

A Noble Family

1. *A Family's Situation*

Madam Josephina Ramirez de Oliyena was the ~~noblest~~ ^{most distinguished} lady in the upper-class high society of Havana in 1861 and it was even

said that she occupied the top position. She was the widow of a ~~quartermaster~~

^{chief official} in the treasury department, ^{noble pedigree and} had enormous wealth ~~and a noble family background~~. In addition,

her education was all for the purpose that she should take leadership in the ~~group~~ ^{social class} she belonged to. She

Her acts and hobbies fitted ~~appeared to abide by~~ all ritual rules, by convention she was pious in religion. It was said that she had said and her judgments so, or rather, she had done so.

~~It was the last issue.~~ Although she was born in 1803, she nonetheless

could still bear her immense ^{body} weight. Her hair all turned gray.

This was her ^{whole} ~~total~~ image.

^{already} We said that she was a widow. Her only child was a son: Carlos de

Oliyena, a cheerful youth of twenty-two years old. He was proud, so said

His mother as well.

At that time, they lived in an old, desolate and big house in

Amagula Street.

Here we'd like to introduce to our readers.

^{Without any doubt} This was a magnificent, splendid building.

It was the symbol of colonial aristocrats. It looked proud, but

not majesty. It was spacious, low, solid, but not pretty. It had two

stories. ~~The lower level~~ One section in the rear was for servants to live. On the upper level there was a

circular hallway, a big hall, two small living rooms, a dining room and two adjoining

bedrooms. ~~We don't need to describe these details, and at present, no need to be so~~ to describe that very carefully. We won't give details. At this

~~particular moment, the focus clearly lies elsewhere. Thus another way or another routine would precise. All right, let's use another way to express the different habit, in order to~~

distract

~~engage~~ readers to the narrative. We are more interested in and care more about that story

than anything else. Still, it is necessary to point out that there was a large sink

on the roof terrace, covered by a piece of green wood plank. Very soon

we will see that this sink also played a part in this story.

Therefore,

~~Okay,~~ let's begin.

One day in November 1861, at eight o'clock in the morning. It was turning cold in this season. Madam

Josephine was sitting in the circular hallway where she could see the

roof terrace, ^{usually} in a dark dress ~~that she usually wore~~. In the small balcony ^{connected to} ~~close to~~ the

turning corner of the hallway, Carlos was smoking a cigarette in a leisured and romantic way.

Another person there was a seventeen-year-old mulatto girl named Gamla.

Her beautiful and ^{slim} ~~elegant~~ body was wrapped in a valuable and gorgeous

long wide dress, and she wore a satin scarf on her neck. Her

beauty was stunning. Fresh morning air seemed to blow toward her gently.

She was sitting on a small stool besides Madam Josephine's feet, looking a little

nervous. Any painter would be glad to draw a picture for this scene, so that cats

could imitate her gesture.

Madam Josephine was reading the news column of the morning papers. She picked some sentences and passages and asked about her son's opinion to get her son's answers. Yet her eyes did not look up away from the newspaper.

"There is nothing I can agree with." The mother said.

~~"I once said already about these personal matters—"~~ Carlos answered, ^{already told you I've thought about those particular matters.}

~~"—Those Chinese people are not suitable for the plantation. There is modernized~~ ^{machines have been} ~~equipment~~ ^{installed} now, but they don't know how to use them. In a sugar factory, only black workers are useful."

^{Even if there is a need} "Black workers—" Madam Josephine said in an annoyed tone, "I don't like any of them. It is a disgusting race. And you should know, those useless laborers, I will find them."

"But mother—," the young man hurried to explain to her, "—You forgot everything you said. Yesterday I talked with Mr. Antonio Virasky who ^{just} introduced a cargo ship from Africa. It is still moored on the ~~seashore~~ ^{coast}. If you like, you may go and take a look to pick out some good ones." They are of different ~~qualities and different ages~~ ^{in different conditions}.

Their discussion was interrupted by a newcomer. Who was that? This needs some explanation. ^{In these} ~~Of this~~ aristocratic family, there was a woman in Havana ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ charge of paying bills to the workers and feeding livestock. Normally, ^{special}

she was a griffe, that is, the daughter of black and mulatto parents.

Her name was Degara, or Donalis or Marianna. She looked

a ~~simple and silent~~ ^{prudent plain} person. A ~~religious believer~~ ^{very pious believer}, on her belt hung a

big string of keys, clanking sharply as she moved.

Marianna was in loud cry as she quickly ~~came~~ ^{rushed} in.

“Alas, Madam!—” she said, “—something bad happened.”

Madam Josephine put the newspaper down on her laps, slightly turned around, and asked calmly, “What bad thing happened?”

“Madam, you should remember that at dinner yesterday, we used the gilded dining utensils.

Normally, after they were washed clean with stove ashes, they were placed

on the lid of the sink to dry out. I myself put them there, because

I never expected something like this would happen...! Oh, my god!

Who would think of that?”

Poor Marianna dare not tell the whole incident, and she used a lot of circumlocution to describe the news. It was really very painful.

But Madam Josephine was impatient to inquire about the result.

“Are they stolen?—” She asked, a little surprised.

Her surprise was not without reason. Stealing in this house—who would be a thief—was ~~an~~ ^{an} unusual ~~brazenness~~ ^{type of} brazenness. To Madam Josephine, the thief

was a criminal. Her judgment about the thief, above everything, was that it was disrespectful. ~~should be respectful. No matter what, it was lack of ethics to her.~~

Next on the second point, doubtlessly it was a thief whatever reason there was.

This behavior couldn't be explained as ~~a common method to make one rich~~, and

it should be condemned for the idea beneath it full of evil and vice.

We pointed out the small ~~racial discrimination~~, but it doesn't mean that we intend to ~~exonerate~~ the thief or ~~assuage~~ his crime.

Right, a thief should ~~have had some manners~~, at least should be so

in imagination. After the arrival of Marianna, a lot of comments all admitted that

it was a serious matter. There was also a knitted bag that contained five hundred dollars. It was given to

her by the Madam the day before, this month's entire budget. ~~It~~ ^{Doubtless, the bag} was placed together with the dinning

wares. ~~She put the knitted bag~~ on the sink ~~back~~ then, because it was too heavy to carry it in her pocket.

~~Her carelessness was doubtless~~, and she saw that clearly herself. There was not defense for her dereliction.

Afterwards, she forgot to bring them back. Yet the problem was not only about the knitted bag, but even

the dinning wares were ~~gone~~. ^{stolen}

The door was closed. After a black slave in the house named Francisco had went out to the marketplace, the old janitor Joseph got up and closed the door very carefully. No one could enter the house, and only Francisco alone left the house.

The black man Francisco was an African. He ~~worked as the horse groom~~. ^{was in charge of the groom work}

"Why did Francisco went to the marketplace?" Asked Madam Josephine.

"Because Nemesio was sick since last week—" answered Marianna, "—Francisco was responsible to do had to do the shopping."

Everyone was thinking silently at that moment.

Obviously, the implied charge expressed in their words was rejected by Gamla. She lowered her head over the laps, couldn't agree with of her mistresses emotionally murmured in indistinct and excited voice to herself:

"My Madam—," she said "—It can't be Francisco."

Madam Josephine made no reply; she paid no heed of the young woman's opinion. She had already made her judgement.

"Carlos—," she instructed her son, "—I am not surprised at what has happened. I always think we don't need this black man in our house. I can't understand your stubbornness: why a young man like you should need a groom. Except those grooms who were born locally, no one would hire them. Veimeo or Nammon, they grew up in this house, and they both have very loyal looks. Aren't they one thousand times better their looks are very loyal. than the one who works for you?"

Carlos tossed away the cigarette that he had finished only a half. He had feelings opposite to his mother's suspicion. At the right moment, he would argue with her.

"Francisco—," he shouted, "—he is a brilliant groom.

He manages the horses in a way that neither Nammon or Veimeo can match. Maybe ~~he doesn't have a pretty face~~ ^{his face is not good-looking}, but he is not as weak as local blacks born in Havana. He is strong and masculine.”

“He is shameless.”

“If only by his looks, he is ~~humble~~ ^{plain}.”

“A barbarian.”

“It’s a mistake, mother. Francisco is ~~very~~ ^{rather} smart.”

“That’s it!—” Madam Josephine finally raised her voice, “—however you describe him, what he has done is clear.”

Carlos made no answer anymore.

Meanwhile, Madam Josephine stood up, and leaned over in the balcony of the circular hallway.

Marianna stood there motionless, dejected. Gamla was breathing in extreme agony.

Suddenly, there was a knocking sound at the gate. Everybody heard it, or rather, everybody felt it.

After a short while, the black man Francisco got into the roof terrace with a big basket under his arm. Inside the basket were the things he bought.

Just as Carlos and Madam Josephine said, Francisco was a ~~humble~~ ^{plain} and rustic man. He wore a short upper garment, a pair of white pants, a huge hat as if in the shape of wings on his head,

and a heavy, plain and simple pendant. ^{He was} A king in the forest and a captive of civilization.

After he came here, sometimes he walked straight into the back of the house, but sometimes went to a small room close to the door of the terrace by habit so as to put the things he bought there. The room was the space to store saddles and other tools. For a moment, he couldn't make up his mind. Taking a look around, he took out a key from his pocket and unlocked the door, pressing the door half open with his back,

Upstairs everybody was looking at that door, as if some secret was hidden inside. Gamla was looking just like the others did.

After a long period of ~~time~~, ^{silence} Francisco came out of the room.

When he came out, there was another basket under his arm. His eyes turned to the roof terrace randomly, not paying any particular attention to what he was looking at. He took off his hat, nodded his head toward them as greeting, and spoke to Marianna:

"When I went out, I saw the dinning wares on the sink were already dry, so I put them up. When I was outside, somebody might come in the house to take them away."

He did not say: ^{people already think so?} this might make him look suspicious, or ~~somebody might think this way?~~ He never had such thoughts.

He placed the basket on the sink, Madam Josephine did not move throughout the process. She couldn't help but asked:

"Besides the dinning wares, are there anything else?"

"Yes—," Francisco answered, "—there was a bag, and I think it has money in it." He said indifferently, "I put it into that Basket. Afterward a male servant came in and took it away as he went past it. I was busy with washing horse tools on the terrace."

In this small incident, ~~details of the other characters' observation~~ and actions within the long space of detailed narrative did not matter. The simple big incident they had expected out of curiosity with their breath held back, if not worth some praise or exclamation, at least was on the border of reflection. Gamla still continued looking at him, but she was not paying attention to what he was doing, because it was no longer necessary. She gazed ~~and~~ at him as if she was indecisive. ~~contemplated. She thought about it back and forth without end.~~ As if pressed by the weight of ~~strangely heavy~~ the building, or moved by some ~~robust life~~, she trembled and contemplated.

unusually stimulating vigor