three elder sisters at the idea of such an innocent, unconventional creature being married. So that although they sang the captain's praises to their friends, speaking highly of his personal attractions, crediting him with a brave and generous heart, testifying to his riches, as if they managed his exchequer, and vaguely referring to certain influential patronage which would put him, sooner or later, in the way of the distinctions of a general, they certainly never forgave him his chronological error.

On the other side Don Cristobal, the father of that perverse, coquettish angel, found himself suddenly in such an awkward position that it nearly drove him mad. He was ashamed at having to give his consent to a daughter of his being courted by a soldier after having so often called the military idle and bloodthirsty, and having clamoured for the reduction of the army. How would he be able to face all his friends in the future? Many dreadful days of doubt ensued. His hatred against the army and the marines was so deeply rooted in his heart that it could not be eradicated in a moment. Nevertheless, he was obliged to confess that the very noble behaviour of Captain Nuñez had influenced him to a great extent. The wish of seeing his daughters married was quite as strong as his dislike of the armed force. In his worry he deplored Nuñez having a commission in the infantry. If he could only have been a sailor the gravity of the situation would have been so much lessened. He recollected that in his diatribes against the army, he had admitted that a few ships contributed to the safety of the colonies. The same thing applied to the civil guard, but as to the rest of the land forces there was no excuse, there was no means of getting out of the dilemma.

Under such awkward circumstances he elected to shut himself up at home. The engagement of his daughter got spread abroad and became a settled affair, and he was afraid of practical jokes. Fear made him take the false step of playing fast and loose, which was unworthy of his character and antecedents. That is to say, that whilst continuing publicly to affect a scorn of the land forces, when talking with his daughter's bridegroom or other military men, he was quite suave and showed as much interest in the questions he asked them about their profession, as if they served in some civil office of the State. Nobody would have thought, to

hear him enter into the details of the active, reserve, and militia forces, that the man entertained an eternal, undying hate against them. But the Pensioner attained a greater perfection in his rôle than anybody could have dared to expect. He did not pretend to get on with them as soldiers, when he considered them a social plague, but as men they might, according to their qualities, be worthy of esteem.

The love affair of Emilita, like that of many others, had begun and gone on in the house of the Merés. These were two señoritas past eighty years of age, and not yet a hundred. From all accounts, they were already grown up at the beginning of the nineteenth century. They had no relations in Lancia, and nobody recollected their father, who died when they were little girls. He had held some appointment in the Exchequer department. It is possible, from its remote date, that he was a collector of the excise or some other taxes now extinct.

In the first place the dress of these interesting señoritas savoured of the eighteenth century, to which they belonged. They could not put up with the fashions of the present day. They wore straight black gowns with lead sewn at the bottom to prevent their turning up, very long waisted bodies, tight sleeves with puffs, low cashmere shoes, and a coiffure too funny for anything. The mantilla they adopted was not of net, but of serge with a velvet fringe, such as is only worn by the working classes; and they carried a stick as a support.

They affected a perfect courtesy, a versatility of character, and an insatiable passion for society and gaiety perfectly astonishing at their age. They certainly had not retained in the present century the licence of manners and wickedness which, according to historians, characterised the society of the past. It would be impossible to imagine creatures more simple. They seemed quite ignorant of life, everything surprised them, and they could not believe in evil. Thus they were frequently the victims of practical jokes at the hands of their friends and guests, without either of them expressing any great surprise at it. From time immemorial they had been accustomed to open their house of an evening to the young people of Lancia, who were attracted by the liberty prevalent there.

The custom of *tutoyant* everybody was tacitly allowed, and it was curious to hear young men of eighteen years of age talking so familiarly to old ladies who might have been their great-grandmothers. It was Carmelita here, and Nuncita there, because the eldest was named Doña Carmen, and the youngest Doña Anunciacion. Three or four generations had passed through that little drawing-room of the Calle del Carpo, so modest and neat, with its polished wood floors,

straw-bottomed chairs, red damask sofa, mahogany sideboard with branch candlesticks, its tortoiseshell framed mirror, and several little pictures in pastels representing the story of Romeo and Juliet. The reception of the de Merés was the oldest institution of Lancia, and, contrary to the usual course of things, these old ladies who had not been able to marry themselves, had a perfect mania for helping everybody else to marry. Innumerable were the marriages due to that little drawing-room. Directly they heard that a young man was more attracted to one young lady than another, our señoritas set to work preparing the noose which was to unite them with an indissoluble bond. Indeed, they would allow no one to have the chair by a certain lady's side, so that when a certain gentleman should come it should be all ready for him, and he would only have to take it. Then they were loud in their praises of a certain gentleman to a certain lady, and would go to a certain gentleman full of the wonders of a certain lady's cleverness, economy, handiness, piety, and beauty. Then they repaired to the house of a certain young lady's mamma, where they had long private, important conversations, and they bearded a certain young gentleman's papa, when all their diplomatic arts were brought into play to soften his heart. And the reward of all these efforts was a little box of sweets on the day of the marriage! So all the mothers of marriageable girls adored the old ladies, and blessings and praises were showered upon them. They were hailed half a mile off, and on coming out of church, matrons hastened to offer them an arm as a support.

But, on the other side, those who had any son of a marriageable age, regarded them with distrust and dislike, and dubbed them as interfering intermediaries.

When the first touch of love was felt in the heart of some susceptible youth, he repaired immediately to the abode of the Las Merés.

"Carmelita, I am in love!"

"With whom, my heart, with whom?" asked the elder with the greatest interest.

"With Rosario Calvo."

"Aha! The rogue has good taste. There isn't a prettier or better educated girl. You were born for one another."

And then the young fellow had the pleasure of hearing for some time panegyrics on his adored one.

"I hope that you will help me."

"As much as you like, dear heart."

So at the end of a few days Rosario Calvo, who had never before set foot in the house of the de Merés, became a regular *habituée* of the evening gatherings. However did they manage to get the girl there? It is difficult to say, but they had brought so many affairs to a successful issue that they certainly must have had some simple, sure recipe. They were as affectionate to their friends as if they were all near relations. Stories of self-abnegation were told of them which did them great honour. During the dreadful revolution of 1823, one of their guests, a cavalry lieutenant, took refuge in their house. The señoritas received him, and hid him for some days, and finally he escaped in the clothes of the servant. But hearing that the police were going to search the house, they were terror-struck at the thought of the lieutenant's uniform being found. Where could it be hidden so as not to betray him? Carmelita at this critical moment hit upon a brilliant, brave idea. She put on the uniform herself underneath her female attire. And yet this lieutenant treated them with such ingratitude that he never all his life found ten minutes to write them a letter of thanks.

But this was not the only act of ingratitude on the part of their guests, who made as much use of their kindness as they could, enjoyed the company and conversation of the prettiest girls in Lancia, arranged matrimonial alliances, and directly all this business was concluded, they found that their affairs or their position precluded their frequenting the parties any more, and they scarcely greeted them when they met their old hostesses in the street. The same can be said of the mammas, who made so much of the señoritas before marrying their daughters, and dropped them when that was done. But this neglectful conduct neither damped the kindness of the good ladies nor quelled their optimistic spirit. They kept up an incessant stream of new-comers to their house, and whilst forgetting the ingratitude of the old ones, they set their minds on the worthiness that they attributed to the new. Besides, they harboured no rancour or ill-feeling in their hearts, and they were not even offended at practical jokes, although some of them were really very serious. Paco Gomez arranged one that was so startling that it is still told in Lancia with gusto.

Ladies could not go to the parties every evening in the winter, they generally went on Saturdays and Wednesdays. But there were a few young men who hardly ever missed going at an early hour, even if they went on to other houses afterwards. On these quiet evenings a game of *brisca* was generally got up. Paco took Nuncita as a partner, and Captain Nuñez, or some other young fellow, Carmelita. But one evening they were regretting that the signs made during the

game were so common and hackneyed, that it was impossible to make them unnoticed by the opponents. So both sides agreed to change them. Paco taught some to Nuncita, and the opponent several more to Carmelita. But these new signs were all so improper that they are only seen in taverns and bad houses. Yet those innocent women took them as a matter of course in perfect unconcern. Some days went by and they were quite accustomed to their use, when Paco suggested a game to several of the guests. Then ensued a scene of comic surprise. Every time one of the two señoritas made a sign, there was an explosion of merriment. And instead of showing the door to the cruel shameless author of the joke, and forbidding his ever returning, the kind señoritas only crossed themselves in surprise, and laughed with the others when they found it out.

"Blessed Santo Cristo of Rodillero! Whoever would have thought it! So we have committed all these sins in ignorance!"

"I shall not confess them, then," exclaimed Nuncita, with determination.

"You will confess them, child," returned the elder, severely.

"But I won't."

"Child!"

"But I don't want to."

"Silence, child, you will confess them three times. To-morrow I shall take you myself to Fray Diego."

Nuncita still protested under her breath like a wilful child, until the severe glances of her elder sister made her be silent, but she was still in a pet. Sometimes without any reason she had these exhibitions of ill-temper and rebellion, and Carmelita had to call all her authority into play to bring her to reason, but this was a rare occurrence. Although only three or four years older than herself, Nuncita, from long custom, weakness of character, or maybe from liking to appear young before people, recognised her sister's authority and accorded her an obedience and submission that many mothers of daughters would envy. It was seldom necessary to call her to order, but when it was so, Nuncita bowed her head, and was soon seen to put her handkerchief to her eyes and leave the room, whilst Carmelita followed her movements with a fixed look and shook her head severely. A little more, and she would have chastised her in

public and sent her to bed without any supper. For such reasons, and because Doña Carmelita frequently called her so, Doña Nuncita, who was over eighty years of age, went by the name of "the child" in Lancia.

Both sisters worked heroically in the love affair of Emilita Mateo, and Captain Nuñez was besieged in the regular way. For a month at least, until they saw he was well under weigh, no chair was left vacant for him excepting by the side of Don Cristobal's youngest girl. In the game of lottery, which was a perfect passion in that society, Nuncita took care that papers should be found with their names combined. When reference was made to the officer and Emilita they were mentioned as one person, already united and inseparable. Services of such great importance were repaid by the Pensioner by a gratitude which beamed from his eyes, and he would gladly have prostrated himself at their feet and kissed the edge of their square gowns. But his dignity and his long series of diatribes against the army chained his feet and forbade these, and all other manifestations of delight. He was deprived even of the consolation of exhibiting pleasure at the sight of the soldier at the promenade with his daughter. But we know that the señoritas cared little for the gratitude of their guests. They married them from their irresistible propensity in this direction, which was as much a necessity of their constitution as web-spinning is to the spider, or singing in the woods is to the birds. Once launched in matrimony, the men and women guests lost all attraction for the Señoritas de Meré. Their attention was immediately turned to the fresh young people who came and took refuge under their protecting wings. But there was one who caused them such bitter disappointment that a little more would have brought them to the grave. Never in their lives had they come across such an incomprehensible man as the count. What the poor things went through to put him in the right path, in the flowery path of Hymen! But the devil slipped through their fingers like an eel.

For some evenings he appeared tender and devoted to Fernanda, never leaving her side for an instant. The glances of the two sisters were then fixed upon them with visible interest; by dint of signs they kept them from interruption, a little more and they would have requested the others to lower their voices, so that the noise should not disturb them. And then suddenly when least expected the count was absurd enough to leave his seat in an absent-minded way with a yawn, and walk off by himself and sit at a corner of the table; whilst Fernanda, on her side, was also very whimsical, for she would take the opportunity to start an animated conversation with the son of the Chief Magistrate of the Court without vouchsafing a look at her *fiancé*. Carmelita and Nuncita were taken aback when

this occurred, and they retired to rest full of consternation. After the final break, and when they were quite certain that the chance of bringing such a magnificent marriage to pass was not reserved for them, they lowered their ambition and turned their attention to Garnet who had been pressing for their help for some time.

But impious fate was again against them. Fernanda snubbed any conciliatory remark that they made to her in favour of the Indian. If she noticed that the señoritas arranged the chairs, so that he would have to sit by her side, she instantly upset their manœuvres and skilfully managed for a contrary effect. When sides were arranged for *brisca* or *tute* she would not accept him as a partner and preferred to give up the game than do so. In short she was so quick and wide awake that she was invincible on every side. Nevertheless, the de Merés persisted in their project, and worked for its accomplishment with the patience which is the surest means for the success of great undertakings.

Some days after the practical joke of Paco Gomez on Don Santos, there assembled at the famous party, besides three or four youths, the same Paco, Manuel Antonio, Don Santos, Captain Nuñez, Don Cristobal, Maria Josefa Hevia, and two of the Mateo girls.

They were not yet thinking of playing. They were all seated excepting Paco, who was walking up and down the drawing-room, telling them the joke he had the other night at the theatre with Manin the majordomo of Quiñones. Since the latter had been paralysed, his well-known companion had to go about the town without his shadow. But in consideration of the regard shown him by his master, the guests of Don Pedro took a good deal of notice of him, and in spite of the rusticity of his manners and the countrified aspect of his attire, they greeted him familiarly when they met him in the street, invited him into a café, and sometimes took him to the theatre. It was Manin here, and Manin there, the great peasant had made himself famous, not only in Lancia, but in the whole of the province. Those short breeches, those white woollen stockings with coloured stripes, that green cloth jacket and wide brimmed hat, gave him an original aspect in the town, where it would be difficult to find a man in such attire.

He was an unfailing source of astonishment to strangers, especially as they saw him associate on an equal footing with the señores of the place; for they seemed to seek his society not only out of respect for the Grandee, but because they found pleasure in Manin's uncouth manners. Besides, Manin was a celebrated bear-hunter, and it was reported that he had occasionally had deadly struggles

with the beasts. Those who were partial to that kind of sport professed great regard and respect for him. Nevertheless, the enemies that the majordomo had in his village laughed sarcastically, and said that the bears were all a farce, and he had never seen one in his life, much less struggled with them. They added that Manin had never been anything more than a country clown, until Don Pedro took it into his head to raise him from his obscure position.

Impartiality obliges us to give this evidence, but we can take it for what it is worth. It must, however, be confessed that the conduct of Manin gave it a semblance of truth, for although he often offered to take his friends bear-hunting, he never kept his promise. But perhaps this was due to his respect for the well-being and safety of the bears of his country. Is it sufficient evidence for dubbing a man a mere country clown? Nobody could say so. It would be more logical to assume that the celebrated Manin, like everybody who rises above the common herd, was a victim of the insinuations of the envious.

So Paco, with his usual freedom, quite regardless of the presence of ladies, told how he and some other friends who had a theatre ticket took Manin to the stage box. The majordomo had never before seen women dancers. When they first appeared on the scene, Manin, thinking that they had bare legs, was perfectly scandalised and fixed his eyes, glowing with anger and indignation, upon them. "But you have not seen the best," Paco said, "wait a bit." When the orchestra began to play, the dancers shook their castanettes, and with a turn they raised their legs as high as their heads. "Shame!" exclaimed the poor fellow, clapping his hands to his face. "What will happen next?"

Paco told the story quite naturally, as he walked up and down the drawing-room, with his head down, and his hands in his trousers-pockets. The young ladies felt inclined to blush, and everybody laughed excepting Garnet, who was still smarting from the joke of the other day.

From his corner, where he sat like a sulky bear, he cast grim and angry glances at Paco. What had happened in Estrada-Rosa's house, when the Indian went to ask for the hand of the señorita? Not a word could be got out of Don Juan nor his daughter; but a certain little servant-maid informed the world that Don Juan refused him with the deepest scorn, that Garnet made mention of his millions and maintained that Fernanda would never have a chance of a better marriage. Then Don Juan got in a rage, called him a sponger, and sent him off with offensive epithets. Every time Paco caught one of the angry glances, he smiled and winked at Manuel Antonio.

"I say, Carmela," he said, coming to a stand before a little picture painted in oils, "where did you buy this San Juan?"

"Jesus! señor," exclaimed Carmelita; "it is not a San Juan, but a Salvador! See how the poor little fellow is laughing!"

"Ah! so it is a Salvador. What is the difference?"

The Señoritas de Meré, hearing such a question, went nearly wild with amusement. They laughed till the tears came.

"Ay, what, Paquito! Ay, what, my heart! You don't know the difference between a San Juan and a Salvador?"

And they laughed and laughed again. They had not heard anything so funny for many years. When they were a little more composed, they dried their tears and used their handkerchiefs vigorously. Paco, who liked to see them so merry, went on to inquire:

"But come, when did you buy this Salvador, that I never saw till now?"

"It was in Nuncia's room, my dear; but it did not do there, because it came in the way of the bed, and so we put it here."

"It was given to Carmela when papa was alive," said Nuncita, "by a painter from Madrid who spent a few days here."

"Were you young then?" asked Paco, gravely, turning to Carmelita.

"Yes, very young."

"Was the painter famous?"

"Very."

"Then I know who it was. It was Murillo."

"No; I don't think that was his name."

"Then it was Velasquez."

"That name sounds more like it. He was a young man, very short, and very gallant. Was he not, Nuncia?"

"Did he not address some soft words to you?"

Nuncita lowered her eyes and blushed.

"Who would recollect these things now?"

"He was very much in love," continued Carmelita; "and at the same time he was most well-bred and clever."

"Of an amorous disposition, did you say? It can be no other than Velasquez."

"He was not named Velasquez, he was called Gonzalez," interposed Nuncita, timidly.

And after this remark she blushed again.

"That's it! Gonzalez!" exclaimed her sister, recollecting.

"Well, it is all the same; he would be a contemporary of his—of the great race of painters of the seventeenth century," remarked Paco, not the least put out by the laughter of the guests, who were astonished at the innocence of the poor women.

"How did he make love to thee?" he continued, with a caressing touch of Nuncita's cheek. "It seems to me you were very coquettish, eh, Carmela?"

This remark was provocative of a smile from the company.

"Carmela, *por Dios!* and are these gentlemen going to make believe I was a coquette?" exclaimed the "child" in real concern.

"They would only believe the truth, girl," said Paco. "Now, don't you recollect you lent a willing ear to the ecclesiastical attorney, called Don Maximo, and no sooner had he left the house than you were talking on the balcony with Lieutenant Paniagua?"

Nuncita smiled with pleasure at the recollection of those times, and replied as she lowered her eyes with gracious timidity:

"Don Maximo came to the house every day, but it was never a question of love."

"Neither a courtship nor a refusal?" asked Paco. "Then confess that the one you really liked was the lieutenant, and done with it."

"What! you were in love with a soldier?" asked Emilita, with pleasant

volubility, as she cast a teasing glance at Nuñez. "Then you must have had bad taste."

The Pensioner became suddenly serious and his moustache went up in horror at his daughter's sally, but he was immediately calmed at seeing that the captain, instead of being offended, only returned a loving smile, and like all the rest treated it as a joke.

"She is not the only one who has had such bad taste," said Carmelita, with marked insinuation, delighted at the chance of making such a clever hit.

"And who was this lieutenant? Some useless puppy, like we have here?" continued Emilia, with the same taking levity.

"Gently, gently, Emilia!" returned Paco. "Paniagua was lieutenant of the third regiment of infantry of Flanders, and a very brave man."

"No, dear, no," interposed Nuncita, "to put the matter right, he was of the Royal Guard."

"Was he not an archer?"

"No, dear heart, I say he was of the Royal Guard."

Don Cristobal hid his amusement under a fit of coughing, and Manuel Antonio and the young people laughed heartily.

"Paniagua was a very remarkable man," continued Paco. "He was endowed with a decision of character befitting soldiers. The day that he arrived, he saw Nuncia at the window in the morning, and in the evening he managed to give her, in the portico of San Rafael after *nones*, a letter of declaration which ran thus:

"Señorita, in confusion and fear and doubting if in your kind condescension you will pardon my boldness, I confess that my only joy is in loving you."

"Oh! you rogue! what a memory you have!" exclaimed Nuncita, now fairly overcome.

The fact was, Paco, to whom, after many entreaties, "the child" had shown the letters she had kept of Paniagua's, learnt the original document by heart and recited it everywhere to the great delight of his friends.

"He was what may be called a resolute man. The character of a person is shown like that. How different to the soldiers of the present day, who before proposing to a girl, dangle about for a whole year and then delay saying: 'Child, when shall we go to church?'"

These words were uttered with a look at the corner, where Emilita and the captain were sitting. The latter took the remark and became serious, and the girl tried to look unconscious although grateful in her heart to Paco for giving the hint; whilst the Pensioner twisted his moustache with a trembling hand, fearing that Nuñez would take offence, but glad with the hope that these opportune allusions would bring him to the point.

Tired of conversation, the young people proposed a game of forfeits. It is a game which wide-awake men always turn to their own advantage.

Fernanda let Garnet sit by her side. She was vexed at the winks and signs of Paco that she had noticed. She was a very proud creature, but she prided herself on her sense of justice. She could not bear anybody to be made fun of in her presence, even if it were the lowest, most insignificant being. Maybe the sense of pride, which was one of her tenderest and most touchy points, made her alive to the wounds inflicted on that of others. Although she hated Garnet, she was sorry to see him made an object of derision, particularly as she was the cause; but this did not prevent her treating him with overbearing airs herself; but it is thought, and not without reason, that although the rebuffs of the lady one loves may inflict misery, they do not sting like practical jokes. The Indian, seeing himself so honoured, was beside himself with delight, and set to overwhelming her as usual with a thousand attentions. Fernanda accepted them with a grave demeanour, but not with repugnance. Then came as usual that game of "three times yes, and three times no," the favourite of all present. Thus Society amused itself with what had entertained its fathers and grandfathers, and with what they thought would amuse their children. Innocent people! There was one spirit there to whom this attribute did not apply. Paco played with the peevish condescension, of a man in advance of his time, making many stupid mistakes, which showed the inattention characteristic of superior beings. Nuñez, on the contrary, was all there. Never was a man more at home in such matters, nor one who entered into them more thoroughly. His bright intelligence had penetrated all the secrets of the game of forfeits, and he knew how to get the best out of everybody according to the circumstances in question. For example, when a young lady had to whisper to him, he instantly became deaf, and the girl was obliged to bend more and more until her ruddy lips brushed the ear of the

captain. If he were condemned to represent the paper corner of the Puerta del Sol and consequently had to have pieces of paper stuck on his face, &c. &c., the wily Nuñez did not guess who it was doing it until he had passed his hands over the girl.

But he gave the clearest demonstration of his portentous talent and the vast knowledge he had acquired in this department of science, when he proposed that the señorita, to whom he would tell what she had in her pocket, would have to kiss him. The young ladies were all so sure that he would not be successful that they willingly accepted the condition. He was certainly wrong in his attempt at guessing the contents of the pocket of Carmelita, wrong again with Fernanda, with Maria Josefa, with Micaela, but see, what a sly rogue! he knew exactly what was in Emilita's: some scissors, a handkerchief, a thimble, and three caramels. The girl began to groan and clasp her hands in a state of nervous collapse. "It was a trap! a trap!" The captain serene, unperturbed, and dignified as some hero of antiquity, refuted the imputation, and proved to satiety that there was no question of a trap. "I do not say," he added with a Mephistophelian smile, "but what it was an understood thing between us, as I was allowed to see beforehand what her pocket contained."

The girl then became still more emphatic in her protestations against this statement, and she became agitated to an incomprehensible degree, and ran to the opposite end of the room, as far as possible from the captain, as if he were going to take by force what he had a right to. Those on her side were the women, whilst the men took the part of the captain. The drawing-room was then transformed into a perfect pandemonium. They all talked, laughed, and screamed without coming to any understanding. But, as is easily supposed, the one who screamed and gesticulated the most, was the girl concerned. Nevertheless, Don Cristobal, seeing there were no signs of coming to an understanding and wishing to countenance his daughter's course of action, intervened in the dispute like a majestic god extending his right hand to calm the waves of the stormy sea.

"Emilita," he said in a tone of command, "play is play; give a kiss to this gentleman."

It is noticeable that he did not say to "the captain," nor "to this señor officer." His lips still revolted at using a term exclusively military.

"But papa!" exclaimed the younger daughter, red as a poppy.

"It must be done!" he returned, with his extended right hand in the most

commanding attitude that could be assumed by such a godlike pensioner.

There was no help for it. Emilita, confused and ashamed, with her cheeks like two fires, advanced with a hesitating step to the brave captain of Pontevedra, who was sharp enough to bring his lips to play upon the brilliant colouring of her face.

But lo and behold! hardly was this effected than up jumps a basilisk of a Micaela, who was indeed the most irascible of the four nereids who inhabited the depths of the dwelling of the Pensioner.

"How shameless! These are not decent games, but low tricks. I am not astonished at Nuñez, for men are what they are. But I am astonished at you, Emilita. It seems to me that a little more modesty and shame would not become you badly. But what is to be done, when those, whose duty it is to inspire you with it are the first to abet what is wrong?"

This heated diatribe against the author of her days turned him pale and paralysed him. There was a moment of embarrassed silence; then they were all eager to defend Emilita, and maintain the purity and perfect innocence of such games. The argument repeated most often was that as there was no *malice prépense* it was of no account, because the important thing in these matters was the intention.

"Was the kiss given with intention?" asked one of the most dialectical youths. "No? Then it was as if it had not been given."

Nuñez assented gravely, being a little irritated, and eyeing his future sister-in-law with some misgiving.

But she declined to surrender to such self-evident demonstrations, and continued to request, each time more violently and in a higher key, that her younger sister might have a little shame, and her señor father a little feeling. But as nobody appeared with these requisites in their hands, to comply with these requests, there was nothing for it but to go on lowering her diapason until her angry protestations were gradually transformed into a far-away mutter like the sounds of distant thunder, and the party returned to its normal state of calm.

But the game of forfeits was over for that night. Nuncita, who was generally the one for bright ideas, suggested that they should play at *la boba* (the fool). I do not know why, but this game had a particular attraction for the youngest of

the Señoritas de Meré. It is impossible to say what it was that pleased the ex-fiancée of the Lieutenant Paniagua, when she managed to get the fool on to any of her girl guests, and what anxiety and concern she evinced when she had it herself and could not get rid of it. Paco Gomez took the pack of cards and took out the three knaves, then knowing Nuncita's weakness, and wishing, according to his temperament, to put her out a little, he made a sign to the others that she had the knave, and all the guests soon became a party to her keeping it. The result was that the "fool" was nearly always in the hands of "the child," and try as she would, no efforts could relieve her of it. This, in spite of her natural gentleness, finally enraged her. The party laughed, and so did she, but more with her lips than her heart. At last, in a moment of anger, she dashed down the cards and declared she would not play any more. Carmelita, seeing such an act of discourtesy, intervened severely as was her custom in any case of insubordination.

"What temper is this? Wherefore this madness? What will these gentlemen think? They will say, and rightly, that you have no education, and that our family has not known how to bring you up. Now, take the cards at once."

"I don't want to."

"What! what do you say, stupid? You—you are mad. Was there ever such a wayward creature? Ta—take up the cards at once."

Anger made her stutter so much that only incoherent sounds proceeded from her toothless mouth.

"Hum!" muttered Nuncita as she twisted her lips into a sulky pout.

"Child, don't enrage me!" cried her elder sister.

"I don't want to, I don't want to," repeated the obstinate creature with decision.

And at the same time she dragged her reluctant feet into the other room.

But her sister immediately followed with the severest and most authoritative demeanour imaginable, prepared to correct that beginning of rebellion which in time might lead to most fatal consequences. A sound of dispute was heard, the sharp angry voice of Carmelita was raised, then it toned down, became more persuasive and reasoning, until it regained its normal suavity, as the echo of a sob reached the ears of the guests. Finally, at the end of some time, Carmelita reappeared with a slower step than her sister, with her eyes blazing with

authority, and the majestic attitude befitting those who dictate laws to the beings Providence has confided to their care. "The child" came behind ashamed and submissive, with inflamed cheeks and tearful eyes. She reseated herself at the table without daring to raise her eyes to her elder sister, who still regarded her with a certain severity, humbly took up the cards, and began to play again. But instead of this touching example of respect and submission making a grave impression on the onlookers, it provoked a smile of amusement on almost all their faces, and there emanated from some of them inopportune bursts of laughter that were only repressed with difficulty.

Nevertheless the game did not last long. The hour approached for the select party to disperse.

"Maria Josefa, I saw your godchild at the promenade to-day," said Paco Gomez, as he absently shuffled the cards. "I gave it a kiss. She gets prettier every day. How old is it now?"

"You can calculate. We had it baptised in February. Two and a half months."

"Was it with its mother?" asked Manuel Antonio, smiling in a peculiar way.

"No! I met the mother afterwards in Altavilla and exchanged a remark with her," he gravely returned with assumed naturalness.

The greater part of the guests looked at him with a smile, and with an expression of reserved malice that surprised Fernanda. Only the two Señoritas de Meré and Garnet remained unconcerned without taking any notice of the conversation.

"But what godchild of yours are they talking about—of the baby adopted by the Quiñones?" asked the heiress of Estrada-Rosa of Maria Josefa.

"Yes."

"Well, then, how are they speaking of its mother?"

"Because these two have an evil tongue. God keep us from that!" returned the old maid, also smiling with malicious pleasure, and at the same time looking at the young girl with the pitiful kindness accorded to innocent creatures.

"But who do they suppose is its mother?"

"Who could it be?—Amalia!—Silence!" she added hastily, lowering her voice.

Fernanda was stupefied. The news was so new and surprising to her that she kept her eyes fixed on her friend as if she had not heard. In the excitement of the moment she had not heard the first words of Paco, but only thought it was a question of his being warm in his praise of the beauty of the child.

"It belongs to those it likens," murmured the Magpie of Sierra, with the same intentional malignity. "Yes, it is like its mother—and its father. Its father was a fine boy."

Fernanda, a sudden prey to overwhelming curiosity, insane curiosity that urged her on, agitated and breathless without her knowing why, bent again towards Maria Josefa, and putting her mouth to her ear, she asked in an agitated voice:

"But who is its father?"

The old maid turned towards her, and fixed her eyes upon her with an expression of surprise mingled with the aforesaid indulgent compassion.

"But don't you really know?"

The girl made a sign in the negative, and at the same time she felt overwhelmed by terrible emotion. A cold chill swept suddenly through her inner being. Pale as death, she hung on the lips of Maria Josefa as if her sentence of life or death depended on them. Her excitement was quite evident to the lady, and after looking at her fixedly for a minute she said:

"No! I won't tell you. What is the good? Perhaps it is all a calumny."

Fernanda instantly regained her self-possession.

"All right!" she returned, with a gesture of displeasure; "be silent, for after all what has all this to do with me?"

This gesture wounded the old maid, who quickly returned with a malicious smile:

"But it is precisely because it does concern you that I am afraid to tell you."

"I don't understand."

Maria Josefa bent towards her and said:

"Because they say that the father of the creature is Luis."

As she had anticipated the blow, Fernanda remained unmoved, and asked her with indifference:

"What Luis?"

"The count, girl."

"And why should it concern me that Luis is the father?"

Maria Josefa was somewhat disconcerted at this question.

"Because he was your betrothed."

"But as he is not so now," she returned, with a scornful shrug of the shoulders.

And then she begun talking to Garnet, who was on her other side, but the indifference was only put on from pride. An inexplicable penetrating sadness fell upon her soul, and took complete possession of her without leaving her power to think or do anything.

If Garnet had not been such a mere animal he would have seen directly that the smile with which she listened to his uncultured, rough conversation was only a stereotyped one without any expression whatever, and that the monosyllables and incoherent replies that fell from her lips showed very clearly that she was not listening to him, but to Paco Gomez, Manuel Antonio, and the others, as they went on chattering about the foundling child.

With what interest did she catch every word that these busybodies interchanged. And as they went on making the fact clear with increasing details, intermixing joking remarks and funny inuendos, there was a tightening at her heart, and it gradually contracted as if they were all compressing it in their hands one after the other to hurt her, but her face remained calm, and not the slightest contraction showed the pain she was suffering.

The party broke up at twelve as usual, and it was a great comfort to Fernanda to breathe the cool, damp, night air. She longed to be alone with her thoughts and think over what she had just heard.

It had rained a good deal. The streets, paved with flat stones, shone in the light of the lanterns. On leaving the house some took the lower road, and others, amongst whom was Fernanda, went off in the direction of the plaza. They had only gone a few steps when they heard the loud trotting of some horses that had

that instant come round the corner, and were bearing down upon them.

"Ah! here is the Baron and his servant," said Manuel Antonio.

It was, in fact, the hour in which the eccentric Baron took his habitual ride through the streets of Lancia. His famous horse was pirouetting as usual, and making such a noise that although his servant's steed was much more quiet, it seemed as if a squadron were going through the town.

As they passed the party Manuel Antonio, with his usual forwardness, cried out, "Good night, Baron." But he only turned his awful face towards them, looked at them fixedly with his blood-shot eyes, and then proceeded without a remark.

The Chatterbox abashed said:

"Go on, drunk as usual!"

They all pretended to look upon it as a joke, but at the bottom they all more or less felt the same alarm on seeing that sinister figure. Fernanda, as a woman, and in her particular state of mind, was visibly affected, and after they had passed she followed the two horses with eyes of terror until they were lost in the darkness.

On retiring to bed, with her wounded heart, she wished to analyse the emotion which swayed her, and to trace it back to the cause. She felt ashamed of herself. Her pride made her cry out with rage in a loud voice:

"What have these bad goings on to do with me? What have I to do with him or her?"

But hardly had she uttered these words than she felt the scalding tears upon her cheeks, and the heiress of Estrada-Rosa quickly turned and hid her face, suffused with blushes, in the pillows.

CHAPTER VII

THE INCREASE OF THE CONTINGENT

THE terrible difficulties that were to arise with the marriage of Emilita, on account of the anti-bellicose opinions of her father, were got over with more facility than could have been expected.

History will not speak (although it could with more reason than it does of many events) of that solemn day when Nuñez had to go in proper form and ask Don Cristobal for the hand of his daughter, of the memorable embrace with which the latter received him, clasping him warmly to his civil breast with that incredible fusion of two heterogeneous elements created to repel each other, and the artless graces of the sweet coy angel are taken for granted and understood. If this particular page were the subject for any historian, he could not abstain from drawing attention to the extreme importance of such concord, which until then had been considered impossible, and at the same time he would impartially show the reverse side of the picture, laying before future generations the way the maligned patrician, Don Cristobal Mateo, was the victim of a social injustice, and of the persecution of his brother citizens.

It must be said that all the world in Lancia thought themselves entitled to joke this respectable and ancient functionary on the marriage of his daughter, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly, but whenever the matter was referred to, allusion was made to the antagonistic opinions he had hitherto held on the abolition of the land forces. The marriage was called the increase of the contingent, and some were impertinent enough to give it that name before his future son-in-law.

One can easily conceive what it cost him to give up a tiresome and ill-judged fad.

But in spite of all the diatribes and murmurs of the neighbours, that hurt Mateo's feelings more than they affected his good humour, and in spite of the envy that burned in the majority of hearts, the increase of the contingent was to be consummated.

The time fixed for the auspicious occasion was the month of August. By that time it had acquired such importance that, as generally happens in little places, hardly anything else was talked of. The relations of the Pensioner, and his four daughters were numberless, and they all expected to be invited on the day of the marriage. And then, on the other side, some of the worthy and punctilious officers of the battalion of Pontevedra, friends of the bridegroom, were filled with the same desire.

As it was not possible to entertain so many people in the poetic dwelling of the Pensioner, they thought of celebrating the marriage in the country. The house most fitting for the occasion, by reason of its proximity to the town, was the Grange.

Don Cristobal made the request to the count, with whom he and his daughters were on very friendly terms, and he immediately placed it at his disposal. The happy union, the safe pledge of peace between the civil and military elements, was celebrated early in the day at the church of San Rafael. Fray Diego performed the ceremony, as he enjoyed great prestige among the officers for being the strangest priest and the most inveterate toper of the capital. More than twenty ladies, and almost as many gentlemen, assisted at the service. That over, they all resorted to the Grange to spend the day there. Carriages were not required to go to a place so near the town. But they had the Count of Onis and the Quiñones' to convey the bride and bridegroom, and a few elderly people like the two Señoritas de Meré. The guests included almost all the Grandee's party, several of that of the de Merés, and a good number of officers.

The count had the old house arranged as well as possible. It was as well known to almost everybody as their own homes, for being so near the town, and having such a beautiful wood, it was the best place for *fêtes champêtres*, and the counts had never refused permission for these occasions. When they had arrived and enjoyed the chocolate, which was waiting for them in the large room, paved with brick on the ground floor, which served as dining-room, they dispersed without ceremony over the house and about the estate, prepared to kill the time as well as they could until the bell rang for dinner.

The bride, with Amalia, who had been her bridesmaid, and two other ladies sat quietly in one of the rooms. Her eyes were shining, her cheeks red, and it was in vain that she tried to conceal the deep emotion she was feeling under a dignified and serious demeanour.

Those in her company, who were all married, caressed her incessantly, passed their hands over her hair, gave her little pats on the cheeks, and sometimes took her by the hands and impressed a kiss on her forehead, with the half tender, half ironical condescension evinced by the long experienced to the novices in matrimony. There is not one who does not feel at the sight of a bride the echo of certain distant music in her heart, the taste of the honey of the remote moon comes to her lips; but it comes, alas! with the bitter taste of several years of matrimonial prose. In every married woman there is a poet disillusioned of his muse. Hence the Byronic smile on her face at the sight of the happiness shining in the eyes of a bride.

Emilita had changed her character in a quarter of an hour. All the playfulness and sprightliness she had hitherto displayed was now changed to gravity and sedateness. She talked wisely with the matrons, her companions, about starting the larder, about domestic servants, who were considered by all to be dreadfully going down, and the price of meat. She seemed to have grown so old in this quarter of an hour that it was surprising not to see some silver threads in her golden hair. To turn to her sisters, they, in strange contrast, seemed to have lost some years since the investiture of the younger one. They had gone back to childhood. Like creatures longing to disport themselves in the light and air, the three rushed into the wood, making the silence that reigned there ring with their voices and innocent shouts of laughter. *Virgen del Amporo!* how they jumped! how they laughed! What impish tricks those little mad things were up to! For the greater enjoyment of the innocent games that their youthful retrogression demanded, they threw off their mantillas, let their hair loose, took off their gloves, cast aside fan and parasol, did all that youth could suggest, and were as pranksome as any children. Not only was their angelic hair allowed to float upon their shoulders, but they took off watches, rings, and bracelets and handed them to papa, taking him by the collar to give him a thousand caresses, like bright and affectionate children as they were. Then, seeing that some of the officers of the battalion were looking at them, they turned red and confused, pinned up their skirts until the foot and part of the leg was visible, and then ran through the wood, avoiding, like the nymphs of Diana, the ardent glances of the officers.

And when they reached a distant solitary spot, where the shadows deepened, and they were beyond the reach of mundane noises and malicious eyes of men, they shouted with delight like God's little birds to their companions to come and enjoy the delightful quiet where they could display their charms and enjoy themselves without fear of being surprised. Then one proposed to play at

skipping and the rest acceded, clapping their hands. Jovita was the first. Jump, jump, until she fell on the grass in a state of exhaustion, pressing her hand to her heart that palpitated with fatigue, not with the insane agitation of youthful passions. Then another jumped, and then another, until they were all exhausted but merry, their rosy cheeks and bright eyes showing the pleasant happiness accruing to an innocent mind. When tired of this they proposed the game of "Let them give unto the kite a little onion with the mite." What laughter and merriment ensued! How the quiet wood echoed with the silvery voices of those beautiful, delicate creatures! Wearied of this game they dispersed for a little. A few formed a group seated at the foot of the trunk of an oak, and went in for the pleasant enjoyment of recounting in a low voice a thousand puerilities; others went in with enthusiasm for the search of little blue flowers, with which they made chains to deck themselves with; others ran after each other like swallows in the air uttering piercing screams the while. The steadier ones devoted their efforts to catching grasshoppers and other timid insects. But they soon reassembled, for a very daring girl proposed climbing a tree if they helped her; and another one said Yes, she would help her. So bear a hand! the spirited girl, who was named Consuelo, set about putting her little feet in the most accessible branches. The wayward companion, who was no other than Socorro, the third of the Pensioner's sirens, helped her. Consuelo finally climbed to where two branches crossed, from thence she got on to another, and all the nymphs applauded, and shouted with enthusiasm.

But lo and behold! Rubio, the lieutenant of the Third, a man known among his companions in arms as a genius in the art of enslaving the opposite sex, suddenly raised his bold head above the bushes. The nymphs, on seeing him, uttered a piercing cry, and stood petrified in the act in which he had surprised them. Consuelo, from the top of the tree, apostrophised him violently. If it had been in her power she would have immediately transformed that new Actæon into a stag. But there, *entre nous*, it is possible that she would have preferred first to transform him into a husband, regardless of a more exact rendering of the classical metamorphosis.

But Rubio, the lieutenant of the Third, knew perfectly well what these shrieks and apostrophisings were worth. He was not put out, he smiled maliciously, and called with a rough voice to his brothers in arms. What confusion! What terror among those merry daughters of the wood as the sons of Mars approached in a closed line! Without picking up their mantillas, gloves or parasols, nothing, in short, that belonged to them, they fled through the plantation uttering cries of

terror. But the satyrs in red trousers willingly followed them, caught them up, and took them captive with hateful laughter. In the meanwhile poor Consuelo, besieged by three of these bold satyrs, simply declined to come down until they went fifty yards off. But they, the cruel creatures, they refused. The nymph entreated, got angry, and was on the point of crying, but neither her anger nor her tears could soften the stony hearts of the infamous satyrs. At last she resigned herself to coming down, and although she took many modest precautions, they managed to see a foot charmingly shod, and a suspicion of leg, which made them roar with delight. But where was Rubio? Where was the most terrible and fiercest of all? They did not know, but at the end of some time he appeared from the glade, bringing with him Socorro, the most sentimental of Don Cristobal's undines. His cruel features bore an expression of triumph, and hers evinced the shame and submission of a captive. Many hours later, near midnight, seated at a table of the Café Marañón, and surrounded by eight or ten of his companions, the lieutenant of the Third related with a malevolent smile his conquest of the nymph, calculating that he had managed to imprint at least twenty-five or thirty kisses on different parts of her bewitching face, and all the sons of Mars applauded and celebrated this fresh triumph of their heroic companion with Homeric shouts of laughter.

Finally the conquerors modified their tyranny, and order was re-established, thanks to the opportune arrival of the Señoritas de Meré, who appeared with Maria Josefa and Paco Gomez. The little ladies, the only ones, in fact, to whom the matrimonial event was due, had turned over their boxes for a befitting toilette for the occasion, and Carmelita wore a dress of black bombazin, which only came out on state occasions, whilst Nuncita, being younger and less sedate, was able to wear a clear dress bordered with flowers, such as are only seen in pictures of the past century. They were very cheerful, satisfaction shone in their eyes, but their legs were not equal to the eternal youth of their hearts; they supported themselves on sticks, and leant with their free hands on the arms of their companions. They were received with cheers and hurrahs. Many rude jokes were levelled at them, to which nobody assented more willingly nor laughed more heartily than the little saints of Meré, so there was little merit in quizzing them. They were never seen to be cross with their friends, and so fun was pushed so far with them that it sometimes bordered on coarseness; but they were very prone to intestine warfare, and to get cross with each other; however, we know the leading feature of these performances.

The bold spirit of Lieutenant Rubio, sharpened, by the circumstances,

conceived a most happy idea; he thought the best way of passing the time until the dinner-hour would be to construct a swing in which the ladies could be pulled backwards and forwards for some minutes by the gentlemen, who would have the pleasure of managing the apparatus. No sooner said than done. Ropes were found, a board was cut, in less than a quarter of an hour everything was in order. Whilst the arrangements were being completed, Rubio kept on giving expressive winks to his companions, who understood, smiled, held their tongues, and greatly admired the audacity and penetration of the lieutenant of the Third. The swing was now fixed. Who is to be the first? They all evinced the same shame, and the same colour suffused their cheeks. One mischievously thought of suggesting Nuncita. The rest applauded the idea. Nuncita held back in dismay. Carmelita neither conceded, nor withheld her permission. The entreaties were repeated on all sides.

The young men seemed each minute to be more taken with the idea. At last, almost by force, and amid the frantic applause of the party, Cuervo, the herculean cornet of the First, took the "child" up in his arms and seated her on the board.

"Hold tight, Nuncia!" cried Paco Gomez, whilst the aforesaid cornet and some other friends began to swing her.

"Gently! gently!" exclaimed Carmelita.

No fear; they were careful because they were afraid she would fall. But, carefully as they moved the swing, the air gradually began gently to raise her skirts. The officers laughed and went on with the swing until there was quite an exhibition.

"Go it! go it!"

The girls, with mingled amusement and shame, hid their faces, fell into each other's arms, and whispered into each other's ears.

"Stop! stop, gentlemen!" cried Carmelita.

Nobody took any notice. The "child's" clothes went higher and higher. One did not know where they would stop.

"Stop! stop! por Dios, señor cadet!"

"Go it with her!" cried the soldiers.

And the swing went quicker and quicker, and Nuncita was so frightened that she had no time to think of modesty.

"Señor cadet! señor captain!" cried Carmelita all trembling, waving her arms, with her lower jaw distended, beating against the upper one, which was also distended, with a strange trembling. "Señor captain, stop, por Dios! For the love of the Holy Virgin! Stop! stop! stop!"

"So-o-o!" exclaimed Paco.

But the captain was obdurate and would not leave off. The skirts of Nuncita were now as high as they could go. The young girls turned their backs, and some ran laughing to hide themselves among the trees. It was only when the officers had completed their shameless act that they gave in and allowed Nuncita to get down. Her sister, instead of being angry with the guilty ones, flew upon "the child" full of fury, with her eyes flaming with rage.

"Get down, you bad girl! you shameless creature! Is this the education you learnt from your parents? Is this what the confessor tells you to do?"

Nuncita, quite upset, puckered up her face and began to cry.

The young men and women tried to calm the infuriated Carmelita. The captain and the cadet took all the blame. It was in vain. The anger was not appeased until it had vented itself in many violent and offensive remarks. The poor "child," seated sobbing on the ground with her face hid in her hands, excited the compassion of all present, who interceded for her incessantly.

It was then a question as to who was to get up into the swing next? Nobody wished to, which was very natural. How could one be swung by such bold, shameless men? It was in vain that soldiers and civilians explained their conduct in the past event, and solemnly swore not to do it again, but to be orderly and prudent and always under the ladies' orders. But they were not to be trusted. The lieutenant Rubio especially inspired them with a great terror as they considered him, and not without reason, as the instigator of all the shameless tricks.

But when they were quite at their wits' end, lo! and behold Consuelo, the brave, determined child, who shortly before had climbed the tree, whispered to one of her companions, came forward and said, to the horror of the other girls:

"I will do it. Help me, gentlemen."

A cry of enthusiasm greeted these spirited words. For some instants nothing was heard but "Viva Consuelo! viva Consuelo!" from the delighted company. There was not one that did not wish to help her and load her with flowers and presents. The athletic cadet, with a knightly air, knelt on one knee and asked her to place her foot on the other. The intrepid girl, nothing loth, consented, and with one spring she was on the seat. Both soldiers and civilians thought they were in luck's way. They exchanged looks of intelligence, they had no intention of keeping their word, and they were determined to repay the girl's confidence with the blackest treason. But when they were getting the apparatus ready and preparing to execute their malicious design, Consuela made a sign to her friend, who immediately came forward with a handful of pins and fastened her skirts together in such a way that even when the swing moved the point of her foot could not be seen.

The weaker sex applauded with mad enthusiasm.

"Good, Consuelo! good!"

The men, vexed and defeated as they were, dared not protest too much, but they complained of her want of confidence, whilst the maiden herself, proud of the feat, looked at them with a smile of derision. The pins were such a success that no girl got up into the swing without prudently having her skirts pinned together.

Whilst such memorable scenes were being enacted in the wood Jaime Moro, scorning rural pleasures, tried to get Fray Diego and Don Juan Estrada-Rosa to make up a party for a game of *tresillo*.

He was bored in church, he was bored in the woods, in the town, and in the country. He only recovered his serenity of mind, and regained his equanimity and cheerfulness of spirits, when he took the cards into his hand. Fate was against him. There were no cards in the house. But he did not give in. He went down into the kitchen, called a servant aside who looked sharp and active, and giving him a *pourboire*, he told him to run to the town and get a couple of packets of cards. In the meanwhile he was strenuous in his efforts to entertain his companions, chatting away on subjects most interesting to them, and, above all, trying to conciliate Don Juan, who showed a decided tendency to go off and take a turn in the grounds and pay a visit to the mill like the other guests. Moro was at his wits' end, fearing he would not hold out till the servant's return, but happily he arrived in time. Directly he held in his hands the much-desired cards he was

another man. Secure now of victory, he dragged off his friends to one of the quiet rooms of the house, had a square table brought, candles, beer, cigars, and there they were!

After such a narrow shave of losing it, Jaime Moro enjoyed his pleasure with a gusto that was enviable. A large number of shallower people, without sufficient imagination to understand or enjoy the delights of *tresillo*, had gone off, with the Pensioner as their guide, to take a turn round the place, and afterwards to visit the new-fashioned mill which the count had had erected a short time ago.

Captain Nuñez, the bridegroom, with a few of his friends who were less partial to the feminine sex, such as Garnet, Don Enrique, Saleta, Manin, and a few others, were of the party. They could not get the count to go because he was not to be found. It was said he was giving orders to the men and surveying some works a little way off, but he was not anywhere about. However, a capable sort of half majordomo volunteered to act as guide.

The property was situated on the decline of the same hill as that on which Lancia is built. At the back of the house there was a wood that shut out the view of the town, so that although it was so near it seemed as if it were a hundred miles away; at the same time it protected it against the north and west winds, only leaving it exposed to the gentle breezes from the south and east. The noises of the town did not penetrate as far as there; only the bells of the cathedral muffled by the distance sounded sweetly at certain hours of the day. The high road goes behind the wood. Another little one branching from it brought it into communication with the estate. As we know, there was no park *à l'Anglais* here, or *au Français*, no little gardens, or cascades, or artificial grottoes. It was a property half for amusement, half for work. First came the wood, then the house with its courtyard, then a large deserted garden, and then immense meadows extending along the skirt of the hill as far as the river and even to the opposite bank. Sheep graze in these meadows, and the tinkling of their bells with the barking of the dogs are heard. It is easy to imagine that you are in the bosom of solitary nature, so profound is the peace, only broken by the song of a bird or the moo of a cow.

The excursionists went through the stables that were in good order, for the count was much interested in the cattle. Nevertheless, Saleta affirmed that he had seen much better in Holland, and one or two coarse incidents were here given to show the care of the Dutch in this respect. When they had been over the stables, they took the road across the fields and went down to the river, adorned on either

side with alder trees and poplars, which formed at intervals a thick coppice, under which the river made its dark and gloomy way. The Loro is one of the smallest, and yet one of the most original rivers in Spain. Before arriving at the sea, "to die" as the poet says, it makes as many twists and turns as any crafty old fellow, who tries to evade the law to which all created beings are subject. It is impossible to imagine a more capricious stream. It sallies forth, brave and buoyant, as if it were going on for miles straight away to the ocean. But after a quarter of a mile it stops, turns, and meanders back nearly to where it started from, which gives some cause for thinking that it is going to take a higher course. It then starts afresh, not willingly, but by force of circumstances; this time it is lost to view, and everybody thinks it will never reappear, but it is not so. When the sly fox knows that he cannot be seen from the town, he sets about returning to it, but for shame's sake he makes a little *détour*, and stays a short while at some village near the same district. It never takes a frank and open course. Like all depraved characters it abhors the light, and takes every opportunity of avoiding trouble, by hiding under bushes, where it stops and grows corrupt in degrading idleness. Nobody can trust it. Many fine young men have been deceived by it seeming like an old rheumatic invalid, incapable of taking a step, and following its invitation to bathe where they were made to think it was only about a foot and a half deep, they were miserably drowned in its slimy depths.

In this river there were no naiads of celestial beauty ready to cleave the crystal waters with their alabaster arms, and no gracious undines with fair hair to come forth at night and play upon the surface.

The river Loro is gloomy, inimical to all poetic fancy, no fantastic figures hover there. The only thing it seems to take pleasure in harbouring is a vast quantity of frogs, so large that it makes one giddy to think that a number of them can live together, and the banks resound with the cheerful sound of their harmonious voices, which thundering sound prevented Saleta declaring, as he did when a little distance off, that when on the banks of the Yumuri on a certain evening, he was lucky enough to kill a crocodile with a stone. 'Tis true that under the piercing glance of his colleague Valero, he hastily added that the crocodile was quite young and only had one row of teeth.

They went for some distance along the gloomy bank of the Loro and crossed it by a rustic bridge, where the count had had it turned from its course by means of an aqueduct to work a mill. But just then a sudden desire seized the friends of the bridegroom, who were genuine representatives of the most vigorous and

masculine element of the battalion, to show off the strength and muscular power of their legs. A lieutenant jumped the aqueduct. A captain, to be in no way behind the subaltern, did the same, but he got his feet wet. His *amour propre* being excited, he took off his coat and jumped it again easily. The others did the same. The scene then assumed the appearance of the Olympian games, or still more those of the famous American display. But Nuñez was a great jumper. He was well known in all the army, especially in the infantry, as an adept in this art. He jumped three or four times with the greatest ease; but naturally wishing to surpass his companions, and give a striking proof of his skill, he affirmed in a scornful tone that that was nothing, and that he was capable of jumping the aqueduct backwards. These words were received with respect by his colleagues, but also with a silence which the captain took for sceptical. He did not divest himself of a particle of his uniform, such courses were only for neophytes, but took a leap, and arriving at the edge of the water, turned and jumped, but unfortunately his feet were caught in some rushes and he fell flat into the stream. He was hidden for a moment from the sight of his friends, and came up puffing and blowing like a regular triton, saying that it was nothing, and that he was going to jump again to show them how it could be done. But his father-in-law would not allow it. He passed his hands over his body to see if he were wet, as of course he was, and then a prey to the wildest agitation, he, who a short while since would have exterminated the whole army completely, set to bawling:

"He must change his things! Now, at once!—Inflammation of the lungs!—Change his things!—Shivers!—Rheumatic fever!"

And other exclamations more or less coherent that gave proof of his profound interest in the officer's health.

In spite of his martial calling, Nuñez acceded to the entreaties, and turned back to the house with his face frowning and furious, fully resolved to undress as far as his underthings, and go to bed whilst they sent to Lancia for a change of clothes. All his friends crowded round him, and so they arrived at the house.

Emilita, who was at the window, seeing them come along like this, asked in surprise:

"What is this?"

"Nothing," cried Papa, "but Nuñez fell into the aqueduct."

On hearing these words, Emilita naturally uttered a shriek of horror, and fell

senseless into the arms of several ladies. Nuñez, transformed into a hero, forgetting his own health, ran to her assistance. In a few moments the place was filled with glasses of water, and two or three bottles of anti-spasmodic appeared upon the scene. When she began to recover consciousness and the critical moment of tears arrived, her sister Micaela, no longer able to control herself, attacked her father violently:

"This has been an act of cruelty! Do you think your daughter has a heart of bronze? You must indeed be deficient in tact to hurt a poor creature like this!"

The poor creature repaid the defence with an affectionate look as she gave her her hand. The Pensioner, being then reduced to the last stage of humility, scarcely dared to murmur, that seeing that Nuñez was at her side, there was no cause for so much concern.

The ladies thought that Micaela had been disrespectful to her father, but they could not do less than admit that it had been a blunder, and they were full of sympathy for the unhappy bride.

CHAPTER VIII

FERNANDA AND THE WINE

FERNANDA was not present at any of these scenes. Early in the day she had resorted to the wood, but soon tiring of playing the part of modest nymph with her friends, she wandered off to more solitary places. Her head, generally so erect, was bowed under the weight of depression or preoccupation; her flexible, supple figure moved from side to side like the body of a bedouin; those dark African eyes, the most precious ornament of the noble city of Lancia, were fixed upon the ground, and the very deep line on her forehead testified to the fixed, gloomy drift of her thoughts.

How much she had gone through these two months! The impression that her love for the count had made in her heart, checked at first by pride and the hope of having it returned, had full sway directly she discovered the secret of his disaffection, and her whole being became possessed with the passions of love and jealousy. These feelings were all the more acute, inasmuch as she clearly

saw that she had long been deceived by Luis, who had feigned affection for her whilst his heart was given to another.

The miserable treachery of Amalia enraged her and inspired her with horror and exasperation. But that of the count, it must be confessed, added poignancy to her grief and depth to her passion.

Nevertheless she knew how to maintain the same friendly relations; but in spite of herself, and without her even being conscious of it, a slight shade of bitterness and scorn betrayed itself at times either in her manner, eyes, or tone, which did not escape the attention of the sharp Valencian.

With her *ex-fiancé* she retained a circumspect demeanour; she dropped the aggressive tone she had taken with him, and adopted a more suave and formal manner, but to her vexation, the emotion she experienced when speaking to him was not unfrequently revealed by a slight alteration in her voice, and by her turning alternately red and white. Her inner life during those six months was devoured by a feverish, anxious, uncertain activity, veiled with difficulty under a tranquil, proud demeanour. At times she could not bear the tension of the dumb rage which possessed her, and it vented itself in a torrent of burning, insulting words, which were uttered in a low voice, when she surprised any sign of intelligence between the traitors. Her ardent, proud nature, flattered by a father who indulged her to a fault, and by a score of adorers prostrate at her feet, rebelled like a wild colt against this obstacle, the first she had ever encountered in her life.

In these moments of frenzy she fostered ideas of revenge. She wrote several anonymous letters to Don Pedro, but none arrived at their destination, for she tore them up before posting them, because the pride, that was one of her characteristics, revolted against such a low proceeding; and they were destroyed with bitter tears of anger. After tearing up the last that she wrote she had reason to be glad of her course of action, for she casually learnt that very evening, that no letter reached Quiñones without first passing through the hands of his wife.

Sometimes, unable to bear it any longer, she would throw herself into an armchair where she remained for a long time with her eyes fixed, in deep and miserable meditation. At these moments she was a prey to sudden fits of tenderness, she confessed without shame, nay even with voluptuous enjoyment, the love that she felt; she pardoned Luis with all her heart, and vowed to love him all her life long in silence and never to belong to another man. As days went

by this feeling increased and took the form of a morbid, irrational desire. The excitement of her feelings, which took possession of her whole being, combined with the bitterness of wounded self-love, fostered this same desire. There was little wanting when she saw Luis at her side to make her open her heart to him and confess the passion that consumed her.

Hardly conscious of what she was doing, Fernanda sought for her *ex-fiancé* all over the place. Everything interested her; the wood, the house, the servants, even the animals grazing in the meadows were accorded a sympathetic glance. How pleasant even that tumble-down house corroded with damp and mice seemed to her! After wandering for some time through the most solitary parts of the wood, she absently made her way to the meadows; there she went along until she came to a certain spot where there were some workmen making a ditch to drain the land. She knew without inquiring that the count after inspecting the work for some time had gone off. She waited for a little while to divert attention, and then she went on with a slow step dragging her parasol along the ground like one who is uncertain where to go next. In fact she did not know, but that was not for want of an object, but because she knew not where the count was. A cruel idea floated in her brain without taking form—she fancied that Luis at that moment might be alone with Amalia. By degrees, as she walked through the fields, the idea gained force, and the stronger it grew, the more her heart was filled with spite and anger. Why? was she not perfectly aware of their criminal relations? Yes, and the more angry the idea made her, the more determined she was not to stand it, for she thought she had a right to prevent their being together. Without having a clear notion of what she was about, she quickened her step. Her nerves became more and more agitated; by the time she arrived at the courtyard she was perfectly certain that the adulterers were together, and alone. She entered the house, and like one who visits it from curiosity she explored it all, even to the most remote little rooms. But she did not find them, and the fact of not finding Amalia anywhere confirmed her suspicions. Tired with hunting about, and excited with nervous anxiety, she went again into the open air. She avoided people who might detain her and repaired to the garden, and directly she put her foot there she was imbued with fresh hope of finding them. That verdant spot where the little trees left to their own sweet will, were so interlaced as to form an impenetrable mass was a perfect place for love passages. She went cautiously and noiselessly along the paths which had almost disappeared under their carpets of grass, intersected in many places by brambles and branches of trees. Sometimes a little clump of irises obstructed her path and she was obliged to jump over it, or else a rhododendron, stretching its boughs to embrace a camellia in front, had formed a

bower so low that she was obliged to bend a good deal to get along. She thought she heard the sound of voices a little distance off. She stood motionless and waited for some minutes, and then she turned to listen, and directed her steps to the spot whence it came.

It was them! Yes, it was them.

Before hearing the voice distinctly she knew it was them. They were going down a path much narrower and more secluded than the others, bounded on one side by the wall, and on the other by a high, quickset hedge.

Amalia had hold of the count's arm with an air that was half imperious, half careless, with her eyes on the ground, whilst he, smiling and subservient, bent towards her as he whispered words into her ear. Fernanda watched them through the foliage from a distance. Emotion glued her to the ground for some instants. The awakening of her pride as a woman seemed to outweigh her sense of misery and anger.

After an anxious scrutiny of Amalia's appearance, she could not forbear murmuring:

"What can this man have fallen in love with? Yes, she is a skinny cat!"

Her next thought was:

"What are they saying?"

Seized with a strong desire to hear their words, and without thinking of the danger that she ran, she went nearer and nearer to the hedge, bending her body so as not to be seen. Having found the shadiest, safest spot, she listened, although she could only hear them as they passed by, as soon as they were a little way off not a word was audible, so the snatches of conversation were rather incoherent.

"Her legs are very rough. You should see how fat she is getting. Neither starch nor rose powder soothes the irritation of the skin," said the lady.

"They are talking of the baby," thought Fernanda.

"I have never seen her in her bath. How much I would give to be present one day!"

"It is because you do not want to."

"No, no, but I do not want to expose you to the danger that would accrue from my doing so."

No more could be heard, but she felt she must wait for them to get to the end of the path and then turn.

"So I hear you were at those childish, silly old ladies," she heard Amalia say as they repassed her hiding-place.

"I assure you I was at the Casino. All the members of the club met to discuss the question of the re-decoration of the *salon*. It was to be over at ten, and we did not get away until twelve. You know the argumentative, aggressive character of Don Juan, don't you? I have not been to the de Merés for an age. Since some people set to——"

The words were here lost again to Fernanda.

That Don Juan must be her father? She would soon find out.

When they reappeared the count was tenderly caressing the hand of his beloved, and smiling and chatting with an expression of rapturous happiness.

"I have often thought of giving up seeing you. At night when I am alone in bed, I am a prey to terrible remorse, and I say to myself, 'There must be an end of this,' and I determine to leave Lancia, and I map out a new plan of life: I imagine myself travelling over all Europe; I forget you; I return at the end of some years, and instead of the old love a tender friendship fills my heart in which we can indulge without fear of Heaven's chastisement. But as the morning dawns, these resolutions vanish; I succumb to temptation; I see you at your house, and the more I see you, the more I hear your adored voice——"

Fernanda clutched at the trunk of a magnolia for support.

As they turned, it was Amalia who was speaking:

"This is not true. I have told you that I am always haunted by a black shadow. However much I pretend to imagine that I am the first——"

"The first and the last! I shall never love another woman but you."

"You don't know how jealous I am of the past. Every day more so. Tell the truth. Did you love her or not?"

"No."

"Then how could you——?"

Fernanda could hear no more, but she had heard enough to make the tears rush to her eyes. She was about to withdraw, when she saw the traitors come to a standstill at the end of the path.

Amalia threw her arms around her lover's neck, pressed her lips upon his mouth, and gave him a kiss that was prolonged, prolonged for an eternity. Fernanda closed her eyes; when she opened them they were going away hand in hand.

She lets them leave the garden, and then follows them immediately. Where are they going? Once in the courtyard, she notices that they stop and turn in the direction of the house. She enters on their track, but they have disappeared, and she does not know to which room they have repaired. She imprudently explores them all, overwhelmed with emotion she cannot control, whilst given over to a strong burning desire to find them out.

"Where are you going, Fernanda?" asks a young man.

"I am going to find the bride."

"Then you are going wrong, for she is at the other end of the house in one of the rooms looking north."

She turned back to avoid suspicion, and then explored the building again. At last she arrived at a certain little room which was locked, and which was no other than the celebrated Countess's Chamber. She was about to turn the handle of the door as she had done to the others when a slight sound rooted her to the spot. She put her ear to the door. "It is them!"

She left the place and ran like mad to the wood, where, arrived at a solitary spot, she sits at the foot of a tree and leans her head against the trunk. With her eyes fixed on space, her face changed and sad, and her hands crossed upon her knee, her whole attitude was expressive of dumb, despairing agony.

The hour for dinner arrived. Two parallel tables had been arranged in the large *salon* on the ground floor.

The dispersed party reassembled at the magic word of dinner shouted to the

four winds by the rough voice of Manin and the silvery one of Manuel Antonio.

When poetic sentiments have their course in the open air in the middle of woods they greatly facilitate the secretion of the gastric juices. So the nymphs as well as the fauns did full justice to the olives, the cucumbers, and the slices of sausage before sitting down to the tables. By the unanimous voice of the military and clergy, worthily represented by Fray Diego, the task of giving each guest his seat was to be undertaken by the bride.

The merry, wayward Emilita, transformed suddenly into a very grave matron, filled the office with a tact and amiability that won her the approbation of the assembly; every girl was given the youth she liked best as a partner, and to every older person, was accorded the companion who was most congenial in character and tastes.

But mad was the applause when she put Lieutenant Rubio between the two Señoritas de Meré. She left this facetious act to the last, which cleverness saved the officer from thinking it was intentional.

Finding himself the victim of such a trick the military man was put out, and was even on the point of protesting against this arrangement of Emilita, but he controlled himself against this outrage of all the laws of gallantry; and as he was taking his place it occurred to him to parody the words of Napoleon as he looked at his two neighbours: "From the height of these two seats forty centuries contemplate me."

This remark won the applause of the company, and put the injured creature into a good humour, and he got on so well with his little old friends that he was that evening voted a capital sort of fellow.

Moro was seated by the side of the count, and during the dinner he impressed on him the advantage of having a billiard-table in the palace of the Grange. He knew every make, but the best was indisputably that of Tutau of Barcelona, and he praised up the article as if he were a traveller for the house. Luis' face showed his disappointment and vexation at not being by Amalia, but Emilita neither dared to put him there, nor by Fernanda. The first would have been a scandal, the second a vexation to both.

They feasted like at a banquet in the "Iliad." But the Achilles of this extensive repast was Manin, the rough Manin who, according to those that were next to him, consumed no less than eleven calabashes of wine. Certainly Manin

deserved being called, if not a Sueve, as that would offend Saleta, at least a Lombard. He talked and halloed as if he were in the street.

The three Fates of the Pensioner, who from the time Fray Diego gave his blessing to their sister, had gained so much childish grace, threw pellets of bread at the officers, who cast glances at the bride, and winked at their friend Nuñez, as they murmured remarks which sent them off into fits of laughter.

Paco Gomez was having a battle royal with Maria Josefa. It was difficult to say which of the two had the worst of it, and which launched the sharpest, most envenomed darts. Saleta being some way off from his friend and censor, Don Enrique Valero, was enjoying himself to his heart's content, relating to Don Juan Estrada-Rosa and two other gentlemen how he made the conquest of a certain English lady, wife of a consul he had known at Hong-Kong, on his way out to the Philippines. The ship only stopped there twenty-four hours. In this short time he won her heart and made her go off with him. But he had to separate from her at once, for the event was made the subject of a diplomatic reclamation on the part of Great Britain.

Manuel Antonio being suddenly seized with a great interest in a scarlet subaltern by his side overwhelmed him with delicate attentions.

"Federico—a little olive—don't take so much mustard, it will spoil it. Keep yourself for the partridges. I know they are most excellent. Do you like Bordeaux? Stop a moment, I will get you some."

And rising from the table in his eagerness to serve, he fetched a couple of bottles and placed them before the youth.

"So Lancia seems to agree with you. When you came six months ago you looked thin and pale. I said, 'What a sad sight, and a young man so bright and pleasant.' Because I thought you were suffering from the chest. I know you had a hard time of it in Barcelona. Eh? and see now, whoever would have thought it? I recollect that when you arrived you wore a gabardine of the colour of flies' wings, very well made, and a scarf of a very pretty sky blue. I recollect that the civil costume suited you very well, but I like you better in uniform. It may be fancy, but I can't help it. I say that with the uniform and with the moustache you are, to my mind, just perfect."

Sundry significant coughs from the officers facing them paralysed him suddenly. But it did not affect him long, for he was incapable of being put to

shame by anybody.

The one who was the most put out and cross was the ensign himself.

As the banquet drew to its close some of the gentlemen, favoured by the Muses, rose to propose toasts in verse or something approaching it. And those who had not a poetic vein congratulated the bridal pair in prose, but the result in either case was the same—to wish the bride and bridegroom an eternal honeymoon; and the periodical which announced the marriage the following day, also expressed the same wish. The toast of the father of the bride was the most original and interesting of all. Was it not strange to hear the bitter enemy of the armed force sing its praises, and declare himself a sworn partisan of the increase of the contingent, and the pay of the officers? He was so moved at his own words that the tears coursed down his cheeks. Of course some said he wept the wine he had drunk, but we are far from believing this malevolent insinuation, first, because it is absurd to talk of weeping wine, and secondly, because his tone was so sincere and his manner so pathetic that nobody could doubt that his words came from the bottom of his heart.

"It is a comfort," he said—"yes, it is a comfort that God has let me see my daughter marry an honourable soldier—for to speak of a soldier in Spain is to speak of honour. To keep up the army, to honour the army, is to keep up and honour the honour of the nation. To keep up the army is to keep up the power and prosperity of the country. To keep up the army is to keep up our prestige with the greatest nations of Europe. To keep up the army is to live respected by the world. To keep up the army is to keep up ourselves. To keep up the army _____"

"Let the army be kept up, but let Don Cristobal sit down," called out somebody.

The Pensioner held his position, cast a look of sad reproach to the place whence the voice had come, raised his pocket handkerchief to his eyes to dry his tears, calmly drank the wine that remained in his glass, and gravely took his seat amid the applause and laughter of the company.

Fernanda did not open her lips during the dinner. All the efforts of Garnet, who, through the kindness of Emilita had been placed near to his much-desired lady love, were without effect. Neither by talking of saffron and describing how tobacco is gathered, making exact calculations on each load of sugar, and what would be the profit if duty were lowered, nor going over the hundred and one

interesting details of the importation of salted meats from the Argentine Republic and the codfish from Newfoundland, could Romeo extract more than dry monosyllables from his Juliet. All she did was to hand him her glass from time to time, and say in an imperious tone: "Some more wine."

The Indian quickly complied with the request, and the young lady emptied the glass at one gulp, put it on the table, then cast her contemptuous eyes over the guests, and fixed them persistently upon Amalia. By degrees those eyes became heavier, the eyelids drooped, they became inflamed and turned from one side to the other with more difficulty.

Don Santos, who was astonished at this manner of drinking, ventured to say:

"Fernanda, you drink like a fish. Stupid! I am afraid I have offended you."

"Give me wine," returned Fernanda, giving him such a strange look that it quite upset him.

All the toasts having been now given, drunk, and responded to, the cheerful company again dispersed. The Pensioner and the officers averse to love-making were the only ones who remained at table. They entered into discussions on the best way of increasing, without much affecting the Treasury, captains' pay by eight dollars, lieutenants' by five, and ensigns' by three a month. Without this reform, the interested parties explicitly stated that there would very soon be a complete dissolution of the army, and it would cease to be the pivot of the honour of the country, and we should never rise to the dignity of other nations, nor have prosperity, power and honour in our lives.

Jaime Moro went in search of Fray Diego and Don Juan Estrada-Rosa and dragged them to the *tresillo* table. Don Juan had lost and so was reluctant, but the plausible fellow managed to convince him that the reason he had not won in the morning was because he, Moro, never lost at that time, but his luck always turned in the afternoon, so he had a good chance of winning now.

Seated at the end of the table was Manin, who, without interfering with the officers' conversation, employed himself in lazily cutting slices of bread with his clasp-knife, and putting large pieces in his mouth, which he washed down with long draughts of Burgundy left in the bottles. He did not approve of the dinner that Marañón, the master of the café of Altavilla, had supplied them. After stuffing like a savage, he said that all the dishes were just as if they came from the perfumers, and that where there was plenty of beans with black pudding,

sausage and marrow bones, no macaroni was wanted. It must be observed that to Manin every dish he did not know was macaroni, which was a source of much amusement to the Grandee.

Whilst concluding the meal so indecorously, he kept up a stream of complaints against it, and Don Cristobal, at whom he cast sundry angry glances, seemed to be held in some degree responsible for it.

Suddenly the door was opened with a great clamour, and four girls rushed into the room in such a state of excitement that the little party was quite taken aback. Without paying any attention to the others, they all turned to Quiñones' majordomo:

"Manin, a bear! Manin, a bear!"

"Where?" he asked, without moving.

"In the wood."

"Who put it there?"

The four stood astounded at this strange question. At last one of them ventured timidly to remark:

"He came by himself."

"Bah! bah! bah!" returned the majordomo rudely.

And he returned to his lumps of bread with more ardour than ever, which perhaps justified malicious people of the town saying that they did not want to hear of the bears he had killed, for he was nothing but a rustic clown.

"But, child, say how you saw it," said the sympathetic Consuelo, who now put in her word, whereupon one who was paler than the others advanced and said with some difficulty:

"How fearful! *Madre mia*, how fearful! I thought I should have died—because you see the bear—the bear was horrible."

She was in such a state of panic, that she could only utter these incoherent words.

Then the resolute Consuelo came forward, and said in a firm voice:

"You see, Manin, this child was with us in the thickest part of the wood a long way off. She heard a bird sing, a mavis I believe—was it not a mavis? Very well, then she heard a thrush, and she turned in the direction whence the sound came. She went some distance, but could not come across it. When she turned back, the bear came out of the bushes, it attacked her, pulled her to the ground, and without doing her any harm, we do not know why, it went off and disappeared."

The famous bear-hunter then quietly rose from his seat, and said in the quiet, firm tone pertaining to heroes:

"Let us go and see what it is."

He asked for a gun, and followed from afar by the pallid damsels, he beat the wood. The only thing forthcoming was a German pig, one of a pair that the count had to improve the breed. The female had died, and the male wandered about sad and alone in the depths of the wood whilst his companion was metamorphosed into black puddings and chops. There were strong suspicions that the author of the attack was this widowed hog, but the young lady of the adventure swore and maintained that it had been a bear that had attacked her, and that they were not to tell her it was that animal, because she had often seen a bear in the zoological museum of the university.

Fernanda had gone off some time before with Garnet. They repaired to the garden. There the young lady took his arm and went several times up and down the same path, where she had seen the count and Amalia.

"You are very much in love with me. Is it not so?" she asked, suddenly.

The Indian surprised, murmured: "Oh! yes; they say that I am an ass, and it is true."

"And what do you feel. Come let us see. What do you feel? Explain yourself."

"I, what?" he exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, what do you feel when you see me? What do you feel when another man comes near me? Take the count for instance. What do you feel at this instant with my arm in yours? Describe me your sensations; what passes in your mind."

"I, señorita.... I don't know how to describe it.Your word is my law as much as if I were one of your family ... and it is the same with Don Juan your father, although he may be a bit cantankerous.... What does it signify to me if he be

cantankerous or not? If I married you, I have a house thank God.... Yes, and it is not because I say it, but my house is worth more than his, as you know. But we would travel first, in France, Italy, England, wherever you like.... And if it cost us five thousand dollars, what would that matter?"

Garnet held forth for some time in this strain, and Fernanda turned a deaf ear to him. At last the boasting tone bored her, and she said, with a touch of anger:

"Will you be quiet, sir?"

Poor Don Santos was quite crushed, and they went on in silence for some time.

"How ugly all this is!"

"What?"

"Everything! The house, the wood, the meadows, the garden. See how hideous this magnolia is!"

"The house is very ugly, and very old; I have often said so. Still, they might give it a coat of whitewash and paint the balconies. The wood is worth nothing, it is no use, and it takes up space that would be valuable for garden produce, or wall fruit or such like."

Fernanda burst out laughing.

"Don't you suffer sometimes from sadness, Don Santos?"

"Sadness? never. I am always cheerful. Only once when I was robbed of eight thousand dollars by a knave I had an angry fit which lasted for two days."

"How ugly the sun is, now seen through the branches of the trees!"

"Would you like to return to the house?"

"No, take me to the river. I have a burning face, and I should like to refresh it with a little water."

They went down by the meadows to the river, and there the heiress of Estrada-Rosa, in spite of Don Santos' advice, bathed her face for some time. After she had dried it, they slowly ascended the path to the house.

"How am I now? All right, eh? You can't think how everything bores me here! I can't do any more; all this wearies me. I was not born to walk about the

meadows like the cows. I like cities, salons, luxury. I should like to travel as you say and see Paris, London, Vienna. How stupid Lancia is! Is it not so? These eternal walks on the Bombé! That San Francisco Park! That tower of the Cathedral so black and so sad! Then always the same faces. The only amusing person in Lancia is yourself. Whenever I see you I cannot help smiling. Why do they call you Garnet? I think your colour is more like a turquoise. You had slaves there in America. Oh! how I should like to have slaves! It is so tiresome to ask for things as a favour! But, no, in America they have yellow fever. I should prefer to go to China."

The more she went on talking, the more excited she became, contradicting her own words, as her thoughts became more and more incoherent. Don Santos tried to make a remark, but she stopped him by putting her hand on his mouth.

"Let me talk, sir! I want to tell you all."

The Indian began to be anxious as the excitement of the girl went on increasing. She chattered away in a familiar, rude sort of way.

"Give me a cigar."

"Fernanda! A cigar! You will be ill."

"Silence! what are you saying fool? I sick! You are trying to annoy me! Give me a cigar or I will leave you here."

The Indian took out his case, and the pretty heiress took one, bit off the top with her sharp teeth, and asked for a match. Garnet gave her a lighted one, at the same time shaking his head in disapproval. When she had taken two or three whiffs, she made a gesture of disgust and exclaimed:

"What infamous cigars! Look, smoke it yourself."

And she put it in his mouth. There was no gesture of disgust with Garnet as he smoked it.

"I should think I will smoke it!" he said with a smile of beatitude. "They cost me two hundred dollars the thousand, but now you have tried one, they are worth a million."

"Come on and don't make impertinent speeches. Take me to the house. This glare sickens me."

They reached the courtyard arm in arm. There a young fellow called out to them:

"Where are you off to? The people are in the wood."

"Tell the people that I scorn them all," returned Fernanda, with an angry gesture that provoked a smile from the youth.

"You don't know the house?" she added, lowering her voice and turning to Don Santos. "Then I will be your guide, you shall see it."

They mounted the mouldy, shabby staircase, and Fernanda, chattering continuously, did the honours of all the rooms to the Indian.

"Here is the celebrated Countess's Chamber!" she exclaimed with a peculiar intonation when they reached it. "I am tired."

They went in and the girl shut the door.

"It is pretty, eh? It is the most beautiful and the brightest room in the house. If this furniture could only tell amusing secrets, it never would have done. Look, tell me something to make me laugh or you will see me cry like a very schoolgirl. See now, I am crying. Sit down here you silly. What a pretty waistcoat you have on! How well it shows the line of the figure! Look at this couch. It is large, eh? It is wide, it is beautiful, it is artistic. Look, then, I should like to burn it. To avoid sitting on it I am going to sit on your knees."

And she suited the action to the words. Garnet lost his head when he found himself with such a sweet burden, and with incredible audacity he put an arm round her waist.

The girl jumped up as if she had been pinched.

"What are you doing, you brute? Do you think that we are in the plantation and that I am some black wild creature?"

After looking at him for some time with angry eyes, her face cleared and her lips expanded in a sweet smile.

"Do you love me very much?"

"Of course not," said the Indian, in a teasing tone.

"Then you shall have one minute's happiness. See, I will let you give me a kiss,

mind only one, and you must swear that nobody shall know about it."

The Indian made a solemn promise.

"Good! now give me the kiss here on the temple. The first and the last you will ever give me in your life. Wait a bit," she added once more jumping up. "For this kiss I am to give you fifty buffets on your purple cheeks. Do you agree to the compact?"

Garnet immediately consented. The young girl then reseated herself on his knees, and bent her head to receive the kiss.

"Good! now it is my turn!" she exclaimed with childish merriment. "Prepare to receive your buffets. What cheeks! *Dios mio*, how magnificent! Do you see how blue they are? Well, I am going to turn them green. Attention! One! the first. Two! the second. Three! the third. Four! Five!"

The strong, small hand of the beautiful vixen struck into the red cheeks of the Indian with no slight effect. His eyes began to get as red and angry as those of a wolf, his blood suddenly became inflamed, and with a sudden movement, he seized her roughly by the waist.

Fernanda uttered a terrified cry.

"What is the matter? Why are you angry?"

"Leave me, leave me, you brute!"

She struggled in desperation but she could not release herself.

Once more free, she was perfectly sober. She cast a vague, strange look at the Indian, and this look, suddenly assuming an expression of horror, was fixed upon him as upon some wild animal that had just attacked her.

"What are you doing here? Ah, yes!" she exclaimed raising her hand to her forehead. "My God! What has come to me? Am I dreaming?"

Then once more fixing her angry, menacing eyes upon him, she cried in a rage:

"What are you doing standing there? Leave the room immediately! Leave the room! leave the room!" she repeated with a voice which grew louder each time.

But when the Indian got as far as the door, she rushed before him, flew along the passages, and when she reached the staircase she fell down in a swoon.

She was lifted up and every care was bestowed upon her. When she recovered consciousness a torrent of tears streamed from her eyes, and continued all the afternoon. And when the party started for home she was still weeping.

"Did you see that this girl of Estrada-Rosa cried from the effects of wine?" said Captain Nuñez, laughing.

CHAPTER IX

THE MASQUERADE

SHORTLY before the rosy dawn opened wide the windows of the East, Satan, who rose in a mischievous humour, sent the most knavish and wanton of the demons to Lancia with orders to awaken it from its slumbers. So the minister of hell waved his black wings over the city, and gave vent to loud discordant laughter, which was effectual in arousing all the inhabitants from their dreams. They awoke with the most immoderate desires to upset, make fun of, and laugh at all ruling authorities, to improvise couplets, and say rude things. One of these people, we can imagine it must have been Jaime Moro, called his servant directly he had jumped out of bed, and asked him with a smiling countenance if Don Nicanor, the bass of the cathedral, would lend him his instrument. The servant without replying, instantly left the room, and soon reappeared with an enormous serpent (wind instrument) in his hands. And without any respect for his master, he applied the mouthpiece to his lips and produced a sound like the roaring of a lion. Moro, lightly attired as he was, made a pirouet and gave three or four taps of the heel in sign of great appreciation, as if that barbarous sound had touched the most delicate fibres of his heart. After trying himself to produce the same noise and ascertaining that he was quite equal to the achievement, he dressed himself, and after taking a hurried breakfast, he sallied into the street, wrapped in his cloak, under the folds of which he had put the instrument that had so delighted him. He stopped everybody with a mysterious wink, and retiring to the nearest portico, he, full of excitement, showed them his hidden treasure. Nobody asked what he was going to do with it. They smiled, squeezed his hand significantly, and whispered in his ear:

"When is it to be?"

"To-night. The carriage leaves at twelve."

"They will escape us."

"Bah! all precautions are taken."

And he went on his way muffled up to the eyes, for the cold was indeed diabolical.

The others not only smiled and pressed his hand, but each of them took from the pockets of his overcoat or from inside his gabardine some powerful instrument, albeit of an inferior kind to the above-mentioned one, and Moro applauded and praised each one, without boasting of his own superiority. And so he continued his round-about and tiring walk until he arrived not at Don Romana's confectioner's shop, which was the usual glorious termination of his morning expeditions, but at the house of Paco Gomez. The place resounded with the quick steps and many voices of a number of busy young people. They were all working with great energy, and with a diligence rarely seen in workshops. Some were cutting out banners, others were moulding cardboard masks, some were painting black letters on the sides of a lantern, some were dressing up two guy figures in gorgeous attire, and some were trying the mouthpieces of various wind instruments and serpents similar to that brought by Moro. The scene of action was an immense dismantled room. Paco Gomez lived in the palace of a marquis, to whom his father was majordomo and who never came to Lancia. The implacable practical joker was a vigilant and careful director of all the work of his companions, leaving the room every minute to give orders to the servants, or to receive some message sent to him. Never was he more indefatigable. He was generally rather disagreeable, and even with his jokes he brought to bear a certain scornful manner, either real or assumed, that made him more formidable. But now he strained every nerve in the matter, for it was a question of the most stupendous and best-arranged farce that the town of Lancia had ever witnessed since the monks of San Vicente came to found it. The cause of it was that Fernando Estrada-Rosa was to marry (the pen scarcely dares write it), Fernanda Rosa was to marry (how difficult it is to say it), was to marry Garnet!

From the time of the memorable scene at the Grange, Fernanda lived in a stupor of misery, in a depression of body and soul that alarmed her father. The doctor was sent for, and he said it was nothing more than a nervous attack, which would be cured by a journey to the court, drives and amusements. But the girl

absolutely refused to try these remedies. She declined drives, theatres, parties, and, still more, a journey anywhere. She only went from her room to the dining-room, and from thence to her father's room, where she only stayed a short time. She had no energy to go on to the second floor, nor spirit to enter into, and direct the duties of the servants. She was mostly shut up in her own room, where she had nothing to do, and she would throw herself into a chair and remain for a long time motionless with her hands on her knees and her eyes fixed. Sometimes she began to read, but finding that the book conveyed nothing to her mind, she ended by casting it aside. Sometimes she appeared at the window, and remained whole hours with a miserable face upon the balcony, whilst her eyes were fixed on space, or on a point of the street without seeing the passers by, or replying to the many greetings made to her, or noticing that she was making herself an object of curiosity to the neighbours. But all at once she was seized with a desire to go to Madrid, and the journey had to be arranged instantly. She expressed her wish in the morning, and by the evening the father and daughter were in the diligence, so eager and vehement had the girl been in demanding the journey. Once started, her state of mind was completely changed. She threw herself madly and wildly into all the pleasures of Madrid that were attractive to a rich, beautiful, provincial girl. She passed two months in the intoxication of theatres, drives, grand evening parties, and concerts. A nervous sort of cheerfulness seemed suddenly to have taken possession of her, and she appeared happy in the midst of the noise and whirl of society, where she was soon known by the nickname of "The African." To add to the gaiety of her life, she liked to dine at cafés and restaurants like a dissipated youth. Don Juan was divided betwixt his pleasure of seeing her contented, and the acute sense of discomfort that the disorganised life, so contrary to his usual habits, and age, caused him.

One afternoon, as they were returning from the drive on the Prado, Fernanda suddenly began sobbing violently. Don Juan was astonished and taken aback, for she had been laughing all the afternoon, and making fun of a certain youth who persisted in following the carriage.

"What has come to you? Fernanda, my daughter!"

The girl did not reply. With her handkerchief to her eyes, and her body shaken by her sobs, she only wept more bitterly.

"Fernanda! *por Dios!* people are looking at you!"

The crying then changed to an attack of nerves, and Don Juan told the

coachman to drive home at once. But before arriving there, the young girl ceased weeping, raised her head, and said in a tone of determination:

"Papa, I want to go back to Lancia!"

"All right, my daughter; we will go to-morrow."

"No, no; I want to go now, at once."

"But think, there is only one hour before the train goes."

"There is plenty of time."

There was nothing to be done but to have their things packed in the trunks and to rush in haste to the station, and the nerves of the excited girl were only somewhat calmed when the whistle of the engine announced their departure and they were off over the arid tracts of land outside Madrid.

The day following her arrival at Lancia, she did not appear to greet her father, nor to take chocolate with him as usual. When the father was thinking of calling her, a servant suddenly entered his room looking pale and agitated.

"The señorita is taken very ill!"

Don Juan repaired to his daughter's apartment, and found her in all the agonies of violent sickness.

"Quick! fetch the doctor!" cried the poor father.

Fernanda made a negative gesture, and weakly muttered: "No; send for the father confessor."

But no notice was taken of this remark. The doctor came, and after carefully considering the case, he called Don Juan aside and said to him:

"Your daughter has taken a large quantity of laudanum."

"For what?" asked the father without understanding.

"For the reason that these quantities are generally taken—to poison herself."

"Daughter of my soul! what have you done?" cried the unhappy parent, and he was about to rush back to his daughter's room, but the doctor detained him.

"She is in no danger now. She has brought up all the poison, and with the medicine I am going to give her she will soon be quite herself. The important thing now is to avoid a repetition of the act."

"Oh, no! I will see about that."

And he ran to his daughter's room, but he could not get a word out of her; she persisted in asking for the father confessor. At last he went himself to fetch the

priest, and soon returned with him.

During the confession Don Juan walked up and down the wide corridor of the house, a prey to burning curiosity. At last the father confessor appeared, and without replying to the father's dumb look of inquiry, he took him by the hand and conducted him to his own room, where they shut themselves in. When they came out at the end of an hour the old banker's cheeks were on fire, his white hair was in disorder, and his eyes showed signs of weeping. He bade farewell to the canon on the staircase and went back to his room, where he remained with the door locked. There he stayed all day and all night, without heeding the messages that his daughter sent him to come and see her.

The father confessor offered himself to interview Garnet and make all the arrangements. The Indian chuckled with delight when he learnt what was wanted. But his plebeian nature and avarice, which had always been his ruling passion, turned his head. When the canon came to discuss the matter with him, he found him completely changed; he hesitated, grunted, shook his head, talked in broken phrases of the luxury that Fernanda had been brought up to, and of the great expenses accruing to matrimony. In short, he asked for a *dot*. The father confessor, who was a just man, full of feeling, could not contain himself before such low conduct, and he overwhelmed him with insults. But the churl did not mind that. Being sure of Don Juan's daughter, he stood his ground, laughed like a beast, scratched his head, and muttered some coarse remark which increased the canon's anger.

When, with many evasions, he had to acquaint Don Juan with what had happened, the disgraced parent was nearly mad with despair and anger. He tore his hair, used very strong language, and spoke of shooting his daughter and then himself. With much trouble the canon succeeded in calming him. At last he listened to reason and the negotiations went on, and after disputing like merchants over the amount of the *dot*, it was settled what it should be, and Garnet consented to give his toad-like hand to the most highly prized girl in Lancia at that time.

But the worst had to come. Fernanda had to be told. When she learnt that a marriage was arranged between her and Don Santos, she was utterly overwhelmed with dismay, and she fainted away. When she came to, she plainly said that she would never do it, no, not if they flayed her alive. Neither her father confessor's remarks, nor the prospect of disgrace, nor the tears of her father, could persuade her. It was only when she saw her frantic parent put the mouth of

the revolver to his temple to take his life, that she rushed to stop him, promising to accede to his wish. And this was how this unnatural marriage came about.

When the noble sons of Lancia learnt the arrangement, they were all overwhelmed with disgust. An immense wave of shame swept into their cheeks. This wave of feeling only came to Lancia with such marked effect when there was a question of fate favouring some Lancian more than was just. If somebody drew a successful lottery ticket, or got some good appointment, or if it were a question of a marriage with a rich woman, or a great success in business, or somebody got famous by his talent, the fine perspicacity of the inhabitants of Lancia was in revolt, and at once set to work to depreciate the money, the talent, the instruction or the industry of the neighbour, and to put things in their true light. Such a feeling might easily be confounded with envy, nevertheless the truly observant would soon gather from the remarks in the gatherings at shops and in the gossips in the streets, that it was only love, albeit it might be too warm, which prompted them to deteriorate the merits of their neighbours and thus generously to renounce the reflected glory which might have accrued to them from a false conception of their value. The marriage of Garnet caused profound astonishment, which was followed by an outcry of indignation. Never were the cheeks of Lancians so dyed with shame as they were at that moment; not even when the press of Madrid happened to eulogise a certain comedy written by a son of the place. What rude remarks ensued, first against Don Juan, and then against Fernanda! Strange to relate, the young men were wild with rage; they maintained that legislation was deficient if it had no power to prevent such unnatural proceedings. The result of all this was that the turbulent feelings aroused by the news were to be vented by the youths of Lancia in a stupendous farce, of which we have witnessed the inaugurations, to testify to their profound disgust at such an out-of-the-way marriage.

The persons concerned heard of the plan, and they tried to evade the blow by keeping the day of the ceremony secret, and then to have it celebrated outside the place. But their precautions were of no avail. The young men found out that the marriage was to be in the early days of February at the estate that Estrada-Rosa had, half a mile from Lancia. Spies were placed in the Calle de Altavilla and round about Garnet's house to prevent them going off unobserved, and a thousand ingenious plans for the annoyance of the bridal pair were hatched in the most fertile brains of the town. As the preparations for the carnival were at the same time, it was decided that the first blow should be in the form of a great burlesque masquerade that was to leave the house of Paco Gomez at twelve

o'clock and parade the streets. In a carriage drawn by four oxen arrayed in pink calico, with their horns adorned with branches there were three mummers which were supposed to represent Fernanda Estrada-Rosa, her father, and Garnet, the latter in a cocked hat. From time to time the carriage stopped, and they performed such a ridiculous farce that the people roared with delight, and crowds gathered to witness it. Fernanda was made to kiss Garnet with transports of enthusiasm, and he being smaller could only encircle her with his arms below her waist, and Don Juan meanwhile was laughing and shaking a bag of money. Occasionally another mummer appeared from the bottom of the carriage, and he was supposed to represent the Conde de Onis. He gave Fernanda a kiss, turned his back on Garnet, and then vanished as quickly as he came. As this pantomime was to be performed in the Calle de Altavilla, in front of Estrada-Rosa's very house, the scandal was dreadful, and the crowds immense. Don Juan in a paroxysm of anger acquainted the Governor, who was a great friend of his, with the facts, and determined to leave with Fernanda the next day. The malicious youths, who had foreseen this determination, had contrived means to render it ineffectual, and they had prepared as we have seen a grand performance of rough music for the night.

It had to be ready betimes, for the marriage had not yet taken place, but they did not want them to escape without it. Armed then with as many noisy instruments as they could muster, with great glass slides on which were painted the same grotesque figures of the carriage, with coarse designations below, three hundred youths assembled in Altavilla with torches in their hands, and they were accompanied by half the people of the place, who encouraged them with their laughter. The noise was horrible. When it ceased, a voice was heard to shout some indecent couplet, upon which the hilarity became outrageous. Lieutenant Rubio, always original, crept along the cornice of the chapel of San Fructuoso, situated almost in front of Estrada-Rosa's house, and rang a bell. Paco Gomez went swiftly from one group to another prompting them in the most insulting couplets, so that the chief points should be given in the loudest tones. Moro went on blowing his serpent enough to hurt his lungs, whilst the Chatterbox who had been one of the most active promoters of the "rough music," treacherously entered the house of Don Juan, pretending to come like a faithful friend, when in reality he was spying out what was going on there. But the political chief thought it was time to officiate as Neptune and calm the stormy waves. When the "rough music" had got so far, he sent to Altavilla, Nola, the head of the municipal guards, accompanied by two of the company, who happened to be Lucan the Florén and Pepe le Mota, with orders to stop the scandal and clear the

street. The Lancians had long given up recognising the divine origin of authority, when it was represented by Florén, or Pepe le Mota. And not only did they cast a doubt upon their right divine, but when they saw them from afar the spirit of rebellion seemed to increase. Was this because the Lancians were predestined by the blind impulses of their nature to war against the established order? It is not very probable. None of the historians of Lancia have noted rebellion against institutions as an especial characteristic of the race. It is more natural to suppose that what irritated them most was the nose of Nola, which was just like the button of an electric bell, and the unpleasant voice of Lucan the Florén, and the monstrosly bent legs of Pepe le Mota. Besides, these respectable agents of government authority were quite cognisant of the anarchical tendencies manifested sometimes by the people of Lancia. But they never thought that their appearing without proper precautions among the crowd of Altavilla, would entail their leaving it without truncheons, without sabres, without kepis, and with buffeted cheeks. Nevertheless, such is the recorded account.

The political chief, not wishing to submit blindly to the decrees of fate, sent immediately for the lieutenant of the civil guard to come with eight of his company, to avenge the unfortunate Nola, Lucan, Florén, and Pepe le Mota. Inflamed with success the harlequins of Altavilla tried to resist. In the meanwhile the lieutenant, a prey to martial ardour, ordered all swords to be unsheathed, and with a fierce smile he charged upon the crowd like a wild boar, and all the Lancians were terrified at the sight. There was a strong tendency to retire from the field of battle, but at that moment somebody infused courage into their hearts by holding out deceptive hopes of victory. "Down with the civilians!" "Down with the cocked hats!" "Death to the potato-face!" Such were the seditious cries that issued from the throats of those rash youths. And some stones were thrown at the same time. The trombones, bassoons, and cornets à piston, of which the harmonious strains had accompanied so many mazurkas in the bosom of peace, were suddenly transformed into warlike weapons, shining formidably in the light of the torches. The cocked hat of the lieutenant was struck ignominiously to the ground by one of them. Whereupon he picked it up, and his bellicose spirit was so stirred, that a line of foam encircled his lips, and he rushed into the battle with his eyes aflame and breathing hardly. Then the youths of Lancia rallied with renewed vigour, whilst menacing cries filled the air, and the swords of the civilians were soon heard upon some of their backs.

The retreat of the fine young fellows of Lancia on that memorable night, when pursued by the bloodthirsty civilians, was like the flight of a herd of deer from

jackals.

The ground was strewn with bronze instruments, witnesses of the fray. The indomitable lieutenant gave vent to his anger for some time in the streets, animating his company with strong interjections, and urging his party on to the pursuit of the rebels, like a hunter calling his pack of hounds in pursuit of a stag.

Thus it was that Paco Gomez, being persistently followed by cocked hats, found himself obliged to avoid a blow by jumping into the larder of the confectioner shop of Don Romana, where he fell headlong to the ground on a dish of soft eggs, and completely destroyed a magnificent burrage tart destined for the precentor of the cathedral. And it was the same with Jaime Moro, who, after losing Don Nicanor's serpent in the fray, narrowly escaped being immolated by the magnificent sabre of a civilian. It was only by taking the precaution of lowering his head, when the blow was struck, that he escaped an effusion of blood. The sword came in contact with the wall of a house, doing no little damage thereby; and months afterwards, Moro delighted in showing as a trophy the piece that was broken away, to strangers who came to Lancia, and with the relation of his prowess on that memorable night, his heroic heart was filled with pleasure.

Many others of those magnanimous youths underwent considerable discomfort from their conduct; some from the sword-cuts, and the majority from the falls and the shocks which resulted from the disbandment. Nevertheless the victory was not gratuitous for the agents of the government.

Besides the destruction of the cocked hat of the lieutenant, and several contusions of his subordinates, the constitutional power suffered an important reverse in the person of one of its oldest representatives—in the person of Nola, the head of the municipals. As we know, this person, who was so unpopular in Lancia on account of the shortness and excessive roundness of his nose, lost in the first struggle his kepis, his sword, and the honour of his cheeks. Anger and revenge reigned in his heart. But he could not do anything to gratify these feelings, because he was deprived of all coercive means. Instead, however, of prudently retiring to the portal of the Ecclesiastical Court, like Florén and Pepe le Mota, he remained in the middle of the street contemplating the battle with anxiety, and on seeing that it was going in favour of the institutions that he represented, delight overflowed his municipal heart.

"Good luck to the guardians! Long may they have it! Down with the rabble!

These vagabonds are punished for once!"

Such were the bellicose cries that issued from his throat. Nevertheless, when least expected, considering that his enemies were flying in complete confusion, he received a blow on his button of a nose from what turned out to be the smooth, compact surface of a piece of lime. The whole of his nervous system was affected by the blow, and being unable to withstand such a shock, he fell senseless to the ground, after his brave spirit managed to utter the melancholy remark, "I am undone! These shameless fellows have done for me!"

So fell that valiant supporter of order, that brave fellow, who had always been victorious in his incessant struggles with the vagabonds of the suburbs. He was lifted up and taken into Don Matia's apothecary's shop which happened to be near. From thence he was taken to the hospital, and the town lost its protecting shield for some days, for neither Lucan el Florén nor Pepe le Mota could be compared with Nola in energy. Whilst these events were going on in Altavilla and the adjacent streets, Don Juan Estrada-Rosa, a prey to indescribable rage, was pacing his room and tearing his hair. The hypocritical consolations of the Chatterbox, or as he was also termed the Magpie of Sierra, were powerless to calm him; and he talked of rushing into the street and avenging himself upon the insolent mob.

"What has my poor daughter done to them?" he exclaimed with a trembling voice which nearly broke into sobs.

Fernanda had retired early to her room and gone to bed. It is difficult to know whether the excitement in the street conveyed anything to her or not. When Don Juan after a sudden resolution went up to her room to waken her, the eyes which encountered the candle that he lighted, were dry and brilliant, without signs of having either slept or wept. He told her to dress immediately, and he gave orders to the servants to light all the lights of the house, so as to deceive those without, and he then went out with her by the coachhouse door which led into a little solitary street. They were only accompanied by Manuel Antonio, and they went by the quietest streets to the house of the Pensioner. Once there, they sent a message to Don Santos for him to come immediately and another to the father confessor. When they had both arrived, the father, daughter, and these two gentlemen, with Manuel Antonio and Jovita Mateo, sallied forth secretly from Lancia by the high-road of Castille. After going some way they waited for the coach that Don Juan had ordered. The six had to manage as best they could in the little carriage, and it fell to Manuel Antonio's lot to sit on the box. Half an

hour later they were at the banker's country-house. An altar was quickly erected, and before the morning broke, the father confessor blessed the union of the affianced pair. Fernanda did not open her lips the whole way, and she preserved the same silence during the preparations for the ceremony. She appeared tranquil, in a state of absolute indifference, or rather of somnolence, like a person who having been violently awakened from a dream is hardly conscious of what is going on around. And this lethargy continued after pronouncing the "Yes" before the altar. Neither the affectionate, eloquent conversation of the priest, nor the incessant jokes of Manuel Antonio during the breakfast, nor the caresses of Jovita, nor the assumed rough sort of cheerfulness of her father, could draw her from her strange absence of mind. The day broke, a sad, foggy day that filtered through the windows in a melancholy fashion. They all did their best to seem cheerful; they talked in a loud voice, they made fun of the servant's dullness, and Manuel Antonio's fear of some *contretemps*. Nevertheless, a deep sadness pervaded the atmosphere. When there was a pause in the conversation, the brows wrinkled and the countenances darkened, and when it was resumed the words sounded melancholy in the luxurious dining-room.

The bride retired to change her dress, and she soon reappeared with the same impassive demeanour.

According to Don Juan's arrangements they were to go immediately to the next town and there take the postchaise. The insulting people of Lancia were thus to be frustrated. When they went down to the garden, where the carriage was waiting, a cold, fine rain was falling. Fernanda kissed her father and got into the carriage. On receiving that kiss on his cheek, the poor old man felt as if a current of cold air passed through him paralysing his members and freezing his heart.

The priest cried:

"Good-bye, Fernanda, take care of yourself, Fernanda. Good-bye, Santos. Come back soon."

And so they were off. In less than an hour they arrived at Meres, waited for the diligence, and got in. The attentions of Garnet could not provoke a smile or gracious word from the lips of his bride, but his grotesque gestures and the nonsense that he talked sometimes brought a look of fatigue and disgust into the young girl's marble face. She slept at intervals or looked with vacant eyes at the landscape. When they arrived at the neighbourhood of Leon it was night.

But what happened at Leon? On arriving at the place, where the diligence

changed horses, they found a large crowd of people, they heard rough voices and the discordant sound of musical instruments with the jingling of bells, and large transparent pictures were seen waving over the crowd.

Paco Gomez, being richer in resources than Ulysses, had written beforehand to some friends of his at Leon, suggesting that they should organise some rough music when Garnet and his bride passed that way. Everything was in readiness. Nevertheless the preparations would have come to naught had it not been for the treachery of Manuel Antonio, for on his arrival at Lancia he secretly made Paco acquainted with all that was taking place. Whereupon Gomez profited by the telegraphic communication, recently instituted, and put himself in communication with his followers. Fernanda was some time in realising that this excitement was on her account, but when some cries that reached her ears made her sensible of the fact she turned pale, her eyes dilated, and uttering a cry she threw herself against the little window with the intent of throwing herself out, but Garnet caught her by the waist. The young girl struggled for some moments in fury, but not being able to free herself from those strong bear-like arms, she threw herself back in the seat, covered her face with her hands, and burst into passionate sobbing.

Dios mio! Her sin had indeed been great, but what a fearful punishment!

CHAPTER X

FIVE YEARS AFTER

FIVE years have passed. The noble city of Lancia has changed little in appearance and still less in customs; several gilded cages in the form of gorgeous houses, built with Indian money round about the San Francisco Park; foot-ways in various streets that never had them in former times, three more lamps in the Plaza de la Constitución; a supplementary municipal guard that owed its existence, less to the necessities of the service, than to the efforts of the justice of the peace, a fellow of excellent ideas almost entirely devoted to Venus, and whose propitiatory sacrifices to Vulcan were only made at the expense of the municipality; in the Bombé promenade a few bronze statues with falling drapery of which the erection caused great scandal, and the magistrate Saleta was

informed at the Grandee's evening party that the half nude was a hundred times more suggestive than the complete; a few silver threads in the heads of our old acquaintances; and the radiant countenance of Manuel Antonio, the most fetching of all the sons of the famous city, showed signs that his beauty was on the wane, like a dream fading in the cold wind of morning, or snowdrops falling in the silence of a day in winter.

The same vegetative, dull, sleepy life; the same gatherings in the shop-parlours, where the sweets of slander were regaled; and personal nicknames still weighed like lead upon the well-being of several respectable families. On sunny afternoons there were the same groups of clerics and military airing themselves in the Bombé. The great bells of the cathedral continued to peal at certain hours, when old lady-devotees were seen hastily wending their way to the service of the rosary, or nones, and the monotonous voice of the canons sounded solemnly in the silence of the old vaulted aisles.

In Altavilla at the evening hour the eternal groups of youths still laughed and talked in loud tones still loth to let any pretty dressmaker, or plump servant-maid pass by without rendering them homage with their eyes or lips, and not seldom with their hands. And there in the heights of the firmament there were the same clusters of greyish clouds heaped together in solemn silence over the old cathedral to listen on melancholy autumn nights to the wind moaning through the high tin arrow on the tower. We are in November. The Conde de Onis was accustomed to ride on dull days as well as fine. The society of men pleased him less and less. His character had become more secretive and melancholy. Sin had destroyed the feeble germs of cheerfulness which nature had put in his heart. The gloomy, extravagant, fanatical temperament of the Gayosos had been increased by the incessant gnawing of remorse, his imagination was distorted, his slight activity enervated, and his whole existence darkened.

People worried him. He imagined hostility in their glances, and he saw hidden meanings in their most innocent remarks that made his blood boil with rage. He never dared enter churches, nor fall on his knees as formerly before the bleeding crucifix in his mother's room. If he heard hell mentioned, he fled in terror. He gave plentiful alms to churches, and paid for Masses he never heard; he put candles before the images, and in the privacy of his chamber he puerilely amused himself in asking fate, by the tossing of money, whether he would be eternally damned or whether he would only go to purgatory. When he heard the chant of priests going to a funeral he grew pale, trembled and stopped his ears. At night he would suddenly jump up from sleep in a cold sweat, crying

miserably: "There is nothing but death, nothing but death!" For some time he lived thus in almost utter retirement without going out more than he was made to by her, whose will ruled his own. But at last his suffering became too intense, and he feared his gloomy thoughts would upset his reason, so he took to riding or walking in the country until he was tired out. The physical fatigue relieved his mind, and the sight of nature soothed his tormented imagination.

It was a dark, cold evening. The clouds pressed heavily upon the hills looking towards the north, and hid the high mountains of Lorrin that stretch like a distant curtain in the west. Heavy rains had fallen converting the low part of the town into a lagoon, and the roads, which went from thence, into seas of mud. In spite of this, the count ordered his horse to be saddled. He left Lancia by the Castilian Road, and galloped amid splashes of mud across meadows and chestnut woods. The yellow leaves of the trees shone like gold, a thousand little streams made their uncertain way down the base of the hill where the waters were deposited on the pasture land with its gentle soft green undulations. A darker fringe marked the stream of the Lora, which hides itself mysteriously under the osiers and thick lines of alder trees. The count, with his head thrown back and his eyes half closed, inhaled with delight the fresh humidity of the afternoon. The road flanked the hill in gentle decline. Before crossing it, and losing sight of the town, he stopped his horse and cast a look back. Lancia was a heap, albeit not large, of red roofs over which waved the dark arrow on the cathedral spire. Below was a yellow spot—the oak-wood of the Grange, and a little lower down were the old orange-coloured turrets of his solitary house. The rain had ceased. A cold wind dispersed the clouds and scattered them behind the mountains; the sky became clear with the pale blue of autumn days, and a few stars appeared like diamonds in the horizon. The trees, mountains, streams and verdure-clad valley shone indistinctly under the clearness of the twilight. The count again put his horse to a gallop and quickly descended the hill which hid Lancia from view. The wind affected his senses and whistled in his ears producing a sweet intoxication that dissipated the black clouds of his imagination. Along the muddy road he only met a stray herd of cattle with its driver, or a waggon drawn leisurely by oxen, in which the carter carelessly slept at the bottom. But before turning a corner he thought he heard the distant sound of wheels and bells. It was the coach that arrived at Lancia in the evening. As it passed by him, he cast an absent glance into the interior, two large shining eyes encountered his own, which gave him a sort of an electric shock. He quickly turned his head again, but there was nothing then to be seen but the back of the coach disappearing in the distance. He pulled the rein of his horse and followed it, but after a few moments in a stunned sort of

way stopped ashamed, and went on with his ride.

"It must be Fernanda." A passing, but very definite feeling told him the fact. Nevertheless he might be mistaken. He had heard no news of her arrival. He knew that she had been a widow for some months. Garnet had at last met his end like an ox from a fit of apoplexy. But at the same time everybody knew that the widow of the Indian bore a deadly hatred against Lancia ever since the humiliating practical joke that her compatriots had played on her at the time of her marriage. The fact of her not having come there at the death of her father the preceding year was a clear proof of it. The Count thought of all this for some minutes, and then put it from his mind, for his thoughts were changed by the sight of a dark thick cloud which presaged another storm. But something indefinite and sweet remained in his mind, which put him in a good humour. He turned the horse and arrived at Lancia very late in the evening, very tired, and covered with mud; but his heart was light and cheerful without his knowing why.

Fernanda never hesitated for an instant. She saw him, and knew him so well, that she even noticed the marks that time and care had left upon his face. He seemed older, and she thought she saw silver streaks in his long red beard. At the same time she was agreeably impressed by the suffering, anxiety, and sadness that she read in the eyes that rested an instant upon her. The memory of her old *fiancé* had always remained green in the depths of her heart. Neither treachery, scorn, nor the thousand distractions to which she resorted in her frivolous, restless, Parisian life had been able to destroy it. If she had found happiness in the power of wealth and health, she would not have been open to that soft wave of sympathy which delighted her for an instant. In such perverse pleasure in the count's sadness there was the bitterness of the slighted woman, but there was also a certain breezy, vapourous feeling like hope, which sang and laughed in her soul, and dissipated the black thoughts which had accumulated in her mind. It was necessity, and not will which obliged her to return to Lancia where she had vowed never again to set her foot. Her husband had made a will in her favour, which his brothers had disputed, and the consequence was a lawsuit, which was soon given in her favour.

She came accompanied by an old servant of her father's, whom she had made her *dame de compagnie*, and a majordomo. From Madrid she had telegraphed to a cousin who, with Manuel Antonio, two of the daughters of Mateo, and a few more friends were awaiting her arrival on the badly paved Place of the Post, where the diligence stopped. And then followed embraces, huggings and kisses, questions, exclamations and tears. The offended heiress of Estrada-Rosa never

thought she could have felt so much pleasure in returning to her native place. In the ardour of their affection, her friends almost carried her off to her house. There they all left her with the exception of Emilita Mateo, to whom Fernanda signed to remain. Then the two friends, with their arms round each other's waists, went slowly up that wide polished staircase which Fernanda had so often trod as a child with bare feet. They soon shut themselves in the old library of Estrada-Rosa to enjoy an hour of sweet confidences. Amid smiles, kisses, and vows of eternal friendship the history of those five years was told. Fernanda talked of her late husband in a tone that lapsed from compassionate to depreciative, for she had lived with him in a state of antagonism of ideas and tastes that had kept them apart. She had been neither happy nor miserable. They had been five years of excitement, filled with crowded streets, splendid theatres, magnificent hotels, gorgeous dresses, many acquaintances, and not a single friend. Her husband devoted himself to the satisfaction of her fancies like some wild bear who obeys the whip of the keeper with growls. They had had one child that had died at four months old.

The skittish Emilita was very unhappy in her marriage. Nuñez had turned out a fast man. Fernanda knew something about it, but not much. It is not easy to go into certain significant details in letters. He began very well, but then he went wrong with bad companions; at first he took to gambling, then to drinking, then he went after women, and it was this last that Emilita felt so deeply. She had willingly pardoned him all the rest. She had borne his coming home drunk in the early hours of the morning, she had pawned her earrings and her mantilla for him, but she could not stand seeing him going into the house of a bad woman who lived in the Calle de Cerrajerías. On saying this the Pensioner's daughter burst into a torrent of tears. The sight of her trouble was the more distressing, as a piquant sort of cheerfulness had always been her peculiar characteristic. Fernanda caressed her tenderly and wept with her. After some minutes silence she said:

"But do you go on loving him?"

"Yes, girl, yes," she exclaimed with rage, "I cannot help it. I am more and more blindly in love."

"Well, *por Dios!* Your poor father must be very much put out."

"As you can imagine! And the worst of it is," she added, weeping bitterly, "that now he has returned to his mania against the army. He says awful things about

soldiers! Yes, yes, awful! Directly I enter the house he begins going on, on purpose to annoy me. My sisters support him. They call us idle good-for-nothings, and say that the contingent ought to be reduced."

Here the tender heart of the wife of Nuñez was torn with sobs. Fernanda, who had also cried at the sight of her affliction, could not help smiling.

"Your sisters, too?"

"I should think so! They all—they all want it to be reduced!"

When the daughter of Estrada-Rosa had shown her that the reduction of the land forces was not so easy as it seemed, her spirits gradually rose. Then they arranged a surprise for the Lancia society. Fernanda was to appear that evening without previous announcement at the house of Quiñones. The idea filled them both with childish delight, and after concerting the details, Emilita went off, promising to return and fetch her friend. It was ten o'clock when they both mounted the stone steps, which were as damp as ever, of the large seignorial stairway of the Quiñones. On arriving at the top, Emilita would not let the servant announce them, but opened the door herself, and pushed Fernanda in. She was an apparition calculated to throw all the guests into ecstasies. The daughter of Estrada-Rosa was resplendent in a most elegant dress from one of the first modistes of Paris. Her beauty, which her compatriots had only known in the bud, had blossomed during the five years of refined and elegant life into a magnificent rose. She had always been admired for the dignity of her bearing, the brilliancy of her large dark eyes, and the delicacy of her skin, but her beauty had acquired in Paris the necessary adjuncts of the most finished manners, and a perfect taste in dress—two distinctions she would never have attained in Lancia. Her black silk dress revealed her neck and shoulders, and a few strings of pearls, twisted in her hair, were all the ornaments she wore. Amalia was the first to see her, and the sight of her beauty caused a sudden chill at her heart, but she recovered herself immediately and ran to greet her.

"Oh! I knew you had arrived, but I never thought you would be so kind as _____"

Their eyes met and that glance revealed the hatred that burned in the depth of their souls. But circumstances were changed. Five years ago Amalia had been the most elegant and distinguished lady of the place; the only one whose bearing and refinement of manners had raised her to a more cultivated and spiritual sphere. But Fernanda now had the advantage of her, for the former had visibly

aged. Many silver threads were noticeable in her hair; her complexion, always pale, had lost its freshness; then her desire and taste for dress had palled, and she had gone on taking the tone of the ordinary commonplace society surrounding her, and so had become more and more careless of her appearance. A bitter smile wreathed her lips, as she exchanged the necessary greetings with Fernanda, who enjoyed her triumph with a grave, serene content.

The ladies immediately surrounded her. There was a rush of kisses and embraces, accompanied with loud expressions of delight. The men, who formed a circle behind, also stretched out their hands and pressed that of the beautiful traveller. And between so many congratulatory and pleasant greetings, and either from forgetfulness or shame, nobody dared make any remark about the loss that the young girl had recently sustained, and so there was no allusion made to the cross old bear who slept his eternal sleep in a cemetery at Paris. When the excitement of the greetings had somewhat abated, Amalia took her smilingly by both hands and exclaimed as her eyes swept over her costume:

"Do you know mourning is very elegant in Paris?"

Fernanda made a *moue* of disdain.

"Dress is of little importance if mourning is in the heart," said Maria Josefa, whose tongue had grown considerably sharper in the five years that had passed.

Fernanda's cheeks flushed red. She was as ashamed as if it were a crime at not feeling the loss of Garnet. Then, irritated by the sense of antagonism, she was on the point of showing her vexation; but she turned her back and began talking to some other ladies.

At that moment the Conde de Onis came out of the library and advanced to greet her. She gave him her hand with an affectionate smile. Nevertheless, the dark circles round her eyes betrayed her emotion. To hide her feelings she went on to the library saying with assumed levity that she would leave them all as she much wished to see Don Pedro.

The noble Grandee was sitting in his chair with the cards in his hand. His hair and his beard were white, but just as erect and fierce-looking as ever. His energetic features seemed more marked; his piercing eyes shone with a fiercer fire. Moving with difficulty his great athletic body, so helpless in the lower limbs, the lines of his face were distorted with an expression of ferocious impotence that inspired sadness and fear. But if he was broken down in body, his

proud spirit, seemed only to assert itself the more remarkably. His respect for himself at bearing the name of Quiñones increased every day, with his scorn for all other people born under the stigma of any other name. Being profoundly thankful to Heaven for the favour accorded him, he would have thought it a sin to envy other men the power of using their legs. What was the good of Juan Fernandez being able to walk, run and jump if, after all, he was only named Juan Fernandez? The only thing that troubled him sometimes was whether it was befitting the dignity of a Quiñones to have utterly helpless extremities, and if it would not be preferable for them to participate in the glory of the rest of his body. But such unpleasant thoughts were put away by thinking that dead or alive, those extremities occupied a superior position in society.

When Fernanda entered the library he fixed his eyes on her, and gave her a look, which took her in from head to foot. Neither the girl's beauty, nor bearing, singularly elegant as it was, seemed to please him, for he immediately turned to the cards and said in an insolent, patronising tone:

"Holla, little one! Is it you? When did you arrive?"

In spite of being offended at such a tone, Fernanda saluted him affectionately.

"I am pleased to see you so well, dear," he continued, "and I take the opportunity of condoling with you. You know I have not written letters for years. I was sorry about Santos. Do you hear, Moro? Are you ever going to give me a decent card again? He was a good subject, an excellent neighbour, incapable of harming any one. You will not get another husband like him. He had one quality not easily met with—modesty. In spite of the money that he made he never pretended to go out of his sphere; he always showed himself respectful to his superiors. Was it not so, Saleta, that he was not one of those parvenu popinjays who, as soon as they hear the clink of money in their pockets, forget all about profits and percentage, as if they had never gone in for them. Valero, sit down and say if this trick will be mine. Have you come to settle here, child? or are you going back to the *franchutes*?" (français).

Fernanda, who was keenly alive to all the gall of this discourse, made a cold reply, and after a few words she returned to the drawing-room.

Don Pedro was vexed by the stamp of elegance and distinction borne by the daughter of Estrada-Rosa. He was angry to think that any one could rise in their turn, albeit but a few degrees. He abhorred all that was foreign, especially Paris, where he imagined the Los Quiñones had no especial prestige. He even

suspected with horror that they were unknown there. But, as may easily be supposed, he put such a disagreeable idea out of his head. For if it took complete possession of his mind, what was left for the noble gentleman? Death, and nothing else.

The party of *tresillo* was composed of old acquaintances. Saleta, the great Saleta, whose lies went on flowing from his mouth so glibly and easily that he always had to go on lying. But Lancia almost lost in him one of its most magnanimous amusing fellows; for, retiring on a pension three years ago, he went and settled in the country, but he only stayed there one year, for he became homesick for Lancia, Quiñones' gatherings, and, above all, the jokes of his colleague Valero; so he left the Gallician regions and came back to live with the Lancians. Valero, having become President of the Chamber, became every day more bombastic, noisy, and lisping. He was sitting on the left of the distinguished host. Facing him was Moro, the unattainable ideal of all the marriageable girls, whose indefatigable head easily stood twelve hours of *tresillo* without any ill-effects, or fatigue. Of all the institutions created for men, the most solid and respectable is that of *tresillo*. It may well be compared to the immutable laws of nature, so unchangeable is its stability. It was as true to Moro that a spade is worth more than a club, as that falling bodies represent a movement uniformly accelerated. And there, in the dark corner of the room, the celebrated Manin was sleeping in the same armchair, with his short breeches, green jacket, and hob-nailed boots. His hair was grey, almost white, but that was not the worst of it, for the sad part was, that he was no longer regarded in the place as a fierce hunter, grown grey in contending with the bears of the mountains. That legend had gradually passed away. His compatriots were right: Manin was nothing but a country clown. His deeds of prowess were now a subject of joke, and he was looked upon as the old buffoon of the mad, illustrious Señor de Quiñones.

Fernanda managed at last to withdraw from the congratulations of her friends, and retired to a corner apart. She was sad. The hostility of the people of the house depressed her, but that was not the chief cause of her sadness, although she tried to think so. The real reason of it, ashamed as she was to confess it to herself, was Luis. The kind greeting of her old *fiancé* had suddenly awoke all her recollections, all her illusions, and all the joys and sorrows of old times that slumbered in the depth of her soul like birds amid the leaves of a tree. The agitation of her mind was intense, but nothing, or very little, betrayed itself in her grave and cold demeanour. Nevertheless, she felt a great shock when she

heard the following words close to her ear:

"How beautiful you have grown, Fernanda!"

She had been so full of thought that she had not noticed the count had taken a seat by her side. Involuntarily she raised her hand to her heart, and she replied immediately with a smile:

"Do you think so?"

"Yes; and I am getting old, am I not?"

She made an effort, and looked him straight in the face.

"No; nothing but a few grey hairs in your beard, and rather a weary look."

The trembling of her voice contrasted with the apparent indifference which she chose to give to her tone.

The count instantly grew serious. He put his hand to his brow, and at the end of some moments, he replied in a gloomy tone, as if he were speaking to himself:

"Weary! yes, that is the right word. Very weary! Weariness is exhaled from every pore."

Then they were both silent. The count was plunged in profound meditation which brought a deep furrow to his brow. After a while he renewed the conversation by saying:

"I saw you before I came here."

"Where?" she asked with assumed surprise.

"On the road. I went out this afternoon for a ride, and the post-chaise passed me. I knew you perfectly."

"Well, I did not see you. I only recollect meeting two or three peasants, but I did not recognise anybody."

On saying this a wave of crimson surged to her face in spite of herself. To hide her confusion she turned her head, and her eyes met those of Amalia, brilliant and steely, as they rested upon her. They looked at each other for an instant. The feline mouth of the Valencian was wreathed in a smile. Fernanda tried to respond by a similar one, but it was a failure. She turned again to the count, and talked of

indifferent subjects, of theatres, music, and projects of travel.

Nevertheless, Luis became more and more preoccupied; he seemed to lose his self-control, and talked at random, as if his thoughts were straying afar. He was silent for some moments, struggled to say something, moved his lips, but instead of their articulating what he wanted, they expressed something quite different, something trivial and ridiculous that he was ashamed of directly he had said it. Fernanda watched him attentively, regaining the calmness and self-possession that he was rapidly losing. She seemed absorbed in the conversation, describing her travelling impressions with naturalness, and expressing her opinions with unconcern, as if there had been nothing between them but an old and tranquil friendship. Finally, availing himself of an instant's silence, he summoned resolution to say:

"When I approached you, you seemed very thoughtful. Of what were you thinking?"

"I do not recollect. Of what would you have me think?"

The count hesitated a moment; then encouraged by the gracious smile of his *ex-fiancée*, he ventured to say:

"Of me."

Fernanda looked at him in silence with playful curiosity, under which shone a delight impossible to hide. The count coloured up to the eyes, and he would gladly have cut his tongue out before having said those two fatal monosyllables.

"All right," said the girl, jumping up from her chair. "*Au revoir*, I am glad to see you friendly."

"Listen!"

"What is it?" she said, turning back, as she was going away, and glancing at him with two smiling, malicious eyes that completed her conquest of him.

"Pardon, if my words offended you."

Fernanda tossed her head disdainfully and went off, exclaiming:

"Repent sinner, or hell will have you!"

"Hell!"

This word, uttered at random, as a joke, gave him a sudden shock, and called him back again to the habitual tenor of his thoughts. All the Gayosos had lived under the influence of this baneful idea. But the terror of his ancestors seemed concentrated in his mind, tormenting and maddening him to a degree. Amalia had had a hard struggle to distract him for a little time from his scruples. Therefore, when she now signed to him to come to her she saw he moodily rose from his seat, and came towards her with slow, unwilling steps. She had too much tact and pride to show any vexation at the short conversation just held with his old *fiancée*. She received him with the same smile, speaking with her habitually assumed tone of cheerfulness, and she did not mention Fernanda's name. But her pallid lips contracted with anger every time his eyes turned towards the girl, which they often unwittingly did.

A beautiful child with blue eyes and long fair hair now appeared at the door with a servant.

"Oh, how late!" exclaimed the Señora de Quiñones. "Why are you so late in bringing her, Paula?" she added severely.

The servant replied that the child was so amused at playing: "Let them give to the kite," that she cried every time they wanted her to go to bed.

"Are you not sleepy yet, my treasure?" said the lady drawing her to her, and passing her hand caressingly over her curls.

The guests were very interested in the little creature, and she went from one to the other, receiving caresses from one and the other, and returning them with good-night kisses.

"Good-night, Josefina. Until to-morrow, my treasure. Have you been good to-day? And has your godmother bought you a doll that shuts its eyes?"

The count regarded her with tears in his eyes, whilst he made incredible efforts to master his emotion. He always felt the same when he saw the child. When his turn came he only brushed her fair cheek with his lips; but Josefina, with the fine instinct of children, who always know who loves them, threw her arms round his neck, and gave evidence of particular affection for him. Fernanda also regarded her with intense interest, with a curiosity so great, that she opened her eyes wide. Josefina was six years old, she had a creamy complexion, eyes of infinite sweetness, and something sad and delicate about her diminutive person. One detected at once her likeness to the count. When the child left him, his eyes met

Fernanda's, and he was so embarrassed, that he took a seat farther off.

Josefina was dressed with taste. The Señores de Quiñones brought her up with every indulgence like an adopted child. This had been for some time the favourite topic of gossip in Lancia. The cost of her little hats was guessed at with the greatest interest; the number of her toys was commented upon, and calculations were made as to what her marriage *dot* would be. But such remarks ended by getting stale. It was only when the subject came up, that some sarcastic allusion was made, or some new discovery whispered. The child came to a stop before a group, in which figured Maria Josefa, the young lady with the long spiteful tongue, and Manuel Antonio, as beautiful as the first rays of morning.

"Listen, Josefina; who do you love best—your godmother or your godfather?" asked he of the child.

"My godmother," replied the child, without hesitation.

"And who do you love most—your godfather or the count?"

The child looked at him astonished with her large blue eyes, and a shade of distrust passed over them, as, with a frown on her beautiful brow, she returned:

"My godfather."

"But does not the count bring you lots of toys? Does he not take you in his carriage to the Grange? Has he not brought you the little waggon?"

"Yes, but he is not my godfather."

The group received this reply with a smile. They knew that the child lied, for Don Pedro was not a man to inspire any one with affection.

"But I think the count is also your—fa—godfather."

"No such thing. I have only one godfather," returned the child, now getting angry. And then she left the group.

She then went to where Amalia was, and placing herself before her, she crossed her little arms upon her chest, and making a curtsy, said:

"Godmother, your blessing."

Whereupon the lady gave her her hand, which the child kissed with reverence. Then, taking her in her arms, she kissed her on the forehead.

"You must go to bed, my daughter. Go and ask your godfather for his blessing."

So the child went to the library. These old world customs were a great pleasure to the Señor de Quiñones. Josefina approached him timidly. That great paralysed gentleman always inspired her with dread, although she tried to hide it according to her godmother's injunctions.

"Señor, your blessing," she said in a subdued voice.

The pompous old Grandee paid no attention, and looked at the cards he held in his hand, whilst wrapped in his grey cloak with the red cross, he seemed to grow bigger and bigger before the frightened eyes of poor Josefina. She thought that there was nobody in the world more immense, more imposing, and more worthy of respect than that noble señor; and Don Pedro shared the same opinion, so that all other beings with whom he came in contact seemed a chaotic mass, in which only two or three were possessed of any individual character. The child waited, with her little arms crossed, for about a quarter of an hour. At last the Señor de Quiñones, after playing a good card, condescended to cast a severe look upon the child which turned her pale. He then stretched out his aristocratic hand with a gesture worthy of his namesake, Peter the Great of Russia, and Josefina pressed her trembling lips upon it and then withdrew. The bombastic old fellow was not quite pleased at his wife treating the little foundling with so much indulgence, but he consented because it flattered his vanity, for Amalia, knowing his weak point, said:

"Treating her like a servant is what anybody would do in Lancia. We ought to do things in another fashion."

So Don Pedro could not but see the weight of that undeniable truth. Josefina crossed the drawing-room to go to bed. As she passed by Fernanda, she caught her by the arm and dragged her to her. All the joy and love that filled her heart overflowed with vehemence upon the little creature whom she covered with kisses. She forgot all about her rival whom she considered defeated. She only thought that it was a child of his, his blood, his very image. And she kissed with ecstasy those blue, deep, melancholy, eyes, that creamy skin, and those yellow curls that surrounded her face like a golden aureole.

"Oh, what beautiful hair! What beautiful curls!"

And she pressed her lips on the child's head with so much feeling that she was

not far from crying.

At that moment a sharp, imperious voice sounded in her ears.

"Not gone to bed yet! you naughty girl."

And on raising her eyes, Fernanda saw Amalia with a pallid face and compressed lips, take the child roughly by the arm, and after giving her a sharp shake, she dragged her to the door.

CHAPTER XI

AMALIA'S RAGE

THE next morning Paula, by command of the señora, took the child off to the ironing-room, sat her in a high chair, and asked a young girl, who was working at the window, for some scissors.

"What are you going to do?" Josefina asked.

"Cut your hair."

"Why? I don't want my hair cut."

Whereupon she got down from the chair with determination, but Paula turned back and put her up again.

"Be quiet," she said severely.

"I don't want to, I don't want to," she doggedly returned.

"It is certainly a shame to cut such beautiful hair," said one of the girls who was ironing.

"What do you mean, child? An order is an order."

And taking hold of one of the precious curls of hair, she cut it off with the scissors.

"Leave go, Paula!" cried the child, "I am going to tell godmother."

"Yes, precious, go and tell your godmother, indeed? All right, you shall tell her when it is done."

And paying no further heed to her protestations, and letting the words fall on deaf ears, she went on with the task quite undisturbed. But the child got down again, angry and furious. Then Paula called the sempstress Concha to her assistance, and she held her down on the chair until she was despoiled of every one of her curls, after which they arranged what was left as best they could.

"What a pity!" said the laundress again.

"It is not so bad, child," returned Paula, combing it with admiration.

At that moment the señora appeared at the door of the room.

"Godmother! come godmother! Look, Paula and Concha have cut my hair."

Amalia advanced some steps, avoiding the child's gaze, fixed her stern eyes upon her head and said in an imperious and cold tone:

"That is not right. Shave it off."

And she went away with a frowning brow, whilst Josefina, astonished, followed her with her eyes. Never had she seen her godmother so cold and stern. She was sad and thoughtful, and remained thus without making the slightest movement, until Paula had accomplished her task.

The little head was soon as smooth as a melon. The servants shouted with laughter.

"Child of my soul! what have they been doing to you?" exclaimed Maria, the ironer, with a tone of regret, although she could not repress a smile.

"Don't say that, woman," retorted Concha with a shade of bitterness. "Yes, she does look ridiculous."

She was a woman of five-and-twenty or more, extremely small, almost as small as Josefina, with sharp, keen eyes, and all the servants were afraid of her.

Paula laughed too and passed her hand over the little creature's head.

"When we want a jar for the vinegar we shall know where to go for it," continued Concha.

The wave of pity passed away. Guessing that the child had fallen into disgrace, the servants became quite facetious, exchanging jokes which were not pretty, but which made them nearly die of laughter. Josefina remained with her head down, quiet and silent. Then the jokes began to take effect, and two tears dropped from her long eyelashes.

"Crying for your little wig? What a shame to hurt her! It is not your fault, but theirs who brought you up like a princess, when you are only like us, and less than us," she added in a low tone, "for we have got fathers."

"Come, Concha, drop that! Don't fret the little monkey, you will soon have fresh hair," said Maria, in a maternal tone.

The child, touched by the kindness, began to sob and left the room.

When she entered the drawing-room in the evening like that, the count could not repress a gesture of anger, and cast an interrogative glance at Amalia, who replied to the gesture and look with a provoking smile. And in a loud voice she said that the child's hair had been cut by her orders, for she had noticed that she was beginning to be vain. It is so! and people flatter her so much that she has become unmanageable.

The count, enraged, immediately took the opportunity of repairing to Fernanda's side, where he renewed the conversation of the previous evening. The two were loquacious and affectionate. Fernanda related her life in Paris with no lack of details; and Luis was particularly expansive, not hiding the cheerfulness of his heart, and talking with animation in spite of Amalia's angry glance fixed upon him. During a pause, Fernanda raised her smiling eyes to her *ex-fiancé* and asked him, but not without a slight blush:

"Don't you know why the child's hair has been cut?"

The count looked at her without replying.

"Because I praised it yesterday, and allowed myself to kiss it."

It was the first time that Fernanda took his secret for granted. He felt a great shock; his face grew red, and so did hers. For some time neither of them could speak.

During the following days the count often walked down the Calle de Altavilla, and he spent a great deal of time in the Café de Marañón. Lancian society was

moved to its very foundation at such an important turn of events, and henceforth he was an object of interest to three hundred pairs of eyes. He gave up going every day to the Quiñones' house, and went occasionally to the de Merés' little party, as it continued to be called in Lancia, although only one of the old ladies was now left in this world. Carmelita had died at least three years ago. Only Nuncia the youngest was left, and she was quite paralytic. From the armchair to the bed, and from the bed to the armchair was all that she could manage with great difficulty. She was also deprived of moral support, as in her sister she lost her protector from impulse. Since she was buried there was no one to keep her in order. With the sudden promotion to the category of persons *sui juris*, the poor "child" was a prey to great distress, everything worried her, everything was an insuperable difficulty. Those sharp scoldings had been less overwhelming to her, for if they had caused tears, they had been salutary in checking her juvenile ebullitions, and so prevented the fatal consequences attending her inexperience. Her guests were a few youths, and several young men of our acquaintance, with a sufficient number of graceful, pretty damsels who came to the house on the look out for a husband. For the "child," in this, and in every respect, kept up religiously the traditions bequeathed by her sister. She was the firm protector of all the courtships that arose in Lancia, however ill-advised they might be. The little house of the Calle del Carpio continued to be the forge, where the conjugal happiness of the worthy neighbours of Lancia was forged. The most constant visitor was Paco Gomez, because the house of the Quiñones was closed to him in consequence of one of his remarks. A certain stranger meeting him in Altavilla with a few others asked him how the Grandee came to be paralysed.

"He is not really paralysed," returned Paco, for he is not disabled at all, only his legs can't put up with all the heraldry stuff that he has got in his head, and so they double up rather than take a step.

This came to Quiñones' ears through a traitor, and he gave orders he was henceforth not to be received. He was the soul and the delight of the "child's" party, and the incessant way he made fun of Nuncita kept all the guests in a fit of laughter.

"I say, Nuncita, look! Don't talk too much, for do you know I saw your leg, and —and—and——"

The poor octogenarian blushed like a girl of fifteen. Nothing could have confused her more than this inopportune reference to the afternoon of the swing. Luis and Fernanda took to seeing each other there once or twice a week. Away

from the angry eyes of Amalia, the count found it very pleasant, and he recovered his serenity of mind. They had long talks in a low voice without being disturbed by anybody. On the contrary the "child" took good care to give them room and opportunity. Nevertheless, he still visited at the Quiñones' house, and he saw Amalia secretly when she demanded it, but he was evidently colder and more distant. She was perfectly aware of the change, but she did not show her colours, and she did not mention his *ex-fiancée*. However, one day she could not help doing so.

"I know that you spend a great deal of time at the de Merés' talking with Fernanda."

He denied it in a cowardly fashion.

"Take care what you do," she continued, fixing her eyes on him, "for treachery may cost you dear."

He was so accustomed to the dominion of this terrible woman that the words sent a chill through him, as if some misfortune were hanging over his head. But when he came out into the street, away from the magnetic influence of those eyes that upset him, he was conscious of an impotent feeling of rage. "Why, after all, should she threaten me? Is she my wife? What right has she to me? What we are doing is a grave sin, it is a crime. Who can deprive me of repentance, of reconciling myself with God and being good?" Repentance had latterly been to him a vague desire due to his love being on the wane, and to his great fear of hell. Now it had changed into a real wish. Certainly it offered several attractions. He would renounce the sin bravely, purify himself, free himself from eternal fire—and then have Fernanda.

For some time past there had been only one bright spot in his criminal connection with Amalia—and that was Josefina. This little creature, white and silent as a snow-drop, sweet as a lily with the innocence of a dove, and the tender melancholy of a moonlight night, was like a delicious, refreshing balsam to his soul—a prey to remorse. How often, when holding her in his arms, he had asked with surprise how such an innocent, pure, divine being could be the child of sin. But that same child caused him fresh cruel torments. Never to see her alone, from day to day, to be obliged to hide his affection for her, to have to kiss her coldly like the others, and more coldly than the others, not to be able to call her the child of his heart, not to hear her lisp the tender name of father, sometimes saddened him to a point of despair. On one or two occasions he had

been allowed to take her to the Grange. Then he passed hours in ecstasy, holding her on his knees, and caressing her passionately.

The child had become accustomed to these violent expressions of affection and she liked them. Sometimes she felt her fair head wet with the tears of her friend. Raising her eyes in surprise she would see him smile, then smiling too, she would reach up her coral lips for a kiss.

"Why are you crying, Luis? Have you a pimple?"

Josefina knew no more serious reason in the world for crying. She loved Luis dearly, and his general coldness saddened and surprised her. By degrees she had come to understand with precocious instinct, that the count loved her more than the others did, but he had to hide his feelings. So she, following his example, also adopted an indifferent manner with him when in public. But when they were alone, she reciprocated his expressions of affection with equal enthusiasm, and this without knowing why, without accounting to herself for what she did.

From the day her godmother ordered her hair to be cut, Josefina noticed that she had fallen into disgrace. She was not now kissed with transports of delights, her slightest wishes were not acceded to, and she was no longer the constant source of interest in the house.

Amalia took to scolding her, using a cold, displeased tone towards her, and the servants followed the example of the señora. The poor child, without knowing what the change signified, felt her little heart sink, she explored the faces of those about her with her beautiful deep eyes, and tried to decipher the enigma that they hid. She became daily more grave, more retiring, more timid. And as she found she was denied the toys or the sweetmeats that they used to lavish upon her open-handed, she left off asking for them.

Amalia, instead of delighting as formerly in her infantile ways, appeared to avoid them, she gave orders she was not to be brought to her bed in the morning as usual. When they met on the stairs, she passed by without looking at her. At the most she would go up to her and say in a displeased tone:

"You have not washed yourself yet. Go, see you are put right." Or else, "They tell me you did not know your catechism lesson. You are getting very idle. Take care and be good, because if not I shall lock you in the cellar with the rats."

She had formerly busied herself in teaching her, in putting the needle into her

hand, and guiding her little fingers. Now she almost always left this task to the servants. She lived in a state of gloomy preoccupation which did not escape the domestics' notice. Josefina also was conscious that her godmother was changed, not only with regard to herself, but in her whole manner of life. And so her mind gradually conceived the idea that she was sad, and that she was suffering, and that this was the cause of her bad temper. One day the lady was alone in her room. She had flung herself in an armchair and sat motionless with her head thrown back and her hands hanging down, apparently asleep. Nevertheless, Josefina, who passed by the room, and ventured to look through the crack of the door, noticed that her eyes were open, very open, and that she was frowning dreadfully. Without knowing what she did, with the blind confidence that children have in themselves, she pushed open the door and entered the room. She went silently up to the señora, and throwing herself suddenly on to her lap, and looking at her with timid affection, she said:

"Give me a kiss, godmother."

The lady was startled.

"How is it you are here? Who gave you permission to come in? Have I not told you not to come up without you are called?" she asked, frowning still more severely.

"I want to give you a kiss," said Josefina in a subdued voice.

"Don't bother me with kisses, and mind you don't come up again without permission."

But the child, overwhelmed with emotion, not knowing to what to attribute this moroseness, and wishing to overcome it at all costs, began to cry, as she threw herself once more upon her lap and tried to reach her face.

"Give me a kiss, godmother."

"Go! leave me!" replied the lady, preventing her raising herself higher.

The child was obstinate.

"Don't you love me? Give me a kiss."

"Go away, child!" she cried, in a fury. "Go away, at once!"

At the same time she gave her a hard push, and Josefina fell on to the ground

where her head came against the leg of a chair.

She got up, raising her hand to where she was hurt, but she did not cry. A feeling of dignity, often shown by childish hearts, gave her strength to keep from crying, although her eyes were filled with tears. She cast one look of unspeakable sadness on her godmother, and then ran from the room. When she reached the staircase, she threw herself down on one of the steps and burst into a fit of sobbing.

The thorns of life were indeed piercing the delicate flesh of that child whose path until then had been strewn with flowers. Amalia's spite grew worse every day, and the reserve and timidity of the child increased in proportion. But as she was only a child, this sadness would vanish when under the impulse of a fancy, and it was at such moments that the coldness and spite of the lady were most evident.

"Señora, Josefina does not want to put on her green frock."

"Why?"

"She says it is dirty."

Amalia then rose, repaired to the child's room, took her by the arm, and shaking her roughly, she said:

"What is this pride? Don't you know, silly, that you are only here out of pity? Take care and don't vex me, or one day, when least expected, I will put you in the street where you came from."

The servants heard these words and always bore them in mind. Until now Josefina had been brought up like a child of the señores, now she was treated like an illegitimate child, and afterwards like a little pariah. The servants now took pleasure in paying off the little attentions they had been formerly obliged to accord her, and the sharp rebukes they had incurred on her account.

Concha in particular, the dwarfish maid, felt an indescribable delight, peculiar to her malignant, spiteful character, every time that the señora evinced in any way her scorn for the adopted child. Josefina had a large, cheerful room looking on to the garden. Although Concha was head maid and dressmaker of the house, she had a duller room that she shared with Maria looking on to the street. Josefina's room had always been an object of envy to her. More than once she had given strong hints on the subject; and now, profiting by her mistress's state of mind, she got permission to sleep in the child's room under the pretext that Paula, who occupied the next bed, snored so loudly. So she installed herself comfortably there, and made use of the little girl's toilet things. A few days later she sent her to sleep with Maria without saying a word to her mistress. When Amalia did know of it, it had been going on for some time, and she heard it without any resentment at not having been told before, and she did nothing to alter what had been done.

Soon after, she thought of another means of degrading the child. Josefina dined at table with the señores. The pompous old Grandee had not consented to this at first, but he at last conceded to the importunities of his wife. Concha, full of spite like her señora, set to intriguing to deprive the foundling of this privilege. Exaggerating what it gave to do, the mess that it made, and the disturbance of the waiting at table, the little girl was finally removed to, and located at, a little table, which was put in the ironing-room near the kitchen. A few days after Amalia, in a fit of bad temper, said that the double service could not be tolerated, and that she was to dine in the kitchen with the servants. Concha sat her on a stool, pushed her a plate of thick soup and a tin spoon saying: "Eat."

The child raised her head in amazement, but seeing the malignant smile in the girl's eyes, she put it down again, and began to eat without any protest whatever. Concha was not pleased at this, for she wanted to see her rebel and cry.

"What is it? Don't you like your spoon? Then, child, you'll have to eat with it as I do, who am quite as good as you. What do you take yourself for, you little fool? Do you think because you wear a fine hat and a cambric chemise you are a

young lady? Young ladies don't come in a basket covered over with dirty rags." And so she went on, bursting into sarcastic, insulting laughter until poor Josefina at last began to cry. Although the other servants were not so malignant, they were pleased at the child's humiliation. They ended by taking her part, whilst Concha, relentless and colder and harder than marble, went on persecuting her with the greatest cruelty. A few days later, as Josefina was passing through the ironing-room to the dining-room, she heard Concha say to Maria:

"I say, girl, have you ironed the foundling's clothes?"

She stopped, not knowing of whom they were speaking, and cast an anxious look from one servant to the other, until a simultaneous shout of laughter from them both made her understand that they were speaking of her.

"Why do you call me a foundling?" cried the innocent child, with difficulty repressing her tears. "I will go and tell my godmother."

"Go run and tell her," returned Concha pushing her to the door.

And henceforth she went by that name among the servants. Amalia prohibited her being brought into the drawing-room in the evening. The count, whose only chance of seeing his child was on these occasions, asked for an explanation, and the lady replied that as she had to get up early for her lessons, she required more sleep; but he did not feel satisfied. He knew that some harm was brewing, but fearing a worse evil he had the sense to be silent.

Then Amalia thought of a more direct way of wounding the count. The child whom she had not only deprived of her caresses, but of all her position in the house, was in a fair way to be an extra little servant. In one instant the transformation was completed. The señora gave orders for all her hats and clothes to be put on one side, and for her to be dressed in the poorest, oldest things out of the press; that she was to be treated like the rest of the servants, and perform little offices in the kitchen that were within her power.

The courtship of Fernanda and the count was getting more conspicuous every day. Although they abstained from talking intimately in the house of Quiñones before the jealous Valencian, she was not oblivious to what was going on. Her eyes, like two rays of light, seemed to pierce her lover's brain and read what was there: Luis was in love with his old betrothed. The adulterous connection weighed on his mind like a heavy stone. She, the loved and preferred of former days, was now old and faded beside that splendid rose who had just reached

perfection. If he had not given her up already, it was through his weakness of character, through the powerful ascendant she had managed to get over him during the seven years of their *liaison*. But he wanted nothing better than to break with her. She read it perfectly in his furtive glances, and in the gloomy abstraction that weighed upon him, in his sudden, unnatural cheerfulness, in his fear and servility which increased every time he came near her. One evening the count asked for a glass of water. A sudden light came into Amalia's eyes—the longed-for moment had arrived. She pulled the bell, and said in a peculiar tone to the maid who answered it:

"Paula, send a glass of water."

A few minutes afterwards Josefina came in, poorly clad, with a little coarse linen apron, and shod with rough shoes. Her little hands had difficulty in carrying a tray with water, and sugar, and sugar-tongs. The guests were astounded, and Luis turned pale. The child advanced to the middle of the room looking timidly at her godmother, who signed to her to go to the count. The count staggered as if he had had a blow, but seeing the little creature standing before him, he hastened to take the glass, and raised it with trembling hand to his lips. Amalia's eyes meanwhile looked cold and indifferent, but the imperceptible trembling of her lips betrayed the cruel delight she was feeling. A significant silence pervaded the gathering whilst this scene was being enacted.

Directly Josefina had left, the Señora de Quiñones explained this change to her guests with perfect naturalness. Some punishment had been found necessary for the arrogance that the child had taken to showing towards the servants. It would not be for long. Nevertheless, it was a daily struggle with the will of Quiñones, who objected to her being brought up with so much indulgence.

"The fact is," she concluded in a tone so natural that it would have reflected credit on an actress—"the fact is, sometimes I am obliged to put her in her place in my house. What good is it to raise her to a position she cannot maintain? Any day we may die, and the poor thing will have to support herself by work, if she does not find a husband before then. And what husband would take a girl with many requirements, and no money?"

The guests were not deceived. She really did not expect that they would be. All that was a pure sop to conventionality, but nobody was deceived as to the real facts. The count left soon after, being unable to control his vexation.

"This business of Luis is not going on very well," said Manuel Antonio to a

little party going home by the Calle de Altavilla consisting of Maria Josefa, the Pensioner, and his daughter Jovita. "If ever the marriage of Fernanda does come to anything, it will be at the cost of much unpleasantness."

"Do you think so?" asked Maria Josefa, to draw him out.

"*Madre!* Are you mad, woman? Don't you know Amalia as well as I do?"

"And what has Amalia to do with Luis' marriage?" asked Jovita, to whose maidenhood simplicity seemed befitting in spite of her two-and-thirty years.

"Ay! It is true there is this little girl here," exclaimed the Chatterbox with comic, mocking gestures. "I did not think of that! Nothing, nothing, little monkey; go on in front, these are matters for grown-up people."

The Pensioner's daughter was pricked to the quick at this remark and made an insolent retort. Manuel Antonio repaid it with another, and a regular quarrel was started, in which bitter pointed words were banded and it lasted as far as the house of the Pensioner, who had made fruitless efforts to re-establish peace between them. As usual, the Chatterbox got the best of it, for his remarks combined the vigour of a male with the subtle spite of a female.

The next day the count had an interview with Amalia in which he expressed his vexation at the scene of the preceding evening. The lady was amiable and condescending, and justified her conduct by its being for the welfare of the child. But Luis noticed that she spoke in a peculiar manner, and he detected a tone of bitterness and irony in her words that astonished him. He left her in a preoccupied and uneasy frame of mind, and for some days he could not shake off the unpleasant impression of the interview. But his love was rapidly taking possession of every corner of his soul and finally conquered even that preoccupation. He was profoundly in love. And as it always happens his timidity increased in proportion to his love. At first he seemed serene and courteous in his long conversations with Fernanda, losing no opportunity of demonstrating his admiration and devotion to his *ex-fiancée*. But he suddenly lost his *aplomb*, and he shunned all reference to his own feelings; and he avoided all gallant remarks, but Fernanda was not deceived. This love had at last come after the lapse of all that time. Ah! how many tears it had cost her!

Although their conversations were on commonplace subjects, they had a delicate, exquisite savour. They talked for hours and hours without being tired, and for the pleasure of being near to, and listening to, each other. Fernanda

chatted in all the joy of her heart without minding the timidity of her adorer, and with the enjoyment of seeing the puerile pains he took to avoid his confession of love, knowing that she could have him at her feet directly she gave the sign. The moment came at last. One day the beautiful widow determined to declare herself. They were talking of marriage and second marriages. Luis began to get excited, and to give his opinion in a trembling voice, trying to change the conversation. Suddenly Fernanda said with perfect calmness and in a determined tone:

"I shall not marry a second time."

He turned pale. His face became so sad that the girl, repressing a smile with difficulty, repeated the remark with still greater decision:

"I shall not be led into a second marriage—unless it be with you."

The count gazed at her in delight.

"Is it really so?" he finally asked, in a trembling voice.

"Yes, it is really so!" she returned, looking at him with a smile.

"Give me your hand, Fernanda."

"Take it, Luis."

They held each other's hands affectionately for some moments. Then the count rose without saying another word. When he arrived home he wrote her a long letter of six pages, describing his passion in the most glowing colours, giving her fervent thanks, and three or four times calling himself an unworthy fellow. The marriage was arranged to take place at the end of the year of mourning, of which there were still two months to run. They decided to keep the matter secret, and not to have the ceremony in Lancia. A few days before the wedding-day she was to go to Madrid, where he would join her, and there at the capital they were to be united for ever.

It is very difficult in little towns to hide anything, and to conceal a projected marriage is impossible. Every pair of eyes and every pair of ears seemed magnified to a hundred, so intensely were sight and hearing concentrated on the couple. By their gait, looks, and manner of greeting, and leaving each other, the ingenious Lancians guessed by veritable magic of what the couple was thinking, and they calculated exactly the progress of the affair that excited such interest in them.

As Manuel Antonio was passing the old-world dwelling of the count, he saw a maid come out with a cardboard box in her hand. The Chatterbox at once scented a wedding, so he took breath and followed her.

"How do you do, Laura?" he said, passing her. Then turning quickly, he said in a careless sort of way:

"How is your master?"

"The señor is not ill."

"Ah! But I was told—well, have not seen him for two days. Are you going shopping for the señora?"

"They are shirts for the señor conde."

"From Ramiro's? Let me see them, as I have to get some too."

The maid opened the box, and the Chatterbox examined the contents.

"They are very fine; they would be too dear for me."

"Yes, señor, they are dear, and yet the señor does not think they are good enough. He wants them of silk, at whatever cost, and although I have been to every shop I can't get them. There is nothing for it but to order them."

"Of silk? *Madre!* Then he is going to be married!"

"I don't know about that, señorito," the maid hurriedly replied, with signs of confusion.

"Get along, little hypocrite!" he returned, laughing; "you know as well as I do, as well as everybody. And when is it to be?"

"I tell you I know nothing."

But the Chatterbox insisted so much, and was so eloquent and familiar, that after some time the servant let out what she knew.

"But look here, I cannot tell you anything for certain of what is going on, but I think he will marry shortly, from some remarks I heard the other day of the señora countess."

"What remarks?"

"She said to the housekeeper that when her son married she would go for a time to the Grange, and afterwards, looking through the keyhole, I saw her crying. Then Fray Diego was in the house the day before yesterday—but I don't know whether I ought to say."

"Get along, woman; what does it matter. Do you think I am a gossip?"

"Well, I heard him say when he was leaving: 'No, no, they are quite right, it is much better for them to do it in Madrid. This is a very spiteful place.'"

The pleasure that Columbus felt at the discovery of the New World was nothing in comparison to that of our Chatterbox. He not only knew without any kind of doubt, that they were going to be married, but he had ascertained where the ceremony was to take place. Overwhelmed with such splendid news, and wishing to pour it forth to somebody, he stopped to consider where it would have the most effect. His thoughts went straight to Amalia; so to the Palace of Quiñones he directed his mincing little steps.

It was the hour of twilight. The señora was sitting in her boudoir, doubtless absorbed in one of those intense, mournful meditations to which she had for some time been a prey. Manuel Antonio was jovial and chatty, and set about cheering her up as much as possible, making the blood circulate with renewed energy in that ulcerated heart, so that the shock should be more painful when it came. He asked for chocolate, and they took it together with pleasant conversation. Amalia seemed to forget her worries, and when she was just becoming quite cheerful, *zas!* the bomb fell. But it fell gently, with that infinite art known only to men endowed with a feminine mind.

The only thing he regretted was not being able to see her face. The room was almost dark. But he was quite conscious of the gravity of the explosion by the sound of her voice and the coldness of her hand as she bade him good-bye. Amalia remained standing for a long time, rigid and motionless. She leaned against the heavy curtain to look into the street, and measured the height of the drop. She tried to open her desk to get a bottle of essence, but she turned the key too roughly and hampered the lock. Then she left the room and wandered about the dark passages and staircase in a vague, uncertain way like a phantom. Then, far away, she saw a point of light, and involuntarily made her way to it like a moth.

It was the dining-room, and seated at the table playing with some little clay shepherdesses, the remains of past possessions, was Josefina. The shade of the

lamp concentrated a bright light upon the little head, round and yellow as an orange. Amalia stopped an instant and looked at her with an ardent gaze, devouring that grave melancholy face which bore such a striking resemblance to Luis. She made a step, and the child turned her head. The expression of her blue eyes was equally sweet and sad, and the movement of her eyelashes the same. The wife of the Grandee covered the distance between them with two steps, and fell upon her like a hungry tiger. She struck, bit, and tore her, and that open face soon bore large purple marks from her hands, and blood began to flow. The child, mad with fear, uttered piercing cries. She had scarcely had time to see her godmother, and she did not know what had happened. Amalia, insatiable, went on striking and hurting. The cries of the victim increased her fury; at last she paused.

"Godmother, what are you doing?" exclaimed the poor child, running into a corner.

This question, and the look of anguish which accompanied it, infuriated the lady afresh, and she beat her again unmercifully. The little creature covered her face with her hands. Then she caught her by the ears and nearly dragged them off. Not satisfied with that, and angry at not being able to hurt her face, she took up a feather broom that was on the table, and hit her sharply on the hands with the handle, leaving them black and blue. At last the child managed to escape. The servants who had gathered to witness the scene with astonishment, let her pass and run down the passages to the staircase. The street door was open. The coachman on taking the horses to water, had left it so. Josefina went out of the house, fled down the street of Santa Lucia, passed under the archway of Santa Barbara, crossed the Archbishop's Square and so to the gate of San Joaquin, to the Sarrió Road.

Evening had closed in. A fine but very fast rain was falling, which soon made her wet to the bones. The wretched little creature ran for some time, and at last stopped from sheer fatigue. The side wall of the road being low at that part, she sat down, and then began to feel the pain from the blows. She put her hands to her head, then to her face, from which she felt a hot liquid pouring that she thought at first was rain. She soon saw it was blood. Blood! the thing in all the world of which she had the greatest fear! Still a prey to terror, she did not moan. She took a fold of her little frock and dried herself, or rather she washed her face, for the frock was wet; but what she felt most, and what hurt her in a horrible way, were her hands. Not knowing what to do to alleviate the pain she began to blow on them. Then she sucked them. But the pain was so intense that

at last she exclaimed, sobbing:

"Oh! my hands!"

At this moment there arose before her, amid the shadows of the night, two enormous figures that froze her with horror. One of them stooped down and took her by the arm.

"What are you doing here?" he said, in a rough voice.

CHAPTER XII

THE BARON'S JUSTICE

IN a large room in the dreary house of the los Oscos, furnished with four old pieces of furniture, and carpeted with two inches of dust, two of our acquaintances in this story were seated at an oak table. One was the baron, the master of the house, the other, his friend Fray Diego. They had an empty jar of gin before them, another half full, and some drinking-cups.

Neither table-cloth, table-cover, nor tray were there. The table was only covered with many-shaped stains of gin and wine, which, in happy conjunction with the dust, had been left during the course of years and months. The room is dull because the Calle del Pozo is dull, and the dirty window-panes have not been cleaned for years, and the evening is closing in.

By the little light that penetrated, it could be seen that the faces of both men were excessively red, so red that it seemed wonderful that blood did not burst from their bloodshot eyes. The baron had arrived at the apotheosis of fiery and fearful ugliness. The crimson scar across his cheek stood out so sharp and black with corrugations, that it was fearful to see it. His fierce, waxed moustache was more white than black. He was dressed in black sheep skin, and he had a red flat cap on his head, of which the great tassel fell sometimes over his ears and sometimes over his nose, according to the movement of the ogre-like body. They were silent for some time. Fray Diego occasionally raised his hand to the bottle of gin, filled his friend's glass, then his own, which he gravely drank at one draught. The baron was not so quick; he took his glass, raised it to the level of

his eyes, and made a series of faces at it, which were sometimes horrible to witness. Then he touched it with the edge of his lips, made faces again, touched it again, and finally, after many attempts and vacillations, decided to swallow it. It was in this grave, quiet way that the two old soldiers spent nearly every evening of the year. The town knew it, and it was a subject of bets with the jocose inhabitants which of the two would die first from apoplexy. Fray Diego had served in the ranks of the Pretender. Then he became a friar and went to the Philippines, and finally he left the monastic rule, and lived in Lancia as an independent priest. They had not known each other during the war, but when they came to Lancia they became united with indissoluble ties of friendship by their ideas being the same, by the recollection of the glorious battles in which they had taken part—and by the gin.

"Long live the Pope, the head of all the kings of the earth!" exclaimed Fray Diego after a long silence, in which they both appeared to be asleep. At the same time he gave a great thump to the table which made all the glasses and bottles ring.

The baron took hardly any notice. He went on winking at the glass he had before him, and after swallowing the contents very leisurely, and licking his lips three or four times, he said:

"Gently, gently, Fray Diego! You don't know what the Popes are."

"Long live the Pope, the head of all the kings of the earth!" repeated the cleric, giving a still louder thump upon the table.

"Take care, Fray Diego! The Popes have always been very ambitious."

"Señor baron!" exclaimed the priest in a voice so emphatic as to be comic; "you have a soul as ugly as your face!"

The baron was unmoved at the insult, and after a time he said, with perfect tranquillity:

"Don't be a fool. What has my face to do with the matter? I am catholic, apostolic, Roman; but if to-morrow the king our señor" (here he raised his hand to his cap) "were to send me with a detachment to Rome, I would go like the Constable of Bourbon, sack it, and take the Pope."

"And I say that if his Holiness sent me to put a bayonet through the stomach of that constable, you may be sure I would put two."

"No."

"How no?" roared the chaplain, getting in a rage.

"Because the constable died three centuries ago."

"I am glad of it, for he has then been burning three centuries in hell."

"All this is very well, *Pater*, but the king is always to the fore, and others have only to be silent and obey."

"The Pope is never silent, señor baron."

"Then he must be gagged."

"I should like to see it done! Presumption! presumption! a hundred times presumption! Who would dare to do it if Fray Diego de Areces were near?" cried the cleric convulsed with rage, and jumping up, whilst his eyes blazed with fury.

"Sit down, *Pater*, and calm yourself, and take another glass, for Fray Diego de Areces is only a common vessel."

The chaplain instantly calmed down, delicately poured out the liquor into the two glasses, and swallowed his own share with pleasure, after which his head fell on his breast, his eyelids dropped, and he was asleep. The baron, radiant with delight, looked at him sharply with cunning eyes, then, profiting by his companion's temporary obliviousness, he took another glass, saying, "The nones."

It was a peculiar feature of those delightful sessions that the gin changed the character of both. The irascible, impetuous temper of the baron was softened in a remarkable way whilst the beneficial effects of alcohol lasted. He was cheerful, communicative, conciliatory, nobody's remarks upset him, nothing seemed worth getting angry about. Fray Diego, on the contrary, who, in his normal condition, was always a jovial, jocose priest, turned into a very devil for disputing and nagging, and he betrayed a combative disposition that nobody would have suspected under his round, placid face and pious calling.

He roused himself at the end of a few minutes, looked at the baron fixedly for some moments with strange ferocity, and said stammeringly:

"Will the señor baron kindly explain to me what he means by a common vessel?"

"Come, I've done with that. Are we to go on about that? What does it signify to you what the one or the other means?"

"Because I choose to know; we must understand one another."

"We have understood each other. You have two pints of gin inside you and I another two, or perhaps more," he added, with several winks.

"It is not so, señor baron, it is not so! We must understand each other once for all, stupid!"

"Here there are no barons and no priests," exclaimed the noble in an excess of good humour, jumping up from his seat. "Here we are only Uncle Francisco—that is I, and Uncle Diego, that is you—are we not? Your hand upon it."

Advancing with his hand extended he staggered, but kept his feet.

"Give me your hand, my brave fellow!"

The cleric was pacified, and they shook hands.

"Now an embrace for the legitimate King of Spain."

"Don't speak to me of embraces," cried the priest, again getting angry. "I recollect Vergarra's embrace, fool!"

"Don't bother yourself, my friend, for we shall pay him out.

"Ay, ay, ay! mutila
Chaplen gorria."

And he began to sing the Carlist hymn in a hoarse voice, but soon interrupting himself, he said:

"Well, Uncle Diego, sing! Give over tears now!"

His friend was in fact shedding great tears as he recalled the treachery of Vergarra.

"Cheer up, soldier! A drink to the extermination of the negroes would not come amiss."

Fray Diego admitted by a movement of his head that he would willingly be a party to this consolatory toast, but he did not move from his seat. They quaffed

another glass, and the effect upon the emotional soul of the baron was so marvellous, that immediately he began dancing an English breakdown on the table, which did not stop Fray Diego's copious flow of tears.

"Hum! I don't care for this foreign dance," he observed at last with a final jump. "I prefer the *danza prima*.^[K] Come here, Uncle Diego."

Whereupon he took the priest by force by both hands, dragged him from his chair, and made some turns with him, intoning one of the long monotonous songs of the country. Fray Diego felt rejuvenated as he was reminded of the spring-time of his life in the country, when his uncle, the Curé of Areces, thrashed him well for getting out of the window by night to pay court to the girls of the neighbouring villages.

"Listen, Diego," said the baron stopping suddenly. "Don't you think before we go on we had better drink a glass to the souls of our betters?"

The priest willingly assented, but the glasses and the empty bottles were rolling on the ground. The baron opened a cupboard and drew from thence fresh elements of spiritual life. This funereal glass inspired him with the happy idea of covering the chaplain's head with his own flat cap and adorning his own with the other's shovel-hat which was lying upon a chair. So clad they went on dancing, making a very remarkable pair. But the baron slipped and fell.

"Help me up, Uncle Diego."

The priest took him by his outstretched hands and pulled him up. But the weight of the noble was too much for him, and they both rolled on the ground together.

"Rise, Uncle Diego!"

"Up, Uncle Francisco!"

They both rolled over with barbarous shouts of laughter. At last the baron regained his footing. The cleric soon followed his example. But his soul, which had been momentarily illumined by the recollections of his youth, suddenly reverted to blood and extermination. He turned fiercely on his friend:

"Let us understand once for all, fool! Why did you call me a common vessel just now? eh? eh? Why?"

"I will explain to you presently, man," returned the baron calmly, "but we will drink first a toast to all faithful Christians, whose visible head is the Pope—I say, if you like."

The chaplain made no objection.

"Well, then, I called you a common vessel because a common vessel you know is used for cooked potatoes."

So saying the baron fell into such a violent fit of merriment that he very nearly choked. In the meanwhile the prominent eyes of his comrade looked at him with such a menacing expression that they nearly dropped from their sockets and fell upon him, as they visibly increased in size like a locust's.

"And why cooked potatoes? I have as much courage as you, fool! as I showed in the action of Orduña and Unzá, and besides, I have six crosses at home."

"You? you?" said the gentleman, unable to resist a smile. "You never served excepting at the mess of the company."

The fury of the brother at hearing this was unbounded. He halloed, he stamped, he thumped the table. Finally he rushed to the door, from the threshold of which he began to apostrophise his friend with excited gestures.

"You say this because you are in your own house! Come out and say it here! Come out with me!"

The baron looked at him with smiling curiosity.

"Calm yourself, calm yourself, Uncle Diego."

"Come out and fight with me! with sword, pistol, or what you like."

"Very well, man, very well. We will come out and kill each other; but it will only be to please you."

He then went with uncertain steps to the cupboard, and with some difficulty, for it was now completely dark, he put his hands into the press, and feeling about, drew forth two large cavalry swords.

"Take one," he said, handing one to the chaplain.

Fray Diego drew it from its sheath and began to fence with it. Whilst making these experiments Don Francisco regarded him with great satisfaction.

"Well, let us go," said the priest returning the weapon to its sheath. "Quick, march."

And taking his shovel-hat that was lying on the floor, and concealing the sword under his robes, he passed out of the door. The baron caught up his cap, put on a heavy overcoat and followed him.

"Stop!" he exclaimed, before he had gone four steps. "Don't you think that we have left some liquor behind?"

Fray Diego gave an affirmative grunt. They re-entered the room, and feeling on the floor they came against the jar of gin that was not completely empty. This they poured into the glasses, and drank up all there was. Their next act was to sally into the street. The rough-stoned pavement was wet. A fine rain was falling, but it was so thick that it penetrated clothing as much as a sharp shower. Night had completely closed in; and as, according to the municipal customs, it wanted a good half-hour before the celebrated oil-lamps were lighted, darkness enveloped the rain-driven town. The two heroes, animated by a warlike spirit, perambulated the Calle del Pozo with determination, the cleric before, the noble behind, both muffled up to the eyes, each with the instrument of murder under his arm. They entered the Calle de las Hogueras, passed under the walls of the fortress and out by the road that runs by the old wall of the town. As the water filtered through their clothes, it refreshed their bodies, and partially equilibrated their tempers. Fray Diego became visibly calmer, and the black clouds of depression that oppressed him gradually dispersed, but the baron's haughty, cruel spirit became meanwhile a prey to the morbid conditions of the other. But both facing the prospect of death pursued their intrepid course through the night and rain. They went for some distance by the old wall until they came to the Sarrió road, which they took. They had not proceeded five minutes along it when they heard a groan. They stopped at once, and approaching the side-wall they caught sight of a bundle, which, on coming nearer, they found to be a child.

"What are you doing here?" said the baron, seizing her by the arm.

"Pardon!" exclaimed Josefina, overwhelmed with terror. "For goodness' sake don't beat me, señor! I have already been beaten so much."

The gentleman immediately loosened his hold, and changing his voice and tone, said:

"No, my child, no; nobody shall beat you. How do you come to be here at this hour?"

"My godmother has beaten me a good deal, and I ran away from home."

"Have you not a father?"

"No, señor."

"Do you live in Lancia?"

"Yes, señor."

"Who is your godmother?"

"A lady."

"What is her name?"

"Amalia."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Fray Diego, striking his forehead with his hand. "It is the adopted child of Don Pedro Quiñones."

"Is not Don Pedro the husband of your godmother?"

"Yes, señor."

"Come, get up, my child. You can't stay there. Come with us."

"Oh, no, for God's sake! Don't take me to my godmother."

"No, we won't go there. You are wet, little creature," he added, touching her clothes. "Come, come."

The two heroes had meanwhile put their swords on the wall, and when they went off to Lancia with the child between them, they left them there regardless of the damp tarnishing and rusting the steel.

"And why did your godmother beat you?" asked Fray Diego as they walked slowly to accommodate their steps to those of the child.

"Because I was playing with the sheep."

"The sheep! But do Don Pedro's sheep come and sleep in the house?"

"Yes, señor, they sleep in the cardboard box."

"Look here, child, what are you saying?" said the cleric stopping.

When the inquiry led to the understanding that the sheep were of clay, Fray Diego resumed his walk, protecting the fragile form of the little creature with his long cloak. But his hand happening to touch her face, he noticed with surprise that the moisture on his fingers was warm. He communicated this fact to the baron, and as they had now reached the first houses of the town, they put the child in a doorway, lighted a match and had a look at her. Her whole face was bathed in blood and cut across with deep gashes, whilst her hands were covered with bruises. The heroes looked at each other in horror, and the same wave of indignation inflamed their cheeks. The baron then gave vent to a string of strong imprecations. These, and his fearfully ugly face, made such an impression on Josefina, that she fled crying to a corner. They managed with some trouble to tranquillise her, and after drying her face with a handkerchief, Fray Diego took her up in his arms (the baron had attempted it in vain), covered her with his cloak, and set off for the ancient house of the los Oscos.

Here they took her in hand. The baron, who had attained some knowledge of surgery in the campaign, carefully washed her wounds, closed them with plaister, and dressed the contusions with a very efficacious ointment that he had by him. The touch of the rough hands of those veterans seemed as soft as velvet as they came in contact with the child's skin. A woman could not have tended her with more delicacy, attention, and devotion.

Josefina soon forgot her fears. That ugly gentleman was not bad. She ventured to ask for water. The baron replied that the best thing she could have to strengthen her would be a glass of sherry. One was brought, and whilst the child drank it, the two champions of the legitimate king retired into a corner of the room to deliberate.

They decided that the thing to be done was to take the child to the house of the Quiñones. The baron undertook to take the little creature back, and then he would tell her godmother what he thought of her; he would tell her she was an infamous woman, a vile, perverse creature, and if she dared ill-treat the poor helpless child again, he would go to her house, slit her ears, and then tie her by the hair to the tail of his horse, and so drag her through the town. Fray Diego did not agree to so much cruelty, but the baron declared that nothing would induce him to swerve from his sinister plan of making a terrible example of her.

It cost some trouble to make Josefina go with them. They only managed it by promising she should not be beaten again, and that in truth her godmother would be very kind to her for the future. That was all she wanted! And they added that if she dared touch a hair of her head, lightning of God! he would wring her neck like a chicken's! and would give her a sound whipping with his horse's bridle. And the countenance of that gentleman was so fearful as he uttered these threats that the child never doubted for an instant that they would be fulfilled.

Whilst making their way to the house of the Quiñones, the baron continued to break out into insulting expressions and threats of murder against the wife of the Grandee. Fray Diego made futile attempts to calm him. But his murderous feelings had so got the upper hand, that the ex-Brother, fearing a catastrophe, left him at the door of the palace. The baron pulled the bell. As he was not acquainted with the feudal custom of the house, he did not pull more than once, so, as he was thought to be a plebeian, the door was not opened immediately. The surprise of the servant was great when he saw that terrible señor, who inspired such respect in the town, and he hastened to ask pardon for not having admitted him more promptly. The baron asked for Don Pedro Quiñones.

He was requested to enter, and the servant preceded him up the large stone staircase. On arriving at the first floor, he was asked to wait whilst he was announced.

A few minutes afterwards Amalia appeared. She cast a sharp, angry glance at the child, whom the baron held by the hand, and turning to the gentleman she said in a cold, haughty tone:

"What do you want?"

"I came to bring this child that I found in the street—and at the same time to have a few words with Don Pedro or with you."

With this last remark the baron's voice perceptibly changed.

"Do you not know me?" he added, seeing that the lady looked at him fixedly without replying.

In little places everybody knows everybody, especially persons of position, although they may not be intimate with them, but Amalia replied in a barefaced manner:

"I have not that honour."

"I am the baron de los Oscos."

The lady bowed.

"Paula," she said, turning to a servant who had entered, "take this child. And Pepe, light the lamps in the blue room."

"Señora," began the baron, "I found this child in the Sarrió road, covered with blood and contusions. I asked her who had brought her to that pass, and she told me that it was her godmother. I cannot believe it."

"Then you can believe it, for it is true," said Amalia interrupting him.

The baron stopped speechless and confused. Then he continued:

"It is possible that you had some reason for punishing her, but I am deeply sorry."

Here Amalia again interrupted him:

"And I am sorry that you are sorry."

"My object in coming here," said the baron, who was fast losing his aplomb, "was to warn you, was to beg you—as I have been told you have had the charity to take this foundling—to continue the good work by protecting, sheltering and educating her, and when it is necessary to punish her will you do so with kindness, for the poor little creature is delicate and weak, and the blows might put an end to her life."

"Is this all you have to say to me?" asked the lady, coldly.

The dreadful face of the baron contorted suddenly on hearing this question; his eyes flashed, the deep wound stood out on his face by reason, no doubt, of his great internal emotion. Formidable sounds were heard in his throat, low rumblings presaged a coming storm. But those noises finally calmed down, the signs of disturbance ceased, and instead of the crater giving forth, as it was feared, a stream of burning lava, rocks, and ashes, it only weakly emitted the two words:

"Yes, señora."

"Very well, then. I take this opportunity of bidding you welcome to the house in the name of Quiñones and myself."

At the same time she pulled the bell rope and rose from her seat. The baron also rose muttering words of thanks and proffers of service.

"Pepe, take the señor baron down."

He made a profound reverence, which Amalia returned in a lesser degree, and the gentleman turned on his heels and left. As he descended the staircase quite nonplussed, his face on fire, and his eyes aflame, it was a great relief to think of the drawing and quartering, the loss of eyes, the horse's tail and other fearful punishments of the Visigoth epoch, to which the señora belonged by virtue of her barbarous behaviour and her cruel, arrogant spirit.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MARTYRDOM

SCARCELY had the door been shut behind the baron when Amalia had the child brought into her presence.

"Come here, señorita, come here! We have not seen each other for some time! How have you spent it? Have you got on well? The baron is very gallant with ladies, is he not?"

The child uttered a sharp cry.

"Oh! my ear!"

"Go on your knees, you grub! Ah! Then does all I have done for you count for nothing? Are you going to show your teeth before you have finished sucking? On your knees, you little rogue! You bad girl!"

Josefina fell in a heap in a corner of the room. Amalia kept her burning gaze fixed upon her for some time. At last, removing her eyes from her, she asked Concha and Paula, who had brought the child in, how she came to escape. The coachman was to blame. Then ensued strong language against the coachman, who was said to be drunk, and with threats of his dismissal if such an act of carelessness occurred again. Then followed many remarks upon the baron's appearance. What was that brute doing at such an hour in the Sarrió road? Who

was the cleric who was with him? After these came a very sad survey of the ingratitude and naughtiness of the child who fled from the house which had given her shelter and made her protectors a laughing-stock. The servants agreed that she deserved a very sharp punishment. The lady then dismissed them, and stopped them with an imperious gesture when they were going to take the child. Once alone, Amalia took a book and began to read quietly by the light of a lamp, whilst the child, on its knees in the darkest corner, sobbed bitterly. Three or four times she raised her head and darted an angry glance at the dark corner, expecting a louder groan from the child so that she could spring upon her. An hour went by—an hour and a half. At last she shut the book, went out, and returned in a few minutes. She began slowly to undress. When half undressed she took the lamp, and approaching the child, obliged her to get up, when she conducted her to the bed, and showing her the floor, she said:

"This is your bed. You will sleep here in your clothes."

When she had finished undressing, the child said in a weak voice:

"Forgive me, godmother, I won't do it again."

But these words fell on deaf ears, and she got into bed and put out the light.

Her eyes remained open in the darkness. The hours chiming their quarters and their halves in a melancholy tone from the clock of the neighbouring cathedral did not close them. They were like two mysterious lamps, only giving light within as they illuminated a thousand sinister and tormenting ideas. Dark thoughts and fierce desires crowded and pressed under that low forehead. She considered the marriage of Luis an abominable treachery. Without recollecting her own want of honour towards the poor old paralysed man God had given her for a husband, nor thinking how her sin had spoilt the life of the count, threatened to die in solitude, without family ties to cheer his latter days, she made him entirely accountable for the wrong, and for all the bitterness she was now feeling in losing the only pleasure that had brightened her gloomy, monotonous existence. The only pleasure. Her love did not deserve any other name. In that ardent, despotic, restless spirit there had never been a question of tenderness. She was completely ignorant of the delicious, poetic thoughts that ennoble a passion and make it pardonable. Her life had been passed in insane excitement, tormented by the idea of being happy at all costs. She had lived for the last seven years under the sway of her licentious, insatiable passion. Never did a melancholy thought of remorse bear witness in that depravity to a single

moral sentiment. Her thirst for pleasure drove her into a thousand extravagant and dangerous courses. She was not contented with gathering under her roof all the youth of Lancia and dancing occasionally as a condescension, but she required for her enjoyment company every day, picnics, masquerades, &c., and she liked to dance until she nearly fell with exhaustion, like a country lass of fifteen summers. She found it necessary to contrive secret interviews with her lover at most extraordinary hours, and on most unheard of occasions. Her ungovernable passion led her to defy public opinion, and delight in making light of precaution. If the count gave her a word of warning, she flew into a rage. She lost more than he did. Slander never hurts the man, but only the woman, who has to bear all the disgrace. But she went into fits of laughter at the thoughts of slander or disgrace. If she were at all put out, she was quite capable of proclaiming her sin in Altavilla when there was a gathering of people. The count got more and more alienated from this woman, who upset all his moral, theological, and social ideas, and finally inspired him with dread. This turned to terror and insufferable foreboding, that made him long for his liberty, especially after Amalia smilingly made a certain revelation to him.

"Do you know, dear," she said, "I nearly did such a mad thing this morning. Quiñones sent me to pour out his drops of arsenic that he has taken for some time. I took up the bottle quickly and, as if pushed by the elbow by an invisible hand, I poured half of the contents into the glass. Don't tremble, coward, for there was no motive in the matter. I never felt anything like it. I swear to you that my will was not party to it. I was controlled by a superior will which strove to overpower mine. I put the glass upon the table, looked at it for an instant, and held it up to the light. There was nothing, not the slightest sign to denote that it was an instrument of death. I put it on the tray and walked with it towards the library without considering what I was doing. But suddenly in the passage I came to myself like awakening from a nightmare. I suddenly saw the blunder I was going to make, and I let the glass fall on the ground."

"It was not a blunder, it was a horrible crime you were about to commit," said the count angrily, as a sweat of horror came over him.

"Very well, crime or blunder, or whatever it was, it was stupid in every way, you know, for one would see by the symptoms that it was a question of poison."

Those words, uttered in a tone of assumed levity, made more impression on the count than any former ones, and henceforth he could not go near her without experiencing a strange feeling of repugnance.

Her youth passed, but she paid no attention to the fact until the arrival of Fernanda. Having no rivals in Lancia, her carelessness of her personal appearance daily increased, and she completely lost the subtle coquetry by which women perpetuate the charm of their person. It was only the sight of the splendid beauty of the daughter of Estrada-Rosa that made her give a thought to herself. She then began to think about the adornment of herself. She procured all kinds of cosmetics, she sent for dresses to Madrid, and availed herself of all the arts of elegance. It was late. That miserable, neglected body, worn out by years and ill-health, could not regain its freshness and grace.

This *idée fixe* corroded her brain during her long, wretched vigil. No longer to inspire love! To be old, and an object of repugnance! Her mind was torn with a thousand fears. Luis was marrying. Why? Had she not sacrificed to him her youth, honour, and salvation, if there was anything after this life but the infernal regions?

What was the good of it? At the first sign of decay in her face all his promises had vanished like a dream; the seven years of love had disappeared in the abyss of time without leaving the most insignificant sign. But she had not wrinkles yet; she was not so old—five-and-thirty, not more. She suddenly put her hand on the table by her side, lighted the candle, and jumped out of bed. She went to the looking-glass and looked at herself for some time, passing her fingers over the surface of her face to ascertain that the much-feared wrinkles were not there.

A groan from behind made her turn her head. She raised the candle and fixed an angry glance upon the child, stretched upon the ground, trembling with fear. The child could not sleep. Her feverish eyes looked at her anxiously, her lips again murmured: "Pardon."

Without paying her any attention, the wife of Don Pedro went back to bed and put out the light. The rays of the morning sun, as they penetrated the room, fell upon the two sleepless beings. With God's daylight commenced the barbarous torture of an innocent creature.

Her fertile, diabolical imagination set to inventing torments with which to feed the hate which consumed her. The sight of suffering was a necessity to her. Josefina was sent down barefooted with a pencilled note to Concha. The missive said: "Concha, I send you this little rogue. Punish her as you think fit."

Amalia knew what an executioner the maid would be, and, in fact, she expressed satisfaction at receiving this note, which flattered her vanity and her

instincts.

"Do you know what this paper says?" she asked, in an aggressive tone.

Josefina made a negative sign. She read writing badly, especially when written as carelessly as that of the señora. The sempstress, however, made her spell out the words until she quite understood them.

"There, you see, you are sent for me to punish you for what you did yesterday."

On saying this she smiled sweetly, as if she were saying that she had something nice to give her.

The child looked at her in surprise.

"Punish me? Godmother has already made me sleep on the floor."

"It does not matter, that is very little for such naughtiness as running away from home. You will have to have a whipping. I am sorry, my child, because you have never had this punishment, and it will hurt you very much. Young ladies have delicate flesh; they are not like us who are accustomed as babies to intemperance and blows. Come along!"

At the same time she drew from her stays one of the formidable whalebones then in vogue.

The child drew back in alarm, but the needlewoman caught her by the arm.

"Don't think of escaping, for then you will come in for a double share."

Josefina seized her hand, weeping bitterly.

"Don't beat me, for God's sake, Concha! You know my godmother beat me yesterday. Look, look at my hands. My head also hurts me. The ground was so hard. I love you very much. I have never blamed you to godmother."

"Silence! silence!" returned the sempstress, trying to disengage herself gently from the little hands. "There is nothing to be done but obedience. The señora gives the order."

"No, por Dios! Concha, no, por Dios!" replied the little creature between her sobs. "I love you very much, and godmother too. If you don't beat me I will give you my box of sheep."

"Really?" said Concha, mollified.

"Yes; now, directly, if you like."

"And your housewife?"

"That too."

"And the little cupboard with the mirror?"

"Yes, the little cupboard too."

Concha gave signs of giving in. The child looked at her with anxious eyes.

"And you promise always to be good?"

"Yes, I promise always to be good."

"Never to run away again."

"Never."

"Very well," she said, in an affectionate, condescending tone; "then if you promise to be good, and you don't tell the señora, and you give me all that you say, then—then—go on child!"

And in one instant she pulled her clothes off and began to beat her unmercifully, laughing like a mad woman with delight.

The screams of the child reached the second floor. The wife of the Grandee was standing before the glass arranging her hair. She stopped. A singular shiver ran through her, a certain indefinable, vague emotion like a tickling sensation that one can't with certainty term pleasant or unpleasant. Anyhow it was something that modified that insufferable fever that the frenzy of rage had raised in her heart. She stood motionless until the cries had ceased. Her eyes shone, her pulse beat higher.

It is thus they say that the heart of a wild beast beats at the sight of its victim. It was the commencement of the child's martyrdom. Under the weakest pretexts she inflicted the cruellest punishments, giving evidence of an imagination so fertile that it would have delighted the executioners of the Holy office. Not only did she strike her for the most innocent offences and pinch her and bite her, but she delighted in keeping her in continual dread of dreadful punishments, and so making her suffer day and night. She made her go barefooted into the garden on

the coldest mornings to fetch her a flower, or she kept her whole hours with her head in the sun to keep the birds from picking at a currant bush. She made her sleep on the ground by the side of her bed, when she sent her several times down into the kitchen for water. She reduced her to eating food she knew she did not like, and deprived her of what she knew she liked.

As the days went by her madness and cruelty increased. At first she made a pretext of some act of carelessness on the part of the child to torment her. Afterwards she did not stop there, but she did it when it came into her mind, or when her physical state impelled her to do so. One torture of her own invention was that of pricking her hands with a needle, and she delighted in seeing them covered with indentures in a few days, when there was scarcely room to put another stab. She deputed this task to Concha, the executioner of her orders, who fulfilled it most conscientiously. She made her learn by heart long pieces of catechism much beyond her power. And if she stumbled three times, she said: "Go and ask Concha for a kiss."

This was the phase she had invented in derision for the little creature to get a stab with the needle. She was never allowed to change her underclothing, so the delicate skin of the child soon became chafed, and she could not help scratching herself. Whereupon Concha flew into a rage, accused her of having the itch, and pushed her from the room. It got worse and worse. The microscopic maid, at the instigation of her mistress, insisted on her wearing boots too small for her which made bad places on her feet and caused her dreadful pain.

One of the most terrible tortures the child suffered was when Amalia took it into her head she was not to cry. Sometimes she let her sob and moan under the blows, and she seemed to revel in the tears of the little creature, and in hearing her piteous entreaties between the sobs; but occasionally she insisted on her suffering in silence. As this was impossible she became like a ravenous wild beast.

"Be silent!"

The child could not, and a groan escaped.

"Silence!" she repeated, accompanying the command with several blows.

So Josefina tried to be silent, and made desperate efforts in the attempt, but in spite of herself the difficult respiration took the form of a groan. More blows.

"Silence, or I will kill you."

The little creature shut her mouth with all her might; she turned livid, and sometimes she fell down senseless. That tender heart was breaking from distress of mind.

At such moments Amalia experienced a diabolical sensation of mingled pleasure and pain similar to that which is felt in scratching a boil. Her boil was that violent passion—a mixture of love, licentiousness and arrogance. Not being able to vent upon her former lover the mortification which tore her heart, she wreaked her vengeance on the fruit of their love. When the child was bleeding and trembling at her feet, her looks of anguish, her gestures, and the tone of her voice seemed to her those of her lover, humiliated and supplicating, and then she experienced an awful pleasure which made her eyes shine and her nostrils dilate.

Josefina was a miniature likeness of Luis. When she had been happy, her face mobile and smiling, and her eyes shining with cheerfulness, it had not been so apparent; but now misery and pain had given to her look a profound melancholy, and to the lines of her face a certain expression of fatigue that were the two things which characterised her likeness to the Conde de Onis. When those beautiful blue eyes turned towards her in sweet resignation, when those red lips trembled in asking pardon, the Valencian felt a voluptuous feeling pervade her worn-out body, so that she was reminded of the pleasures she had experienced in the indulgence of her unlawful passion.

After all, she thought, she had not aged at all, in nothing but the fading of that face of hers and her head producing white hairs with such horrible rapidity. Her body, her breast, her arms, her neck retained the same alabaster hue, the same adorable brilliancy, the mark of a fine and beautiful race. She touched herself in search of consolation with feverish hands, and encountered the same softness and freshness. That body had not worn out. She still felt her own youth, the ardent circulation of her blood, the thirst for enjoyment, and the yearning for the rapture of love.

And yet all those delights were gone for ever; the novel of her life that had embellished her dark existence of latter years had come to the last chapter. She was an old woman! It was a settled fact. At this thought that branded itself on her brain as with a hot iron she felt overwhelmed by an animal necessity to cry, roar, or tear. It was at such times that the child underwent the cruellest punishments, and her fragile existence incurred real danger. Terror was another

of the sufferings she frequently inflicted on her. In the late hours of the night she made her get up, and sent her to the most remote rooms of the house in search of something. The child returned pale, trembling, and overwhelmed with fear. Sometimes her terror was so great that she let the candlestick fall, and returned running and screaming with fright. Then Amalia, enraged, pinched her and struck her, and pretended she must go again to the place named. Then the little creature let herself be tortured rather than expose herself afresh to the same fright. On one of these occasions Amalia smiling fiercely, said:

"Ah! So the señorita is so cowardly? Very well, I must undertake to cure you of this weakness."

She recollected the extraordinary impressionability to nocturnal terrors that Luis had confessed with shame in moments of expansion. So she prepared dreadful alarms for her. Sometimes she hid behind a door, and when she was passing gave a loud cry as she seized her by the neck. At other times she took a knife and said her death had come, and told her to turn down her nightgown so that she could cut her throat easier. But this last did not produce as much effect as she expected. Josefina unconsciously longed for death which would release her from such a martyrdom. For a more efficacious cure of fear, Concha and she invented a fearful practical joke which would have been enough to terrify a brave man, much less a child six years old. They both dressed themselves up in sheets, left the room partially lighted whilst the child slept, put on masks like skulls, and at midnight they came in uttering fearful cries like souls from another world. When the little creature awoke and saw those apparitions, she was paralysed with terror, then she clapped her hands to her eyes and her whole body was bathed in a cold perspiration. Her heart beat so violently that it could be heard at a distance, she gave vent to a few hoarse, terrified cries, and finally, putting her hands to her breast, she fell senseless to the ground, a prey to fearful convulsions.

Her timidity was incurable; and, moreover, she was henceforth subject to faintings and to nocturnal frights. She would wake up with signs of great fear, look fixedly at one point in the room as if some apparition were there, her heart beat violently, and her brow was bathed in sweat. In such moments she completely lost consciousness. Amalia called her in vain. It was only when she put her hands upon her that she uttered a cry of fear and sunk her head in terror.

Serious disputes arose between Concha and Maria the ironer on account of these tortures. Maria was naturally compassionate, and she was sorry to see the

martyrdom of the child, although she did not know all, for Amalia took care to keep it from the servants with the exception of Concha. Although Maria was not ill-tongued she could not abstain from blaming her mistress's conduct in the kitchen.

"My dear, it is worse than the Inquisition. It does not seem that we are Christians, but Jewish dogs. At one time so indulged that she was spoiled, and now suddenly the little angel is treated worse than an animal. I say the matter has gone beyond bounds! I cannot see such wickedness."

"Silence, little fool and meddler," interposed Concha, "who made you boss of the show? If the señora wishes to teach the child what is right, is she to consult you how to do it? Do you know what it is to bring up children? If she has to be punished it is right it should be done by a hardworking, honourable woman. Some day she will give her thanks for it."

"Yes, thanks, indeed! She will give them from the cemetery. A month hence she will be gone."

"Very well, and what is that to do with you? Are you her mother?"

They quarrelled three or four times like this, and the dwarfish sempstress's shamelessness and evil-mindedness always showed themselves.

At last being unable to endure such a spectacle with patience, Maria determined to go away. One day she went to the señora, and with the excuse that ironing was bad for her, she asked for her wages. Amalia was quite aware of the real reason, as she knew of her having complained of her cruelty, but she dissimulated as usual:

"Yes, girl, I understand that ironing is tiring for you. You don't enjoy much health. I also have not been well for some days. To contend all one's life with sickness, and now at the end to have this child, on whom all my hopes were founded, turn out so ungrateful and perverse! I don't know how I have patience."

Maria hesitated for an instant.

"Well, you see, señora—children will be children."

The wife of the Grandee saw that if she pursued the subject the ironer would say something disagreeable, so she cut short the remark, paid her her wages, and dismissed her affably.

This did not prevent the servant telling in confidence at a certain house where she went in service what was going on at the Quiñones. The news spread in the same confidence from one to another, and in a short time there was a considerable number of persons acquainted with the cruelties perpetrated on the child.

The Conde de Onis, to avoid the curiosity of the public, which worried him above all things, and also to be free of Amalia, to whom he had told nothing, had removed about a month ago to the Grange. He had not written to his old love, although he thought of doing so every day to tell her of his determination to marry. But so great was the terror with which the Valencian inspired him, that the pen fell from his hands every time he took it up to acquaint her with the fact. He thus let the days go by in this continual state of indecision, thinking with anxiety how enraged she would be, and like all weak natures, hoping that some unforeseen event would arrange a compromise. That way of breaking the connection without any quarrel or explanation whatsoever was quite in accordance with his character. He knew nothing of his child's tortures, nevertheless he felt such sudden anxiety when he thought of her that his nerves were quite shaken, and he walked up and down the room in visible agitation. The passionate love with which Fernanda had inspired him had made him forget Josefina a little. He occasionally thought of her with bitterness; he thought that even if he married Fernanda, he would not attain happiness if he could not see his child every day; although he quite understood that that would be impossible whilst she remained in Amalia's power. Then he thought of taking her away with him, and it gave him pleasure to imagine wild projects of getting hold of her, and flying with her and Fernanda to some remote and tranquil spot in the world.

The count was going through one of these days of vacillation when Micaela, the most excitable and violent of the Pensioner's four undines, appeared at the Quiñones' house. She came for the purpose of asking Amalia's advice about a dress that she was planning for the next ball at the Casino. In spite of her thirty years and more, she still laid siege to the masculine sex. Visitors at this hour were rare, but as the noble family of the Pensioner was so intimate with the señora, the servant did not hesitate to show her up to the boudoir where she was.

"How tiresome of me, is it not? But, dear, it is the only time that I thought I should find you alone," she said, with the gracious volubility that characterised the Mateo's daughters.

Amalia received her cordially, albeit with a certain surprise and uneasiness that

escaped Micaela. They entered on the matter in hand, and the question of dress soon completely absorbed them. Amalia took her friend towards the window. But they had not said many words, when Micaela thought she heard a feeble groan in the room. Turning her head, she saw in a corner Josefina on her knees, tied by the elbows to the dressing-table so that she could not get up without raising the heavy piece of furniture, which was far beyond her strength. Amalia hastened to give an explanation:

"This child is getting so naughty that I am obliged to tie her to keep her quiet. Yesterday she bit the sewing-maid's finger, now she has just broken a looking glass. One has not patience to bear it!"

Micaela, who was shocked at the punishment, was silent. The wife of Quiñones went on talking with assumed indifference about the dress; but in spite of its being a theme that ought to have interested her, the girl was absent-minded, and cast frequent glances at the child. Josefina let another groan escape, whereupon her godmother turned round with ill-repressed anger.

"Will you be quiet? will you be quiet?" And she looked at her for some time with extraordinary severity.

She returned to the conversation, but a slight change was noticeable in her voice. Micaela paid less and less attention. Indignation had risen to her throat, and she would have ended by making some unpleasant remark to her friend, if the child had not moaned again.

"Come, I see she is not going to leave us in peace," said the lady, making an effort to smile, "I shall have to set her free."

Then she went and untied her, taking some time to do it, for the cord was tied as many times round her little body as if she were a heavy box. But when the time came for the child to get up she could not. No doubt the muscles had become strained during the hours she had been in that painful position.

"Up, longshanks!" she said jokingly, as she helped her to rise.

Micaela watched the scene in stupefaction, whilst her eyes blazed with fury.

"You did not like the position, eh? Then, my child, if you don't want to return to it, you must be good and obedient. Is it not so, Micaela?"

But Micaela did not open her lips, feeling each moment more brow-beaten in spite of the honeyed smile on the Valencian's face.

"Very well," she continued, caressing the red face of the child, "you are forgiven now, but take care about being naughty. Go down and ask Concha for a kiss."

On hearing these words, the child grew deadly pale, remained motionless for some moments, and finally went to the door with an uncertain step. Before arriving there, Micaela, who observed her attentively, noticed that she raised her eyes full of tears, but Amalia merely pursued the conversation on toilettes. Before three minutes had elapsed low, distant cries of the child reached the boudoir. Micaela was thunderstruck, and she bent her head towards the door so as to hear better. But Amalia quickly rose from her seat and went to shut it. The cries were still audible, but the nervous girl had meanwhile to listen to Amalia's remarks. She was seized with great uneasiness, her face became flushed, and she was a prey to the burning desire of shaming the wicked woman, and overwhelming her with such opprobriums as Jew, scoundrel, infamous one. She

suddenly became aware of all that went on in that house. First the jealousy, then the news of the marriage of Luis falling like a bombshell, then the miserable revenge wreaked on the child for the forsaking of the father. She well knew the spiteful nature of the Valencian. But what good would it do to insult her at that moment? It would only make a great scene, and she would be sent from the house. In spite of her violent temper, Micaela had a kind heart. What she was most intent upon, was doing something to help the unhappy little creature. And she had sufficient self-control to dissimulate a little, and to consider that the best course was to tell everything immediately to the count, who must be ignorant of such cruel revenge. She finished the interview as soon as possible, and took her leave without being able entirely to hide her distress. Once in the street, she felt the necessity of unburdening her heart. She thought of Maria Josefa who lived in the neighbourhood, and who professed such tender affection for the foundling.

She entered her house agitated and trembling, and before uttering a single word, she fell on the sofa and fanned herself with the end of her mantilla.

"Uf! I am suffocated. I don't know what has come to me. She is an infamous creature—a wicked woman who ought to burn in hell! I have always said so, only my fools of sisters would not believe me. This choking is very tiresome.... She has a heart of stone!"

"But what is it?" asked the wise old maid with terror, and dying of curiosity.

Then the nervous daughter of the Pensioner, stuttering with rage, told her how she had found Josefina, the pallor of the child at the curious suggestion of the godmother, and then the cries she had heard as if she were being tormented. Maria Josefa immediately united her imprecations with those of the girl. Then they went over all the instances of cruelty that they knew of the wife of the Grandee, and they made up their minds to acquaint the count with what had happened after ascertaining a few more details. For this purpose they had that same afternoon a talk with Maria, the laundry-maid, who had left the Quiñones house some days ago. At first she was cautious for fear of the consequences, but she concluded by letting her tongue loose and recounting the thousand iniquities perpetrated on the foundling by the Señora de Quiñones. They were horrorstruck. They thought of telling the judge; but besides making an enemy of the fiery Valencian (which be it said to their credit they did not much mind for such a cause) they knew that it would be a fruitless effort. The Quiñones were the most important people of the place. Don Pedro being the head of the Government Party in the province, all the authorities were quite under his

influence. Everything would be covered up and remain as it was before. The best thing was to appeal to the count; but he was at the Grange just then. Besides, although everybody, or nearly everybody, knew the secret of the child's birth, it was impossible to take it as a matter of course. After some debates they decided to write him the following letter, signed by Maria Josefa:

"Señor Conde de Onis,—My esteemed friend, I beg, with due reserve, to tell you that the child that was adopted by our friends the Quiñones, in whom we are all so much interested, is an object of cruel tortures in that house; and I believe that it is our duty to intervene to stop it. You will tell me what ought to be done, which I as a woman would not think of. If you would like to hear particulars of the martyrdom of the little creature you can refer to Maria, who left service in Don Pedro's house some days ago.

Your affectionate friend,
MARIA JOSEFA HEVIA."

Luis crumpled up the letter in his clenched hands, and all the blood rushed to his face. Without thinking of what he was doing he left the house, and almost unwittingly took the road to Lancia, where he arrived in a few minutes. The vague and terrible presentiment that had oppressed him was finally realised—Amalia was revenging herself cruelly. The underlying drift of the letter was evidently an appeal to him, as the father of Josefina, and the cause of her misery. Not knowing what course to take, he went to think it over at his house, where he only had an old woman in charge. From her he ascertained the whereabouts of Maria, and finally sent her a message to come and see him. The laundry-maid was quite aware of the object of the summons. She went to the town as quickly as possible, and after making him promise not to make use of her name, she gave him a circumstantial account of what the innocent child was exposed to. He listened, pale and horrorstruck, unable to repress the violent, quick beating of his heart. When she came to certain hateful and terrible details, the count began to pace up and down the room like a caged wild beast, as he tore his hair, struck his brow, and uttered cries of rage. Once more alone, a thousand wild ideas passed through his mind. He thought of going to the Quiñones' house and taking away the child by force; he wanted to wring the neck of the vile woman; he wanted to tell Don Pedro the whole story; he wanted to inform the judge, and have the infamous creature imprisoned.

Fortunately, these fits of rage were as short as they were violent, and then ensued prostration and tears. He went to the house of his *fiancée* and told her with sobs what had happened, thus making his confession for the first time. The good Fernanda mingled her tears with his, distressed at the fate of the unhappy little creature, and at the misery of her lover. They spent some time talking over the terrible events, and seeking means of thwarting that direful revenge. Fernanda at last persuaded him to try gentle means. To think of compassing anything by force was absurd, for the count, not having yet acknowledged his sin, he had no legal right over the child. To provoke a scandal was useless. No servant would dare witness against his mistress, and things would be worse than they were before. Finally, the count decided to write a letter to his old love.

"I have just heard that our Josefina, our adored Josefina, is undergoing incredible tortures at your hands. I believe it is a vile calumny. I know your character is quick and fiery, but it is noble, and I cannot attribute such cowardice to you. I only write to you to ascertain that the angelic little creature continues to be the delight of your life. If it should not be so, tell me, and we will find some means of transferring her to my care. I suppose you are aware of the step I am about to take. I have nothing to say to you on the subject. The step was inevitable, sooner or later. At all events, you can be sure that my remorse is softened by the sweet recollection of the years that I have loved you. Farewell! Write me some kind word."

CHAPTER XIV

THE CAPITULATION

JOSEFINA was wasting away. Her cheeks were as pale as wax; there was constantly a look of terror in her sweet, gentle eyes, around which suffering had traced a purple circle. She spoke little, and never laughed. When she was left in peace she sat in some corner, and remained motionless looking at one spot, or she went to the window and wrote on the panes of the glass with her finger.

Sometimes, in spite of such misery, the childish nature asserted itself. If the cat approached her slowly with his tail in the air, his back arched, soliciting a caress with a weak purr, she would throw herself upon the ground, call him, drag him to

her, stroke his fur, scratch his head, tickle the back of his neck, and murmur words of affection in his ear, a course of spoiling that the animal received with transports of delight.

"I love you, I love you. You are my good cat. Are you not good? You must not scratch me as you did. Who do you like best in the house? Say, treasure. Who gave you a sardine yesterday? Who puts you a saucer of milk every day? And if I could always give you fish too, I would, because I know it is what you like best. Is it not, my treasure? But you must not steal or you know you will be beaten. Don't get on Manin's bed and be naughty or you will be killed. I heard so the other day in the kitchen. And catch a lot of mice, so that godmother will like you and will not turn you out."

The cat, delighted, purred from the depths of his throat with pleasure, and rubbed himself more and more vehemently against her. The child held him up to her mouth, put her arms around him, pressed him to her heart, kissed him, and sometimes, forgetting her sufferings, she shed tears of tenderness. But any noise in the next room made her jump up with terror in her eyes, she pushed the cat away from her and stood motionless, waiting for what was to come, and it was almost always some cruel punishment.

"You naughty girl! So you dirty your clothes like that crawling about on the floor! Wait a bit! wait a bit!"

Continual shocks had so upset her constitution that her health was quite out of order. But although it was not her fault she was treated as if it were, and once Concha's fury was so great that she seized her by the ears and made her lick the ground.

The most terrible hour for the little creature was lesson time. Amalia gave her early in the morning long pieces of sacred history and grammar to learn. Josefina retired to a corner and made desperate efforts to commit them to memory. A little before the dinner hour Concha, who was deputed for the task, took a chair, drew out the famous whalebone, and with that in one hand, and the book in the other, she commenced her pedagogic functions. Every time the child hesitated or forgot a word, it cost her a blow from the whalebone on her face, hand, or neck; and as her memory was not very strong the pounding was incessant.

It was still worse when her godmother taught her. Concha was coldly cruel, but Amalia became irritable directly; the crying of the child worried her nerves, she flew into a rage like a hungry panther, and finished by striking her frantically

until she fell trembling and bleeding at her feet.

Her hatred to the little creature seemed increased if possible after the letter from the count. Her pride, wounded to the quick by the cold, self-sufficient, insulting diplomacy conveyed to her mind by the words of her old love, she vented her rage upon the daughter. Besides, the idea of Luis being distressed at hearing of the tortures was an additional inducement to continue them unsparingly. Let her suffer! let him suffer! the vile, perfidious creature who had taken her youth, and then when she was old cast her from him like an old rag to be swept away.

On one of these days of intense raging anger the life of Josefina was in imminent danger. At the usual hour she had been summoned to the dining-room for her lessons. Concha took a seat and drew with unfeigned delight the fatal whalebone from her bosom, for the administration of blows seemed a physical pleasure that day. Trembling as usual the child came and gave her the books, and then with stammering tongue began saying a chapter of sacred history, when Manin's entrance interrupted them. He came in with his eternal green jacket, short breeches and rough manners, making the floor tremble under his hobnailed boots. It was this costume, which even in the country was out of date, that chiefly gave rise to the notoriety and fame he had been supposed to have as a formidable bear-hunter. He entered with his head down as usual; he peered in at the door, saying:

"Concha, haven't you anything to eat here?"

"Is your stomach so empty, Manin?" returned the needlewoman laughing.

The peasant opened his mouth wide to join in the laugh.

"Yes, God have mercy! I can't wait a minute more. You all seem barefooted Brothers in this house; you have no thought of food till the time comes."

"Well, come along you great greedy creature," said Concha putting the book and whalebone on the chair, and going in a petulant way to the dresser.

They quite understood each other these two. The needlewoman was hard, cruel, and stubborn, but the majordomo knew how to get at the few grains of good humour she had. He teased her unmercifully, he pinched her when she passed by him, and said a thousand coarse, shameless things to her which she knew how to take in the opposite sense. And the dwarfish maid, who was neither

kind nor pretty, and whose cruel nature had choked every germ of pleasantness and transformed her into a priestess of misery, a fatal, pitiless Eumenide, was pleasant and obliging to that brute. She admired his bearish manners, his roughness, his greediness, and his insolent, careless way of treating everybody, including the pompous Señor de Quiñones. Manin was a solemn-faced rogue with his shameful rudeness, his deportment of a brave hunter of wild beasts. Sly-faced rogue! for with all his shameless rudeness, his posing as a hunter of wild beasts, and his slovenly dress, he had known how to take life easily in this world without spoiling his hands, nor hurting his back by hard work in his village. The needlewoman fetched a plate of cold meat and put it on the oilcloth of the table without any apology for a serviette; then she cut half a loaf and left him with the indispensable bottle of white wine and a glass by the side of the meat. Concha then re-seated herself, and the child approaching repeated the words that she had just said. In a few moments, zas! a blow with the whalebone and a cry of pain. Immediately afterwards another blow and another cry, and so it went on. The needlewoman was delighted that she stumbled more than usual. Manin devoured his food in silence, only occasionally turning his head with marked indifference towards the sad scene. Soon he began murmuring at every blow like a machine:

"Give it! Go it! That was good! There's a blow!" and other similar exclamations.

The sacred history lesson came to an end, and there was a respite before taking the grammar, when the maid began joking cheerfully with the majordomo. She was in an angelic humour.

"Did you ever see such meat?"

"Fine, truly fine."

"The worst of it is it will spoil your appetite for dinner."

Whereupon the room then vibrated with the fellow's laughter.

"This? Yes! It would be something for me to lose my appetite. You will have to put a hot iron in the water, like you do for the señora."

"I would put it on your body, you great pig."

"Look here, Concha, none of your teasing; because although you are only a little bit of a thing, and you have roguish eyes and a mouth like a cherry, you shall have such a blow one of these days, without your knowing whence it

comes, that all that little row of pearls I see now shall be knocked down your throat."

"Silence! silence, you old clod-hopper; you are a fine one for blows. You couldn't give them if you tried in such a tight costume. You are indeed a fright."

"You are not saying this from your heart, but because you think it fine."

"I know very well that there is a good deal behind all that. (And here he gave her a few rough digs in the ribs). If I could catch you in a maize field!"

"It would only be as if you caught me in the market-place. No; you are nothing but jaw and tongue."

"And hands too to touch what is nice," returned the barbarian, taking hold of the needlewoman's chin with his hand.

"Leave go! leave go, you pig!" And she gave him a blow on the fingers with the whalebone. Then the rude fellow caught hold of her again, and she defended herself again in the same way. He then tried to get hold of her waist, whereupon the maid ran across the room pretending to be angry.

"Don't touch me, Manin, or I will call the señora."

But Manin did not care; he ran after her with grunts and laughter, catching hold of her here and seizing her there, whilst his cheeks, which were as hard and coarse as an elephant's hide, came in for blows from the servant, without showing that he felt them. The furniture was knocked about, the ground shook, the plates rang on the dresser, and still he did not give in, but he grew more and more false and fawning. The rogue knew that, irascible and fiendish as the little woman was, she was open to flattery like all human beings, and that it was for the interest of his stomach to keep her in a good humour. Finally, roaring like a bull, he caught her by the waist and held her up in the air. He held her up without any effort, as if she were a three-year old child.

"Now, little spitfire, what do you say now? Where is your courage? Where are your hands? Come, witch, and ask pardon, or I will let you fall like a frog," roared the great bear, moving her to and fro in the air.

"Let me go, Manin! Let me go, ass! There will be a row! Look here, I shall scream!"

At last he put her down gently, and the maid, panting, dishevelled and frowning, so as to look more angry, said in an excited voice:

"You have no shame, Manin. If we were not in this house as we are I would smash this lamp on your face for your rudeness and insolence. But here are the servants listening to all this, and what will they say? Don't say another word, for I won't answer you."

"So you can scream now, vain little thing, after you have been in the seventh heaven," muttered Manin, in a drawling tone, looking at her angrily and pushing up his beard.

"If you don't get out of my sight, you ruffian!" exclaimed the little servant, as she looked at him with laughter in her eyes, in spite of herself.

Then Manin re-seated himself for the consumption of the rest of the bread, and to drink another glass of white wine. Josefina meanwhile sobbed in a corner, putting her wounded hands to her mouth and patting her cheeks, contused with the whalebone blows. Manin then deigned to cast a look at her.

"Don't cry, little fool, the pain of the blows will go by, and the sense will remain in your head for ever," he said, cutting a piece of bread with his clasp-knife and putting it into his mouth. "If you would like to know my opinion, the more they beat you, the more pleased you ought to be. What would you be if Concha was not kind enough to beat you well? A little ignoramus, not worth a measure of acorns, a little beast, God save the comparison. And now what will you be? As fine a woman as you can see." (He paused whilst he cut another piece of bread and chewed it so that it caused a large lump in his right cheek). "Come, if I had had masters like you have to bruise my skin with blows, I should not be an ass now; they would not call me Manin, but Don Manuel, and instead of being a miserable underling I should be going about giving myself airs, walking down Altavilla with my hands behind me like the señores, and reading the papers in the casinos." (Another pause, and another cutting of a hunch of bread). "It is nothing but just, if you will see it so. How can you learn such difficult things without a few whippings? Whoever learned *daqué* without being beaten? Nobody. Then if you get learning you should thank God for having put a mistress over you like an aureole. For the end will please you; you will have soft hands and delicate feet, is it not so?"

Concha, having now resumed her severe manner, seated herself and made an imperious gesture to the child to approach. It was the turn for grammar and it

went worse than the history, either from want of memory or because she was upset by fear. Then the whipping recommenced; a whalebone blow now and then, then oftener and oftener. Manin, true to his pedagogical opinions, applauded with his mouth full, and cut his bread into wonderful geometrical shapes before conducting them with all solemnity to his mouth. The faults were many, the blows were the same. But at the end of the lesson Concha thought that besides the punishment at every fault there was a certain reparation due for general naughtiness, and so she had better conclude by a beating that would include everything. Therefore she jumped up from her chair, and brandishing the formidable whalebone, exclaimed:

"Now to make you study better and to open your mind! Now!"

The blows were so hard and so many that, trying to escape the torture, the little creature seized hold of the skirts of her torturer with her clenched hands. Without knowing how, perhaps through having carelessly caught hold of them, the string which held them broke and they fell off, leaving the needlewoman only in her undergarment. She gave a cry of shame and quickly pulled up the skirts. Then, without waiting to tie them on again, she cast a glance of the deepest anger at the child and left the room holding her things on with her hands.

"You have done it finely now—finely, finely, finely!" said Manin, dexterously cutting the mouthful he was about to raise to his lips.

The little creature paralysed with terror did not cry even; her wounds ceased to hurt her. At the end of a few minutes Concha reappeared accompanied by the señora, who came in with a sarcastic smile.

"It seems that the señorita takes pleasure now in unrobing girls in public. You like that, señorita, do you not? Manin must have had a nice view of Concha. Eh, Manin?"

She took a few steps forward. The child receded in dismay.

"Don't be afraid, señorita. I have not come to beat you. Who gives heed to whippings? I have only come to invite you to take a turn in the cellar—the cellar with the rats—you know it. There you can amuse yourself in undressing any rat of the many that will pay their respects to you. Come along. Give me your hand so that I can take you with all ceremony."

The child ran behind a chair, from whence, being pursued by Amalia and

Concha, she got under the table, and finally took refuge behind the majordomo.

"Manin! Manin! For God's sake hide me!"

But he took her by the arm and handed her over to the señora. Then they each took a hand, and in spite of her piercing cries they dragged her off.

"To the cellar, no! to the cellar, no! Godmother, pardon. Kill me sooner. See what a terror I have. No, not to the cellar for the rats to eat me!"

The servants came out in the passage and assisted at the scene in solemn silence. The cries of the child were soon lost in descending the dark winding staircase leading to the underground cellar.

Amalia opened the door of the horrible place and pushed her daughter inside. She banged the door to, and the child running to get out, caught her hand in it. A fearful cry of pain was heard. The Valencian reopened the door, and gave such a rough push to the child that she was thrown on the ground, and then she turned the key.

The cellar was a dark, damp prison, only lightened by a few stray rays of light from an ox-eye above. It had once been used as a wine-cellar, now there were only empty bottles there. Scarcely was the child alone, when she got up, looked round mad with fright, tried to cry, but she was unable to utter, and finally, extending her hands in an excess of fearful trembling, she fell senseless to the ground. At the end of half an hour the stable-boy, who had witnessed the incarceration, came to the door being moved by compassion, and looked through the keyhole. There was nothing to be seen. He called very gently:

"Josefina."

The child did not reply. He called louder. The same silence. Alarmed, he called and knocked at the door with all his might without obtaining any reply. Then, at the risk of losing his place, he went quickly upstairs to say what had happened. Amalia sent Concha with the key to see what had occurred. Paula and she together carried the little creature upstairs senseless, cold, and with all the signs of death upon her face. Afraid of the complications that might arise, the wife of the Grandee put her quickly to bed, where she soon came to herself, but a serious fever immediately set in. The doctor was sent for. He found her very ill. To account for the injury of her hand and the contusions about her, Amalia, clever in lying, invented a story that the doctor believed, or pretended to believe. She

hovered for some days between life and death. Amalia followed the course of the illness with anxious eyes. She was not unhappy at the thought of losing the being upon whom she had vented the bitter disappointment of her heart, but she was distressed at the idea of losing her revenge at one blow. When Josefina had been in bed three days, she heard that Fernanda had left for Madrid the previous evening in the postchaise, and that Luis would only be four or five days before joining her. This was a severe shock; a burning wave of bile inundated her heart, and that night she too had fever. So they were escaping! There would be no possible revenge for the traitor. He would go to Madrid; he would marry; he would perhaps have news there of his daughter's death, but the caresses of his adored bride would soon put it out of his mind. Of that long, ardent love affair there would be nothing left but a man parading his bliss through Europe, and a poor old sad woman in Lancia, a laughing-stock for the Lancian circles. Her flaccid flesh trembled. The revengeful instincts of her race cried out in futile rage. No, no, it could not be! She would sooner drag his dead daughter to his feet; she would sooner kill him with a stab in the heart!

A singular and terrible idea occurred to her—to tell her husband everything. She ignored what she would incur herself, but it would provoke an immediate scandal. Don Pedro was violent, and he enjoyed great power and prestige. Who could say the harm that such a bomb would cause? Certainly he was paralysed, and he could not take personal revenge; but would not that proud, punctilious man find means of repaying the injury that had been done him? She would come to grief herself, but she would willingly fall if the traitor paid for his treachery. After a long struggle with these thoughts she did not dare run the risk of making the confession by word of mouth, nor writing under her own name, but, disguising the handwriting, she wrote an anonymous letter:

"The child that you adopted six years ago is the daughter of your wife and a gentleman who visits your house, whom you call your friend. I do not tell you the name. Look for him, and you will soon come across the traitor.

(Signed) A FAITHFUL FRIEND."

She posted the epistle and anxiously waited to see the effect.

Don Pedro received it in her presence and read it, whilst her face violently contracted and assumed a cadaverous pallor.

"Who writes to you?" she asked in a natural way.

The Grandee replied immediately, and folding and retaining the letter, he said, with some effort to control his voice that trembled:

"Nobody. One of the persons I recommended, complains that he has been kept waiting. This governor! He has no memory, no regularity at all!"

Anxiously and restlessly awaiting the course of events, she retired to her boudoir. Jacoba came in the evening with an air of mystery and gave her a letter from the count.

"What does this man want with me?" she asked in a surprised, vexed tone.

"I don't know, señorita. He wrote the letter in my house, and is there waiting for the answer."

The count's letter ran thus:

"Amalia, I know that our child is in danger of death. By all that you love best in the world, by the salvation of your soul, grant me an interview. I must speak to you. If this evening it cannot be, come to-morrow to Jacoba's house.

Yours, LUIS."

"Yours! yours!" she murmured with a bitter smile. "You have been mine, but you have changed your owner, and it will cost you dear."

"Shall I take the answer, señorita?"

She stood pensive for a few minutes, walked up and down the room completely absorbed in thought, went to the window and looked through the panes. Finally, half turning round, she said very abruptly:

"Very well; I will go to-morrow at the hour of Mass."

"He asked after the child with the greatest interest."

"Say that she is better."

The intermediary retired, and Amalia remained for a long time looking at the street through the window-panes without seeing it. From seven o'clock in the

morning of the following day, Luis was waiting for her in Jacoba's little house. It only consisted of a kitchen on the ground-floor and a little bedroom upstairs, and both so low that the count's head, with his hat on, touched the ceiling. In this little room he was walking up and down with impatient steps, with his hands in his pockets looking cautiously every minute through the blinds of the only window there was. The lady did not arrive until nine o'clock. He saw her coming with her mantilla veiling her eyes, her missal in her hand, and her rosary hanging on her wrist, with a firm, self-assured step, as if she were coming to give orders to her old protégée. When he heard her voice in the kitchen his heart beat quickly, he began to tremble, and in his agitation he forgot all that he was going to say.

"How are you, count?" she said, with perfect naturalness as she came in and gave him her hand.

"Very well—and thou?"

She raised her head as if she were surprised to hear him *tutoyer* her, and replied, as she looked at him fixedly:

"Perfectly."

"And the child?"

"Somewhat better."

The man's face brightened at hearing this news. A ray of happiness shone in his eyes, and taking the hand of his former lover, he led her to the poor, straw-stuffed sofa, and said:

"Let us sit down, Amalia. Although it may be a liberty on my part, I beg of you to let me go on *tutoyant* you when we are alone. I do not forget, I never can forget, how many happy hours I owe you, and how much happiness you brought into my sad, monotonous life. You revealed to me all that was sweetest and best in my heart without my hardly suspecting it. All the first impulses of my soul were for you. Until now, you alone had penetrated it and sounded, and knew its melancholy, weakness, and tenderness. If I separate from you, it is only in obedience to a law of nature which impels us all to found a family. I have nobody in the world but my mother, who may soon leave me alone. You ought not to mind my wishing to make a home, and have an heir to my name and estates. Besides, my conscience rebukes me."

The count, delighted at the improvement of the child, was more expansive and loquacious than usual, being unable to hide his happiness, and thinking everything was arranged according to his wishes. Josefina was happy with her mother, he happy with Fernanda, and Amalia, being resigned, would grant him a sweet affection that would get purer every day.

She looked at him now with a certain quizzical curiosity.

When he had finished, she said, with a sarcastic smile:

"From the night you saw Fernanda in her splendid *recherché* dress, this feeling of conscience must have been insupportable."

The count smiled too, somewhat shamefacedly.

"Don't believe it, Amalia. I have always felt remorse. Certainly, on getting old, one sees things more clearly. My beard is white in many places, as you can see. That which is excusable in a youth as wildness, as an irrepressible ebullition of vitality, becomes crime in an older person. Love at my age ought not to clip the wings of reason, and if it does, it merits the term of madness. My determination may be hard for both of us. It is very trying to me; it costs me a good deal to break loose from a *liaison* that force of time has almost converted into a habit. Besides, unfortunately, there exists a bond between us which is impossible to break completely. Destiny has brought forth from the mire of our sin a beautiful blossom, a sweet white lily. Let us remove the stain from her brow, although she is the offspring of an unlawful passion, do not let us corrupt her with our blameworthy conduct. Let us make ourselves worthy of her by living like Christians."

"All this is very well, only I am sorry that this course of Christian doctrine has come so late, and so simultaneous with the arrival of your old *fiancée* to the place, because it seems as if you had completely forgotten your catechism, until she came to refresh your memory. But, after all, it is not for me to interfere as it does not concern me. The gist of it all is that you are going to marry. You do well. Man is badly off alone, and when he finds a worthy companion like you have done, he ought not to lose the opportunity. Fernanda is a very good girl; I am sure that she will make you happy; you will have many sons, and after a long and happy life you will go to heaven."

This state of resignation surprised Luis and he could not help feeling somewhat taken aback.

"And you, too, will be happy?" he timidly asked.

"I? what does it signify if I am happy or unhappy?" she said, shrugging her shoulders disdainfully.

"Don't say that, Amalia! Happiness is not that madness to which we have given ourselves up these seven years. There is a taste of bitterness in that, which I have noticed for some time and which you will soon perceive. A pure, worthy life, a quiet conscience, and the esteem of honourable persons will give you more pleasure than criminal passion. Besides, you have what I have not; you have an angel with you, a fragrant, beautiful lily that will sweeten your existence."

"Ah, yes, Josefina! Really, so she is to be the one who is to afford me my only pleasant times in the future!"

This was said with such a strange inflexion of voice, so sharp and so strident that Luis shivered.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean what I say, that it is fortunate I have Josefina to cheer me."

"But you say it in such a strange way."

The Valencian then gave a curious forced laugh of sinister sound that came from the back of her throat.

Luis looked at her fixedly, getting more and more uneasy.

"But what a fool you are, Luis! How more than foolish! Egotism has so blinded your eyes that you cannot see what is before you. If you were twenty, this innocence might perhaps inspire me with pity, but at your age it only fills me with scorn and derision. To think that three or four insolent remarks on morality and conscience will suffice to make me contentedly accept the humiliation you impose upon me; to suppose that I, whom if you do not know, you ought to know, am going to consent to be cast away like an old rag, that I am to crawl like an enamoured slave at the feet of Fernanda, to serve her as a footstool when she mounts to her couch, is the height of stupidity and nonsense. Why don't you ask me to be bridesmaid at once?"

The count looked at her with dilated eyes full of anxiety and fear.

"So what I have heard of the tortures you have inflicted on our daughter is

true?"

"Quite true! And you do not yet know all. Look here, I am going to tell you all, so that you may not say you are deceived."

Then, in a few incisive words, with a cruel satisfaction revealed in her voice, she put before him the fearful picture of the pain and misery suffered by the unhappy little creature during the last few months. The account was infinitely more shocking than the one Maria, the ironer, had given. The count, pale and overwhelmed, without making the slightest movement, looked the picture of despair. He soon covered his face with his hands, and so listened until the end.

"Oh, how infamous! oh, how infamous!" he groaned to himself.

"Yes, very infamous, but I hope to be more so. Have you heard all these infamies? Then they are nothing compared to what I shall do."

"You shall not do it, you wicked woman!" exclaimed Luis. "I would sooner strangle you with my own hands."

The Valencian rushed to the door.

"If you come a step nearer, I'll shriek!"

"Oh, infamous, infamous person!" exclaimed the count, again in a deep voice, "and God allows such monsters upon the earth!"

He took a few steps back and cast himself again upon the sofa. He rested his elbows on his knees, and put his head between his hands. After some time he raised it saying:

"Well, what do you exact from me?"

Amalia took a step towards him.

"That which you ought to expect, if you have any common sense left. I don't ask for our connection to continue, because at the pass we have come to it is not possible; it would be like giving the lie to love, and I have too much pride for that. But I do not want you or this woman to make me a laughing-stock; I am not going to be made a subject of derision to those who know of our connection: and those are all who visit at the house. I demand as the condition of the child being as she was, that you immediately break with Fernanda and think no more of her."

"But, Amalia," he exclaimed, in accents of misery, "you know quite well it is impossible; my wedding is fixed; all Lancia knows it. Fernanda is waiting for me in Madrid; only a few days are wanting——"

"And if only a minute were wanting, this wedding shall not take place. If you marry Fernanda the child shall pay for the offence in the way you know."

"Oh, I will prevent it. I will tell the authorities. I will ask for the care of the child."

"This is only talking for talking sake, Luis," replied Amalia, calm and smiling. "The authorities of Lancia are under the Quiñones. Nobody would dare say a word against me."

"If I refer the whole matter to Don Pedro."

"He will not believe you, and if he did believe you, instead of impeding my revenge which is also his, he would help me."

A long silence then ensued. The count was plunged in thought with his hand pressed against his brow. Suddenly he rose hastily, and walked up and down the room in an agitated way.

"It cannot be! it cannot be!"

The Valencian followed him with her eyes. At last she said, as she walked to the door:

"Good-bye."

The count retained her with a gesture. "Stop."

Amalia stopped motionless, with her hand on the latch of the door as her piercing glance rested upon him.

The count went on walking for some time without paying any attention to her.

"Very well," he said, in a hoarse voice, stopping short, "the marriage shall not take place; you will tell me what I am to do."

His altered face evinced the calmness of despair.

"You will have to write a letter to Fernanda to bade her farewell."

"I will write it."

"Now, at once."

"Now, at once."

Amalia went to the stairs and asked Jacoba for a writing-case. As there was no table there, she put it on the chest of drawers. The count approached and began to write standing. Amalia approached too.

"This is what I want you to write to her."

It was the rough draft of the letter. The count cast his eye over it.

"My good friend Fernanda," it ran, "I wanted you to be away so as to tell you in writing what would be beyond my powers to say to you. I cannot be yours. It is not necessary to give you the reasons because you will guess them. Would that I loved you enough to ignore everything and fly with you! Unfortunately, or fortunately, there are things that weigh on my heart more than love. Pardon me for having deceived you and try to be happy as it is the wish of your best friend.

"LUIS."

He traced the lines of this letter with a trembling hand, and before finishing it, tears rose to his eyes.

CHAPTER XV

JOSEFINA SLEEPS

THE noble Grandee easily guessed the author of his disgrace. As soon as he read the anonymous letter and recovered his self-command, his suspicions fell upon the Conde de Onis. In this he was only influenced by the likeness that he now clearly saw between him and the foundling. For either his excessive pride had blinded his eyes, or else because Amalia had known how to keep him deceived,

he had never noticed anything between them beyond a cool, conventional friendship at which nobody could have taken umbrage. The same pride arrested the course of his bitter thoughts by making the most of this consideration. Why give any importance to what an anonymous letter said? Why not suppose it was a vile calumny by which some enemy tried to envenom his existence? But the dart had gone so deep into his heart that he could not pull it out. All the considerations invented by his inclination could not destroy the perfect conviction that, without his knowing how, had taken shape in his brain. Sundry details, unnoticed at the time, soon stood out and guided him like lighted torches. The first of all was naturally the illness of his wife simultaneous with the appearance of the child. He recalled her strange aversion to having a doctor to see her; then the indulgence and extreme attention lavished on the child. He also recollected the visits that at one time his wife made to the Grange on the pretext of getting plants. There was no circumstance connected with the count's friendship and the finding of the child that he did not turn over and weigh thoughtfully. He became silent and meditative. The hard look of his piercing eyes was always fixed upon Amalia directly she came into the room. Sometimes he had the child fetched on some pretext or another, and looked at her for a long time trying to decipher in the lines of her face the enigma of her existence.

Amalia saw all this, and read the thoughts of her husband like an open book.

"When is Luis to be married?" asked the Grandee one day in an assumed, careless tone.

"They say it will be some time yet. He has to arrange I don't know how many matters before going to Madrid," she replied, with the greatest calmness.

"Is he still at the Grange?"

"Yes, always; he only comes in sometimes of an evening, according to what he told me one day when I met him in Barrosa's shop."

The very next evening the count appeared at the party.

"What? You here? Have you left the Grange?" Don Pedro asked, with a penetrating glance.

"Definitely, no; I have the carriage below. I am going back to sleep."

"You must be dull there, eh?" asked Don Cristobal Mateo.

"In the day, no; I am very busy with agricultural occupations, with the mill, cattle, &c. But the evenings are very long."

Luis only came for the sake of seeing his daughter. Amalia had not allowed it until the child had partially recovered; then she was dressed as before, and she resumed her old rights. But not the affection. The charm was gone, because Luis hated her, especially through having had to submit through coercion. With the ardent passion full of love and mystery there had also mingled an attachment to the little creature. But the tortures that her mad anger inflicted on the little girl had made a gulf between them. The poor child, clad in rich clothes, wandered alone about the palace of the Quiñones without inspiring any one with tenderness. Amalia avoided her. The servants, ashamed of their unkind treatment, and sulky at the sudden change which put the foundling again above them, did not speak to her. The long martyrdom she had undergone and the terrible illness with which it terminated had made great ravages in her appearance. Her pale cheek was as transparent as mother-of-pearl; there was still a dark black circle from agitation and pain round her eyes. The count's heart contracted every time he saw her, and it cost him some effort to restrain his tears.

Amalia did not tell her lover of the imprudent anonymous letter she had sent to Quiñones. Fearing from her husband's excitability some serious consequence would ensue, she determined to get him off the scent, as it was not possible to restore his tranquillity. The course that seemed to her best to take was to remove his suspicions from Luis and put them on Jaime Moro. He was the only one who, by his position, age, and appearance could seem like a probable lover. She began by treating him before Don Pedro with particular partiality, picking him out from the other guests in a very conspicuous manner. She cast smiling, significant glances at him; she took pleasure in standing behind his chair when he was playing at *tresillo* and joking with him; she called him every minute to her on some pretext or other, and then kept him at her side with long whispering conversations in which her cheek came in close proximity with his. It was not so easy as it seemed to make a conquest of Moro, although it was only a make-believe. He was not at all churlish; on the contrary, he had a just reputation of being gentlemanly and courteous with ladies; but when ladies stand in the way of billiards or *tresillo* there is nobody six miles round so cross and uncivil. Amalia was a great bore to him when the *tresillo* players were waiting for him. Then his answers to her questions did not come readily; he smiled mechanically and gave frequent longing glances at the table where his companions were enjoying the delights of some trick with a good suit.

"Moro, sit here, we will have a chat together."

Moro trembled as if the world were coming to an end. He took a seat by the side of the lady with a face that was very long, not at all consistent with the passion that was supposed to consume his breast. The Grandee had paid little heed to these marks of favour and insinuating smiles of his wife. He looked at them with vacant eyes without any suspicion arising in his mind, which was entirely turned in the right direction. Nevertheless, Amalia was so persistent and seemed so engrossed, that the noble gentleman began to pay heed to those signs and to attribute some significance to them. The Valencian felt the pleasure of triumph. Her machinations were about to be realised. And to give an important, decisive stroke to her plot, she suddenly thought of a dangerous trick. She was seated in a corner with Jaime Moro at her side, quite in sight of Don Pedro. Moro was *distract* as usual, and the wife of Quiñones had to make prodigious efforts to sustain the conversation; she smiled, she coquetted, she involved him in a mesh of honeyed phrases, which she greatly intensified with her smile so as to attract Don Pedro's attention.

"What is it? Are you looking at my bracelet?"

Moro had not noticed it.

"It is very pretty," he quickly returned politely.

"It belonged to my mother. It is better than it looks. This portrait, which is of my grandmother, is made in mosaic. Look!"

Whereupon she raised her hand, and Moro looked at it with assumed admiration.

"Look well at it."

And she raised it a little more so as to bring it near his face. Then seeing out of the corner of her eye that Don Pedro was looking at her, she lifted it a little more so as to brush the lips of the young man; then she instantly withdrew it with a quick gesture. Moro was quite taken aback. He involuntarily looked at Don Pedro, and seeing that his glance was fixed on him with a cold piercing look, he coloured up to the eyes; and Amalia rose and left the room as if to hide her confusion.

The proud Grandee was fully overwhelmed by the secret that he thought he had discovered. His ideas underwent a sudden shock. Agitated by a thousand

conflicting suspicions, dominated by furious anger, he moved the cards in his trembling hands without thinking of them, for his mind was full of awful revenge against his wife and against him. Against whom? Who was the traitor? Doubt inflamed his rage. What he had seen was very conclusive. Nevertheless, he could not get the Conde de Onis out of his mind. The testimony of his eyes was arrayed against his instinct, a voice within that told him continually the name of his enemy.

The count himself then appeared at the party. He greeted Amalia coldly, and was going straight to the library, when Manuel Antonio caught hold of him by the tail of his coat.

"Where are you off to, Luis? Come here, boy; don't go and bury yourself in the game directly. Look here, Maria Josefa and Jovita have been disputing every evening about the date of your marriage. But I said to them: 'Don't dispute any more. If Luis comes to-day he is so kind that he will certainly tell you himself.'"

"Then you told them wrong," replied the count, approaching the group.

"Have you turned so cross then?"

"It is not crossness, it is ignorance. These ladies know very well that things don't happen as, and when, we wish. If I were to name a date now, and it turned out differently they would think that I had been making fun of them."

In spite of the efforts he made to smile, the face of the count expressed infinite sadness, and his voice was low and hoarse.

"No, no! nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Jovita, laughing. "Tell us any day, and if it should turn out differently we shall think it was not by your wish."

"Very well, then, to-morrow."

"So soon as that!" cried both old maids in astonishment.

"You are not easy to please. What day do you want me to marry? Fix it yourselves."

The count had not said a word to anybody about his marriage being broken off. The innate weakness of his character made him withhold a piece of news that would so soon spread abroad. He fought shy of public curiosity and avoided questions at which his face might betray the cause of such a determination. And

he trembled and became profoundly sad every time, like now, the matter was alluded to. Until then nothing had transpired. It was thought in the town from day to day that he would go to Madrid to join his bride. Nevertheless, Manuel Antonio, whose olfactory sense was superior to that of all his contemporaries, had scented something. And with the tenacity and dissimulation of an Isabella of England, he began to collect bits of news and piece them together in such a way that at the present time he was very near the truth.

"You seem very sad, Luisito," he said to him suddenly. "You look more like making your will than being married."

The count was affected, and not knowing what to say, he answered, with a forced smile:

"Marriage is a very serious step."

He then tried to beat a retreat, but Manuel Antonio retained him again. He wanted to get a key to the enigma at all costs, and to have his suspicions confirmed, so seconded by Maria Josefa, who knew better than he what line to adopt, he kept up the conversation for some time on the difficult subject. Luis was on thorns. He kept looking at Amalia, as if he were claiming what she had been obliged to concede him. The lady at last rose, put her head out of the door, and then resumed her seat. In a few moments Josefina's pale, gentle face appeared. She cast her sad eyes over the room, and at a sign from her godmother she directed her steps to the library. She passed the count, he half turned towards her and gave her a rapid, anxious look, which did not escape the sharp eyes of his interlocutors. The child raised her eyes shining with a happy smile to his. It was a magnetic shock that suddenly filled her childish heart with joy. The guests tried to keep her, but obedient to the command of her godmother she went on to the library. A few minutes afterwards, Quiñones sharp voice was heard:

"Is not the Conde de Onis there? Why does he not come in?"

"I am coming, Don Pedro," returned Luis, quickly, glad to escape from the boring group.

On his entering the library, in less time than it takes to tell, a terrible scene took place that put everything in commotion, and terrified the guests. Don Pedro, with the cards in his hand, was with Jaime Moro and Don Enrique Valero. Saleta, who made the fourth, was sitting talking to the chaplain behind him. Three or four people were standing round the table watching the game. Josefina was near the

noble Grandee with her arms crossed, waiting for the benediction before going to bed. At the count's entrance, Quiñones darted a rapid, sharp glance at him, and then gave one of deep hatred at the child, as he said, with a sarcastic smile:

"Ah, do you want your blessing? Take your blessing."

And so saying he gave her a tremendous blow that felled her to the ground, whilst blood flowed from her mouth and nostrils.

Luis seemed to feel the blow in his own cheeks. All the blood left them and he turned deadly pale; then his will being overpowered by a blind impulse, he cried out:

"It is a vile shame! It is a cowardly act!"

He then tried to throw himself on Quiñones, but the others held him back, whilst Don Pedro called out in a loud voice, mad with anger, "At last! At last, dog!"

He made a supreme effort to rise from his chair and attack the destroyer of his honour. He half managed it, but finally fell back senseless with his mouth distorted. The guests had all risen and rushed to the library. The ladies shrieked in terror. The men behind asked what had happened. The Conde de Onís cast a frenzied look at them, stepped to the spot where Josefina was lying, lifted her from the ground, and with her in his arms, he tried to pass out, but Amalia stood in the way.

"Where are you going?"

Then she tried to snatch the child from him. But Luis stretched out his hand, caught the Valencian by the hair, and after shaking her roughly three or four times, he cast her away from him, and made for the drawing-room door. He flew down the staircase and out into the street, where his carriage was waiting for him, and jumping into it with his precious burthen, he said to the coachman:

"Quick, to the Grange!"

The heavy vehicle jolted along the badly paved streets, and he was not long in reaching the high road. The moon shone high in the firmament. Great thick clouds floated across its disc, but it reappeared directly. A stormy wind soughed in the upper atmospheric regions. Silence and peace reigned below.

Josefina still remained unconscious. The count wiped the blood away with his handkerchief. Then he tried to revive her by imprinting long, passionate kisses upon her alabaster cheek.

At last her eyes opened, she looked at the count with a strange intensity and then they lighted up with a sweet smile:

"Is that you, Luis?"

"Yes, my life, it is I."

"Where are you taking me to?"

"Where you like."

"Take me far away, very far away! Take me to your house. Take me, even if you can't feed me. Being with you I shan't mind dying."

The count pressed her to his heart and covered her with kisses.

"Yes, yes, you are going to my house," he exclaimed, whilst tears bathed his cheeks. "You shall never leave it, because they would have to take my life before they should take you. Listen, Josefina, I am going to tell you something. Try and understand. Make an effort and you will do so. I am your father. The Señores de Quiñones took you into their house; but I am your father. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Luis, I understand you."

"They took you in because I was wrong enough to give you up to them instead of keeping you with me."

"Now I understand you, Luis. You were not wrong. You were good, and I love you."

"Yes, child of my soul, I love you more than my life. Forgive me."

"I love you too—but not them. I loved godmother once, but not now. She has beaten me so much. If you could but know! She bit me, she scratched me, she dragged me on the ground, she told Concha to beat me with a broom, she tied me with a string like a dog."

"Don't, don't, you kill me!" said Luis, sobbing.

"Don't cry, Luis, don't cry! See how kind you are; you are crying for me."

"Should I not cry for you as you are my daughter? I am your father! Don't you know it, don't you know it?"

"Yes, I know it. You are my father, and I am your daughter. I am sleepy—let me sleep upon your breast."

And her little fair head sank in sleep. The count bent his own to imprint a kiss upon her brow, and his lips encountered the fire of fever.

The little creature enjoyed a few minutes lethargic sleep. Occasional cold shivers ran through her delicate little body. At last she awoke with a cry.

"Luis, they are taking me away! Look at them, look at them! There they are!" Her eyes were full of wild terror.

"No, daughter, no, they are trees on the road waving their branches towards us."

"Don't you see Don Pedro threatening me? Don't you hear what he is saying?"

"Calm yourself, my soul, it is the roaring of the wind."

"You are right. They are gone now. Look how the moon is shining! Look at the beautiful fields and the quantities of flowers! A palace of crystal! There is a child playing with a white cat. How lovely! It is prettier than Rose. Let me play with her, Luis."

"You shall play as much as you like, and I will buy you a white cat and a white dove that will eat out of your hand."

"No, I don't want you to spend money; I am contented if you don't leave me."

"Never, you shall live with me always, because you are my daughter. Go to sleep, my heart."

"Darkness again! It has come back. Take them away, Luis, take them! for God's sake! How they are pulling at me!"

"Don't be afraid, you are with me. Look, there is the moon again. Do you see how it shines? Sleep, my heart."

"It is true—Yes I see the fields full of flowers—I see the white cat—The child is not there—Where is it, Luis?"

"It is in my house waiting to play with you. We are very near now. Go to sleep."

"Yes, Luis, I am going to sleep. You tell me to, don't you? I ought to obey you because I am your daughter. I am cold. Hold me tighter."

He pressed her closer and closer to his breast. Josefina slept at last. The carriage rolled along the deserted road, past the fields lighted by the light of the moon. The wind moaned in the distance. The trees began to wave their branches.

The drive to the Grange was reached.

Luis bent his head to wake the child, but on giving her a kiss, he felt the coldness of death. He raised her quickly, he shook her violently several times as he called her loudly:

"Josefina! Daughter! daughter! daughter! Wake up!"

The fair head of the child fell from one side to the other like a lily with a broken stem.

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FOOTNOTES:

- [A] A peseta is worth 9½*d*.
- [B] Spanish game of cards.
- [C] One of the Spanish military orders formed to wage war against infidels.
- [D] Spanish games of cards.
- [E] About £700 or £800.
- [F] Spanish game of billiards.
- [G] The officer who collects the king's revenue.
- [H] About £300.
- [I] About £400.
- [J] *Lapiz*, a black stone. He meant to say *apice*, the smallest part.
- [K] An old-fashioned dance still in vogue in Galicia and Asturias. One chants a song, and the others join in the chorus.

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