

*Sab*<sup>1</sup>  
Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda<sup>2</sup>

(Translation of Several Passages by William Little© 2016)<sup>3</sup>

[*First Selection: Last Three Pages of First Part, Chapter VI*]

Al concluir estas palabras estremeciéronse los pitos, como si una mano robusta los hubiese sacudido y Carlota asustada salió del jardín y se encaminó precipitadamente hacia la casa.

Tocaba ya en el umbral de ella cuando oyó a su espalda una voz conocida que la daba los buenos días: volvióse y vio a Sab.

—Te suponía ya andando para la ciudad—le dijo ella.

—Me ha parecido—respondió el joven con alguna turbación—que debía aguardar a que se levantase su merced para preguntarla<sup>4</sup> si tenía algo que ordenarme.

—Ya te lo agradezco Sab, y voy ahora mismo a escribir a Enrique: vendré a darte mi carta dentro de un instante.

Entróse Carlota en la casa, en la que dormían profundamente su padre, sus hermanitas y Teresa, y Sab la vio ocultarse a su vista exclamando con hondo y melancólico acento:

—¡Por qué no puedes realizar tus sueños de inocencia y de entusiasmo, ángel del cielo!... ¿Por qué el que te puso sobre esta tierra de miseria y crimen no dio a ese hermoso extranjero el alma del mulato?

Inclinó su frente con profundo dolor y permaneció un rato abismado en triste meditación. Luego se dirigió a la cuadra en que estaban su jaco negro y el hermoso alazán de Enrique. Puso su mano sobre el lomo del primero mirándole con ojos enternecidos.

—Leal y pacífico animal—le dijo—, tú soportas con mansedumbre el peso de este cuerpo miserable. Ni las tempestades del cielo te asustan y te impulsan a sacudirle contra las peñas. Tú respetas tu inútil carga mientras ese hermoso animal sacude la suya, y arroja y pisotea al hombre feliz, cuya vida es querida, cuya muerte sería llorada. ¡Pobre jaco mío! Si fueses capaz de comprensión como lo eres de afecto, conocerías cuánto bien me hubieras hecho estrellándome contra las peñas al bramido de la tempestad. Mi muerte no costaría lágrimas ... ningún vacío

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<sup>1</sup> The edition of *Sab* (1841) we are transcribing and translating is by José Servera, Madrid: Cátedra, 1997. The first passage is found on pages 147-149.

<sup>2</sup> Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (1814-1873). For a brief biographical description of this important Cuban-Spanish writer, see: => [Avellaneda](#).

<sup>3</sup> The English translation follows the selected Spanish passages. Explanatory footnotes will appear on both the Spanish transcription and the translation pages, which follow at the end of the Spanish texts.

<sup>4</sup> The use of “la” (instead of the standard “le”) is an instance of “*loísmo* / *laísmo*” where the form of the direct object pronouns “lo” and “la” substitute for the indirect pronoun form “le.” The Wikipedia article on “*loísmo*” accurately says the following: “**Loísmo**, with its feminine counterpart **laísmo**, is a feature of certain dialects of Spanish consisting of the use of the pronouns *lo* or *la* (which are normally used for direct objects) in place of the pronoun *le* (which is used for indirect objects). *Loísmo* and *laísmo* are almost entirely restricted to some dialects in central Spain; they're virtually absent from formal and written Spanish. In practice *laísmo* is more frequent than *loísmo*.” Gómez de Avellaneda uses *laísmo* throughout this novel because standard nineteenth-century Cuban Spanish was closer to the “conservative or traditional” Spanish of the Iberian Peninsula. You will note other examples of such “conservative” Spanish throughout the novel and in these passages. For example, “*conocer*” in lieu of “*saber*”.

dejaría en la tierra el pobre mulato, y correrías libre por los campos o llevarías una carga más noble.

El caballo levantaba la cabeza y le miraba como si quisiera comprenderle. Luego le lamía las manos y parecía decirle con aquellas caricias: «Te amo mucho para poder complacerte: de ninguna manera otra mano que la tuya recibo con gusto el sustento.»

Sab recibía sus caricias con visible conmoción y comenzó a enjaezarlo diciéndole con voz por instantes más triste:

—Tú eres el único ser en la tierra que quiera acariciar estas manos tostadas y ásperas: tú el único que no se avergüenza de amarme: lo mismo que no naciste condenado a la servidumbre..., pero ¡ay! tu suerte es más dichosa que la mía, pobre animal; menos cruel contigo el destino no te ha dado el funesto privilegio del pensamiento. Nada te grita en tu interior que merecías más noble suerte, y sufres la tuya con resignación.

La dulce voz de Carlota le arrancó de sus sombrías ideas. Recibió la carta que le presentó la doncella, despidióse de ella respetuosamente y partió en su jaco llevando del cabestro el alazán de Enrique.

Ya se había levantado toda la familia y Carlota se presentó para el desayuno. Nunca había estado tan hermosa y amable: su alegría puso de buen humor a todos, y la misma Teresa parecía menos fría y displicente que de costumbre. Así se pasó aquel día en agradables conversaciones y cortos paseos, y así transcurrieron otros que duró la ausencia de Enrique.

Carlota empleaba una gran parte de ellos gozando anticipadamente con el pensamiento la satisfacción de hacer una divertida viajata con su amante. ¡Tal es el amor! Anhela un ilimitado porvenir pero no desprecia ni el momento más corto. Esperaba Carlota toda una vida de amor, y se embelesaba a la proximidad de algunos días, como si fuesen los únicos en que debiera gozar la presencia de su amante.

Presentía el placer de viajar por un país pintoresco y magnífico con el objeto de su elección, y a la verdad nada es más grato a un corazón que sabe amar que el viajar de este modo. La naturaleza se embellece con la presencia del objeto que se ama y éste se embellece con la naturaleza. Hay no sé qué mágica armonía entre la voz querida, el susurro de los árboles, la corriente de los arroyos y el murmullo de la brisa. En la agitación del viaje todo pasa por delante de nuestra vista como los paisajes de un panorama, pero el objeto amado está siempre allí, y en sus miradas y en su sonrisa volvemos en nuestro corazón los cuadros variados que van desapareciendo.

Aquel que quiera experimentar, en toda su plenitud, estas emociones indescriptibles, viaje por los campos de Cuba con la persona querida. Atraviese con ella sus montes gigantescos, sus inmensas sabanas, sus pintorescas praderías: suba en sus empinados cerros, cubiertos de rica e inmarchitable verdura: escuche en la soledad de sus bosques el ruido de sus arroyos y el canto de sus sinsontes. Entonces sentirá aquella vida poderosa, inmensa, que no conocieron jamás los que habitan bajo el nebuloso cielo del norte: entonces habrá gozado en algunas horas toda una existencia de emociones ... pero que no intente encontrarlas después en el cielo y en la tierra de otros países. No serán ya para él ni cielo ni tierra.

*[Second Selection: from Second Part, Chapter I]*

El mulato, cuya voz fue sofocada por la conmoción, guardó un instante de silencio, y Teresa le dijo:

—Ya lo sé, Sab; sé que te has criado junto a Carlota; sé que tu corazón no se ha entregado voluntariamente a una pasión insensata, y que sólo debe culparse a aquellos que te expusieron a los peligros de semejante intimidad.

—¡Los peligros!—repitió tristemente el mulato—; ellos no los preveían, porque no sospecharon nunca que el pobre esclavo tuviera un corazón de hombre: ellos no creyeron que Carlota fuese a mis ojos sino un objeto de veneración y de culto. En efecto, cuando yo consideraba aquella niña tan pura, tan bella, que junto a mí constantemente, me dirigía una mirada inefable, parecíame que era el ángel custodio que el cielo me había destinado, y que su misión sobre la tierra era conducir y salvar mi alma. Los primeros sonidos de aquella voz argentina y pura; aquellos sonidos que aún parecían un eco de la eterna melodía del cielo, no me fueron desconocidos: imaginaba haberlos oído en otra parte, en otro mundo anterior, y que el alma que les exhala se había comunicado con la mía por los mismos sonidos, antes de que una y otra descendieran a la tierra. Así la amaba yo, la adoraba desde el primer momento en que la vi recién nacida, mecida sobre las rodillas de su madre. Luego la niña creció a mi vista y la hechicera criatura convirtióse en la más hermosa de las vírgenes. Yo no osaba ya recibir una mirada de sus ojos, ni una sonrisa de sus labios: trémulo delante de ella un sudor frío cubría mi frente, mientras circulaba por mis venas ardiente lava que me consumía. Durmiendo aún la veía niña y ángel descansar junto a mí, o elevarse lentamente hacia los cielos de donde había venido, animándome a seguirla con la sonrisa divina y la mirada inefable que tantas veces me había dirigido. Pero cuando despertaba era la mujer y no el ángel la que veían mis ojos y amaba mi corazón. La mujer más bella más adorable que pudo hacer palpitar jamás el corazón de un hombre: era Carlota con su tez de azucena, sus grandes ojos que han robado su fuego al sol de Cuba; Carlota con su talle de palma, su cuello de cisne, su frente de quince años... y al contemplarla tan hermosa pensaba que era imposible verla sin amarla; que entre tantos como la ofrecerían un corazón encontraría ella uno que hiciese palpitar el suyo, y que para él serían únicamente todos los latidos de aquel hermoso seno, todas las miradas de aquellos ojos divinos y las sonrisas de aquellos labios de miel. ¡Teresa!—añadió bajando la voz que había sido hasta entonces llena, sonora y clara, y que fue luego tomando gradualmente un acento más triste y sombrío— ¡Teresa! ¡Entonces recordé también que era mulato y esclavo...! Entonces mi corazón abrasado de amor y de celos, palpité también por primera vez de indignación, y maldije a la naturaleza que me condenó a una existencia de nulidad y oprobio; pero yo era injusto, Teresa, porque la naturaleza no ha sido menos nuestra madre que la vuestra. ¿Rehúsa el sol su luz a las regiones en que habita el negro salvaje? ¿Sécense los arroyos para no apagar su sed? ¿No tienen para él conciertos las aves, ni perfumes las flores? ... Pero la sociedad de los hombres no ha imitado la equidad de la madre común, que en vano les ha dicho: «¡Sois<sup>5</sup> hermanos!» ¡Imbécil sociedad, que nos ha reducido a la necesidad de aborrecerla, y fundar nuestra dicha en su total ruina!

Calló un momento, y Teresa vio brillar sus ojos con un fuego siniestro.

—¡Sab! —dijo entonces con trémula voz—, ¿me habrás llamado a este sitio para descubrirme algún proyecto de conjuración de los negros? ¿Qué peligro nos amenaza? ¿Serás tú uno de los ...?

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<sup>5</sup> “*Sois*” is the second person plural verb of “*ser*” (“*ser*” = “to be”; “*sois*” = “ye art” in Elizabethan English; you in modern English) that has long been and still is standard Castilian Spanish in Spain and in isolated regions of Latin America. In any dialect of modern Spanish, the familiar second person verb forms and pronouns have a rather biblical ring to them; however, in nineteenth-century Cuba, the form sounded to Cuban (or Spanish) ears as nothing more than “you.”

—No— la interrumpió él con amarga sonrisa—, tranquilizaos, Teresa, ningún peligro os amenaza; los esclavos arrastran pacientemente su cadena: acaso sólo necesitan para romperla, oír una voz que les grite: «¡Sois hombres!» pero esa voz no será la mía, podéis creerlo—. Teresa alargó su mano a Sab, con alguna emoción; él fijó en ella sus ojos y prosiguió con tristeza más tranquila:

—Era puro mi amor como el primer rayo de sol en un día de primavera, puro como el objeto que le inspiraba, pero ya era para mí un tormento insoportable. Cuando Carlota se presentaba en el paseo o en el templo y yo iba en su seguimiento, observaba todos los ojos fijarse sobre ella y seguía con ansiedad la dirección de los suyos. Si un momento los paraba en algún blanco y gentil caballero, yo suspenso, convulso, quería penetrar a su corazón, sorprender en él un secreto de amor y morir. Si la veía en casa melancólica y pensativa dejar caer el libro que leía, o el pañuelo que bordaba; si revelaba el movimiento desigual de su pecho una secreta emoción, mil dolores desgarraban el mío, y me decía con furor: «Ella siente la necesidad de amar: ella amará, y no será a mí.» No pude sufrir mucho tiempo aquel estado de agonía; conocí la necesidad de huir de Carlota y ocultar en la soledad mi amor, mis celos y mi desesperación. Vos lo sabéis, Teresa, solicité venir a este ingenio y hace dos años que me he sepultado en él, volviendo a ver raras veces aquella casa en que pasé días de tanta felicidad y de tanta amargura, y aquel objeto adorable, que ha sido mi único amor sobre la tierra; pero lo que no podéis saber, ni yo podré deciros, es cuánto he padecido en estos dos años de voluntaria ausencia. ¡Preguntádselo a esos montes, a este río, a estas peñas! Sobre ella he derramado mis lágrimas que el río arrastraba en su corriente. ¡Oh Teresa! Preguntádselo también a este cielo que ostenta sobre nosotros sus bóvedas eternas; él sabe cuántas veces le rogué me descargase del peso de una existencia que no le había pedido, ni podía agradecerle; pero siempre había un muro de bronce interpuesto entre él y yo, y el eco de las montañas me volvía los lamentos de dolor, que el cielo no se dignaba acoger.

Una gruesa y ardiente lágrima se desprendió de los ojos de Sab, cayendo sobre la mano de Teresa, que aún retenía en las suyas; y otra lágrima cayó también al mismo tiempo y resbaló por la frente del mulato: esta lágrima de simpatía y compasión.

[*Third Selection: from Second Part, Chapter II*]<sup>6</sup>

—¡No!— exclamó ella inclinando su cabeza sobre la del mulato, arrodillado a sus pies—, no me apartaré de ti sin que me jures respetar tu vida.

Un sudor frío corría por la frente de Sab, y la opresión de su corazón embargaba su voz: sin embargo, a los dulces acentos de Teresa levantó a ella sus ojos, llenos de gratitud.

—¡Cuán buena sois!—la dijo—, pero ¿quién soy yo para que os intereséis por mi vida? ... ¡Mi vida! ¿Sabéis vos lo que es mi vida? ... ¿A quién es necesaria? ... Yo no tengo padre ni madre ... soy solo en el mundo: nadie llorará mi muerte. No tengo tampoco una patria que defender, porque los esclavos no tienen patria; no tengo deberes que cumplir, porque los deberes del esclavo son los deberes de la bestia de carga, que anda mientras puede y se echa cuando ya no puede más. Si al menos los hombres blancos, que desechan de sus sociedades al que nació teñida la tez de un color diferente, le dejasen tranquilo en sus bosques, allá tendría patria y amores... porque amaría a una mujer de su color, salvaje como él, y que como él no hubiera visto jamás otros climas ni otros hombres, ni conocido la ambición, ni admirado los talentos. Pero ¡ah!, al negro se rehúsa lo que es concedido a las bestias feroces, a quienes le igualan;

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<sup>6</sup> Sab, 1997, 205-208

porque a ellas se les deja vivir entre los montes donde nacieron y al negro se le arranca de los suyos. Esclavo envilecido, legará por herencia a sus hijos esclavitud y envilecimiento, y esos hijos desgraciados pedirán en vano la vida selvática de sus padres. Para mayor tormento serán condenados a ver hombres como ellos, para los cuales la fortuna y la ambición abren mil caminos de gloria y de poder; mientras que ellos no pueden tener ambición, no pueden esperar un porvenir. En vano sentirán en su cabeza una fuerza pensadora, en vano en su pecho un corazón que palpita. ¡El poder y la voluntad! En vano un instinto, una convicción que les grite, «levantaos y marchad», porque para ellos todos los caminos están cerrados, todas las esperanzas destruidas. ¡Teresa!, esa es mi suerte. Superior a mi clase por mi naturaleza, inferior a las otras por mi destino, estoy solo en el mundo.

(English translation by William Little© 2016)

[*First Selection: Last Three Pages of First Part, Chapter VI*]

After saying these words<sup>7</sup> the pito<sup>8</sup> trees shuddered as if a strong hand had shaken them, which frightened Carlota, and she left the garden and walked hurriedly toward the house.

As she was about to enter the house she heard behind her a voice greeting her that she recognized: she turned around and saw Sab.

“I thought you were already on your way to the city,” she said to him.

“I thought,” the young man answered slightly upset, “that I should wait for your ladyship to get up to ask you if you had any more orders for me.”

“Thank you, Sab, I’m going to write to Enrique<sup>9</sup> right now. In a minute I’ll return and give you my letter.”

Carlota went inside where her father, little sisters, and Teresa<sup>10</sup> were fast asleep; and Sab saw her hide from his view while he exclaimed in a deep and melancholy tone:

“Why, heavenly angel, can’t you achieve your dreams of innocence and enthusiasm...? Why did they one who put you on this earth of misery and crime not give that handsome foreigner the soul of this mulatto?”

He lowered his head in profound pain and remained for a while downcast in sad meditation. Then he turned toward the stable where he found his black pony and Enrique’s beautiful sorrel. He put his hand on his nag’s back while looking at him with a tender look in his eyes.

“Faithful and peaceful animal,” he said, “you endure meekly the weight of this miserable body of mine. Nor do the sky’s storms frighten you, nor do they cause you to cast it off into rocky crags. You respect your useless load while this beautiful animal here shakes his while tossing and trampling on the happy man whose life is loved and whose death would be mourned. Oh, sad pony of mine! If you had the capacity of understanding, as you do know affection, you would know how much good you would have done me by dashing me against the rocks in the

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<sup>7</sup> The immediate context of this passage is this: Carlota, the young, beautiful, sensitive heroine has just finished speaking in a garden with kind and sympathetic words to the black slaves on her father’s Cuban plantation. Next, in this passage, she speaks to Sab, her father’s (black) mulatto slave who was a house slave and then given responsibilities as the sugar plantation’s majordomo.

<sup>8</sup> The formal name of “pito” trees, as they are thus known in Cuba, is *Erythrina berteroana*. They grow to a height of 30 feet and have clusters of long spiky pale red flowers.

<sup>9</sup> Enrique is a handsome young, tall, blond Englishman (presumably, Henry, although his English name is never used in the novel), who courts Carlota in part because, he is attracted to her (she, by contrast, falls madly in love with him as if he were the prince charming of her dreams) and, in a larger measure, because his father needs his son Enrique to marry the daughter of a rich Criollo (Cuban of European extraction) plantation owner to solve Enrique’s father’s financial problems.

<sup>10</sup> Teresa is a bastard child whose mother died when she was young. Teresa was taken in as a kind of charity case by Carlota’s parents. She is cold and resigned to her inferior (embarrassing?) social status. Furthermore, she is fully aware that she is neither as pretty nor as charming as Carlota, although Carlota is most loving toward her. However, since she is outside the inner family, and given her keen intelligence but limited possibilities for social betterment, she is aware of all that goes on in the household including Sab’s unrequited love for Carlota and Enrique’s unworthiness as a husband for Carlota.

raging storm.<sup>11</sup> My death would have caused no tears ... This poor mulatto would have left no void on earth, and you would have run freely through the fields or you would have born a nobler load.”

The horse raised its head and looked at him as if he were trying to understand. Then he licked his hands and with his caresses seemed to be saying; “I love you much so I can please you; in no way can I receive my sustenance from any hand but yours.”

Visibly moved, Sab received those caresses and began harnessing him saying in a voice that by moments was even sadder:

“You are the only being on earth that these sunburned and rough hands would ever want to caress. You are the only one who is not ashamed to love me, even though you were not condemned to servitude at your birth... But, oh! your condition is more fortunate than mine, sad animal; your destiny is less cruel because you have not been given the disaster of thinking. Nothing cries into your inner self that you deserved a nobler destiny, and you suffer yours with resignation.

Carlota’s sweet voice yanked him out of his somber thoughts. He took the letter the young lady handed him, respectfully he took leave of her, and he left on his mount leading Enrique’s sorrel by the reins.

By then the whole family had risen, and Carlota went in to breakfast with them. Never had she been so beautiful and so amiable. Her happiness put everyone in a good mood, and even Teresa seemed less cold and indifferent than usual. In this mood they spent the day in pleasant conversation and short strolls, and so on during Enrique’s absence.

Carlota spent a great part of those days happily anticipating in her mind how satisfying it would be to take an entertaining outing with her beloved fiancé. Such is love! It longs for a limitless future but it does not disdain even the shortest moment. Carlota was looking forward to a long life of love, and she was enchanted with the prospect of the coming days as if they were the only ones in which she should be able to enjoy her lover’s presence.

She intuited the pleasure of travelling through magnificent, picturesque country with the object of her choice, and truly nothing is more gratifying to a heart that knows how to love than travelling in such circumstances. Nature is embellished with the presence of the object of one’s love y the loved one is embellished by nature. There is a certain unknown magical harmony between the lover’s voice, the whispering of the trees, the bubbling of the streams, and the murmuring of the breeze. In the bustling of the trip everything passes by our eyes like the scenery in a panorama, but the beloved object is still there, and in his glances and in his smiles we store away in our hearts the diverse scenes that are gradually left behind.

Whoever would like to experience these indescribable emotions in all their fullness should travel through Cuba’s countryside with the one you love. Traverse with that person her gigantic mountains, her vast plains, her picturesque meadowlands; climb her jagged peaks covered with rich and unspoiled greenery; listen to the sounds of her streams and the song of her mockingbirds in the solitude of her forests. Then you will feel that immense, powerful life that those who live under the foggy skies of the north never knew. Then you will have enjoyed in a few short hours the entire gamut of the emotions... but do not attempt to find them under the sky or on the earth of other countries: in those places they are neither sky nor earth.

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<sup>11</sup> Earlier, Sab and Enrique were riding through a dangerous storm when Enrique was badly injured when he was bucked off his horse spooked and nearly killed. Enrique remains away from Carlota’s plantation for a while in recovery. Sab saved his life, for which Carlota is grateful, but she never requites Sab’s love and adoration for her.

[*Second Selection: from Second Part, Chapter I*]

The mulatto, whose voice was suffocated by emotion, was quiet for a moment. Then Teresa said:

“I already know, Sab. I know that you were raised alongside Carlota. I know that your heart has not been voluntarily given over to a senseless passion, and that only those who exposed you to the dangers of such closeness are to be blamed.”

“Dangers!” the mulatto repeated sadly. “They didn’t foresee them, because they never suspected that this poor slave had a man’s heart. They didn’t think Carlota was an object of veneration and worship in my eyes. Actually, when I saw that girl, who, being so pure, so pretty, when she was near me would direct toward me an ineffable look, it seemed to me she was the guardian angel that heaven had sent to me, and that her mission on earth was to direct and save my soul. The first sounds from that silvery, pure voice—those sounds that even seemed like an echo of heaven’s eternal melody—were not unknown to me. I imagined having heard them somewhere else, in an earlier realm, and that the soul that sent them forth had been communicating with mine though the same sounds, before either soul had descended to earth. That is how I loved her, adored her from the very moment I saw her as a newborn baby, rocked on her mother’s knees. Then she grew into a young girl in my sight and the bewitching creature turned into the most beautiful of all virgins. I dared not look her in the eyes nor stare at the smile on her lips, trembling as I was with a cold sweat bathing my forehead, while a consuming, burning lava circulating in my veins. In my sleep I continued seeing this girl angel descend over me or slowly rise toward heaven from whence she came, urging me, with her divine smile and that ineffable look of hers that so often she had cast in my direction, to follow her. But when I awoke she was a woman and not the angel that my eyes were seeing and my heart was loving. The most beautiful, most adorable women that ever made a man’s heart beat, that was Carlota with her skin like a lily, her big eyes that had stolen the fire from the sun over Cuba; Carlota with that slender figure of hers like that of a palm tree, her swan-like neck, her forehead of a fifteen-year-old’s . . . , and considering how beautiful she was, I thought it was impossible to look at her without loving her; for among so many men who would offer her their heart she would find one who would make her heart throb, and all the pounding of her beautiful breast and every look in her divine eyes and the smiles on those honeyed lips of hers would be for him alone. Teresa! Then I also remembered that I was a mulatto and a slave! . . . Then my heart burning with love and jealousy also pounded for the first time with indignation, and I cursed the nature that condemned me to an existence of nullity and opprobrium. But I was unfair, Teresa, because nature has not been our mother less than yours. Does the sun refuse to shine on places where black slaves live? Do streams dry up in order not to slake their thirst? Do the birds and flowers’ perfumes not share their concerts with them? . . . But the society of men has not imitate the fairness of our common mother, who, in vain, told them: “You are brothers!” Imbecilic society, that has reduced us to the necessity of hating her and of founding our happiness on her total ruin!

He was silent for a moment, and Teresa saw a sinister gleam in his eyes.

“Sab!” she then said in a shaky voice, “have you summoned me to this place to reveal some project related to a black conspiracy? What danger threatens us? Are you possibly one of those...?”



“No,” he interrupted her with a bitter smile. “Calm down, Teresa, no danger threatens all of you. The slaves are patiently dragging their chains; maybe all they need to break them is to hear a voice shouting to them: ‘You are men!’ But that voice will not be mine, you can believe me.” Teresa reached out her hand to Sab rather moved. He fixed his eyes on her and continued sadly in this calm way:

“Pure was my love like the first ray of the sun on a spring day, pure like the object that inspired it, but even then it was for me intolerable torture. When Carlota would appear on the public square or in church and I was trailing behind in her party, I would notice every eye fixed on her and then I’d anxiously follow the direction of her eyes. If a moment’s glance of hers stopped on some white and proper gentleman, I felt convulsed with bewilderment wanting to plumb the depths of her heart, to discover there a secret of love, and to die. If I would see her melancholy and pensive at home and she would drop a book she was reading or a handkerchief she was embroidering; if her breast showed heaved with an unevenness of breath due to a hidden emotion, my heart would be stabbed with a thousand wounds, and I would exclaim to myself: ‘She feels the need to love: she shall love, but it will not be I.’ I couldn’t stand that state of agony for long; hence I felt an urgent need to flee from Carlota and to hide my love, my jealousy, and my desperation in solitude. You know so, Teresa, so I asked to come to this sugar mill, and it’s been two years since I’ve been buried in it, seldom returning to the big house in which I spent days of immense happiness and intense bitterness... and where there was that adorable object that has been my only earthly love. But what you cannot know, nor could I tell you, is how much I have suffered during these two years of voluntary absence. Ask these mountains, this river, these boulders! On her account I have shed my tears, which the river’s current has been sweeping away. Oh, Teresa! Ask also this heavenly sky that displays its eternal vaults over us: it knows how many times I’ve begged it to unload from me the weight of an existence I had neither requested nor thanked it for. However, there was always a bronze wall erected between it and me, and the mountains’ echoes bounced back to me the painful cries of mine that heaven refused to receive.

A thick and ardent tear emerged from Sab’s eyes and fell onto Teresa’s hand, which was still holding his; and another tear from also fell at the same time rolling down the mulatto’s face: this was a tear of sympathy and compassion.

*[Third Selection: from Second Part, Chapter II]*

“No!” she exclaimed leaning her head toward the mulatto’s, who was kneeling at her feet. “I will not part from you if you do not swear to me you’ll respect your life.”<sup>12</sup>

A cold sweat ran over Sab’s face, and the oppression in his heart choked his voice; nevertheless, hearing Teresa’s sweet tone, he raised his eyes to her full of gratitude.

“How good you are!” he said to her, “but, who am I that you’d take interest in my life?...” My life! Do you know what my life is like? Who needs my life? ... I have neither father no mother... I’m alone in the world; no one will cry over my death. I do not even have a country to defend, because slaves have no homeland. I have no duties to fulfill, because a slave’s duties are

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<sup>12</sup> Teresa is responding to the immediate last thing Sab said to her: “Why are you still here? ... Go away, lady, and let me die.”

the duties of a beast of burden that toils while it can and is discarded when it can't any longer. If, at least, white men, who eject from their social circles a man who is born with a different skin color, would leave him be in his forests, that's where he would have his loves and his homeland ... because he would love a woman of his own color, free in the forest like him and, like him, he would never have seen other climates or other men nor known ambition nor marveled at others' talents. But, ah! they refuse to a black man what is conceded to wild beasts that are equated with him, because they let wild beasts live in the mountains where they were born; but black people, they're dragged out of their theirs. A debased slave, he will bequeath slavery and debasement to his children, and those children will beg him in vain to have a life in the forest like their ancestors had. For even greater torment they will be condemned to see men like them, for whom destiny and ambition open up a thousand paths to glory and power; whereas they cannot have ambition, they cannot hope for a future. In vain they will feel the power of thought in their heads, in vain a beating heart in their chests. Power and will!<sup>13</sup> In vain an instinct, a conviction will cry out to them: 'Rise up and march,' because all paths are closed for them, all hopes are destroyed. Teresa! such is my plight. Superior to my class by my nature, inferior to others due to my destiny, I am alone in the world."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The phrase "power and will" (< *el poder y la voluntad*) suggests an influence—or at a minimum an affinity—with the highly influential and disseminated writings on these themes by the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), especially his book *The World as Will and Representation* (or *The World as Will and Idea*). The original German title is *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, whose first volume was published in 1818/1819. The work was quickly translated into French. Avellaneda had a deep and wide knowledge of French literature and philosophy due to the extensive library in her grandfather's house.

<sup>14</sup> In a fairly melodramatic dénouement characteristic of Romantic literature, Sab dies in the end sacrificing himself so that Carlota can win a lottery that gives her a dowery that makes it economically and socially possible for Enrique to marry her. Teresa had actually won the lottery prize, but Sab and Teresa make a switch by which Carlota gets the money. Enrique becomes rich and successful in commerce. Teresa ends her life in a convent. Carlota discovers that her hyper-materialist husband is not her equal as a lover or poetic idealist, whence she dies alone and disillusioned. In a final chapter titled "Conclusion," the narrator says that Carlota "was a poor poetic soul thrown among a thousand positivist existential circumstances" [Carlota era una pobre alma poética arrojada entre mil existencias positivas.] In brief, the novel is, in the Cuban context of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an early or proto-anti-slavery work and a proto-feminist (by implication) depiction of the "slavery" women endure in unequal marriages when there is no possibility of escaping the chains of marriage without recourse to the legal or religious possibility of divorce.