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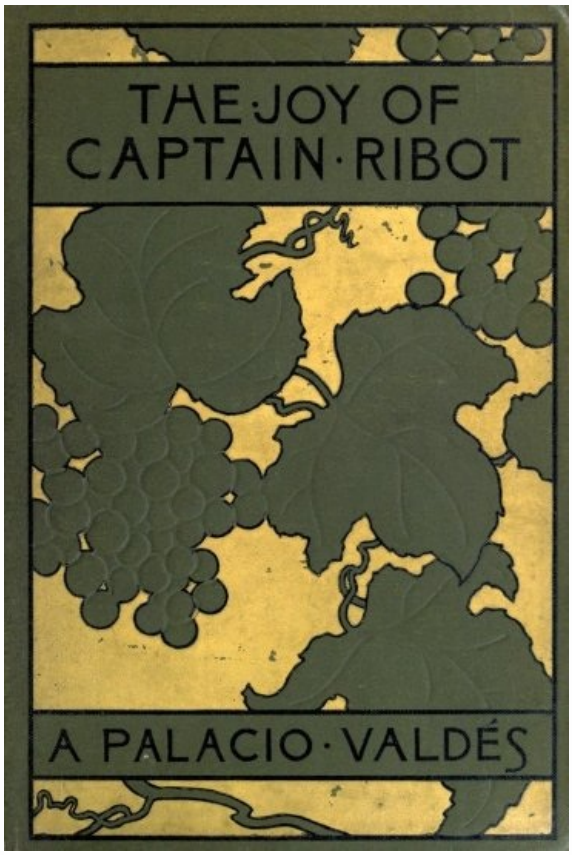
The Joy of Captain Ribot



THE JOY OF CAPTAIN RIBOT

**AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION FROM THE
ORIGINAL OF**

A. PALACIO VALDÉS

BY
MINNA CAROLINE SMITH

NEW YORK
BRENTANO'S
1900

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Introduction

"We Americans are apt to think because we have banged the Spanish war-ships to pieces that we are superior to the Spaniards, but here in the field where there is always peace they shine our masters. If we have any novelists to compare with theirs at their best, I should be puzzled to think of them, and I should like to have some one else try"—wrote William Dean Howells in *Literature*.

When a work by one of the world's masters of fiction has called forth a remark like the foregoing from a leading man of letters in America, it would be a misfortune if the public to whom the remark is addressed might not enjoy the privilege of acquaintance with that work. And it was this most charming novel by Señor Armando Palacio Valdés, "La Alegria del Capitán Ribot," that prompted Mr. Howells to write those words. Any reader must be hard to please who would not take the keenest delight in a story presented with a touch so delicate. The scene is laid in Valencia, one of the earth's famous garden spots, where the touch of the classic hand, laid upon the spot ages ago yet lingers. It is a story dominated by the purest joy, as its serene Mediterranean landscape is dominated by the purest sunshine.

Every novelist of character must have some purpose in mind in a given work, and the purpose of Señor Valdés in this is of no slight import. It happens that, from an unclean quality that distinguishes the fiction of a certain nation, the minds of many lands have been infected. For the almost universal aim of its authors has seemed to be so pervasively to color their pictures of life with one particular kind of sin as to give the impression that it is a main factor of modern civilization, instead of something that blots but a small proportion of the lives of men and women in any land. So, when Señor Valdés wrote to me, several months ago, about his new novel, he said: "It is a protest from the depths against the eternal adultery of the French novel." And when I read the book, I thought that "A Married Woman" would have been a good name for the story, so nobly and so truly does it present a type of the true and devoted wife in Cristina Martí—one of the great creations in modern literature. The trait that makes Señor Valdés one of the most eminent of living novelists is greatness of soul, finding expression as it does in a consummate mastery of his art. That trait appears in his "La Fé" as in no other novel that I know; and in the present story it pervades the whole work, which, moreover, is clean, sweet, and wholesome in every part. Magnanimity is a word that somehow implies that greatness of soul derives itself from greatness of heart, and the magnanimity of Señor Valdés is of a degree that transcends limitations of race, of creed, and of patriotism.

He has given evidence that in his catholic sympathies the fact of a common humanity is sufficient for the inclusion of any man in his brotherly regard. Of such as he the nations as yet count too few among their sons. And when one of these speaks, no difference of tongue should be allowed to bar our listening.

In the same article that has furnished the text for these remarks, Mr. Howells notes, among the admirable attributes in which this noble-minded Spaniard excels, "something very like our own boasted American humor with some other things which we cannot lay special claim to; as a certain sweetness, a gentle spirituality, a love of purity and goodness in themselves, and an insight into the workings of what used to be called the soul." As to the specific qualities of the book before us, I cannot better express my own sentiments than to continue in the words of Mr.

Howells:

"La Alegria del Capitán Ribot is, as all the stories of this delightful author are, a novel of manners, the modern manners of provincial Spain; and, by the way, while we were spoiling our prostrate foe, I wish we could have got some of these, too; they would form an agreeable relief to our own, which they surpass so much in picturesqueness, to say the least. The scene is mostly at Valencia, where Capitán Ribot, who commands a steamer plying between Barcelona and Hamburg, is the guest of the civil engineer, Martí. The novel is, as far as Ribot and his two friends are concerned, a tender idyll, but on the other side it is an exquisite comedy, with some fine tragic implications. Around all is thrown the atmosphere of a civilization so different from our own, and of a humanity so like the Anglo-Saxon, as well as the Russian and the Scandinavian, even, that we find ourselves charmed at once by its strangeness and its familiarity. There are the same temptations, the same aspirations, the same strong desires, the same trembling resolutions, masking under southern skies and in alien air; but instantly recognizable by their truth to what all men feel and know."

Mr. Howells has expressed a desire to have Señor Valdés for our own. So far as a most intelligently sympathetic presentation of this beautiful story in English can do so, I am sure that my friend the translator has made him so.

SYLVESTER BAXTER.

THE JOY OF CAPTAIN RIBOT

CHAPTER I.

IN Malaga they cook it not at all badly; in Vigo better yet; in Bilbao I have eaten it deliciously seasoned on more than one occasion. But there is no comparison between any of these, or the way I have had it served in any of the other ports where I have been wont to touch, and the cooking of a Señora Ramona in a certain shop for wines and edibles called El Cometa, situated on the wharf at Gijon.

Therefore, when that most intelligent woman hears that the *Urano* has entered port, she begins to get her stewpans ready for my reception. I prefer to go alone and at night, like the selfish and luxurious being that I am. She sets my table for me in a corner of the back shop; and there, at my ease, I enjoy pleasures ineffable and have taken more than one indigestion.

I arrived the 9th of February, at eleven in the morning, and according to my custom I ate little, preparing myself by healthful abstinence for the ceremony of the evening. God willed otherwise. A little before the striking of the hour a heathen of a sailor broke a lantern; the burning wick fell upon a cask of petroleum and started a fire, which we got the better of by throwing the barrel overboard with several others. But the pilot-house was burned, together with much of the rigging and some of the upper works of the steamer. In short, the consequences kept us busy and on our feet nearly all night.

And this was the reason why I did not go to eat my dish of tripe at the Señora Ramona's, but notified her, by means of the speaking trumpet, to be ready for me that evening without fail.

It was about ten o'clock. Peaceful and contented, I descended the ladder of the Urano, jumped into a boat, and in four strokes of my boat-man's oars I was taken to the wharf, which stood deserted and shadowy. The hulls of the vessels could hardly be made out and absolute silence reigned on board them. Only the silhouette of the guards on their rounds or that of some melancholy-looking passer-by was vaguely outlined in the gloom. But the obscurity, that the few street-lamps were insufficient to dissipate, was soon enlivened by the wave of light that proceeded from the two open doorways of El Cometa. I fluttered away in that direction like an eager butterfly. There were only three or four customers left in the shop; the others had departed—some spontaneously, some because of intimations, each time more or less peremptory, given by Señora Ramona, who always closed up promptly at half after ten.

This woman greeted my appearance with a peal of laughter. I cannot say what curious and mysterious titillation affected her nerves in my presence; but I can affirm that she never saw me after an absence more or less prolonged without being violently shaken by merriment, which in turn inevitably resulted in severe attacks of coughing, inflaming her cheeks and transforming them from their hue of grainy red to violet. Yet I was profoundly gratified by that peal of laughter and that attack of coughing, considering them a pledge of unalterable friendship, and that I could count, in life and in death, upon her culinary accomplishments. On such occasions it was my duty to double my spine, shake my head, and laugh boisterously until Dame Ramona recovered herself. And I complied therewith religiously.

"Ay, but how good it was yesterday, Don Julian!"

"And why not to-day?"

"Because yesterday was yesterday, and to-day is to-day."

Before this invincible reason I grew serious, and a sigh escaped me. Dame Ramona went off in a fresh fit of laughter, followed by a corresponding attack of asthmatic coughing. When at last she recovered herself she finished washing the glass in her hands, and called to three or four sailors chatting in a corner:

"Come, up with you! I am going to lock up."

One of them ventured to say:

"Wait a bit, Dame Ramona. We'll go when that gentleman does."

The hostess, frowning grimly, volunteered in solemn accents:

"This gentleman has come to eat some stewed tripe, and the table is set for him."

Thereupon the customers, feeling the weight of this hint, and comprehending the gravity of the occasion, lost no

time in rising to depart. Gazing at me for an instant with a mixture of respect and admiration they went out, wishing us good-night.

"Well, Don Julian!" exclaimed Dame Ramona, her face brightening again, "that tripe of yesterday fairly was of a kind to make one's mouth water with delight."

My face must have expressed the most profound despair.

"And that of to-day—won't it do anything?" I inquired in tones of woe.

"To-day—to-day—you will see for yourself."

She waved her fat hand in a way calculated to leave me submerged in a sea of doubt.

While she was giving the last touches to her work, I took some absinthe to prepare my stomach adequately for its task, at the same time meditating upon the serious words that I had heard.

Would it, or would it not, be so well seasoned, piquant, and aromatic as my imagination depicted?

But when I had seated myself at the table; when I saw the dish before me and felt its bland fragrance penetrating my nostrils, a ray of light illumining my brain dissipated that dark spectral doubt. My heart began to palpitate with inexplicable pleasure. I comprehended that the gods still held in reserve some moments of happiness in this world.

Dame Ramona divined the emotion that overpowered my soul, and smiled with maternal benevolence.

"What's that, Dame Ramona?" I exclaimed, pausing with my fork held motionless in the air. "Did you hear it?"

"Yes, señor; I heard a scream."

"It called 'Help!'"

"Out on the wharf."

"Another scream!"

I threw down the fork and rushed to the door, followed by my hostess. When I opened it I heard a sound of incoherent lamentation.

"My mother! Help! For God's sake! She is drowning!"

In two jumps I leaped over the rampart between me and the wharf, and made out the figure of a woman waving her arms convulsively and uttering piteous screams.

I saw what had happened, and, running to her, I asked:

"Who has fallen in?"

"My mother! Save her! Save her!"

"Where?"

"Here!"

And she pointed out the narrow space in the water between a lighter and the wharf.

Although narrow, it was too wide for me to reach the craft. I plucked up courage, however, and sprang for the rigging rather than the deck, managing to grasp a cable. In this way I dropped to the deck. Seizing the first rope I came across, I made it fast and slid down to the water's edge. Happily, the woman had also grasped the rope and so kept herself afloat. When I got to her I endeavored to seize her by the head. But only a wig remained in my hand! I made another attempt, and this time caught her arm. I drew her to the side of the vessel. Then I saw that it would be impossible to get her out without help. How could I climb the rope with one hand only? Fortunately the cries of the daughter, together with my own, aroused the crew of a lighter, composed of four sailors, and they easily got us out. There were some planks at hand, and so we reached the wharf with her and took her to an apothecary's near by, where she was at last restored to consciousness.

While the apothecary was attending her, the daughter, pale and silent, bent over her, her face bathed with tears. She was a young lady of good stature, slender, pale, her hair black and wavy; her whole personality, if not of supreme beauty, attractive and interesting. She was dressed with elegance, her mother also; and I inferred that they were persons distinguished in the town. But one of the throng that had pressed into the shop informed me that they were strangers, and had been but a few days in Gijon.

When I found that she was neither dead nor hurt to any serious extent, and feeling the chill of the bath penetrating me and making me shiver, I wished them good-night.

The young lady raised her head, came towards me with animation, and seizing my hands cordially, looked into my eyes with tearful earnestness, and murmured with emotion:

"Thank you, thank you, señor! I shall never forget this!"

I gave her to understand that my service deserved no thanks; that anybody in my place would have done the same, as I sincerely thought. The only real sacrifice that I had made was that of the stewed tripe; but I did not say this, very naturally.

When I reached the steamer and got into my room I felt so chilled that I feared a heavy cold, if not pneumonia. But I rubbed myself energetically with alcohol and wrapped myself so warmly in my bed that I wakened as usual in the morning, healthy and lively, and in excellent humor.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN I had dressed myself, and after I had complied with my ordinary duties and looked after the carpenters repairing the damages from the fire, I thought of the lady who had been on the point of drowning the night before. In strict truth, the one whom I thought of was the daughter. Those eyes were of the kind that neither can be, nor should be, forgotten. And with the vague hope of seeing them again I went ashore and directed my steps towards the apothecary's.

The druggist informed me that they were stopping at the Iberia. So I went to ask about the lady's condition.

"Is it necessary that you should see them?" the chambermaid asked me.

That was my desire, but I hardly ventured to say so. I told her it was not necessary, but I should like to know how they had passed the night. I was told that Doña Amparo (the old lady) had rested fairly well and that the doctor, who had just gone, found her better than he had expected. Doña Cristina (the young lady) was perfectly well. I left my card and went down stairs somewhat depressed. But I had no sooner reached the street floor than the chambermaid came after me and asked me to come back, saying that the ladies wished to see me.

Doña Cristina came out into the corridor to meet me. She wore an elegant morning-gown of a violet color, and her black hair was half-imprisoned by a white cap with violet ribbons. Her eyes were beaming with delight and she held out her hand most cordially.

"Good morning, Captain. Why were you avoiding the thanks we wished to give you? I had just finished a letter to you in which I expressed, if not all the gratitude we feel, at least a part. But it is better that you have come—and yet the letter was not wholly bad!" she added, smiling. "Although you may not believe it, we women are more eloquent with the pen than with the tongue."

She took me into a parlor where there was an alcove whose glazed doors were shut.

"Mamma," she called, "here is the gentleman who saved you, the captain of the *Urano*."

I heard a melancholy murmuring, something like suppressed sighing and sobbing, with words between that I could not make out. I questioned the daughter with my eyes.

"She says that she regrets extremely having caused you to risk your life."

I replied in a loud tone that I had run no danger at all; but even if I had, I was simply doing my duty.

Again there proceeded from the alcove various confused sounds.

"She tells me to give you a tablespoonful of orange-flower extract."

"What for?" I exclaimed in surprise.

"She thinks that you also must have sustained a shock," explained Doña Cristina, laughing. "Mamma uses that remedy a great deal, and makes us all take it too. Just tell her that you are going to take it, and it will please her immensely."

Before I could recover from my astonishment I did as Doña Cristina requested, and was immediately rewarded with a murmur of approval.

"I have just given it to him, mamma," she announced, darting a mischievous glance at me. "Now you may feel at ease!"

"Many thanks, señora," I called out. "I believe it will do me good, for I was feeling a bit nervous."

Doña Cristina pressed my hand and struggled to keep from laughing. She said in a low voice:

"Bravo! You are on the way to become a consummate actor."

The strange and unintelligible sounds renewed themselves.

"She asks if you have telegraphed to your wife, and advises you not to do so, as it might frighten her."

"I have no wife. I am a bachelor."

"Then to your mother," Doña Cristina had the goodness to interpret.

"I have no mother, either; nor father, nor brothers or sisters. I am alone in the world."

Doña Amparo, so far as I could understand, showed herself surprised and displeased at my lone condition, and invited me to change it without loss of time. She also added that a man like me was destined to make any woman happy. I do not know what qualities of a husband the lady could have observed in me, except facility in grasping and sliding down a cable. I responded that surely I desired nothing else; but up to now no occasion had presented itself. My life as a mariner, to-day in one place, to-morrow in another, the shyness of men like me who do not frequent society, and even the fact that I had not met a woman who really interested me—all this had impeded its realization.

While saying this I fixed my gaze upon the smiling eyes of Doña Cristina.

A sweet and fanciful thought thereupon came into my head.

"Let us change the subject, mamma. Everyone follows his own pleasure, and if the Captain has not married it must be, of course, because he has not cared to."

"Exactly," said I, smiling, and gazing at her fixedly, "I have not cared to marry up to the present, but I cannot say that I may not care to some day when least looked for."

"Meanwhile we wish that you may be happy; that you may get a very handsome wife and a half-dozen plump children—lively and mischievous."

"Amen," I exclaimed.

The frankness and graciousness of the young lady were spontaneously attractive. I felt as much at ease with her as if I had known her for years. She invited me to seat myself on the sofa, seating herself there also, speaking low that her mother might rest, for the doctor had said that she had better not talk.

I asked for the details of her mother's condition, and was told that she had suffered a slight contusion on the shoulder, which the doctor had said was of little account. She had also overcome the ill effects of the chill. The only thing to be feared was the nervous shock. Her mamma was very nervous; her heart troubled her, and nobody could say what might be the consequences of that terrible shock. I did my best to assuage her fears. Then to make conversation, I asked her if they were Asturians, although knowing that they were not, both from what the doctor had said, and because of their accent.

"No, señor, we are Valencianas."

"Really? Valencianas?" I exclaimed. "Then we are almost compatriots! I was born in Alicante."

So we continued the talk in Valencian, with pleasure unspeakable on my part, and I think also on her part. She told me that they had been in Gijon only nine days, having come to visit a nun who was her mother's sister. They had had this intention for years, and had never carried it into effect before, on account of the length and discomfort of the journey. At last they had undertaken it, but unfortunately, it seemed, for it had nearly cost her mother her life. They were pleased with the country, although it seemed rather dull in comparison with their own.

"O Valencia!" I exclaimed with ardor, "I who have visited the most remote regions of the earth and have been on so many diverse shores, have never found anything comparable to that land. There the sun does not rise in blood, as it

does in the North, nor scorch as in Andalusia; its light is gently diffused in balmy and tranquil air. The sea does not terrify as it does here; it is bluer and its foam is whiter and lighter. There the birds sing with notes more dulcet and varied; there the breeze caresses at night as by day; there the delicious fruits, that in other parts are in season only in the heat of summer, are enjoyed the year around; there not only the flowers and the herbs have scent, the earth itself exhales a delicate aroma. There life is not sad and weary. Everything is gentle, everything serene and harmonious. And the tranquillity of Nature seems to be reflected in the profound gaze of the Valencian women."

That of Doña Cristina, which was the most gentle and profound I had ever seen, sparkled with a certain mischievous delight.

"Who would think, hearing you talk, that you were a sea-wolf! You speak like a poet. I am almost tempted to believe that you have contributed verses to the periodicals."

"Oh, no!" I exclaimed, laughing. "I am an inoffensive poet. I never write either verses or prose; but you will pardon me for saying that those eyes of yours revived in my memory various beautiful things, all Valencian, and the poetry went to my head."

Doña Cristina appeared to remain in suspense for a moment; she regarded me with more curiosity than gratification, and changing the conversation she asked graciously:

"And the steamer that you are commanding—does she go to America?"

"Only once in a while. Usually we run between Barcelona and Hamburg."

"And your stop here is for several days?"

"Just long enough to repair the damages from a little fire on board, day before yesterday."

On my part, I asked how long they proposed to remained in Gijon.

"We had been thinking of leaving the day after to-morrow and stopping some days in Madrid, where we expected to meet my husband; but now it is necessary to postpone going on account of what has happened. At all events, as soon as my mother has completely recovered herself and the doctor gives permission, we shall start."

I must confess it although it may seem ridiculous—that "my husband" produced a strange sensation of chill and discouragement in me that I could scarcely succeed in hiding. How the devil had it not occurred to me that the young lady might be married? I cannot account for it to this day. And conceding it to be the case, why should the information cause such a bitter emotion when it concerned a person whom I was only just beginning to be acquainted with? I cannot account for that either. I am tempted to believe in the truth of what happens in the old comedies when the gallant is fired with love at first sight of the lady. If I was not on fire, at least I had on board all the materials for the fire.

Nevertheless, reason soon asserted its supremacy. I comprehended the absurdity and the ridiculous character of my sensations, and, calming myself, I asked about her husband with natural and friendly interest. She told me that he was called Emilio Martí, and was one of the partners in the shipping house of Castell and Martí, whose steamers run to Liverpool. Moreover, he had various other lines of business, for he was an active and enterprising man. They had been married only two years.

"And you have no family?"

"Not as yet," she responded, blushing slightly.

She went on to tell me that they were both born in Valencia, where they had always lived; through the winter in the city, Calle del Mar; in the summer time at their villa in Cabañal.

I knew several of the Castell and Martí steamers. I spoke of my satisfaction in placing myself at the service of the wife of one of their owners.

We talked a little longer. I was downcast and felt a desire to go. I managed to take my leave, but not without another dialogue with Doña Amparo with closed doors and an interpreter. On reaching the street my unfounded and even irrational depression was soon dissipated, as I talked with acquaintances and went about my affairs. But all through the day the figure of Doña Cristina was constantly present to my imagination. I adore women who are slender and white, with great black eyes. My friends used to tell me once that in order to suit my taste a woman must be in the last stage of phthisis. They were not far from right. My only love had been a consumptive, and she died when all the preparations were made for our marriage.

The next day I held it to be in the line of my duty to go to the hotel to inquire about the ladies. Doña Cristina asked me in and received me with even greater cordiality, putting her finger to her lips and asking me to speak in whispers like herself, for her mother was sleeping. We seated ourselves on the sofa and chatted in low but lively tones. Doña Amparo was well, and required nothing but attention.

"Moreover (I will tell you in confidence), until they have finished her wig she will not show herself outside her room."

"Ah, the wig! Yes, I remember now."

"Yes, you remember that you tore it off, wicked one!" she replied, laughing.

"Señora, it was impossible to foresee! It is fortunate that I did not tear her head from her body."

We both laughed heartily, forcing ourselves at the same time to laugh noiselessly. A moment later she said, in a way so natural that it pleased me immensely:

"I am hungry, captain, and am going to have some breakfast. Will you not join me?"

I thanked her and excused myself. But as I could not say that I had breakfasted she said that of course I must breakfast with her, and went out to give some orders. I felt delighted, and even if I should say enthusiastic it would not be an untruth. While the maid was getting the table ready in the room where we were, we continued our chat, our mutual confidence steadily growing. All through the breakfast she treated me with a cordiality so frank and hospitable that it quite charmed me. She cut bread and meat for me with her own hands and poured out wine and water. When I wanted a dish or a plate, with provincial simplicity she would jump up and take it from the sideboard without waiting for the maid.

I told her jestingly of the grave occupation in which her cries had surprised me the night of the accident. She laughed heartily and promised to make it up to me when I came to Valencia, by cooking a paella for me by all the rules of the art.

"Not that I have the mad presumption of expecting to make you forget the tripe of Señora Ramona. I shall be satisfied if you eat a couple of platefuls."

"Why a couple? I perceive with sadness that you take me for a gross and material being. I hope to show you, in the course of time, that apart from these hours of tripe and snails, I am a man naturally spiritually-minded, poetic, and even, to some extent, delicate."

She ridiculed this, piling up my plate in most scandalous style, inviting me not to dissimulate my true condition, but to eat as if she were not present.

"Do not think of my being a lady. Fancy yourself breakfasting with a companion—the pilot, for instance."

"I have not sufficient imagination for that. The pilot is squint-eyed and lacks two teeth."

This lively and intimate chat intoxicated me more than the Bordeaux that she poured for me without ceasing. And her eyes intoxicated me more than the wine or the chat. Although we talked in whispers and checked our laughter, occasionally there escaped me an indiscreet note. Doña Cristina raised her finger to her lips. "Silence, Captain, or I shall have to sentence you to the corridor before you have half breakfasted."

She asked me to tell her something about my life. I gratified her curiosity, relating my history, which was simple enough. We discussed the pleasures of a sailor's life, which she thought superior to those of any other.

"I adore the sea, but the sea of my home above all. Here it makes me afraid and sad. If you could see how often I go to the window of our villa at Cabañal to look at it!"

"But in Valencia I prefer the women to the sea," I remarked, having reached too lively a stage.

"I can believe it," she responded, smiling. "Oh, they are very beautiful. I have a little cousin named Isabel who is truly perfection. What eyes that child has!"

"Are they more beautiful than yours?" I asked presumptuously.

"Oh, mine are of no account," she answered with a blush.

"Of no account?" I questioned with astonishment. "Indeed, there are no others so bewitching on all this eastern coast, among all the beautiful ones that there abound. They are two stars of heaven! They are a happy dream from which one would never wish to awake!"

She instantly became serious. She kept silence for a while, without raising her eyes from the tablecloth. Then she said with an affected indifference, not free from severity:

"You have breakfasted fairly well, have you not? But on board the food is better than at hotels."

I kept silent for a while, in turn. Without responding to her question, after a moment I said:

"Pardon me. We sailors express ourselves too frankly. We are not versed in etiquette, but our intentions must excuse us. Mine were not to say anything impertinent."

She was immediately mollified, and we continued our chat with the same cordiality until the end of the breakfast.

CHAPTER III.

I WENT back to the ship in a worse state than that of the day before. The lady occupied my thoughts more than was desirable for content or peace of mind. I went back again that afternoon and again the next day. Her interesting figure, her eyes—so black, so innocent, and so piquant at the same time, were rapidly penetrating my soul. And as always happens in such cases, her eyes first began to please me and then her voice began to enchant me; soon it was her fine hands, like alabaster; a little after that the soft veil of hair that adorned her temples; immediately thereupon, three little dimples in her right cheek. At last I found happiness in a certain defective way she had of pronouncing the letter R.

These and other discoveries of like importance could not be made, it is evident, without due attention, all of which, instead of pleasing the lady, annoyed her visibly. She always received me cordially, but not with her former frankness of manner. I observed, not without pain, that in spite of the gayety and animation of her conversation she revealed a bit of disquiet in the depths, as if fearing that I might again say something unwelcome. While comprehending this, nevertheless I had not the force of will to stop gazing at her more than I should.

At last the wig was brought in secret to the hotel. Doña Amparo tried it on in the most absolute privacy; she found it imperfect. It was returned to the hands of its maker; various changes were effected in it without either the public or the authorities becoming aware of the fact, and after various trials equally secret the good lady emerged as fresh and juvenile as if my sinful hands had never attacked her charms. For in spite of all—that is, in spite of the wig, of years, and of obesity—Doña Amparo had not completely lost her charms.

They invited me to take a drive with them through the environs of the city. The pleasure with which I accepted may be imagined. On reaching the country we alighted, and for an hour we feasted our eyes upon that smiling and splendid landscape. I found myself happy, and this happiness incited me to show towards Doña Cristina great deference and gentleness of speech. I felt impelled to say to her everything beautiful and interesting that occurred to me. But she, as if divining these perverse tendencies of my tongue, curbed it with tact and firmness, asking me some indifferent question whenever there seemed to be any danger of my uttering something indiscreet, leaving me with her mamma while she went on ahead, or taking pains to make her mother talk. This did not dishearten me. I was so stupid, or so indiscreet, that in spite of these clear signals I still persisted in seeking pretexts for directing various whiffs of incense towards her. I declare, however, that I did not think I was acting the gallant. I believed in good faith that such obsequiousness and such flatteries were legitimate; for we Spaniards from remote antiquity have arrogated to ourselves the right of telling all pretty women that they are pretty, without other consequences. But she cast doubts upon the correctness of such a proceeding. That these doubts were not ill-founded I see clearly enough, now that the mist of my sentiments has been completely dissipated and I read my soul as in an open book.

It chanced that that same afternoon, on our way back to the city, seeing the numerous and handsome country houses that we passed, Doña Cristina remarked:

"Our place at Cabañal is very charming, but not sumptuous. My husband is not satisfied with it; he wants

something better."

"He wants something better?" I cried without stopping to think. "But if I were your husband, I could desire nothing!"

The lady kept silence for a moment, turned her face towards the window to look at the road, and murmured ironically,—

"Well, sir; let us have patience."

I believe that not only my cheeks, my forehead, and my ears turned scarlet, but even the whites of my eyes. For several minutes I felt on my face the impression of two red-hot bricks. I did not know what to say, and seeking escape from my embarrassment I turned to the other window and remained in ecstatic contemplation of the landscape. Doña Amparo, who had remarked nothing, spoke in response to her daughter's observation:

"Emilio is a very good man, very industrious, although somewhat fantastic."

"How is he fantastic?" exclaimed Cristina, turning sharply, as if struck. "Because he desires what is better, more beautiful, and seeks to acquire it? That shows rather his good taste and good will. For if the world did not have men who aspired to perfection, who always see a 'farther on' and who take steps to approach it, neither these handsome country houses nor others still better, nor any of the comforts that we enjoy to-day would exist. The idlers, the spendthrifts, and the poor in spirit ridicule such ideas so long as they are not realized; but when the hour comes that the ends aimed at can be seen and touched, they shut themselves up in their houses and refuse to congratulate those who made it possible because they do not care to confess their stupidity. Then you know well that Emilio, however 'fantastic,' has never had the fantasy to think of himself; that all his efforts are devoted to give pleasure and prosperity to his family, to his friends, and to his neighbors, and that all his life up to now has been a constant sacrifice for others."

Doña Amparo, during this vehement discourse, showed herself strangely affected. I was astonished to see her stammer, rub her eyes, grow red in the face, and fall backward as if in a swoon.

"I—is it possible?—my son!"

Uttering these incoherent words, she swayed, then seemed to lose all sense of the external world. To restore her to consciousness it was necessary for her daughter to bathe her temples with eau de Cologne and apply sal-volatile to her nostrils. When at last she opened her eyes there burst forth a flood of tears that flowed down her cheeks and poured into her lap like a copious rain, some of which moistened my coat. At these symptoms Doña Cristina again opened the little satchel that she carried, that I could see contained numerous little flasks. She took one of these, together with a lump of sugar, and moistened the latter with several drops of liquid. She thrust the sugar into her mother's mouth; that lady gradually recovered her senses and at last was conscious of her whereabouts and of who was with her.

On my part, being the indirect cause of the unfortunate scene, I understood that nothing would be more suitable than for me to throw myself out of the carriage window, even though I should fracture my head; but imagining that the results of such a procedure might be too melancholy, I hit upon a decorous substitute by biting at the head of my cane and staring into vacancy. Doña Cristina did not choose to take cognizance of these tragic manifestations, but they so penetrated the heart of her mamma that the latter seized my hands convulsively, murmuring occasionally:

"Ribot! Ribot! Ribot!"

Fearing that she might again enter into the world of the unconscious, I hastened to take the flask of salts and hold it to her nose.

The rest of the way back, heaven be praised! was traversed without further mishap, and I made desperate efforts to have my foolishness forgotten and forgiven, talking with all formality about various things, principally of those most to the taste of Doña Cristina. At length I was rewarded by seeing her bright face again unclouded and her eyes expressing their accustomed frank joyousness. And, prompted by her humor, she even went so far as to make gracious fun of her mamma.

"Did you know, Captain Ribot, that mamma never swoons except when she is with the family, or among persons in whom she confides? The greatest proof of the sympathy with which you inspire her is that which she has just given."

"Cristina! Cristina!" exclaimed Doña Amparo, half smiling, half indignant.

"Now, be frank, mamma! If Captain Ribot has not won your confidence, how is it you ventured to faint away in his presence?"

Doña Amparo decided to laugh, giving her daughter a pinch. When we parted at the hotel door they invited me to breakfast with them the next day, they having decided to leave for Madrid on the day after that.

It could no longer be doubted; if I was not in love I was on the way to be, with a fair wind and all sails set. Why was it that this woman had impressed me so profoundly in so short a time? I do not think it was merely her figure, although it coincided with the ideal type of beauty that I had always adored. If I had fallen in love with all the white and slender women with dark eyes that I had met in the course of my life, there would not have remained any time to do anything else. But she had a special attractiveness, at least for me, which consisted in a singular combination of joyousness and gravity, of sweetness and brusqueness, of daring and timidity, alternately reflected in her expressive countenance.

The next day, at the appointed time, I presented myself at the hotel. Doña Cristina was in most delightful humor and let me know that we were to breakfast alone, for her mother had not slept well the night before and was still in bed. This filled me with selfish satisfaction, observing her merry mood. Before going to the table she served me an appetizer, graciously ridiculing me.

"Since you always have such a delicate appetite, and look so languishing, I have ordered something bitter for you, to see if we cannot give a little tone to that stomach of yours."

I fell in with the jest.

"I am in despair. I comprehend that it is ridiculous to have such a ready appetite, but I am a man of honor and I confess it. One time when I attempted to conceal it I missed my reckoning. One of my passengers was a certain very charming and spirituelle lady towards whom I felt somewhat favorably disposed. I could think of no better means to inspire her interest than to feign an absolute lack of appetite, naturally accompanied by languor and poetic melancholy. At table I refused the greater part of the dishes. My nourishment consisted of tapioca, vanilla cream,

some fruit, and much coffee. Then I complained of weakness, and ordered glasses of sherry with biscuit. Of course I suffered terribly from hunger; but I overcame it finely in solitude. The lady became enthusiastic; she professed for me a profound and sincere admiration, and despised for their grossness all those at the table who were served with more solid nutriment. But, alas! there came a moment when she unexpectedly came down into the dining-saloon and surprised me feasting on cold ham. That ended the affair. She never spoke another word to me."

"She did right," said Doña Cristina, with a laugh. "Hypocrisy is something more shameful than a good appetite."

We began our breakfast, and I gave her to understand that now that she so abhorred hypocrisy I proposed to proceed with all possible frankness.

"That is right! Entirely frank!" And she served me an enormous ration of omelette.

We went on chatting and laughing in undertones, but Doña Cristina did not neglect to serve me with fabulous quantities of food, greater, in truth, than my gastric capacity. I wanted to decline, but she would not permit it.

"Be frank, Captain! You have promised to be entirely frank."

"Señora, this surpasses frankness. Anybody might call it grossness."

"I do not call it so. Go on! Go on!"

But soon, straightening herself back in her chair a bit, and assuming a solemn tone, she spoke:

"Captain, I am now going to treat you as if you had not only saved my mother's life, but mine as well. At one and the same time I wish to pay you for her life and my own."

My eyes opened widely without my comprehending the significance of such words. Doña Cristina rose from her chair and, going to the door, opened it wide. There appeared the maid with a big dish of stewed tripe in her hands.

"Tripe!" I exclaimed.

"Stewed by Señora Ramona," proclaimed Doña Cristina, gravely.

The joke put me in better humor yet. But how short was the duration of that intoxicating delight! When we reached the dessert she informed me, perfectly naturally:

"I have news for you. We are not going to-morrow. My husband is coming for us the day after."

"Yes?" I exclaimed, with the expression of a man who is forced to talk under a shower bath.

"Although the journey is a bit uncomfortable, coming and going again at once, he says that as mamma has probably not yet completely recovered from her shock he does not like to have us travel alone."

Saying this, she took the letter from her pocket and proceeded to look it over. "He also tells me to give you a million thanks and is glad that he is to have a chance to give them to you in person."

I was looking at the back of the letter, but I caught the words of the ending: "Adiós, life of my soul," and it augmented the sadness of my mood. However, I expressed my satisfaction at the prospect of knowing Señor Martí so soon, but it required some effort to say so. As melancholy began to take possession of me, and as Doña Cristina was not slow in perceiving the fact, I found no better means of combating it than to take more cognac after my coffee than was prudent. This produced an exaltation that resembled, without being, joyousness. I chattered away, and must have uttered many ridiculous things and some of them wide of the mark, although I cannot remember. Doña Cristina smiled benevolently. But when, for the fifth or sixth time, I took the decanter to pour out another thimbleful, she touched my arm, saying:

"You are already exceedingly frank, Captain. I will free you from your word."

"I am its slave, señora, at the cost of my life," I replied, laughingly. "But I will drink no more. I am resolved to obey you in this, as in everything you may command. But nevertheless," I continued, looking boldly into her eyes, "there are things that intoxicate more than cognac and all spirituous beverages."

Doña Cristina's eyes fell and her fair face frowned. But instantly smiling, she said vivaciously:

"But you must not intoxicate yourself in any fashion. I abhor drunkards."

I did not wish to follow this advice; and though it is true I drank little more, I insisted upon gazing at the fascinating lady. I continued chatting like a dentist, and in the midst of my prattle I came near giving utterance to more than one endearing phrase; but Doña Cristina, ingeniously and prudently, cut these off before I had a chance to say them.

We both rose from our seats. We went to the balcony to look at the traffic and movement on the wharf. With her permission, I was smoking a Havana cigar. As her beautiful head occupied my thoughts more than the traffic on the wharf, I noted that a little shell comb was falling out of her hair.

"If I were this little comb I should be very content with my place. I would make no effort to escape."

And boldly, with no thought of what I did, I raised my hand to her head and put the comb back in place.

She turned as red as a cherry, her eyes fell, and she remained silent for several seconds; at last, looking me in the face with a lofty expression, she said in a changed tone:

"Señor, I do not know what motive induces you to take any liberties with me. The service you have rendered us entitles you to my gratitude, but not to treat me without respect."

My semi-intoxication was dissipated as by magic. It left me petrified and ashamed as I had never before been in my life and never expect to be again, and I scarcely had power to murmur a few words of excuse. I believe she did not hear them. She turned her back disdainfully and left the room.

In about one moment afterwards there flashed through my mind an idea that did not lack a certain probability, that is to say, that I was superfluous in that place. And without waiting to examine it with sufficient attention in the light of reasonable and serious criticism, I put it immediately in practice, taking my hat and removing myself before any grass had a chance to grow under my feet.

Though I was on shipboard and in the consignee's office and in other parts of the city, shame did not quit me all day long. It was fastened to my face with a red seal and I was unspeakably mortified. My friends laughed and murmured such words as "Martel tres estrellas," "Jamaica," "Anís del Mono," and others which sounded like marks of liquors, but I knew what ailed me, and this increased my woe. On the next day, after washing and scrubbing myself energetically with soap, it seemed as if there were some bits of that red seal still adhering to my skin.

Of course I did all I could to forget Doña Cristina and her so holy name, and seemed to succeed throughout the

day. But at night her image would not leave my couch for a moment; it twitched my feet, it pulled my hair, and later, to make it up to me for these shocking tribulations, it gently inclined itself towards me and lightly touched my cheek with its lips.

On awaking, a luminous idea attacked me. Martí was to arrive that day, and it was my unavoidable duty to go to meet him at the station: first, for courtesy's sake; second, to prevent his asking for me, and thereby causing his wife any agitation; third, because my absence would surprise Doña Amparo; fourth, because it was necessary not to reveal what had occurred; fifth—I do not know what the fifth reason was, but I have an idea that there was a fifth reason and that it had something to do with the mad desire that I felt to see Doña Cristina again.

The mail train arrived in the afternoon. I therefore had sufficient time to think over the bother of such a step and to change my purpose. But after considering it in all its aspects and then considering it again and making infinite efforts for heaven to touch my heart, I still did not repent, and my feet conducted me to the station almost in spite of myself.

On reaching the platform I saw my ladies talking with an employee. Availing myself of the prodigious diplomatic aptitude with which heaven had been so good as to favor me, I passed along behind them at a slow pace and profoundly absorbed in the contemplation of a pile of beets.

"Ribot! Ribot!"

I stopped, filled with astonishment. I turned my head to the southeast, then to the north, next to the northeast, and so on successively towards all the points of the compass until, after many unfruitful efforts, I succeeded in locating the direction from which the voice proceeded.

"Oh, señoras!"

I approached them, overflowing with astonishment, and seized the hand of Doña Amparo. I started to do likewise with Cristina and—did I not say before that this lady was distinguished by a white skin? The statement must be corrected. At that moment she might have been born in Senegal.

I asked for her health without venturing to extend my hand, and she responded, looking in another direction.

"How is this, Captain Ribot?" asked Doña Amparo. "All day yesterday you did not come, or to-day either."

I excused myself, saying I had been occupied. Doña Amparo would not accept my explanation and talked to me fondly. This lady showed herself constantly more affectionate and amiable towards me. While we were talking, Doña Cristina did not open her lips. I felt hurt and confused. I did not venture to look her in the face, but observed her from the corner of my eye and noted that her face, instead of recovering its ordinary aspect, became more and more cloudy. Her eyes persisted in gazing in the opposite direction from where I stood.

Doña Amparo, not remarking anything, monopolized the conversation. On my part, I spoke little and incoherently. My having come at all was weighing me down fearfully, and I had an impulse to leave under some pretext, without awaiting the arrival of Martí. But before I could make up my mind the station-guard sounded his trumpet announcing the train. So it was no longer possible to go without grave discourtesy.

The train came into the station, and among the goodly number of heads that suddenly showed themselves at the car windows the eyes of Doña Cristina discovered that of her husband.

"Emilio!" she cried joyfully.

"Cristina!" he replied in a like tone.

And without waiting for the train to come to a full stop he leaped out and embraced and kissed her effusively. But she, blushing like a schoolgirl, and at the same time smiling with pleasure, brusquely freed herself from his arms.

"Always the same!" he exclaimed, laughing heartily, as he extended his hand to his mother-in-law.

She, however, was not satisfied with his hand and seized him by the head like a child and kissed him repeatedly, asking with hearty interest about his journey as he inquired about her health.

While they were talking I maintained a respectful distance from the group. And then it was that Doña Cristina turned her eyes towards me with a friendly smile, at the same time beckoning me to approach. That unexpected smile caused me such pleasure and surprise that I could scarcely hide my feelings. I hastened to obey.

"He saved mamma!" she said, with a little emphasis, presenting me to her husband.

He grasped my hands affectionately, expressing boundless thanks. He was a man of twenty-eight or thirty years, tall, slender, pale-faced and black-eyed, his beard also black, silky, and abundant; a Levantine type, like his wife—but delicate and fragile, at least in appearance.

"Thanks to his bravery, we are not mourning a misfortune to-day," continued the lady.

"Señora!" I exclaimed, "the action was of no merit whatever. Any passing sailor would have done the same."

But she, paying no attention, went on to relate what happened with all details, exaggerating my conduct.

This panegyric from her mouth, after what had happened, caused me more shame than pleasure. I felt the pangs of remorse, and what at first had seemed to me a slight imprudence now appeared a lack of delicacy.

Returning to the town I left them at the hotel door, refusing to stop with them, in spite of Martí's insistence. In these first moments the presence of a stranger might be unwelcome. But I agreed to take coffee with him that evening at the Suizo. I hoped that he might bring his wife, for she enjoyed taking a walk after dinner.

But the hope was not realized. Martí came alone, saying that his wife was fatigued and indisposed. I thought this a pretext, and it made me sad. Perhaps that first moment had exhausted her effusive gratitude, and distrust and rancor had returned to her heart.

In less than an hour, Martí and I were excellent friends. He struck me as a sympathetic person, of open nature, affectionate, cheerful, and candid. The hundred affairs that occupied him did not leave him much time to give to any one thing. In his conversation he sped lightly from one affair to another, but showed himself ever wide-awake and energetic. I let him talk, observing him with intense curiosity. The impression from that first conversation that best remains with me was his fashion of rumpling his wavy hair, running his fingers back through it after the manner of a comb, and giving a little cough when about to express some idea that he deemed important. This mannerism, which in another might perhaps seem ridiculous, had in him a gracious effect, boyish and attractive. I cannot clearly express the sentiments that Martí inspired in me at that time. They were an indefinable mixture of sympathy and repugnance, of curiosity and jealousy, which can be accounted for only by one who has found himself in a situation

analogous to mine.

The *Urano* was to weigh anchor the next day at flood-tide in the afternoon. In the morning I presented myself at the hotel to take leave of my new friends. Martí and his mother-in-law warmly expressed their regret at my departure. Cristina did not make her appearance. She was shut in her chamber at her toilet, as I understood, and had not the kindness to have me asked to wait; on the contrary, she dismissed me so abruptly that she seemed to fear I might.

"*Adios*, Captain Ribot!" she called from within. "Pardon me for not coming out; it is impossible at this moment. May you have a most happy voyage; and again you have a million thanks from me. We can never forget what you have done. A pleasant trip!"

Martí urged me to breakfast with them, but I had much to do and declined. Moreover, I must confess I felt so melancholy that I wanted to get into the street. He, as well as Doña Amparo, offered me a thousand inducements to run down to Valencia on my return to Barcelona, where the steamer always stayed for eight or ten days. He, as well as his wife, would take great pleasure in entertaining me at their home. I was obliged to promise to do so, but with the definite intention of not complying.

It was always difficult to get away from the ship; and the coldness of Doña Cristina gave me no encouragement to make such a visit.

In the afternoon Martí came on board to press my hand once more before my departure. He again urged me cordially not to fail to make them a visit. Again I made the promise, with the mental reservation already mentioned. We finally bade each other a most affectionate farewell and I put to sea, continuing my voyage to Hamburg.

CHAPTER IV.

NOT until I found myself on the bridge of my steamer, between the sky and the sea, could I take account of the impression that the wife of Martí had made upon me. How many hours I have passed that way, in the solitude of the ocean, given over to my thoughts! Seldom have they been sad. My life, after the profound grief caused by the death of my fiancée, of which I have spoken, has generally had a tranquil, if not happy, course.

I was born in Alicante, my father a seafarer. In my school days I showed a fondness for study. My father would have desired me to become a lawyer or a physician; anything rather than a sailor. But I found such careers prosaic, and impelled by the romanticism natural to youth, and to my somewhat dreamy and fanciful temperament, I preferred that calling. My father agreed to this with apparent reluctance, but was, perhaps, pleased in reality by the appreciation that I showed for his own profession. I soon learned navigation, and made two voyages to Cuba. But my only sister having died and my mother feeling rather lonely, I felt obliged to stay at home and lead the life of a young gentleman of leisure. Nobody was surprised at this. As my father was said to have amassed a reasonable fortune, I was to a good degree exempt from the hard law of toil.

A few years later I fell in love. My marriage was arranged and would have taken place had not Matilde, as she was named, been taken ill. Her recovery was hoped for, but hoping and hoping, the good and beautiful girl passed from life. My grief was so intense that my health and even my reason were threatened. My parents could find no more adequate remedy than to send me to sea again. I agreed with indifference. Now I went as second officer in a steamer of the same company in which my father was employed. After a few months my father was crippled by rheumatism, and while he was undergoing treatment the owners placed me temporarily in command of the *Urano*. Unfortunately he could not resume his place; after dragging out a painful existence for some time he died. My mother would have liked me to forsake the sea and again live leisurely at home with her; but I had grown so accustomed to the sea, to the varied and active existence of the navigator, to-day in one port, to-morrow in another, that I could not be persuaded to forsake it. On board of my steamer, therefore, to which I had become greatly attached, I reached my thirty-sixth birthday. My mother died, and a little later the incident took place that I have just related.

I have said that when alone with my thoughts I comprehended that Doña Cristina had taken too much possession of them. Her image floated before me like a dream. That look, now grave, now roguish, of her black eyes; that impressionable shyness, her blushing like a schoolgirl in contrast with her gracious self-possession; then her facile forgiveness, and the repressed tenderness that she showed for her husband—all tended to idealize her. But more than anything, I confess, my own temperament contributed to this, and the solitude in which the mariner passes most of his time. After the death of Matilde no true love had ever occupied my heart again. Idle affairs, adventures for a few days, amused me along various degrees of the scale. And so I had come to see the first gray threads in my beard and hair. But my romantic nature, although dormant in the depths of my heart, was by no means dead. The adventures in folly, the coarse pleasures of the seaports, far from choking that tendency, encouraged its revival. I never felt more thoughtful and melancholy than after one of those affairs. To recover my equilibrium, I would stretch out under the awning with a book in my hands; filling my lungs with the pure sea air and opening my soul to the ideas of the great poets and philosophers, peace and joy would return. Reading has always been the supreme resource of my life, the most efficacious balm for its troubles.

The adventure with Doña Cristina transported me to complete ideality, and I breathed the atmosphere wherein I found myself most sane and happy. So I occupied myself with pleasurable thoughts about her, without considering that unhappy consequences might follow. Many a time, when a pretty young woman had crossed my path in port, I would afterwards tenaciously hold her image in my mind's eye. Again, in the solitude of the sea, fancy would evoke her, I would imagine her in diverse situations, I would make her talk and laugh, I would make her grow angry and weep, and would endow her with a thousand charming qualities. And in the companionship of this phantasm I would pass happy days, until on arrival in port it would dissolve or be replaced by another.

So now I attempted to do the same. But I could not succeed, even partially. Doña Cristina had not fleetingly passed me by like many other handsome women. The impression that she had left with me was much deeper; she had stirred nearly every fibre of my being. Instead of representing her as I chose, I saw her as she had appeared in reality. And again I felt the shame and the sadness that she had made me experience. On the other hand, her condition as a married woman deprived my dreams of the innocence that they had had on former occasions; it tinged them with a

sombre shade that was little pleasing to my conscience.

I therefore determined to clear my mind of these thoughts. I sought to distract myself from such imaginings, to forget the beautiful Valenciana, and recover my peace. Thanks to my efforts, and even more to my prosaic occupations, I succeeded. But on skirting the eastern coast on my return trip from Hamburg, when I doubled the cape of San Antonio and there spread before my view the incomparably lovely plain that holds Valencia and surrounds it with its garden of eternal verdure like a brooch of emerald, the image of Doña Cristina appeared to me in form more ideal, more seductive than ever; it took possession of my imagination never to leave it again.

I do not know how it was, but the day after arriving at Barcelona I hastily adjusted the most important matters, left the ship in charge of the first officer, and took the train for Valencia. I arrived at dusk, went to a good hotel, dined, changed my clothes, and made the most careful toilette I had ever made in my life. Then I went out to look up the house of Martí.

Not until then did I take account of the folly I had committed. I well knew that Martí would receive me with open arms, and would be delighted at my visit. But what would his wife think of it? Would she not suspect that its motive was an interested one, and put herself on her guard? The idea that she might think that I sought payment in annoying gallantry for my service at Gijon was abhorrent. I was tempted to return to the hotel, go to bed, and leave the next day without letting anybody know that I was in Valencia. Nevertheless, an irresistible impulse pressed me to see her again. An instant, only for an instant, to engrave her image most profoundly in my soul and then to go away and dream of it through all my life!

Walking slowly I came to the Plaza de la Reina, the most central and lively place in the city. The night was serene, the air warm, the balconies were open; before the cafés people were sitting outdoors. And to think that there in Hamburg I had left the poor Germans shivering with cold! I took a seat under the awning of the Café del Siglo, as much for the sake of calming myself as to wait until they had finished supper at the house of Martí. When I thought it was time, I entered the Calle del Mar, which was near by. I followed its course, agitated and joyous, and stopped before the number that Martí had indicated. It was one of the most sumptuous houses of the street, elegant, of modern construction, with a high principal story, crowned by a handsome upper story. The great portal was adorned by statues and plants and illuminated by two clusters of gaslights. One of the windows was open and at that moment there escaped the lively notes of a piano. "Is it she who is playing?" I asked myself with emotion. I enjoyed the music for a moment, and at last approached the door. The porter called a servant, whom I told that I wished to see his master on urgent business. I was shown into the office. Martí appeared without delay. What a cry of surprise! what a cordial embrace he gave me! Then taking me through a corridor, speaking to me meanwhile in a whisper that his wife might not fail to be surprised, he ushered me into a room full of people.

"Cristina, here comes the bad man!"

She was at the piano. At the sound of her husband's voice she turned her head; her eyes met mine. She instantly turned them away and back to the piano just as quickly, as if she had seen something sad or alarming. But controlling herself almost in the same moment, she rose, and, advancing towards me with a forced smile, she extended her hand.

"I am very glad to see you, Captain Ribot. We are immensely pleased to have you visit us."

I felt my heart constricted, and I could not help responding with a certain carelessness:

"There is no occasion for such feeling. It is entirely casual. I had some business to look after in Valencia and on that account you see me here."

Martí embraced me anew.

"I am enchanted with the rude frankness of you sailors! That is just the way to speak! Away with these conventional lies that deceive nobody and simply serve to show what actors we are. The main thing is that we have you here and that your visit gives us genuine pleasure."

Then turning to the company he added, not without a certain emphasis:

"Señores, I present you to the captain of the *Urano*. I have nothing more to say."

An extraordinarily lean young man approached to give me his hand. His skin was rough and weather-marked, as if he had come from long and painful labors in the sun. He was prematurely bald, and from his mouth there depended an enormous pipe stuffed with tobacco. He was dressed with elegance, though a little carelessly.

"My brother-in-law, Sabas."

He was followed by a person of about the age of Martí, more or less, tall rather than short, blonde, his mustache small and silky, his skin flaccid, most carefully shaven. He was likewise fashionably dressed, and with a care that contrasted with the negligence of the other.

"My intimate friend and partner, Don Enrique Castell."

These were the only men present. I was next taken before Doña Amparo, who was working at her crochet, seated in a crimson-velvet chair; I was then presented to the wife of his brother-in-law, a plump little woman, round-faced, blonde, and blue-eyed, sitting on a divan and at work with an embroidery frame on her lap. Beside her was a young girl of seventeen years whose face of admirable correctness, soft and ivory-like, had the same expression of timid innocence as the virgins of Murillo. She was the daughter of a white-haired lady with an aquiline nose and severe and imposing physiognomy, seated beside a gilded table with a newspaper in her hands. Martí presented me to her as his Aunt Clara, a cousin of his mother-in-law.

The entire company welcomed me most kindly, particularly Doña Amparo, who with tearful eyes seized both my hands, retaining them until the excess of her emotion obliged her to drop them in order to raise her handkerchief to her eyes. The conversation first turned upon the mishap of that lady. My conduct was eulogized to a degree that put me to shame and made me uneasy, and they discussed the causes of the accident. The brother-in-law of Martí, with voice cavernous and husky, perhaps from abuse of tobacco, bitterly censured the conduct of the authorities of Gijon for not having properly lighted the wharf. I replied that almost all wharves were lighted in the same way, since they were not intended for purposes of public pleasure but for the loading and unloading of merchandise. He insisted upon his position, showing that in all maritime cities the wharves are places of recreation. I replied that in that case people must look out for themselves. Martí cut short the dispute by asking me to what hotel I had gone, that he might send for my luggage. In vain I opposed his doing so. Seeing that he felt hurt by my refusal I gave way at last,

all the more since the entire family joined in urging me.

In the meantime Cristina played the piano with careless fingers, talking all the while with her sister-in-law. She was elegantly dressed in a loose crimson gown beneath whose folds were revealed the lines of coming maternity. Whenever I could I gazed at her with intense attention. And when she observed it she seemed restless and nervous, and took pains that her eyes should not meet mine. Martí went out to give some orders about my chamber. His friend and partner, who had kept silent, reclining negligently in an easy-chair with legs crossed, began to ask me various questions about my voyages, the fleet of steamers, the ports where we touched, and everything relating to the commerce in which the ships of our line were engaged. The talk acquired the character of an examination, for Castell showed that he knew as much as I did, or more, about such things. He had travelled much, knew two or three languages perfectly, and on his travels had not only gained knowledge useful in commercial affairs but a multitude of ethnographic, historical, and artistic facts that I was far from possessing. He was a really accomplished man, but I could not help noting that he was fond of exhibiting his learning, that he carefully rounded his periods in his talk and listened to himself, and that, without lacking in courtesy, he did not conceal his slight appreciation of the opinions of others. On the whole the man was not congenial to me, although I recognized his excellent qualities. He had a voice clear and mellow like a preacher, with grave and noble gestures that enabled him to display his hand, which was short and beautiful, and ornamented with rings.

Martí returned, and his Aunt Clara, without giving up her newspaper, questioned him.

"How is it with olives, now, Emilio? Have they not risen twenty centimos this week?"

"Yes, aunt, I am informed that they have risen and will rise still further."

"It couldn't be otherwise," she exclaimed in triumphant tones. "I told Retamoso so last month, and he paid no attention to me. He is obstinate, like a good Galician, and so short-sighted in business that he can scarcely see the length of his nose. If it weren't for me, I believe that he would soon go into bankruptcy."

The voice of the lady was vibrant and powerful; her sculptural head raised itself so proudly when she spoke, her aquiline nose was held so high, and her eyes flashed so imposingly that in her presence one might fancy himself transported to the heroic age of the Roman republic. Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, could not have been more severe and majestic.

Martí coughed, to avoid replying, desiring neither to contradict his aunt nor to offend his uncle.

"And what do you say to the fall in cocoa?" she continued, with the heroic accent that might be employed in asking a consul about a legion surprised and overwhelmed by the Gauls.

Martí contented himself with shrugging his shoulders.

"Yet he had the assurance to deny that it is anything serious," she continued with increasing scorn. "It could only be hid from a man of the narrowest, most limited judgment, altogether unadapted to ventures in the wholesale trade. When I saw the Ibarra steamers arriving, loaded with Guayaquil, I said to myself, 'Yes, indeed, this staple is bound to fall.'"

"Uncle Diego knows how to tell where the shoe pinches, all the same," Martí ventured to remark.

"Yes, indeed! Behind a counter, selling cheese and codfish by the quarter pound, he would be invaluable. But as a man of business he is a good-for-nothing; it is only because I have taken the trouble to think for the two of us that we have been able to get where we are."

At this moment there appeared in the doorway a short stout man, of a pale complexion, bald, with small eyes, who greeted those present with a pronounced Galician accent.

"Good evening! How do you do?"

"Hola! Uncle Diego! How do you do, Retamoso?"

Doña Clara, caught in the act, turned her eyes again to her periodical, without abating an atom of her dignity.

Her husband, who, so far as could be seen, had heard nothing, shook hands with those about him, kissed his daughter, and coming over to his wife, said to her in affectionate tones:

"Don't read at night, wife! Now, you know you are trying your eyes."

Doña Clara took no notice. Retamoso, turning to the others, declared with profound conviction:

"She never can be idle. Isabelita, my daughter, entreat your mamma not to read! Now, you know that she does too much. When she is not reading, she is casting up accounts; when not casting up accounts, she goes down to the warehouse to make out bills; when not making out bills, she writes letters; when not writing letters, she speaks English with the Ricartes's governess. Hers is a wonderful head! I don't understand how she is able to do so many things in turn, without being either disturbed or fatigued."

I owe it to Doña Clara to say that she seemed suspicious of this panegyric, for instead of acknowledging it and showing herself gratified by it, she made the gesture of an offended queen.

"I do not disturb myself for such little things, dear, because I have trained myself in a manner different from the women of your province. If there they still go on spinning by the fireside, in the rest of the world they hold a more brilliant position. Here is a sailor," she added, indicating me, "who has travelled much, and can confirm this."

I bowed and murmured some courteous phrases.

"Well, all this does not hinder my admiring your ability," went on Retamoso in a tone of exaggerated adulation. "Does not all the world know it in Valencia? Am I to be the only one who does not, or pretends not to know it? How many women might be educated like you, and yet not have the capacity to accomplish in a month what you do in a day!"

"Tell me, Ribot," queried Doña Clara, addressing me as if she had not heard her husband, who went on murmuring flattering phrases, opening his eyes wide and arching his eyebrows to express the admiration which possessed him, "among all the many ports that you have visited, have you not met women with as much business faculty as men, or more?"

"I have known some women at the head of powerful commercial houses, directing with much wisdom, carrying on correspondences in several languages, and keeping their books with perfect exactitude. But—I confess freely that a woman engaging in industrial speculations, or inclined to politics or business, appears to me like a princess with a taste for selling matches and newspapers in the streets."

"What's this!" exclaimed Doña Clara, throwing up her Roman head. "Then you believe that the position of woman is nothing more than that of a domestic animal, caressed or beaten by man, according to his caprice? Woman should, in this view, remain always in complete ignorance, without studying, without instruction!"

"Let her be instructed as much as she likes," I replied, "but in my notion woman has no need of learning anything, because she knows everything——"

"Just so!" interrupted Retamoso with enthusiasm. "That has always been my opinion. Isabelita," he went on, turning to his daughter, "have I not said to you a thousand times that your mamma knows everything before having to learn it?"

I saw a smile flit over Martí's lips. Cristina rose from the piano where she had been sitting and went out of the room.

"I do not understand what you wish to say," declared Doña Clara, with a certain acerbity.

"Women who know how to make us happy, make happiness for themselves also. What other knowledge can equal this upon the earth? The toils of men, the callings conquered by civilization, go to achieve slowly and painfully what woman performs at once and without endeavor, making life more supportable, and alleviating its woes. Being, as she is, the repository of charity and of the gentle and beneficent sentiments, she guards in her heart the secret of the destiny of humanity, and transmits it by heredity and education to her sons, contributing to progress in this way more truly than ourselves."

"That is more gallant than exact," interrupted Castell, impertinently. "Woman is not the repository of progress, and has contributed nothing to it. You may study the history of the arts, the sciences, and the industries, and you will not find a single useful discovery that we owe to the genius or the industry of a woman. This demonstrates clearly that her mind is incapable of elevation to the sphere wherein move the high interests of civilization. Woman is not the repository of progress. She is solely the repository of being; and as this is the case, two things only ought to be demanded of her, health and beauty."

"You would be right," I replied, "if the unique phase of progress lay in useful discoveries. But there are others; and, as I understand them, more important ones—the brotherhood of man, the moral law. This is the true goal of the world."

Castell smiled, and, without looking at me, said in a low voice:

"For all that, I believe that I could name about fifty-seven other goals, if I know the world."

And lifting his voice he added: "I have discussed life with many men, and I can declare that scarcely one has failed to assign his own especial goal to the world. Among clergymen it is the triumph of the Church; among democrats, political liberty; among musicians, music; and among dancers, the dance. And yet the poor world contents itself with existing, laughing once in a while at so much folly, and trampling everybody under foot as it goes its way."

He paused and settled himself more comfortably in his arm-chair. I felt annoyed at those words, and especially at the scornful tone in which they were uttered. I was going to reply with energy, but Castell continued his discourse, tranquilly expounding his thoughts in a series of reasonings held together with logic, and expressed in elegant and precise fashion. I could not help admiring the varied qualities of his erudition, his penetrative talent, and, above all, the clarity and grace of his choice of words. Like submissive slaves, all of those in the dictionary came trooping to his tongue's end, to express his thoughts easily and harmoniously.

His theories seemed strange and sad to me. The world bears its goal in its own existence. Morality is the result of especial conditions that life has unfolded for itself upon our planet. If the human race had been produced under conditions of life like those of the bees, it would be a duty for unmarried women to deal out death to their brothers, as the workers do. All manifestations of life, even to the highest, are ruled by instinct. The virtuous man, like the degenerate, is moved by an irresistible impulse of his nature. Morality, which the religious man admires as a divine revelation, is nothing more than an invention destined to satisfy this or that instinct.

I really found myself without enough courage to contradict successfully his audacious assertions. My reading was wide, but desultory, as I had read more for entertainment than for instruction.

Then, too, I had never cultivated expression; because my profession did not require it, and I wrestled with great difficulties whenever I tried to express my thoughts.

Martí came to my aid, cutting off the discussion in a jocular fashion.

"Do you know what is the destiny of woman according to my brother-in-law, Sabas?"

All looked up, including the one spoken of.

"Sewing on buttons."

"I don't see why you say that," muttered Sabas, ill-humoredly, taking his pipe in his hand.

"Why shouldn't I say it? There isn't a man in the Peninsula who has lost more buttons than you! Yet I could not mention one of having gone to your house and not finding Matilde sewing on some."

Sabas muttered some unintelligible words.

"What does *she* say?" asked Martí.

"Yes, he loses enough!" said the plump lady, laughing.

But her husband, coloring, gave Martí a severe glance.

"If he loses as many as there are in the world," interrupted Doña Amparo, from her little red-satin elbow-chair, "buttons are not everlasting, and I believe that my son would rather go like Adam than trouble others to sew on his buttons!"

She spoke these words with emotion as if they were accusing her son of a fault.

"Although he loses more than there are in the world, it is a matter of no importance, and not worth while for you to put yourself out about, or be vexed with us," replied Martí.

"I am put out about it because it seems to me that everybody has a desire to find fault with my son. The poor fellow is always in disgrace. But until the day he dies his mother will always defend him!"

She uttered these words with even more emotion. I saw with astonishment that she was preparing to weep.

"But, mamma!" exclaimed her son-in-law.

"But, mamma!" exclaimed her daughter-in-law.

Both of them appeared contrite and concerned.

"Such is my maternal passion, my children!" went on Doña Amparo, struggling not to weep. "I cannot help it! We all have faults in this world, but a mother is not able to endure those of her children. I suffer horribly when anyone points them out to me, and much more when it is a member of the family. Some such sad ideas come into my head! It seems to me that you do not care for—I believe that I could die content if I knew that you cared as much for one another as I care for you."

Excess of emotion prevented her from saying more. She let her needlework fall upon her lap, leaned her forehead upon her hand, and seemed half ready to faint away.

Her daughter-in-law hurried to bring her flask of salts, and she began to smell it. Martí also assisted, with filial solicitude. Both showered a thousand affectionate attentions upon her, soothing her and making excuses. Thanks more to their tender words, I think, than to the salts, the sensitive mother recovered her faculties. When these were restored, she tenderly kissed her daughter-in-law's brow and seized Martí's hand, begging pardon for having offended them.

As I already knew a little of the character and whims of Doña Amparo, I was not surprised that Retamoso and his wife, Isabelita and Castell, paid scarcely any attention to this incident, and went on talking among themselves as if nothing had happened. Sabas, the cause of the disquiet, tranquilly smoked his pipe.

As soon as he had calmed his mother-in-law, Martí invited me to come with him that he might show me the room intended for me. It was luxurious and elegant, exceedingly luxurious it seemed to me who had passed my life in the narrow confines of a ship's cabin, or in our modest dwelling at Alicante. When we reached this room, a maid was making ready my bed under the señora's inspection. As we entered unheard she was herself smoothing the sheets with her delicate hands. Our footsteps made her lift her head, and as if she had been caught doing something wrong, she seemed annoyed, relinquished her task, and said to the maid with an ill-tempered accent:

"Well, you may go on with this, and see if you can finish it quickly."

She was going out, but her husband detained her, taking her hand.

"Have orders been given for bringing up cold coffee and cognac?"

"Yes, yes; Regina will stay and see to everything," she replied with some impatience, drawing away her hand and walking out.

I enjoyed her embarrassment with ill-concealed delight. As we went out again into the corridor I said to Martí, to make talk, and also out of curiosity:

"It seems to me that Doña Amparo was a good deal upset."

"You saw that!" he exclaimed, laughing in the frank and cordial manner that characterized him. "The least thing upsets her. The poor thing is so good! I am as fond of her as if she were my own mother. Her one desire is for us to love her. She is so sensitive that the least little sign of indifference, the smallest neglect, affects her deeply, and almost makes her ill. For that matter, although we all go on carefully, and are very attentive to her, it is not enough. Fancy this! I have taken up the custom of kissing her good-night before going to bed! If by bad luck I forget it for one day, the poor lady cannot sleep, thinking that I am vexed with her, wondering if she has offended me without knowing it; and next day she casts timid, anguished glances at me that I do not understand until my wife explains the enigma to me. I laugh, and go and smooth her down."

When we returned to the parlor, the company was dispersing. Castell gave me his well-cared-for hand, shaking mine, expressing with the careless coolness of a man of the world his pleasure in knowing me. Sabas and his wife showed more warmth. Doña Clara, majestic and severe, said good-night to me without mentioning Jupiter or Pollux, or any other pagan divinity, which surprised me. Retamoso improved a moment of confusion to say to me half in Galician:

"It may be that you are right, Señor de Ribot, and that women are not made for business. But mine is an exception, you know. Oh, a marvel! You have already had opportunity to be convinced of this. A veritable marvel. Phs!"

And he arched his eyebrows and showed the whites of his eyes, as if he beheld before him the Himalayas or the pyramids of Egypt.

Cristina took leave of them all from the head of the stair with the gracious gravity that suited so well her attractive face. I had eyes for nobody but her. Doña Amparo kissed everybody, kissed her son, her daughter-in-law, Doña Clara, Isabelita, and also, even, Retamoso. I do not say she kissed Castell, but I believe it was more from lack of courage than lack of inclination.

At last we four found ourselves alone. In order to prolong the waking moments, I begged Cristina to play on the piano a piece from an opera. She showed herself willing, and, without replying, seated herself on the piano stool, fingered the keys lightly for a moment, then commenced to sing in a half-voice the serenade from Mozart's "Don Juan." As I did not know of this accomplishment my surprise was great, but even greater my pleasure. Hers was a contralto voice, grave and sweet. The music of the great masters has always the power to move us, but when the voice of an adored woman transports the soul, music truly seems as if it had come hither from the heavens. I enjoyed for some moments a happiness impossible to describe. My very being was transformed, enlarged, quickened with love and joy. When the last notes of the lovely accompaniment died away, I remained swallowed up in a delicious ecstasy, scarcely knowing where I was.

Martí pulled me out of that abruptly.

"Come, come! The Captain is falling asleep!"

We all rose. Doña Amparo retired to her room, but not until Martí had kissed her hand, giving me at the same time a mischievous wink.

"If you need anything," said Cristina to me, "you have only to ring the bell."

And without giving me her hand, she wished me good-night. Martí accompanied me to my room, and took himself off, chaffing me affectionately.

"If you are not able to sleep without the smell of pitch, Captain, I will order a piece brought up and we will set it on fire."

When I found myself alone, all the impressions of the evening were loosed in my heart like imprisoned birds, and began fluttering about in a bewildering whirl. Why was I there? What did I expect? How was this going to end? The kind welcome and frank cordiality of this noble family moved me. The heartiness of Martí filled me with confusion and shame, but the lovely form of Cristina rose up before me, adorable, bewildering, blotting out all the rest. The thought of being so near her, when I had resigned myself to see her no more, overwhelmed me with felicity. I asked again and again, how would this end? At last I slept, kissing the hem of the sheet that her hands had smoothed.

CHAPTER V.

ACCORDING to my morning custom I rose first of anybody in the house, and went out to take a walk in the city. I had seen much of Valencia, and was always gratefully impressed by the quiet animation of her streets, her serene heavens, her perfumed balminess. Yet how different from those impressions was the sensation that I now experienced.

The beautiful city of the east was awakening from sleep. People began stirring in the streets; balconies were opened, and faces, pearl-white and with magnificent Arab eyes, were visible behind the flower-pots. As a morning greeting the gardens sent forth odors of pinks and gillyflowers, mallows and hyacinths; the sea its breezes fresh and wholesome; the sky its rays of radiant light. Valencia awoke and smiled upon her flower-gardens, her sea, and her incomparable sky. Her fortunate situation made me think of ancient Greece; and as I saw passing me the happy, peaceful, intelligent faces of her inhabitants, I longed to repeat the famous words of Euripides to his countrymen: "Oh, beloved sons of the beneficent gods! In your sacred and unconquerable country you reap the glory of wisdom as a fruit of your soil; and you tread stately evermore with sweet satisfaction beneath the eternal radiance of your skies."

I doubt if anyone, Greek or Valencian, was ever more content than I was at this moment. But as a sorrowful moment waits eagerly upon every joyous one in life, I was disappointed, on returning to the house, not to see Cristina. Martí and I breakfasted alone in the dining-room; and I learned from him that his wife had already breakfasted, and was in her own room.

What man was ever so gay, so affectionate as Martí? He began to tell of his family, his friends, and his projects exactly as if we had been friends all our lives. His projects were innumerable—tramways, harbor improvements, railroads, street widening, etc. I could not help thinking that for carrying out all these plans not only an enormous capital would be needed, but also an activity almost superhuman. Martí seemed to possess it. At that time, besides the steamboat traffic that almost ran itself and took up but little of his time, he was exploiting some zinc mines in Vizcaya, was building several wagon roads in several provinces, and was opening artesian wells in Murcia. In this last he had already used a large sum without getting much result, but he was sure of success.

"When we strike water," he said to me, laughing, "I intend to sell it by the cupful like sherry."

He expressed himself rapidly, incoherently at times; but always pleasingly, because he put his whole soul into every word.

I contrasted his confused and vehement mode of expression with that of his friend and partner, Castell, so firm, so clear, so polished. We spoke of him, and Martí outdid himself in eulogies of his personality. There was not apparently in all the world a man better informed, more talented, or upright. He knew everything; the sciences had no secrets for him; the planet hid no corner that he had not explored. He was, moreover, highly trained in the plastic arts, and he owned a collection of antique paintings, picked up on his travels, that was famous in Spain and in foreign lands.

"But—Castell is a theorist, did you know it?" he ended by saying, winking one eye. "We are two opposites, and maybe because of this we have been friends from childhood. He has always been given to studying the foundation of things, and their reason, philosophy, æsthetics. I don't understand anything of all that, I have a temperament essentially practical, and if you will not think me boastful, I will venture to say that in Spain there is a greater lack of useful men than of philosophers. Does it not seem as if there is a plethora of theologians, orators, and poets? If we wish to take our place beside the other countries of Europe it is necessary to think about opening ways of communication, making harbors, pushing industries, exploiting mines. In my modest sphere, I have done all that I could for the progress of our country; and if I have not accomplished more," he added, laughing, "do not believe that it is for lack of will, but for want of the precious metal."

"And Castell is your partner in these enterprises?" I asked him.

"No; we are not associated except in the steamboat line. He is a man who is fretted by figures. He is rich and wishes to enjoy his fortune tranquilly. But although he does not mix much in business, when there is any lack of money he finds it for me without hesitation, because he has full confidence in me."

"It seems as if this taste for business is in the family. Your Aunt Clara also shares this temperament," I said, to satisfy the curiosity that had pricked me since the previous night.

"My Aunt Clara is a notable woman of great talent. But I believe, without speaking ill of her, that the soul of the house, who has made all the money, is her husband. Oh, my Uncle Diego looks out for number one. There is no abler nor more prudent merchant on all the eastern coast. Believe me, anything he lets go by isn't worth stooping to pick up."

"Surely, according to what I have been given to understand by himself, it is the señora who guides him in difficult matters, who really holds the tiller in the business."

"Yes, yes," said Martí, smiling and a little out of countenance, "I do not doubt that my Aunt Clara gives him some good counsel, but not of necessity. In Valencia he is considered a bit crafty. It is possible that there may be some truth in it. You know the Galicians——"

He coughed to hide his embarrassment, and to change the conversation. I had already taken notice that it was repugnant to him to find any fault. He found himself on terra firma only when he was praising people, and he did this with such ardor that he seemed to taste a peculiar pleasure in it. Rare and precious quality, that ever made him more worthy of esteem in my eyes!

When we had finished breakfast, I pretended that I had occupations, and left him to look after his own. I went out into the streets again, and I soon encountered Sabas in one of the nearest ones. He seemed to me even more dried up and black than last night. He saluted me with grave courtesy, and after turning and joining me, urged me to accompany him to his house, as it was necessary for him to change his clothes. I was surprised at this necessity, as I could not see that he was damp or untidy. Later I found out that it was his custom to change his garb three or four times every day, following the elegant rules of court life.

Meantime, as we wended our way to his house, not far from that of his brother-in-law, he informed me that he had a collection of canes and of pipes—a very notable collection. It appeared that it was one of the sights most worthy a visit of any in the city, and with an amiability that I appreciated highly, he offered to show it to me. He lived in a charming little house. His wife came to open the door for us, to whom he said laconically:

"I have come to change."

We went to his room, and he at once proceeded to open the cupboards wherein he kept the canes. There were, indeed, a lot of them and of many kinds, and he exhibited them with a pleasure and pride that filled me with even more astonishment than their number and variety.

"You see this palasan; it has forty-two knots. It had forty-three, but it was necessary to take off one, because it was too long. Look at this other one, this violet stick." He stroked it. "Feel it. This one is of tortoise-shell. It is the real thing—a white one. It was brought to me by the captain of one of my brother-in-law's steamers."

The door of the room was half-opened and a little red head appeared.

"Papa, mamma let us come to give you a kiss."

"Run away; we are busy now," replied the father solemnly, dismissing the child with a gesture. But I had gone to the door, and I kissed with pleasure that little red head. He was a bright child of six or seven years. Behind him came another smaller one, red-headed too, and leading by the hand a girl of three or four years, dark, with great black eyes and curling black hair. I have never seen more lovely little creatures. I caressed them all warmly, and especially the little girl, whose velvety eyes were marvellous. But they were all timid, and without paying attention to my questions, looked doubtfully at their father. His face showed sternness and annoyance. He seemed offended that I found his collection of children more notable than his canes. He kissed them as if in compromise, and when his wife came running to find them, he said to her sharply:

"Why did you let them come in here while I was busy?"

"They got away while I was getting out a shirt for you," she answered humbly.

And pushing the chicks before her, she drove them from the room. After this I felt hopeful that her husband would terminate his exhibition of canes. He finished at last, and I, knowing that I flattered him, uttered a thousand exaggerations about his collection, which profoundly delighted him. He then took the liberty of dressing before me. His wife began to wait upon him like the most efficient and servile of valets. She put on his shirt; she put on his cravat; she got down upon the floor to fasten the buttons of his shoes. This happy husband let himself be dressed and polished off with a restrained gravity, meantime prattling about his canes and pipes, these collections being, it appeared, the aim and end of his existence. From time to time he reproved his meek spouse.

"Don't fasten it so tight! Less dressing and more rubbing on these shoes! Tell the maid that I wish her to take care not to daub my shoes. I don't care for that cravat; bring me a scarf that will tie!"

Finding a button off his waistcoat, he was struck dumb. He stared at his wife with a look so severe that it made her flush.

"I don't know how I missed it," she stammered. "It came off when the waistcoat was washed. I put it aside to sew it on. I was called to the kitchen, and after all I forgot all about it."

"Nothing, it is nothing! Of what consequence is one button more or less?" he said with a sarcastic smile.

"You know I am very sorry about it."

"Have I not told you it is nothing, madam? Why do you worry about it? One button, one button! What does one button signify compared to a bit of gossip with the laundress?"

"But, man, for heaven's sake, don't be like that!" she cried in anguish.

"Have I said anything?" he shouted, furious.

Matilde controlled herself and occupied herself with sewing on the button.

"How *should* I be? Say!" he persisted with unabated fury.

His wife did not look up.

Sabas then permitted several snorts to escape him, mingled with incoherent words, and accompanied by a gnashing of teeth that the sarcastic smile still upon his lips made even more repellent.

With heroic courage I tried to soothe his troubled spirit. The winds fell, the waves became tranquil, and he said to me affably:

"You are going to dine on a *paella* to-day. I know it already from Cristina. My sister has a cook who stews like an angel."

Matilde finished sewing on the button. When she lifted her head I saw tears in her eyes.

Sabas gave the signal for starting, but first he sent his good lady to find his gloves, to bring his stick, and then his handkerchief. He drenched it with scent from a perfume bottle, gave the last polish to his shoes, and a few touches of the comb to his whiskers. Matilde fluttered about him like a butterfly, arranging his coat and his cravat and his hat with her plump white hands. And when he, dismissing her, took her chin in his hand with a careless, protecting gesture her eyes shone with a radiant, triumphant expression that seemed to transport her to the heavens.

In the passage as we were going out we encountered the three children, who would have thrown themselves upon their father to be kissed, but he stopped them with a threatening gesture.

"No, I can't now. I should be all slobbered over."

I, who had no fears of being daubed, kissed them with pleasure, wishing to make amends to them for his crossness. Vain hope! They received my caresses with indifference, following with their eyes their elegant and morose papa.

Matilde watched us from the top of the stair, having eyes for nothing but her husband. She noticed that the collar-

band of his shirt did not fit well, on account of his overcoat, hastened to pull it down for him and turn it up; and profited by the opportunity to give a few more touches to his whiskers with her fingers.

It was now eleven o'clock in the forenoon. The streets were full of people. The sun shone in the sky in all its splendor. We breathed a perfumed air, proving ourselves to be in the city of flowers. At every step we encountered servants carrying branches and sprays of them that loving ones were sending to delight their friends. In Valencia flowers make up so large a part of life, and their use is so general and natural, that the sending of flowers is like saying good-morning. Contemplating this profusion of carnations, roses, and lilies that rejoice the eyes and make fragrant the air, I could not help saying, "This is the city where there is so much that is lovely to enjoy that it matters little what one does with one's days!"

I could have gone about the streets with pleasure until time for dinner, but Sabas felt himself in duty bound to invite me to take an appetizer, and we entered a café in the Plaza de la Reina.

While sipping a glass of vermouth Sabas showed himself loquacious and expansive, but without losing his natural gravity. He talked to me about his family and friends. I saw at once that he had an analytical temperament of the first rank, clear perceptions, and a keen instinct for seeing the weak side of people and things.

His sister was a discreet woman, affectionate, of upright and noble intentions—but her character was excessively difficult; she enjoyed opposing people; at times she lacked courtesy; she was wanting in docility, in a certain meekness absolutely essential in a woman; lastly, although really generous, she did not make herself liked.

I should have enjoyed protesting against this absurd summing up. It was precisely these qualities of her character, at once timid and resolute, and her coldness a bit harsh, that made me more in love than ever. I abstained, however, for prudential reasons, from speaking.

His brother-in-law was, poor fellow, an industrious man, generous, intelligent in business—but absolutely incapable, as everybody knew. All the world imposed upon him and used him. He was of a temperament so volatile that as soon as he had undertaken one project he was tired of it, and thinking of another. This had made him lose a great deal of money. He could not tell how many enterprises Martí had engaged in. Some of them would have been very successful if he had stayed in them; but he scarcely encountered the first difficulties in them before he threw them aside, abandoned them. He had only shown himself persistent where it was absolutely useless—in the matter of the artesian wells. What a lot of money the man had already carried off and buried in that wretched business! The one thing that had really turned out well had been the steamboats, and these he did not start, but inherited them from his father.

His friend Castell possessed great learning, expressed himself admirably, and was immensely rich—but had not a scrap of heart. He had never shown any affection for anybody. Emilio was mistaken through and through in thinking that he returned the passionate, fervent adoration that he felt for him.

"But do not touch upon this point when you are again with him, as I have tried it several times. Whenever the conversation brings in the name of Castell it is necessary to open the mouth, roll up the eyes to their whites, and fall into an ecstasy, as if one beheld a divinity of Olympus. Castell knows this weakness of my brother-in-law, approves of it, and gives himself airs over it. For the rest, on the day when he has any need of him, he will see how the matter stands then."

"But Martí told me that he finds money for him when he needs it in his business," I put in.

"Yes, yes," he agreed with his sarcastic smile; "I do not doubt that he finds money for him, but everybody in Valencia knows the meaning of that."

I asked no questions. Having been admitted into the intimacy of the family, I would not prompt him. Sabas went on:

"This man is, moreover, vicious and immoral. He has been entangled for years with a woman who has borne him several children; but this is no obstacle to his bringing back a charmer with him whenever he makes a foreign journey. He has already had three, one of them a Greek, a beautiful woman! He keeps them a while and presently tires of them, like lackeys who no longer please him. This, you understand, makes a great scandal in a provincial capital; but as he is named Don Enrique Castell and owns eight or ten million pesetas, nobody wishes to offend him. The priests and the canons, and even up to the bishop, take off their hats to him a league off."

"I have been told of the wealth of your relations, the Retamosos!"

"Oh, no; that is a much more modest fortune; it is counted by thousands of duros, not by millions; but all that has been earned bit by bit, did you know it?—peseta by peseta, at first behind a counter, and then at a desk."

"Your Aunt Clara, it seems, is a lady of much judgment in business."

Sabas roared with laughter.

"My Aunt Clara is an imbecile! She has never done anything in all her life, except speak English with governesses and show her classic nose in the Glorieta and the Alameda. But my Uncle Diego is the slyest Galician born in this century. He laughs at his wife, and he is capable of laughing at his own ghost. I do not consider that he has ability for any great enterprises. He has not, as I just said, the genius of affairs; but I assure you that, among those who handle small amounts, I have never known, nor do I think you could readily find, a more cautious man."

In this fashion my elegant friend continued his studies of his family with a criticism implacable, yet clever and at times witty. From that he went on to talk about his native city; and I found his observations concerning the character of the Valencians, their customs, politics, and administration of provincial affairs, sharp and to the point. I confess that I had mistaken him. I had at first taken him for a mere coxcomb, a vapid and frivolous young man. He turned out to be a man of good understanding, observing and clever, although a little exaggerated in his analyses, and sufficiently severe.

We went out of the café, and before going to the house, we took another turn in the streets. Naturally, as I am a native of the east coast, son of a sailor, and myself a sailor, the aspect of the great Mediterranean city had an especial seduction for me. The narrow streets, tortuous, clean, with their profusion of fine shops; the large number of ancient stone houses with artistic façades, belonging to noble families that have made their names known and respected throughout the world; the hill towers, among whose turrets one may imagine still flit the old-time archers; the bridges with their benches; the Lonja, whose rooms of exceptional size and beauty shelter the richest traders of Spain; the lively market-place and open space about—all reveal, together with her mercantile traditions, an ancient

and opulent capital. All spoke to me of the grandeur of my race.

I gave myself into the hands of my companion, who took me to the flower-market. We were not long in penetrating an iron-walled passage where, on one side and the other, leaving space in the middle, was seen a multitude of pale, black-eyed women exhibiting their merchandise—carnations, roses, lilies, hibiscus, and iris. Great was the animation in this little place. Ladies, with their rosaries and mass-books in their hands, stood before these venders, examining their wares with liberal and intelligent eye, and bargaining everlastingly before deciding to buy. Gentlemen laden with branches and sprays were given numerous instructions concerning their arrangement. Servants and shop-girls also hastened to the stalls, took their little handful of flowers, stuck some of them in their hair, and leaving their bits of copper, marched happily away with others in their hands, to continue their tasks. With what enthusiasm they would look at their flower-fillets! With what pleasure they breathed their fragrance!

As we cruised among the stalls I observed that most of the flower-venders greeted my friend by name, smiling amiably upon him, and asking him if he had no orders to give.

"You are popular in the market," I said to him, laughing.

"I am a good customer, nothing more," he answered modestly.

And placing his hand on my shoulder, he pushed me towards one of the doors, where we stationed ourselves, somewhat retired and half-hidden among the foliage.

"This is a strategic point," he said to me. "You will see how many fine figures pass by here within five minutes."

And truly the ladies who entered by the other door, after making their purchases or giving their orders, went out by this one. They passed so near us that their dresses brushed us. My companion had a compliment or a pleasant word for all. Many of them knew him and greeted him; some paused an instant to respond with gracious repartee to his gallant phrases. I was surprised at the impudence with which this man, married, and understanding good form, thus paid court to women; and yet more that they accepted his gallantries without reserve.

I have seen many beautiful faces in the various lands where my wandering life has carried me, but nowhere so many, so delicate, of such opaline transparency of complexion, of such exquisite purity as now. Then, what eyes! The soul moved in their blackness and mystery as if yearning to enfold you in happy dreams—sweet, voluptuous, unfathomable eyes, that seemed to hold both love and death. From among the multitude of heads there was cast upon me a swift glance. It was she; yes, it was she! While still she was hid in the crowd, I knew it was she who approached! My heart began to beat violently. In a few moments she appeared. She was dressed in black, and wore a mantilla. In one hand she carried her mass-book and a rosary wound about her wrist like a bracelet; in the other, a bunch of carnations. She was with her cousin Isabelita, and both were accompanied by Castell. I cannot explain the sort of impression that man made upon me at this moment. My heart was constricted as if in the presence of great danger, and the vague antipathy he had inspired me with the night before was transformed into hatred. The violence with which this feeling was born within me surprised me, but I did not confess to myself the cause of it. I held it well in hand and forced myself to appear as agreeable as I could.

They seemed surprised when they saw us. Castell and Isabelita congratulated us on the excellent position that we had chosen.

"What doesn't this rogue know about the conduct of gallantries!" exclaimed the daughter of Retamoso, giving Sabas a tap on the shoulder with her book. And then, laughing, she blushed like a poppy.

"Come, cousin," returned Sabas, "at least you know that I haven't offered you any gallantries. But we still have time. You are got up with so much elegance that on seeing you I forget our family ties."

Isabelita blushed even more, if that were possible. Sabas persisted in his compliments. Castell came to his aid. Meanwhile Cristina glanced absently from one to another. I divined that it was to avoid meeting my eyes.

Sabas spoke to her:

"Little sister, aren't you going to put one of your carnations in my button-hole?"

"Why not?" she answered.

And handing her book to her cousin, she took the largest and most beautiful one in her bouquet and fastened it where he bade her.

Moved by a sudden impulse, and with a daring that I thought I had lost towards this woman, I said:

"And is there nothing for the others?"

"Would you like one?" she asked me, handing me one with a glance.

"No; I desire the honor of having you fasten it in my button-hole," I replied firmly.

There was an instant of suspense. She showed indecision; but at last picked out another carnation and hastily put it in its place. I thought I noticed (it may have been illusion, I do not know) that her hands trembled. Oh, *Dios*, with what pleasure I could have kissed them!

"And I? Do I not have my turn?" asked Castell then, bowing with an amiable smile.

"Oh, pshaw! we have already had enough of carnations," she said crossly, going on out of the door.

"I came too late," murmured the banker in some confusion.

"Would you like one of mine?" Isabelita asked him, timidly.

"Oh, with the greatest pleasure."

And he bowed smiling, and apparently delighted while the young girl placed the carnation in his coat. Yet I understood that he was disgruntled.

We all followed Cristina; and her cousin paired off with her, Sabas, Castell, and I walking behind. But we had not walked far when Sabas saw a charming shop-girl, and stopped to chat with her. Castell and I waited for him a moment, but seeing he was not likely to finish soon, we followed on after the ladies.

"This brother-in-law of Martí's seems to me a youngster of a good deal of ability," I said to my companion.

"As a critic?" asked Castell, laconically.

"As a critic?" I returned, surprised.

"Yes; he is admirably endowed with power to see the weak and strong sides of things, to weigh and measure, to compare, to penetrate the labyrinths of conscience. But these faculties are exercised upon others; it never occurs to

him to apply them to himself. Thus all his analyses, criticisms, wise and pointed counsels, are wasted; and he is an absolutely fatuous and useless man. He has undertaken five or six careers, and gone on in none of them; he wasted his patrimony in gambling and dissipation; he martyrizes his wife, neglects his children, and he is at present living on his brother-in-law."

"A good panegyric!" I exclaimed, laughing.

"You will hear the same from all sensible people in town. This does not hinder him from being an agreeable fellow, popular and generally liked; and this is because his defects can scarcely be called public, but private vices."

We joined the ladies at last, and arrived at Martí's about the hour of dinner. My hosts had invited in my honor the company of the night before, all of them with the exception of Castell being members of the family. Emilio made me sit at his wife's right. The touch of her dress, the perfume that floated from her, and a yet more mysterious fluid wherewith her nearness filled me, intoxicated and upset me. This went so far that, desiring to show myself gallant and attentive to her, I could scarcely say or do the most ordinary things. I spilled water on the tablecloth, I asked her three times if she liked olives, and dropped the olive-fork in offering her one. But I was happy, and I could not conceal it.

She showed herself courteous and a little more kindly disposed, thanking me for my attentions and gracefully covering up my blunders.

It made me even more happy when Castell fixed his glance upon the carnation in my button-hole, and asked me with his cold, ironical smile:

"Captain, would you take a thousand pesetas for that carnation you are wearing?"

"A thousand pesetas!" exclaimed Martí, looking up in surprise.

I was indescribably agitated, as if I had been surprised in the act of committing a crime. I knew no better than to smile stupidly and exclaim:

"How full of jokes you are!"

But Cristina held up her beautiful head proudly, and turning to Castell, she said:

"Captain Ribot is a gentleman, and does not sell the flowers that a lady bestows upon him."

"Ah, so she bestowed it upon you!" said Martí, and turning to Castell added: "But, Enrique, would you wish Ribot to sell you this carnation, when, if she had given it to me, I, although her husband, would not let you have it for your whole fortune?"

And at the same time he gazed at his wife with a look of intense affection. The innocence and nobleness of that man moved me. He must have touched the soul of Cristina. Dropping her head again, she murmured in intense tones:

"Thou art thou—*tu!*"

These simple words were a poem of tenderness.

"It is well known," observed Castell with the same indifference, "that there are things in the world that cannot be and should not be bought with money. Unfortunately men are not in the same category with them, and therefore we pursue material and even gross objects until we secure them, however remote they may be."

"But I do not find them remote," said Sabas. "It seems to me that money serves well enough for almost all the cases that present themselves. Thus you hold another carnation to be better than this. This was given me by a lady. All right, Castell, I will let you have this one for two pesetas."

The company laughed. Cristina seemed vexed and said to her brother:

"You are rude; you are a clodhopper. Matilde, do me the favor of taking the carnation away from that pig. After that, he shall not keep it."

Sabas covered it up with his hands.

"Wait a bit, my girl, wait a bit. If Castell pays the two pesetas, I'll give it up. Until then we do not separate, no!"

"Here it is!" said Castell, taking the money out of his pocket-book and passing it across the table.

"There—go!" said Sabas, passing over the carnation.

This jest produced a shout at the table. Yet it did not please Cristina. She was furious, and called her brother names, and vowed that she would never give him another flower as long as she lived.

Meanwhile I had had time to recover from the extreme agitation that the words of Castell had caused me. We finished dining gayly, but Cristina did not again appear smiling and cordial as before.

Two hours later I took the train for Barcelona, where my presence was indispensable. I was accompanied to the station by Martí and Sabas. Martí made me promise another and a longer visit.

"After my next voyage," I told him, "I am thinking of asking the company's permission to stop at home when they change the order of time for the ships, six weeks hence. Then I will come down from Alicante and spend a week or a fortnight with you."

"We shall see if you are a man of your word," he replied, squeezing my hand affectionately until it was time for me to take the train and be off.

CHAPTER VI.

I DO not know what relation exists between salt water and love, but experience has made me realize that there exists in it some mysterious and stimulating virtue. On land I am able to control somewhat my most vehement sentiments and conquer them. Once on board I am a lost man. The most insignificant attraction takes on gigantic proportions and in a little while knocks me flat. So it happened that while in Valencia I proposed to myself to make nothing of flattering invitations, and never again in my life to return to stand before Doña Cristina, continuing in this commendable resolution until I left Barcelona, no sooner did I find myself afloat than it vanished like the mist, and seemed to me a veritable absurdity.

It was from Hamburg that I wrote to the shipping house, asking permission to remain over one voyage at home, to arrange certain family affairs. Meanwhile it had come about that I was not able to think of anything but the wife of Martí. Not even in dreams did she leave my mind; every word she had spoken sounded ceaselessly in my ears, as if I had in my brain a phonograph charged with conversations, and in my heart I felt every one of her gestures and movements. On returning towards Valencia the delight of thinking that soon I was going to enjoy a sight of my idol produced in me a sentiment of mingled shame and remorse. I feared a disdainful reception from her, and I feared also an affectionate and cordial one from her husband.

I did not intend to lodge in his house, to hush my noisy conscience. After spending six days in Alicante, I went to Valencia with a friend who chanced along, and made him an excuse for not going to the house of Martí. I did not go directly to see him, preferring to go later. I went out first to take a walk in the streets. But while walking through one of the principal streets, I saw not far distant three ladies looking at the fashions in a shop-window.

As I drew near I perceived that one of them was Cristina, and the other two, Doña Clara and Doña Amparo. I hastened up to them, and saluted them standing behind them. (How could I do such a thing?)

Cristina turned her head; and, as if she had seen something alarming, she gave a cry and ran forward hastily a few steps. My astonishment was great and the surprise of these ladies was scarcely less. Perceiving at once the strangeness of her conduct, and as if ashamed, she turned and came and welcomed me with unusual amiability. She explained her cry and her flight by declaring that a few moments ago she had given a bit of alms to a poor creature who had been a criminal, and all at once, without knowing why, it seemed to her as if he had followed them and was going to attack her. Doña Amparo and Doña Clara were satisfied with this, and laid her attack of nerves to her condition; they wished her to come into a shop and take a quieting draught, but Cristina said no.

I knew better than this, and walked on with them, saddened because I knew.

Martí received me with lively delight, professing to be vexed with me because I had not sought the hospitality of his house; but I, fortified by my excuse, held fast, and would not give in. Sabas also showed pleasure at seeing me. I could not do less than offer him my compassion on seeing in his face traces plainer than ever of his arduous labors beneath the sun. The result of these, by what I could gather, was the acquisition of an amber mouthpiece with his initials engraved upon it, of which he was so proud that it seemed as if all the vigils and anxieties that it had cost him had been well spent.

It was not necessary to inquire what impression my arrival made upon Castell. His cold, ceremonious courtesy made unnecessary any inquiries of that sort. Really it seemed to me that the lightly disdainful attitude that he held towards all the world was a little emphasized towards me. Perhaps I was ill-tempered, but a secret instinct warned me that this man hated me, and I paid him in his own coin.

Cristina was now quite advanced in her maternal expectations. Although women do not consider themselves beautiful at this time, except to their husbands, I found her more beautiful and interesting than ever, an indubitable proof of the depth of the affection wherewith she had inspired me. Her imaginary fears and her agitations at sight of me only increased it, and I credited her lack of courtesy to these imaginary fears. I noted that after the meeting she took pains not to look at me; but the very haughtiness with which she did it showed that some agitation ruled her spirit, and that I was not absolutely indifferent to her. Such was at least my illusion at the time.

Although I was not lodged in his house, the cordiality of Martí and my secret longing forced me to go every day to dine and spend some time with them. It was impossible for me to hide my love. At the risk of being observed (not by Martí, who was innocence personified, but by the others), I scarcely quitted the sight of Cristina. Whenever occasion presented, I made plain what was passing in my soul. If she dropped anything upon the floor, I was there to hasten and pick it up. If she glanced towards the door, I had already run to close it. If she complained of any ill feeling, I proposed all the remedies imaginable. In short, I showed to all concerned a lively interest and anxiety that came from my heart. She received these attentions with a serious face, sometimes with a certain diffidence; but I understood that she would not permit herself to take the slightest notice, and this sufficed me.

One day I grew more daring. Showing no such intention, I went nearer and nearer to her until my arm touched her dress. Then she got up brusquely and placed herself elsewhere. These silent rebuffs produced a melancholy impression upon me. But I was compensated by other enjoyments, fanciful, perhaps, but that did not hinder their being delicious. When we were sitting at table, although as I have said she took great pains not to look at me face to face, she could not help glancing about, and her eyes would meet and thrill my own. When this happened, I believed I could see that her face colored slightly.

Love did not wholly stifle my powers of observation. I mean to say that I loved the wife of Martí and studied her at the same time. I soon came to see and understand that beneath her rare and gracious mingling of timidity and ease of manner, of insistent happiness and supercilious seriousness, there existed in her a depth of exquisite sensibility, carefully and even ferociously guarded. The modesty of sentiment was so strong in her that any manifestation of tenderness caused it to retreat. She preferred to pass for hard and cold rather than that anyone should read her soul.

Unlike her mamma, who was delighted to receive endearments, and who kissed everybody, she never gave a caress to any member of her family, and avoided receiving one whenever possible. Her husband himself, when he found himself a little rebuffed, took it with his jolly shout, accepting everything with a laugh. In spite of this they all loved her dearly, and looked upon her coldness as a graceful oddity, with which it pleased her at times to snub them a little.

Because of her character, the least expression of affection from her lips had an inestimable value. But it was necessary to turn it off and pretend that it was not noticed. If it was observed and she knew it, all was lost. She returned at once to her brusqueness, cutting off gratitude with some ironical or disdainful speech. She also had the spirit of contradiction well developed; that is to say, she was wont to antagonize other people, not from pride or ill-humor, as I was soon convinced, but rather because of her great reserve, which made it repugnant to her to show the real strength of her feelings.

And with all this—an extraordinary thing!—there was never a creature whose features expressed more fully the movements and emotions of her spirit, even to the faintest shades of thought. Whatever dominated her for the moment, whatever stirred her, in spite of barred fortress that she sought to guard, was revealed in her eyes, in the changeful lights on her face, in all her gestures and movement.

Martí showed himself every day franker and more cordial towards me. This, it may be divined, made it possible for none but a villain to breathe in an enterprise against him. And I, who did not hold myself that, was embarrassed and saddened. We were inseparable from the first. Not only did we dine and take our coffee together, but he often insisted that I should accompany him while he was attending to his business; he soon made me his confidant and even asked me to give him advice. At last, after I had been five or six days in Valencia, he joyously proposed that we should thee-and-thou each other, and without waiting for my response began to do so with a cordiality that touched me. I experienced a mingled pride and humiliation, pleasure and pain; thinking how the confidence of this man brought me nearer his wife, yet held me all the more removed from her morally. I had occasion to prove this only a few hours afterwards. When we were again at the house, I, out of shyness, did everything possible to conceal that we had so soon adopted a new method of addressing each other. Martí made it plain directly. Cristina lifted her head surprised, looked at us both an instant, and dropped her eyes again, but not before I had, I believed, surprised in them an expression of annoyance. I guessed what passed in her soul.

Martí invited me the next day to visit his estate at Cabañal, where he had certain orders to give about the house and garden. The family was usually installed there by May, the present month; but this year, on account of the happy event that was expected, the moving out had been postponed.

We made the trip on foot, by the road and across the fields, in order to see the farms and gardens that lie between the city and the sea. I consented with good will, and at the hour for the promenade we started out upon our way, walking slowly until we reached the place.

My companion never closed his mouth after we came out of the house. The discussion of his affairs engrossed him to such an extent that he paid no attention to the delicious country, carpeted with flowers, whose white cottages seemed like doves alighted near us. Round about every one of the little houses with their sharp-pointed roofs grew a grove of orange-trees, pomegranates, and algarrobos. Beyond were cultivated fields with flowers and vegetables, some set with roses, lilies, carnations, gillyflowers; and others with strawberries, alfalfa, and artichokes. Running about among them on the well-beaten paths were beautiful brunette children, who stopped to gaze at us with their deep, dark eyes. The father of the family, bending to his task, would always lift his head as we passed and salute us gravely and silently, lifting his hand to his hat of coarse straw.

Martí did not see this, and scarcely the road we were walking on.

"One of two things! Either this business of the artesian wells will turn out well, in which case I not only hope soon to get a return on the capital employed, but I shall also make a good income for myself and my heirs; or it will turn out badly, and then it will look as if the capital were lost, but it will not really be so, because of my disposition and personal knowledge, trained and skilful in this class of work, which I think I should immediately use in making canals from a river in the province of Almeria, where there are great tracts of land that might prove very productive if watered, and which need only irrigation and ways of communication. It is a project that I have been turning over in my head for several years. You know well how much time and money it takes in Spain to get people together for this sort of business. Not only are directors, capitalists, and superintendents lacking, but even workmen who know how to carry out a certain class of works that I undertake. Well, whether the artesian wells turn out well or ill, I still have this knowledge ready at my command."

"That seems to me exactly the idea," I said, absorbed in the contemplation of the beautiful, variegated floral carpet that was spread before us.

"Yes, I think that's it!" exclaimed Martí, with emphasis. "But these ideas, friend Ribot," he went on, gayly flinging out his arms as if to embrace all mankind, "these ideas only come after some years of experience, and not even then unless one has practical sense and a vocation for business."

"Yes, aptitudes can be developed, but they cannot be acquired."

"There is my brother-in-law, Sabas. I make superhuman efforts to discover in him some ability, something he can do, and I only succeed in putting myself out. Whatever matter I confide to his care, even if I give him precise and definite instructions, he manages to knock all to pieces. It has got so tiresome that I leave him in peace and employ him in nothing whatever."

I could not help thinking that this punishment was not found very cruel by the brother-in-law, and yet it came into my imagination that he might have purposely provoked it as certain naughty children provoke it from their teachers, but I kept these and my other observations to myself.

"It is very different with my friend Castell. Of wide and penetrating talent, with a remarkable mind, immense learning, a profound knowledge of the sciences and arts, and even of mechanics—but from the first moment of application he is discouraged by the least scrap of an obstacle in his way. He is all obstacles and doubts and scruples. He loses heart before he begins anything and he has given up business. To carry out an industrial enterprise a knowledge of the matter is not enough; it must be studied; it is necessary that the one who undertakes it should possess an essentially positive mind—above all, that he should have, like me, an iron will."

Little by little we drew nearer to Cabañal. I have already described these shores of the sea whose great plain lies blue beneath the sun. We walked on enveloped in its light and breathing the fragrant air. The joyfulness of such a scene, serene and luminous as a picture by Titian, the idyllic bits that we came upon here and there, entered into the soul and overflowed it with a gentle felicity. In all this joy, this soft tranquillity, Martí with his beautiful, waving locks, his great, innocent eyes, did not seem to me so forcible a man as he wished to appear, not altogether of iron.

Before coming to the first houses of the village we turned off to the left. There at a distance was a white villa that Martí told me was his property. On the way I saw a curious plot of ground whose walls were made of perfectly symmetrical and equal-sized stones. These walls seemed to be in ruins, and through great openings I could discern certain structures, great iron pipes, rusted and fallen in pieces to the ground, wheels and other portions of machinery.

"What is this?" I asked, surprised.

Martí coughed before replying, pulled a bit at his shirt cuffs, and declared, with a gesture between peevishness and shamefacedness:

"Nothing—a factory of artificial stones."

"But it does not seem to be running."

"No."

"Whom does it belong to?"

"To me."

I shut up, because I understood how much the subject mortified him. We went on several steps without deigning to cast another look upon the abandoned factory, when, turning, he suddenly exclaimed:

"Don't imagine that I didn't know how to manufacture stone—all these walls are built of the products of the factory. Take up a piece of the stone and examine it."

I took up a piece, examined it, and saw that in fact it had, in appearance at least, all the necessary qualities of resistance. It gave me pleasure to say so. Martí explained that the failure of the factory was due to the scarcity of workmen. Valencia was a province that for centuries had neglected industrial for agricultural pursuits; it lacked hands. Then the manager had not properly filled his place; the increase on tariffs and freights, etc., etc.

The subject was undoubtedly vexatious to my friend. He spoke of it in a low voice, with a frown on his forehead, and he avoided looking at the unlucky factory. So in order to mortify him no more, I showed the least possible interest in all the rusting machinery, and went onward without bestowing another particle of attention upon it.

We came at last to the walls of his grounds. We entered them by a wrought-iron gateway, and crossed a handsomely laid-out garden to approach the house. This was a modest structure, but sufficiently spacious, and furnished within in considerable luxury. The furniture, suitable for the summer season, was simple and elegant. But that which roused my enthusiasm was the extensive park that stretched beyond, whose walls reached to the seashore, upon which it opened by a wrought-iron gateway. Formerly this had been a productive field. But first Martí's father and then himself had transformed it into a vast garden. Shady, gravelled pathways were bordered by orange-trees, lemons, pomegranates, and many other sorts of fruit-trees. Here was a little grove of laurels, and in the middle of it was a stone table surrounded by chairs. There was a grotto tapestried with jasmine and honeysuckle; yonder was a thicket of cannas, or cypresses, and in the centre a statue of white marble. And like a base for decoration, there was the azure line of the sea, into whose waves seemed ready to fall the oranges that hung from the boughs. The sun, that was already sinking, enveloped the garden and the sea with a sudden blaze of illumination; its golden rays were scattered over the white paths of the enclosure, made the whitewashed house resplendent, penetrated the thickets of cypress and laurel, lighting up the marble faces of the statues, and hung drooping from the branches of the trees like threads of the gold of waving tresses. At the right were visible over the walls the masts of little fishing boats with their simple rigging, and yonder extended the town of Cabañal in a rare and picturesque blending of fishermen's cots and aristocratic mansions wherein the grandees of the city came to spend the summer. More distant still was the port and the tall masts of steamboats.

Martí showed me all the grounds, although without much pleasure or pride. Business, past and future, burdened him; he did not know how to throw it off. It was only when we came to a corner next the beach that he was enough distracted for a few moments to point out to me a summer-house in the Greek style that was admirably introduced into this smiling landscape. It was adorned within by carved furniture brought from Italy, statues and vases. It had a little lookout balcony towards the sea, and over the door was inscribed a name that caused me a slight tremor.

"The building of this summer-house was a thing of my wife's. That is why I had her name put over the door."

From thence we returned to the house by new and ever more beautiful and embowered pathways. Before reaching it, we came upon a little artificial hill, and, topping it, a bit of a castle. About it was a little pond of water, imitating a moat. We crossed it by means of a drawbridge, and ascended by a narrow footpath between hedges of box and orange, arriving at the top in the time that it takes to tell of it. The path, because of its artful windings, produced the effect of being measured by rods, instead of by inches. Over the door of the little castle was engraved another name that also made me tremble, although in a very different way.

"The idea of the little artificial hill was my friend Castell's, and, naturally, it bears his name—which is all the better that it exactly suits it," he added, laughing.

For me the pun had much less charm. Perhaps the antipathy with which the subject inspired me had part in this. We entered the diminutive castle and ascended to its roof. From there were admirably revealed not only the park, which did not seem so vast, but also a good part of the cultivated grounds, all the harbor, and the Puerto Nuevo and the grand expanse of the sea. Above its innumerable wavelets, above the freshness and dark depths of the water hung the crystal vault of the sky, dappled with delicate tints of rose. The sun flung a river of gold across the waves. Among the flowery fields and the fields of maize shone the little white cottages nestled among their oranges and cypresses. Beyond Valencia was Miguelete, and in the distance the encircling mountains, that at this hour seemed all of violet and mauve and lilac.

"What is this hut?" I asked, disagreeably impressed by the sight of an ugly brick structure which reared itself up on the confines of the park.

"Nothing—that was an attempt at a beer manufactory," replied Martí dryly.

And again his brow was furrowed by the frown.

"And did it not get to the making of it?"

"Yes, there was some made. It turned out badly on account of the quality of the water. The maker, whom I got here from England, did not explain this to me in time, and I was obliged to waste money enough uselessly."

Coughing perfunctorily, he pulled at his shirt-cuffs, ran his fingers through his hair, and hastily descended the stair of the little castle, followed by me. There was in every movement of this man when he expressed pleasure or annoyance so much heartiness, such childlike innocence, that I felt myself constantly more attracted to him. It seemed to me that I had loved him for a great while.

When we came away from his estate the sun was already setting behind the distant mountains. We made our way around the house, and crossed the grounds again and through the fields of maize, the gardens and orchards. It was the hour of stopping work, and the laborers in the fields, with their Valencian kerchiefs about their heads, were resting at the doors of their cottages under the sweet fresh tendrils of vine-covered arbors. Their children were climbing upon their knees and dancing about them while the mothers prepared the rice for supper.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN we arrived at the house, night had already fallen. The family was assembled in the dining-room and the table set. Isabelita dined at her cousin's, and Retamoso and Doña Clara were getting ready to leave without their daughter. Sabas and Castell dined there also. We were joyously welcomed, and all, except perhaps Cristina, attacked me with questions concerning the impression that the country-place had made upon me. I showed myself enthusiastic, not merely for courtesy, but because I really was so. I enlarged heartily upon the enchanting situation, the taste and care with which the place was laid out, the elegance of the Cristina pavilion (I believe that I insisted too much on this point), and I finished by saying that I should not find it unpleasant to spend all my life there.

"In the Cristina pavilion?" asked Castell, with his ironical smile.

"Why not?" I responded boldly, casting a quick look at Martí's wife. She seemed to be thinking of something else at this moment, but I divined, none the less, that she did not lose a word of what I said.

"Then it's your taste to live caged like a canary. I also should like very well to live in that way, but on condition that I should be taken care of by a hand chosen by myself."

Saying this, he also looked out of the corner of his eye at Cristina, who kept her face turned the other way, and looked terribly dignified.

"But I, who am not a sybarite, make no condition whatever," I returned, laughing.

Martí slapped his friend several times upon the shoulder affectionately.

"As if we did not all know you, you old rascal! You would live in the way you are talking about a fortnight perhaps. At the end of that time you would be so bored with your cage, with lovely hands, and canary seed that you would throw it all over."

Castell protested against this judgment, declaring that fickleness in love depends not so much upon the temperament and its changes as upon the vague but pressing necessity that we all feel to seek for the being who can respond to our inmost sentiments, our most intimate aspirations, our secret longings; or, to speak in more prosaic words, although less clear also, those that adapt themselves exactly to our physical and moral individuality.

"I have not found—like you," he concluded daringly, "among so many women, the one who meets all the necessities of my being, many of them unimportant perhaps, but none the less existent. If, like you, *or before you*" (he uttered these words in a peculiar manner), "I had chanced upon her, then certainly my career of gallantry had ended, and you would have had no cause to call me, as now, an old rascal."

His attitude, his accents, and the furtive glances that the rich ship-owner cast from time to time upon Cristina while he was talking, confirmed me in the suspicion that I had conceived, whereof I have not before had occasion to speak, that this gentleman was paying court to the wife of his intimate friend and associate.

The effect of this dawning suspicion upon me was deplorable. I already hated my rival; now to myself I called him false friend, traitor, double-faced! But at the same time a voice cried out in my conscience that I, though a new friend, was not perceptibly better. This voice distressed me indescribably.

The talk went on, and Castell found occasion to say all he chose to Cristina, as if nobody but herself could hear. His well-chosen words admirably fitted the gestures, quick and speaking, wherewith he emphasized them. Cristina talked with her mother, but by her evident agitation and by the cloud of vexation which darkened her face I guessed that she was listening to what Castell said, and that it was not to her liking. In that moment, with a frown upon her forehead and a proud expression in her eyes, she seemed to me more adorable than ever.

Retamoso, with his hat already on his head, came up to Castell, and bending as if to speak in his ear, but in reality talking loud enough to be heard by his wife, said in his attractive Galician accent:

"Señor Castell, you are in the right—like a saint! The question hits the mark, hits the mark. If I had not had such good judgment in choosing a companion, what would have become of me, poor fellow! What a darling!—eh? What a treasure! Ssh! silence, keep the secret for the present, but I wouldn't have had two pesetas. Silence, ssh!"

And arching his eyebrows and making up faces expressive of admiration and restrained bliss, he moved away, shuffling his feet. His beloved better half, who had heard perfectly well, gave him a sidewise look which was not shining with gratitude, and turning up her hawk's nose, she said good-night to us with imposing severity.

We were now all standing up and preparing to seat ourselves at the table. Martí, observing that his piece of bread was a little broken, exclaimed jestingly:

"Aha, I think I find here the footprints of my little mouse, don't I, Cristina?"

She smiled assent.

"I suppose I'll be banished for picking at your bread, some day."

Then, as Martí turned to talk with Castell, I went up to the table carelessly and, pretending something else, contrived to get a morsel of the bread that Cristina had picked at, and ate it with inexplicable pleasure. This did not escape her, and I noticed that her face took on a slightly annoyed expression.

"Come, come to dinner, and everyone to his place!" she cried, with a pretty grimace of vexation.

I obeyed humbly, and seated myself in my accustomed place. The dinner was a gay one.

Martí was talkative and full of fun. As if he had not until then made enough of the beauties of his estate at Cabañal, he enlarged upon them with an enthusiasm that I had communicated to him on our walk. He ended by proposing that we should go there afternoons for picnics, since circumstances hindered the moving out altogether. It is needless to say with what delight I heard this proposition. Cristina welcomed it with pleasure, and also the others at the table. Sabas remarked, with his habitual gravity, that perhaps he should not be able to go every day.

"No; we know already that we need not count upon you. It would not do, would it—to throw over all business in the Plaza de la Reina and the Café del Siglo?" said his sister, laughing.

"It isn't that, my girl!" exclaimed the elegant creature, piqued. "You know that I am not particularly fond of rural amusements."

"Yes, yes, I know that you are one of the citified, and cannot breathe except in an atmosphere of tobacco smoke."

Doña Amparo hastened, as always, to the rescue of her son.

"It will please me very much if Sabas does not go, for picnics always disagree with his stomach."

"What would it matter to Cristina if I had to stay shut up?" exclaimed the critic with an affectation of bitterness.

"Poor little thing! You get on admirably on late suppers at the club, with olives and champagne."

Martí intervened and cut off the dispute between them, seeing that Doña Amparo was already making ready to faint away. Everyone has his own preferences in the matter of amusements and it was folly to try to impose our own upon others. "Everybody has a right to be happy in his own way," and if Sabas found himself happier under a roof than under the open sky, he had no wish to disturb him.

"All that I beg," he ended by saying, "is, that although he is not to be of the party, that he will let Matilde and the children come with us."

Sabas generously granted this petition, and all friction seemed to be ended; but Cristina, who still wished to tease him a little, said with a mischievous smile:

"Of course we understand that this means the afternoons when she has no buttons to sew on."

"Cristina, Cristina!" cried Martí, half vexed, half laughing.

We all did all we could to restrain our laughter. Sabas shrugged his shoulders with apparent disdain, but remained surly the rest of the evening.

The next day and the days thereafter, without his honorable company but with that of Matilde and the eldest of his children, we made our excursions to Cabañal.

Martí and Castell's carriages took us thither directly after breakfast, and brought us to the city at sunset. This time was spent chatting on the upper balcony of the summer-house while the ladies embroidered or sewed, or we went out into the park, where we played like children with balls or hoops.

Sometimes we left the place and ran about the village or went down on the beach, where we were greatly entertained by watching the fishing boats coming in; at other times we directed our footsteps into the country, visited some of the cottages, usually that of a certain Tonet, an old servant of Martí's, who owned the little farm where he lived. There we often rested, and his wife welcomed us with chocolates or peanuts or served us some other refreshment.

But the important business of the afternoon was the picnic, or rather its preparation. For it interested us that the picnic was spread and eaten in the open air. We carried the alcohol stove and the rest of the things to some distant and shady place in the park. The ladies put on their aprons; the gentlemen, in shirt-sleeves, made chocolate or coffee, or fried fish that we had just bought on the beach, and passed a happy time. How happy I was when the party gave me the task of stewing up some sailor's dish, and I went about among my scullions and scullionesses with the stewpan in my hands, despotically giving them exact orders and sometimes—who would believe it?—going so far as to forget that I was in love!

Yet I was more and more in love all the time; there is no doubt about that. Neither when I said to Cristina in an imperious tone, "Bring me the salt!" nor, when I reproved her sharply for cutting the fish up into too small pieces, did it even enter my imagination that a more perfect creature could ever have existed under the sun. In the country the supercilious severity that I had often remarked in her disappeared. Her mood was gay, changeful, lively, and she invented a thousand tricks to make us laugh, while from her lips witticisms flowed continuously. She was the soul of our excursions, the salt that seasoned them.

I could not keep my eyes away from her. I listened to her and stared at her like an idiot. Sometimes, though not often, she made me feel that I was carrying water in a sieve. For example, one afternoon, standing in the summer-house, she showed us a thimble that she had bought. Everybody examined it, and I also after the others, then I contrived to keep it without being noticed. A good while passed; nothing more was said about the thimble. But when we left the mirador to go to our picnic she crossed in front of me and said without looking at me:

"Put the thimble in this little basket."

It was of no use to be cunning and crafty with her. She saw everything; she observed everything.

Another afternoon, when her sister-in-law Matilde was playing on the piano and she standing turning the leaves of her music, I stole up silently from behind. Pretending to find myself enraptured by the music and looking closely at its sheets, I devoured with my eyes her alabaster neck and the fine, soft hair, there where the black locks of her head seemed to die away and be lost like exquisite music that melts in pianissimo. Well, then as if she had eyes for seeing what was behind her, she raised her hand to the neck of her dress and pulled it up with a gesture of impatience. It was an admonition and a reprimand. But in spite of her dumb rebuffs and reproofs and although she used seldom to look at me, I felt myself happy beside her. And this was because in these rebuffs and in the sternness of her countenance I found no distaste for myself, nor desire to mortify me. Everything emanated from a noble, if exaggerated, sentiment of dignity, without counting the intense affection that she professed for her husband, of which she constantly gave clear proof. Nor in this either was she unworthy the exquisite delicacy of her sentiments. Instead of showing herself tender and submissive towards him as so many women would have done in her case, she shunned showing any fondness in my presence and, whenever it was possible, avoided the caresses that he would have given her. Sometimes he laughingly asked her the reason for such severity, but she remained inflexible.

Of her sense of justice and the instinct that inspired it she gave witness more than once, although it was always tacit. I had gone to the house one morning. There was no one in the dining-room but herself and her mother. She happened to ask for a glass of water. I took it upon myself to anticipate the servant, went to the sideboard, took a goblet and a little tray, and was about to pour out the water and serve her when she interrupted me dryly:

"No, let it be. I am not thirsty now; it was a whim."

I was very much crestfallen, and even more saddened than humiliated. I cut short my visit and retired. That afternoon I stayed at the *fonda* and did not go to Cabañal as usual.

At night I went to the house when they were finishing supper, entered with a stern countenance, and did not try to glance at her. But I saw plainly that she looked at me, and I wished her to keep on until I saw a humble expression on her face.

In a few moments she addressed me with unusual amiability, seeking to make amends. I stood my ground rigidly. Then she said in a clear voice and with a gracious smile that I can never forget:

"Captain Ribot, will you do me the favor to pour a little water into one of those goblets and bring it to me?"

I served her, smiling. She smiled a little too before drinking it, and my resentment was melted like ice in the warmth of that smile.

Castell was always one of the party on our excursions to Cabañal. Sometimes, though rarely, he drove out alone in one of his traps.

I no longer doubted that he paid court to Cristina and had also observed the love that I felt for her. But he owed it to his immeasurable pride not to seem to notice a rival so little formidable; I could not see the slightest change in him. He continued to treat me with the same refined courtesy, not exempt from patronage, and—why should I not say it?—with also a sort of benevolent compassion. It is true that Castell extended this compassion towards all created beings, and I think I should not be wrong in affirming that it went beyond our planet and diffused itself among other and distant stars. As a general rule, he listened to nobody but himself; but at times, if he were in the humor, he would invite us to express our opinions, making us talk with the complacency shown to children; listening, smiling sweetly at our nonsensical chatter and our little mistakes. It was a regular secondary-school examination. When he deigned to pry into my limited field of knowledge I could not help fancying myself a microscopic insect that had by chance fallen into his hands, that he twirled and tortured between his encircling fingers.

They all listened to him with great deference. Martí ever showed himself proud of having such a friend, and believed in good faith that neither in Spain nor in foreign lands existed a man to compare with him—in the world of theory, of course, because in practical matters, Martí was all there, as I knew.

But Isabelita, Cristina's cousin, listened to him with even more absorption. It is impossible to imagine a more complete attention, an attitude more submissive and devoted than that of this girl with a profile like an angel, when Castell held forth. Her pure and pearl-like face was turned towards him; she sat perfectly still as if in ecstasy; the lashes of her innocent eyes did not move.

The one who took the least pleasure in the dissertations of the rich ship-owner was, as far as I could see, Cristina. Although she forced herself to hide it, I was not long in divining that the science of her husband's friend and associate did not interest her. She often grew absent-minded and, whenever she could find a plausible pretext, she would leave the room. Can it be supposed that this lack of reverence for a representative of science lowered her in my eyes? I think not!

I noted further that, although Cristina joined apparently the projects of her husband, and never contradicted him when he discussed them with his usual frankness before us, she showed lively vexation when Castell encouraged them. When the millionaire, therefore, would begin a pompous eulogy of Martí, praising in affected language his clear sight, his decision and activity, Cristina's face would change; her cheeks would lose their delicate rose-color; her brow would be knitted, and her beautiful eyes would take on a strange fixity. Usually she could not stand it to the end. She would get up and leave the room abruptly. The good Emilio, intoxicated with gratitude and pleasure, took no notice of this.

What a soul was that of this man, how noble, how sensitive, how generous! Chance brought to my knowledge a magnanimous action that raised him still more in my eyes. With the freedom that he had given me from the first, I entered his private office one day unannounced at a rather inopportune moment. His mother-in-law sat sobbing (for a change) in an arm-chair, and he with his back towards the door was opening his safe. On hearing me he turned and quickly shut the door of the safe. He seemed a little more serious and thoughtful than usual, but the generous expression of his face had not disappeared. He greeted me, making an effort to appear cheerful; then turning to his mother-in-law and putting one hand upon her shoulder, he said affectionately:

"Come, mamma, there is nothing to grieve about. Everything will be arranged this afternoon, without fail. Come now, go to Cristina and rest a little. You must not make yourself ill."

"Thank you, thank you!" murmured the suffering lady, without ceasing to weep and blow her nose.

Recovering finally at least a part of her energies, she left the place, not without giving me a strong, convulsive grasp of the hand and drawing her son-in-law to the door for three or four kisses. He shook his head and said, smiling:

"Poor woman!"

I gave him a glance of interrogation, not venturing to put the question in words. Martí shrugged his shoulders and murmured:

"Tss! It's the same as always. Her son abuses the bounty of this poor woman and it gives her a great deal of trouble."

As I perceived that he did not wish to go into further explanations, I refrained from inquiries, and we talked of other things. But a moment later Cristina came into the office, not in a good temper, and asked him:

"Mamma has been begging money of you, hasn't she?"

"No, my girl," replied Martí, coloring a little.

"Don't deny it to me, Emilio. I have known all since this morning."

"Very well, what of it? The thing is not worth wrinkling this little brow," he answered, touching it tenderly.

Cristina remained silent and thoughtful a few moments.

"You know," she said at last firmly, "that I have never opposed your expenditures for Sabas. I have enjoyed your generosity towards all, but your treatment of my brother has especially pleased me. Yet I have asked myself sometimes, 'Will this generosity of Emilio have really good consequences? Will it not encourage my brother to continue in his idle and dissipated habits?' If he were alone in the world, he might indulge in such luxurious ways without much danger. When he came to want, you could, by reducing him to strict necessities, keep him on his feet. But he has a wife, he has children, and I fear that they will have to bear the consequences of your generosity and of the habits which, thanks to your kindness, their father does not abandon. And, too," she added in low tones that trembled a little, "at present we have no great responsibilities, but we shall have them——"

"I believe you; we shall have them!" exclaimed Martí. "It looks to me as if the first of them would not be many days in arriving!"

Cristina's cheeks colored swiftly. Emilio, changing his tone, went over to her, put his arm about her shoulders affectionately, and said to her:

"You are right in this, as you are in everything that you say. You are a hundred times more sensible than I am. Perhaps I should have refused Sabas if he had come begging of me, because I am already a little tired of his affairs; but your mother comes—when I see her crying—you don't know how that moves me."

Cristina lifted to him her eyes shining with immense gratitude, her face quivering with feeling; fearing that she could not control her emotion, she suddenly left the room.

"Poor little thing!" said Martí, smiling once more. "She is very right. Sabas is a bore."

"He gambles, doesn't he?" I ventured, because of the confidence that had been shown me.

"It would be better to say he is skinned by sharpers. What a fellow! He has lost, and promised to pay, five thousand pesetas."

"He promises it, and you have to pay it."

"Possibly. But what is to be done? It is not all his fault. He has a mother who is too soft."

"And a brother-in-law who is too kind," I thought.

Martí put his arm across my shoulders, and we went thus to the sewing-room to find Cristina and Doña Amparo. They were both there, the first frowning and meditative, the other completely overcome by her emotions. Matilde came in presently to breakfast with them. I perceived that she was sad and seemed as if ashamed. Soon after two ladies dropped in for an intimate call, and conversation cleared up the heavy atmosphere of the room.

Cristina went out for a moment to attend to some of her domestic matters, and I noted that she left her handkerchief forgotten upon her chair. Then, with the dissimulation and ability of an accomplished thief, I went over to it, sat down as if absent-mindedly, and when nobody noticed, I took the precious object and hid it in my pocket. Cristina appeared again, and I noticed that she glanced about at all the chairs in search of her handkerchief; then she shot a glance at me, and, I firmly believe, guessed from my manner that I had it. Then not daring to ask me for it aloud and at the same time unwilling to give up and let it pass that she allowed me to have it, she went about searching in all the corners of the room, asking:

"Where can my handkerchief be?"

Nobody but me observed it, because all the rest were absorbed in conversation. At last I saw her sit down in her chair, take up her work, and go on with it in silence.

I went away to luncheon at the *fonda*, without accepting their invitation to remain. I had a vehement desire to enjoy my precious conquest by myself; for I considered it such in my mad presumption after she gave over looking for it. Once in my quarters and assured that the door was fastened, and that nobody could see me through the key-hole, I snatched the kerchief from my pocket and gave myself up to a sort of madness which even now makes me blush when I remember it. I breathed its perfume with intoxication, kissed it numberless times, pressed it to my heart, swearing to be eternally faithful, put it away with the pictures of my father, took it out to kiss it, and put it away again. At last I came to the end of all imaginable extravagances, better suited to a young student of rhetoric than to the captain of a steamboat of three thousand tons.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN the afternoon I was with the family at Cabañal as usual. Martí did not accompany us, having to attend to a certain business matter. (Did it have to do with the five thousand pesetas that his brother-in-law had lost?) At all events, I was selfish enough to rejoice at his absence. During the trip out and the hours that we stayed at the place, I observed something in Cristina's manner and gestures that made my heart tremble with joy and hope. I cannot explain how, without her looking at me nor once speaking directly to me, I felt overwhelmed by a celestial happiness, but so it was. We passed all the afternoon in the summer-house. The ladies worked at their sewing or embroidery. I read or made believe to read. Cristina, affected by an unusual languor, did not rise from her chair until the moment of leaving. While the others laughed and jested, I saw that she kept silence and was grave although without any apparent cause. Her face was slightly flushed. My imagination suggested to me the idea that it was because of the thoughts drifting through her soul and the timidity that they inspired. On the dark and gloomy horizon of my life light began to dawn; so my heart said to me. During that unforgettable afternoon, I was as happy as the angels must be in Paradise, or the author of a drama when he goes out on the stage to receive applause between the leading old man and young lady.

After dining at my hotel I went to take coffee at the Siglo, with the intention of going thence to Martí's house. I encountered Sabas on entering, his pipe in his mouth, seated among several of his friends, whom he was haranguing in his own solemn and judicial manner. He saluted me from a distance with a wave of the hand, and presently seeing that I was alone, separated himself from the group and came to join me.

He was in a jovial mood and did not seem in the least cast down by his folly of the day before, nor ashamed of it. We talked of our daily excursions to Cabañal, and I described them as very lively and delightful. He did not care to contradict me openly, but I understood by his gestures more than by his words that he looked upon all that as childishness unworthy a serious and mature man like himself. For one who could appreciate them, Valencia held pleasures more highly flavored, other fascinations; and he was sorry that I was out of them without tasting them. He did not say what they were, but from what I already knew, it was readily to be supposed that they had some relation direct or indirect with roulette.

"Have you seen the famous stone factory?" he asked me in serious tones, although his eyes gleamed with a malicious smile.

"Yes, I have seen it."

"A fine business! And also the celebrated beer distillery?"

"Also."

"Better business yet! isn't it?"

Then sounded in the depths of his throat a chuckle that could not be uttered because at that moment he was

earnestly sucking his pipe. I was confused, as if he had said something offensive about one of my family, and I responded vaguely that certain enterprises turn out well, and others ill, and that their fortunes depend upon fortuitous circumstances more than upon the intelligence and industry of whosoever undertakes them.

"Tell that of others, but not of my brother-in-law," he answered with sarcastic gravity. "Emilio's enterprises are always brilliant, because his is a practical genius, essentially practical."

"He seems to me a very clever man," I remarked with some embarrassment.

"Not at all; not at all; I will not admit a bit of it. His is a practical, and his friend Castell's a theoretical genius."

"We have already talked a little about that," I replied smiling, to turn his scalpel away from the unpleasant subject.

"They are both geniuses, each one in his own fashion, the only geniuses that we have in Valencia."

I did not know what to say. That sarcastic tone annoyed me extremely. Sabas must have observed this, because exchanging it at last for another more serious, he set himself to make, as usual, a careful and reasonable analysis of his brother-in-law's conduct. It was something to see and to admire, the gravity, the aplomb, the air of immense superiority with which that man talked over others, the penetration with which he uncovered the hidden motives of all their acts, the incontrovertible force of his arguments, the sorrowful divination with which he formulated them. It was such that I could not do less than acknowledge to myself that every one of his observations hit the mark; but although I knew this, I was both astounded and indignant while I listened. I tried to hold the opposite side, but I could see that this only served to make clearer the perspicacity and conclusiveness of his judgments, and when I had taken my coffee and smoked a cigar, I got away from him.

"For all that," I said, shaking his hand, "I have no room for doubt that Emilio is a very good fellow, and full of talent."

"Agreed!" he responded, returning the hand-shaking, "but confess that a little common sense would be useful to him!"

I left the café angry and miserable. I was very glad to get away from the sight of the dolt who had spoiled my morning. I directed my steps slowly towards the house of Martí, but on the way my thoughts took a sadly audacious direction. I was filled with a moral suffering, that had since morning afflicted me; this, mingling with my flattering hopes, made me so that I had not strength to mount the steps, and in front of the door I turned about, went to my hotel, and went to bed.

That was for me a memorable night! As soon as I had put out the light I understood that it was going to be long indeed before I could woo sleep to come to me. A whirl of wild thoughts filled my brain, disordering, agonizing. The lovely vision of Cristina came in the centre of all, but did not succeed in calming their ardor, nor controlling them. In vain fancy called up the scene of the handkerchief and that adorable face, softened and moved, the sight whereof had made me happy all day long. In vain I invoked the celestial felicity that sooner or later must descend upon me. Whether it was illusion or reality, I thought that the fruit was ripening, and already responded with delicate tremors to the continued shaking that my hand gave the bough. Perhaps it would be long in falling into my lap. But I ought to confess that this alluring future possibility did not leave me peaceful and joyous as I had hoped. I tried to become so by closing my eyes, but this did not do it. My eyes were only the more widely open. My forehead burned my hand when I passed it across it. I experienced a strange restlessness that obliged me to change my position constantly. The curious suffering whose first slight stings I had felt during the day, now pierced me fiercely and intolerably.

This suffering was nothing else but remorse. To be really happy it is a necessity that a man should be contented with himself, and I was not. Another image, melancholy and grief-stricken, followed always after that of Cristina in the interminable procession of my thoughts, disturbing the happiness of which I had had a glimpse. It was that of Martí. Poor Emilio! so good, so generous, so innocent! His mother-in-law wrung money out of him and would have ruined him to support her son in his idleness; his friend, whom he looked upon as a brother, deceived him; his brother-in-law, upon whom he heaped kindnesses, ridiculed him publicly. He had no heart near him that was loving and faithful except that of his wife. And I, an outsider, to whom he had offered so much frank and affectionate hospitality, I would snatch it away! The idea weighed down my heart, made me feel myself disgraced. In vain I forced myself to picture in lovely colors what it would be to be the lover of Cristina, to taste of the intense pleasure of passion, and the joy of conquest. In vain I tried to make my fault seem less by recalling to mind the shortcomings of others. In my ears sounded ever a voice assuring me that to go on would be to be unhappy. And my quivering nerves kept me tossing between the sheets with my eyes ever more and more wide open.

The hours went by, sounding slowly, sonorously, and sadly from the cathedral clock. I tried earnestly to shut my eyes and go to sleep, but fiery, invisible fingers pressed open my eyelids. At last I bounced out of bed, struck a light, dressed myself, and began walking the floor. And when I had paced back and forth for a while, searching the most secret corners of my heart, I understood what must of necessity be done. I had recourse to chloral, more chloral than I had ever taken in nights like this of sleeplessness and struggle. I renounced my desires once for all, my hopes, the enjoyments of love and the flatteries of self-love. I entered into my spirit with a lash and drove from it the perfidy of will which, for the few pleasures that it gives us, causes us so many burning wounds. This cost me labor, for it hid itself away in all sorts of corners, obliging me to pursue it closely, leaving it no point to stop upon. But at last I succeeded in driving it out in sober earnest, and I stopped in the middle of the room, tired out, perspiring like one who has performed some heavy task, but at peace. I undressed again, lay down on the bed, and the winged god, son of sleep and night, bore me away in his arms to the mysterious palace of his father.

When I awoke, the sun, already high in the heavens, was shedding its golden rays upon the city. As soon as I had dressed myself I went directly to the house of Emilio. The husband and wife were together in the sewing-room, and with them were Doña Amparo, Isabelita, Doña Clara, a dressmaker, and a domestic. The first question that was asked me was where I had been the night before. I excused myself with a headache. Cristina, who was embroidering near the balcony, did not lift her eyes, but I noted on her face the same expression of gentle compassion that she had worn during the episode of the handkerchief. And, too, while I was talking with the others I saw that she stole a swift and timid glance at me.

I improved a moment when all were occupied, and approached her. Drawing the handkerchief from my pocket, and in a voice so low that the company could not hear me, yet not low enough to make any secrets suspected, I said:

"I have carelessly kept a handkerchief of yours, thinking that it was my own. Until I got home I did not perceive my mistake. Here 'tis; take it."

She lifted her head and gave me a look of intense surprise; her face flushed a vivid carmine; she took with a trembling hand the handkerchief that I held out to her, and again bent her brow over her embroidery frame.

After that, tell me frankly if I have not the right to laugh at Cæsar, Alexander, Epaminondas, and at all the heroes of pagan antiquity in general! At least I live in the intimate conviction (and this thought makes me vastly greater in my own eyes) that if Epaminondas had found himself in my shoes he would not have returned the handkerchief.

I turned anew to the group and joined the chat with animation, although, perhaps, it was an excessive animation. My soul was profoundly moved and it should be declared among these frank confessions that, although I felt no pride in my heroism, neither did I experience that sweet content that the moralists say always accompanies good actions.

I lunched with them and we went afterwards to Cabañal, where the afternoon passed as merrily as ever. But my gayety was only feigned; although I wore myself out pretending it, and to divert myself, I am sure I cut a sorry figure.

Cristina did not care to hide her preoccupation. All the afternoon she was thoughtful and serious, even to the point of making herself remarked.

When night came, praise God! I would have opportunity to turn the key that locked up my thoughts and weighed down my soul, and ease my pain a little.

It chanced that Martí had brought from his library the works of Larra, and he read to us, to pass the time, one of his most delicious pieces, entitled "El Castellano Viejo." We all laughed and applauded the gifts and ingenuity of the great satirical writer. From this we went on to talk of his life and his tragic end in the flower of his youth, for he was not yet twenty-eight years of age when he voluntarily quitted this world.

"And why did he kill himself?" asked Matilde.

"For that which men usually kill themselves, for—a woman!" answered Martí, laughing.

"I believe you! When they don't kill themselves on account of money," exclaimed the young wife, showing herself a trifle annoyed.

"That kind have not wholly lost their senses, but there are many more of the first sort," he returned, laughing.

"Thanks, very much. And was she married or single—this one who interested him?"

"Married. It is said that he maintained relations with her during the absence of her husband, that his return was announced, and that then she, repentant or timid, made known to him her resolution to break off with him. The grief of Larra was so severe that he was not able to bear it, so he shot himself."

"But she did right, and he was very stupid to leave life when he was so young and when there are so many women to choose from and marry."

"He was already married," said Martí.

"He was married!" exclaimed the women indignantly and all together.

"And had several children."

"Then he should be quartered! He ought to be hung! The scoundrel should be cast out with the other refuse! It would serve him right!"

The wrath of the ladies made us laugh. Someone observed that she also was married, and that this fact had not seemed to irritate them so much.

"Because women are weak creatures. Because women do not run after men. Because they are deceived by honeyed words. Because men rouse their compassion, pretending to be mad and desperate!"

"You are right," I said, to calm them. "The one who resists ought not to have the same responsibility, if failing at last, as the one who makes the attack. But coming to the concrete example of which we were talking, my opinion is that Larra gave more proofs of suicidal egotism than of high and delicate love. If he had really loved this woman, he would have respected her penitence, would have considered her all the more worthy of adoration, and would have found in his own heart and in the nobleness of the adored being resources to make life worth living. But to leave life, to deprive his children of a father and his country of a true Spaniard, makes me, at least, think that he did not love his beloved for the lovable qualities heaven had bestowed upon her, but for his own sake."

The ladies joyfully agreed with me. This roused Castell's pride of wisdom; or perhaps he only gave way to his ever-present desire to instruct his fellows, believing himself infallible. He leaned back in his chair, and holding my attention by his little finger glittering with rings, delivered a complete course in philosophy. His was a well-linked chain of reasoning, elegant sentences, a great abundance of psychological, biological, and sociological facts—all to show that "man is irrevocably fettered to his own sensations;" that "no other sincere motive exists except that of pleasing them;" "the world is a battle without a truce;" "struggle is the inevitable condition for the preservation and upholding of the great machine of the universe," and so on.

"Without struggle, friend Ribot," he concluded, "we should return to the condition of inert matter. Combat trains us and strengthens us; it is the sole guarantee of progress. He who, led away by a mad notion, strives to suppress antagonism towards other creatures attacks the very root of existence and attempts to violate the most sacred of its laws."

"Oh, yes!" I exclaimed with emotion. "He would be mad, but I affirm that he would experience immense pleasure in attacking this sacred law. I should like nothing better than to get up some morning and smash it into bits. I have passed the greater part of my life upon an element where this sacred law demands a fervent worship. In the depths of the sea the creatures devour one another with indefatigable devotion; the greater religiously swallow up the less. You may rest assured, Señor Castell, that the great machine of the universe will not suffer any damage from their sins. But I confess frankly that I have never become accustomed to these proceedings, wherein marine animals have the advantage over terrestrial ones. Some nights in summer, on the bridge of my boat, I have asked myself: 'Is it possible that man is obliged to imitate this ferocious struggle everlastingly, and be forever implacable to all who are below him? Will there not come a day when we will gladly renounce it, when compassion will rise above interest, and the pain that we cause not only to our fellow-beings, but to any living creature, become unendurable to us?'"

"Dreams, nothing more! Nor are you the first who has followed this chimera."

"Well, then, let us dream!" I cried, with more passion than I suspected myself capable of, "let us dream that this sad reality is no more than an appearance, a horrible nightmare from which perhaps the human spirit will one day awaken. And meanwhile so much!—let every man manufacture his magic world and travel through it, companioned

by love and friendship and virtue, by all those beautiful visions that make life joyful. For life, Señor Castell, however balanced and physiological it may be, is a sad and insipid thing when the imagination is not moved to adorn it. If capricious fortune should ever drag me, like Larra, into being enamored of a woman who belonged to another" (here my voice did not change in the least), "I should not perfidiously attempt to gain her affection away from her husband, to win pleasure or joy. At least, I should not hesitate to strike down my own joy pitilessly. I should rather try to make use of my poor imagination, as great Petrarch made use of his divine one, to love her, to keep her image sacred in the depths of my heart, to give her unselfish adoration; and my life, by contact with this pure love, would gain elevation and nobility."

From the beginning of our talk I had felt the eyes of Cristina resting upon me. Now I saw her rise hastily and go to the piano to conceal her emotion. Doña Clara, Matilde, and Isabelita applauded. Emilio, laughing, threw his arms about my neck.

"What warmth, what enthusiasm, Captain! I am a man essentially practical, and not in the least able to argue with Enrique; but you have answered him, and said things very agreeable, and very fine, and, what is rarer, you know how to say them very well."

This was the truth, in spite of my modesty. It was the first and only time in my life that I felt myself an orator. And if in that moment the directors of the Athenæum at Madrid had invited me there, I think I should not have minded giving in the capital a lecture on "The Future of the Latin Races," or any other topic however grand!

CHAPTER IX.

FROM that day her attitude towards me changed materially. She showed herself less diffident and distrustful; she did not seek so carefully to avoid looking me in the face. When I entered she did not suddenly turn serious as she used. Little by little her freedom of manner increased, making her cordial, and affectionate too, within the bounds of her reserved temperament. Her delicacy hindered her from recompensing me in words for what I had uttered in her presence; but she used her ingenuity to find a way to make me understand that she approved of me.

One afternoon there was talk of certain things that had been bought and left forgotten in a shop. Martí wished to send a servant for them. She said with apparent indifference:

"Captain Ribot, do you not go through the Calle de San Vicento? Then do me the favor to get this parcel and bring it to me to-night."

I was overwhelmed with delight. At night when I delivered it to her she received it with more indifference than ever.

"Thanks!" she said dryly, without looking at me.

It did not matter. I was sure she had given me a reward. I felt happy and peaceful.

But next day, after this small bounty and grateful success, adverse fate had prepared for me a graver alarm than I had ever experienced in my life of peril and hazard. Neither when I ran aground in the Rio de la Plata, nor when the sea knocked away the bridge and half our masts in the English Channel, did I feel my heart so constricted by any sudden encounter. The agent to furnish me with this most cruel trial was Doña Amparo. We had been chatting in this lady's sewing-room, Cristina and I. While they worked I had been turning over an album of portraits of all of the family and many of their friends. I inquired, and Doña Amparo told me, who the originals were. Cristina remained silent.

"Who is this charming child?" I asked, gazing at the likeness of a little girl of ten or twelve years. "What beautiful eyes!"

"Don't you recognize her? It is Cristina."

"Ah!" I exclaimed, surprised. And, looking at her, I observed that she was crimson.

"She was then in school. Wasn't she very lovely?"

"Yes, I think so," I stammered.

"Mamma, don't say such absurd things. She looks like a picked chicken!" exclaimed the one under discussion, laughing.

"Like a picked chicken!" cried the mother indignantly; "you were plump as possible. From that time you have done nothing but lose ground. I would give something to see you now as you were then. And Ribot will say the same."

"Señora," I murmured, although in confusion, "no doubt she was very beautiful at that time, but I think that the present is better worth while."

Cristina blushed more yet, and bent over her work serious and silent. Her mother did not choose to drop the subject. I did not venture to contradict her openly; I only uttered monosyllables or phrases of doubtful interpretation. At last we gave up this conversation, so dangerous to me. We were told that the hairdresser had come, and Cristina went to her room.

I continued turning over the album, and Doña Amparo went on moving back and forth the ivory needle of her lace-work. We preserved silence; but three or four times, on lifting my eyes, I observed that she was looking at me with irritating persistence. Finally I could see that she laid down her work, doubtless to look at me more to her liking.

"Ribot," she uttered in a low voice.

I thought it well to seem deaf.

"Tss! Ribot."

"What did you say, señora?" I asked, pretending to come out of my great abstraction.

"Look me in the face."

"How? I do not understand."

"Will you look me in the face?"

As I had not been doing anything else, this petition would have been tremendously absurd if it had not been even

more disquieting.

"Now, move your chair a little nearer."

This new demand appeared to me much more disquieting. I drew up, none the less, according to orders, dragging the chair with an ill-omened squeak. Adopting a tranquil and unembarrassed air, distinctly contrary to what would have suited me at that instant, I waited for what it was she had to say to me. Doña Amparo gazed at me smiling, and then, with a deep look, she said:

"Ribot, you are in love with my daughter Cristina!"

I grew pale, then crimson; afterwards other shades of yellow, green, and blue. Indeed, I think my face was a rainbow for the space of several seconds.

"Señora! I! How can you suppose it? On my life, what a notion! What an idea!"

Doña Amparo, on seeing me in such a terrible state of agitation, became frightened, and turned pale also. She reached out immediately for her smelling-bottle; with one hand she held up my head, and with the other put it under my nostrils. I was given salts to smell in such a moment as that!

I took my bitter cup as best I could, thanked her, and, with smothered words and faltering tongue, ascribed my emotion to my natural surprise. The accusation was so grave that really——

Doña Amparo smiled benevolently, doubtless to calm me, and would not consent that we should say another word before I took a drop of ether to fortify me. I swallowed it not without difficulty, for my throat was constricted so that I was scarcely able to breathe. Then, to mollify the just indignation of this lady, I returned to my discomfited and incoherent protestations against such a monstrous supposition.

I in love! How could it be possible that I should have the hardihood, the audacity? Her daughter was a model of all the virtues. Nobody would have the rashness to offend her with other sentiments than those of respect and admiration—I least of all, a friend of Martí, who was such a gentleman, so loyal, who had given me so many proofs of unmerited esteem, etc., etc.

"All this is very well, Ribot," declared Doña Amparo, emotionally sniffing her smelling-salts, "but this does not hinder you from being on fire, mad, lost, for my daughter."

"You deceive yourself, señora. I assure you that you——"

"Come, confess yourself," she said, putting one hand on my shoulder, and looking at me with a smilingly mischievous face: "nobody can hear."

"Señora, for God's sake!"

"Confess, sinner! Confess yourself!" and she gave a gentle and affectionate little pull at my beard.

I was terrified, dreading something decidedly unpleasant.

"Let us keep the secret between us two. You are in love with Cristina, as Castell has been for some time."

"Enough of this!" I said, trying to find a way to escape.

"He is a much worse rake, and, between the two, frankly I prefer you."

I was stupefied. What was it that this señora preferred? Why was she talking to me in this manner? Where was she going to stop?

"Isn't it true that Cristina is very lovely?" she went on with the same flippancy. "She is such an interesting type, of such delicacy! It is not strange that you should become enamored of her. Of course, I will not have her talked about."

"Señora!"

"No! I know what you would say! She is the best of creatures, virtuous, incapable of failing her husband. Further, Emilio has no equal, so much affection, so much loyalty, so splendid! He adores his wife. I am as proud of him as if he were my own son. I would not consent, for anything in the world, that he should have the least trouble."

"He will not have any on my account, make yourself easy," I ventured to say.

"That is honorable in you, Ribot," she replied, pressing my hand. "You are very good, enough better than that rascal of a Castell," she added, smiling sweetly. "And, truly, you could not do less than be fond of Emilio. He is so good. I always find him so affectionate towards me. But who can blame any poor fellow for falling in love! The wrong is in murmuring soft nothings in the ear of Cristina when Emilio is not looking. We will suppose that they are foolish things, that she has eyes like this and a skin like that. But that is not right. Emilio is his best friend, and if he suspected, he would be disturbed. You, Ribot, are much more respectful. You would not let yourself gaze, except by stealth. But what eyes he makes at her! Come, now, let us see, sinner, did you fall in love at Gijon or here?"

"I beg of you, señora—I—I feel so much upset, I must ask you to allow me to retire."

"How reserved you are, Ribot! Well, this pleases me. Men of few words are those who best know how to care. But with me you ought not to be so timid. I know the affection you have vowed her. Open your heart to me, so that I can do everything possible to console it. To whom better than me can you unbosom yourself?"

"A thousand thanks, señora. Permit me to go. At present I feel that I should not be able to say anything in reason."

"I understand you! I understand you, dear Ribot!" declared Doña Amparo, pressing one of my hands with emotion between both her own. "You are like me, exceedingly sensitive, exceedingly emotional. Don't you want another drop of ether? Neither you nor I is fit for this world. I cannot bear to see anyone suffer. Now here you see me, me who, in spite of my adoration for my son-in-law, for whom I would willingly give my life, am dissolved in tears at seeing you suffering on account of my daughter. I am weeping like mad."

And truly Doña Amparo did not in this moment malign herself.

"Frankly, Ribot," she went on rackingly, "if it were possible for Cristina to care for you without troubling Emilio, I would myself go and intercede for you."

"Thank you, thank you," I murmured, pressing her hand before I got mine away.

"Believe me, you are as dear to me as a son, and I would give something if——"

Here her voice strangled in her throat, and I improved the precious opportunity to stride with tragic footstep from my scene of trial.

I went out in indescribable confusion. I felt angry, wrathful at such a woman, who with so much frivolity and folly lifted the veil of the most delicate secrets, the deepest intimacies of her family life. Between my teeth I called her

coarse, imbecile, a bad mother. My anger carried me so far as to accuse her of an inclination to trade upon her child's attractions, of having been born for the part of a *Celestina*. Yet little by little I calmed myself, and with calmness arrived at last at justice. Doña Amparo was absolutely idiotic, of this there was no doubt; but she was not a bad woman. Hers was a heart that spread itself like butter over the first comer. It was necessary to her to be looked after and petted like a child or a dog, and like them she knew no difference between the hands that bestowed caresses. Reflecting thus, my spirit was little by little inspired with less wrathful sentiments; but I could not help thinking, all the same, that if the foregoing conversation should become known to Cristina, she would fall dead of shame.

I encountered her in the office with her husband and Castell. Emilio, who was beginning to organize and get under way his famous project for putting canals through the province of Almeria, was in an excellent humor. I suspected that Castell had finally facilitated the matter with the needful. Emilio was babbling away, chaffing his friend affectionately about his scepticism and theories, and his apathy towards business. If he had Castell's means at his disposal, he would undertake to become the richest man in Spain, at the same time giving bread away to many families and furthering the progress of the nation. When I entered, the torrent of his chaffing was diverted to me, and he threatened to marry me off within a period of not more than two months. Then he began talking to me about his project. As soon as the great family event we were all hoping for had come off, he would go to Almeria to hasten the preparation for the canal. He drew from the desk a lot of portfolios and showed me the plans, explaining details, and trying to stir up in me the same enthusiasm that animated him. I gave him a religious attention, but only in appearance. I really lost not one movement of Castell's while I looked over the papers, for I suspected him. I saw him manage skilfully to get near Cristina, who with one foot on the balcony sill was turning over a book. When he got near her, under pretext of examining the book she held, I observed that he brought his cheek near hers until it almost touched; and although his back was towards me and I, of course, could not see his lips move, I knew that he was whispering something to her. The lady moved her head abruptly away and tried to withdraw; but—oh, what a surprise!—Castell detained her, taking hold of her wrist. At the same time with his other hand he tried to put a letter between her fingers. Cristina refused to take it. There was a struggle in silence. My heart beat in my breast. I was afraid that Martí would turn his head and see what was going on. Not for sake of the villain Castell, it may be readily understood, but to save my friends from the scandal and from cruel trouble, I did everything possible to keep him occupied. Cristina's frightened eyes were several times turned towards us; then not getting free otherwise, and fearing that which was surely going to happen, if this struggle were prolonged a few seconds more, she decided to take the letter, which she crumpled and hid in her hand. Then, pale, yet smiling, she came over to us and busied herself also in looking over the plans, forcing herself to seem at ease. But her face did not lose its intense pallor and her whole body was trembling.

As for Castell, I never saw anybody cooler, serener, or showing less emotion of any sort. He remained a little while quiet, his hands in his pockets, looking out over the balcony into the street. Then he walked about the room. Now and then he would give Cristina a quick, scrutinizing glance. In spite of the profound aversion with which he inspired me, I could not help admiring the man's incredible audacity and at the same time his perfect self-control and unquenchable confidence in himself. I have never known anyone to whom other created beings represented less.

I did not lose sight of the hand in which Cristina had crumpled the letter. Emilio went on through the portfolios without ceasing his long prolix explanations. Then rising from his chair and taking Castell's arm, he halted him in his walk.

"Do you—don't you want to go into such a business?" he said in the chaffing tone.

"You know already, Emilio, that I can't serve you," replied the other, with his placid and patronizing smile.

"In work, no—I know that. But as a figure-head you can do me a great service. As you are rich and are known as a scientific man (you know that, although you don't care much about it), it is necessary that you should take the most important position, and be president of the council of administration. No work will be demanded of you. You shall be given a comfortable arm-chair, and you can, from time to time, drop off to sleep, scattering benedictions."

Cristina had remained near the table. Standing up, she, with a lofty expression, cast one full glance at Castell. Then unfolding that which she held, she tranquilly tore it up and flung the tiny bits into the waste-paper basket.

CHAPTER X.

OUR way that afternoon lay towards the cottage of Tonet, where some refreshment was prepared for us. This Tonet, a regular Moor according to his eyes, his complexion, and his teeth, was a wonder at preparing *paellas* and playing on the flute. Whenever it occurred to us to go and visit him, he received us with the gravity and courtesy of a feudal señor. Scarcely opening his lips, he made himself understood to his wife and children by signs, had chairs brought for us under the arbor, and soon afterwards he used to serve us figs, dates, chufas, and fresh cinnamon cakes, with which his pantry was always provided. When we had let him know we were coming, as on the present occasion, he offered us ice cream, rich with vanilla and filberts. He was a meek, sad man, seeming careless of all things. He was never joyful, but liked to see joyousness in others. On Sundays and on many afternoons when his work was done early, he would come out and sit down alone in front of the cottage and play softly for a while on his flute. He did not do it for his own pleasure; it was a lure, nothing more. Little by little he drew to his own cottage the young people from all the cottages round about, and a dance was improvised. His eldest son, a boy of fourteen years, played on the taboret and was almost as grave and silent as he. Both passed hours, one blowing and the other beating his instrument, serious, melancholy, with eyes fixed on space, and heeding neither much nor little the noisy dance that their music evoked.

Sabas, who was of the party this afternoon, marched abreast with me as we were making our way across the fields of high Indian corn, already bursting into ears. The first subject that he proposed for my consideration, sucking his pipe and spitting at regular intervals, was of a nature essentially critical. Why did his brother-in-law persist in keeping up this estate with so little of it under cultivation, and at so much expense, when by so little effort it could be made productive? Every one of the constituent elements of this proposition was separately examined by a rigidly

mathematical method. To do so he formulated in the first place certain definitions, clear, distinct, and luminous. What is an estate for recreation? What is a productive estate? What is an estate of combined pleasure and utility? After this he laid down certain axioms as profound as they were indisputable. All that is productive ought to produce. To attain an end one ought to employ means. Man is not alone in the world, and ought to consider his family. Vanity should not influence human actions. One-sided propositions immediately followed with their premises and corollaries; then he would go on to the end gently, but with invincible logic to prove the proposition on which hung the following corollary: Emilio is an active and enterprising man, but at the same time a careless fellow.

Satisfied, with good reason, by the method and intuition and the logic wherewith the Supreme Being had so highly favored him, Sabas continued sucking and spitting with dizzying rapidity. The second subject which this lucid soul attacked this afternoon directly concerned me.

"Come, tell us, Ribot, have you never thought of getting married?" he asked me after a long pause, taking out his pipe and fixing a scrutinizing gaze upon me.

I confess I felt disturbed. I understood that the depths of my soul were next to be sounded, and trembled, perceiving that this transcendent critic was disposed to exercise his scalpel on me.

"Tss! Sailors think little of that. Our life is incompatible with family pleasures."

"Sailors, when they arrive at a certain comfortable condition and have reached an independent position like you, have the right to retire peacefully and enjoy a comfortable life," he replied with the gravity and firmness which marked every utterance that came out of his mouth.

How did he know that I had reached an independent position? Solely by his marvellous intuition, for I had given nobody an account of the state of my affairs. I admired such tremendous penetration from the bottom of my heart, and was humbly disposed to find out how much more he knew about me.

Sabas meditated several minutes. And while he meditated, sucking his pipe, his cheeks sunk in a supernatural manner. The energy that he expended upon that tobacco smoke was such that I was persuaded he must be swallowing it.

At the same time the intensity of his reflections influenced in like manner the secretion of his salivary glands.

"Why should you not marry my cousin Isabelita?" he said to me suddenly, with that brusque and peremptory accent which characterizes men who rule their kind by their power of thought.

Isabelita was walking on with Matilde in front of us. I grew pale, fearing she might have heard these serious words, and frightened and confused, murmured some incoherent words.

"Yes," proceeded the critic, "my cousin is a very nice girl, very modest, and more, she admires you extremely."

"Admires me!" I exclaimed, amazed. "And for what does she admire me?" I asked candidly.

Sabas laughed noisily, coughed, and got rid of his nicotine.

"She will tell you that when you are alone with her, hand in hand."

"You do not understand me," I returned, nettled. "What I wish to say is that I do not see anything in myself to be admired by anybody. And as for Isabelita, I have always believed that she had dedicated all of her admiration to Castell."

"That is nothing special. A man with eight million pesetas is an admirable being. But the admiration, in this case, will not bring any practical result. All the world knows that Castell keeps the mother of his children, and no young lady of good family thinks of him. With you the case is different; it would be possible for it to be quickly carried to a satisfactory solution; and my opinion is that you ought to leave your steamboat and try at once for this elegant craft. Isabelita is sensible, modest, well-educated, diligent; she is accustomed to the strict economy of a house where they turn a dollar over a hundred times before parting with it; an only child, and heiress of all her father's money. And my Uncle Retamoso owns more than people imagine. Who ever can tell exactly how much money a Galician has? Probably while he lives you would not have a right of five centimes; but what does that matter to you? In the first years of marriage you can keep yourself well enough on your capital, and when necessities grow greater, and certain additional things become necessary, you can make a raise on your prospects as his son-in-law, enough to carry you over until a certain joyful event——"

Other wise reflections poured like busy and knowing bees from the mouth of that extraordinary man. In my life seemed gathered together all the loose ends of existence, all its aims fulfilled, and the quintessence of human relations extracted.

While my future was thus being discussed, although I found myself embarrassed by the new perspective offered to my view, I had, none the less, enough largeness of mind to admire the logic of his discourse, his surprising wealth of figures, richness of diction, turns of expression, subtle and logical distinctions, and the perfect links of his chain of reasoning. The breathing world, I believe, held no secrets from this man, and the mechanism of his reasoning worked with the exactness of a chronometer.

When we reached the cottage and were seated to partake of the refreshment that had been prepared for us, Emilio, who was near me, asked me in an undertone:

"Then it is decided that you are going to leave us to-morrow?"

"There is no help for it. The boat is due any moment now."

"What a pity!" he exclaimed in a melancholy tone; and placing one hand affectionately on my shoulder he added: "Do you know, you rascal, that we are getting used to you!"

I was moved by his words, and more yet by the cloud of sadness that darkened his cheerful, sympathetic face. I kept silence. He did the same. Throwing himself back in his chair, he remained unlike himself, thoughtful and melancholy. At last he turned to me and said, almost in my ear:

"If you would take my advice you would give up your sea-faring life, which, say what you will, is a little risky, and marry and settle down. Why be always alone? Do you never think of old age, and how sad it would be to pass the last years of your life in the power of self-seekers, without children to make bright your home, without a wife who of herself brings order and comfort?"

"But I am an old fellow already," I answered smiling, but sad in the depths of my soul, "I am thirty-six years old."

"That is a good age for a man. And then, by your looks and strength and suppleness, you are only a boy. I know,"

he added, casting a mischievous glance towards the place where Isabelita was, "a girl of eighteen Aprils who would marry you in preference to all the young bucks of the city."

"Bah! this girl would laugh if you should propose to her a man double her age."

"Don't you believe it! Because you know it already, I will tell you in confidence that Isabelita admires you."

"But, man——"

"No, no. I know particularly that she admires you."

The thing was serious. This unexpected admiration made me anxious and timid. I could not see my face in a mirror, because there was none there; but a glance at my shaggy, brown hands and at my feet, neither small nor especially well-shod, made me unable to divine the nature or extent of my charms.

Well, well, the least that a man can do when, with reason or without, he finds himself admired by a girl, is to pass her the plate of olives and ask her if she likes them. This is exactly what I did a little after I had had it brought to my notice that I had fascinated Retamoso's daughter. She pricked one with her fork, and at once her lovely face was covered with blushes, as if she had pricked my heart. I was not sure, but I figured that the next thing after this was to serve her a bit of sausage. The same blushes dyed her brow for this hash as for the olives. The consecutive repetition of this physiological phenomenon filled my spirit with alarm. My gallant sentiments grew so animated that I did not stop offering her entertainment at very short intervals for some time. I think that if she had taken all I offered her that afternoon, medicine would have been powerless to counteract the effects of my attention, and that angelical being would have spread her wings for heaven, the victim of an indigestion.

Once started on the downward path of soft nothings, I did not hesitate to sit down beside her and let her know that she had wonderful eyes, indescribable; cheeks that were smooth, rose-colored, indescribable; hands little and shapely and charming and—also indescribable. The knowledge of these facts caused her profound surprise, to judge by the look of incredulity that appeared upon her countenance. She told me that truly I knew very well how to go on, and that only a rascal of a sailor, accustomed to flatter women all along the coast, could find such a proceeding possible. Saying this, she grew redder than a cherry.

The conversation went on for some time in this sweet and pleasant fashion, as if we were playing at fencing in a comedy, and while it lasted the blood ebbed and flowed constantly in the face of Isabelita. I outdid myself, as the critics say of bad actors in the journals; that is, I was jolly, smart, full of chaff, and absolutely stupid. Our chat attracted the attention of the rest, and I could see that they looked at us with curiosity and glanced mischievously at one another.

I don't know now what fatuity made me do it, but I begged Tonet to play on his flute, and I proposed that, when the company came, we should dance together. She accepted readily, and laughed a good deal (was it at me?) when we were thus matched. I invited Isabelita, that's sure, and I began jumping about with her like a rattle-pated student, and I was not long in discovering that in a little while everybody was watching us attentively. My agitation was not calmed by this. However, I went on hopping about at a great rate, while everybody applauded, crying *vivas*, and looking at us with laughing eyes. Only the silent Tonet and his immobile son fixed theirs upon us as grave and melancholy as if they wished to remind us of the nothingness of all things human, and the brevity of existence.

Cristina, who until then had been quiet, and on whose brow I could see the lines marked by the scene of the morning, now began quickly to wake up a bit. Her face was so lively that everybody admired it. They had not seen her like that in years. Doña Amparo declared that since she was a little girl, when her playfulness and tricks had caused her mother more than one start, Cristina had not frolicked in such fashion. We encouraged her, applauded her, threw her *chufas* and almonds until she began to show a wish to dance also. Emilio and her mother would not let her, on account of her condition. But nonsense and witticisms kept on issuing from her mouth, splitting everybody's sides with laughter. She had a lively wit, and she got her words off with a brusque naturalness that gave them a great effect. Some things that she said seemed to me a little dashing, but I admired her so much that I did not mind them. When anyone talks a great deal of nonsense, it is almost impossible to keep within strictly prudent limits.

"This is all right," said Sabas in my ear, seating himself beside me. "Now you have a chance to strike while the iron is hot. Get in with my uncle. Talk to him about the subject that will butter your bread."

I laughed, but took no further notice. I went on paying court to Isabelita with everybody's good will. I mistake—Doña Clara looked at us now and then with eyes whose expression was a trifle more severe than usual, and she sniffed her Roman nose when we chanced to take a little luncheon of *chufas*. I do not know but I may be wrong, but two or three times I had a notion that I heard her murmur the English word, "Shocking!" This would have been nothing strange, for in difficult places this illustrious matron preferred the Anglo-Saxon language to her native idiom. That which I can fearlessly affirm, and nobody will contradict, is that I saw her eat more than a kilo of chocolates, and that this operation, however vulgar in itself, did not make her lose one atom of her majesty.

The hour arrived for us to go back to the house for our carriages, to return to the city. But at the moment of starting to walk, Cristina felt very badly. I saw that she grew pale and put her hand several times to her head and heart. The sal-volatile of Doña Amparo was of no avail; neither was the orange-flower water nor the Melisa water, nor other remedies that, like faithful friends, accompanied this nervous lady everywhere. Cristina begged us to leave her alone a moment with Tonet's wife, who would bring her a cup of *tila*. A quarter of an hour later she came out of the cottage, serene, but with reddened eyes. The nervous crisis had ended in tears.

The sun had already disappeared when we started on our walk through the fields of Indian corn and the little fruit orchards. Calming my dashing gallantry and stifling the gush of vanity that had burst forth in my spirit at the supposed admiration of Isabelita, I remained silent and sad. As I was walking apart in company with her and Matilde, I did my utmost to hide it; but seeing that this was impossible, and fearing that they would notice my mood, I made a feint for the purpose of falling back to walk alone. I was displeased with myself. The gallantry of that afternoon seemed to me a treason to my true sentiment, to the sweet and delicate love that I guarded like a treasure in the depth of my heart. I could not but think with disgust that I had descended to the most trivial cheapness. I was afraid, with good reason, that Cristina, whose regard and esteem for me had seemed increasing, would despise me from that hour, and this thought hurt me deeply.

Since her indisposition she had not turned towards me or looked at me, nor spoken a word to me. Luck made it so that she could not help speaking. She had forgotten her watch and left it in the cottage and wished to go back for it. I quickly anticipated her. When I returned with it, she waited for me, a little apart from the others.

"Thank you," she said, with a hard, cold face, and tried to rejoin the rest.

Whoever has experienced the pangs of love will believe me when I say that that gloomy countenance gave me inexpressible joy.

"Listen to me a moment, Cristina; I have something to say." I spoke with a voice not quite under control.

"You may say it," she replied, looking over my head at the horizon, and in a glacial tone that, for a like reason, warmed instead of chilling me.

"I wish to beg advice of you and I scarcely dare. Did you notice that this afternoon I paid a little more attention to your Cousin Isabelita, as if I were courting her?"

"No. I have noticed nothing," she answered, more sharply still.

"Because this is the truth—and I venture to say it, it is only because of the great difference in age between us—I only did it because Isabelita admires me."

She gazed at me stupefied, as if she suspected that I had gone mad.

"At least this is what I have been informed in turn by Sabas and Emilio."

"What idiots!" she exclaimed, her lips smiling, understanding my meaning. "They are capable of making sport of everything. Fortunately you are a man of sense, and take no stock in such nonsense; and if not, you would stop at my poor cousin."

"In this case, I have, after all, taken certain steps towards winning her good will, and before going farther I wish to obtain your approval."

"My approval!" she exclaimed, agitated, and with a choking voice. "But what need have you of my approval? I have no part in the matter. Beg it of her parents."

"Before begging it of her parents I desire it from you. I know that you have no direct interest in the matter, but it has to do with your cousin, of whom you appear to think a good deal, who has distinguished me with her esteem, however little merited. Nobody can give me true counsel in this case better than you; so I beg it of you, in the name of our good friendship, as a favor which I shall appreciate all the days of my life."

She remained silent for some time.

We walked on together through the high-growing corn which made even dimmer the fading twilight.

I watched her out of the corner of my eye, and it seemed to me that I could detect slight, almost imperceptible, changes sweep over her face. Soon her brow contracted and her lips moved several times before a sound escaped them. At last she said in a trembling voice:

"It makes me very happy that you have made your choice at last. Men ought not to live alone, and especially those who, like you, have an affectionate, indulgent temperament, and know how to appreciate the delicate heart of a woman. Isabelita is almost a child; I can tell you little about her character. You will take it upon yourself to form her. But I can assure you that she knows how to fulfil the duties of a housewife. She is industrious, careful, economical; and under these qualities are hid others that will show themselves. She is very pretty, too."

"You have forgotten the one which makes her dearest and most attractive to me."

"What?"

"That of being your cousin."

Her beautiful face darkened; she frowned and replied in a sharp tone:

"If you do not care for my cousin for herself, if you would take her as a toy to distract you from other illusions, or, which would be worse, to follow and nourish them in secret, you would commit a great sin; and I should in such case advise you not to think of her, but to leave her in peace."

Uttering these words, she hastened on and joined the others, leaving me alone.

When we got into the carriages to return to the city, I was melancholy, too wrapped up in serious meditations to go on playing the boy with Isabelita. Under pretext of a headache I found a place alone at the back, and to support my pretext I did not go up to Martí's house, but retired to my hotel.

At eight o'clock in the morning I heard the cheerful voice of Emilio, who came into my quarters like a hurricane, threw open the windows, and sat down on my bed.

"You can't go to-morrow, Captain!" he cried, laughing, and pulling my beard to finish waking me.

"Why?" I asked sleepily.

"Because to-morrow you are going to be god-father to a little girl more beautiful than the morning star."

"What! Cristina——?"

"Yes; Cristina was taken ill after you left us. We thought that it was to be like her afternoon indisposition; but she, who ought to know, begged us to send for the woman she had engaged for the case. I was afraid she might not succeed, and sent for the doctor; but Cristina would not consent that he should come into her room. When the woman took charge of her, the poor—Oh, what courage, what suffering, Captain! Not a groan, not a moan. I walked about dead, torn to pieces, praying God that she would scream. I don't understand suffering without a sound. I am appalled by temperaments like Cristina's, that not one complaint escapes in the worst of pains. At two o'clock in the morning my brave little woman came through her trouble, making me father of the prettiest, healthiest, cleverest little one the sun of Valencia ever shone on. I'm sure of it, although I have not yet seen it."

He got up from the bed, took several turns in the room, came back and sat down, got up again, and went through a series of evolutions that showed the delightful agitation of his spirit. I felt deeply moved too, and congratulated him with hearty words. When he stopped at last, I asked him:

"So you do me the honor of being god-father?"

"It will give me great pleasure if you will accept. To tell the truth, I thought first of Castell. You don't mind, do you? Enrique is more than a friend and brother to me. It would be the natural thing. But I will tell you privately, Cristina opposed it. Religious scruples, do you see? Enrique professes such upsetting ideas and declares them with such excessive frankness, the ladies cannot forgive him. It is all because he is not a practical man. He might hold all the notions he liked if he would keep them a little more to himself when he is among women. As for me, I laugh at his materialistic ideas. Enrique a materialist, when there is not a more generous man in the world! Because, in spite of

his great talents and his wonderful powers of illustration, do you know, Enrique is a child, a heart of gold!"

As he uttered these words with an accent of conviction, he shook his black, curly head in a way that made me want to laugh and to weep at the same time.

"And what does Cristina say to the substitute?"

"When I proposed your name, she was delighted."

I was delighted too, hearing this. I dressed hastily and marched off to make the acquaintance of the new star. The next day we went to church, and I performed my duty with emotion, yes, bursting with pride. Later I took the train for Barcelona, promising my friends to return soon to visit them, and to make the visit permanent by settling my camp in Valencia.

CHAPTER XI.

I THOUGHT this matter over, and my purpose became fixed during my voyage. I found that, although not rich, I had enough to live comfortably on; and when I returned to Barcelona I offered my resignation to the shipping house.

I cannot clearly explain the sentiments whose tumult at that time filled my soul. Confusion reigned therein. Intense love for Cristina, the angelic beauty and innocence of Retamoso's girl, the desire for repose and for a comfortable and tranquil life that all men feel on arriving at a certain state, and the sharp prickings of conscience that questioned my right to obtain it under such conditions, struggled together within me. But there was one sentiment which, however silenced, was stronger than the others—the ardent desire to be near Cristina, to live in her intimate circle, and never to lose sight of her charming face. I held no thoughts against the peace of her heart or the honor of her husband, but only to be happy enjoying her presence all of my life.

In this mind, neither saint-like nor criminal, I took the train for Valencia two months after I had left it. In a train that passed mine in a station on the way, I caught a glimpse, through a window, of the silhouette of Sabas, and near it the red head of a woman who was not Matilde.

"Sabas, Sabas!" I called.

When he saw me, he saluted me affectionately with his hand. The lady who was beside him also smiled cordially; I did not see why, for I did not know her. I remained puzzled. I was doubtful if I had not been mistaken. Was it really Matilde? I was not long in finding out.

I reached Valencia before dark. After leaving my things at the inn, I hired a conveyance to take me out to Cabañal, where I knew that Martí was now installed. I was anxious to consult with him about my plans. As I drew near the country house I felt my heart beating violently. This roused anew my sentiment of honor. "Are we like this?" I said to myself scornfully. "While thinking of binding yourself by a sacred fetter, of offering yourself to an innocent young girl, you cannot control your impulses! You are going to press the hand of a friend, to make him your confidant, your kinsman, while still your spirit is not cleansed of traitorous thoughts!"

The family was assembled in the dining-room. I observed at once a certain sadness and unusual gravity on their faces. They all wore long faces, filled with a consternation that alarmed me excessively. Martí embraced me, however, with his accustomed cordiality, showing sincere delight at my arrival. I gave my hand to the others and, coming to Matilde, I said to her, without stopping to think:

"So you are a widow? I saw your husband in a station. We had no chance to speak, but we greeted each other."

I had not finished uttering these words before I was stupefied by her beginning to weep bitterly. She pressed my hand convulsively and, between the sobs that rent her breast, said:

"Thanks, Ribot! Many thanks! My husband was running away with the young lady."

"I saw a red-headed lady beside him, but I did not think—" I stammered, abashed.

"Yes, yes, the young lady," she sobbed.

"Forgive me, but what has been said can't be unsaid; but, yes, she seemed young to me."

"She would like to seem young! She is more than thirty years old!" she cried angrily; "more painted and bedizzened than a doll in a bazaar. You should see her mornings on her balcony!"

Martí came to my aid, saying in low tones:

"She was the young lady in the company acting at the theatre."

"Ah!"

Everybody kept still and looked at the floor as one does when paying a visit of condolence. Nothing could be heard in the room but the increasingly poignant sobs of the outraged wife. The situation was trying, agonizing in the highest degree. Fortunately Doña Amparo had the happy inspiration to faint away, and this accident introduced an element of variety into the scene which we immediately improved. We ran to her aid. We opened flasks with shining stoppers. The dining-room was filled with the penetrating fragrances of the apothecary's shop. Tears, embraces, sighs, kisses. At last her equilibrium was restored, and she came to herself.

I thought I would lose my head in the odor of ether; but before this could happen Martí drew me from the room, and carried me off to his office.

"Did you ever see such a wretched affair?" he cried, shaking his head in immense annoyance.

"But what is it all?"

"Nothing; the other night he won three or four thousand pesetas at play, and he has gone gayly off to spend them with an actress."

"What madness! But he will come back!"

"I believe you; he'll come back when he has run through with every dollar, as he did the other time."

"The other time?"

"Yes; three or four years ago he eloped with a circus-rider. But then he carried off more money than this time."

I had no wish to seek for more details, for I saw that Martí was going to break down. There is nothing sadder than the sadness of a happy man. To distract him, I turned the conversation, and talked of myself and the projects I had under way. His face changed at once, and a cheerful smile played about his mouth.

"Bravo, Captain! At last you are going to be our own," he cried, hugging me until he choked me.

We talked the matter over carefully. At last we decided that, considering my age and character, I must not conduct myself like a youth, but with all due formality. After gaining the consent of Isabelita, which Martí seemed to think already assured, I must, before entering upon our relations, visit her people and talk seriously with them. This plan captured his imagination and he drove along assuredly. He cheered me, embraced me several times, calling me cousin, and promising me to help me all that he could, and promised, too, that Cristina would do the same.

We returned to the dining-room. Our cheerful countenances were in great contrast to the solemn and dejected ones there. Doña Amparo's eyes still showed the water-marks of their recent flood. Matilde—there is no saying how she was. Isabelita, who was staying with her cousins, received me with the same blushes, but without any great signs of rejoicing, which I attributed to the trouble her family was in. Castell was, as always, cold and disdainful. Cristina—I cannot express how I found Cristina. Her eyes had a strange sadness, which impressed me painfully. I at once imagined that she found herself bowed beneath the burden of some great wrong, and that this could be nothing else but the infamous gallantry of Castell. Perhaps he had narrowed the circle. Perhaps—oh, what a thought!

All at once I saw her eyes brighten with delight at the entrance of the nurse with my god-daughter in her arms. She was a beautiful rosebud, fresh, sweet, delicate, and probably, as that is the rule, dowered with marvellous intelligence. Martí would have testified to that with his blood.

To carry conviction to our minds, he found no more adequate means than to enter upon a series of mimic representations, certain of which had a surprising success. First he intoned a hymn of the Church with the voice of a precentor. The little girl at once began to put up her lips and burst out crying. Then he sang some *sequidillas*, and the youngster at once cheered up and began to bounce, trying to get down on the floor, doubtless to run away on all fours. He barked, he mewed, he crowed like a cock, and we understood at once that the little one had no lack of zoölogical notions, but had an idea of the classifications introduced in the animal kingdom.

Martí demonstrated the thesis in a way which left no room for doubt, and proud of the impression on the assemblage that his notable experiments succeeded in making, he considered it proper next to take the child from her nurse's arms and toss her up and down in his own like a bottle of ink. Maybe he imagined that by this method of concentration he would invigorate still more her psychic faculties. But he did not go on with this long enough to make her black. The little creature, not familiarized with his novel method, objected to it with loud screams and all the indignation of her soul. Cristina took her, did all that she could to hush her, and gave her again to the nurse, who was the one who really brought calm into her outraged heart.

Before we went in to supper, they obliged me to dismiss my cab. Castell would take me back in his own. I tried to get out of this, because the company of this gentleman grew constantly more distasteful to me; but it was not possible. Emilio, with his characteristic impetuosity and slight knowledge of men, gave the order to the coachman to depart.

They placed me beside Isabelita. Everybody would say that that was perfectly natural, and that I ought to have been whispering to her all the evening. Of this I have nothing to say. Perchance, if they had been asked if I should touch her foot gently with my own and fondle her hand underneath the table, some of them would have held a contrary opinion and would have discussed it more or less at length. But I, deciding that the majority would finally decide in favor of it, did not hesitate in anticipating the decisions of such a tribunal.

At twenty minutes after ten I settled down in a corner of the dining-room where Retamoso's girl was, and where I could chat freely with her. I told her first that she was the only woman in the world who could make me happy; second, that by my frank and sympathetic character, and by my honorable intentions—and because of the voice I said it in—I deserved what would make me happy. In accordance with these things I was resolved that on the following day I would give an account of this matter to Señor and Señora Retamoso. It was then twenty-five minutes after ten.

Our deliberations continued a little longer. Castell was accustomed to depart at eleven, and he asked me politely if I wished to do the same. I agreed, as was proper, since the family would wish to retire, and we betook ourselves to the city. During the ride I had occasion to think once more that it was an error of nature that I had hair on my face, and that instead of a hat I should have covered my childish thoughts with a thick hood. That gentleman, penetrating into the secret laboratory of life, arranged the facts of being in his mind, taking pains to pit his ideas against my inexperienced reasonings; sometimes yawning, again smilingly pardoning my puerilities. Take it all together, he handled me so well that, in consequence, I could feel a real hood on my head. But that which stirred me up most was his gracious manner of considering me a man; and the recognition of this attitude towards me irritated me more than ever, and I swore between my teeth that I would never ride again in his cab, but would, instead, go on my own feet.

Next day, solemnly attired in a coat which had made the voyage to America eleven times and to Hamburg thirty-seven, I presented myself at the Retamoso house. It was situated on the Plaza del Mercado, not far from the Lorija, and was more substantial than beautiful, of modern construction, only one floor above the business rooms, with a plain front destitute of ornamental carvings, with three large doors and three little stone balconies. But it was much more spacious than its exterior promised. Its warerooms, occupying the corner part, were large and high as the salons of a palace. Great piles of codfish, barrels of flour and of alcohol, cases of sugar and cocoa filled it, forming narrow and intricate passages. Through these I went, half-suffocated by the distasteful odors of these products of overseas, and preceded by a clerk with a pen behind his ear, until I reached the back of the room, where there were three glass doors, giving upon a *patio*. Near one of these was a low railing of pine, painted green; in the middle, a single table and a big desk; and behind the table and the desk, a little man with an embroidered velvet skull-cap. It was himself, Señor Retamoso.

"Señor de Ribot! What good fortune is this?" he exclaimed, rising to come out of the enclosure, making numberless bows, and lifting his hand as many times more to his skull-cap. "To what do we owe the honor?"

"I wish to speak a few words to you," I answered, casting a significant glance at the clerk, who, understanding, disappeared in the zigzag passages.

The face of Señor Retamoso underwent an enormous change. The delight that had overspread it was swiftly succeeded by a deep sadness. It was as if a cloud had intercepted in an unexpected fashion the rays of life and

warmth, withering and drying up that which a moment before had been joyous welcome.

"Very well. I will be with you in a moment," he murmured, re-entering the enclosure, carefully locking the safe and putting the key in his trousers pocket.

This done, he came out and, facing me, said in a glacial way:

"I am at your service."

"This good man thinks I have come to beg money," I said to myself, surprised at this change.

"The occasion of this visit," I said with hesitation, "is a little delicate. It is possible that you know."

"I know nothing," he declared, resolutely cutting me short.

"I meant to say it is possible that you have suspected——"

"I have suspected nothing," he said in turn, more dryly still.

A little irritated by these interruptions, I said with spirit:

"It is all the same. You are going to know now. It has to do with a certain sympathetic understanding established between your daughter Isabelita and me. As this sympathy might in time be transformed into affection, and be carried to the point of loving relations, I thought that I ought to consult the will of her parents. My age forbids flirtations or a clandestine courtship. Further, the friendship that binds me to Martí, in whose house I had the honor of meeting your daughter, and the kindness, however unmerited, with which your wife and you have honored me, oblige me to conduct myself frankly and loyally."

The round face of Uncle Diego resumed its first expression. The cloud that intercepted the rays of delight had been chased away.

"Oh, Señor de Ribot! What do I hear? I knew nothing. I had heard nothing. I am a poor man. Why not go to my wife, who understands it much better, and will know what I ought to answer?" he exclaimed smiling, all honey, lifting his hand to his embroidered skull-cap, and throwing back his leg so as to make a deeper bow.

"I thought of seeing both of you."

"Oh, Señor de Ribot! But why? Come, come with me. I will take you to the place where you can adjust this account. I know nothing about these experiences, but there is one in the house who knows more than Merlin. Take care, Señor de Ribot, take good care. Keep your stirrups. Whoever has to come to an understanding with my lady needs the use of his head."

Going on like this, he conducted me to a staircase, and by it we ascended to the principal story. Once arrived, he squeezed my hand hard between his own, and, in a falsetto voice, recommended me to look out for myself when talking before his wife, and not be disconcerted in her presence. He promised that he would help me all that he was able, but that I must not expect much, as he also felt constraint before Doña Clara.

"She is a deep woman, Señor de Ribot. When I say this, I say all."

Without freeing me, he led me to the door of a parlor, and gave two knocks upon it with his knuckles; the voice of Doña Clara was heard, saying:

"Enter."

Retamoso again squeezed my hand to encourage me, and we entered the apartment.

Doña Clara was discovered dressed in black, as correct and elegant as ever, seated in a leather chair, with a book in her hands. She took from her aquiline nose her gold-bowed glasses and let them hang suspended over her breast by their golden chain. She gave me her hand, at the same time casting upon me a look so imposing that, in spite of the valor wherewith her spouse had inspired me, I could do no less than tremble. Then she took her tragic figure up out of her chair and went and sat down in the middle of a sofa of green velvet, inviting us by a gesture to place ourselves in the arm-chairs that were on either side. We obeyed orders, and Retamoso, finding no more excellent resource as a preparation for the session than to rub his knees with the palms of his hands, looked at me meanwhile sadly and anxiously.

"Señor de Ribot," he said at last, "I beg you to tell my wife what you have just had the kindness to tell me."

"It has to do, señora," I said in a trembling voice, "with a delicate matter that I desire to submit to the approval of you both. So if I take the liberty of speaking of it to you, it is solely that, no matter what, it cannot be said that I lacked in showing the respect and esteem with which you inspire me. Between Isabelita and me an especial friendship, is beginning to take shape——"

"I know it," interrupted Doña Clara solemnly.

There followed a moment of suspense, then I went on:

"Isabelita, because of the gifts of character, innocence, and modesty which adorn her, deserves not only affection, but hearty admiration. I cannot, naturally, explain all the charm that she has for me since I have felt myself attracted towards her. I found courage to give her to understand this, and I flatter myself to think that she did not take it ill. Until now no bond has existed between us, except a sensitive attraction——"

"I know it," said Doña Clara once more, with the same solemnity.

I felt even more constrained. Retamoso gave me several encouraging grins, and taking breath, I was able to go on:

"From then until now I can affirm that there has been nothing serious between us. I could not do otherwise, as I would never think of aspiring without the permission of her parents. But however this inclination may seem unexpected, when I embarked for Hamburg two months ago, I carried the thought with me, and the resolution to strengthen this dawning friendship——"

"I know it," once more said Doña Clara with even more solemnity, if that were possible.

I remained mute and confused, giving up my disclosures, which the supernatural penetration of this lady left useless. But I could not help admiring the singular contrast between these consorts—he knew nothing, she knew everything.

Retamoso gave me several mischievous winks, making me understand that this was to be expected and had nothing surprising in it. Doña Clara, at the end of a short silence, held herself up still more erect, and blowing her nose in a manner to inspire a monkey with awe, said:

"Before going farther, I beg you to let us continue the conversation in English. The subject is so serious and

delicate that it demands it."

I profess and have always professed a great admiration for the language and literature of Great Britain. On the little book-shelf of my cabin voyaged always the "Tom Jones" of Fielding, the "Don Juan" of Byron, and certain books of Shakespeare. But, in spite of this admiration, I had never supposed that it was the only idiom in which grave and delicate subjects could be treated. I did not seek, however, to oppose this fine philological stroke, nor to discuss the preference that the stern mamma of Isabelita showed for one branch of the Indo-European languages over its sister tongues, and hastened to yield to her request. With this the surprise, delight, and grins of Retamoso reached a climax. He put his finger to his forehead, arched his eyebrows, opened his eyes absurdly, and several times when Doña Clara could not see, being turned towards me, he lifted his hands to heaven, murmuring unheard:

"What a woman! What a woman!"

Doña Clara, without being at all set up by this idolatrous worship, let me know in guttural and emphatic English that nothing of all I had said, done, or thought had been hid from her, and that she knew also all that had been said, done, or thought by her daughter Isabelita. This declaration filled my mind with a feeling of littleness and limitation that ended by humbling me. In the impossibility, then, of supplying any facts she did not know, or of uttering one thought worthy of the intellectual height of this lady, I took upon myself the role of calming down, submitting my feeble reasons beforehand to her own.

After sniffing several times like a ship displaying its banner on weighing anchor in a port, and after fixing upon her nose her gold-bowed glasses to contemplate me for a while in silence, Doña Clara found it well to give me some account of her intentions. Isabelita was a child, I was a man. Laying down these two propositions, at first sight undeniable. Doña Clara logically deduced from them that it was necessary to be careful. A child does not generally know what she wants; a man is in duty bound to know. Further, it was impossible to put aside what I wished for.

"Señor de Ribot," Retamoso at this point interrupted, "will you be so kind as to put what my wife says to you into Castilian for me?"

This was done, and when he found out what was meant, he expressed noisy enthusiasm, exclaiming energetically:

"Just so! That's it! Exactly! That's it, that's it! Just so! That's it!"

Doña Clara did not pay the slightest attention to these words, and keeping her nose pointed the same way, submitted me to a long and careful examination. Although I was sufficiently upset, I answered her questions clearly, and had the satisfaction of noting certain slight signs of acquiescence that touched my pride. She examined my pretensions, and (as a result of the conscientious investigation concerning my conduct, which was carried to the extreme) Doña Clara declared at last, turning her head slowly towards her husband like a globe revolving on its axis, that I was "a decent person," a thing that I had never doubted in my most extravagant moments.

Every phase of the investigation was successively and faithfully interpreted by me into Castilian, so that Señor Retamoso could understand. Everything won from him the same warm approval, and was greeted with a salvo of "That's it's!" and "Just so's!"

Doña Clara terminated the interview by rising from the sofa, and with the same firmness, the same impassive calm and sang-froid, let me know that here would be my home, and that she would have much pleasure in receiving me whenever I wished to come. Saying this, she let her glasses drop by means of a clever and surprising jerk of her nose, and presented me her hand. I took it with the greatest veneration.

"Permit me, Señor de Ribot! One moment, one moment, no more!" exclaimed Retamoso, who, following our example, had also risen. "I have not the knowledge that my wife has, nor do I understand foreign tongues. So I am not sure that I understand all that you desire. It seemed to me that I understood that there is something between you and Isabelita."

"Are we still there?" I said between my teeth, looking at him with surprise and anxiety. As for Doña Clara, she cast a look upon him that might have ground him to powder.

"Yes, señor," I replied shortly at last.

"Bear with me, Señor de Ribot. I am a little slow of understanding, and especially in matters so fine as these. Yet I believe I understood (pardon me if I mistake) that you desire our permission to pay court to her. Pardon me, for heaven's sake, if I do not express myself like you two."

"Yes, señor, I desire your authorization to confirm my relations with Isabelita."

"Precisely! That's it! I see that I am not mistaken. Well, then, sir, I am agreeable to all that Doña Clara has said, and if she had said more, I should be still more agreeable. You already know my opinion of you, Señor de Ribot. When there is a head in the house capable of giving useful advice in all affairs, why bother one's head discussing them? Only I desire that in this nothing is promised on our side. For the present, nothing is settled. If later, Señor de Ribot, we are of the same opinion, and all come to an understanding, we shall be able to talk in another fashion. My wife has already talked in another fashion, and I have not cut her short; but you understand me, señor?"

I understood perfectly that this crafty Galician, before giving his word, wished to find out exactly how much I was worth. I let myself be imposed upon by the ruse. I accepted what he proposed, saying that my visit was not an official one, but merely a simple call of courtesy and respect, and that I desired that they should retain their liberty, as I retained my own.

"That's it! Just so! Nothing is settled."

Doña Clara had maintained her rigid and immovable position while we were talking, gazing into space over our heads in an attitude solemn and disdainful; nothing would give an idea how grandiose it was, except the Minerva of Phidias on top of the Acropolis, if by chance this work of the antique pagan master had been preserved intact until our time. She remained thus until I, taking myself to the stairway, disappeared from her horizon. Retamoso went down stairs with me, took me as far as the door, pulled off his skull-cap, and uttering a thousand oh's and ah's, pressed both my hands with inexplicable tenderness, and said in my ear, as he dismissed me, "It is understood, Señor de Ribot, that nothing is settled, isn't it? My opinion is that nothing should be settled."

My good Martí laughed not a little when I related to him the details of this interview. He congratulated me warmly, and, carried away by his fanciful optimism, he sketched out twenty plans, each more agreeable than the last, for my future. I was to become very rich, and be associated with him and Castell in a steamboat line whose direction should be my charge. I should also have a part in the business of the artesian wells when they began to strike water.

In regard to the canals from the river, he expressed sincere regret that it was impossible at present to give me anything to do. I replied that that did not weigh on me; I would try to live without it. My resignation moved him so much that he finished by saying, running both hands through his tresses:

"I shall be very much annoyed if, after all, we don't find a way for you to get a show in this business, for it is going to be the best thing ever done in Spain before to-day."

When what had taken place was made known to Cristina, she showed herself more affectionate and kind to me than usual. I observed, none the less, on her face a melancholy expression that she tried in vain to conceal. She made a visible effort to appear gay, but at the best she seemed a bit absent, and her great black eyes were often fixed upon space, revealing deep absorption.

I stayed to supper with them. We were at table, besides the married couple and their mamma, Isabelita, Castell, and Matilde, with all her children, who entertained us very much. The deserted wife, whose eyes were now always red, smiled sadly, seeing the tenderness and enthusiasm with which these little creatures inspired me. There was not lacking someone—I think it was Doña Amparo—to hint that I was going to be a most affectionate father, which caused Isabelita a veritable suffocation of blushes. This color came back several times during supper, because Martí thought well to season it with more or less transparent allusions to our future kinship. Above all, when he opened a bottle of champagne, and, lifting the goblet, drank to the wish "that Captain Ribot would cast anchor in Valencia for life," the cheeks of his cousin did not set fire to the house, because, fortunately, there was no combustible material stowed near them.

When we rose from table to take a turn in the garden, I offered my arm to Cristina. I had a lively desire to talk with her, to sound her soul, which seemed to me to be disturbed. Before seeking refuge in another port, where the fate that was controlling me was drawing me, I ought to know that it was the will of God; but never, never could I forget that dream of love. This was the truth. Although I had made heroic efforts to drive it away, thinking of other scenes, other joys, other duties, it returned persistently to charm my nights and to disturb my conscience.

I had already taken her hand upon my arm when Castell, coming up to us and making a little bow, said:

"Have we not arranged that this evening I was to be your escort?" At the same time he cast upon her a particular look; it was threatening, and did not soften the cold smile that played about his lips.

Cristina responded with a timid glance and hastened to release my arm from her own, saying in an altered voice:

"Thank you, Captain Ribot. Enrique had invited me before——"

And they departed down the stairway. From above, when the light of the vestibule fell upon their faces, I could see that Castell was talking to her with an angry gesture, as if he were making recriminations, and that she was excusing herself with the greatest humility.

Oh, God! the veil that had hid the truth from me was swiftly torn away. That man must even now be her lover. All the blood in my veins rushed to my heart. I felt giddy and was obliged to grasp the railing so as not to fall.

CHAPTER XII.

I CAN swear that no anger entered into the agitation that I experienced. My pride did not resent her preference. I only felt a mortal sadness as if the last illusion left to me in life had flown away and escaped. And more, the deep love wherewith she inspired me was not quenched or lessened. The respect and idolatry of my sentiment were weakened, it is true, but its tenderness was at the same time increased. The goddess had fallen from her pedestal and was transformed into a woman. Losing in majesty, she had gained in charm.

During the days following, I observed that the humble expression of her face that had so much surprised me grew more marked. From this I judged that she acknowledged her fault and begged my pardon. Instead of showing myself troubled, I did everything possible to appear more respectful and cordial than before. She recognized this, and constantly gave me proofs of her affectionate friendship. Her heart was noble; if she had fallen in her own sight, it was owing to fatal circumstance, and not to her vicious inclination. Such were then my sentiments.

And Martí? Poor Emilio! Every time that I saw him I felt more and more attracted by his generosity and innocence. I thought that he was a little thinner, but always cheerful and always confiding. We spent one afternoon alone at the seaside. As neither he nor I was out of humor our conversation ran playfully from one subject to another, and we laughed at the anecdotes we happened to remember. One of those that I told had better fortune than it deserved. He laughed so much that at the end he grew pale, put his hand to his chest, and, to the great terror of us both, threw up blood. I helped him as well as I could, carried him to a fountain near by, where he drank water and washed himself. I was much startled by this. I could scarcely speak. I encouraged him, however, telling him that this was not important, and citing numerous cases of friends who had had this sort of thing without any serious consequences. When he had composed himself, he smiled.

"You are right. It is nothing. I am sure that my lungs are perfectly sound, because until now I have never even coughed. I will take a little better care of myself, and when summer comes, I will go as a precautionary measure to Panticosa. But it is necessary to keep all this from Cristina. You know how women are. Don't say anything to Castell either. He is very pessimistic, and his affection for me would make him alarmed. He would be capable, in his anxiety, of revealing it to Cristina."

My eyes, in spite of myself, filled with tears. Seeing this, he appeared surprised; there was a moment of suspense; then, laughing aloud, he embraced me, exclaiming:

"You are very original, Captain! There is some strength to be desired here too! But I confess that if I had not such a practical temperament, and were not accustomed to examine every subject coolly, this would make me apprehensive. Fortunately, I know what to count on in the strength of my constitution."

"My emotion was caused by surprise," I hastened to say, to mend matters. "And then I am not very well these days; my nerves are upset. But, as I have said, this means nothing, especially for you, who seem to be such a robust man."

"The most robust of men! I have nothing more than a rather weak stomach, and sometimes a little kidney trouble. Except for this, I am an oak. If this were not so, how could I endure all the work loaded on my shoulders, the

frequent journeys, and all that I have to carry?"

"Exactly. I have no doubt of it. And you have never before felt any pain in your lungs?"

Martí took a few steps, looked at me closely, and in a voice made to seem strong by a special effort, answered:

"My lungs are those of an athlete!"

"Indeed?"

"Those of a gladiator," he insisted, shaking his head with an air of unquenchable conviction.

Upon this he launched into a panegyric of his respiratory apparatus with much enthusiasm and warmth. He could not have been more eloquent if he had been a commercial traveller and was offering it as a sample to a great commercial house. I congratulated him with equal enthusiasm on the possession of such a perfect example. Inspired by his own eulogies, he struck his chest, taking deep breaths, then sang the last aria of "Lucia." After that, who could have any doubts of his organs?

We returned to the house, he in an excellent humor, but not I; for in spite of his weight of testimony, I was not able to dismiss certain apprehensions. Indeed, as our pathway narrowed, and he walked ahead of me, his narrow shoulders, his long neck and drooping ears, did not remind me of the figure of Milon of Crotona nor any other winner in the Olympian games. It seemed to me that such magnificent lungs as he said he had would not have chosen such a poor lodging.

It was the hour of twilight. The park began to be filled with darkness and mystery. Although we were in the last days of September, the fresh blossoming flowers of that fortunate region filled the air with fragrance. The trees were as green and leafy as in early spring; the turf shone in eternal freshness. But mingled with the luxurious, romantic scent of heliotrope, roses, and violets came from surrounding orchards other heavier breaths of ripe fruits. The fruitful earth filled the air of heaven with the perfume of grapes and melons, pears and apples, drying hay and Indian corn.

In front of the house, seated in rocking-chairs, we found Cristina and her mother, Isabelita, Castell, and Matilde. Her children were running about the garden, cackling and gabbling like parrots, while their unhappy mother watched them with a melancholy smile. When we appeared in front of a close thicket of Indian cannas, Castell was seated beside Cristina, talking to her in low tones. She cast one glance at her husband, then at me, and at once lowered her eyes with a serious, pondering expression on her face; but raising them again, she scrutinized Emilio carefully, while he sat down, chatting and laughing with exaggerated volubility. Cristina got up, went over to him, and said:

"Emilio, you are pale. Do you feel ill?"

"I? What an idea! I never felt better. It is because I have been laughing all the afternoon. The captain has a stock of delicious anecdotes. At supper we must tell some of them; not all, though, for they are all colors."

She was not satisfied; but although she went and sat down, her eyes never quitted him. Castell made efforts to attract her attention, talking into her ear. The conduct of that man seemed to me the height of cynicism.

Soon it was quite dark, and we went into the dining-room, where it was light and the table ready. Just as we were going to sit down at it, a servant entered, and calling Martí apart, gave him a letter, with an air of mystery. He opened it at once and was not able to repress a movement of annoyance. Pocketing it and excusing himself for a few moments, he took his hat and went out. Our curiosity was excited, but nobody said anything. At last Cristina, whose anxiety was evident, asked the man:

"Who gave you the letter?"

"A gentleman."

"Did he wait for an answer?"

"No, señora. He wanted to speak with the señor, and he went across by the main door to wait for him."

The unusualness of the incident, and the mysterious manner of the servant, increased our curiosity extraordinarily. We had not long to wait for its satisfaction. Martí presented himself in a few moments, and, putting his hat down on a chair, asked jocularly:

"Don't you all know whom I shall have the honor to present to you?"

We all looked eagerly at him.

"A gentleman whose name begins with an S."

"Sabas!" exclaimed Matilde.

Her next act was, with quivering face and violent gestures, to hurry her children out of their chairs, and, pushing them wildly before her, get them out of the room, herself following after.

We all stood up in our agitation. The nose of the deserting husband was promptly stuck in at the garden door, and behind it entered its interesting proprietor. A groan from Doña Amparo. A convulsive embrace next, tears in abundance.

Sabas, although in the arms of his mother, cast a wandering and afflicted glance about the dining-room.

"Matilde! My children!" he cried in a dramatic manner.

"All have abandoned thee except thy mother!" responded Doña Amparo in most pathetic accents.

Sabas leaned his head, a resigned victim, against the maternal bosom. At this Doña Amparo hugged him yet more fervently, ready to give her life-blood for her abandoned son. He freed himself at last, arranged his cravat, and held out his hand to us solemnly, in the dignified attitude of a general who concludes a capitulation after a heroic resistance.

He went up to greet Cristina, but she turned her back upon him, and went out of the room. He shook his head in a sentimental manner, and gave us a sweet, expressive glance. Then he raised his eyes to heaven, as if petitioning for the justice that earth denied him.

I was truly alarmed to see that his face was black and the skin peeled off in some places, especially the nose.

He looked as if he had returned from a scientific and civilizing expedition into Central Africa, rather than from a romantic expedition with a young lady to the capital of Catalonia.

Doña Amparo made him drink a glass of orange-flower water to calm him. There was no need of it. His attitude on

that critical occasion, at once tranquil and resigned, impressed us profoundly. However, when he had drunk the orange-flower water, he said with astonishing firmness:

"I must see Matilde."

And, joining the action to the word, he proceeded, full of majesty, towards the door. He went on into the inner rooms. And we all followed him, we were so fascinated by his noble and severe manner.

We were filled with anxiety concerning the dramatic scene that was going to take place. Sabas opened two or three doors consecutively, without being able to find his wife. But his intrepid heart was not cast down. Without uttering a word he mounted to the upper story. We followed him anxiously.

Matilde was in her room, and Cristina was with her. At sight of her husband she groaned wrathfully, and started towards another door to try to get away again. Cristina tried to detain her.

"Let me go!" she cried madly; "I don't wish to see him."

"Matilde, for heaven's sake!" cried Cristina, embracing her.

"Let me go, let me go! Everything is over between us two!"

Then the fugitive, standing in the middle of the room, showed that his strength was leaving him. He put his hand feebly to his forehead, his legs doubled under him, and, taking just enough steps towards a sofa to reach it, he fell across it in a swoon.

We all ran to his aid, and his offended wife was not the last one. On the contrary, it was she who, grieving and trembling, bathed his temples with water, and unfastened his waistcoat and shirt to help him breathe, exclaiming wildly:

"Sabas, my Sabas! Forgive me!"

Meanwhile, Doña Amparo applied to his nostrils various chemical products of a stimulating nature. The rest of us helped on the restorative work more or less modestly, bringing a carafe of water, uncorking bottles, or giving air to the fainting man by means of a fan.

The only one who remained inactive, seeming indisposed to offer any hygienic aid to her brother, was Cristina. Standing erect near us, she looked strangely severe. Doubtless her behavior might seem to some persons cruel and unnatural; but not to me, for my deep, unreasoning love for this woman made all that she did seem right and proper, her every movement adorable.

At last Sabas returned to the world of consciousness, and asked of his mother, who was in front of him, that which has been asked so many times:

"Where am I?"

"With your wife!"

"With your mamma!"

"Who adores you!"

"Who idolizes you!"

Four feminine arms embraced him, and four lips were pressed almost at the same time above his skinned nose.

His eyes wandered about the room at all of us as if he did not know us, and were fixed at last upon his wife; then he groaned frightfully:

"Matilde! Matilde! Matilde!"

Then he hugged her and fell back in an attack of convulsive laughing. His loud laughter joined to the sobbing of his wife and the wails of Doña Amparo made a terrifying mixture that would have melted the hardest heart. More, by virtue of the contagion that all the world knows lies in this sort of an attack, I felt a shocking desire to laugh also. By hard work I managed to stifle it. I left the room and went down again to the dining-room. The others were not long in following me, leaving Sabas restored and at peace with his wife and his mother. Ten minutes later they came down also. Cristina gave the order to serve the soup, and I observed with some astonishment that Sabas dined with an excellent appetite, and during dinner showed himself as gay and disputatious and smart as ever. His wife devoured him with eyes of pure affection, and devoted herself to waiting upon him.

When we finished, he rose before taking his coffee, lighted a good cigar, and asked his brother-in-law if he would let him take his cab.

"But are you going out?" his wife asked him with surprise and annoyance.

"Yes; I am going to take my coffee at the Siglo. I haven't seen a single one of my friends yet. I shall be back soon."

Matilde tried to keep him, begging that he would not go that night, caressing his hands, with no result except to make him cross. Observing, however, the bad effect this had upon us, he changed his tone and embraced her, saying in endearing accents:

"Goosie! Aren't you going to let me go and celebrate our reconciliation?"

With this the infatuated wife was satisfied and content, brushed the dust from his shoes, and went with him to the cab door.

We remained in the dining-room some time. Emilio was the first to start to bed, saying that he felt sleepy. I thought that his hemorrhage had affected him more than he had acknowledged. Matilde went up to put her children to bed. We remained chatting, Isabelita and I in one corner, Cristina and Castell in another, while Doña Amparo embroidered by the light of a lamp between.

This state of things impressed me uncomfortably. We seemed like two pairs engaged in courtship, watched over by the mamma; and this idea, so far as it concerned Cristina and Castell, could not but fill me with great repugnance. Such was my faith in that woman that I scarcely believed what I saw. I was absent and melancholy, and with difficulty kept up the conversation with my intended.

My intended! The winds were driving me upon a coast where I didn't know whether I was going to be shipwrecked or find a snug harbor. I confessed to myself with alarm that since my dreadful convictions about Cristina, my heart was less inclined than ever to admit another woman.

When Matilde came down after getting her children to bed, in order to get out of this scarcely decent situation, and also to rid myself a little of the sadness that overpowered me, I proposed that we take a turn in the park. The

proposition met with favor, and Cristina was the first to accept it, rising from the sofa where she had been sitting. But Castell said, with his usual decision:

"I don't feel equal to it. It is much too damp in the park at this hour."

Cristina turned and sat down again beside him.

"We are not so much in fear of dying, are we, Matilde?" I said smiling. She and Isabelita followed me. Doña Amparo stayed with her daughter and Castell. We went to the end of the garden, and from there entered the open spaces of the park, where the balmy air did me a great deal of good, for my brow had been burning and my heart filled with mournful presentiments.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE park, wrapped in the shades of night, seemed like a forest; it was more grand and mysterious. The magnolias, cypresses, and araucarias that half covered the ground might be imagined cavaliers wrapped in their cloaks, silent and threatening. The foliage did not stir; the gravelled roads scarcely showed their whiteness; the footpaths were submissive to the darkness. We followed the first of these in a sort of vague disquiet, exchanging few words. The same emotion seemed to seal our lips and oppress our hearts. When I recall those first moments of that night and the overwhelming melancholy that oppressed me, I cannot help being a bit superstitious.

But if the darkness inspired sadness and a vague dread, the fragrances, some sweet, some keen, that filtered through the silent leaves, invited us to go farther. We inhaled, as we went on our way, a thousand delicious odors, from the scarcely perceptible breath of violets to the strong, dominating perfume of the magnolia.

On arriving at a certain place, a sort of little opening where the languorous, sensuous perfume of heliotrope dominated all others, Matilde made a gesture of pleasure. It was her favorite fragrance. She would not let us go any farther, and made us sit down on a rustic bench so that she could get her fill of it, as she said. But, unluckily, that perfume, subtle with Oriental love, immediately recalled to her memory the poetical image of her spouse. And, fascinated by this recollection, she entertained us for some time by relating the most interesting particulars of his domestic life—at what hour this extraordinary being got up in the morning, how soon afterwards a glass of water with lemon in it was introduced into his precious organism, how many slices of toast he took with his coffee, how many pipes he smoked, how he walked about the house, and even how, every Thursday, he took magnesia to cleanse and purify this splendid work of nature.

As if in sympathy with her enthusiasm, and desiring to give testimony to the admiration that such a rare and beautiful subject inspired, a gentle light suddenly shone over the place. We turned our eyes towards the sea, and saw the moon coming up above its quiet waves. The waters smiled; in the park the silver, smooth leaves of the magnolias, the silky-whiteness of the roses, the tops of the cannas and laurels glittered in luminous points of light. The darkness fled away into the depths of the thickets, forming dense, impenetrable masses. Soon the moonlight began penetrating these also, as the moon rose higher in the azure vault, scattering golden rays.

Matilde, who was reminded by everything in heaven or on earth of Sabas, thought that it was now time to get his bed ready for him, and asked us to come into the house. Isabelita did not wish to go so soon. The night was delicious; she would stay alone with me. I did not wish to say anything about the unusualness of this, to disturb her angelic innocence. We sat for some moments on the same bench, chatting about indifferent matters.

I was not long, however, in bringing the conversation to our projected marriage. It interested her immensely. She must have six dozen of chemises, and four of petticoats, and three of this, and eight of that. I could not help her much in all that. I was absent-minded or critical, and, without knowing why, responded but poorly and with little tact when she consulted me. But my attention was held when the child began to talk about our house, and the expenses it would occasion, and the expenditures we must count upon to furnish it. I was surprised at the ease and capacity wherewith she discussed economic subjects. She not only understood what concerned her father's business, but also exchange, discounting bills, stocks, and so on. For some time I listened with amazement while she discussed the probable rise of certain public stocks that her father had recently bought, of the transferring of others that he held, of the sudden fall of the stock of the tobacco company, of treasury bonds, and a thousand other things of whose existence I scarcely knew. This financial erudition did not impress me agreeably. I understood the necessity of a woman's having some knowledge of affairs in order to rule over her house properly; but so much mercantile knowledge shocked my temperament, which was not at all practical, and, more yet, the idea it gave me of this young creature. It seemed impossible that such old words could issue from such youthful lips.

But this was not the only thing. Going on from one thing to another with strange smartness, the child reached the point of inquiring the amount of my capital. I did not try to hide it from her. At the first hint I told her, with complete clearness, one house, a little land, a few bonds of the company in whose service I had been—about sixty thousand dollars all reckoned.

Isabelita kept silence a moment.

"It isn't much," she said at last, with a certain antagonistic inflection I did not know in her.

And, after another pause, she added, with a forced smile:

"My father thought that you were much richer."

"But you perceive how mistaken he was," I said, with a smile still more forced. "We are almost always deceived about others, sometimes thinking them richer than they are, sometimes more noble."

This was all that I said. I felt an enormous, overwhelming repugnance, almost a nausea. In one instant I had made up my mind. I would not marry this self-hawker, with her angelic profile, for all the treasures of earth.

And, curiously, as soon as I made this resolution, I felt at peace and almost happy. I felt as if I had thrown off a great load. So, to the surprise of Retamoso's daughter, who had remained thoughtful, and a little put out by my words, I began to show myself gay and never more merry.

But the evening was advancing, and as I was not interested in conversation, and wished to be alone and think over the proper method for breaking off with her, I proposed that we should return to the house. As we got up we heard a

murmur as of people coming; we did not know any other way except to sit down again. Castell and Cristina sailed into the little open space. From the darkness of the place where we were sitting, we could see them plainly, for the moonlight completely enveloped them. I perceived at once that the conversation was a serious one. He came along smiling, bending his head insinuatingly towards her, to talk close to her ear. Cristina was pale, with frowning brow, her gaze hard, and fixed on space. I wished to get up at once, but Isabelita held me back. They passed before us without seeing us. As for him, we could not hear him, because he spoke very low; but some of her words reached our ears distinctly.

"There is nothing more to be said about that."

This sentence, uttered with unusual energy, impressed us forcibly. Isabelita grasped my wrist with a nervous hand and stood up to follow them. And, truly, if curiosity excited her, my own was no less; but as I knew where that would lead me, and as it seemed to me indecorous to surprise such a secret, I tried to stop her. It was useless. The girl pulled away from me, and was off after them. I followed also, determining to do something to attract their attention in some way. But by this time I could no longer see Isabelita. I went forward in the darkness, which was there very dense, guided only by the sound of their voices. In a few moments I realized that Castell and Cristina had stopped. I still advanced and saw that they were in a glorieta, or arbor, formed by four great laurels, planted a little distance apart, whose branches interlaced. I approached with a cautious step. Isabelita was outside the arbor with her ear glued to the branches. When I came up to her, she flashed one hand over my mouth and the other arm about my neck so hard that she hurt me. I was stupefied by such violence, whose reason I could not imagine. Weakly, and because I thought it would save Cristina's modesty, I remained passive and quiet.

"Perhaps you consider," said Castell, "my patience of several years, my sufferings, the silent, constant service I have given you, a mere caprice. Perhaps you suppose that my self-love is concerned in this rather than a deep, irresistible passion. Have I not an equal right to suppose that the disdain with which you have so many times humiliated me is the work of pride and of obstinacy more than of virtue?"

"You may suppose whatever you like. The way you judge me—"

"I know you," interrupted Castell. "Nobody could be more charming. I have never found a woman whose beauty and whose character appeared to me more interesting and worthy of admiration."

I heard a slight sniff of disdain and then these words:

"I would prefer you to admire me less, and let me live more at peace. But it is not about this that I wish to talk at present. I consented to come out with you, and find myself here at this improper hour, at the risk of my husband's honor, which is dearer to me than life, because I see a way to solve the problem of my life. Rich or poor, happy or disgraced, I am resolved to live in honor and peace."

Nobody can imagine exactly what went on within me at that moment. The horrible suspicions, almost certainties, which had smeared the image of my idol, fled like black spectres. I saw her again in all her purity, with an aureole of virtue that was her glory and charm. A celestial happiness descended into my heart. All my body trembled, seized with an irresistible emotion.

"You might search everywhere, you might look the wide world over, for one whose happiness concerns me more than your own, and you could not find one," said Castell.

"That is very little to say," replied Cristina with a sarcastic accent.

"Because you think that nothing on earth moves me or interests me, don't you? There you are wrong. Before I gave rein to this disgraceful passion, I lived in a state of perpetual interest in all things. Cities, mountains, rivers, the ocean, society, art, passing affections, everything moved me and attracted me. To-day all these things are objects of loathing in my eyes. Barren boredom, a wearing contempt, and a causeless weariness dog me everywhere, surrounding me like poisonous vapors. All the nerves of my life are parched—except one. When this is stirred, my being trembles, my faculties are roused, the horrible spell that binds me is broken, and daylight breaks upon my spirit——"

"Better say night. A bad conscience has need of night."

"Conscience always stops on the steps of the temple of love. Did you ever know anyone who, truly in love with a woman, devoured by desire for her, has been hindered by conscience? I know nobody. If any human being came to me with a tale like that, I should tell him frankly that he lied. No mouse ever hesitated before cheese; no man before a woman, in fear of his conscience."

"All the worse for men if that is so. But I repeat it is not about this that I wish to speak at this moment. At the risk of your carrying out your half-veiled threats, I am resolved to put an end to this persecution, and it shall be ended. Indeed, it shall be ended!"

"Do you know one thing, Cristina? I have come to think that you enjoy being obstinate rather than virtuous."

"Do you know another thing, Castell? I have always thought that there is no love whatever in your make-up, but, instead, a monstrous vanity that has need of satisfying itself at the cost of the honor and happiness of your best friend."

"If there was nothing in me but vanity, how long would it have taken it to be revenged upon this scorn, these insults? I doubt if there is a woman in the world who knows how better to cut the heart with a gesture, envenom the soul, and fill it with mad anger by a glance. I am persuaded that you cannot love, but only scorn, a man. If you condescend to your husband, it is because he is a poor, miserable thing who doesn't dare hold up his head in your presence."

"Spare your insults! This is well! If you had always talked like this, I should have been saved much pain. Now let us come to the other matter. It is absolutely necessary that from this night henceforth you must cease to mortify me, either with words, looks, or hints of any kind. It is absolutely necessary that, if you cannot treat me with respect as the wife of your friend, I should be to you as any indifferent person. And, further, I am resolved, thinking everything over, to give an account of what has passed to my husband."

"This is decreed?" he asked in a mocking tone.

"This is decreed!" she said angrily.

There was a pause.

"And are you not afraid," he asked at last, speaking slowly, "if following upon the thousand tortures and

humiliations that you have made me suffer, and my despair of ever being successful with you, if no compassion follows, that my love might be turned into hate, and that I take means that the event which overthrows me should engulf you and yours in yet more frightful ruin?"

"No, I am not afraid," she replied with fiery pride.

"You do well. I shall not take any revenge whatever."

"You may do it if you choose," she interrupted him impetuously. "Emilio is a man who likes luxuries and comforts, I know, but he cares very much more for his wife and his honor. If the alternative were offered him, he would give his fortune gladly, if not also his life. So you may ruin him as soon as you please. If nothing is left us, we two can go to work. But when he finds himself in somebody's office as a humble clerk, nobody can come up to him and call him a complaisant husband; and when I go through the streets, the people in Valencia may lean out of their balcony windows and say: 'This poor woman that we see there with a basket on her arm used to have her carriage and go dressed in her silks;' but they shall not say, I swear it, 'She who goes yonder is a prostitute.'"

Her voice sank as she uttered the word. I felt my throat constrict.

"Oh, oh! this is too much!" exclaimed Castell.

"Yes." She repeated the word firmly. "And it is all the same whether one sells oneself for fear or to get money."

"Pardon me, Cristina, but it seems to me that you are giving the conversation rather a romantic turn. 'A basket on her arm.' This is folly! I call your good judgment in against such nonsense. Here is a man who loves you with all the strength of his soul, who to win your love would be capable of making any sacrifice, even of his life. You have already taken away all my hope, and, in abandoning the contest, at least don't make me out a seducer in a novel of the kind that stirs up the wrath of dressmakers."

"Let us stop talking. I cannot stay here any longer," she said. I could see that she stood up.

"Yes, let us put an end to it. I give up trying for you, but not loving you. I renounce the idea of vengeance, as I have told you. But understand, however, that this is only a truce. My hopes that you will love me some day will not be banished. Separated from you, I shall wait with patience for a time when our paths shall cross again and I shall offer you the poor heart that you have coldly trampled upon."

"Very well. Good-by."

Castell also stood up. More by Cristina's next words than by what I could really see, I understood that he was holding her.

"Let me go!"

"Before you go, I want the reward that my sacrifice merits. Let me kiss these glorious eyes."

"Let me go!" she repeated forcibly and fiercely.

"I have renounced all," he said as energetically, but lowering his voice; "but I swear to you I will not renounce this kiss, if it costs me my life."

"Let me go, or I shall scream."

"Scream as much as you like. If you want to make a scandal and perhaps kill your husband—his death for one kiss—I am willing."

At that moment I entered the glorieta and put my hand on his shoulder.

"Who is it? Who goes there?" he exclaimed, giving a jump that separated him widely from Cristina.

"There is no need of being alarmed. It's me."

"And who are you?" he replied, drawing a revolver and pointing it at me.

"Keep your gun for thieves, or hold it in readiness for some traitor who, abusing the confidence reposed in him, tries to seize upon honor and happiness. There are no thieves or traitors here."

"If there are no thieves, there are at least persons about devoting themselves to overhearing private conversations. But for such persons a whip would be more suitable than a revolver," he returned in sarcastic tones.

"Keep your sarcasms likewise for a more opportune occasion. Nobody here has tried to overhear conversations. They are heard when they come to one's ears, and I am sincerely sorry that I was here at this time to hear them. If I had been asleep in my bed, I should have avoided the sorrow of entering into the foul and hidden corners of the human conscience."

"You lie!" he cried, coming wrathfully towards me. "You were spying upon us. How can you talk of foulness when you are sunk in filth yourself? You have been spying upon us, I repeat it. I have seen you doing that for some time past. By what right do you follow our steps and pretend to interfere in the affairs of this family, you who are an outsider?"

"An outsider interferes when he sees anyone is in need of help," I replied calmly. "Moreover, I have not the habit of following any path, except those of the ocean currents. I have not insulted you, and you have no right to insult me as you have been doing."

Then he, perhaps taking my calmness for cowardice, or possibly wishing to provoke a violent scene, so as to extricate himself from his difficulty, grabbed me by the lapels of my coat, shook me, and bringing his threatening face up to mine, yelled:

"Yes, señor, you have followed us, and I will not endure it. Do you hear? Yes, I have insulted you, and why? Are you not satisfied with one insult? Then here goes for another."

I caught his arm in air. I caught hold of the other one also, and holding him like a vise, because here my greater muscular strength was of service, gave him several shakings and forced him backwards into the foliage of the arbor.

A voice sounded in my ears:

"Give up, Enrique, give up! Don't risk your life for anybody!"

I paused, stupefied. My fingers relaxed their hold and released their captive. Turning my head, I saw before me the virginal figure of Isabelita. Yes, it was she.

"Thank you very much," I said smiling.

But I was of no consequence. She did not even glance my way. With an agitated countenance, her eyes fixed upon Castell, she took his hand and led him out of the glorieta.

CHAPTER XIV.

CRISTINA was sitting down, her face hidden in her hands. I went up to her.

"Forgive me for coming in here. I was not master of myself."

"You did exactly right; thank you," she murmured, without changing her position.

We remained silent. Presently, rising abruptly, she exclaimed:

"Come, let us go in! let us go in!"

And emerging from the glorieta, she went hastily towards the house. I followed her, and catching up with her, suggested the propriety of not presenting herself in such a disturbed state to Emilio.

She did not reply to me, but she changed her direction, and turned her steps towards a narrow acacia path, where the light of the moon could scarcely penetrate. I soon lost sight of her. I paused a moment, debating whether to go on to the house or follow her. I decided upon the last, because I was afraid she might stumble anew upon Castell.

I followed the path, and saw her as she came out in front of the little pavilion that bore her name. I joined her and advised her to rest there a moment.

The salon, profusely adorned with statues and vases, offered at this hour a mysterious enchantment. The moon shone through the crystalline windows. The polished furniture, the porcelains, the pictures hanging on the wall, reflected the moonlight mournfully. The marble statues threw huge dark shadows upon the walls, tragic and threatening.

Cristina dropped upon a sofa, and I sat down beside her.

We remained silent for some time.

"When, for the first time," I said at last, "I had the pleasure to enter your house, I felt as if I saw a little bit of heaven below—joy, cordiality, serene and innocent happiness, the tender love of a wife who inspires respect, the restful felicity of a husband free from any of the suspicions that embitter existence—a yoke of love and peace; and about you plenty, riches, all the good gifts of life. Shall I surprise you if I say that among the leafage of so many joys I have seen uplifted the head of the serpent?"

"I do not doubt it," she replied pensively, looking out at the heavens through the crystal-clear windows.

"If I could not see your face, I should still be able to divine what you are feeling. Your eyes are not able to conceal what passes in your soul. How happy you would have made me by confiding to me your troubles! I am a new friend, I know, but the affection that you and Emilio inspire in me could not be more sincere."

"Thank you, thank you, Captain Ribot," she murmured, "but it is not possible."

"It is not possible, truly. How could it be when I lack skill to persuade you of the sincerity of my sentiments? I confess that there have been reasons why you should not give me your confidence. I have repented with all my soul, and I beg your forgiveness."

As if these words agitated her, she rose, pushed aside a hanging curtain, went to the piano that stood open, ran her fingers over the keys, then came and sat down again.

"I understand by what I overheard," I said, after a pause, "that Castell has some hold over you—that you are in his debt."

"Our entire fortune is in his hands."

"What!"

"Emilio has been to him for money to use in his business, which was ruined."

"And this was given in the hope of obliging you to accept his devotion?"

"It is possible. Castell is more of a business man than a lover. No matter what he pretends, buying and selling is his business. He has always had the idea of getting absolute control of the steamboat line."

"I suppose that after what has been overheard, he will desist for a little in trying to get possession of it."

"I don't know."

She sat thoughtful for a few moments. Then, as if she were talking to herself, she said in a dull voice:

"The day that Emilio and I were married he was at my house from the hour of the ceremony until I went to change my dress. We were going to Madrid to spend a few days. When I came down, I stumbled upon him waiting for me on the stairs. He made some gallant speeches to me at that time, and begged a spray of my orange flowers, which he put next his heart. I gave it to him against my will, from bashfulness, from timidity. He was repulsive to me from the first moment. Later, when we were at the station, and he came to give me his hand for good-by, he said, almost in my ear, 'If some day it chances that you get tired of him, remember that he has friends who admire you as much or more than he does.'"

"What insolence!"

"I did not like to say anything to my husband then; I have not wished to since. The friendship that united them was strong, and I hesitated to break it. How many times since then I have asked myself if I did right or wrong!"

"And before that he had not addressed you especially?"

"Yes, and no. Once we were at Denia. Castell was there, and I danced with him at a ball at the house of some friends; it was several months before I knew Emilio. That evening he made a little love to me and almost declared himself. I took that for what it was, the diversion of a traveller who does everything he can think of to keep from being bored. And, indeed, he left Denia, and Spain, and spent nearly two years in travelling. When he came back, I was going to be married to Emilio. It was only a fortnight before the wedding."

"Providence has been cruel placing such a man in your pathway, and giving him power to cause you so much trouble."

She did not answer. She remained thoughtful for a while; at last, looking at me with her great eyes full of interest, said:

"But you are so very, very good, Ribot. Don't let us talk any more about my troubles, but think of those that *you* have to bear."

"Bah! 'tis quite the contrary with me. I should give thanks to God that I have been undeceived in time. Somehow I

have always suspected that the girl was in love with Castell, although Emilio and Sabas were so certain of something else. And, to be frank, I also love someone else better."

"Then why don't you marry her?"

"Because, because—I don't know why; that is to say, if I knew and if you also knew—but there are things that I do not care to confess to myself."

These words made her look troubled. I was repentant at once, as the rays of the moon let me see on her forehead that frown dreaded of yore.

"No, Cristina, no!" I hastened to say vehemently, "I beg you not to think that which I read in your eyes. I have been through bitter struggles, despairing conflicts with myself. I have stumbled, and fallen too, but I have risen; and—I can say it without pride—never shall treachery find shelter in my breast. I have not Castell's brilliant qualities. I am far from possessing the advantages that make that man admired and sought after; but if I possessed them all, I swear I would not use them to stab a friend in the back. Far more than the satisfactions of love, more than all the enjoyments of earth—and even those of heaven if they were offered me—I hold the peace of my own conscience."

The warmth of my tones and the sincerity of expression with which I uttered these words made her lift her head and look at me in a slight amaze. Her brow grew calm, and a sweet smile lingered upon her lips.

"Yes, I have already come to see that you are more original in that way than could at first have been imagined. I think it much better this way."

And saying so, she graciously held out her hand to me, and I pressed it with as much respect as emotion. At this moment a shadow fell across us, then one appeared before us, saying:

"Good-evening."

Both Cristina and I were painfully startled.

"You here, Emilio? I thought you had gone to bed," she said, instantly controlling herself.

"No, no; I didn't go to bed. I felt the heat, like the rest of you, and came out for a turn in the garden. I heard the sound of conversation, so I came in."

In spite of the natural voice he made a point of using, there was something in his manner and a strangeness in his tones that disquieted us immensely.

"It is a very beautiful night," he went on, beginning to walk up and down the place with his hands in his pockets. "The month of September has not fallen behind August. Even in the mornings it is scarcely cool yet. I found I had no desire to go to bed."

I replied to him in words as unimportant as his own. He gave no sign of having heard me. He went on walking up and down in an absorbed manner, and at last he went over to the balcony and stood motionless looking out through the glass. Then he opened one of the windows and stepped outside to get more of the cool night air.

Cristina gazed at him without moving an eyelash. In her eyes a great anguish was visible. She seemed alarmed. Thus several minutes passed in silence. At last, as if unable longer to endure this tension, she rose impetuously, went to her husband and put her hand on his shoulder, saying:

"Come, let us go to the house."

"As you like," he replied dryly.

We went out of the pavilion and along the avenue of acacias that led to it. I tried to walk with Martí and to talk with him. I saw that he shrank from my company, and answered with few words. Before reaching the house he took his wife's arm and went on ahead, leaving me behind. This mute rebuff made my heart ache. I followed with a sadness that presently gave way to decided impatience, thinking with what injustice I was treated. As we went along in this fashion, there came into my mind the strong resolution to enter into a clear and definite explanation with him, and disclose to him all that had passed.

We arrived at the door of the house and paused under the glass portico. Through the opened window of the dining-room I could see Isabelita, Castell, and Doña Amparo.

"Come," I said, with affected indifference, "you two are going to bed and I into the city."

"Won't you wait until we can order the carriage?" asked Cristina timidly.

"No; I have an appetite for a stroll in the light of the moon. *Hasta mañana.* Good-night."

I offered Emilio my hand.

"No," he said, with an unusual gravity. "I am going with you as far as the farthest gateway. I, too, feel like a stroll."

I gave my hand to Cristina. For the first time in her life she pressed it with singular force, at the same time giving me an anxious look of supplication. I, moved to the depths of the soul, answered her eyes with my own, promising her in that way that she might depend upon me.

We walked away slowly, taking the path that led to the entrance gate. Martí walked with his hat in his hand, and preserved an obstinate silence. I waited for him to break it before we parted, promising myself to be faithful to the silent promise that I had made to Cristina. So it was he who, as we approached the boundary wall, paused and, without looking at me, spoke:

"Married men, Ribot, often have an exaggerated susceptibility. Not only do their own affections torment them, but the fear of becoming objects of ridicule sometimes obliges them to be suspicious even when they are by nature confiding. The friends of such men do well to avoid awakening this susceptibility, conducting themselves on all occasions with care and delicacy. By this means friendship is yoked to gratitude."

"You are right," I replied. "So far in my life I have managed to fulfil this obligation towards all men with whom I have had to do, not merely towards friends, as you say, but towards men of my general acquaintance. An unfortunate accident placed me in a situation that wounds your *amor proprio*, if not your honor. Understand, however, that Cristina——"

"We will not talk of Cristina," he interrupted, gazing firmly into my eyes. "Every night of the year before going to sleep I give thanks to God for having united me to her. To-night will be the same as the others."

"We will talk about me, then. An unfortunate accident, I repeat, placed me in a situation to hurt the susceptibility that has been mentioned. I deplore this with all my soul, although I do not find myself to blame. In any case, it would have been an indiscretion. However, these matters are of such peculiar delicacy that a recent friendship cannot risk

the consequences of the slightest annoyance. If you feel any such annoyance, I am resolved to take myself away from here, and never again set foot in your house."

There was no response. We pursued in silence the remaining distance to the gate. When we reached it, he paused and, without looking at me, said in a trembling voice:

"Although I feel it very much, I cannot do less than accept your resolution. Perhaps I am making myself ridiculous in your eyes and in those of anyone who might know of what has passed; but what would you? I prefer to be considered absurd rather than see disturbed in the slightest degree the tranquillity that until now I have enjoyed."

"You are right," I said. "In your place I should do the same. To-morrow morning early I shall leave Valencia, and it may be that we shall never meet again. I desire you to know, none the less, that this is one of the profoundest griefs of my whole life. I appreciate your friendship more than you realize. I am grateful for your affectionate hospitality, and I shall never console myself for having unintentionally caused you the least trouble. If some day you have need of me, all that I have is yours."

"Thank you, thank you, Ribot," he murmured, moved.

He put one hand on the latch of the gate, and with the other lifted his hat. I did not care to let him see that I knew he did this to avoid taking my hand, so, without extending my own, I went out into the road.

"*Adios*, Martí," I said, turning my head, "God keep you always as happy as you have been until now."

"*Adios*, Ribot. *Muchas gracias.*"

CHAPTER XV.

THE gate closed. Through its bars I could see him going farther and farther away, his uncovered head bowed, until he was lost to sight among the trees. I stood alone in the middle of the road. A profound depression filled me; it was as if I had lost something that had been the chief interest of my existence.

With slow step I began my departure from that pleasant place, believing that I should never return to tread this path again. Indeed, these latest events had followed one another so hastily and precipitately that I could scarcely realize them. One moment I had been in that house as the accepted friend about to become a member of the family. The next, I left it as a stranger whose name would soon be forgotten. Yet in the midst of my sorrow, in the mournful night that had fallen upon my heart, shone one consoling star; it was Cristina's look of supplication. In that house, perhaps, my name would now no more be spoken, but she would never forget it. This thought gave me inexpressible consolation. I went on my way with a firmer step, and when I came to the last corner of the walls surrounding the estate, I stopped beside it. I looked at it sorrowfully for a little, then, going up to the stone, I kissed it many times. Then I went on again, blushing as if someone had seen me.

The moon on high bathed the country in luminous purity, transforming it into a sleeping lake. The plain stretched before me, bordered by the mountains whose crests seemed floating in the distance in a white mist. Here and there the little groves of orange-trees and laurel stood out in the fleecy whiteness, or great cypresses rose solitary and still, casting their shadows across the road. Beyond smiled the sea, reflecting the light of the moon.

The sweetness of that night penetrated my heart, refreshing it. The fields, still abounding in flowers and fragrant with the odors of ripe fruits, soothed my senses and calmed the fever of my thoughts. I went on with a lighter step. Valencia already slumbered lightly upon her couch of flowers. Her street lights shone afar like stars of earth. Those of the heavens formed a rich canopy above, protecting that fortunate city.

When at some distance from the country house, I felt the need of resting a little while. I did not care yet to be among people. It was necessary to get my thoughts together and contrive some plan of life in place of that that had, in one moment, been upset. I sat down on a stone, drew out a cigar, lighted it, and calmly began smoking. I had not been sitting there long when I heard the sound of an approaching carriage. At first I did not know whether it was coming from Valencia or Cabañal. When I was convinced it was from the latter, I felt strangely uneasy, and thought of concealing myself; but instantly changing my mind, I determined to remain where I was. Soon I descried the horses; they drew near. It was Castell's cab, as I feared.

When he was quite close I planted myself in the middle of the road and called to the coachman in an imperative voice:

"Stop!"

He made a gesture of surprise, but stopped the horses almost as they came upon me. As he was pulling them in with the reins, obliging them to stop in time, the man recognized me and said:

"Good evening, Don Julian."

Castell had been leaning half out of the window. When I approached him he looked at me in surprise, then springing up with a fiery gesture he reached for his pocket, crying:

"If this is an attack, take care!"

"No, it is not an attack," I said, lifting my hand in sign of peace; "I wish to speak with you."

"Send me your seconds and I will speak with them," he said haughtily.

"Before doing that, it is necessary to speak with you a moment," I replied.

He stared at me a little while as if trying to discern my intentions. Convinced, doubtless, that they were not bellicose, he opened the cab door and said coolly:

"Get in!"

I sat down facing him. The carriage went onward.

"I desire to know," I said, at the end of a moment, "if it was you who let Martí know that he would find Cristina and me alone in the pavilion?"

He opened his eyes wide in no feigned surprise, and answered in an ungracious manner:

"I don't understand what you are saying to me."

I perceived that this was true, and I went on, modifying my tone.

"After you and I separated, she and I went along the acacia path to the pavilion, for the purpose of giving Cristina time to recover herself before going to the house. She found herself very much upset and did not care to present herself to her husband in that state. After we had been there a little while, Martí came unexpectedly. He was angry, naturally; sought an explanation with me, and in consequence I have left his house never to return."

"I knew nothing of it. Although I feel no obligation to give you any satisfaction whatever, since there is a question between us to be settled on other grounds, I will yet tell you that I did not speak one word to Martí about the affair. It rests with you to believe me, or not. But it certainly surprises me that after having had an explanation with him, you should leave his house and now be talking with me as cordially as ever."

"It is very simple. I did not speak one word about what I had just heard."

"You have allowed him to suspect you of treachery?" he asked in the greatest surprise.

"Yes, señor."

"And why have you done so?"

"For my pleasure."

He cast a hostile, suspicious glance at me, shrugged his shoulders, and remained silent. I broke the silence after a moment.

"The pleasures of men, Castell, are as varied as their physiognomies. However much you may have thought yourself in love with Cristina, I believe I was more. I adored her with all my soul, with all the powers of my heart. But to win her by treacherous means would, far from causing me joy, be the worst misfortune that could befall me upon earth. I should never sleep quietly again. I have made a cruel sacrifice, but I have made it for love of her, for the peace of my conscience. The tears that you see in my eyes now refresh my soul; they do not scorch it. I am going away, going away for good. You will remain, and perhaps time may bring it about that you can gain what I have so much desired; but wandering upon the sea, alone on the deck of my ship, I shall be happier than you. The stars of heaven shining above me will say: 'Be joyful, for you have done right.' The wind whistling through the rigging, the waves breaking against the sides will say: 'Joyful, joyful!'"

The light of the moon illuminated his face. I saw a smile gradually spread over it.

"These same waves that will say such agreeable things to you will think nothing of swallowing you like a fly some day. The winds will help them finish the task, and the stars of heaven will be present with all possible serenity. You are living in a profound error, Ribot. There is no other happiness upon earth except in possessing what one desires."

"Although to get it you stab a friend to death from behind?"

There was a moment of suspense, but he presently said firmly:

"Although to get it 'twere necessary to walk over men."

"There is neither good nor evil, then?"

"In life the good of some is the evil of others, and it will be so to the end of time. You may have seen some time a nest of swallows? The little ones wait anxiously for the arrival of the mother; she comes gently, opens her bill and, with loving care, feeds them one by one. How interesting! How full of tenderness such a sight! But the insects that have been destroyed and fall into the beak of the swallow to serve her in feeding her children—does the spectacle seem so tender and interesting to them? On the other hand, you see a man go stealthily up to another, knock him down with a blow, take the money out of his purse and carry it away to his house to buy bread for his children. How horrible! You shudder and hurry quickly away from such a scene. But why? If you were an insect you would go along there buzzing joyously."

"But we are given a conscience."

"Conscience does not prevent us from being fatally fettered. You find yourself in love with Cristina, the same as I am; both of us desire her. You are held back by fear of remorse, but I pursue my undertaking with no fears whatever. We both follow an instinct. Mine is more sane, because it tends to augment my vitality, while yours tends to diminish your strength. You need not laugh nor be so much surprised. Remorse in a world where necessity rules is absurd. Think you that the heroes of Homer and Aeschylus hesitated at fratricide or incest? Yet they were, nevertheless, the most noble examples of human kind."

"I am far from opposing you in augmenting your vitality," I replied, ironically; "but would it not be better that you seek a wife of your own, rather than another's."

"Another's, another's!" he repeated under his breath. "That is conventional, like all the rest."

He remained thoughtful for several minutes, looking out at the landscape through the window. I watched him with a mixture of curiosity and repugnance. Those blue eyes of his with their steely reflections inspired me for the first time with a sudden dread.

"The virtuous? Draûpadî," he began saying slowly, without taking his eyes from the scene, "one of the most interesting heroines of antiquity had five husbands, all brothers. Those heroes enjoyed her love in common, without dishonor or remorse. If we lived in like simplicity, to aspire to Cristina would be moral and plausible; we should be offering a woman two new protectors. Why does it cause you so much horror to share a woman with a friend? The world began in that way and will end in that way."

"It may end as it chooses!" I exclaimed. "Now and evermore, it will be a sin voluntarily to cause pain."

"Don't be a child, Ribot," he replied with his irritating self-sufficiency. "There is only one undeniable truth in this world, and that is the common impulse of plants and animals, insects and man. In the serene region where life abides, everlasting life, sorrow and death, signify nothing. The one supreme end of the universe is to augment the intensity of this life."

I did not respond. I remained thoughtful and silent in my turn for some time, gazing out of the other window at the road. At last I saw the first houses of the suburbs.

"Will you have the kindness to ask the man to stop?" I said; "I wish to get out here; and to-morrow I leave Valencia without fighting with you. Attribute this to cowardice if you like. It will be a new sacrifice for me to make on the altar of my love, and to the friendship that I owe Martí. I do not aspire to be a Homeric hero like you, nor dream of leaping triumphantly upon the bodies of my enemies. Will you stop?"

He gave me a big, contemptuous stare, and pulled the cord, saying coldly:

"I don't know whether or not you are a coward; but I can tell you on the spot that you are one of those people who are self-deceived, and live in delusions concerning themselves and the world about them."

The cab stopped. I opened the door and stepped out upon the ground.

"*Adios*, Castell," I said, without giving him my hand. "You may seek that happy region which I do not desire to know. I will remain in this other that is more sorrowful yet more honorable."

He shrugged his shoulders without answering, and turned his eyes away from me disdainfully, as he again pulled the cord. Then he leaned back comfortably. The carriage departed, and I began walking slowly towards my hotel. I followed the white highroad whereon scattering houses now cast shadows, until I reached the city's streets, and lost myself in their labyrinth.

In the Calle del Mar I found myself in front of the house of Cristina. On her bedroom balcony grew a rose-mallow. I made sure that nobody saw me, then I climbed up to it and picked some of its leaves. I went to the hotel, and up to my room, and was soon sleeping sweetly with those leaves held fast in my hand.

CHAPTER XVI.

ONCE more the sea! Port traffic, the noise of loading and unloading, troublesome business in the consignees' office—afterwards lonely, tranquil hours lulled by the songs of the sailors and the murmur of waters against the keel! I did not let my dream of love weigh down my soul. At the end of several months, it remained a tender and poetic impression which gave reality to my existence. Yet when one night we passed Valencia, and I saw the lights of Cabañal shining in the distance, I was surprised to find myself singing on the bridge in a low voice the farewell from "Grumete"—

"*Si en la noche callada*
Sientes el viento!"

And, without being able to help it, my eyes filled with tears like a sentimental female. But that soon passed, and I soon recovered the joyous mood which seldom, thank heaven, forsook me.

I heard from a friend in Barcelona that Castell had married Isabelita Retamoso. Much good may it do! I learned from the same man that the steamship company, Castell and Martí, had gone to pieces, and that both partners were involved in a ruinous lawsuit. On hearing that, I could not refrain from exclaiming with exquisite delight:

"Ruined, it may be! but dishonored, no!"

My friend stared at me surprised, and it cost me not a little to evade an explanation. Did not some self-satisfaction enter into my pleasure? I am almost sure it did. I do not give myself out for a saint, and not even the saints are able to get rid of self-love entirely. At last, on my return from Hamburg, after one of my voyages, I found in Barcelona a letter that had been waiting for me several days. It was from Martí, although written in another hand. He told me that he was very ill, and in trouble, and invited me in extremely affectionate terms to come and make him a visit if it were possible. He did not explain what his troubles were, nor allude in the least to the misunderstanding that had been between us, perhaps not to let his amanuensis into our secrets; but the whole letter breathed of his hearty desire to be all right with me again, and to make me forget my unhappy departure from his house.

I took the train immediately for Valencia. I entered the city at nightfall, one year and three months after leaving it. I went to the hotel where I had then stayed. The hotel-keeper received me with cordial demonstration, and told me, without my asking, many details of the lawsuit between Castell and Martí. Martí was ruined. He had lost his directing share in the steamboat line, in which his partner still remained. Following that, to reimburse himself for capital loaned, Castell transferred Martí's credit. The creditors sold all his property at auction, including that at Cabañal and the house in the Calle del Mar.

"If, in spite of all this," said my host, "Don Emilio enjoyed good health, he could easily get up again, for he is young and he has a great head for business. But the poor man is very ill, very ill. I have not seen him for some time, but by all that I hear it is his last sickness."

These words made me very sad. It was dinnertime; but, although I went and sat down at table, I could scarcely take a morsel of food. I went out afterwards, intending to go to the house of Martí—he was living now in an apartment in the Calle de Caballeros. Before arriving I turned about, fearing to disturb him at that hour, or cause him any emotion that might hinder him from resting well. I directed my steps to the residence of his brother-in-law, Sabas, that he might prepare Martí, or at least advise me when it would be best for me to go to see him. Sabas's plump wife, as lively, busy, and sweet as ever, received me with her usual affability. Her idolized husband had gone out.

"He is at Emilio's house?" I said, as the natural thing.

"No, I believe—" she hesitated. "You had better go to the theatre. Maybe he is there. As the doctor found Emilio better to-day, he said that he would go and celebrate."

She blushed as she uttered these words. I showed no surprise, in order not to increase her confusion. After kissing my old friends, her children, I went off to the theatre that she named in search of their elegant papa.

When I entered, the play had already begun. I took up a position in a corner behind the stalls and scrutinized the theatre. I was not long in seeing him in his place in a proscenium box. These boxes in the provinces, as in the capital, are the sacred spots, whence the superior beings of each locality radiate their splendors. Accustomed to lay down the law for the multitude, the gilded youths who meet there, converse, argue, smoke, and yawn, firmly convinced that they have no duties to fulfil towards the masses, those who listen placidly from the stalls. They dwell separate like the gods of Olympus, in conscious enjoyment of their perfections and their power, grinning at the actors, tossing compliments to the actresses, and from time to time talking in loud voices with their kind in the opposite boxes, over the heads of the rabble of the unfashionable.

Sabas belonged to the ruling caste, although his face showed none of the marks that characterize it, neither the flabby flesh, the pallid skin, nor the loose mouth, signs of the life of self-indulgence.

His dark, sunburned face, peeled in places, offered rather an extremely industrious aspect. It would not have been strange if he had arrived that same night from Madagascar or Java, after enriching himself in a caoutchouc expedition. This was doubtless the opinion of the contralto of the company (much richer in avoirdupois than in voice), to judge by the timid admiration and the blushes wherewith she received his ardent compliments every time that the exigencies of the piece obliged her to go near his box. I sat down in one of the *butacas* and waited for the fall of the curtain. I confess that I was less interested in what was going on on the stage than in the play that was revealed between the box and the footlights. Sabas, leaning his chin in his hand with a purely Oriental languor, fixed his gaze of serpent-like fascination upon the contralto. She, overcome with an irresistible terror, made efforts to flee from that glance and escape. In vain. In spite of herself, even in the most important scenes and against all the demands of the play, she would break abruptly away from the tenor in a love duet and turn towards that tropical and fascinating man of the quivering nostrils. She listened with eagerness to his voice vibrating like a cry in the desert, hoping ever that he would end by offering her fifty elephants, a necklace of pearls, and the heads of three rajahs, his enemies.

When the act was ended I went without delay to the box. Sabas received me with the grave indifference which, in all perfectly cultivated countries, expresses elegance. I explained my wishes at once. He accepted them benignly; disdaining his conquest, secure like all heroes of arriving always in time to conquer, he took his hat and we left the theatre. We walked for some time in silence. I felt my heart oppressed with sadness wherein I perceived with alarm a certain anticipation of something pleasant. This something could be nothing else than the presence of Cristina. Yes, I recognized it with shame; yet in that sad hour it absorbed me more than anything else in the world.

Sabas stopped after a time, took his pipe from his mouth, and, looking at me attentively some moments, remarked solemnly:

"You see how it is, friend Ribot. The madness of my brother-in-law has carried him to the extreme that I have prophesied so many times."

"Poor Emilio!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, poor indeed. At present he hasn't a peseta, nor anybody who will lend him one."

"The worst of all is, according to what has been told me, his illness is very serious."

He found nothing to answer to this. After a while he again took out his pipe and paused.

"Does it seem to you, friend Ribot," he exclaimed in indignant accents, "as if a man with a family has the right to throw away his capital according to his own caprices and reduce that family to destitution?"

I shrugged my shoulders, without knowing what to answer, suspecting that Sabas included himself among the most important members of that suffering family.

He put his pipe back between his teeth, and having, doubtless, thus got himself in connection with his electric current, contrived to move onward. He was not long in interrupting it, by taking out the pipe again, spitting, and going on talking.

"I understand perfectly how a bachelor can dispose of his means as he pleases; how, getting up some morning out of humor, he could go out on the balcony and toss over everything that he owns. At most there is only himself to pay for the consequences of his whims. But when a man who is not alone in the world, who has assumed sacred obligations to fulfil, throws himself into senseless speculations and wastes an important property, his conduct seems to me not merely imprudent, but also immoral."

I did not doubt that Sabas included among these sacred obligations that of providing him with means to submit to his own fascinations all the sopranos and contraltos who presented themselves on the Valencian horizon; and not to say anything impertinent, I determined to hold my peace. In this manner, using his pipe like a manipulator of an electric machine to retard or hasten his fancy, and slopping over in a torrent of critical wisdom, we reached at last the house where his brother-in-law lived. It was not so sumptuous as that in the Calle del Mar, but new and elegant. We mounted to the apartment on the second floor, which was the one that Martí occupied, and rang. Regina, the old *doncella*, came out to open for us, and on seeing me could not refrain from a cry of surprise.

"Oh, Don Julian!"

"Silence!" I exclaimed, putting my finger on my lips.

Next, I seized upon my god-daughter, taking her in my arms and silently covering the child with warm and tender kisses. But she did not receive them in the silence that was to be desired. Frightened by my beard, and perhaps pricked by it, she began at once crying to heaven.

I heard the voice of Cristina.

"Who is there?"

And she appeared from the end of the corridor. On seeing me, she paused for an instant, then immediately came on to me, holding out both hands with an affectionate gesture.

"Oh, Captain! My poor Emilio is dying!"

I saw her eyes cloud with tears. I pressed those beautiful hands that I held, and murmured some words of hope. Perhaps her fears were exaggerated. Emilio had always enjoyed good health; but this sort of temperament bore disease for many years. I asked if it were possible to see him at that hour, and, having been answered affirmatively, made ready to go in. Cristina would not let me enter until she had first prepared him. He was very nervous, and a sudden emotion might injure him. While she was gone to perform this gentle duty, Sabas improved the opportunity to give me his hand, dark as an Asiatic colonial's, in good-by and departed with his energetic characteristic importance. Through the door that still stood open I saw him go down the stairs carrying in his ardent glance desolation and tears for the contralto.

"Come in, come in this minute!" It was the voice of Emilio, a little hoarse, but as vigorous as ever. I hastened towards the place whence came the sound, and entered a room where the luxury of the furniture was in contrast with the modesty of the things in the rest of the place. He was reclining in an arm-chair with two cushions at his back, wearing an elegant dressing-gown. The light of a candle fell on his face, where I could see very clearly the fatal signs of tuberculosis. But that face was beautiful, more beautiful and more interesting than any I had ever seen. The hair of head and beard was longer; this with the whiteness of the skin and the great, black, melancholy eyes made

him look like the Nazarene. Those eyes shone at sight of me with a frank and cordial expression. He took my hand and, pressing it affectionately between his own, said several times in a low voice:

"Captain! Captain! Captain! How good you are!"

I found myself too much moved to speak.

"How do you find me? In a very bad way, don't you?" he asked at last, after a long silence.

"I hope I shall see you better soon," I answered, making an effort to control myself and hide the emotion that mastered me.

At the same time I took the candle, and bringing it nearer his face, pretended to examine it with close attention.

"Do you know what ails you?" I asked. "It's *morriña*!"

"What is that?" he asked, opening his eyes wide.

"It is an illness that attacks the Galicians when they lose an amount exceeding fifty centimos."

I saw a smile steal over his lips and, glancing gayly at his wife, he exclaimed:

"The same as ever! He doesn't seem to me a bit changed—no!"

I understood that the kindest thing I could do at that moment was to go on joking. I plucked up my courage and unlocked my stock of buffooneries, although they can't be called very witty. Soon I had the pleasure of hearing him laugh heartily. His face brightened, his eyes shone; in a few minutes we were chatting together with the same gayety as if he were perfectly well and had not lost a centimo of his capital.

Cristina watched us with a melancholy smile. She was happy in seeing her husband so cheerful, although she knew that this could not last long.

And, indeed, a violent attack of coughing soon came to interrupt most sadly our chat. He became livid and half-stifled, holding his head between his hands.

"The chill of the night air is bad for you. It is the chill of night that brought it on, Emilio," said Cristina. "It is time for you to go to rest."

He lifted his hand, making lively signs of negation with it. When the attack subsided, and he could speak, he exclaimed:

"No, don't take him away from me! I feel much better. The captain is a mouthful of oxygen. He brings me the good sea air."

I stayed half an hour longer, to please him. At last I went, not before promising to return early the next day. I did not wish to go in that night to pay my respects to Doña Amparo. I had already had notice from Sabas that she had taken up a fashion lately of fainting away at sight of any friend whatsoever. As the hour seemed to me unseasonable for such an organic phenomenon, I deferred it until another more suitable.

Cristina came with me to the door.

"How do you find him?" she asked, fixing an anxious look upon me.

"I don't find him well. But while there is life, who knows? who knows?"

Nobody could help knowing. She also knew; but the unhappy lady sought some way to hide the truth from herself.

I went away with my head in a whirl, and my heart torn and rent. The force I had used to appear cheerful upset my nerves, and I could not sleep. Poor Martí! Never had he seemed to me more hearty, more innocent, more worthy to be beloved. Not one word, not the most insignificant allusion to the treacherous actions of his friend Castell, nor the inhuman manner in which he had ruined him. And in the days following it was the same. His soul not only knew how to avoid filth like the feet of ladies, but did not believe in it.

I wrote to our shipping house to say that, for reasons of health, I wished to stay on land during the next voyage, and constituted myself companion and nurse to my unfortunate friend. I was seldom away from him. When I left him I saw a sadness in his eyes so sincere that I wished to stay. Every day he lost strength; I saw that he grew constantly weaker. He began to have cruel stiflings that threatened his life. While they lasted I fanned him, and Cristina bathed his temples. But when he came out of these attacks like a man who has succeeded in escaping an imminent peril and unexpectedly finds himself safe and sound, he would be talkative and gay, assuring us that very soon he would be able to go out into the streets and take up his business again.

His business! Neither illness nor ruin had been able to uproot his passion for projects and his liking for great industrial enterprises.

"If you could guess, Captain, the idea which I have had for days in my head!" he said to me once, looking at me with his candid eyes and pushing back his hair. "A grand project, and sensible, too, at the same time. At fifteen kilometres from Valencia there is a river that can be made to produce a waterfall of a thousand horse-power. Suppose that two hundred are lost in harnessing it, there would still be eight hundred, which, well distributed, would move almost all the industries of the city and give light to it all. Manufacturers and the city would save an enormous amount, and to become the owner of that waterfall would be a brilliant stroke of business. Because, as you can see ——"

Here he took a paper, drew out a pencil, and set himself to scheming with figures with as much enthusiasm as if the operatives were already installing the great electric machine that was to distribute power to all the factories of Valencia, with so many horse-power and such and such qualities as if he had the magazine in the house.

Cristina and I exchanged a look over his head, and we knew not what to say. Formerly this passion had been his peril. Now it seemed to console him. So, not to go against him, we followed his fancy, and praised his project to the skies. This made him so happy that his cheeks burned and his glassy eyes shone with pleasure. Cristina could not control her emotion, and hastily left the room. I went on admiring the project warmly, so that he would not notice her going, and went so far as to promise to invest my small capital in the enterprise. With this his gayety came to an end. Quickly changing his expression, he pressed my hand, and, looking at me sorrowfully, exclaimed:

"No, Ribot, no! Although the affair is all plain enough, there might be some bad luck. I will not risk your capital!"

"There would not be any risk," I replied; "I would gladly put it in, because it seems to me that this is a sure thing."

"Absolutely sure!" he said, with the accent of unquenchable conviction, which at another time would have made me smile. "But I won't give you any shares in it until it is under way and has begun to pay dividends."

Poor Martí! He was going fast. His cheeks fell in, the circles under his eyes grew deeper; he passed his nights in coughing and his days in torment between pain and choking.

The fainting fits of Doña Amparo grew constantly more frequent and prolonged. Her sensibility became so over-excited by this, that the fluttering of a butterfly was enough to throw her into a convulsion, from which she could only recover by covering everybody's face, as of old, with tears and kisses. As for me, being the friend most often at hand, I received the greater part of these inundations.

Sabas came every day at eleven o'clock, before going for his usual promenade to the café where he took his vermouth. If the doctor had said that the invalid had less fever (and he often said it to encourage him), this gave our dandy so much satisfaction that he could not do less than celebrate by going to breakfast at the café, and then go off on an excursion with friends of both sexes.

We saw the end approaching. As the fatal hour drew near, Emilio showed himself less and less apprehensive, occupying himself constantly with making calculations and planning out new schemes. Even in the middle of the night he would beg for paper, and scratch down figures.

"Next week I think I shall be able to be out," he said to me one morning. "There is nothing ailing me now. The pain in the kidneys is all gone; my tongue is almost clean. If this cough that keeps me awake would only leave me, I should be quite well. To-day I feel just like walking, like taking a good long walk."

And he proved his words by getting up from his chair and taking several steps.

"I am going to the dining-room," he said, opening the door; "see what a surprise I am going to give Cristina."

And he walked down the passage. I stood looking at him from the threshold of his room. When he had got about half-way, the poor fellow toppled, and before I could get to him, fell his length upon the floor. Several years have passed since then, and yet they have not been able to obscure in my soul the shamed and melancholy smile he gave me as I came to him.

"That's bad, Captain!"

I lifted him and carried him in my arms back to his chair. He weighed no more than a child. Cristina, as well as I, reproved his imprudence, but we readily convinced him that his weakness came from lack of nourishment. If he would eat more his strength would increase rapidly, and we should soon see him able to walk out in the garden as of old.

Although Cristina knew the seriousness of his condition, and made herself no illusions regarding the outcome, I observed in her a sort of ignorance or disregard which, at such a time, could not fail to make me anxious. She thought certainly that his illness was unto death, but by every word that came from her mouth I perceived that she judged the end to be very far off. I could see that it was very near. And yet it was nearer than even I supposed. On the day following his fall in the passage, I went to see him between ten and eleven o'clock in the morning. Contrary to his custom, he had not dressed. He said he found himself a little fatigued from coughing. I cheered him up by calling him only lazy, and sat down beside him. I found him indeed very feeble, and looking very much discouraged. In spite of this he was chatty and cheerful as always. At last he decided to get up, but before doing so we decided that he should take a little cup of broth to give him strength. Cristina went out to prepare it. A few moments after, the sick man had an attack of coughing and choking that nearly overcame him. I did not call Cristina, not wishing to alarm her, and began to fan him, as usual, to give him air, hoping that he would quickly recover. Yet, without knowing why, I felt more disturbed than usual. My heart beat violently, seeing that pallid face, with its closed eyes and the opened mouth struggling for breath. As the seconds went by, my anxiety increased in like measure, and I reached my hand towards the bell-button. But at that moment Martí opened his eyes and smiled sweetly. I calmed myself and said:

"Now you are better! It has passed."

"Open the shutters. I can't see well," he answered me. These words brought back my alarm. The shutters were open. Yet I made a movement to go, to please him; but as I tried to leave him, he seized one of my hands.

"Ribot, Ribot!" he cried, gazing at me with sightless eyes. "Do not leave me! I am dying, do not leave me!"

He raised up, convulsively grasping my hand. His expression changed quickly, his eyes glazed. His head rolled about as if it would be disjointed, then he fell heavily backward. Horror and stupefaction kept me a moment stunned, gazing at the floor. But recovering myself, I took his head between my hands and held it against my breast, crying:

"Martí! my friend, my brother! Canst thou hear? In this world of treachery there are few men left like thee!"

And I kissed that brow where had never fallen the shadow of a sinful thought.

At that moment a hand touched my shoulder. I turned as if it had stabbed me and saw her eyes straining wide with terror and her trembling form that fell prone upon the ground.

CHAPTER XVII.

IT is impossible to describe what took place in that house upon the death of Emilio. Everybody adored him; to all he was like a loving father, ready to sacrifice his own wishes for those of others.

The grief and woe of Cristina were so great that we feared for her life. After a few days, however, it was necessary to think about business matters. Those of Martí were so much entangled that his unfortunate family was likely to become quite destitute. The only one to call upon in regard to his affairs, as the nearest relation, was Sabas; but this profound person, for whom the human heart had no hidden corners, despised the prosaic details of existence. He lived like a god in a state of perpetual joy, removed from the toils and anxieties that afflict mankind. It was necessary that I grasp the reins. I begged permission to do this, and took hold of the work with little knowledge, but with illimitable interest and good will. At the end of six months of hard work, struggling with creditors, lawyers, and clerks, I succeeded in disentangling the snarl. The debts were all paid and a small income was rescued for Cristina, sufficient to enable her to live comfortably but without any luxuries. I breathed freely again, and enjoyed my success as much as if I had brought through successfully some gigantic undertaking.

The gratitude of Cristina was my sweetest reward. In a grave and reserved way, as she did all things, she made me understand it constantly. This gratitude, joined to the innocent caresses of my god-daughter, who now began to prattle, calling me "Uncle Ribot," as if I were of her own blood, fully repaid me for all my endeavors. All that troubled me was to note with what scrupulous care Cristina reduced the expenses of her house, and the straits she endured. I told her this care was exaggerated—her income would permit her a little more leeway, but I did not succeed in making her see it. After a while I came to understand that her economy did not cause her the slightest pain. I thought she rather enjoyed it, and by this means was saving up to add to the small inheritance of her little daughter. Later I found out, not without indignation, that these savings served to support the household of her elegant brother. He had gone on applying the scalpel to all of our actions. Persuaded after a while that neither the kindness of his sister nor my business ability would henceforth provide him with means sufficient to make the conquest of even one single chorus girl, he decided at last to go to work, watching the bank in a gambling club.

None of her ancient splendors seemed to be missed by Cristina, as far as I could ascertain, neither handsomely furnished rooms, nor carriages, nor servants. The property at Cabañal alone excited in her a melancholy regret. Only when we mentioned that did she become sad and pensive. This was very natural. Her passion for the country, for a free and peaceful life was strengthened now by the gentle memories that that estate kept for her heart. There had fleeted the happiest hours of her life. After I had observed this on a number of occasions, the thought was born in my brain to try to buy the place. I quickly thought over the state of my property. As I was a man of few wants, I could part with a third of what I had, and there would still be enough left me to live upon. As soon as I was convinced of that, every hindrance got on my nerves. I could not rest until I had gone to Barcelona, where lived the banker to whom the estate had been assigned, and had had a talk with him. Cabañal had gone at auction for eighteen thousand duros. I soon saw that its present owner would like to get it off his hands for the same money, then his profits would not all be eaten up in the expense of keeping up the place as it had formerly been. At last, after several conferences and enough bartering, we agreed upon the contract and the deeds were passed, I making him promise to keep the transaction a secret. Then I made a deed of gift to my god-daughter of the property. With both documents in my pocket and with my heart light with joy, I returned to Valencia. Before taking possession of the country house it was necessary to buy, and instal there, furniture as nearly as possible like that which the house had had before. It cost me some labor, but I performed it with inexplicable enjoyment. It is needless to say that where I laid myself out to have everything perfect was in Cristina's own room—her *tocador*. By means of untiring search I was able to find some of the same pieces of furniture that had been there before, and I bought them; others I ordered copied, and they turned out very like. As soon as all was ready I took possession of the place, cautioning all persons who had served me, and the gardener, too, not to let the matter get noised abroad before it was time to open the house.

The birthday of my god-daughter arrived. Several days before, I had all the furniture put in place in the country house, and I took pains to see that all was placed as nearly as possible as it had been formerly. I knew so well every arrangement of that house that it was not difficult for me to make it look very homelike. Cristina's room took a good deal of time, for I aspired to have it lack not one detail. The furniture, the curtains, the articles on the dressing-table, even the coverlet on the bed, had been restored or copied with utmost exactness. On the birthday I carried my god-daughter a fine toy in the morning, promising her another for the afternoon. And for the afternoon I invited her, with her mamma and Doña Amparo, to take an excursion into the country, to picnic in some secluded spot, to celebrate that memorable date. The coachman, previously instructed by me, drove us about for a time, then brought up in the neighborhood of Cabañal. There I made him stop and said:

"Señoras, I don't know whether I have committed an indiscretion. If I have, I beg your pardon beforehand. Knowing Cristina's passion for Cabañal, I have had our picnic prepared there. I am a friend of Puig, who bought it, and when I was in Barcelona he gave me permission to go into the house, and to take as many people with me as I liked. I repeat, you must forgive what I have done, if you do not approve of it."

Doña Amparo declared it very nice, and was joyful to the soul at visiting once more the place that had always pleased her. But Cristina's face was something to behold. She had never let me see it so forbidding. She controlled herself, however, in silence; and I, taking no notice of her annoyance, ordered the coachman to go on. The gardener and his men played the drama of receiving us as guests, and conducted us to a glorieta where I had had the table spread. Before our picnic, I invited them to take a little walk, but Cristina refused emphatically, affirming that she had hurt her foot. As Doña Amparo did not care to leave her alone I went with my god-daughter; the little one and I amused ourselves by running and frolicking about in those shady avenues. When we returned I observed that Cristina's eyes were red and that her mamma was drooping with evident intentions of popping off.

But I did not care to go into any of that. Joyful and merry as I had never been, I began to open the baskets and distribute their contents, aided by the little girl and the man who had brought them from the hotel. By a great effort, and to conceal her suffering, Cristina took a few, but very small, mouthfuls. Doña Amparo, however, ate heartily. But Julianita, the little one, and I knew how to do our duty. To finish off, I opened a bottle of champagne. Then, standing up and taking my god-daughter on one arm, I swung the glass high with the other, exclaiming:

"To the health of Julianita! To the health of my little girl!"

I drained the glass, then gave the baby the drops in the bottom.

"I promised thee a present for this afternoon, and thou shalt see that I keep my promise. Thy present is this estate, of which thou hast been despoiled. I bought it for thee some days ago. Receive it, my daughter, with this tender kiss which I place upon thy cheek, and may heaven bless thee with many and happy days!"

Cristina rose up from the bench, pale and trembling.

"Captain Ribot! It cannot be!" she cried in a choking voice.

"Here is the deed of the property, and here is the deed of gift," I answered, presenting the documents.

"But my daughter cannot accept such an enormous sacrifice!"

"I have few necessities and no near relations. The law gives me the right to choose my heir. I have already chosen her," I added, placing my hand on the curly little head of my god-daughter.

She remained quiet with her eyes fixed upon the ground. At last she went out of the glorieta, and without opening her lips started towards the house. I followed her at a distance, leaving the fainting form of Doña Amparo to the care of the child and the servant. I observed that she walked faster and faster. When she reached the door she was almost running. She paused a moment, kissed the wall, and entered.

I followed her as she went about the rooms; I heard her exclamations of delight, and even saw her go into her own room. At sight of that, a cry escaped her, and she fell sobbing upon the white-wood bed.

I went over to her and said:

"This room holds yet within its walls the perfume of a sacred and peaceful life. The furniture had been scattered through the city; and these pieces, that could claim nobody as one master, on finding themselves together again will speak to you, Cristina, in the sweet and mysterious language of their souvenirs. I consider myself happy in having restored them, and happier yet in having worked for so many days to arrive at this moment."

She rose from the bed, and, holding out her hand, said to me in a trembling voice:

"Thank you, Ribot, many thanks. You are indeed a faithful friend to us. God will reward you for all the good you have done, for I can never repay you."

I was moved to the depths of my soul by those simple words.

"Cristina," I replied, "I accept the title that you so nobly bestow upon me. I have been a loyal friend to you and to Emilio; I have watched over his interests and his honor with ceaseless care. But I have watched over my thoughts with even more diligence; because thoughts are restless things, and might, against my will, go straight away and annoy you. I have nothing to reproach myself with. I have always loved you as I love you now, with the respect that divine beings inspire. But in spite of all my efforts to stifle it, a strong desire lifts itself in my soul, and I feel that I shall never find peace if I do not suffer it to live, or at least need not kill it. Forgive me, Cristina, for the question I am going to ask. But may I not hope that some day you will call me by another name than friend?"

She remained grave and silent, looking down at the floor. Then she sat down in a chair near the candle-stand, leaned her elbow on the little table, and her head in her hand, and there she sat in a thoughtful attitude. I knelt down beside her and let myself hope.

"Get up, Ribot," she said, giving me a sad and affectionate glance. "It causes me pain and almost shame to see at my feet the man who sweetened the last hours of my husband, who has sacrificed himself for me, and his fortune for my daughter. My heart tells me that this man should not be refused my very life if he asks it. But do you not think, Ribot, that there is something between us that ought to stop us, something that would overshadow the happiness that you have a right to? Remember the circumstances when we first knew each other. Examine the secret impulses that brought you to this place, those that you have felt since, your struggles, your thoughts, your joys and pains during these three years and a half. And tell me frankly if you do not imagine that conscience would not whisper to us that we had not acted with perfect delicacy. I believe it would; and I think I know you well enough to know that it would be enough to disturb the serenity of your life. This is what I hear speaking within my secret heart. While it is there, do you not think that if we were united there might rise in our world an infamous suspicion that would wound, even in his grave, our cherished one?"

I understood the truth of these words and my heart sank. The tears rushed to my eyes. I hid my face in my hands to conceal them.

"What? Do you weep, Ribot?" she exclaimed, leaning her head upon mine. "No, in God's name! no, do not weep, my friend! I have no right to cause you the slightest pain. I will do as you wish."

I shook my head and answered:

"Let me weep for a moment. It will pass."

My tears fell abundantly. When I lifted my head I saw that they were also streaming down her cheeks. I stood up and, drawing out my pocket-handkerchief, said smiling:

"Do you see! It's over! Sadness and I were never very constant friends."

Then she took my hands and, pressing them warmly, looked into my eyes, exclaiming:

"Yet, truly, I would not hurt you! After my husband, no man has ever inspired me with so deep an affection!"

"These noble words not only give me strength to live," I answered, "but they make life lovely to me. How many times, leaning on the bridge of my ship, I have felt happy gazing at the shining stars! And why not now, when I can see these sweet eyes, so frank and so serene? Let me see them all my days, and I promise you I will always live in joy and peace!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

I KEPT my promise. Since then my days go on, happy and full of peace. I fixed my residence in Alicante, but for long spaces of time, indeed during almost half the year, I am in Valencia. And when I am there, I am looked upon at Cristina's house not merely as a friend, but as a member of the family. Nobody fails to show delight when I am seen arriving, but most of all does my coming please my god-daughter, an enchanting little girl of five years, with eyes as luminous as her mother's. As soon as she hears my step, she comes running to meet me, laughing and jumping, throws herself upon my neck, covers me with kisses, and pulls my beard in a way to bring tears—of pleasure.

I can hear her voice on the stair at this moment calling:

"Uncle Ribot! Uncle Ribot!" While I stay in Valencia she comes to the hotel for me every morning with her nurse. We go out together. We walk about the streets and in the Glorieta. We go into the confectioners' shops (Julianita knows all the best ones that are to be found in the Hacienda) and buy sweets. We go to the flower-market and buy flowers. And when luncheon time comes, we go to the house loaded with parcels and sprays of flowers. The mamma comes and opens the door for us. Her beautiful eyes shine with joy, and always glisten with gratitude.

There is nothing more that I long for. Secure in the affection of these beings that I love, and in my own self-respect, I watch calmly the fleeting of the hours. Snow has begun to show slowly about my temples, but it does not touch my heart. Neither envy nor boredom enters it. And if, as I have heard Castell say many times, life has no flavor, I am persuaded that he does not know what it can give. For me it has a delicate, exquisite savor. I am an artist in happiness. This thought increases my pleasures.

And when inexorable death knocks at my door I shall not wait for him to call twice. With firm step and tranquil heart, I will go to meet him, and giving him my hand say:

"I have done my duty, and I have lived happily. Nobody has suffered because of me. Whether I am led to a sweet eternal sleep, or to a new incarnation of this impalpable force that fills me, I have no fear. Here I am!"

But, no! it is not death that will in that moment knock at my door. It is life, radiant, immortal, divine! From my opened window I feel it and see it. The sun rises in the firmament and sheds its rays upon the garden. The flowers, shining, exhale their perfume. This light and these odors intoxicate me. Everything is riant, stirring, singing, in the world that I behold from my balcony. Beautiful is life! Her fruitful breath meets my own softly. What joy in the freshness of this springtime morning! The birds among the boughs sing joyfully with melodious voices in concert with the sunbeams.

But I would not exchange all their melodious voices for one that is now calling me impatiently from the stairway:

"Uncle Ribot, I am waiting for you!"

"I am coming, my girlie; I am coming."

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The following typographical errors were corrected by the etext transcriber:
He had also overcome the ill effects of the chill=>She had also overcome the ill effects of the chill
The world bears it goal in it own existence.=>The world bears it goal in its own existence.
irresistible impluse of his nature=>irresistible impulse of his nature
Si en la nocha callada=>Si en la noche callada

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE JOY OF CAPTAIN RIBOT ***

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