

CHAPTER VI.

THE BETROTHAL.

André Certa, entirely recovered, sure of the death of Martin Paz, pressed his marriage: he was impatient to parade the young and beautiful Jewess through the streets of Lima.

Sarah constantly manifested toward him a haughty indifference; but he cared not for it, considering her as an article of sale, for which he had paid a hundred thousand piasters.

And yet André Certa suspected the Jew, and with good reason; if the contract was dishonorable, the contractors were still more so. So the mestizo wished to have a secret interview with Samuel, and took him one day to the Baths of Chorillos.

He was not sorry, besides, to try the chances of play before his wedding: public gaming, prohibited at Lima, is perfectly tolerated elsewhere. The passion of the Limanian ladies and gentlemen for this hazardous amusement is singular and irresistible.

The games were open some days before the arrival of the Marquis Don Vegal; thenceforth there was a perpetual movement of the populace on the road from Lima: some came on foot, who returned in carriages; others

were about to risk and lose the last remnants of their fortunes.

Don Vegal and Martin Paz took no part in these exciting pleasures. The reveries of the young Indian had more noble causes; he was thinking of Sarah and of his benefactor.

The concourse of the Limanians to the Baths of Chorillos was without danger for him; little known by the inhabitants of the city, like all the mountain Indians he easily concealed himself from all eyes.

After his evening walk with the marquis, Martin Paz would return to his room, and leaning his elbow on the window, pass long hours in allowing his tumultuous thoughts to wander over the Pacific Ocean. Don Vegal lodged in a neighboring chamber, and guarded him with paternal tenderness.

The Spaniard always remembered the daughter of Samuel, whom he had so unexpectedly seen at prayer in the Catholic temple. But he had not dared to confide this important secret to Martin Paz while instructing him by degrees in Christian truths; he feared to re-animate sentiments which he wished to extinguish--for the poor Indian, unknown and proscribed, must renounce all hope of happiness! Father Joachim kept Don Vegal informed of the progress of affairs: the police had at last ceased to trouble themselves about Martin Paz; and with time and the influence of his protector, the Indian, become a man of merit and capable of great things, might one day take rank in the highest Peruvian society.

Weary of the uncertainty into which his incognito plunged him, Paz resolved to know what had become of the young Jewess. Thanks to his Spanish costume, he could glide into a gaming-saloon, and listen to the conversation of its various frequenters. André Certa was a man of so much importance, that his marriage, if it was approaching, would be the subject of conversation.

One evening, instead of directing his steps toward the sea, the Indian climbed over the high rocks on which the principal habitations of Chorillos are built; a house, fronted by broad stone steps, struck his eyes--he entered it without noise.

The day had been hard for many of the wealthy Limanians; some among them, exhausted with the fatigues of the preceding night, were reposing on the ground, wrapped in their ponchos.

Other players were seated before a large green table, divided into four compartments by two lines, which intersected each other at the centre in right angles; on each of these compartments were the first letters of the words *azar* and *suerte*, (chance and fate,) A and S.

At this moment, the parties of the monte were animated; a mestizo was pursuing the unfavorable chance with feverish ardor.

"Two thousand piasters!" exclaimed he.

The banker shook the dice, and the player burst into imprecations.

"Four thousand piasters!" said he, again. And he lost once more.

Martin Paz, protected by the obscurity of the saloon, could look the player in the face, and he turned pale.

It was André Certa!

Near him, was standing the Jew Samuel.

"You have played enough, Señor André," said Samuel to him; "the luck is not for you."

"What business is it of yours?" replied the mestizo, roughly.

Samuel bent down to his ear.

"If it is not my business, it is your business to break off these habits during the days which precede your marriage."

"Eight thousand piasters!" resumed André Certa.

He lost again: the mestizo suppressed a curse and the banker resumed--"Play on!"

André Certa, drawing from his pocket some bills, was about to have hazarded a considerable sum; he had even deposited it on one of the tables, and the banker, shaking his dice, was about to have decided its fate, when a sign from Samuel stopped him short. The Jew bent again to the ear of the mestizo, and said--

"If nothing remains to you to conclude our bargain, it shall be broken off this evening!"

André Certa shrugged his shoulders, took up his money, and went out.

"Continue now," said Samuel to the banker; "you may ruin this gentleman after his marriage."

The banker bowed submissively. The Jew Samuel was the founder and proprietor of the games of Chorillos. Wherever there was a real to be made this man was to be met with.

He followed the mestizo; and finding him on the stone steps, said to him--

"I have secrets of importance to communicate. Where can we converse in safety?"

"Wherever you please," replied Certa, roughly.

"Señor, let not your passions ruin your prospects. I would neither confide my secret to the most carefully closed chambers, nor the most lonely plains. If you pay me dearly for it, it is because it is worth telling and worth keeping."

As they spoke thus, these two men had reached the sea, near the cabins destined for the use of the bathers. They knew not that they were seen, heard and watched by Martin Paz, who glided like a serpent in the shadow.

"Let us take a canoe," said André, "and go out into the open sea; the sharks may, perhaps, show themselves discreet."

André detached from the shore a little boat, and threw some money to its guardian. Samuel embarked with him, and the mestizo pushed off. He vigorously plied two flexible oars, which soon took them a mile from the shore.

But as he saw the canoe put off, Martin Paz, concealed in a crevice of the rock, hastily undressed, and precipitating himself into the sea, swam vigorously toward the boat.

The sun had just buried his last rays in the waves of the ocean, and darkness hovered over the crests of the waves.

Martin Paz had not once reflected that sharks of the most dangerous species frequented these fatal shores. He stopped not far from the boat of the mestizo, and listened.

"But what proof of the identity of the daughter shall I carry to the father?" asked André Certa of the Jew.

"You will recall to him the circumstances under which he lost her."

"What were these circumstances?"

Martin Paz, now scarcely above the waves, listened without understanding. In a girdle attached to his body, he had a poignard; he waited.

"Her father," said the Jew, "lived at Concencion, in Chili: he was then the great nobleman he is now; only his fortune equalled his nobility. Obligated to come to Lima on business, he set out alone, leaving at Concencion his wife, and child aged fifteen months. The climate of Peru agreed with him, and he sent for the marchioness to rejoin him. She embarked on the San-José of Valparaiso, with her confidential servants.

"I was going to Peru in the same ship. The San-José was about to enter the harbor of Lima; but, near Juan Fernandez, was struck by a terrific hurricane, which disabled her and threw her on her side--it was the

affair of half an hour. The San-José filled with water and was slowly sinking; the passengers and crew took refuge in the boat, but at sight of the furious waves, the marchioness refused to enter it; she pressed her infant in her arms, and remained in the ship. I remained with her--the boat was swallowed up at a hundred fathoms from the San-José, with all her crew. We were alone--the tempest blew with increasing violence. As my fortune was not on board, I had nothing to lose. The San-José, having five feet of water in her hold, drifted on the rocks of the shore, where she broke to pieces. The young woman was thrown into the sea with her daughter: fortunately, for me," said the Jew, with a gloomy smile, "I could seize the child, and reach the shore with it."

"All these details are exact?"

"Perfectly so. The father will recognize them. I had done a good day's work, señor; since she is worth to me the hundred thousand piasters which you are about to pay me. Now, let the marriage take place to-morrow."

"What does this mean?" asked Martin Paz of himself, still swimming in the shadow.

"Here is my pocket-book, with the hundred thousand piasters--take it, Master Samuel," replied André Certa to the Jew.

"Thanks, Señor André," said the Israelite, seizing the treasure; "take

this receipt in exchange--I pledge myself to restore you double this sum, if you do not become a member of one of the proudest families of Spain."

But the Indian had not heard this last sentence; he had dived to avoid the approach of the boat, and his eyes could see a shapeless mass gliding rapidly toward him. He thought it was the canoe--he was mistaken.

It was a tintorea; a shark of the most ferocious species.

Martin Paz did not quail, or he would have been lost. The animal approached him--the Indian dived; but he was obliged to come up, in order to breathe.... He looked at the sky, as if he was never to behold it again. The stars sparkled above his head; the tintorea continued to approach. A vigorous blow with his tail struck the swimmer; Martin Paz felt his slimy scales brush his breast. The shark, in order to snatch at him, turned on his back and opened his jaws, armed with a triple row of teeth. Martin Paz saw the white belly of the animal gleam beneath the wave, and with a rapid hand struck it with his poignard.

Suddenly he found the waters around him red with blood. He dived--came up again at ten fathoms' distance--thought of the daughter of Samuel; and seeing nothing more of the boat of the mestizo, regained the shore in a few strokes, already forgetting that he had just escaped death.

He quickly rejoined Don Vegal. The latter, not having found him on his return, was anxiously awaiting him. Paz made no allusion to his recent adventures; but seemed to take a lively pleasure in his conversation.

But the next day Martin Paz had left Chorillos, and Don Vegal, tortured with anxiety, hastily returned to Lima.

The marriage of André Certa with the daughter of the wealthy Samuel, was an important event. The beautiful señoras had not given themselves a moment's rest; they had exhausted their ingenuity to invent some pretty corsage or novel head-dress; they had wearied themselves in trying without cessation the most varied toilets.

Numerous preparations were also going on in the house of Samuel; it was a part of the Jew's plan to give great publicity to the marriage of Sarah. The frescoes which adorned his dwelling according to the Spanish custom, had been newly painted; the richest hangings fell in large folds at the windows and doors of the habitation. Furniture carved in the latest fashion, of precious or fragrant wood, was crowded in vast saloons, impregnated with a delicious coolness. Rare shrubs, the productions of warm countries, seized the eye with their splendid colors, and one would have thought Spring had stolen along the balconies and terraces, to inundate them with flowers and perfumes.

Meanwhile, amid these smiling marvels, the young girl was weeping; Sarah no longer had hope, since the Sambo had none; and the Sambo had no hope,

since he wore no sign of hope! The negro Liberta had watched the steps of the old Indian; he had seen nothing. Ah! if the poor child could have followed the impulses of her heart, she would have immured herself in one of those tranquil beaterios, to die there amid tears and prayer.

Urged by an irresistible attraction to the doctrines of Catholicism, the young Jewess had been secretly converted; by the cares of the good Father Joachim, she had been won over to a religion more in accordance with her feelings than that in which she had been educated. If Samuel had destined her for a Jew, she would have avowed her faith; but, about to espouse a Catholic, she reserved for her husband the secret of her conversion.

Father Joachim, in order to avoid scandal, and besides, better read in his breviary than in the human heart, had suffered Sarah to believe in the death of Martin Paz. The conversion of the young girl was the most important thing to him; he saw it assured by her union with André Certa, and he sought to accustom her to the idea of this marriage, the conditions of which he was far from respecting.

At last the day so joyous for some, so sad for others, had arrived. André Certa had invited the entire city to his nuptials; his invitations were refused by the noble families, who excused themselves on various pretexts. The mestizo, meanwhile, proudly held up his head, and scarcely looked at those of his own class. The little Milleflores in vain essayed his humblest vows; but he consoled himself with the idea that he was

about to figure as an active party in the repast which was to follow.

In the meantime, the young mestizoes were discoursing with him in the brilliant saloons of the Jew, and the crowd of guests thronged around André Certa, who proudly displayed the splendors of his toilet.

The contract was soon to be signed; the sun had long been set, and the young girl had not appeared.

Doubtless she was discussing with her duenna and her maids the place of a ribbon or the choice of an ornament. Perhaps, that enchanting timidity which so beautifully adorns the cheeks of a young girl, detained her still from their inquisitive regards.

The Jew Samuel seemed a prey to secret uneasiness; André Certa bent his brow in an impatient manner; a sort of embarrassment was depicted on the countenance of more than one guest, while the thousand of wax-lights, reflected by the mirrors, filled the saloon with dazzling splendor.

Without, a man was wandering in mortal anxiety; it was the Marquis Don Vegal.