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# Miralda

A Story Of Cuba

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# 1 A Havana Market

Day had not yet brightened over beautiful Cuba; yet there was one spot in Havana where wide-awake energy and bustling activity reigned supreme, and that was in the market-place. The open square blazed with innumerable lights, by aid of which were displayed such an array of good things as might gladden the eyes of an epicure. Meats and fish of all kinds, fruits, flowers, and vegetables such as only the tropics can produce – these overflowed the range of stalls bordering the square, and were heaped high on the pavement, here and there, in rich and picturesque confusion.

The place swarmed with negroes, who were buying the day's supplies for the households where they served, for the most part, as slaves. In the markets of cooler climes, which need not be held by night to avoid the heat of a tropic day, there is certainly no lack of life and movement – and yet they are as placid as pictures, as still as statues, beside this market of Havana.

One unused to such shouts and shrieks, and therefore apt to take as serious the volleys of contention and abuse heard on all sides, must certainly expect to see such words followed by murderous blows at any moment – until his fears are calmed by the frequent outbursts of noisy laughter, as cheery as it is coarse, which suggests some peaceful solution of the strife.

The lamplit market is peculiar in this respect, that a white man is rarely seen among the crowds that throng it; indeed, it is in every way so strange to a foreigner that he can not cease to wonder at it; nor is its least remarkable feature the eloquence with which the black buyers haggle over their purchases, accompanied by such inimitable play of gesture, and such bodily contortions, as might rouse the envy of accomplished acrobats.

One of the negroes, a great coal black fellow, hailed by his friends as Alexandro, stood near a table piled high with pineapples, and tended by a little negress, who served her customers with eager assiduity. Alexandro smiled with satisfaction as he saw how fast the fruits were going, and nodded to her so encouragingly that he might well have been taken for a partner in the business. The table was emptied just as the rising sun gave signal that the market must close, and the square be cleared of every trace of its presence.

Alexandro now approached the little negress and said: "You have had a fine trade to-day, Miralda."

"Yes, very good indeed," answered she, "but there's a world of work before me yet, if I am to

succeed."

As they spoke, the sun had full risen; and the market-place was now as deserted as though cleared by magic. The negroes were no longer the sole representatives of Havana; the town was now full of life and movement everywhere.

Alexandro swung a great crate of vegetables to his shoulder and left the market with Miralda. Talking and laughing cheerily, they made their way through the crowds of carters and porters who now thronged the streets on their way to the wharves, where countless vessels lay at anchor waiting to discharge cargoes gathered from the four corners of the world.

Here Miralda stopped to buy fresh fruits, which she meant to sell through the streets. Alexandro asked her: "How long do you think it will be before you make up the needed sum?"

"A long time, I fear," answered the little negress, "for work as hard as I can, it goes but slowly."

"Do not lose courage, child," said the negro, "for you will win at last, and then we shall have a grand celebration."

Miralda, whose face had grown sorrowful for a moment, brightened at these words, and laughed through the threatening tears; then she gave over to Alexandro's keeping a number of small coins, saying: "Put these with the others, please; in your hands it is safer. I've got enough left to buy my new stock."

Alexandro took the money, counted it carefully, and then put it into a little purse that he carried on a chain about his neck, like a locket or medal. Miralda, in the meantime, had hurried away through the crowd, eager to resume her work. "Ah! she is a good child," murmured Alexandro, looking after her, "and I shall never regret the money spent in freeing her."

Miralda soon reappeared with a great basket of pineapples, and took her stand by a beautiful marble fountain which the Havanese merchants must pass in going to the ships. Here she cried her wares more energetically than ever, and rarely did a passer-by fail to purchase, or to pay something more than the exact price asked, or to speak some kindly word as well. Soon the last pineapple was sold, and she must seek new supplies; however, she did not now return to the fountain, where business was no longer brisk, but sought a new place, in one of the most frequented streets, where she spread her wares in the friendly shadow of an awning, and offered them in the most persuasive

terms. Fortune still favored her, and in her heart she blessed the day for a happy one.

It was now nine o'clock, an hour when every street was deserted and every industry came to a standstill, because the Havanese sought their homes to escape the scorching heat, and to enjoy the first meal of the day.

The fruit venders, of whom there were hosts, crouched in such shady corners as they could find, and dozed behind their wares. Miralda, however, though up among the earliest, and, indeed, weary before the day had fairly begun, alone struggled against sleep, fearing to lose the first tide of returning custom. At last, however, she too drifted away, unwillingly, to the Land of Nod.

At the window of a handsome residence, well shaded from the sun by ample awnings, there now appeared two ladies, apparently mother and daughter, who chatted together as they looked out over the street: "Do look at that poor little negress, Mother," said the younger Creole. "How tired she is. Why, even the sunlight shining full in her face does not waken her!"

"What is there strange in her being tired, Maurita?" said the mother. "All these poor creatures seem so; and you know they do not mind the sun as we do."

"I see that poor child every day," said Maurita, "and one of our slaves tells me that she works from morning till night, trying to earn enough to buy her father's freedom, because he is growing old, and must soon be unfit for the hard field work. The girl interests me, and I want to know more about her."

"What a whim!" answered Madame Guani. "You know what a way these creatures have of trying to work on our sympathies, and how thoroughly unreliable they all are."

"Not all, Mother," answered Maurita. "Are there not many among our own servants who are good and faithful, and who could not be bought to deceive us at any price?"

"I admit that, child," answered Madame Guani, "but still insist that it only means self-interest, after all. Our free blacks know that they can not easily find another place so good, while our slaves are too dependent to dare risk offending us. Now, granted that this girl were the paragon you think her, you yet certainly know that both custom and propriety forbid our interesting ourselves in any of these negroes, excepting our own servants."

"Oh, yes!" answered Maurita. "We whites must not regard the blacks as human beings, but simply as creatures made to wait on us! It is inhuman!"

"And you are visionary," said her mother. "We will drop the subject, my dear. Go to the piano and play for me."

Maurita was an exquisite musician, and her music quickly won an audience. One by one the

family gathered in the beautiful room, and the servants who dared leave their posts gathered in the hall – even the sleepers in the street roused themselves to listen.

Little Miralda was enchanted, for there was nothing she loved so dearly as music. She rose slowly from her resting place, and, as though drawn by some spell, glided slowly across the street, and took her place by the window. Indeed, she pressed her face against the shutters that she might see how the wonderful music was made. Finally, forgetting self completely in her delight, she began to hum the melody – softly at first, but gradually more loudly, until her lovely voice rivalled the tones of the piano. Maurita flew to the window to discover the singer, and Miralda, recalled to herself by the sudden silence, and frightened by meeting the gaze of Maurita's merry eyes, ran away just as the latter was about to speak.

Down the street she flew, her feet winged with shame and fear, till at last she dropped, exhausted, on the stone bench of a little park, murmuring to herself: "Oh! oh! How could I have been so rude? Now I must hunt some other place to sell my pineapples; for I shall never dare go near that window again."

Maurita watched long at the window. She knew not why she should feel such interest in the little negress, and yet there was something that attracted her toward the girl. Of all this, however, she said nothing to her family, to whom she well knew it would only be a subject of ridicule.

In the meantime, Miralda, whom we left resting in the little park, sought a beautiful garden beyond the city, and soon disappeared among its trees and shrubbery. An hour later she reappeared, laden with the daintiest of wreaths and nosegays, and returned toward the town. She took her stand before a fashionable restaurant, and finally resolved to enter. She first went timidly to the proprietor, and presented him with one of her best boutonnières, asking his help in disposing of the rest. But no help was needed, for the wealthy idlers crowded around and bought the pretty flowers eagerly: "Our little Black Pearl," said one of them kindly, "shall not go with a leaf unsold."



## 2 Freedom And Slavery

Miralda had worked diligently all day, hardly sparing herself even during those hours when the excessive heat drove most of the Havanese to rest; but now the time had come when there was no further demand for her wares, and she might turn wearily homeward.

In the finer streets there was hardly a house without a volante, the favorite vehicle of the Havanese, before its door; and everywhere crowds of children were playing, trying, seemingly, to make up for time lost in the enforced rest of earlier hours. Miralda lingered to watch the brilliant crowds – gentlemen in European costume, ladies in dainty, lace-trimmed gowns, entering the volantes to go calling or shopping; but all likely to find their way, sooner or later, to the Alameda of Queen Isabel. Here the driveways were flanked, on either hand, by magnificent palms, beneath whose swaying shadows passed the volantes with their gaily dressed occupants, and the splendidly mounted cavaliers. But neither the horsemen nor the fair Creoles lent ear to the rustling of the palms and mimosas, nor to the plashing of the fountains; no one remarked on the exquisite fragrance of the flowers that grew in gardens separated from the driveways by gilded iron trellises; no one expressed surprise and delight over the bread and orange trees, nor the thousand and one other features of the beautiful park sure to have won our admiration; because, indeed, all that would be so new to our Northern eyes was as commonplace to them as corn and wheat to us.

Miralda turned away from the town at last and directed her steps toward the seashore; she was very contented, for she had had a successful day, and besides the money she had given Alexandro, she had enough to buy her little stock in trade for the following morning. She was now following a palm path, not far from the shore; the slender trees, with their fan leaves, among which myriads of fireflies twinkled, towered seventy or eighty feet above her head, and seemed like friendly giants who guarded her pathway, and rustled their plummy crowns for joy over her good fortune.

She had walked perhaps a half hour when she reached the plantation, entering it at a point where there were grouped many huts for the negroes; these were lightly built of palm, and thatched with palm leaves; and each was surrounded by a little garden where flowers and vegetables, in riotous abundance, disputed the supremacy. Chickens were scratching up the ground about

the little dwellings, and with their cacklings were mingled the quackings of geese and the occasional grunting of pigs. The tired slaves lolled in the shadows, enjoying a well-earned rest.

Miralda now went to one of these huts, where her father, Gabriel, lived; for he was a slave on this plantation. He lay stretched out before the door, on a rush mat, smoking a cigar. Miralda greeted him affectionately, and seated herself on the mat beside him.

“Oh, but you must be tired, Father!” she said.

“And tired I am,” answered Gabriel, laughing, “for I have worked well all day, as a good slave should. But you, too, must be tired, child, for you have worked all day in dust and heat, while hundreds of others thought only of rest. Tell me, my girl, have you been really happier since Alexandro took the crazy notion of buying your freedom? It seems to me that Señor Cardenas was a good master to you, as he is to me; and as for work, you had hardly half as much then as you do of your own free will now.”

Miralda answered: “Señor Cardenas was always a good master to me, and were I still a slave, I could not ask for a better; but since I have been free, I realize that there is nothing else so good as freedom. The work I do now does not seem hard, because it is for myself, and I may even leave it undone, if I choose; I may do, and go, and come as I please, now, while as a slave I could move only at the will of another.”

Gabriel laughed, and said: “Those are thoughts and ideas that would never have come into your head had not Alexandro put them there. But I should like to know how he is better off than I. He is no longer a slave, it is true; but he is a servant in a rich family, like hundreds of others, and must work the will of others quite as much as I do. Let us look squarely at the matter. What more could I ask for? Cardenas clothes me, feeds me, and if I am sick, sends a doctor to me; and for all that I have only to work; he is a good master, and I never realize that I am a slave.”

“But would not you like to be free, Father?” asked Miralda. “Surely you do not wish to be a slave all your life. Should not we be happy if we owned a little hut and garden where we might work together, for each other, and be free to rest when we were tired? Think how often you are ill, and how hard it is then for you to go to work with the rest and keep up with them all day. Don’t you remember what Mother used to say? ‘A little hut,

with freedom, and work, and a happy heart would make me perfectly contented.' ” Gabriel was deeply moved at the idea, even, of such happiness in his old age, but still sought to hide this feeling from

Miralda, and to divert her thoughts from the subject; for he knew how large a sum it would require to buy his freedom, and he could not see how she could ever hope to earn so much. But as he recalled her poor mother’s constant longing to be free, two great tears rolled down his face, and spoke more truly than his words.

“Oh, you do long to be free!” said Miralda. “Only it seems impossible to you; and so you speak against your own heart, and try to hide your thoughts from me.”

Gabriel nodded silently.

At this Miralda sprang to her feet, fairly dancing for joy. “You shall be free,” she cried. “I will free you!”

“You? But how is that possible?” cried Gabriel.

After Miralda had for a time enjoyed his amazement, she told him what a fine start she had already made with the required sum, explaining how she had earned it, dollar by dollar, and how her every task was a delight because it was done for his sake, and meant some help toward his freedom.

Gabriel was overcome with amazement. It seemed to him that Miralda could not be the little child he had carried in his arms, but was rather some good angel sent from heaven to comfort his old age. He felt like one suddenly awakened from sleep; and freedom, now that it seemed possible, looked like paradise itself. In thought he could see the little palm hut, with Miralda moving cheerily about; then his doubts came back, to blur the beautiful picture: “How is it possible,” he said, “that you can do so much? And why have you kept your plan so long a secret from me? And why have you hidden it especially from me?”

The little negress clasped his hand closer: “Would not you have been the first to laugh at me? Would not you have said I must be crazy to dream of such a thing? – that a child could never earn such a sum? Would not you have forbidden my working so much? You who used to take extra work on yourself, in my old slave-days, so as to make my tasks lighter! My dear, good Father! Oh! I had to begin secretly, so as to save up a little money to show you the plan was possible. Indeed, I thought, at first, of keeping it all to myself till I could come to you and say: ‘Father, you are free! – FREE! – I have freed you!’ But I could not wait any longer to tell you, because I am too happy over the good fortune that has helped me so much to-day.”

While they spoke, the sun sank slowly, and the evening breeze arose, bearing to them sweetest

perfumes; among the wealth of tropic foliage the fireflies flitted, shining through the darkness like a shower of falling stars. The hour of rest had come; but Miralda was too happy to sleep: “It is so beautiful here,” she said, “let us stay and talk.”

Gabriel’s heart, too, was full; and yet neither could at first find words. But Miralda’s feelings, always seeking expression in music, brought one of the old familiar songs to her lips, and her clear young voice rose sweetly through the gathering darkness, while the stars came out, one by one, in tropic splendor. Then, at last, they began to talk, like eager children, of the beautiful future that freedom was sure to bring them, painting it to each other in dazzling colors, until sleep claimed its own, and they sought the hut for such repose as might strengthen them for another day of toil.

### 3 The Plantation

Before daybreak Gabriel and Miralda were stirring, the one ready to begin work in the cane fields, the other to take up again the tasks that were to earn her father's freedom.

In a beautiful grove not far from the planter's magnificent home, there stood a tower whose bell called the slaves to work each morning, and rang the signal for rest when the day was done. As Gabriel's words have already shown, Senior Cardenas' slaves were most humanely treated, and were even, in many respects, far better off than the free negroes.

It will not, therefore, surprise the reader to learn that the first meeting-place of the men, women, and children called together by the morning bell was the church. This formed a wing of the Cardenas mansion, and as the blacks trooped in through its open doors they saw the altar already prepared with lighted candles; a priest soon entered, and read Mass, which was served by two negro boys.

For a European, the devotion and recollection of these slaves would have been a wonderful sight; for it is hard to realize that these poor black creatures can have the same Christian thoughts and feelings as their whiter brethren. Yet truer devotion could rarely be found; no foot nor hand stirred; no word was spoken; all eyes were directed only to the altar; and from almost every heart there rose a prayer for the good master whose humanity privileged them to preface the day's toil with attendance at the Holy Sacrifice.

At the close of Mass, the priest turned toward his people, and gave them a brief instruction; he had himself been a slave, and knew the human heart in its sorrows as in its joys; his hearers hung upon his words.

The divine service ended, the slaves left the church, and repaired to an open square where the overseer told them off into separate groups, some for the cane, some for the tobacco, and some for the coffee fields; each was expert in his appointed task.

Gabriel, with many others, was sent to the sugar fields. The evening before, many cuttings of the cane had been prepared, and packed in a wagon; this the slaves now took with them. Arrived at their destination, the first task was to prepare the ground for the planting. It was heavy work, and wrung many a drop of sweat from Gabriel's brow; yet the old man hardly seemed to feel it. Since yesterday there had come to him, with the hope of freedom, a new courage – a new life, al-

most.

The slaves about him rested from time to time; but Gabriel worked away, singing at his task, and inspiring the others to renewed diligence; save only those idle ones who are always enemies to industry. "Shan't you stop for a smoke to-day?" asked his neighbor Pedro, who was hardly able to wield his hoe any longer.

Gabriel leaned on the handle of his spade, and looked back over the ground already prepared: "We have worked well," he said, "and earned a cigar, I guess." This gave the signal for a general pause, for Gabriel's word went as far as the overseer's, so high was he known to stand in Señor Cardenas' good graces, through his diligence and fidelity. So, as he lit his cigar, all the workers followed his example. Pedro, who certainly had not been among the lazy ones, could not refrain from asking him: "What's the matter with you, Gabriel? You act as though some great good luck had befallen you. Has Cardenas taken you into partnership?"

"Great good luck has surely come to me," answered Gabriel, "for since yesterday I know that my girl is working hard so as –" Here he paused, because it seemed to him that it might hurt his fellow slaves should he speak of a happiness beside which their hopeless bondage must seem harder than ever. Pedro, however, questioned him so persistently that he was compelled to speak, explaining Miralda's plan, and even describing the little home to which they were looking forward. The other slaves gathered about, and listened to him eagerly; but it was plainly to be seen that his words impressed them very differently. Some envied him, as they openly confessed; but others wondered that Gabriel should care for freedom, when he could never hope to live so easily and happily as now, while Señor Cardenas provided for his every want. But in one thing they all agreed; that Miralda was the very pearl of negro maidens, and that the happiness of having a daughter so faithful and devoted was worth more than wealth and freedom. After the smoke the work was resumed, and pushed forward so rapidly that the field was soon ready for the planting. The cuttings were now set in holes about eighteen inches deep, and about two feet apart, already prepared for them; one slave holding the slip, while a second placed about it the earth previously removed. This work was too exacting to advance rapidly, and lasted the day through, save for the brief interruption of a hurried meal at noon. By

evening, however, all the slips were set; and with hearty good wishes, and hopes for a rich harvest, the negroes left the field, and sought well-earned repose; beyond which loomed up a continuation of the task the following day.

Miralda had not returned at the usual hour, nor did she make her appearance till far later; her work had detained her some what, and she had also waited for a talk with Alexandra.

Gabriel was sorely disappointed, for he had gathered the finest flowers from their little garden, to brighten the hut as if for some feast day. And indeed it seemed to him like one, this first day on which he could look forward to freedom. As it grew later, and darkness began to gather, he felt anxious, and hastened down the palm avenue by which Miralda was sure to come; but he had hardly entered it before he met the little maiden, breathless with haste, and still almost running: "Where have you been so long, child?" asked her father. "I was growing very anxious about you."

"Oh! I had an extra trip to make to the docks, where I had to carry some flowers; and when I had delivered them, and got my money, I saw Alexandra not far off, talking with a beautiful gentleman; so I sat down on some sacks of coffee that lay there ready for lading, and waited, because I wanted to ask Alexandro how much money I had saved altogether. They walked right by me three times; and Alexandro looked straight at me, too; but he was so busy with his talk that he never saw me.

What they were saying must have been very important, because they looked so earnest, and kept on talking and talking for a whole hour before Alexandro started back to his house. Then I ran after him; but he never noticed me till I pulled at his sleeve; and even then I had to call at him as loud as ever I could.

'Alexandro,' I said, 'have you no time for me today? I want so much to know just how many dollars I've saved, so that I can count up how long it will be till I can free Father.'

'Why, is that you, Miralda?' he said. 'Your father free? - Ay, free he shall be; and not he alone, but all Cubans, white and black - and when the hour comes, Alexandro the negro will not fail in his part.'

I couldn't understand what he meant, and I asked him again about my money; and then he said: 'Child, it isn't a question of money, but of brave hearts and strong hands.' - Then he broke off suddenly, as though he had said more than he should; and he rubbed his hand over his eyes, and spoke like his own kind self again: 'Oh! the money? Let me think. Why, you must have at least a hundred dollars; and that's a great deal, you know.'

'But how much will it take to buy Father free?'

I asked him.

'The price of a good slave, like your father, is always at least a thousand dollars,' he answered. Then I sat down on the bags of coffee again, and counted, and counted, till I made out that it would take me at least six years longer to earn so much as that; and that made me so sad that I forgot all about Alexandro, and ran away without saying good-bye to him."

"Six years more!" said Gabriel. "What a long time! Until yesterday, it would not have seemed long; but now it looks like an eternity. Oh! I fear, Miralda, that we shall never be able to gather up such a sum!"

"Oh, yes," answered Miralda, "it is a long time; but with good courage one never fails; and so we're sure to win at last. And let me tell you, Father, that I have found a new helper, who has told me how to put my money out at interest, so it will grow faster."

"Who is this new helper?" said Gabriel.

"A fine young Creole lady, the beautiful Maurita, of whom I have already told you."

"She! Why, how did you ever meet her, and what can you have to do with her?" asked Gabriel, amazed.

"I was crossing the park on my way back home," said Miralda, "and the band was playing so beautifully that it seemed like heaven. All the benches were filled with gentlemen, who were listening to the band, and the volantes were driving slowly round, filled with beautiful ladies. You know how I love music! So I stopped a minute to listen, thinking to myself, 'I can run on so much the faster afterward, and make up for lost time.' Then pretty soon a volante drove by me, so close that the wheel almost went over my foot, and I cried out with fear. A lady leaned out of the carriage, and caught my hand: 'Are you hurt, dear child?' she asked.

I told her no, and I tried to run away; but she held me fast with her pretty little soft, white hand, and as she leaned down to look at me she said: 'Why, this is Miralda, our little Black Pearl! Wait a moment, dear.' I was so ashamed that I could not look up at first; but she was so gentle and friendly that at last I found courage, and could answer her questions. She told me she had heard me sing, and liked my songs, and that I should come to her window and talk to her. She was so kind that I wanted to tell her about you; so when she asked why I worked so hard all day, and whether it was true that I hoped to earn money to buy you free, I began to say yes. But it all came over me so sorrowfully that I could not finish.

'What is the matter?'

'O!' I told her, 'the price of a good slave is at least a thousand dollars; and I've only saved a



hundred; and at that rate it will take six years longer to free my father.'

'Six years?' she said; 'that is long, indeed. However, you must put your money out at interest, and then it will grow faster.'

'How can I do that?' I asked.

Maurita thought for a while, and then she said: 'Bring your money to me, and I will take care of all that.'

I was going to thank her, but another volante drove by, and separated me from her. Then, for the first time, I began to think you would be anxious, and I hurried as fast as I could to get home."

Gabriel kissed his good child, thankful to have her safe again; and again they sat before the little hut, and made bright plans for the future, far off though it seemed.

## 4 The Black Nightingale

The next few days brought but little change; Miralda's work went on as usual, and Gabriel was still busied with the other slaves in the cane planting. Yet one change there was; each morning Miralda watched for Alexandro at the market, and each morning she was disappointed; he did not come as usual to talk to her and congratulate her on her thriving trade. She next looked for him at the docks, where she had last seen him; and finally went to ask after him at the house where he had been in service; here, however, she was turned away with the curt assurance that Alexandro had left his place, and none of the household knew anything of his present whereabouts. All this grieved Miralda greatly, not because she feared that Alexandro intended to keep her money, but because it was thus left lying idle in his hands, while in Maurita's she had been promised that it should earn good interest. She still asked eagerly after him, here and there, but could learn nothing certain; some of the people she questioned would only shrug their shoulders, while others would say nothing more than that he was journeying through the Island on affairs of great importance. But one day, after she had almost given up the hope of ever seeing him again, she suddenly met him in one of the side streets, where he was talking earnestly with two other negroes. She flew joyfully to meet him, and to ask him about her money, which she was so anxious to give over to Maurita's keeping.

Alexandro shook her hand heartily, and said: "You could not do better than to place it with her, especially as it can not be nearly so safe in my hands, now that I am constantly journeying hither and thither, and have no permanent home."

"I have heard of your journeys," said Miralda, "and I beg you to tell me what it all means, and why you act so strangely and so mysteriously lately."

The negro laid his finger on his lips: "It means what can concern only the hands and hearts of men, my child. One day, indeed, you shall learn all about it; but now you must neither speak nor think further of it. I will give your money over to Maurita's care, and from her you can then learn what disposition she may make of it. Now, I must say good-bye to you; for time presses, and to-day I must start on a voyage that will hold me absent from Cuba for three months."

He was gone, and Miralda stood looking after

him in silent wonder, and trying to think what it could all mean. "But what is it to me, anyway?" she said to herself at last; "I have surely enough to do, without troubling myself with other people's affairs." And so she skipped cheerily back to her work.

The next day, Miralda made her way to Maurita's home, where she was received with the greatest kindness; still the child felt abashed by the unaccustomed elegance of her surroundings, and was almost dumb, between delight and shyness, until Maurita called her to the piano to sing. "As you did outside there, behind the blinds," she said laughingly.

In music, she could, however, always forget herself; and she willingly sang on, as Maurita urged, song after song, while the Creole girl improvised the accompaniments. The little negress had really wonderful talent, and her voice rang out with a power and purity of tone that surprised Maurita. "Where did you learn to sing so well?" she asked.

"No one ever taught me," answered Miralda. "I used to sing with my mother, and she never told me I sang well."

"You sing charmingly," said Maurita, "and I think you ought to study with some fine teacher, who could train you for concert work."

Miralda shook her head. "No," she answered, "I could not do that; because I dare not spend a penny, but must earn every cent I can, instead. What would become of my beautiful plan if I were to stop to learn singing?"

"Oh! I forgot to tell you that Alexandra brought me your money," said Maurita, "and I have invested it for you in my brother's business, where I think we may hope that it will soon be doubled. But, to return to our music, would not you like to study singing if some one would give you the lessons for nothing?"

"No," answered Miralda, "I should not; because if I am so happy as to free my dear Father, then I must still work, so as to help buy a little piece of ground where we can live, and work for each other. If freedom were to separate us, we had better have remained slaves on the Cardenas plantation, where we were sure of Sundays and the other holydays together, at least."

Maurita could not but admire the child's steadfast devotion to her father, and yet could not easily give up her hope of seeing the little negress develop into a celebrated singer, as she surely might with such a voice, and such talent. "You are a

strange girl," she said, "and among all the negroes I know, the only one who does not hate work. In my home, here, we have so many slaves that they are in each other's way; and yet they are always complaining of having too much to do. Yet you work willingly, from morning till night, with hardly a moment's rest; and when I show you a way to become really rich, you simply turn your back on it."

"My work is all for my father," answered Miralda, "and so it never seems hard for me; indeed, I enjoy it all, and am only unhappy when I must sit idle."

"Well," responded Maurita, "you are a good, devoted child; yet you could earn far more money by singing than by selling flowers and fruit."

At these words the little negress started up and cried: "Why then, I will sing, of course; but I'll go on with my fruit selling, too; I can do both."

"No, no," answered Maurita. "Either singing or fruit selling would require your whole time – and yet – wait a moment! – I've thought of a plan. My birthday comes next week, and I should like to surprise my guests with some beautiful songs. Will you do me the favor of singing for me then?"

"How could I refuse," said Miralda, "when you are so good to me? Only I am afraid your guests may not care for my songs, and then I should be so frightened that I could not utter a note."

"Do not fear," answered Maurita, "we will listen to your songs as long as you can sing a note. Come, and let us practise now."

Now, for the first time, Miralda knew what it was to sing with one's whole heart and soul; and she began to realize what a delight it would be to study more and more the beautiful art, and to long to study as Maurita had advised. But as soon as she realized that this wish was making her forget, even for the moment, the task she had undertaken, she put it away from her, and turned resolutely back to the every-day duties that were surest to help her earn her father's freedom, and make his old age a happy one.

Never had Miralda returned to the plantation with a lighter heart than this evening; indeed, she stopped from time to time to sing a verse of her new songs to the friendly old palms and the rustling mimosas. But the next morning found her the same tireless, little pineapple girl we discovered on our first visit to the Havana market, and her many tasks were performed as diligently and devotedly as on that first day we made her acquaintance.

When she greeted Maurita at her window about noon, Madame Guani was also there, and bid her come in that she might hear the singing her daughter had praised so highly. "Ah," she said, when the music came to an end, "they should call you the Black Nightingale rather than

the Black Pearl, for indeed your singing is not less delightful than that of the wonderful bird. You must come often and sing for us; my daughter loves music, and you can give her great pleasure."

The birthday, of which Maurita had spoken, had at last come, and volante succeeded volante, as guest after guest arrived, until the beautiful home was crowded with the brilliant company gathered to honor the young hostess.

The birthday supper was followed by a stroll in the gardens, where countless Chinese lanterns shone among the tropic shrubbery, making it look like some fairy garden. Suddenly, the ladies were startled by sounds like pistol shots; but as these were soon followed by the brilliant light of numberless rockets, that soared high above the palms, and then fell back in golden showers through the darkness, their alarm was changed to delight. This was but the prelude to a wonderful display of fireworks.

To the fireworks succeeded the music. In a little marble rotunda, overgrown with flowering vines, the piano had been placed, and the first notes of Maurita's masterly accompaniment caught the attention of every guest. Then Miralda's clear voice rose, through the gathering dusk; shyly, at first, but with more and more confidence as she forgot herself in the inspiration of the music, until her beautiful notes rivalled in sweetness the perfume of the flowers, in brilliancy the sparkling drops of the fountain. Every heart was moved, and each forgot that it was one of the despised negroes whose gift gave such pleasure.

At last Miralda slipped away, meaning to leave the grounds by a little side gate, and hasten at once to her father; but from a stone bench among the shrubbery a man arose, and to her amazement, she recognized Alexandro. "Miralda!" he exclaimed heartily, "you are an honor to your people; I would not lose the pleasure your singing has given me for many, many dollars. Tell your father how you have delighted every one, that he, too, may rejoice as does your friend Alexandro."

"You here!" exclaimed Miralda. "I thought you far away. You yourself told me it would be months before you should again see Cuba."

"And so I believed," answered Alexandro, "but I am like the storm wind, that knows not where it may blow from one hour to another."

Miralda could understand nothing of all this, yet, as it was growing late, she did not wait to ask questions, but hurried on to the little gate by which she expected to make her way to the street. The gate, however, had been locked, and she was obliged to retrace her steps, in order to reach the main entrance to the grounds. Passing the rotunda, she heard voices in the neighboring shrubbery, and paused involuntarily. Alexandro

was there, with Señor José Guani, and a stranger whom they called General: "The time is not yet ripe," said this latter, "and we have much work before us, to rouse the Cubans, ere they will be ready to fight under my standard. They are indolent, and slow to realize the true state of affairs; but once they do see it, they will resist to the death. You, José, must use your utmost influence to recruit your circle; and you, Alexan-dro, on whom I count no less, must set out at once on your new mission. A sailboat awaits you, and will bring you to the rendezvous before sunrise. Go, then. Be discreet, and you will not fail."

As soon as Miralda realized that these people were discussing some secret plan, she hastened on, and, reaching the street without further interruption, hastened home.

In the meantime, the guests, once more assembled in the beautiful dining-room, were discussing the musical programme they had just enjoyed, and vying with each other in praise of the little Black Nightingale.

Maurita seized the right moment to tell the story of Miralda's self-sacrificing devotion to her father, and of her unremitting toil to earn his freedom! then she placed a great silver urn among the flowers that decorated the center of the table, and added: "I want you all to help me make up a sum that may shorten the years of work that still lie before the poor child, unless we take pity on her."

The urn was soon heaped high with shining dollars and gold pieces, although many of the contributors were opposed to the freedom of the blacks. Beautiful, enthusiastic Maurita was irresistible; and Madame Guani, hitherto most bitterly opposed to "pampering the negroes," as she called it, herself set the example of most generous liberality. As Maurita bent over the urn, rejoicing in the good fortune of her protegee, the glittering heap of coins was enriched by two sparkling diamonds – for the happy tears overflowed her eyes as she realized that, for the first time in her life, she had been really helpful to another.

News of the little Black Pearl's transformation into a Black Nightingale was quickly carried through the city, and the Havanese, no less eager for novelties than the Londoners, the Berliners, or the Parisians, vied with each other in securing her services to entertain their guests. Miralda shrank from the work, but nevertheless accepted it gladly as a help in her great plan to free her father.

One day, when she had finished her fruit-selling earlier than usual, she found the beautiful Maurita lounging in her hammock, beneath the palms, while one slave kept the airy couch in motion, and another fanned its occupant. But she no sooner perceived the little negress than she sprang to meet her, and overwhelmed her with congratula-

tions. "You lucky child!" she cried, "your money has grown almost tenfold through a splendid speculation of my brother's; and now nothing stands in the way of your heart's desire – you can free your father at once." Maurita flushed as she spoke, for what she said was not strictly true; she had herself supplied the greater part of the needed sum.

Miralda was at first too overwhelmed with joy to speak, for she had looked forward to years more of hard work before reaching the desired goal, and could hardly believe her own ears when she heard Maurita's words. She stood for a moment like a statue, then trembled in every limb, and burst into tears; a moment later found her on her knees before Maurita, kissing her feet.

When the Creole maiden drew her to a place beside herself, on a marble bench near the fountain, the little negress could not sit still, but sprang to her feet, and danced about, clapping her hands for joy, and laughing and crying in the same breath. When at last she found words to speak: "Oh! oh!" she said, "my heart beats so that it almost bursts. It hurts me. To think that Father will be free, and we can have a home of our own, like white folks! And yet," she continued, "it doesn't seem possible; because I have done so little – too little, I fear! Can such great gladness be bought so cheap? Oh! do you believe it can be all true? Or isn't it a mistake?"

"Indeed it is not a mistake, child," answered Maurita, "it is true, and it will last, and even grow greater, day by day."

The little negress looked at her with unspeakable gratitude, and then darted away homeward, her feet hardly touching the ground as she flew.

Many of the Havanese were amazed to see their little Black Nightingale flying through the streets as though she had borrowed the bird's wings as well as its voice, but Miralda was too enraptured even to realize how strange her breathless flight must seem to others; her only thought was to reach home, and tell her father the blessed, blessed news.

## 5 The Sugar Harvest

On the day of Maurita's good news to Miralda, there was extraordinary excitement on the Cardenas plantation, because it was time to cut the sugar cane, and bring it to the mill.

The overseer had gathered all the slaves, old and young, for this work, and they were rejoicing over it as would the Rhinelanders over a vintage. At this one can hardly wonder, for the task is a cheery one, in which all take some part, even to the children. Every creature on the plantation helps with the sugar harvest, which is gathered to the accompaniment of songs and laughter, and wears rather the aspect of a festival than of a plain working day. Señor Cardenas usually visited the fields at this time, too, which was an added pleasure to his slaves, among whom he seemed more like a peasant farmer among his servants than like a slave owner. Indeed, he was a most humane man, and realized the ideal master sometimes described in books.

All set forth for the fields, led by the overseer; the children fairly dancing for joy over the coming feast – for all were free to eat to their heart's content, now – the elders laughing, shouting, and singing. Gabriel was, of course, among them, and rejoiced with the rest, humming a cheery song whose refrain Pedro caught up with all the strength of his lungs.

All along the coast of Cuba were now being enacted scenes similar to this on the Cardenas plantation; but not everywhere was there found such good cheer among the slaves. All depended on the master, and where he was harsh and inhuman, the poor creatures went sadly enough to their appointed tasks. The sugar fields made a beautiful picture now; the great, jointed cane stems, green or gold, standing proudly up among the waving, rustling leaves, crowned with silvery blossom bunches that gave the one touch of cooler coloring amid the burning brilliancy of the landscape.

When the slaves reached the fields, some of the young negresses set an example soon followed even by old Gabriel, who danced no less joyfully than the rest, although, it must be admitted, somewhat more stiffly. But play had quickly to give place to work, and the men began to cut the canes, which the women and children gathered up and made into sheaves.

Cardenas was always liberal with his slaves, and now, as God's good gift of the harvest was garnered in by their hands, he urged them to eat

their fill of the luscious food. With the children, it was not necessary to repeat the invitation; they seized upon the sugar cane as though famished, and devoured it in unbelievable quantities. The older workers, too, regaled themselves with it, when the tropic heat had parched their throats with thirst.

Some one of the slaves was always ready to take a sheaf as quickly as it was tied, swing it up on his shoulder, and carry it to the sugar mill. Soon, however, the wagons were on hand, and ready for their share of the work in gathering the vast harvest; even then the blacks were kept busy in handling the cane. The work was heavy in the extreme; but the cheerful industry of the slaves showed thorough good will, and argued well for their master's interest.

Finally, the day's work was at an end, save that in the midst of the field there remained a circular space where the tall, flower-crowned cane still stood untouched. The overseer now called a halt, and gave the workers permission to enjoy their long-postponed smoke. This they had been obliged to forego during the day, because the risk of fire is great, and the whole harvest might easily be destroyed by one tiny spark.

The untouched central space, however, was to be given over to the flames, as the only means of destroying the host of noxious creatures, rats and serpents especially, whose refuge it had become as the harvesters had worked in toward it from all sides. Certain slaves were appointed to surround the place and set fire to it. With a jubilant shout they set about the work; and in a few moments the fierce flames had devoured every living thing the cane had sheltered.

At the mill, the cane was passed through powerful rollers, tended by the slaves, and its juice, thus expressed, was received in vats, and thence emptied into caldrons placed over great fires, in order that evaporation might the more quickly reduce the sap to a thick syrup. This was a work of time.

Some idea of the magnitude of Cuba's sugar trade can perhaps be formed if we remember that there were more than twelve hundred sugar mills in the island, five hundred of which were operated by steam, and the balance by wind power, and that the island's annual product averaged about 500,000 tons, or 1,000,000,000 pounds.

Gabriel was resting, seated by the fire with folded arms, and deep in thought. Suddenly Miral-

da appeared; she flew toward him, and throwing both arms about his neck, cried: "O Father, you are free!

I have the thousand dollars, and to-morrow we can go and pay it over to Señor Cardenas, the very first thing."

The news was not received by the old Gabriel a whit more quietly than it had been by Miralda herself. He was seized by a perfect paroxysm of joy, and danced about the sugar mill like some wild creature; nor could he calm himself so quickly as had she after her first outburst of joy. Finally, however, he stood quietly beside her, and looked lovingly down into her face: "And you, my little child! my own good girl! have bought me free by your work – through your love! You may be sure I shall work well for you, in my turn. We shall be the happiest negroes in Cuba."

But after they had stood silent for a moment, Gabriel spoke again: "In our gladness, I had forgotten one thing; Señor Cardenas needs every helping hand with the harvest now, and might well think me a thankless creature should I leave him without warning. I must stay till this press of work is over; for he has been always a kind and generous master to me. You are a good child, and you can not but agree with me as to this."

Miralda had not thought of this, and the threatened delay seemed a disappointment almost too great to bear; but she overcame herself, and answered sweetly: "Neither ingratitude nor any other fault must stain our happiness, dear Father. You must surely do what is right."

It so happened that Señor Cardenas heard all that passed, for he sat not far distant, behind one of the great vats. He was deeply moved, both by the self-sacrificing devotion of the daughter, and the fidelity and gratitude of the father, and resolved to reward each to the best of his ability. He left the mill without being observed, and returned to the plantation a little before Gabriel and Miralda sought their palm hut, to spend a long evening in undisturbed talking and planning for the future that now loomed up so bright before them.

Gabriel held faithfully to his resolve, and so long as the sugar harvest lasted, he worked with redoubled energy, with the feeling that he could not do enough for the good master he was so soon to quit. But as soon as the last stroke of work was done at the sugar mill, he donned his best clothes, and presented himself before Señor Cardenas. Still, he went with a half guilty feeling; for although the Cuban law warranted his buying his own freedom, he had been a slave so long that it seemed almost a treason against his master to desire it.

Not so Miralda; she could not find words enough to express her happiness at their good for-

tune; and it was only as they entered the planter's study that she became embarrassed, and began to wonder how they could explain their errand.

Señor Cardenas was seated at a table, writing busily, and bid them wait a moment. He soon looked up, and asked Gabriel what he wished. Miralda then stepped forward, and stammeringly began: "My father has worked so long on your plantation that – that – he feels almost as though he were a part of it – he has often said that the Cardenas plantation is the paradise of Cuba – and so —"

"And so," said the planter, "he wishes to be free, like his daughter, and leave this Cuban paradise?"

Although these words were spoken in the most kindly way, they alarmed poor little Miralda, who feared that Señor Cardenas might oppose her father's freedom.

"Master," she said at last, "freedom is very sweet."

"It is, indeed," answered the planter, "and that you know, having tasted it; but freedom is also very costly. Your father lives now without a care; however the harvest may go, he is well fed and well clothed. If he is sick, he is kindly cared for. Now is it wise to throw away such certain advantages for an uncertain future? One, rather, almost certain to bring him to poverty and privation?"

Miralda was silent, her heart beating audibly; and Gabriel knew not what to answer, but stared silently at the floor.

"Consider this, if you have not already thought it over," continued Señor Cardenas. "And then comes another question: the price of so good a slave must be at least a thousand dollars. Can you possibly make up such a sum as that?"

These words brought all Miralda's courage back, and she quickly placed a little sack on the table before the planter, saying: "Here it is, Master, every dollar of it."

Señor Cardenas pretended to be very much surprised at this, and asked how she had ever come by so much money.

Now it was Miralda's turn to study the floor, while her father told of her devotion and self-sacrifice, and begged that she should not be disappointed of her wish to set him free.

Señor Cardenas laughed, and said: "It seems that you are to have your own way about it." Then he handed Gabriel the paper he had been writing when they entered, saying: "Here is the receipt, and you are your own master from this hour."

Both father and daughter knelt before the generous man, and covered his hands with kisses, overwhelming him with thanks and blessings.

"And now," said the planter, "you must tell me how you expect to make your own way in the



world.”

“By working,” answered Gabriel, and “By working,” echoed Miralda.

“Well said,” replied the planter. “But I have freed many another slave who has felt able to earn his own living, and yet who has made such a failure of it that he has been glad to come back before the year was out, to ask, with tears in his eyes, that I would take him back on the same footing as before. Are you sure of better luck?”

The negroes were silent.

After a painful pause, the planter opened a window looking toward the sea, and bid Gabriel approach it: “You know this tobacco and coffee plantation,” he said, “and how beautifully it is situated on the coast. How would you like to live there?”

“I should like nothing better,” answered Gabriel, “but — ”

Señor Cardenas took the negro’s hand in his own, and spoke to him with deep feeling: “My good old Gabriel! the filial devotion of our little Black Nightingale is no less known to me than that gratitude and good will that held you here till our harvest was done, much as you longed for your freedom. I appreciate the one no less than the other, and I wish to show my appreciation by giving you your choice of whether you will take charge of this plantation, as my overseer, at suitable wages, or will take back your purse with its thousand dollars.”

Gabriel looked doubtfully at the planter, feeling that he could hardly be in earnest. But when he remembered the unswerving uprightness of his old master, and realized that he meant just what he said, the negro did not hesitate an instant: “Master,” he said, “I may be free, and still serve you! Oh, how can I ever thank you enough!”

And, indeed, it was only through hasty flight that Señor Cardenas escaped another avalanche of thanks and blessings.

Miralda now hastened townward, that she might at once tell her young benefactress of the further good fortune fallen to her through the generosity of the planter; and Maurita congratulated her warmly, as though the news were as great a surprise as it was a pleasure; although Señor Cardenas had really discussed the plan with her before definitely arranging it.

The freeing of a slave under circumstances so remarkable had not, of course, taken place without being noised abroad, and was, naturally, of especial interest to Gabriel’s old comrades on the plantation; these last, with their master’s full consent, arranged a celebration in honor of the great occasion. Under the trees, in front of Gabriel’s hut, the negroes ate, and drank, and danced, and sang till sundown; then they formed themselves into a guard of honor to conduct the new over-

seer to his new home.

It was a motley procession, provided with such a variety of musical instruments as are rarely assembled in one orchestra, and with many that certainly were improvised for the occasion – drums and horns, banjos and violins, mandolins and guitars, cow bells and empty casks, dishpans and rolling-pins – these, with a vocal chorus nearly a thousand strong, accompanied Gabriel and Miralda to the seaside plantation. When the new home was reached, they found Señor Cardenas awaiting them there, on the veranda; and, at his order, all gathered quietly in a circle while he formally presented Gabriel as a free man, and an important officer of the great estate, whom they were henceforth to obey as the representative of his own authority. All promised faithfully to observe their master’s directions, even the children holding up their hands to take part in the pledge.

The overseer’s house was a neat dwelling, with several pretty rooms, and as Gabriel entered it, he felt like a new creature, so wonderful did it seem to be master of such a place, after the little palm hut. For hitherto, he and Miralda had lived precisely on the same footing with the other slaves. Now, they walked almost timidly from room to room, touching the different pieces of furniture half shyly, and altogether as much overcome by embarrassment as by delight.

Finally, they began to realize that it was all their own, and the fervent thanksgivings that made part of their evening prayer bore ample witness to their gratitude; nor did they forget petitions for the welfare both of their generous master, and of the poor slaves who had rejoiced so unselfishly in their prosperity.

The next day Gabriel entered upon his new employment, striving faithfully to learn the various details of the work he had now to direct. Miralda was happy as a bird, flying about the house, and making ready the meals for her father.

## 6 A Secret Meeting

The coffee plantation, sloping toward the sea, was a lovely sight: with its blossom-covered trees, it was not less beautiful than an orchard white with cherry blooms. The coffee tree, however, bears blossoms and fruit, both green and ripe, at one and the same time, and so offers a variety of form and color unknown to our northern shrubbery.

It was the task of the women to gather the ripe berries, and the direction of this work fell to Miralda, who, young though she was, commanded their willing attention and obedience, knowing how to gain each with kindly words, as well as by the good example of her diligence. Swarms of shining humming birds flew from the trees, as the blacks approached to gather the berries, glistening like dewdrops, or like jewels, in the sunlight. Only, where their nests were hidden, the parent birds would find courage to linger. And it was pathetic to see these tiny creatures, inspired by love, defy beings who could crush them with a touch.

The greater part of the day was required for the several processes necessary to prepare the coffee for packing. One group of the negresses were busied in removing the reddish outer pulp which incloses the two berries. Others were steeping the hulled berries, in order to soften their tough inner husk. Others, again, were washing the berries already steeped, so as to remove such pulp as still adhered to them, before putting them through the first drying process. Only berries that had been dried some twenty days were put through a machine which removed the innermost hull.

It can easily be seen how important to Señor Cardenas was due diligence in this work, since even brief neglect, among so many, would involve considerable loss. But little Miralda knew how to keep others busy, as well as to work for herself; and when she saw signs of flagging, she would sing some cheery song that put new life into the tired hands and set them to moving in time with the music.

A month had passed, bringing the plantation work to a brief standstill, and Gabriel and Miralda, with a number of the slaves, now repaired to the seashore, which presented a new field of labor. The men carried with them shovels, ropes, and poles, whose use we shall shortly see. Arrived at the shore, they began at once to hunt carefully through the hot sand, the object of the search being turtle eggs, which are regarded by the Cubans as great dainties, and command an

extravagant price in the Havanese markets.

When a fine nest was discovered, the negroes hastened to gather its contents and pack them in a great basket brought for the purpose.

After a good morning's work, the slaves had gathered under the shade of the palms, a little back from the shore, for their noonday meal, when suddenly Pedro discovered an enormous turtle creeping from the water and advancing along the beach.

The negroes at once rushed swiftly but cautiously, so as to form a line between the great creature and its one place of retreat, the sea. Poles and ropes were now brought into use, and the turtle was finally, after a struggle, turned over on its back, and thus rendered helpless. The negroes next passed the ropes about it in such a way as to admit of its being swung from a stout pole, and so managed to carry it to the plantation. No light task, as it weighed above five hundred pounds.

For afternoon work Gabriel set them to fishing, at which they also had good luck, making a fine catch of such fishes as would be great curiosities among us; notably the flying fish, whose long, wing-like fins sustain him for a considerable length of time in the air, as well as carry him swiftly through the water. The fishing boats were soon well filled and the kitchen well provided; and most of the slaves returned, with Miralda, to the plantation, while Gabriel remained behind with a few others to secure the boats. They decided to finish their day's work with a sea bath, and were enjoying this luxury to the utmost when suddenly their good-humored laughter was changed to yells of terror, and they sprang from the water and rushed pell-mell up the beach, where they threw themselves gasping upon the sand.

The cause of this sudden terror was a great shark, which they had discovered approaching them through the clear water.

Gabriel counted his men, and was thankful, indeed, to find that the sea monster had robbed him of none.

Suddenly two strangers, a white man and a negro, approached the trembling slaves, looking keenly toward the point at which they had left the water. The negro threw off his clothing, drew a great knife from his belt, and sprang into the sea before the very eyes of the waiting shark. The slaves watched breathlessly for the battle that must now begin between the man and the sea monster.

The shark, eager for his prey, had changed his

position as the man sprang into the sea, and the watchers on the beach could not see what followed, because this movement troubled the water; but they could see, a moment later, that the foam had become reddened with blood. Nor was it long doubtful which had won the battle, as a little later the man emerged from the water, safe and sound.

Gabriel rushed toward the victor, grasped his hand, and thanked him warmly for the courage he had shown. "You have fought bravely, young man," he said, "and skilfully as well, and we are all grateful to you, because you have made this place safer for us all by killing that man-eating monster."

Alexandro (for it was he) said: "You make too much of it, my old friend. The coast must be rid of these creatures, and it is a duty to risk life, if need be, for the general safety – at least where one has learned how to handle the monsters. But tell me. Can you find a resting place for me and my companion for the next day or two? If all I hear is true, you are now so situated that you can entertain your friends when you will."

Gabriel was delighted to undertake all that Alexandro asked; for he could not forget that this generous man, in freeing Miralda, had prepared the way for his own good fortune. He begged Alexandro to count on his gratitude, and to command him in everything. Such directions as were needed came, however, from the white stranger, whom Alexandro consulted in hurried whispers before asking Gabriel to lead the way at once to the plantation, toward which they silently followed him.

A slave had been sent ahead to warn Miralda of their coming, and she was watching eagerly for Alexandro as they approached the house. A glance told her that she had seen his companion before, but the matter did not seem to her of especial importance. She set forth the best meal the house could afford, adding such extra dishes as the day's sport had provided.

The white man was silent and reserved while Gabriel and Miralda were present; when they had withdrawn, he turned earnestly to Alexandro and asked: "Who are the people, and how do they stand with us?"

Then Alexandro drew a paper from his pocket, and laid it before the questioner, whom he called General Valdez.

The general's face brightened as he read, and he nodded approvingly more than once: "I hope you are certain of them all," he said, "for unless they are devoted to the cause, life and death, it would be better not to count on them."

"I am certain of them," said Alexandro.

While their guests talked, Miralda and her father sat on the veranda, each puzzled over Alex-

andro's new course of life, which seemed to involve so much that was strange and mysterious.

Presently the wheels of a carriage were heard, and a volante appeared, from which, to their amazement, Maurita and her brother greeted them: "It is late," said the former, "but José and I must see General Valdez at once," and putting aside Miralda's offer of refreshments, they hurriedly entered the house.

"How strange it all is," said Miralda.

"Yes, strange indeed," answered Gabriel, "and I fear that there must be something wrong about anything that calls for so much secrecy."

"Oh, no," responded Miralda eagerly, "it can not be wrong, because neither Maurita nor Alexandro could be concerned in anything that was wrong; they are too noble and true-hearted for that."

"That may all be," said Gabriel, "but I can not understand it."

The reader may imagine that the astonishment of father and daughter was not lessened when Señor Cardenas appeared, and without a word of explanation also joined the group within.

In the midst of the room where the company was gathered stood a great table, with chairs about it; here the first comers sat, chatting quietly, till the entrance of Cardenas, when the meeting became more formal in character. "My friends," said Valdez, "I believe you all agree with me that our beautiful Motherland must be freed from Spanish tyranny if she is ever to enter on her natural and rightful course of development. Shall we leave her forever at the mercy of a power which perpetually oppresses and impoverishes her?"

"Never," answered Cardenas. "As things now stand, our every industry, agriculture, mining, manufacture, is tied hand and foot by imbecile interference, and crushed under an ever-increasing load of taxation. The day of armed resistance may be delayed, but it must come at last."

"We must be free and must control our own interests," said José; "and yet the young men of Cuba are for the most part willing to dream life away in sweet idleness, rather than lend their aid in tearing off the fetters that make them virtually slaves."

"Yes," added Maurita, "but let us not forget that while our own slavery to Spain's intolerable rule saps our Cuban manhood, that we are no less injured in our property and business interests by the bondage of the blacks. Freemen are the best workers the world over."

Alexandro's face brightened at these spirited words, for he also hoped for the downfall of slavery.

"All that is for the people to decide when they have wrested self-government from the tyrants," answered Valdez. "I stand ready to lead in the

undertaking, and even now there lies ready, in an American port, a ship well furnished with munitions of war – nor do I doubt that, once Cuba begins the struggle, she shall find friends ready to help her both with money and men. I myself have enlisted a troop of Americans who will fight to the death in a cause which concerns all humanity.”

Again Alexandro laid a paper upon the table, from which all might read the list of names he called off, in an exultant voice. “These – all these,” he said, “are Cuban patriots, who stand ready to die for the cause of freedom.”

“You have worked well,” said Valdez, “and I trust that the island will be grateful when the great work is done. There is still much work before you, also, for I build my hope of success in no small measure on your faithful efforts.”

“You know, my General,” answered Alexandro, “that you may count on me at all times, and under all circumstances – that my life is given wholly to this one object.”

“I do indeed know it,” answered Valdez, “nor do I count less upon the devotion of those whose names you have just called, and whose influence must certainly bring us a host of helpers when we begin our uprising. Nevertheless, the time is not ripe for undertaking that as yet. I have here for each of you a list of the supplies we shall need, of every sort, before we can venture on armed resistance. Make every effort to secure them in the next six months, but observe secrecy, and an especial prudence in recruiting new associates, for we stand now where an unguarded word may destroy all.”

After some further consultation the company separated.

While awaiting the carriage, Maurita drew Miralda aside and whispered to her: “Miralda, you deserve my confidence, and this much I must tell you: The men of Cuba are planning a revolt against our tyrants; and if they succeed, as I think they must, blacks as well as whites will be freed from slavery.”

“Oh, Miss Maurita,” answered Miralda, “don’t have any hand in such work, I beg of you. Such affairs are only for men – and there is always danger of failure – and that would mean death to you, young and good and beautiful as you are.”

“Be calm,” answered Maurita, “the danger is not so great as you think. Our plans are well laid, and can hardly fail. And I am going to ask you, too, to play a little part in the undertaking. Alexandro will be coming and going about here frequently now, and I want you to see that the little pavilion in the grove is left always unlocked for him. But you must never question him as to our plans, because the conspirators are bound by a solemn oath to keep them secret.”

“Ask what you will of me,” answered Miralda, “because I am ready to lay down my life for you. But do not you endanger your own.”

“Now for another favor,” said Maurita. “In the cupboard of the room where we met I have hidden the papers of the association. Take this key, and carry it constantly with you, so that in case of any search after these documents by the police you may be able to destroy them without a moment’s delay.”

The volante now reappeared, and Maurita immediately entered it with her brother and drove away.

## 7 The Cats In A Mousetrap

After this evening Alexandro came and went frequently, but Miralda avoided meeting or talking with him, fearing to be drawn further into an affair which seemed to her to bode only ill for all concerned in it. Other meetings, too, were held at the overseer's house from time to time, and by ever-increasing numbers, and Maurita seldom failed to take part in them, yet not another word did she speak to Miralda of their object, although she was no whit less friendly and affectionate toward the little negress than formerly.

Just as the tobacco harvest was being gathered in, Maurita came suddenly one day and asked Miralda to come to her home once more for an afternoon of singing. Miralda found a large audience awaiting her, and these were more than ever delighted with their little Black Nightingale, who seemed to sing more sweetly than ever before.

Maurita proposed that they should arrange a concert for the benefit of the poor of the city, and that Miralda should sing in the great opera house. Against this the little negress protested till Maurita laughingly reminded her of her promise to sacrifice life, if need be, at her request.

A subscription list was started, with some of the leading names of Havana, and it soon grew to such proportions that there was every promise of a crowded house for the occasion.

The day before the concert, as Miralda looked out toward the coast, she saw a ship draw near it, and finally anchor there. Then boats were lowered, and laden with arms, and plied back and forth, carrying weapons to a company of armed men who had suddenly appeared to receive them, and who quickly concealed them in the coffee plantation.

Miralda perceived at once that all this must be connected in some way with the conspiracy; and soon General Valdez appeared, with Alexandro at his side, and led the soldiers – for such they were – to the palm grove, where they proceeded to encamp. Miralda wept over the threatening danger, and might even have warned the authorities, save that such a course must surely bring destruction on her benefactors, Alexandro and Maurita.

Secretly as these movements had been managed, they seemed not unknown along the coast and through the country. But in Havana all went on as usual, and the evening of the concert found a brilliant audience assembled for the occasion.

When Maurita stepped timidly before the footlights she was greeted with kindly applause from

the many who had already heard her sing, and even in her confusion she could distinguish many friendly faces among the audience. After her first number the applause was unanimous, and all agreed that Maurita had not said too much in declaring that the little negress might become one of the world's great songstresses.

In the midst of the applause a messenger suddenly entered the governor's box and handed him a letter. The governor read it, then leaned over and whispered some order in the ear of one of his officers, who hastily rose and left the box. Maurita, who was watching anxiously, felt her heart sink, for the first time; for she feared that the cause had been betrayed. She would have rushed forth to warn the patriots, but she had bound herself by oath to take no part in the uprising: "Your patriotism," said Valdez, "is ardent, but you are too impatient for this work – too imprudent."

The concert went on, till suddenly the music was interrupted by cannonading, and the audience rose in tumult. The governor and his officers had disappeared, and this alone showed that the patriots were lost, for they had arranged that the doors should be guarded so that the Spanish leaders could not quit the building. But the tables were turned, for it was the government officials who guarded the doors, and not one of the audience, man, woman or child, was permitted to pass if even the least suspicion could be supposed to attach to them as partakers in the conspiracy. And many a one wholly ignorant of the affair was thrown into prison and held there until released by tedious legal process.

Maurita was among the first to rush toward the doors, wild with anxiety for news of the patriot troops, among whom was her brother. She trembled lest she should be made a prisoner; and yet, at the very thought of personal dangers, she felt new courage come to her heart; so that, resolving never to discredit the cause by any unworthy weakness, come what might, she lifted her beautiful head proudly and advanced with dignity toward the officers guarding the only place of exit. Among these there was considerable hesitation as to whether or not she should be detained; but a whispered consultation among them resulted in the decision to send her also to prison. Poor little Miralda, almost distracted with terror, had by a different path reached the door just as Maurita was led away. The child hesitated for a moment, almost on the point of begging to share the fate of

her benefactress, but duty toward her father had also its claims, and she was glad when the officer said: "Our little Black Nightingale may fly away home as soon as she likes."

The cannonading still continued, accompanied by the sharper, quicker firing of musketry; and Miralda hesitated about trying to make her way through the city when a little negro, who had crept close to her through the crowd, pressed a paper in her hand, whispering: "Don't read this till you get home – and don't lose it. The man who gave it me said Maurita's life was in your hands."

Grasping the paper convulsively, Miralda now fled homeward, and was soon back at the plantation. But Gabriel was nowhere to be seen; the cannonading had evidently alarmed him, and he had rushed to the city to protect his daughter. Miralda at once opened the paper and read: "Maurita's escape is provided for, but you must help. At midnight you must be under the window of her cell with a boat. You must also have some disguise ready for her. You must conduct her to some place where she can be safe till the storm is past." There were also directions by which she might find the proper waiting place.

But even while Miralda was rejoicing at the possibility of aiding her benefactress, and was turning over in her mind plans for helping her to some safe asylum, a troop of soldiers appeared, advancing along the avenue of palms, and she realized at once that her first work must be to save the precious papers from their hands. Her alarm was the greater as she saw that her father was being led along, in the midst of the company, seemingly a prisoner.

She flew to the cupboard, snatched forth the papers, and then rushed to the kitchen, where she set them afire, and then covered their ashes with fuel.

Hardly had she accomplished this when the soldiers were at the door. Their officer said sternly: "You must at once unlock for me every room, cupboard, and closet of this house, and assist in the search to be made by warrant of law."

The search was a thorough one, overlooking no possible hiding place, from floor to roof. It was, however, fruitless, and Gabriel and Miralda were set free.

As the soldiers departed, Miralda told her father what had befallen Maurita, and the part that she must so soon play in helping her to escape. "I will manage the boat myself," she said, "because you must stay here in order to watch that the coast is clear when we are ready to return. Should all be safe, you must have a light burning here under this palm. If we can not see a torch as we draw near, we shall know the soldiers have come back, and that we dare not enter. If, ho-

wever, you are left undisturbed, then get ready our larger boat, with provisions; for we must hide Maurita away on one of the little islands for the present, while she could not be safe here."

"That is a good idea," said Gabriel, "and I think we must persuade Señor Cardenas also to take refuge there. He was wounded in the fight, and now lies hidden on the plantation, where he is safe for the present. The other patriots are for the most part killed or made prisoners, excepting the few brave fellows who have escaped with Valdez and Alexandro to the mountains, where the country people are well disposed toward them."

Midnight found Miralda under the window indicated, where she awaited Maurita in the little boat, which she knew so well how to manage. She was dressed like a little European sailor boy, and had brought a similar costume as the best disguise for Maurita.

It was not long before the window above opened, and some one carefully lowered a rope ladder, down which Maurita quickly made her way to the boat. Under Miralda's direction, she slipped off her outer clothing and donned the disguise brought for her. Her discarded garments were then thrown into the water, and Miralda rowed swiftly and silently back to the point from which she had taken the boat. Here the two friends landed safely, and made their way, by a short cut, toward the plantation. As they approached it they saw the signal torch burning cheerily among the palms. "All is safe," said Miralda, "and we can enter fearlessly."

Now that silence was no longer necessary, Maurita, throwing herself into the arms of the faithful little negress, burst into a flood of tears, and overwhelmed her with thanks. "It is too soon yet for thanks," said Miralda, "for it would not be safe for you to remain here, where the careless word of a slave might at any moment betray you. Wait till I have brought you to some secure place of refuge."

"Where will you take me?" asked Maurita.

"I can think of no better place than one of the little islands that lie so near at hand and yet are never visited by any one," said Miralda.

"Señor Cardenas will accompany you thither, for he was wounded in the fight, and did not escape to the mountains."

Maurita asked anxiously for news of her brother and Alexandro.

"They are safe now," said Miralda, "but we should do well to pray for them; danger threatens for the future."

They had now reached the tree where the torch was placed, and Miralda seized it, extinguished the flame in the earth, and threw the stick away.

Gabriel, who awaited them, whispered: "All is ready. Come to the beach, where Cardenas awaits



us with the boat.”

## 8 The Glory of The Queen's Garden

Gabriel and Miralda accompanied the fugitives for a short distance, but then turned back to the plantation, where their absence the following morning would be sure to excite suspicion. They therefore landed at a convenient point, and gave the further direction of the boat over to a trustworthy fisherman.

When at last their destination was reached, Cardenas and Maurita both exclaimed over the enchanting beauty of a scene which, even to their eyes, accustomed to the rich loveliness of the Cuban landscape, was like a glimpse of Paradise. Through the placid channels separating a world of little islands the boat sped along, sometimes in the shadow of giant trees and overhanging vines, sometimes in the brilliant tropic sunlight; but always through scenery of unsurpassable loveliness. They landed at a spot where a little brook mingled its crystal waters with the sea.

The first task was to build some sort of a shelter; and the two men, with the help of ax, hammer, and nails, ready among the boat's stores, soon had the work well under way. Maurita, left unoccupied, now found time for reflection.

For the first time in her life she was learning to know what discomfort could mean, and she was appalled at the prospect which lay before her. And while she was safe for the moment at least, the thought of her brother's danger caused her to weep bitterly.

When night fell it found the hut unfinished; and the fugitives were forced to sleep under the open sky. The next morning, however, advanced the work so well that the little cabin was duly completed, even to the last bit of palm leaf thatch.

But a new anxiety confronted them, for their stock of provisions was nearly exhausted, and this, to the luxuriously reared Creoles, seemed a serious misfortune, since a trip to the mainland for further supplies might become a clue to their hiding place. The old fisherman, however, reminded them that they need only ply hook and line to draw from the sea all necessary supplies, and that from the abundant small game of the islands they could snare enough to vary this diet. To the slaughter of the wild creatures that flocked about them almost like pets Maurita would not, however, consent, until the appetite of each had rebelled against the monotony of the regime thus imposed upon them.

The ingenuity of Señor Cardenas worked out a plan by which they obtained salt, through the

evaporization of sea water. Maurita, for her part, questioned the old fisherman closely as to the various plants and herbs that seemed to give some promise of edible qualities, and so, when the sacrifice of some of the wild birds was at last resolved upon, the little party fared right royally.

One day, when Señor Cardenas had mounted to the roof of the hut, and was looking out across the water, he discovered a boat that, though still far distant, seemed to be directing its course toward the islands. He called the fisherman to his place of observation, and the latter agreed with him as to the course of the little vessel. "Whether they are friends or foes," he said, "we don't know, and so we had best prepare for flight. If, however, we are really pursued, my knowledge of the islands will enable us to escape, for I know their ins and outs better than any one else."

"If my eyes do not deceive me," said Cardenas, "those are friends. Yes," he cried, "it is Pedro and Seros," and he was about to hail them when the fisherman interrupted: "It would be safer not to trust them, perhaps," he said.

"I do not fear them," said Cardenas, "and even should they prove treacherous, we are two against two; and I guess each of us can take pretty good care of himself."

The boat now drew near the hiding place, and the two slaves could be heard calling their master.

"A fig for your fears!" cried Cardenas, and making a trumpet of his hands, he shouted at the top of his voice: "Pedro! Seros! Hello, there!"

A moment later the two blacks were beside him explaining their errand: "Gabriel and Miralda sent us," said Pedro, "and our boat is filled with provisions, which you must surely need."

"We will unload them at once," said Cardenas, "and you shall tell your messages afterward."

When the precious cargo was safely bestowed, the master's first question was: "How goes the war?" Maurita's: "Is my brother safe?"

"The war was quickly ended," said Pedro, "for Valdez and his followers were so completely worsted that, after a few skirmishes, they were forced to fly to the mountains. Two days after your escape there came a bloody day for Havana; in the early morning a file of fifty prisoners was marched into the city, most of them Americans, though there were also Scotch, Irish, Germans, Italians, and even a few Havanese among them. To the general horror it was commonly reported that these prisoners would be shot. This news traveled fast,

and in a few hours the streets were thronged with folks who flocked in from the surrounding country.

The terrible news was true. Heavily fettered, the poor fellows were led to the market-place, where they heard what was to befall them with seeming indifference. I could see them plainly, every one."

"Was my brother among them?" asked Maurita anxiously.

"No," answered Pedro, "but Alexandro was. The throng was so great that the soldiers who came to shoot the poor prisoners could hardly force a way through it. When, however, they had taken their places in ranks at the required distance, an officer called the prisoners out, twelve at a time, and as fast almost as they could take their places, the report of the guns rang out and the insurgents fell, weltering in their own blood. Alexandro was among the last group, and met death, like his comrades, in uncomplaining silence and with no less courage than when he fought the man-eating shark.

The dead were not left long in the market-place, because the sight maddened the people, and a riot was feared. The poor bodies were loaded into wagons, without shroud or coffin, and sunk in the sea. General Valdez, with his few remaining followers, can hardly escape capture much longer. With him the revolution must end."

Alexandro had proved himself so brave, so generous, and so devoted that neither Maurita nor Cardenas could restrain their tears on learning of his tragic death.

The two negroes were finally dismissed with orders to return at once with the news should affairs in Havana change greatly either for better or worse.

## 9 Miralda On Trail

Of the state of affairs on the plantation the refugees were left happily ignorant, for hardly had the two slaves set out with the fresh stock of provisions before a police agent appeared on the plantation and demanded that Miralda should reveal the hiding place of her master and of Maurita. It was well known that she had been a protégée of the latter, and it was also known that the conspirators had held many meetings in the overseer's house; and it seemed not improbable that the little negress might have played an important part in the conspiracy.

Miralda answered freely and fearlessly, and denied that either she or her father had taken the least part in the affair. The evidence, however, was strong against her, and she was taken to Havana as a prisoner. The slaves who saw her led away wept like children, believing that she, too, would be shot in the market-place. Poor Gabriel, who was working at a distance from the house, had not even the consolation of bidding her good-by.

With a heavy heart Miralda heard the prison doors clang behind her, and she was soon conducted to her cell by an old woman, who acted as turnkey. Her window looked out on the sea; and the woman told her that the room had only a little while before been occupied by an aristocratic Creole girl; but that she had mysteriously escaped, and that the window had in consequence been supplied with an iron grating. Dreary as it all was, the little negress was at least thankful that Maurita's cell had fallen to her lot, and found comfort in the thought that her dear benefactress was safe.

As the hours passed on without interruption, the child thought earnestly of how she must answer when called before the judge. Her resolution was soon made that in all that related to herself alone she would answer without the least concealment; but that she would remain absolutely silent as to anything that might harm her friends. Serene in this resolve, and in the peace that follows earnest prayer, she slept quietly and rose calm and refreshed.

The morning brought her first hearing before the governor, who cross-examined her severely as to her dealings with the conspirators, especially Alexandro and the Guani family. Again the evidence was strongly against the little negress. After summing it up, the governor asked: "Had you no knowledge of the conspiracy?"

"I heard it spoken of, but without understand-

ing about it."

"Whom did you hear speak of it?"

"Alexandro."

"What did he say?"

"I can not exactly remember now; but it was something about an uprising. I did not understand it then."

"Did Maurita never speak to you of the conspiracy?"

"Yes, but only to bid me avoid even the appearance of taking any part in it, and to forbid my even questioning Alexandro concerning it."

"Was your father a conspirator?"

"No, never."

"Did not some of the conspirators meet at your plantation?"

"Yes."

"In what room?"

"In the big parlor."

"Were you never present?"

"No."

"Did you never Listen, and hear what was going on?"

"No."

"Do you not know anything of the memoranda held by the ringleader, especially the lists of their associates throughout the island?"

"Yes."

"Where is this list now? Why has it not been discovered?"

"I burned it."

"Why did you burn it?"

"Because one of the conspirators told me to."

"Who was that?"

"I will not tell."

The governor was amazed at this reply, but felt confident that he should finally get at the whole truth. After a pause he continued:

"Do you know where José Guani is hidden?"

"No. And if I did, I could not tell."

"We have means to bring the obstinate to reason. For your own sake, you had better answer. Do you know where Maurita Guani and Cardenas are in hiding?"

"Yes."

"Where?" demanded the governor, astounded.

"That is my secret, and one which I can not tell."

"By Heaven!" cried the governor, beside himself with rage, "you are a daring girl, but I will soon break your spirit. Who has told you their place of refuge?"

"No one. I myself led them to it."

"Then you are guilty before the law."

"Yet, my lord governor, I have only acted as it seemed to me any Christian ought; above all, one who had received such benefits from both."

The governor saw that he was dealing with an extraordinary girl, and now assumed a milder tone, hoping that persuasion might avail more than threats: "I can save you from great danger," he said, "if you will be reasonable, and confess as to these other people."

"I can say nothing as to others, and I fear nothing for myself. You can not do more than kill me; and I would rather die innocent than live on guilty of having betrayed my benefactors." From this resolve nothing could move the faithful girl.

Valdez, in the meantime, had fled to the most inaccessible fastnesses of the mountains with the remnants of his troops. Here, however, they could not long remain; for they were without even necessary food, and the Spaniards were following fast on their traces by aid of bloodhounds. And so the poor starving refugees were picked off, one by one, by Spanish bullets; or torn by the fangs of savage brutes that hunted them down.

Valdez shared the latter fate and endured the terrible wounds inflicted by the hounds before his captors could call them off, with such stoicism as to command the reluctant admiration of his foes. He was led to the prison where Miralda was still detained awaiting further examination. His trial was of the briefest; he denied nothing of the accusations brought against him, but refused any answer to questions concerning others. The governor tempted him, as he had Miralda, with the prospect of safety, in return for a betrayal of the associates, and asked him particularly as to the little negress. Valdez denied under oath, however, that she had taken even the least part in the conspiracy, first or last.

The governor attached no importance to this denial, but still remained convinced of Miralda's guilt, and counted on the execution of Valdez to bring her to a state of mind favorable to full confession.

On the first of September, at seven in the morning, the general was led from the prison to the scaffold, which awaited him in the public square. Like a hero made for better things, he walked firmly to meet his fate. The prison guards led poor little Miralda after him, and placed her where she could not avoid witnessing every detail of the terrible work.

The square was thronged with Havanese, who looked pityingly on the poor child, and among these was Gabriel.

Lopez, after mounting the scaffold, simply called on the people to bear witness that he died gladly for his country, and then submitted him-

self patiently to the hands of the executioner. He was quickly bound; and then the iron band, duly adjusted about his throat, was tightened. The spectators gasped as though themselves enduring its cruel pressure. The execution was over – Valdez was no more.

Miralda, almost fainting, was carried back to the prison, and led immediately before the governor. "You have seen," he said, "to what your obstinacy will bring you. Speak fully, now, of all that I have asked and you shall go freely home, under your father's care."

Still the poor child only answered: "I can not betray those who were good to me. Kill me if you will, but I can not betray them."

## 10 Under The Cedars

A few days after Pedro had brought fresh provisions for the refugees they received another visit, and this time from Gabriel, who was almost in despair over Miralda's imprisonment. "I have been turned away from the prison door each day," he said, "but I have heard how they are torturing her, and I fear the worst."

Both Maurita and Cardenas were overcome by this news, and Maurita insisted that she must at once return to Havana and give herself up to save Miralda.

"But how can that save her?" said Gabriel. "It would only be throwing away two lives instead of one, for it would make them so much more sure that she had a part in the conspiracy."

Cardenas also objected to the plan. "No," he said, "too many other lives hang on yours for such a risk to be run, so long as there is any other hope left. I believe myself that the only idea is to frighten the child into a confession, and that she must finally be freed. But if the worst should come, then she shall be saved in spite of them all. I will free my slaves on the sole condition that they shall rescue her. As they number above a thousand, many of them resolute fellows, and as all are attached to the child, and proud of her as an honor to their race, they will snatch her from the scaffold if need be."

"Perhaps you are no longer safe here," said Gabriel, "for if my poor child should be tried beyond her strength, she may reveal your hiding place."

After some deliberation it was decided that they should return to the Cuban coast under cover of the darkness. The boat was laden with a few necessaries, and when the last glimmer of day had disappeared, the little party entered it and fled to the mainland, guided only by the stars. The landing was safely made at the desired spot, and here the refugees parted from Gabriel and the fisherman and entered the dense woods, under shelter of which they hoped to reach the mountains.

The undertaking was a desperate one, for Cardenas was hampered by the care of a helpless girl, who had been unaccustomed to walking, even in the city streets. Maurita was brave, however, and not only tried her best to keep up with her guide, but insisted on carrying one of the packages of food, which they dared not throw away. But after an hour's struggle with the difficulties of the road the poor girl sank to the ground and declared that she could not move another step, though life itself depended on it.

Cardenas was too much alarmed on her account

to consider himself in the matter, and resolved, despite the great danger, to seek out some hacienda, where she might rest, as soon as she could struggle forward again. For some hours she slept the sleep of utter exhaustion. Finally, however, she awakened, much refreshed, and with an appetite for such food as their packages contained. And there, in the shade of the cedars and mahogany trees, with hunger for sauce, the coarse fare tasted more delicious than the dainties of her well-remembered birthday party.

Strengthened by food and sleep, the Creole girl was again able to follow Cardenas, and good fortune soon led them to a farmhouse, where both were glad indeed to rest, and to partake of an abundant meal, washed down with Spanish wine. Maurita begged that they might remain, for the people seemed honest and trustworthy; but Cardenas would not hear of this plan, as the place lay too near the coast.

They resumed their journey, avoiding the highways, and striking deeper and deeper into the woods. When hunger and exhaustion became unendurable, they sought the shelter of some poor farmhouse, where the owners were not likely to be on the lookout for political refugees. They had made a considerable journey, for the cooler air told that they were well in the mountain country, before they dared follow one of the roads, which led to a farmhouse not far distant from the point where they had left the woods.

Soon they heard the lowing of cattle, and presently the herd appeared, under the care of two drovers, of whom one seemed an expert at his work, while the other showed but little skill in dealing with his refractory subjects. As this latter passed Maurita and her companion he started and stared, then hastened after his fellow-drover and whispered to him. This latter became more than ever absorbed, seemingly, in the care of the herd, and then José (for it was he) turned his horse sharply, and returning quickly to the two wayfarers, sprang to the ground and clasped his sister in his arms.

"Thank God!" cried Maurita, "Who has kept us in safety and led us to you."

"Sister," answered José reverently, "we may indeed thank Him, for I was on my way to Havana in this disguise to seek some news of you because I could no longer endure the terrible uncertainty. This meeting is surely providential, because you might have wandered over all Cuba without discovering me, since it has been my fortune to



find refuge in a mountain paradise, one of God's own fortresses, where none but the initiated can enter."

Between Cardenas and José greetings were next exchanged, and the latter now led the way to a little hacienda where they could obtain food and a night's rest. Here they could speak freely, only conducting their conversation in English, for greater security. José related all the circumstances of the brief war, and of his flight, and of the dangers through which he had passed; and how, at last, he had found safe asylum both for himself and their mother, whom Maurita would find at their journey's end.

Maurita and Cardenas told José of their escape, their flight to the Queen's Garden, and of the threatening danger which alone had driven them from that hiding place. This led, of course, to the story of Miralda's devotion; and José, who had little imagined such courage possible in the poor, ill-taught child, was moved almost to tears as he heard of her sublime fidelity and gratitude.

The following morning José procured riding mules for Maurita and Cardenas, and the party again set forward on their way. Their road now led downward, and in the beautiful valley to which it soon led them could be seen the great cabbage palm, towering to the height of one hundred and sixty to one hundred and seventy feet. The dwarf palm, known to us as the Spanish walking-stick, formed the principal undergrowth to these gigantic trees; another species of the palm family filled the whole valley with its fragrance, similar to that of our violets, while the great twelve-foot leaves that hung downward from its top offered a natural umbrella, not to be despised as shelter from either rain or sunshine, though its thorny black trunk looked forbidding enough.

Presently the aspect of the landscape changed, and the trees became so overgrown and interwoven with the tropic vines, which, reaching from one to another, made a perfect labyrinth of netted walls that it seemed wonderful, indeed, that José could guide the newcomers through its intricacies. For an hour he led them down its winding paths, when suddenly they beheld the open fields of a well-cultivated plantation.

All about the border of the open were double rows of beehives, set like watchtowers to the little earthly paradise. From the brook that babbled beside their way flocks of flamingoes and spoon-bills rose at their approach, and in its pools there swam many brilliant water birds, that, less timid, seemed undisturbed by their coming. Beyond a beautiful extent of lawn rose an elegant hacienda, half hidden in blossom-covered shrubbery, and over the lovely valley stretched the sunlit azure of the Cuban sky.

José hastened ahead to prepare his mother, but

she at once divined the whole truth. "Oh," she cried, "Maurita is with you." A moment more, and mother and daughter were fast locked in each other's arms. Leaving them to the happiness of this reunion, we must now return to our little Miralda.

# 11 The Death Sentence

While the Guanis, with Señor Cardenas, thus found themselves safely reunited, Miralda was still a prisoner; for nothing could induce her to give the evidence against her friends which was demanded as the price of her freedom. At the very moment when Maurita was clasped to her mother's heart, the poor little negress sat sorrowful in her cell, looking out over the beach where so many people were coming and going in freedom, and watching the boats and ships with which the harbor was alive.

The hour for her final hearing had, however, come, and the old turnkey came to lead her once more before the governor. This time all took place in the presence of four judges. The offer of pardon, on sole condition of evidence against her friends, was repeated, and she was solemnly advised that its refusal meant death, and that her decision must be final.

Miralda's reply was: "All that concerned myself I have already told you without concealment or excuse; and if I am guilty before the law, then you can only do your duty, and I must die. But I can not betray my friends. Life is very sweet to me, for I had hoped to spend it in working for my dear old father; yet I can not buy it with an unworthy action. You Spaniards say that the poor blacks are not fit to be counted as human beings; and I certainly should not be were I to give over to your vengeance those who have loaded me with kindnesses."

The judges had now only to pronounce sentence; but one among them looked compassionately upon the brave child who stood ready to lay down her life for her friends. For the sentence condemned her to death by the garrote by strangulation.

Although she had expected this, the poor girl was overcome on hearing it. After a moment's struggle, however, she murmured: "God's will be done." The only favor she asked was permission to see her father, and this was granted.

In the loneliness of her cell Miralda first felt the full horror of her position, and broke down completely, giving way to an agony of weeping, and shrinking in terror from the frightful pictures that rose before her like visions. Again she saw the execution of Valdez; then she beheld herself led out to the scaffold, and given over to the executioner – felt the cruel band about her neck – saw her own dead body.

Then a gleam of brightness followed. Maurita's sweet voice seemed to call her: "Come, dear child,

and I will save you." From her window a rope ladder surely swung, that would lead her down to a little boat waiting below! She rushed to escape, but only to be met by the iron grating that made escape impossible.

But after this natural yielding to the fear of death – a death which must come to her in the very bloom of youth and strength – her natural resolution, capable of suffering everything for those she loved, reasserted itself, and after fervent prayer the child slept peacefully.

About midnight she was roused by the stealthy opening of her door, and she saw in the dim light a veiled figure, which beckoned her to follow. Rising quickly, she walked softly down the winding corridors, led always by the shadowy guide, until they had reached the outer doors. Here the figure disappeared in the darkness. After a moment's hesitation, Miralda tried the doors, which she found unlocked, and made her way into the street. But she had to pass the sentry, and being challenged, could not give the password. So she was led back to the doors she had just passed, and given over to the prison officers once more, and finally locked once more in her cell, over which a guard was now set.

The next noon brought Gabriel for the promised visit, and it was not strange that the poor old man gave way to agonizing grief at the sight of his one remaining child, the pet and pride of his declining years, who must so soon meet a terrible death. Miralda tried to comfort him. "Dear father," she said, "we must all die, sooner or later, and a few years will not make so much difference, after all. And yet I had so hoped to make your last days happy!" After a sorrowful pause, she continued: "If you can get permission, I want you to bury me near the chapel, on the plantation, for there are many true hearts among our old comrades, who will not forget to pray for me. My only other wish is that Maurita may know that I was glad to die in order to save her, and that in heaven I shall always pray for her."

Gabriel nodded, unable to speak a word. Soon the turnkey came to say the visit must end. "Have you no other wish?" he then managed to say through his sobs.

"None," answered Miralda, "except that you will give my greetings to all our comrades, and tell them that I die cheerfully, and trusting in God's goodness."

Gabriel was now led out, and made his way sorrowfully toward the plantation. He stopped to

rest and look back toward the prison where Miralda awaited death, when suddenly he remembered the letter given him by Señor Cardenas, to be used in this emergency. He now hastened on with incredible speed, and reaching the plantation, called the slaves together and told them of the fate hanging over his child. A cry of horror burst from the blacks, who esteemed the Black Nightingale as an honor to their race, as well as for the constant tenderness and thought-fulness by which she endeared herself to all.

"Yes," continued Gabriel, "she must be strangled by the executioner tomorrow, if no help can be found."

"By Heaven!" cried Pedro, "help shall come. It were a shame to every Cuban, above all, to every black, if this poor child should be thus done to death."

"But what help can be given?" asked Gabriel. "How can you make good your words? Only by daring death to rescue her at the very steps of the scaffold! All you," he cried, "who are ready for that, give me your hands, and swear it!"

After a moment's hesitation, one and all joined in the undertaking, binding themselves by a solemn oath, as Gabriel had asked. Yet even in his terrible anxiety the old man bid them avoid bloodshed if possible, shuddering, even for his daughter's sake, at becoming responsible for the horrors sure to follow should the rescue require this.

## 12 The Pardon

The fateful morning found the streets, and especially the square about the scaffold, thronged with Havanese of all classes; though it was noticeable that the center of this place was crowded with negroes – slaves from the surrounding plantations and the black porters and draymen usually busied about the wharves. Poor old Gabriel knelt near the steps by which his daughter must mount to meet her death. From the branches of a tall mimosa Pedro, so placed that he could be heard and seen by all his followers, was ready to give the signal for the rescue.

When the executioner advanced through the crowd he was greeted by a storm of hisses and a shower of mud and stones, but these demonstrations ceased at once when Pedro cried: “None of that! Be quiet there!”

Hardly had the tumult been calmed when the passing bell was heard, and Miralda was led forth by the guards. A little abashed before the great throng, Miralda trembled slightly; her tranquillity returned, however, as she knelt for the last prayer, and her responses were made at once fervently and quietly. The blacks now waited eagerly for the signal from Pedro, which should have come at this point, and pressed so closely about the scaffold that the guards were ordered to drive them back.

An attempt to carry out this order would certainly have been resisted to the death, but a jubilant shout rang out from Pedro, whose post permitted him to be the first to see the man who now appeared in the distance, waving a paper high above his head and shouting: “Pardon! Pardon!”

The cry was taken up by the vast throng, and the air was rent with acclamations: “Pardon! Pardon! Pardon!”

Silence fell, however, as the governor received and read the message, then he spoke: “Our merciful sovereign is graciously disposed to pardon the prisoner. Miralda, you are free.”

Again the mighty throng echoed the glad words: “Free! Free! Free!” and Miralda was safe within her father’s arms.

Kindly hands tore off the black death mantle and replaced it with one of white. An elegant carriage was placed at the disposal of father and daughter, and all Havana led them home in triumph to the plantation.

Miralda’s first question when they were at last alone was for Maurita and Cardenas. She was rejoiced to learn that they had left the Queen’s Garden (the little island) for another refuge, as she feared search might be made for them there.

The next day a general amnesty was proclaimed. The Queen ordered the release of all persons awaiting trial for participation in the insurrection, and bade all refugees return to their homes in full assurance of safety. What a day followed for Havana! The prison gates were the most sought places in the city, and those whose friends were in hiding sent messengers to carry them the glad news with all possible speed.

Gabriel and Miralda were deeply concerned for Maurita and their master. They must be in safety somewhere, but no one knew their hiding place, which was probably in some wild spot where the news would travel but slowly. Each refugee who returned was questioned eagerly by the faithful Cardenas slaves, but no trace of the master was found.

Miralda mourned then for the anxiety and discomforts her good friends must be enduring – and still more did she mourn for that other friend, the noble Alexandro, who slept so soundly in the sea depths. The pardon had come too late for him!

But one day a strange thing happened, for as Miralda sat at work among the slaves, in the cigar factory, a familiar tune was heard, whistled by some one who was advancing up the palm walk.

And then the whistling changed to singing! And surely the voice was wonderfully like Alexandro’s! But the fancy was a wild one, and she put it resolutely away. “The dead,” she said, “do not return.” A moment later, however, brought the wayfarer into their midst, and the slaves all cried out, half in terror, half in joy, “Alexandro! Alexandro!”

“Yes,” answered Alexandro, “it is myself, and not my ghost, old friends. The good God saved me without any miracles.”

“But how? Oh, tell us,” they cried.

“Chiefly by the bad marksmanship of the Spaniards,” answered Alexandro with a cheery laugh, “for I faced the guns with the rest of the prisoners, yet escaped unhurt. As I realized this, the thought came to me like a flash that my one safety lay in feigning death; so I sank down with a groan, and escaped detection when moved with the dead bodies taken so hastily to their sea burial because an outbreak among the people was feared.

My hands were bound like the rest, but I was thrown on the wagon under the bodies of my poor comrades, and had a chance to loosen them before the shore was reached. Here, again, I was in dread lest we should be thrown in one by one, and I

would thus be discovered. But, happily, the work did not seem worth so much ceremony, and the officer in charge had us dumped into the water pell mell.

My escape was all the more favored by the presence of a ship, underneath which I dived, thus placing it between me and the soldiers. After this I dared swim on my back and take time to think over what was to be done.

My first thought was to ship as a sailor for some foreign port, and thus place myself in safety till the storm should blow over. But I soon saw that this was a cowardly plan, since there was a good chance to help my associates if I could hide myself in Havana. I first found shelter with a fisherman whose hut was near the shore, and whom I knew for a true man, who would not betray me. Soon after, I succeeded in placing myself in the house of one of the judges who had been of the associates, though his residence was in the very building where so many of our poor comrades were imprisoned. Here, well disguised, I could come and go, and did, indeed, succeed in warning and helping many who had taken part in the uprising.

I it was, Miralda, who opened the prison doors for you – nor would your escape have been frustrated but for an unforeseen change in the guard for the night. I stood close to the scaffold, too, ready to drive my dagger into the executioner's heart if no other help remained to save you."

"Ah, friend," interrupted Pedro, "there were a thousand others ready to do as much. These brave fellows were only waiting my signal to save our little Black Pearl."

Miralda was deeply moved to find how her life had been guarded on all sides, and yet most thankful that it had been saved without bloodshed. "But tell me," she said, "who helped Maurita to escape?"

"That judge," answered Alexandra.

"God bless him!" said Miralda earnestly. "But where is she now? Of that we have no idea."

"She is where I can guide you," said Alexandro, "and with her are her mother, her brother, and Cardenas."

"Then we shall have them all back," cried Miralda joyfully. And the slaves echoed: "We shall have them all back. It will be a grand feast day."

"Go to rest now," said Gabriel, "that we may set out in the early morning to bring them home."

## 13 The Reunion

Shortly after midnight fire burned on the hearth of every slave hut, and breakfast was making there. Soon all were ready to set forth under the guidance of Alexandra. As they passed along the highway bearing torches and singing plantation songs, the dwellers by the way wondered where this troop of people were marching through the night, and what made them so merry.

By sunrise they were not the only singers, for the birds made the woods ring with their morning songs. When finally a halt was made for refreshments and needed rest, they had advanced so far on their upland journey that the Queen's Garden, on the blue expanse of sea so far below, looked like a mere handful of flowers.

Miralda told the slaves how it had been the refuge of Maurita and their master, and how she herself had led them there. But the talk did not last long, since all were anxious to reach the journey's end as soon as might be. Alexandro, to whom the mountains were old friends, led them by the most direct ways, needing not to follow the windings of the regular roads.

It was, however, nightfall before they reached the liana labyrinth bordering the hidden plantation; and here many thought they should camp for the night rather than seek the refugees at so late an hour.

Miralda, however, would not listen to this plan, but insisted that their friends should not be left in anxiety a moment longer than need be.

So they passed on toward the hacienda, singing a familiar plantation song, and bearing aloft the torches saved for the occasion.

Señor Cardenas, with Madame Guani and her two children, sat talking sadly together, and José had just said: "This life is hardly better than imprisonment. I wish to God we were well out of it!"

"Don't forget, José," answered the older man, "that, trying as it is, we should yet thank God that we are here, and wait in patience." Suddenly the song was heard, and as the refugees rushed forth, the singers were revealed by the light of the torches they carried.

"As I live, it is my slaves!" cried Cardenas.

"Amnesty! Amnesty!" cried Miralda, who had flown ahead, to be the first to tell the good news. "You can all come safely back now."

Maurita clasped Miralda in her arms, forgetting all prejudice of race and rank. "You would have died for my sake," she said.

"You would have done no less in my place,"

answered Miralda. "Let us not speak of it."

But spoken of it was, for Alexandro told the story of the good child's suffering, and of her fidelity, "even unto death," in words so eloquent that all were deeply moved. Madame Guani, in particular, who had held the whole race of blacks as too inferior for noble thoughts or deeds, was amazed at the heroism of this little, ignorant negress, as well as by the burning words of Alexandro. She, too, took Miralda to her heart with affectionate gratitude.

The following morning all were ready betimes for the homeward journey, and after due farewells to their hosts, the refugees mounted the horses brought for them and set forth, accompanied by the faithful slaves.

Maurita alone regretted the parting from their beautiful asylum, because she had there learned the value of work, and the flatness and insipidity of life without the toil that can alone give it real zest – can alone ennoble it. The common tasks to which she had turned for a moment's distraction had revealed themselves as not only demanding thought and attention, but training as well, and the petted aristocrat began to realize the source of much that she had been forced to admire in the little negress – to recognize, indeed, that the little black was in this hitherto unknown field of work her superior.

The Cardenas plantation was reached in safety. Here the erstwhile refugees rested over night, before returning to Havana.

Señor Cardenas, however, slept but little; his thoughts were busied with the events of this happy return, in which his slaves had played so important a part – in which creatures whom his own race hardly recognized as human beings – whom he could sell at any moment, mind and body at least, if not quite soul and body – the despised blacks – had acted not like bondmen, but rather like devoted children. His was not a heart to treasure remembrance of his own good deeds, and so he did not reflect that the loyalty shown was but the reflection of his own kindness and humanity.

Before setting out for the city the planter called his slaves together, and after thanking them in fitting words for their loyalty and fidelity, proffered them their freedom. Few, however, accepted this generous offer. Pedro, acting as spokesman for the rest, said: "Master, we thank you for the great gift you offer us, and we know it is the greatest you could bestow, yet when we remember how many of our old comrades who have gained freedom are



living in misery now, we feel safer in your care; and we want to stay here still as your slaves.”

Thenceforth it was more than ever the care of Cardenas to study the best interests of the loyal servants who had shown such confidence and affection, and we need hardly say that there was at least one plantation in Cuba where the blacks worked like copartners in their master’s business rather than like slaves.

To Gabriel and Miralda their master gave a small plantation for their own; and here Maurita spent a portion of each year, counting it, indeed, the happiest time of all.

As for our little Black Nightingale, though she had chosen the retired life and workaday duties of a country home rather than the brilliant career of one of the world’s greatest singers, she never regretted her choice, but was happy to give her beautiful gift of song, rather than to sell it, whenever it could give pleasure to her friends or bring help to the needy. And so the poor little negress, who began life as a slave, became a noble woman, deserving the respect and affection accorded to her by all.