

RACHEL BUSK

PATRAÑAS

Rachel Busk

Patrañas

«Public Domain»

Busk R.

Patrañas / R. Busk — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

INTRODUCTION	5
CARLO MAGNO AND THE GIANT	7
EL CONDE SOL	12
SIMPLE JOHNNY AND THE SPELL-BOUND PRINCESSES	14
TURIAN AND FLORETA	21
THE BLOOD-STAIN OF THE ALCÁZAR OF SEVILLE	27
THE ADVENTURES OF DOÑA JOSEFA RAMIREZ Y MARMOLEJO	29
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	36

R. H. Busk

Patrañas / or Spanish Stories, Legendary and Traditional

INTRODUCTION

You will often have it said to you, when smarting under a disappointment, “Never mind! it is all for the best!” I dare say you are sometimes inclined to doubt the truth of this maxim; I remember when I was a child I did, but I have found out in life, that it does very often prove true. And if you like, I will tell you one instance in which this was the case.

In the course of one of my rambles in Spain it happened one day that I was tempted by an old longing to make acquaintance with one of her most out-of-the-way and primitive villages, to separate from my party at the comfortable hotel at C – and make my way with only one young companion to a place some five miles west, called Guadaxox, a name which I dare say in your longest geography lesson you have never been called on to pronounce; and you would find it no easy matter to do so, unless I wrote it for you thus: *Guadakquoth*.

Five miles’ walk through the clear bright air of Spain, and the fresh spring breeze charged with all the perfume from the mountains, is a pleasant prospect enough; and as I can usually adapt myself to any quarters which may fall to my lot on a march, I had little fear of not being sufficiently rested to perform the return journey easily before sunset. My companion was a hearty lad of fourteen, who had joined us for his Easter vacation from Eton, and the prospect proposed even less difficulties to him.

I think you would be amused with our little adventures by the way through a country in which every outline of foreground or horizon, every tree and plant, every beast or fowl, every implement of husbandry, every article of dress of the people, every individual thing you meet, will probably prove new to an English eye. But I must not dwell on these things now. I will only tell you that we had such a bright and pleasant day as I have hardly ever known out of Spain; that we found so much to sketch and so much to interest us altogether, that we never noticed how the time passed, nor how the wind from the mountains had covered the fair sky with angry clouds. It was only when the first great drops of the storm patted us on the shoulder that we realized the extent of our difficulty. We looked at the banks of clouds and then at each other, for we each felt there was little chance of holding up that evening, and if it did, some of the mountain paths we had to traverse would be rendered too slippery by the torrent to be pleasant, not to say safe, for our lowland-bred feet.

It was a *contretemps* which disconcerted us not a little; but we turned with what courage remained to see after a shelter for the night. Time forbids me to describe the only *venta*, or inn, the place boasted, it will suffice to say it wanted for *every* comfort. It only expected to have hardy peasants to house who would not object to the earthen floor or the companionship of pigs and fowls in their slumbers. My Eton companion thought it rather manly to roll himself up in his great coat and compose himself to sleep on a board sloped from a low bench on to the floor. For myself I preferred sitting up, and established myself bravely in a chair, having previously taken the precaution to replenish the lamp. The first stage of weariness was just coming on when the door, which there was no means of locking, was thrown rudely open, and a couple of rough carters were ushered in to take up their quarters in the same apartment. I remonstrated at the intrusion without success, and something of an altercation ensued, in the midst of which another door, which I had not before noticed, was opened by a lady in black, who beckoned me into her room. I followed her, glad of an escape, but with a misgiving, lest I had not mended the matter. At first sight I had felt inclined to set her down as “an old hag;” but as she talked I saw intelligent benevolence in her dark eye, and traced remnants

of early beauty in her shrivelled countenance. We were soon friends. She was travelling from place to place with her daughter, who supported them both by her exertions on the stage; she had gone on with friends to another village that evening, so her bed was free; it did not look inviting, and I excused myself as delicately as I could. She had the tact not to press the matter; and we continued sitting up, talking about the customs and legends of the people, a matter in which the old lady was well versed, and which had always had a special charm for me. She was delighted to have some one who would listen to her “long yarn;” and I was delighted to have found a source at which to satisfy some of my curiosity about Spanish Traditions.

The next day, as I sat in the hotel at C – writing down the substance of what she had told me, and which I have embodied in the following collection of tales, I could not help saying to myself, “Well, it was all for the best. I thought that storm a great annoyance yesterday, but it has procured me an acquaintance with the very subjects after which I had had many fruitless researches before.”

The store thus begun has been added to since in many various ways which I will not detain you by narrating, as I sincerely hope you are anxious to plunge into them, and still more that they will answer your expectations and entertain you as they did me.

I dare say they will seem to you at first very like other stories you have read, but if you follow them attentively you will trace many singular national characteristics. One in particular to which I would call your attention is the spirit of humour of which the Spanish and particularly the Andalusian people are so fond. This will sometimes lead them to what we should be inclined to consider irreverence; but it is nothing of the sort with them; and if you find them speaking with playfulness on a sacred subject¹, it is because such a vein of faith underlies all they say that the notion of being irreverent never occurs to them.

¹ The Story “Where One may Dine Two may Dine” is a particular illustration of this.

CARLO MAGNO AND THE GIANT

Many tales of Spain are full of memories of Charlemagne. It is strange that history says comparatively little of his doings there; but his was a character such as the Spanish Romancers were sure to seize, and, with their habit of heaping all perfections on their heroes, ascribe to him all manner of fabulous achievements. Here is one of the exploits they tell of him: —

One of the Moorish kings, who sought his alliance in the internecine turmoils in which the chiefs of their race were at the time engaged, had an only and beautiful daughter, the apple of his eye, who was guarded with jealous care, indulged in every wish, waited on by the most beautiful maidens in a fairy-like palace, and suffered to know nothing of her father's wars and dangers. Life seemed all smoothness and pleasure to her; and every one, who at any time met her eye, made it their delight to obey her faintest sign.

But life passed even amid continual sunshine, flowers, and harmony may become monotonous. When the Moorish princess had had fifteen years of it, she began to seek some pleasure newer and more exciting. Her fond father, only glad to hear her express a wish, that he might have the satisfaction of gratifying it, promised to give her a fresh diversion such as she had never before seen.

For this purpose he ordered a great *fête*, and chose out all the mightiest men of his forces, to perform feats of arms and mock combats before her.

The princess, who had never witnessed any combat more serious than that of her pet doves, was delighted beyond measure with the new sensation, and thought she could never tire of seeing the brave horsemen contend; dealing each other such heavy blows, and all the while seeming so indifferent to danger. Nevertheless the time came when the sameness of these shows struck her too, and she began to crave for something newer yet.

The king then ordered that valiant men out of other countries should be invited to come and contend before her, each after the fashion of their own country; and many warriors of renown were content to come and display their prowess; the Moslem in the hope of winning the bright smile of the king's daughter; Christians, to have the opportunity of displaying their might before the infidel horde.

Among the strangers, but belonging to neither of these categories, came one day a powerful giant, five cubits high, who rode on a horse as tall as a house. All the mighty men of the king's army turned pale when they saw him; and the king regretted that his invitations to all comers had been so unlimited that he could find no courteous excuse for excluding him; to prefer an unfair one would have been dangerous, as his ire would have been terrible if provoked. So he received him as smilingly as his trepidation would permit; and the giant seemed a very good-natured person, too full of his own consequence to think of any thing else, even of picking a quarrel with any one.

He challenged every one to fight with him, but no one would venture; and this testimony to his might put him in still better humour. Then he showed off all his feats of strength, to the great delight of the court, and of none more than the princess, who was so astonished at the prodigies he rehearsed, that she leant out from her balcony, and suffered the veil to blow away from her face.

The giant happened to be looking towards her at the moment, and that moment sufficed to make him fall in love with her. For the rest of the day he exhibited his surprising strength with renewed energy; but the evening was no sooner come, than he stole up to her window, which, though it was in a very high tower of the *alcázar*², was just at a convenient height for his head to reach as he stood upon the ground. Putting his face against the lattice, he whispered very softly that he must speak to her. The poor little princess was dreadfully frightened, and could not guess what he wanted, but thought it would not be dignified to show any fear; so she went near enough to the window to be heard by him, and asked him his pleasure. The giant told her that he loved her, and she must marry him.

² Moorish palace.

The princess was dreadfully terrified when she heard this, for she knew she had no possible means of resisting him if he chose to carry her off by force; and she reflected, too, that her father himself would have very little chance if he attempted to fight him: and what a dreadful thing it would be if he should kill her father – her dear father, who was so fond of her! Yet in the fright she was in, she could think of no better stratagem than to stammer forth that he must give her time to think about it.

The giant was not very dissatisfied with this reply, and promised he would leave her quite to herself till the next day. All that night, and all the next day, the little princess thought and thought of what excuse she could make; but she could think of nothing but to ask him to give her another day; and then again she sat and thought, and no invention would come: and she durst not tell, her father, lest he should in his indignation challenge the giant to fight, and be killed by him. But when he came the third time, and she could still think of no stratagem for getting rid of him, she was obliged to tell him plainly that she could not make up her mind to marry him.

At first the giant tried all sorts of clumsy persuasions and entreaties; but the maiden held firm; and at last, finding she would not yield, he grew fiercely angry, seized the alcázar by the roof, and made it rock backwards and forwards, tore up the trees, and threw them on the ground, and stamped upon the soil with a noise like peals of thunder. The poor little princess was so terrified she hardly knew what was happening, only she heard him swear that he would come back and take her by a way she could not escape him; and after repeating that threat several times at length disappeared.

It was a long time before the princess came to her senses again, for she had fainted with the dire terror, and when she did, she began to wonder what the terrible trouble was which had so shattered her; by degrees the memory of the stormy scenes lately passed came back to her, but all was now so calm and still, she could hardly realize the truth of what she had gone through. It was a great relief to find the giant was quite gone – far away; and she learnt that he lived a long, long way off, in a valley as far below the level of the plain as the height on which her father's alcázar stood was above it. She remembered, indeed, his threat that he would come back, but it seemed that it would have been so easy for him to have taken her then had he been so minded, that she could not think he was serious in the intention to carry her off at all. Why should he come back to do what he might just as well have done at once?

Time passed on, and she heard no more of the giant; people left off talking of his feats of strength, and she began to forget all about him. A matter happened, too, which gave another direction to her thoughts. A neighbouring king made war upon her father, and with such overwhelming preparations, that this time he could not conceal the fact from her. Every one was full of apprehensions, and the king, distracted with the fear of losing his kingdom, had no time even to think of the fancies of his beloved daughter. The princess heard from one and another of the attendants that things were going very wrong, that the enemy were getting the upper hand, and advancing nearer and nearer; but she learnt more from their anxious looks than from their lips, for every one was afraid to distress her by giving her details of the truth.

We must now go back to the giant, whom we left marching off in no good humour. The truth about him was, that with all his strength he was not very courageous – he was more of a bully than a warrior. He had heard a great deal of the bravery and more particularly of the excellent arms of the Moors, and as he knew they would rise as one man to defend their princess if he carried her off, he did not like the idea of their making pincushions of his legs with their fine sharp swords, even if they could not reach to do him further damage. So he resolved to carry out his plan in a way which would be less fraught with danger to himself.

Coming down from the alcázar, he went on to the neighbouring sovereign, and treacherously gave him a description of all he had seen at the court where he had just been staying; told him the number and situation of the army, and the condition of the defences, and pointed out the least protected points of the country by which an incursion could be made. Having received a rich guerdon for this information, he continued his way homewards, and then set all his people to work to cut a

long cave, which he made them extend further and further in a sloping direction till it should come out opposite the alcázar where the Moorish princess dwelt, by means of which he could reach her unperceived, and carry her off without danger to his own skin, while the city was in the midst of the tumult which he thought would be brought about by the inroad of the inimical power he had perfidiously invoked.

Various underground rumblings had been observed for some time past by the country people, but as they held little communication with each other it did not strike them that the sounds continually advanced in the direction of the capital. Indeed, all minds were too much filled with apprehensions of the destruction the advancing foe above ground was likely to reek upon their property, to have time to give way to fears of a chimerical foe in the regions below the soil.

Thus the giant worked on steadily and without hindrance, while the poor little princess was far from thinking of her tormentor otherwise than as at a safe distance; much less did she dream of his continually nearing approach! Enough she had to excite her anxiety without this. And she sat crying over her father's danger till her face became quite pale and her eyes worn with tears.

At last a day came when every one seemed bright with fresh hope; and they ran hastily enough to tell her the good news. The youthful conqueror, Carlo Magno, had been appealed to by the king to help him. His advent had entirely turned the tide of affairs: the enemy had been completely repulsed, and the victorious army was returning in triumph to the city.

The news spread like wildfire; every one hastened to deck their houses festively, and put on their best attire, to do honour to the conquerors; and when they appeared, shouted their thanks in loud acclamations. The little princess was very desirous to see the young hero who had saved her father's life; and, though it is not the custom for Moorish women to appear in public, she contrived to see him as he passed by, and thought in the silence of her heart how nice it would have been if it had been the handsome Christian who had wanted to marry her instead of the monstrous giant. Having once seen him, she was so desirous to see him again that she sent to ask him to come, that she might thank him for having saved her father's kingdom; but it was not entirely for her father's sake that she contrived the interview.

When he came, however, though he was very courteous towards her, he was also very reserved, and stayed a very short time; assured her that what he had done was nothing at all; that his sword was ever ready to defend the right, whoever it might be invoked his aid; and with that took his leave without paying her any compliments. The Moorish princess was sad when she saw him go out so; and sadder still when she learnt that no Christian prince cared to know a Moorish maid. Carlo Magno himself, however, was sorry for the poor child, as he had seen that she wanted to be better acquainted with him; but he could hold no intimacy with the unbeliever.

The giant, meantime, had gone on boring away; and, though he had now got quite under the alcázar, every one was so full of festivity and rejoicing that nobody heeded the sound of his pickaxe. On his part, he had not been altogether unmindful to listen for the sounds which might keep him informed of what was going on in the upper world, he had been very well satisfied with what he heard. There had been unmistakable clashings of battle, and he never doubted that the princess's father must be getting the worst of it; and now, when he heard the sounds of busy running to and fro in the festive palace, he made sure it was his allies pillaging the place.

At last the tunnel was complete; he crept out in the first fall of the darkness of night, threaded the familiar way up to the princess's window, rested his foot on the cornice of the first story for a stepping-stone, and with one grasp of his hand had swept her off her couch before she had time to open her eyes. Then closing her mouth, so that she might not cry and raise an alarm, walked quietly back with her to his subterranean passage, down the sloping path of which he carried her in exultation.

Quickly and silently as the feat had been performed, the keen bright eyes of a little black slave had followed the whole affair, as she lay at the foot of her mistress's couch. She had seen the huge hand spread over the room, – the nail of its little finger had indeed sadly grazed her forehead.

She recognized it at once as belonging to the giant, her mistress's dread of whom she had so often shared. And no sooner was her helplessness to rescue her apparent, than she rushed madly into the banqueting-hall, tearing her clothes and plucking out her hair, and crying out in wailing accents what had befallen. It was not easy to gain credence to so strange a story; and when at last her earnestness induced belief in her sincerity, the princess's room had to be searched to afford the necessary proof that she was gone. When this was found to be indeed but too true, the wail was taken up by all the people. The banquet was broken up, and every one went hither and thither, not knowing what to do; for, withal that the giant was so big, none had seen him pass to tell which way he had gone.

But Carlo Magno, brave and self-possessed in the midst of all, saw an occasion to be of service to the poor Moorish princess, and make up for the disappointment he had caused her in the morning. It was plain to him that if the giant had stood under the window, as the little black slave had said, he must have left his foot-prints there; and that he could thence be tracked whithersoever he had gone. So he raised a loud voice, and bid all the people be still: and that if they would all remain without stirring, he would deliver their princess; for he wanted them not to stir up the soil any more, lest they should destroy the track.

The voice of Carlo Magno, after what he had already done for them, possessed great authority with the people; and so all stood quite still, while he bade the little black slave guide him to the window; and there, under it, sure enough he found the giant's footprints, two great holes in the sand, like dry tanks for water. Allowing due space for his prodigious stride, the prince readily found another and another, till they brought him to the mouth of the tunnel, where he had indeed passed. When all the people saw the great gaping hole which had never appeared there before that night, and gazed down its descending gullet, no wonder they thought it was the mouth of hell opened to vomit forth its monster.

But Carlo Magno said he would deliver the princess though his enterprise should indeed lead him into the realms of Hades. And all the people applauded his courage, but he went down the black path alone.

Though he travelled at all speed, the giant had now good start, and the length of his step was equal to several of the Christian prince's charger; but Carlo Magno made such good haste that he had not got above a hundred miles before he heard the giant's laugh, exulting over his prize, resounding through the gloomy passage, though still at some considerable distance. This roused the Christian prince's indignation, and made him urge his steed yet faster, till at last he came within sight of him. And then, when he saw his monstrous arms bearing the little helpless princess, his compassion made him use yet greater speed, till at length just as he reached the mouth of the cave, Carlo Magno managed to overstep him by one bound of his horse, and then wheeling round confronted him with fearless eye.

The giant I have already said was more of a bully than a warrior. When he saw the Christian knight so brave and firm, and withal encased in such strong armour, and brandishing his trenchant sword, he felt his best defence lay in hectoring and boasting, and thereby frightening the Christian hero from attempting to fight him.

With a terrible voice, therefore, which made the rocks resound, he asked his opponent, on whom he lavished every startling epithet, what he meant by venturing to appear before him; following up the question by such a volley of imprecations and threats as he fancied would suffice to make him wish to escape with a whole skin.

Carlo Magno, however, who knew that the dogs who bark most bite least, waited unmoved till he had exhausted his whole repertory of violent language, and then quite undismayed summoned him to surrender the maiden.

Another loud and angry volley followed upon this demand, with further threats of the terrible vengeance he intended to take on the intruder.

“Then,” said Carlo Magno, “if you will not give her up quietly, I must even take her by force.” And with that he dismounted and drew his sword. The giant saw now that he must defend his life, or he would lose it; and so, forced to fight, he drew his clumsy sword and began laying about him in right-determined fashion; but all his blows alighted far and wide of the Christian prince. Furious at finding his awkward efforts ineffectual, while the highly trained agility of the prince saved him from all his strokes, he began laying about him with such untempered violence that at last his weapon dropped from his hand. Fully expecting that Carlo Magno would try to possess himself of it, he hastily bent down to regain it. But Carlo Magno had other thoughts. Waiting calmly till the monster had bent him sufficiently low, he swung his fine sharp blade and buried it deep in his heart with the unerring dexterity with which the matador lays low his bull – at one thrust.

Of course he severed the giant’s head afterwards to bear away as his trophy; and raising the princess in his arms, who had swooned away at sight of the horrid combat, bore her swiftly upwards through the subterranean path and delivered her, yet unconscious, to her father.

EL CONDE SOL

A great war was proclaimed between Spain and Portugal, and the king called all his knights to arms to follow him into the field.

“Tell me, Conde,” said the wife of Conde Sol, “how many years will you be absent in this campaign?”

“If I am not back, Condesa, in six years, reckon me dead, and forget me, and take another husband.”

Six years pass, and eight, and ten, and one more yet, and the Conde Sol is not come back, nor has any news been heard of him. Men say he has fallen in the wars; but the Countess believes them not; her heart tells her that her husband lives, and she will take no rest and no diversion. Her father comes to see her, and he finds her always in tears.

“What ails thee, daughter dear? Why are thy eyes ever filled with tears?”

“Father, let me go to seek the Count; for my heart tells me he lives, and that I shall find him.”

“Do all thou wilt, daughter, and my blessing go with thee!”

The next morning the Countess sets out and goes to seek the Count, bowed down with sadness, by land and by sea, through all Spain and Italy and France. One day she comes to a vast plain shaded by pine-trees, and in the shade a herd of kine grazing.

“Tell me, I pray you, *vaquerita*³, and tell me now in truth, whose are the kine grazing in these pastures?”

“They belong to the Conde Sol, lady, who commands all this country.”

“And all these wheat crops that they are just garnering in, *vaquerita*; tell me in truth, whose are they?”

“The Conde Sol’s, lady; for it is he sows these fields.”

“And whose are all those sheep, *vaquerita*, all with their little lambs gathered round them so tenderly?”

“The Conde Sol’s, lady; for it is he who has them bred.”

“And whose these gardens and this royal-seeming palace, *vaquerita*? Tell me the truth, I pray.”

“Also the Conde Sol’s, lady; for it is there he has his abode.”

“And whose are those horses, *vaquerita*, which I hear neighing in the stall?”

“They belong to the Conde Sol, lady; for he goes with them to the hunt.”

“And whose is that fair dame, *vaquerita*, who stands so near that knight?”

“That is the affianced of the Conde Sol, lady, whom he is just going to make his bride.”

“Now, *vaquerita*, *vaquerita*, by the love of our Lord’s sufferings, give me here thy poor dress, and take my robe of silk, and let me go, for I have found him I seek!”

Then she put on the poor dress, and went and stood where the Count must pass, begging charity. When the Count came by, he bent down over his saddle-bow, and gave her an alms, and asked her, —

“Good stranger woman, whence are you?”

“In Spain was I born,” answered the Countess, with a faltering voice.

“And why do you come hither?”

“I go over all countries seeking my long lost husband, and so by chance I came here too. I have gone through perils on the sea, and hardships on the land; my feet are cut by the stony rocks; and — will you believe me, Conde? — when at last I find him I learn that he is about *to be married*, Conde; that he had so forgotten his fond and lawful spouse who had come so far for love of him!”

³ Good Cowherdess.

“*Romerica, romerica*⁴! Hush now, say not so. Confess that the evil one has sent you to tempt me with a false story.”

“Neither has the evil one sent me, Conde, neither do I seek to tempt thee; but nevertheless I am thy true wife, Conde, who has come so far to seek thee.”

Then the Conde Sol, when he heard that, sent to fetch a light-footed palfrey wearing a breast-band covered with silver bells, and with stirrups and spurs of gold; and on to this he sprang, and rode back to the castle bearing his good wife in his arms, and presenting her to all his people, bade them honour her as their lawful mistress.

⁴ Female pilgrim.

SIMPLE JOHNNY AND THE SPELL-BOUND PRINCESSES

When Ferdinand King of Spain drove the Moors out of his dominions with his invincible sword, there were among their chiefs many descended from right noble lineage. Among them was one, of whose ancestor Clotaldo the following story was told, who for his prowess was elected king of the fertile provinces of that part of the East which is called Syria.

Clotaldo had three beautiful daughters, who were so beautiful that men said they were divinities and not women. The King thought that as they were so very beautiful they ought not to be given in marriage in the ordinary way, but that whoso would marry them should perform some great deed of valour. So he called together all the masons of the kingdom and made them build an immense castle, so high that it seemed to reach up to heaven. And more than this, he gathered all the magicians and made them enchant it with all their enchantments, so that no one might ever be able to get at them or see them unless the King himself should admit him.

So the magicians enchanted the castle with all their spells, and set three enchanted horses to guard the enclosure so that no one might break through.

Meantime the King sent heralds round into all countries to proclaim that every noble, or knight of high degree, who could make his way into the castle should have one of his daughters in marriage; they were likewise at the same time to set forth their beauty, to let all men know the worth of the prize for which they were asked to contend. And he did this because he thought that none but one worthy of them would be able to overcome all the obstacles he had interposed.

Many were the adventurous and valorous knights and nobles and princes who were drawn to try their fortune at this high enterprise. But none could find any way into the castle, and they all came back crest-fallen, without having effected any thing.

At last came three brothers, who though but simple knights and poor of estate, yet were of high and noble lineage, and of higher and nobler courage. They no sooner heard Clotaldo's heralds pronounce this embassy in their country, which was Denmark, than they set out to try whether they might not be fortunate enough to deliver the three princesses from the enchanted tower.

First they came to Clotaldo and told him their purpose, who ordered that every thing they asked for should be given them for their assistance; so the two elder brothers asked for mettled horses and shining arms; but the youngest brother said all he wanted was a waggon and two oxen, with provisions for several days, an immeasurably long rope, some long nails, and a powerful hammer. Whatever each asked for he received.

The two elder brothers set off very confidently on their dashing steeds, and in a very short time arrived at an eminence overlooking the castle; but to their dismay they found it was ten times as high as they had ever imagined; and then, too, that it had neither door nor window, nor the smallest break of any kind in the massive walls.

"How can we ever get into a place like this?" said the eldest brother, looking very foolish.

"It looks to me very like a fool's errand," said the other.

"I vote we go back," answered the first.

"The best thing we can do," rejoined the second.

"And the sooner the better," continued the first.

"Here we go, then," added the second; and they turned their horses' heads round, like chicken-hearted men, and galloped back by the way they had come.

They had not gone far when they met their younger brother toiling along in his cart.

"It is no use your going to the castle," said the eldest brother: "we have been there, and find the game is impossible."

“We shall see,” answered the youth.

“But I tell you the thing can’t be done!” ejaculated the second.

“When I go out to do a thing I don’t go back without doing it,” said the youngest, quietly. “But as there is a considerable distance to be got over yet, I am going to have some dinner: you had better do the same.”

The other brothers, who had not had the foresight to bring any provisions themselves, were very glad of the invitation, so they all sat down and dined. When they had done, the youngest brother set out to continue his journey in his waggon, and the two horsemen were going to pursue theirs homewards, when suddenly one of them said to the other, “Suppose we stop and see what he does; may-be he will succeed, and then, as we are two to one, who knows but that we may be able to overcome him, and take the merit to ourselves?”

“Well thought!” exclaimed the eldest, heartily; and they turned their horses’ heads again, and followed behind the cart; telling their younger brother they had come to see if they could not be of any service in case his temerity led him into danger.

The younger had overheard their conversation; but he saw no way of getting rid of the brothers, who were well armed and well mounted; so he could but continue his way and trust to his wits to save him from their intentions afterwards. As he rode along he measured the vast height of the castle with his eye, and laid all his plans in his head. Arrived under the wall, he bound the nails and hammer into his girdle, and, tying one end of the rope round his arm, proceeded to scale the wall of the castle.

The brothers sat on their horses watching him, expecting every minute to see him fall to the ground; but on he went, steady and lithe, with the tenacity of a cat or squirrel, till he got so high that he looked like a little speck, and at last was lost from sight altogether.

Scarcely had he attained the battlements of the wall, and trod a few steps upon the flat, than three most beautiful nymphs, who seemed more divine than human, came out to meet him. At first he was so dazzled with the sight of their exceeding beauty, that he could not speak, but stood gazing at them while they said, —

“Who art thou, young man, who ventur’st to profane the decorum of this *alcázar*⁵, the abode of three virgin princesses? With thy life must thou expiate this temerity.”

“To die at your command, fair ladies, and in your sight, would be joy enough for me,” stammered forth the young knight; “but yet I have first a work to accomplish, which is your liberation. So tell me now, what is it I have to do to set you free?”

“Since thou art so stout-hearted and so well-spoken,” responded the sisters, “we will even tell thee what thou hast to do, and great shall be thy reward. Know, then, in this castle are three noble horses, and thou hast to take one hair from the tail of each, for in this lies the spell which binds us. But they are fierce and shy of approach; nevertheless fear not if they even breathe out fire upon thee; for if thou art bold, thou shalt succeed.”

The young knight went out to meet the three enchanted horses without fearing or flinching; and though they breathed out fire upon him, he took the three hairs from their tails, and destroyed the spell of the princesses.

Then he bound the cord round the first princess, and with much care and address he lowered her gently and safely on to the ground below. He did the same with the second. But when he would have parted from the third, she turned and thanked him with gentle words, and said, —

“Take this necklace, noble youth, which for both workmanship and power has no other like to it on earth. Never part from it, and may-be that one day it may deliver thee from as great strait as that from which thou hast delivered us.”

With that she waved her hand to him, and prepared to descend as her sisters had done.

⁵ Moorish castle.

As soon as the young knight had watched her reach the ground in safety, he turned to drive the strong nails into the tower to make fast the rope for his own descent; but scarcely was he thus occupied than his wicked brothers, seeing the moment of their advantage had arrived, gave a violent pull to the rope, and down it came, leaving him no means of escape!

Then they made haste and carried off the princesses, riding on without stopping till they came to the king.

Clotaldo, seeing his daughters free, never doubted but that those who had brought them were their true deliverers, and therefore loaded them with honour and favour, and married them to the two elder princesses. It was in vain that the youngest princess tried to explain the deceit: there were four living witnesses against her; for the elder princesses took the part of their promised husbands, and said that the long imprisonment had turned their younger sister's mind, and no one listened to her. So there was a great rejoicing, and a noble marriage-feast; but she sat in her chamber apart, weeping.

Meantime the youngest brother was left full of terror and dismay on top of the exceeding high tower, with no means of ever getting away from it, and, which was worst of all, with the prospect of never again seeing his little princess. He did not care about the others, but she who alone had thanked him, and that so prettily, and who had had a thought for his future welfare in giving him the splendid necklace, he could not give *her* up.

He took it out and looked at it: it was indeed of curious workmanship, and the bright gems sparkled like rays of hope. He kissed it because it reminded him of the kind little princess, but he could not see how it was to help him; so after gazing at it for a long time, he at last wrapped it up, and put it by in his bosom again. But as he continued to think of all that had lately taken place, he remembered how the sisters had spoken of the wonderful qualities of the horses who held their spell, and at last he began to wonder whether with their aid he could not make his escape.

To remain where he was was certain death, and a shameful, pusillanimous death to boot. He was never wanting in clear thoughts, or fair courage to execute them, and a plan now ripened rapidly in his mind which he determined to put into execution.

"If thou art bold, thou shalt succeed." The words rang in his ears, and seemed an omen of good fortune. He went back to the place where he had found the horses before: there they stood, all three abreast of each other, as if waiting a word of command from him.

Resolutely the young knight sprang on the back of the centre one, and gathering the floating manes of the three in his hand, all started together, and with one fearful bound, which seemed to shiver the tower to atoms behind them, they dashed off the battlements, the wild career through the air depriving him of the use of his senses.

When he came to, he found himself lying on the ground in a wild wood so full of thick trunks of withered trees that daylight hardly penetrated. He walked on for a long lonesome way, till at last he came to a place where cattle were feeding. Of the herd tending them he asked where he was, and found he was on the borders of Clotaldo's kingdom; "but," said the herd, "you are not of this people, by your dress and speech."

"No, friend," replied the young knight; "I am a poor foreigner, who am come out to seek fortune, and she has reduced me to a sad plight. But I have one favour to ask, which is that you will exchange clothes with me."

The cattle-herd was pleased enough at the proposal, and asked no further questions. He had soon arrayed himself in the knight's fine clothes, and he in turn found a complete disguise in the rough clothing of undressed skins which made up the peasant's attire.

Thus he walked on eight hundred leagues, begging alms to sustain his life by the way; and with all the fatigues, and privations, and hardships he had endured, he was quite altered, so that his brothers would not know him again. That he might appear still more different from his former self,

he assumed the manners of a half-silly person, and took the name of Juan; and all the people called him “*Juanillo el loco*”⁶.”

All this time Clotaldo had been urging his youngest daughter that she should marry like her sisters, but she never would look at any of the princes he named to her. She had determined to belong to no one but the young knight her deliverer, and she felt all confidence in his valour, that he would find means to make his way to her. At last, one day, when the king had been persuading her very urgently to follow his counsel, she brought out a drawing she had made in secret of the necklace she had bestowed on her knight, and told her father that when he could find any one who could produce a necklace like that, she would be his wife.

The king was very glad to have her consent on any conditions, and forthwith set clever draughtsmen to copy the drawing, and sent heralds abroad over the whole earth, to proclaim that whoever could make the necklet to the required pattern should have the hand of his daughter. But the workmanship was so fine, and the setting of the jewels so cunningly devised, that no goldsmith on earth could produce it.

It was just about the time that Juan reached the kingdom that all the people were full of excitement about this subject, and thus it came to his ears also. So when he heard the conditions the princess had made, and remembered her words when she gave him the necklet – “that the earth could not produce such another” – he was beside himself for joy, for he knew that she was waiting for his return.

However, not to betray himself too soon, he continued his silly ways, and, as if he knew nothing of the matter, asked to see the design. The guards and people told him to go away, but the king was a very just man, and said there was no exception named in his decree, and therefore whoever applied must be allowed a fair trial.

“But,” he added, when he saw the rough, uncouth form of the suppliant, “remember, fellow, if you fail, your throat shall pay the forfeit of your impudence.”

The feigned Juanillo played his part perfectly; he gave his assent by a silly grin, and a nod of his head to all the remonstrances used to dissuade him; and at last they shut him up in a tower, with a furnace and crucible, and much gold, and priceless diamonds, and emeralds, and rubies.

So the knight let them fasten the gate as if he were going to set to work in earnest. And at the end of three days, when they came to see what he had done, he brought out the original necklet; and every one was in amazement, because all could see that it presented the perfect image of the design.

When the princess heard by the cries of all the people that some one had succeeded in producing the necklet, she came forward to see who it was; and in an instant, through all the disguise, she knew her deliverer again; and she turning to the king said, —

“Well, the conditions are fulfilled: I am ready to do your bidding!”

Her father was amazed at her readiness to marry the rough, silly man Juanillo appeared, and tried all he could to dissuade her; but, as she would not change her mind, there was no excuse for him to go back from the word plighted by his proclamation. So the princess and the knight were married; though Clotaldo was so ashamed of the bridegroom, he had the ceremony performed in the quietest way, and assigned them a little house outside the walls of the town to live in, where no one should see or hear any thing more of them.

Clotaldo had had a very prosperous career hitherto; but the troubles of life were beginning to press round him, and the first trouble he had was failing eyesight. His physicians could not understand the malady, or do any thing for him; and at last he became quite blind. In despair at the loss of his sight, he sent into all countries to call together the wisest mediciners; but none could help him; till one day an ancient man appeared, who said that the only remedy for his case was the water of a fountain

⁶ Silly Johnny.

flowing out of a sharp rock in the mountains of Sclavonia; but that it was a perilous journey to fetch it, on account of the fierce beasts inhabiting the surrounding country.

As there was no one with sufficient courage to run the great risks, the king called his two sons-in-law, and said, as they had been so valiant in overcoming the spells of the great castle, they could doubtless help him now; and that they would not shrink from the perils of the journey, which was to procure the means of restoring his sight.

The knights did not dare to show any hesitation, as it would have betrayed their former deception. So they set out on the journey, but with heavy hearts, and plotting as they went what excuse they could make for coming back without success.

But Juanillo, the moment he had heard the old physician's sentence, had taken counsel with his princess, and at her bidding went out into the wilderness, and called one of the enchanted horses, and vaulting on to him, sped away like a whirlwind. After passing through ten thousand perils, he filled his flask with the water of the fountain which sprang out of the sharp rock in the mountains of Sclavonia, and made the best of his way back again.

As he had nearly reached home he met his two brothers riding out, looking very doleful and in great perplexity. When they saw him speeding along like the wind, they were very curious to know who he was and whence he came; so they called to him to stop and tell them. And he answered, courteously, —

“I have been to fill my flask with water which flows over the sharp rock in the mountains of Sclavonia!”

When they heard that, their first impulse was to spring upon him and take the prize from him; but when they saw his impetuous horse, and reflected that he had come back unscathed from all the perils of the adventure, they perceived who he was, and feared to measure their strength against his, therefore they assumed a different tone. Instead, however, of making up for past faults, and cheerfully acquiescing and rejoicing in his success, they still followed their selfish aim, but in a more covert way than they had at first meditated. Thus they offered him any bribe he liked to name if he would give them the flask of water.

Juanillo gave them the flask, but refused their bribes, naming as his only guerdon two golden pears which the king had given them off a tree in his garden, which only produced two every year, and which none might pluck but he.

The bargain was thus settled. Juanillo returned to tell all to the little princess; and the two knights bore the flask exulting to the king, and vaunting the deeds of valour by which they pretended they had won it, taking care to say nothing about poor Juanillo.

The king recovered his sight, and loaded them with rewards and honours. But before long he was stricken with another infirmity: gradually his hearing began to fail; and getting no relief from his physicians, he very soon became quite deaf. A proclamation of great reward attracted the learned in the medical art again to his court, and among the men of science came once more the old doctor who had given effectual counsel before.

In the deserts of Albania, he said, under the shade of the highest mountains, live, among their many wild beasts, a race of lionesses, more fierce than the rest of their kind: if any one can by artifice procure the milk of one of these, without injury to her life, that would be the sovereign remedy.

Juanillo no sooner heard the sentence than he went out into the wilderness and called another of the enchanted horses, and started off on him like the wind, to the desert of Albania; and, armed with the words of magic the little princess had taught him, he could get up to the lioness without being perceived by her, and fill his flask with her milk.

Meantime the king had called his two elder sons-in-law, and not doubting that, as they had acquitted themselves so well before, they would be able to accomplish this feat also, despatched them to the mountains of Albania. They, suspecting that their brother would do the work as before, set out with less concern than on former occasions, and only plotted how they should cajole him this time.

Nor had they advanced many leagues when they met him coming back at full speed on his brave steed, and the bottle of lioness' milk in a flask at his girdle.

"Good morrow, friend!" they cried, as he came near: "whence ride ye, so fast and so early?"

"I have been to the desert of Albania, to fetch the lioness' milk to bathe the ears of our good king," replied the younger brother.

"At what price do ye put it, friend?"

"Nay, this I sell *not*."

"But we have come out to fetch it, and how shall we return to the king without it?" And they pleaded so wheedlingly, that Juanillo was fain to give them the flask, but exacting this time the penalty of an ear of each of them.

The condition was hard, but the game was desperate now. If they returned empty-handed this time, it was an acknowledgment of their perfidy before; and after all it was a much less injury than might have befallen them in the deserts of Albania if they had pursued the journey, or from the anger of the king and the populace if they had remained at home. So they combed the hair over their ears to conceal the loss, and pushed their way home to the king with their trophy, while Juanillo returned to his little princess.

Clotaldo recovered his hearing by the use of the lioness' milk. But a direr danger awaited him now; for a powerful neighbouring sovereign suddenly declared war against him, while he was quite unprepared. His prowess in battle in his younger days it was which had procured him the throne; but now, in his declining years, he feared to take the field, not through any coward fear for his life, but lest the glory of his country should be tarnished by his waning energy. So he called his two sons-in-law to him, and said that their valour, which had been proved in so many enterprises, had now a signal occasion for manifesting itself; and he gave them the command of Captains-General of his forces, and sent them out as if they had been his own sons, to meet the foe.

This order gave them greater trepidation than any of the preceding, for there appeared no way out of it. How was Juanillo himself to fight the battle for them without an army? and how could they transfer the command of the army to him without betraying all?

While they were going along, then, sad of heart, to put themselves at the head of the forces and trust to good luck to extricate them from the fray, they met Juanillo, coming along at fiery speed, with two of the enemy's standards planted on his stirrups, and they saw by the colours that the enemy had been laid low. For at the first threat of war he had taken soft leave of the little princess, had gone out into the wilderness and called the third of the enchanted horses, and with him had ridden with such impetuosity against the enemy, imitating Saint Jago, that he had put the whole army to flight, and borne off their banners as trophies.

But the brothers talked and persuaded him, with soft words, into giving these up also; and the payment he exacted this time was, that they should let him brand them on the shoulder as if they had been his slaves of war.

After this he returned home to the little princess, and his brothers carried the banners to the king's feet. When the king saw this fresh testimony to their merit, his indignation rose high against his third son-in-law, whom he supposed to be living in shameful indolence, and doing nothing for the honour of the dynasty and nation. So he pronounced a decree banishing him from his kingdom, and forbidding him ever to appear before him again. The brothers, who had always lived in fear that their treachery would come out some day, upheld him in his intention, as they thought they would breathe easier when he was removed to a distance.

Now Juanillo had been very forbearing and very generous all this time, but this was rather too much. He could not bear that his little princess should be banished from her friends and country without any fault; and she, too, represented to him how sad it would be for the people when the old king died, if they were to live under the governance of the two wicked brothers. So Juanillo went up to the king, and begged him with great humility on his knees that he would grant him one last

favour before he went away for good and all; and that was, to have a famous banquet on the last day, and invite all the kingdom to it.

The good king granted the request; and a day was appointed when all the great men and small of the kingdom met for a famous banquet.

Simple Johnny dressed himself for this occasion in his true character. His massive chestnut curls were parted on his lofty forehead, and every one was struck by the dignity with which his broad shoulders carried the crimson and ermine mantle; in fact, few suspected that it was Simple Johnny at all, and the most inclined to believe it were still doubtful. But he, as one who had a great duty to perform, went up with earnest mien to the king, and laying down the two pears and the ears before him said, —

“The time is come, O King, to make known the truth to thee. Long have I suffered in secret; but if my silence is to occasion my banishment and that of my dear wife, I must make known that it was I who delivered the princesses, I who fetched the water from the sharp rock in the mountains of Slavonia, I who brought the milk of the lioness from the deserts of Albania, I who overcame thine enemies and brought home the two standards. Here are my proofs; and if more are needed, bid the princes uncover their shoulders, and they shall be found branded as my slaves taken in war.”

The good king was much astonished at this revelation; but now something came back to him of what the little princess had said, and how he had thought her mad for the story. And when he had investigated all patiently, and was convinced of the truth of Juanillo’s statement, he was full of indignation, and commanded the bad brothers to be put to death, and his daughters banished for their silent participation in their infamy. To Simple Johnny he gave a very hearty embrace in the sight of the people, and not only made him heir to all the kingdom, but associated him with himself in the government, beginning from that very day.

Simple Johnny, however, would not allow his brothers to be put to death, but only deprived them of the right to reign, which might have brought misery on the kingdom, and appointed them houses and money that they might spend the rest of their days in harmless retirement.

TURIAN AND FLORETA

There lived once in very ancient times in Spain a young prince, the Infante Turian. He was a very beautiful youth, and the only child of his parents, King Canamor and his consort Leonela: they were thus tempted to indulge him very much, and, as we should say, to spoil him; in fact, he was allowed to have every thing he asked for, and when any present or novel article of merchandise was brought to the palace, if it happened to take his fancy, he got into a way of expecting to have it for his own, and no one thought of thwarting him.

One day there came a foreign merchant to the court, who, instead of having a train of mules heavily laden with varieties of his wares to suit all tastes and fancies, was quite alone and unattended, and himself bore his whole stock. It consisted, indeed, of but one little parcel easily stowed away in the folds of his cloak. The servants were scandalized at such a mean apparatus, and would have driven him away without letting him have a chance of addressing himself to their masters, telling him if he had nothing more to show than the contents of one little case, it was not worth while to trouble them. It was in vain the merchant urged that what he had to show was of priceless value, and in itself alone was worth all the mule-loads of other merchants put together: they held it for idle raving, and bid him begone.

It happened, however, that the Infante Turian was coming home at the moment, and hearing the altercation, his curiosity was piqued to know what it could be that could be counted so precious. He had horses, and arms, and trappings, and gay clothes, and games, and baubles of every sort, and he had wearied of them all. He had acquired them without labour, and he consequently held them without esteem. Now there appeared a chance of some quite fresh sensation; moreover, the merchant himself had a strange air which fascinated him; again, his accent was different from any he had heard before, and suggested that he brought the productions of some climate which had not yet laid its stores at his feet. Proud, too, to show his power in setting the man free from the importunate scorn of the servants, he ordered them to stand back, and then gave the strange merchant permission to open his store.

Assuming an air of mystery, which excited the young prince still more, the merchant, however, now told him he must take him to some private recess apart, as what he had to show must be seen only by royal eyes. The prince accepted all conditions in his eagerness, and was indeed rather flattered by this one. As soon as they were quite alone, the strange merchant placed before him a portrait. Yes, nothing but a portrait in a very simple frame! But it was *such* a portrait that it quite turned poor Turian's head. He had never before dreamt of any thing so beautiful; he went into ecstasies at first sight, kissed it, gazed at it, paced up and down the hall with it, raved about it, and grew almost frantic, when the strange merchant at last went up to him and said it was time for him to go home, and he must have the portrait to pack up again.

"Pack up again!" cried the prince: "why, I buy it of you at triple, tenfold, an hundredfold its weight in gold."

The merchant assured him it could not be sold; he required, indeed, a considerable price for suffering it to be seen, but part with it he could not, on any conditions whatever.

The prince threw his purse to him, and ordered him in no measured terms to depart while the way was clear, otherwise he would set on him the myrmidons from whom he had but now released him.

The strange merchant quietly picked up the purse, counted out conscientiously the sum he had named as the price for the sight of the picture, and laid down the rest; deliberately stowed away his fee in his belt, and at the same time took from it, unperceived by the prince, a little box of powder; then suddenly turning round, he scattered its contents over his face, producing instant insensibility. Prepared for the effect, he caught him in his arms, and laid him gently on a bench, and then, possessing himself of his picture, he stealthily left the castle, unperceived by all.

When the Infante Turian came to himself, some hours afterwards, of course pursuit was vain; nor could any trace be learnt of the way the stranger had taken.

The prince was furious that, at least, he had not learnt some clue as to the original of the portrait, but there had not been time for a word of inquiry. And when he set himself to recall every detail, all that would come back to his mind was, that on the blue embroidery of the white drapery which veiled the matchless form, he had made out in curious characters the name Floreta. Armed with this only guide, he determined to roam the world till he discovered the real beauty whose ideal had so absorbed him.

King Canamor and Queen Leonela were inconsolable at the idea of their only son leaving them on so wild an errand; but they had never taught him obedience and self-control, and they could not move him now. All their persuasions could obtain was his consent to be accompanied by the *Conde Dirlos*, an ancient counsellor of great wisdom and authority in the kingdom, who would know how to procure him assistance by land and sea, in whatever enterprise he might be minded to take in hand. But it was stipulated that he was to control him in nothing: simply watch over him, and further his designs, so as to save him from fatigue and danger.

On they wandered for a year and a day, meeting many adventures and incurring many perils; but no one knew the name of Floreta. Wherever they went it was still a foreign name. At last – it was just the day year that the strange merchant had brought the portrait – their travels brought them to a steep mountain-path, which led down to the sea. At a turn of the winding road, just below them, a tall figure appeared, wrapped in a long cloak, and wearing a high-peaked cap. The prince gave a bound of joy, and shouted to the figure to halt. It paid no heed, however. “Stop! or you are dead!” shouted the prince, at the same time pointing an arrow with unerring aim at a spot a little in advance of the moving figure. As if conscious of what was going on, though he never moved his head, the strange merchant – for it was he, and the prince had instantly recognized him – stood still for an instant, as the bolt rattled in the ground on which he would have stood had he pursued his way three steps further, and then passed on unheeding. The prince shouted more madly than before; but to no purpose; and in another moment the wind of the road had taken him out of sight.

Madly the prince spurred his horse in pursuit, and reached the turn; but no living form was to be seen. The rocks now resounded with the cries and imprecations with which he adjured the magician – for such he now rightly deemed him – to stand forth. At last, when he was silent from sheer exhaustion, a low but commanding voice from the depths of a neighbouring cave bade him listen, but, as he valued his life, advance not.

“Speak!” cried the prince; “nor torture me with longer suspense. What must I do to find Floreta? I am prepared to go to the end of the world, to undergo any hardship, any torture, to find her; but find her I am determined: if you refuse your help, then by help of some other; so you see it is idle to turn a deaf ear.”

“By none other help but mine,” answered the magician, “*can* you find Floreta; so your threats are vain. But if I had not meant you to see her, I should not have shown you the portrait at first, for I knew its influence could not be other than that it has exercised. I am going to instruct you how to reach her; but first you must give me my guerdon.”

“Name it; ask what you will,” interposed the impetuous prince; “ask my kingdom if you like; but keep me not in suspense.”

“I only ask what is reasonable,” answered the magician; “the real is worth a thousandfold the representation;” and he named a price equivalent to a thousand times the sum he had originally received.

Without so much as waiting to reply, Turian turned to *Conde Dirlos* and told him now was the time to fulfil his father’s behest by accomplishing this requirement, and begged him to raise the money without an instant’s loss of time.

The count remonstrated in vain, and in vain represented the miseries he would be inflicting on the people by requiring, in so sudden a manner, the levy of so large a sum. Turian, blinded by his passion, bid him save his words, as nothing could change his purpose; and the king's orders to obey him having been unconditional, *Conde Dirlos* set out with a heavy heart to comply.

Ten days of anxious suspense during his absence were spent by the prince in wandering over the rugged declivities of the coast: the ardour of his excitement demanded to be fed with deeds of daring and danger. When he was not so occupied, he was seated panting on the topmost crags, scouring the whole country with his eager glance to descry the first impression of the return of the count, with the means of pursuing his desperate resolve.

The day came at last. And afar off, first only like so many black specks, but gradually revealing themselves as *Conde Dirlos* on his faithful steed, and a long file of heavily-laden mules, came the anxiously expected train. And now he never left his point of observation; but cursed the sluggish hours, as he watched the team now steering over the sandy plain, which seemed interminable in expanse, unmeasured by landmarks; now toiling backwards and forwards up the zig-zagged steep, with provoking seeming of being further off one hour than the last, as at each wind they turned upon their steps; now detached-liked spectres against the sky, as they crossed from one reach of the lofty sierra to the next.

All things have an end, even Turian's anxious suspense; and as the count at last neared the magician's cave, he descended at break-neck pace to meet him.

"There is the price," said the count, in sad and solemn accents; "but before rendering it out of your hands, stop and consider it;" and as he spoke he removed from the treasure the brilliant red and yellow cloths, the royal colours of Spain, with which it was covered. "Here, from each province of your father's dominions, is the due proportion of the tribute you have demanded. See – will you spend it so?"

The prince darted forward to glance at the goodly sight of so much gold, but drew back with horror.

What could he have seen to turn his flushed cheeks so deadly pale?

"Count!" he cried, choking with fury, "what have you brought to mock me? This is not coin. You have brought me tears, burning tears, instead of gold."

"It is all the same," replied the count; "I saw you were infatuated, and I brought the money in this form, that the sight might warn you of what you are doing, and by its sad horror arrest you. There is time to return it back into the bosom of those from whom it has been wrung, and no harm will have been done. But if you persist, you will find the magician will take them for current coin."

"Quite so!" chimed in the voice from the cave; "it is the money I like best. But I cannot stand dallying thus: if the treasure be not handed over at once, the bargain is at an end, and you never hear of me again."

It only wanted this to quench any little spark of pity and misgiving which the old count's judicious stratagem might have awakened. So without further loss of time the prince called to the magician to come forth and take the spoil.

He was not slow to comply, and taking a handful of the weird currency out of each mule-load, rang it on the rock, where it sounded like the clanking of a captive's chains.

"That is good," he said in a satisfied tone, when he had concluded his scrutiny. "Now for my part of the bargain. I am not of those who fail because I am paid beforehand: you will find me as good as my word, and even better; for I will supply an item of the bargain which you, impetuous youth, never thought to stipulate for, though the most important of all. I will not only instruct you how to see Floreta, I will give you moreover the means whereby, if she pleases you, you can take her captive and bear her away."

"Nay, interrupt me not," he continued, as Turian, nettled at the exposure of his want of diplomacy, was about to declare that he had never thought of any other means to captivate her being

required but his own smile and his own strong arm; “I must begin, and have but time to complete my directions. You see yon castle on a rock out at sea;” and as his long bony finger pointed westward, there seemed to be traced against the sky the form of a royal castle at about three days’ journey, which Turian, who had for ten days been beating about the coast, could have sworn was not to be seen there before. Nevertheless, fascinated by the magician’s commanding manner, he durst say nothing but a murmur of assent.

“Then that is your haven; take ship and steer for it. When you reach the land throw down this token,” and he gave into his hand a fine coil of silken chains; “follow its leadings till it take you to Floreta, and if she please you, cast it round her, and she is yours.”

As he spoke he disappeared from sight, with the mules and their burden.

Turian now once more reminded *Conde* Dirlos of his father’s command, and bid him provide him with the swiftest galley on all the coasts of the kingdom, manned with the stoutest rowers, and that with the utmost speed.

If the wise old count shrunk from the former mission, his horror was but the greater at this one. He reminded the prince that when the king had given his consent to the adventure, he had not contemplated any other than a loyal undertaking, such as a noble prince might entertain: he would never have trusted him on one of this nature.

Turian felt the force of the reproach, but lacked the strength of character to command himself. Hurried on by his uncontrolled desire, he bid the old man remember that the command to fulfil his orders was quite unconditional, and there was no limit whatever named.

The count owned this was unfortunately true, and as he could prevail nothing by argument, set himself to remedy the Infante’s headstrong wilfulness by making the journey as safe as possible. He not only insisted on having the galley examined as to its seaworthiness by the most experienced shipwrights, and selected the steadiest oarsmen to man the banks, but appointed a consultation of all the astronomers of the kingdom to name the day when they might be sure of safe passage, free from winds. It was pronounced that a storm was just then impending which would last ten days, and after that there would be ten days of fair weather, so that if they allowed ten days for their preparations, they would have time to make the journey and return in all security.

The delay seemed another age to the Infante; nevertheless he was now so near the accomplishment of his object that it passed swiftly enough in the enjoyment of the pleasure of anticipation. The count, too, found some relief to his anxieties in the fact that the storm came on at the predicted moment, giving him great confidence that the halcyon days predicted to succeed might be surely counted on.

They came duly; and a shout of admiration rose from the people on the shore as the gallant vessel moved out over the face of the blue, sunlit waters, which glittered as if showered over with every precious stone at each stroke of the countless oars. And those on board were equally entranced with the gorgeous sight as they seemed to soar along over the soft bosom of the crystal deep; and the noble outline of their native mountains, peak above peak, from the verdant slopes where the cattle browsed lazily, to the wild steeps where even the mountain goats ceased to find a footing, receded with ever-varying forms of beauty from their sight.

It was not on *these* that Turian’s eye rested. His glance was bent on the castle for which they were making, and his thoughts were bound up in the beauteous treasure within. Such confidence had he in the magician’s word, that he had laid his arms aside and held only the silken chain that was to be his guiding line to happiness; and toyed with it, thinking how he would throw it round the prized form of the portrait’s original, and how he would gaze on her when she was his.

While he was still wrapt in these thoughts they drew near to the mysterious shore, and every one was occupied in admiring the strength and noble proportions of the castle. But Turian had no thought but for the treasure it contained. Springing lightly on to the land, he lost no time in fulfilling the magician’s injunctions; and sure enough the chain uncoiled itself, and, wriggling with a serpent’s

motion, went straight before him to a gate in the castle wall. It was unlocked, and Turian, pushing it aside, gained entrance to a sumptuous garden, at one end of which was a shady arbour, and in a bank of perfumed roses Floreta herself lay asleep. How his heart beat at the sight! Just as she had seemed in the portrait; just as he had pictured her in his sleeping and waking dreams. Riveted to the spot, he stood contemplating her, as well he might, for her complexion was white as snow, or rather as pure crystal, and tinted as the fresh rose yet on the rose-tree⁷.

The cautious count, fearful of some ambush, had marshalled the crew of the galley into a guard to track his steps noiselessly and be ready in case of sudden attack. The play of light upon their arms passing in sudden reflection over the scene woke the Infante from his reverie, and roused him to action. The coiling silken links readily embraced Floreta's limbs, and such was their hidden power that, though she woke at the Infante's approach, she was powerless to resist or cry.

Thus he bore her to the galley, and the men having resumed their places on the rowers' banks, in silent order they pushed off unperceived by any one on the island, for it was the hour of the noontide rest.

But soon Floreta's maidens, coming to attend her rising, discovered her loss. The king her father and all the people quickly gathered their arms and ran wildly in every direction, till at last they saw the strange vessel making fast away, and they doubted not it was carrying off their princess, but they could only stand on the shore throwing up their arms and crying in powerless despair.

Turian had in the mean time removed the chain from his prize; and thus freed from the spell, Floreta, too, held out her arms towards her parents and countrymen, and cried unavailingly on them for help. Turian, incapable of contradicting her, yet incapable also of giving her up, contented himself with admiring her at a distance, and let her spend herself in lamentations at first; but when the good galleon had put sufficient distance between itself and the castle to destroy the freshness of the impression of parting, the Infante commanded his people to cast anchor that he might try his power of consoling her more at ease. And indeed, it was not long before his sweet words of admiration and his protestations of affection and devotion seemed to succeed in reconciling her to her situation; before long they were very good friends and very happy, and the sun shone and the sea sparkled, and nature smiled, and all seemed fair and bright.

Nevertheless the prudent old count had his misgivings. True, there were yet several more days of the promised calm before them, but he felt he should never be easy till he had his charge safe at home again; so he urged the Infante to give orders to put under way once more, and right glad was he to feel the bark moving towards the port and in good time to reach home before the next storm.

Nevertheless, —

Quando Dios quiere
En sereno lluve⁸,

says the proverb, and while they were singing and making merry, and dancing to amuse Floreta, suddenly the sky became overcast and the wind sprang up, and the waves dashed against the bulwarks, and instead of being able to row the vessel into port the oarsmen could hardly keep their seats. Then in the midst of their fright and horror and piteous cries for help, an ancient seaman stood up, and having commanded silence, harangued the crew, and told them that they might be sure the tempest was sent them because they had the strange damsel on board; that if they would save their lives they must bid defiance to the Infante's wishes, and take him from her and cast her into the sea. The danger to all was manifest and terrible; any way out of it was preferable to succumbing, so the old man found

⁷ Mirandola está mirandoQue bien era de mirar;Blanca es como la nieveY como lo claro cristal,Colorada como la rosaY como rosa de rosal.

⁸ If God so will, it may rain with a clear sky.

a willing audience. The dismayed count had but time to rush in to the Infante and tell him of the mutiny before the angry mariners had already burst into his presence. If they were for a moment staggered by pity at sight of the exceeding beauty of Floreta, and by Turian's agonized assurances that the fearful sacrifice would have no effect upon the storm, the old mariner's voice overruled their hesitation and rendered them pitiless as the blast.

Then at his command they tore the Infante from off Floreta, to whom he clung declaring that they should not destroy her without him, but that he would go down into the deep with her, and they bound him fast hand and foot and took Floreta, too full of terror to resist or cry, to throw her into the raging sea. But before they had completed the sacrifice, the cries of the prince, seconded as he was by the prudent old count, ever ready to second a middle course, prevailed, and instead of committing her to the deep, they set her on an island past which the bark was drifting, Turian thinking in his own mind that as soon as the fury of the storm was spent he should be able to induce them to put back and fetch her off.

The old seaman knew what was in his mind, and he knew that the work was but half done. He inveighed that the half-measure was useless; he predicted that the storm would not thereby be quenched. But it was too late to listen to him now: they were carried past the land where Floreta was; and it was beyond their efforts to go back to fulfil his purpose now. Meanwhile, as he had predicted, the tempest raged higher and higher; the oarsmen were powerless: but the bark drifted nearer and nearer home; and at last, just as a great wave dashed against it and broke it up, they were brought just so near to land that they could swim to shore. One young and vigorous oarsman took charge of the old count, who was rendered more unfit for the feat by dismay at the ill-success of his mission even than by the weakness of his age. But none looked after the Infante, for he was known to be the expertest swimmer of all the country round.

It was not till the hull had heeled over and gone down that they remembered they had bound him hand and foot, and he could not escape. And so he, who was the cause of all, alone was lost.

THE BLOOD-STAIN OF THE ALCÁZAR OF SEVILLE

Of all the beautiful things which are to be seen at Seville, there is perhaps none which engrosses the attention as the alcázar – so called because built after the fashion of a Moorish palace. To the traveller unacquainted with the East it affords a practical realization of the famed elaboration of Moorish magnificence. It is not very certain whether in it Pedro the Cruel erected a new foundation, or restored an old one remaining from the time of the Moorish occupation; but he certainly left nothing wanting to make it the worthy habitation of one of the most powerful monarchs of the time⁹. The present century has not been wanting to the example thus set; and by dint of the artistic care bestowed upon it, its beauties shine now as brilliantly as at the moment of their first completion. The gardens, with their groves of plantains, datunas, tunales, myrtles, box-trees, and oranges, may appear stiff to an English eye; but be there in the summer, and you readily realize the luxury of paths so contrived as to be always in the shade, and which, when this even is too hot, can be cooled down by turning on a flow of icy water over the tiles which pave them.

It is in the interior, however, that the greatest luxuriance of imagination has been displayed. It is all one blaze of dazzling tints, such as, one would think, no one but some of Aladdin's genii could have produced. The walls are panelled with a delicate embroidery-like fretwork of every gorgeous hue; the roofs cieled with seeming liquid gold, suspended in burnished drops. It is the dazzling image of all one has dreamt of Byzantine or Persian colouring; it is like being in the fairy palace which was all one large prism. It might have been imagined by mad genii, and executed by frantic fairies. It might be the laboratory where tints are prepared for rainbows and tropical sunsets, or where the painting of peacocks and butterflies, humming-birds, and exotic flowers is devised. Or it might be the jewel-storehouse of some thrice-rich monarch, to whom emeralds and rubies are plentiful as figs and peaches, and all in cabinets of wrought gold.

Amid all this splendour there is one sad, dark spot, which has outlived the wear of five centuries, to stand a witness of the judgment of Heaven overtaking the tyrant and the oppressor. Pedro the Cruel was the only Christian monarch who ever indulged himself with such a nest; and I fear the life he led within it was not what that of a Christian monarch ought to be. Not to speak of his other faults, his thirst for blood was so great as to be surpassed only by the atrocities ascribed to Nero. Whoever displeased him in any way was summarily put to death, and that sometimes amid cruel tortures, without form of trial.

An old ballad has lately been found, which arranges in rhyming order the whole catalogue of names and qualities of the distinguished people whose lives were forfeited by his hand, or at his behest, which served the people to perpetuate their detestation of his character. There was Don Garcilaso, and his little brothers Don Juan and Don Diego; the Infante of Aragon, his cousin; Don Fernando, a knight of high renown; the noble youth Don Luis de Albuquerque; and Peralvarez Osorio, who had injured him in nothing. Then the Queen of Aragon, to whom his father was brother; and Doña Blanca, his own wife; Doña Juana and Doña Isabel, high ladies both, of the Asturias; and Gutierrez of Toledo, and the Archbishop his brother; Don Iñigo d'Orozco, who fought him in the field; and Don Suero, the good prelate, Archbishop of Santiago, and also Bermejo de Granada. And besides these many more, both hidalgos and caballeros.

Thus at last his wickedness outgrew the people's patience; and when the good Henry of Trastamare rose up against him, and provoked him to fight, and slew him, they all hailed the act as the execution of the sentence of Divine Justice, and acclaimed Henry as their deliverer and their ruler in his stead; for Alonso, the son of his unblessed union with Maria Padilla, whom he had forced the people to acknowledge for his successor, had been carried off by sudden death soon after; and though

⁹ It was completed 1364.

the daughter of his lawful marriage had married our own John of Gaunt, all his reputation, and that of the Black Prince his father, could not outweigh their disinclination for a foreign king.

With regard to the mode of Pedro the Cruel's death, the more credited account is that his end was an episode of the siege of Montiel, where he had sought to hide himself from the victorious pursuit of Henry de Trastamare. Local tradition loves to think it found him out with poetical justice, and left its stain in the very hall which had been the scene of his wanton excesses; where others had fallen at his command, and whence the decree had gone forth for the relentless execution of his victims.

THE ADVENTURES OF DOÑA JOSEFA RAMIREZ Y MARMOLEJO

Doña Josefa Ramirez was the only child of noble parents of Valencia. She grew up in every virtue, and joined the wisdom of a Minerva to the beauty of a Venus. She was hardly eighteen before various noble youths were contending for her good graces; but of them all the only one she favoured was Don Pedro de Valenzuela, who, though of noble lineage, yet did not possess the fortune or position that her parents thought should entitle him who wedded with the descendant of the illustrious houses of Ramirez and Marmolejo.

Little Doña Josefa did not think of all this; she was much attached to her boyish playmate, and hoped that as her parents were very fond of her she would one day win their consent to receive his attentions; in the mean time, she thoughtlessly listened with great delight when he came and sang a love song under her windows, and even, I am afraid, sometimes came to the *reja*¹⁰ to give him a coy look of thanks and encouragement.

One day, as the youthful Don Pedro de Valenzuela was thus pleasantly occupied, he had finished his song and was waiting to see if a pair of bright eyes would not come sparkling behind the *reja*, when, his thoughts being quite engrossed by this expectation, and his attention abstracted from every thing around him, he suddenly found himself attacked from behind by two men who were wrapt up in their cloaks and masked so that he could not recognize them, nor indeed had he time to think about it, for before he could even draw his sword they had stretched him dead upon the ground; he could only cry out Josefa's name, and expire.

Doña Josefa was thrilled with dread at the tone in which her name was uttered; it seemed to portend something dreadful, such as she had never known before. She flew to the window, and by what remained of the gloaming light, she saw her lover's body stretched lifeless on the ground, while the assassins had escaped without leaving a trace behind.

The terrible sight seemed to change Doña Josefa's nature: all her woman's weakness was quenched within her, and every thought bound up in the one determination of avenging the precious life which had been so cruelly sacrificed for love of her. She tore off her woman's gear with the indignation of an enraged lioness, and arrayed herself in a full cavalier's suit, with a *montera*¹¹ to cover her head and an ample cloak to hide her from scrutiny. Then she took a belt well furnished with arms, and a sword and blunderbuss to boot; and then a purse with two hundred doubloons; thus accoutred she wandered forth in quest of Don Pedro de Valenzuela's assassins, making her way in all haste out of Valencia, for she knew the assassins would not long have remained there.

Hiding herself in the mountains by day, and taking the most unfrequented paths by night, she wandered on till she came to Murcia, and there she resolved to take up her abode for some little time to rest, and also to learn what she might chance to hear.

Here, in her cavalier's dress, she walked about on the promenades, joined knots of speakers in the public *plazas*, and at night sat down at the card-tables and other places of resort, every where keeping her ears open to drink in any word any one might let fall about her lover's assassination. One night, as she was sitting at a table carelessly shuffling a pack of cards, she heard two gentlemen talking very earnestly, and some words they dropped made her strain all her attention to catch the thread of their discourse.

"Yes, they are gone on; I am sure of it; and some hours ago," asseverated the first speaker, as if he had been contradicted before.

¹⁰ Ornamented iron-work in front of the lower windows of Spanish houses.

¹¹ A warm hunting-cap, with flaps to cover the forehead and ears, capable therefore of serving, in some sort, as a disguise.

“To be sure,” rejoined the other, in a tone of yielding conviction; “it was not likely they should remain in the country. No doubt it is as you say.”

“Excuse me,” said Doña Josefa, approaching the speakers with a courtly bow, for she could restrain her curiosity no longer, “but I think you were speaking of some gentlemen of Seville... I am of Seville, and – ”

“Of Valencia,” politely rejoined the gentleman, fairly caught in the trap. Had Josefa said she was of Valencia, his mouth would have been sealed for fear of betraying secrets.

“Oh, indeed, of Valencia!” she continued, assuming a tone of disappointment; and then, after a moment’s pause, she added, as if indifferent, “I think you spoke as if concerned for some friends in trouble?”

“Oh, not *friends*,” answered the person addressed, with a slight shudder; “we had but the most distant acquaintance with them; but they called on us yesterday to ask us to help them out of a difficulty.”

“Ah! that is very often the way of the world,” replied Doña Josefa, for she felt she must keep the conversation going till she could get all the information she wanted, though scarcely seeing how to bring it to the right point without exciting suspicions. “I’ll warrant now it was a regular piece of Valencian roguery¹²; they came with some pitiful pretence, begging, I’ll be bound; and I dare say at this moment are laughing at the ease with which their doleful story loosed your purse-strings; ha, ha, ha!”

The silvery laugh and biting tone of the young cavalier stung the Murcians to the quick; it seemed a point of honour to justify themselves from the censure of having been cajoled. The friend who had all this time remained silent, not quite liking the freedom, but now completely reassured by the noble bearing, fair smooth brow, and perhaps also by the sad but winning glance of the young stranger, here joined in.

“You have a fine knowledge of the world, young friend, and such wise words do not often come from lips on which the hair is not yet grown. Nevertheless there was no deception on this occasion: I never saw men more blasted with fear and shame.”

“Ah!” pursued Josefa as carelessly as she could, for she saw she was now on the right track, “it is easy for a Valencian to assume a look of shame.”

“But, man, these were not men used to shame; these were true men and gentlemen of blood – blood as blue as any blood in Spain.”

“Pshaw! they told you so!” rejoined Josefa with an incredulous shrug, which she knew must bring out the names.

“Why it was no less than Don Leonardo and Don Gaspar Contreras!” broke in the other speaker.

“Don Leonardo and Don Gaspar Contreras!” ejaculated Josefa, this time hardly master of her contending emotions; yet knowing the importance of playing her part to the end, she added in a tone of thundering indignation, —

“And you can stand there and tell me that Don Leonardo and Don Gaspar Contreras came before you bowed with a look of shame, – to beg alms?”

“Even so, fair sir,” rejoined the Murcians; “and if you still have doubts you can go to Valencia, and seek for them; you will not find them there.”

“And pray, sir, why should I not find Don Leonardo and Don Gaspar Contreras in their noble *palacio* at Valencia?”

“Because they dare not show their faces there,” replied one.

“Because they are at this moment riding for their lives to the sea coast, and you would be more likely to find them at Cartagena,” exclaimed the other at the same moment.

¹² The Sevillians to the present day give a very bad character to the Valencians.

Josefa had now learnt pretty well all she desired to know; nevertheless, to make quite sure of her facts, she sat down again, pushing chairs towards the Murcians, and continued in a more pacific and friendly tone, —

“You must excuse me, gentlemen, if the idea of coupling shame with the name of Contreras came upon me as so strange and unaccountable a conjunction, that I could not bring myself to accept it at first; but I am fain to take it on your honourable testimony. But pray tell me, what *can* have happened to bring this about? I have a cousin married to a Contreras, and whatever affects the honour of their house affects my own. It must have been some terrible necessity reduced them to this plight.”

“The old story – jealousy working in ill-regulated minds!” answered the elder speaker. “It seems Valencia possesses some monster of beauty, which has turned the hearts of all her cavaliers.”

“Doña Josefa Ramirez y Marmolejo!” interposed the younger Murcian apologetically, as though he thought it a reproach not to have the name of the beauty of the day on the tip of his lips.

“Well, the young lady, it seems, preferred to every one else of Valencia a certain Don Pedro de Valenzuela – ”

Josefa had managed to preserve her composure, in spite of her emotion at hearing her attractions canvassed by the two strangers, but at mention of Don Pedro’s name the blood fairly left her cheeks. To hide her embarrassment, she dropped her glove and stooped to pick it up, till she had summoned the colour back.

“The other gallants,” continued the speaker, not heeding the interruption, “were the more nettled at this, that he was not of so high estate as they – ”

Josefa could hardly refrain from exclaiming that he was better than all of them put together; but she coughed and bit her lip, and by a supreme effort kept the tears out of her eyes.

“And when they found they were slighted, while he was allowed to come and strum night after night at the *reja*, they grew furious. None were more indignant than the two cousins Leonardo and Gaspar de Contreras. One night, as they were passing casually by Doña Josefa’s house, and saw Don Pedro standing under the window, basking in the smiles of the lady, while they had to wander by as unrecognized outcasts, their blood was up, and without reflection or premeditation, they set upon him there and then, without calling upon him to defend himself, and killed him like a – ”

“But what ails you, fair sir?” ejaculated the speaker, as he observed poor Josefa making vain efforts to look indifferent, and trembling from head to foot.

“Nothing, sir, thank you,” stammered Josefa bravely; “the wind is high to-night. With your permission I will e’en close this window.” The moment’s seclusion from the company, and the gasp of air thus gained, enabled her to appear once more a not too eager listener.

“I can now understand why the Contreras are running away like —*dogs*,” she replied, not without some little display of feeling, for she burned to bandy back against the assassins the epithet which, though it had not been breathed, had so nearly been applied to her lover.

A very little more talk elicited that the cousins expected to find a ship sailing from Cartagena in three days; in the mean time they were making the best of their way to the coast. Worn out with the long tension of suppressed emotion, Josefa was glad to retire as soon as there was a break in the conversation.

Next morning she purchased a horse, fleet as the wind, and arrived the same night at Cartagena; and here she once more set to work to find out the retreat of the assassins. In this, fortune again favoured her. For having placed her horse in a stable, and hired a room in the principal inn for herself, she sat down beside an open window, while she thought upon the plan to pursue. As she sat here, her attention was arrested by a conversation going on between two men seated under a leafy *parral*¹³, which effectually concealed her from their sight.

¹³ A spreading vine, trained along a horizontal trellis, so as to form a shady arbour; an unfailing adjunct to most houses in the south of Spain.

“Where are you going to-night, so finely arrayed?” inquired one of the voices.

“Where every one is going,” responded the other; “to the house of Don Juan Mancilla, for he gives a right noble banquet in honour of two guests he has staying with him, natives of Valencia. He is to give a representation of a comedy, and many other fine things.”

Doña Josefa held her breath, and leant further out of the window.

“Something I heard of their arrival yesterday morning,” rejoined the first voice. “But why all this haste? Methinks the comedy would have been the better got up for one or two days’ rehearsal.”

“Ah, but you see, the Valencians take ship at half-past twelve this very night,” replied the other; and then in a lower key, “They are even now running from Valencia for some charge of a duel there –”

“Hold, man, hold!” warily ejaculated the first voice; “who knows who may overhear you?”

Doña Josefa had overheard enough; her work now up to half-past twelve was but to learn the situation of Don Juan Mancilla’s house, and the way thence to the harbour; no difficult task, for Don Juan Mancilla’s was one of the first names in Cartagena; and near the landing-place she met a garrulous servant of the Contreras, who was easily led to speak of his masters’ movements. Between the two points lay an *alameda*, or promenade, planted with poplars, such as adorns the outskirts of every Spanish town, affording a most convenient spot for the rencontre for which she had now with beating heart to lie in wait.

The tress which on that last sad night she had severed from her lover’s fair young head, and which now alone remained of him who had been all to her, in her hand, she paced backwards and forwards under the pollard poplars, like a knight keeping watch before a sacred shrine. Her thoughts wrapt in the absorbing memories of the past, and the fantastic part fate had assigned to herself, she had taken no note of how the hours had sped by, and when the clocks chimed out the hour of mid-night, it came upon her as a sudden warning. Not many minutes more had elapsed, before she perceived two cavaliers advancing towards her, whom her eye, practised by long acquaintance, readily recognized as the game she had come so far to seek. Their loud talk, swaggering mien, lofty stature, and moreover the clanking of their swords as they walked, reminding that in Valencia the Contreras bore the reputation of the most accomplished fencers of all the country round, might have made a less resolute heart faint even then, and give up the enterprise. But Doña Josefa never flinched. With one foot firmly planted on the path, and resting on the other as a kind of prop, placed in position to support her against any attempt to thrust her aside, she stood firmly and calmly waiting their approach.

“Don Leonardo, and you, Don Gaspar Contreras!” she said, as soon as they had advanced within hearing, “know ye, who I am?”

“Another time, good friend,” said Don Leonardo impatiently, and tried to pass on.

“We are pressed, and have but time to join our ship,” said Don Gaspar; and he endeavoured, though not without courtesy, to make his way past her.

“You must hear me, Señores de Contreras,” rejoined Doña Josefa in a hollow voice; “and when you have heard me, you will never want a ship more.”

“Come, this is more than pleasantry!” exclaimed Don Leonardo, getting angry.

“Make way, good sir; you see we are pressed for time,” said Don Gaspar, more conciliatingly; for he felt it was no time for picking a quarrel.

“It is no pleasantry, indeed!” Doña Josefa had replied almost before he spoke; “but most serious earnest. Señores de Contreras, again I ask, Do you know me?”

“What does this trifling mean?” exclaimed Don Leonardo, hotly, and at the same time putting his hand on his sword.

“It means,” replied Josefa, calmly and solemnly – “It means that you are called to answer with your vile lives for the noble life of Don Pedro Valenzuela, whom you treacherously slew without so much as calling on him to draw. *My* sword is the sword of justice, not of the assassin; *yet* I call on you to defend yourselves, if you dare!”

“Good sir, you rave; we are not those you seek; and we know not who you are!” interposed Don Gaspar, putting his hand on Don Leonardo’s sword-arm, for he had already drawn.

“I have twice asked you if you do not know me,” answered Josefa. “Now, then, I tell you: I am Doña Josefa Ramirez y Marmolejo. Have I not a right to avenge the blood of Don Pedro Valenzuela?”

“Ho! ho! so brave anon, you would now make this pretence of womanhood a shield. Methinks your tongue knows not the timidity of woman, and that your arms are no woman’s toys,” blurted out Don Leonardo contemptuously, despite of Don Gaspar’s warnings.

“Draw! Don Leonardo,” commanded Josefa; “nor waste more time in words. I seek no quarter, nor – give any!”

“At you then!” exclaimed Don Leonardo, rendered furious by her impassibility, and breaking away from Don Gaspar’s hold.

Josefa awaited his onset firmly, her drawn sword extended in her hand, like a statue of the avenging angel. Don Leonardo rushing at her, blind with rage, thrust himself right upon her rapier, which pierced him through and through; and, before he had time to utter a cry, he fell a lifeless corpse at Don Gaspar’s feet.

Don Gaspar, who had no idea that there was any truth in Josefa’s declaration of her sex, felt no inclination to measure his sword against so successful an antagonist; but, in order not to appear to avoid the fray ignominiously, bent down and busied himself with the effort to remove the body of his cousin.

“It is your turn now, Don Gaspar!” said the avenging angel calmly, having just withdrawn her sword from the breast of her prostrate victim. “Stand on guard, for your hour has come!”

This confident assertion, and the conviction that the encounter could not be escaped, excited Don Gaspar almost to the same pitch of indignation as Don Leonardo had displayed, notwithstanding that he was by nature less irascible.

“Think not to find so easy a victory a second time!” he exclaimed.

“It matters little,” replied the lady calmly; “you have killed my life already, when you killed Don Pedro!”

While she was yet speaking, Don Gaspar had already rushed to the encounter; and she, standing with her trusty sword prepared to meet him, sent his body to measure the ground, and his soul to its account, after the same manner that she had served Don Leonardo.

Meantime the bandying of angry words and the clash of steel had not been unheard by the guests, who were even then traversing the *alameda*, as the banquet of Don Juan Mancilla broke up. Quickly as the contest had been carried through there was still time for many persons to assemble, and there was every chance of Josefa being caught and handed over to justice. All sank away, however, before the high and innocent glance of her flashing eyes and the noble mien, which stood surety hers had been no vulgar aim.

“The Sanctuary of S. Francis may yet be reached,” whispered an old nobleman, who perceived at a glance that the young stranger belonged to his order, which he had rather not see subjected to the ordeal of a public inquisition. “Here, boy, follow me. Courage!” he added, as he observed she had hardly energy left to move from the spot; “we shall soon be there.”

Doña Josefa, so courageous anon, felt palsied at the sight of the advancing strangers, and the apprehension of having all her motions and manœuvres sifted in the vulgar sieve of public opinion. She knew what she had done could only be judged and appreciated by the few who had felt what she had felt. This very terror at last nerved her to take the old man’s counsel; and so, wrapping her wide cloak around her, she followed at a little distance, delicacy prompting her to avoid appearing to belong to him, so that he might not be compromised through his good-nature. All those who were about at the time were men of similar position, who judged that the course adopted was the wisest, and so Josefa and her guide proceeded to their journey’s end without molestation. Arrived at the church door, the old nobleman pointed to the entrance and passed on his way.

Josefa began to explain to an old Brother who kept the door the misadventure which had brought her thither, but it was more than she could do to conclude the narrative, her feeble powers were already overstrained, and she sank fainting at his feet. For several days she was carefully tended in the hospital; and one day, when the noise of the affair had blown over, and the knowledge that she had taken refuge in the Sanctuary had quieted the pursuit of justice, she sent a messenger to the inn to fetch the swift courser she had left there on arriving, and under favour of the darkness of the evening set out to return to Valencia.

She had travelled a considerable distance without accident, when suddenly she perceived three travellers coming towards her; the moon shone brightly, and her keen eyes, quickened by natural feminine apprehension, were not slow to make out that they were of the kind most unwelcome under the circumstances, though to meet any one was awkward enough.

She had no time to consider what she should do, for the strangers were advancing at a rapid pace; nor were they slow to declare their character. The chief called out to her before they had even come up, to 'stand and deliver.' The only circumstance in her favour was that they stood on the narrow ledge of a mountain path, the one closely packed behind the other as one man.

"It is idle to attempt to resist us, young gallant," cried the leader as he saw her draw her sword; "we are too many for one even as valiant as I dare say you fancy yourself; besides, there are more of us behind who will soon be up."

Doña Josefa uttered no boast, she took up a firm position; her fine well-tempered rapier extended in her hand received them on its point, and threaded them through as they came, one behind the other.

But, alack! the strong men, in the contortions of their last agony, overstepped the narrow footing of the path, and fell over the brink, carrying in their bodies the trusty sword which had stood her in such good stead.

"There are more of us behind who will soon be up!" she repeated to herself, as with dogged determination she still held up against her misfortunes, and proceeded on her way for a wind or two of the path without disturbing incidents. One more turn and there stood before her three more bandits in the same order as the last. She had her *trabuco*¹⁴ ready to aim, and her aim was so steady, that before they had time to perceive her purpose, her ball had pierced through the three of them, and they were sent rolling over the precipice, to join the bodies of their companions below.

Whether Josefa thought that these exploits might bring her into fresh conflict with the arm of the law, or whether the fresh horrors gave a gloomy turn to her mind, and indisposed her for venturing home, I know not; but whatever her motive, she made up her mind at this point of the journey to continue her wanderings only as far as Barcelona, and there take ship to make a pilgrimage to Rome.

The sea was not much more propitious to poor Doña Josefa's fortunes than the land had been. The vessel on which she had embarked had not been two days out before it was attacked by Algerine Corsairs, who took every soul on board prisoners, and carried them off to Africa, where they were sold as slaves.

It fell to Josefa's lot to be bought by a rich renegade of Tunis, whom she served under the name of Pedro, a name she deemed she had a certain right to take. The renegade was much pleased with her soft discreet manners, and general superiority and uprightness of character; and soon advanced her to the post of steward over his household, having her first instructed in the Arabic tongue. Things went smoothly enough for some time; but when she had been in this service about three years, it happened that one day, when the master was gone out hunting, a maid-servant, who held a high place in the household, and whose forwardness the supposed Pedro had often noticed, came and made a free confession of an irrepressible affection for him, and entreated him to marry her. Josefa, much

¹⁴ Blunderbuss.

annoyed at the incident, could only answer that it was impossible: for she had not confidence in the girl to trust her with her secret.

The enraged girl, furious at the repulse, swore by Mahomet to be revenged; accordingly, no sooner was the master returned, than she went to him with every token of distress and indignation, and accused Pedro of abusing his power as steward of the house, and having sought to force her to marry him although she had resisted because he was a Christian, and the law of Mahomet forbade such an union.

The master, highly incensed at the perfidy of the slave he had treated with so much forbearance and indulgence, ordered him to be thrown into a dungeon and starved to death, without hearing any defence.

Such would indeed have been Josefa's fate, but that one of the slaves who respected her brought her daily the scanty means of subsistence she was able to secure. At the end of several days the master, coming to the dungeon to see what had befallen, was greatly provoked to find her not only alive but comparatively well, and took up a cord to administer summary chastisement.

This indignity was more than Josefa could endure; to avert it, she begged him to listen to her; told him she could easily prove the falsity of the accusation under which she was suffering, seeing she was a woman.

The master was delighted to hear the exculpation of his favourite slave, and immediately had her released and reinstated in her authority, and the shameless accuser consigned to the same prison.

From this time he continued to extend his favour and confidence towards her: of all the people about him who shared his pleasures and his riches, she was the only one to whom he could talk of the absorbing agony of his soul, the remorse for having renounced his religion and become a renegade. The result was that he one day announced to her that he had made arrangements for realizing the greater part of his fortune, which he divided in two parts, one of which he bestowed on her; with the other he had resolved to go to Rome in pilgrimage and endow a shrine, where he would pass the remainder of his days in prayer and penance.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.