

**ELLIOT
FRANCES
DICKINSON**

OLD COURT LIFE IN SPAIN;
VOL. 2

Frances Elliot
Old Court Life in Spain; vol. 2

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=24712809

Old Court Life in Spain; vol. 2/2:

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Frances Minto Dickinson Elliot Old Court Life in Spain; vol. 2/2

CHAPTER I Fiesta of the Corpus Domini

THE time is early summer; the sky an unbroken sphere of blue, as deep and smooth as a turquoise, canoping the blanched domes and pinnacles of the cathedral and illuminating with ineffable splendour the elegant galleries of the Giralda tower. No shade anywhere, on plaza, *patio*, or river bank; nothing but a blazing sun, making golden motes; the thinly leaved palms scarcely leaving a reflection on the hot earth.

It is the Fiesta of the Corpus Domini. The whole city of Seville is astir, the procession is passing, Don Pedro following bareheaded, attended by Don Juan de Mañara, Ferran de Castro, Don Garcia Padilla, and many others, under a gorgeous canopy, and so delicately fair and flaxen-haired does he look, he is more like a young saint than a king.

Behind him walk the archbishop wearing a jewelled mitre,

and the chapter in rich copes and robes, followed by the knights of the military orders of Santiago and Calatrava, the cross upon their breasts, armed *cap-à-pie*, with nodding plumes, each knight with his flag and cognisance borne by page and esquire; a magnificent procession, set off by the sombre background of monks, penitents, choristers, and chanting canons intoning the offices of the Church.

Now all who have seen a religious procession in Spain will understand the splendour of it. The mediæval magnificence of the robes, wrought in plaques of solid gold and incrustated with priceless jewels, the brilliant glow of sacred banners, the sheen of the steel caps and armour; and above all the amazing glitter of the gigantic dolls (or *pasos*), larger than life, dressed in the most gorgeous robes, representing the Saviour, the Virgin, and saints and martyrs. To the sound of trumpets, drums, and cymbals they advance in a blaze of tapers and torches, carried on platforms of wood, through the narrow streets, over which silken awnings are drawn from house to house, every soul present, from the king down to the last of *los pobres*, prostrate on the stones.

The Virgin first, diamond-crowned, of gigantic height, with deep-set glassy eyes, one big hand ablaze with rings, raised in benediction; San Fernando, habited in steel, his helmet raised to display his glistening visage, his royal mantle sewn with the emblem of the *Nodo* of Castile and Leon; the local saints, Justina and Rufina, who, refusing to worship the Phœnician idol Salambo in her temple in Triana, suffered martyrdom;

San Tomas and San Lazarus, and the imaginary Santiago, as a heavenly knight, Protector of Spain, clad in the white mantle of his order, a broadsword by his side, and a glory round his casque, carrying the baton of command.

From the balconies and the *miradores* float damask draperies, striped Moorish stuffs, and wreaths of feathers and flowers; fans wave incessantly in the heavy air, and long black mantillas fall over eyes lustrous under meshes of coal black hair – to the wild ringing of every bell in the city, led by the boom of the Giralda, and petards exploding as of a city taken by assault.

As the procession passes the stone balcony of the Palacio del Ayuntamiento, Don Pedro's mistress, Maria de Padilla, flashes forth, a dark vision of beauty, crowned with a regal circlet as though she were a queen, by her side her little son Alonso, dark-eyed as she is herself.

Such a sight causes the archbishop to tremble lest a speedy judgment should follow on himself. Yet, spite of the chanting and the prayer, the sacred *pasos* with their hard unearthly eyes reflecting, as it were, the horror expressed by the archbishop, Don Pedro at once arrests the procession, and with a gracious gesture signs to Maria to descend and take her place beside him. And so godless is he in the eyes of all men, he would insist, but for the confusion which ensues by the sudden stopping of such a crowd and the screaming and cries of those who were pressed together, – when, in the confusion, the glove which he carries in his hand, worked with the arms of Castile, drops on the ground.

Don Juan de Mañara, who is nearest to Don Pedro, rushes to pick it up, but is forestalled by one of the chapter, a stalwart young priest, by name Don Jaime de Colminares. As he is in the very act, on bended knee, of returning the glove, a youth all aflame with passion rushes forth and stabs him in the breast.

A gleam, a cry, a quiver, and all is over. Not a voice is raised, not a hand stirs. Even the archbishop is mute in presence of the king, but his pallid face and the terrified glances of the chapter say more than words.

Not so Don Pedro, who stamps his foot with wrath as he faces the assassin, the least moved among them all.

“Who are you?” asks the king, his voice trembling with rage, “who dare to assume my prerogative of life and death?”

“My name, my lord, is Emanuel Perez,” is the prompt answer as he meets Don Pedro’s furious glance with honest eyes.

“Why have you killed this man?” demands the king, maddened at his coolness, his hand on the hilt of a wrought dagger at his waist, while the archbishop and the chapter draw round to listen.

“My lord,” answers Emanuel, falling on his knees, for the majesty of the king has subdued him, “I had my reasons. Ask me not to speak evil of dignitaries,” and he gazes round at the rampart of glaring eyes.

“Speak,” answers the king; “the dead is silent, the living man must tell the tale. Speak, or tortures shall make you. Were it even myself you had to accuse, I command you, speak. The crime is

public, so shall be the punishment. I live before my people.”

Cries of “Castila! Castila!” come from the excited crowd. Caps are flung in the air and loud *vivas!* come from the beggars and ruffians of the street.

Behind Don Pedro rises the Moorish arch of the Puerta del Perdon, a sheet of delicate carving, white as snow, framing his figure as in a picture. Above rises the cathedral, a gigantic pile of richly carved cornices and tier above tier of carved parapets and domes, the walls ornamented with innumerable niched figures, bosses, roses, and stars. On one side of the street lies the murdered priest in his sacerdotal robes, the painted dolls on the other, the stately form of the archbishop between, his hands folded, his eyes cast down in prayer, the affrighted chapter gathering about him in purple robes, and behind the populace eagerly pressing round the king.

Then Emanuel speaks: “Sire, my father is a *zapatero* (shoemaker); I follow the same trade. We are poor but honest, no one reviles us. My lord, I had a sister,” as the word passes his lips he quivers all over, and looking down on the canon’s blood, which has made for itself a little runnel among the stones, he savagely stamps on it, while at the word “sister” a cynical smile passes over the king’s lips and the majesty of his attitude relaxes.

“She was *hermosa*,” continues Emanuel, not noticing the change, “*muy hermosa*. Every one looked at her. She went to confession in the cathedral at the altar near the image of Santo Cristoforo, twice, three times – we could not think why she went

so often – then she disappeared. We sought her everywhere, in the market, the stalls, the exchange, by the river, in the narrow alleys, and at the gates. No one had seen her. After some days her body was found in a deep ditch near the river. Then we knew the truth, and who had dealt with her. Of the foul deed and who had done it we spoke. Three days after, my father’s body was brought to us, stabbed to the heart. Then, upon the wounds of Christ, I swore an oath to kill the beast who wore the robe of God to defile it, and I have kept my word.”

In the tumult of his soul, Emanuel forgot the presence of the king, the crowd, the occasion, all but his passion of vengeance.

“And if the crime was so public,” asks the king, whose attention has deepened as he proceeded, “and your father talked so loud that he was stabbed for it, what punishment did the archbishop and the chapter impose on the canon?”

“His punishment!” cries Emanuel. “Ha! that is just it. His punishment! *Por Dios!*” – and such a volley of words comes he can scarcely articulate – “The chapter! Yes, the chapter held a court in the sacristy with closed doors, the villains! and condemned him *not to say Mass for one year!*!”

“Then,” cries Don Pedro, in his harsh voice and a bitter smile on his face, for the young man’s courage pleases him, and his honest eyes, “I condemn you, Emanuel *el zapatero*, to pass one year without making shoes.”

A loud shout of applause rises from the *pobres*. Those near the steps of the cathedral repeat it to others farther off, the people

in the streets shout it to those at the windows, and these to the crowds pressed on the terrace-roofs, so that the king's justice is known to all.

“Yes, my lord archbishop,” speaks the king, resuming in a moment all the dignity of the sovereign, as he turns to where he stood carrying in his hand the pastoral staff, a wonder of ancient workmanship – “yes, my lord archbishop, and most venerable chapter, from whose ranks so notable a light has been extinguished, I have spoken, I am *El Rey Justiciar*. Rich or poor, prince or beggar are the same to me. As to you, Emanuel,” turning to the young man, “I believe you are worthy of better things. From this day I name you a soldier, and attach you among the Alguazils who guard my person. Be as faithful for my honour as you have been for your own and you shall soon be promoted to a command.”

CHAPTER II

Don Pedro – Maria de Padilla – Albuquerque

IN the upper story of the Alcazar is Don Pedro's retiring room, overlooking the central Patio de las Doncellas below, the soft echo of ever-bubbling fountains and runnels mingling with the songs of birds hidden among the luxuriant foliage of palms and fragrant plants.

But little in keeping with the harmony without is the carved door by which the apartment is entered, still hung with the heads of four unjust judges placed there by the king as a warning to evil-doers. It is a small and secluded room, cut off from the state apartments of the upper story, appropriated to the use of Doña Maria del Padilla, panelled with cedar, broken by coats of arms in red, blue, and gold shields, portraits of kings of Castile and Moorish caliphs, emblems and badges, gilt "castles" and rampant "lions"; the ceiling rich in carved rafters, dividing into deep compartments, ornamented with bosses and lozenges in the same bright hues, by which the effect of the dark wood is greatly heightened; sconces for candles and circles for torches also on the walls, showing that it is the habit of the king to use the room by night as well as day. Little sun enters, and what does penetrate comes from lofty casements darkened by panes of painted glass,

reflecting in turn on the deeply tinted *azulejo* tiles of the floor, always so noticeable a detail in Moorish chambers.

In a dark corner a secret stair descends to the caliph's bedroom on the ground floor, an arrangement suited to the erratic habits of Don Pedro, who constantly comes and goes at all hours of the day and night and can thus enter without being observed.

He is seated on a high-backed chair with his back to the light, a mere youth in appearance – his stormy life ended before he was thirty – in which one seeks in vain for the murderous epithet of *El Cruel*. But as his face turns towards the light, the fair locks about his shoulders darken into a dull red and the blue eyes assume a strangely sinister expression. Opposite to him stands his great minister, Albuquerque. During two troubled reigns he has guided the helm of state through troubled periods of rebellion, Moorish wars, and conspiracies. At the death of King Alfonso he skilfully maintained Mary of Portugal – his first protectress – as regent for her son; a difficult task, for as long as he lived Alfonso treated his mistress, Eleanor de Guzman, as a queen.

Astute and ready-witted Albuquerque has long understood the inherent cruelty of the young king, as well as his obstinacy. He fostered his boyish fancy for his kinswoman, Maria de Padilla, the better to rule him, until it ripened into such an overwhelming passion that his own influence was undermined. With good cause he curses the day he brought her to Seville, especially since she has borne the king a son, and her enmity to him has grown into an open attack upon his authority. Now, with the knowledge of the

queen mother, he has come with a proposition calculated greatly to curb if not to end her power.

Albuquerque is barely past the prime of life, but his thin, deeply lined face gives him a look of age. His black Spanish eyes are turned full on his master. Too cunning to betray the intense anxiety he feels, only a slight flush on his cheek tells of his emotion. Well he knows the perverse disposition of the royal youth before him, and that the very fact of a too great insistency will only rouse him to violent opposition, especially on a subject touching him so nearly as that which he has come to discuss. Still he feels that what he has to say is of such paramount importance to the state that, spite of himself, the tones of his voice deepen and his manner acquires a solemn earnestness.

“A disputed succession, my lord,” he urges, watching the effect of his bold words; “Maria de Padilla’s children conspiring in every corner of the kingdom, as do now the bastards of your father, Enrique de Trastamare, and his brothers Don Fadique and Don Telmo. Have they not read us a lesson in rebellion? God alone knows what an arduous task was mine to prevent his naming his favourite, Don Enrique, to the succession, and shutting you, my lord, up in a monastery for life. Is Castile again to endure the same evil from which I have freed it? Invoke not Nemesis again, my Lord. You have suffered enough from the same cause to know its bitterness. Think what blood has flowed from that infatuation of your father’s, and the death of Doña Eleanor still to be avenged by the great house of Guzman.”

But here Albuquerque is arrested by such a sudden glance of fury from the king, he wisely desists.

“Maria is my kinswoman,” he continues in another tone, skilfully changing his line of attack. “*I brought her to Seville.*”

Don Pedro listens in haughty silence. Dark passions gather on his brow as the well-chosen words fall from the lips of the great minister. At the mention of his children by Maria de Padilla he gives an indignant start and seems about to interrupt his smoothly flowing periods. But carried, spite of himself, by the weight of his arguments, he withholds himself; and, with darkly glancing eyes, silently assents, especially as the name of Enrique passes Albuquerque’s lips.

The concluding sentence as to the disinterestedness of Albuquerque in regard to Maria de Padilla he treats with evident contempt. It is clear that sort of pretence does not touch him, for he well knows that it was Maria’s determination to throw off her kinsman, not consideration of the good of Castile, which led him to urge any measure which would weaken her influence.

“Keep to the matter in hand,” he says sternly. “I understand you press on me a royal marriage for reasons of State; you need not diverge from that point. It is an act repugnant to me. Why not open war and an alliance with England and the Black Prince?” he continues, passing his hands slowly through the meshes of his long fair hair. “I know the serpent’s trail is over Castile. I have crushed the mother and those with her, but the rest of the brood I could not reach.”

“But you did well, my lord,” answers Albuquerque with a dark smile. “A couple of Infantes more or less, ha! ha! Who cares whether they live or die but their mother, and she was dead? To wring their necks and send them spotless to paradise was a worthy deed. Would that their brothers lay as low as they.”

“Do not give me all the credit,” breaks in the king, mollified by this applause. “If ever minister acted for himself it was you. Who chose the guards? Who bribed the captain-general? Who? But let it lie. We will not quarrel over the spoil like low accomplices. The deed was done, and well done;” and with a discordant laugh he joins in the ghastly jest with a voice that freezes the blood by its merciless cruelty.

“Yes, my lord,” replies Albuquerque, “it is so. You will do well to rid Castile of the other traitor too. For if Don Enrique de Trastamare dies suddenly, or is *killed*” (here the astute minister pauses as if weighing in his mind by what means the happy consummation of his death could be accomplished), “there is his brother, the young Grand Master Fadique, who would at once take his place, backed by the knighthood of Santiago and Calatrava, and be upheld by all your enemies. It is the same blood, my lord, the same ambition then as now. ‘The throne! the throne!’ is the war-cry of the bastards, and France is ever ready to fan the flame.”

“True,” answers Don Pedro, “I am surrounded by foes. If I am a devil, they have made me so. From my birth, my life has been endangered by their machinations, I and my mother also. Fadique

is the best. He has a soft face and winning ways. He says he hates his brother. He may be a traitor,” he continues, rising from his chair and pacing up and down the room with the uneasy step of a beast of prey. “What matter? I use him as a tool; though,” and he suddenly stops and falls into a muse, “there was a time, when my father was alive – we were boys then, playing in these gardens together – that he did somewhat win my heart, and I showed it. I was a fool then. But now, let us fight it out.” Then resuming his restless pacing up and down: “Can I trust Fadique?” he mutters.

“Tush!” cries Albuquerque, moved out of his calmness by this unusual sensibility; “he will stab you first and then succeed you. The treachery of the race, their greed of power, is patent everywhere. The people speak of it in the wine shops, the beggars make songs and sing them in the streets, and the soldiers – ”

“No, by God! Not my soldiers!” cries Pedro, quickly arresting him. “I will not believe it. Not my soldiers! They are true! Fadique may or may not be false, what matter? I tell you” (impatiently) “I use him as a ‘tool.’ ”

“My Lord,” replies Albuquerque, lifting his deep-set eyes upon his master, “although young, I perceive you are already skilled in kingcraft. Nothing answers like diversion. You have dealt wisely in setting up one brother against the other. In making Fadique Grand Master of Santiago the jealous spleen of Don Enrique is fed and nourished. He has no position in Castile. But about that prophecy, my lord,” continues Albuquerque – seeking to return to the important matter on which his mind is set, which

Don Pedro is obviously seeking to avoid – “of which I spoke to your Grace. Do you intend to verify it by the lack of rightful heirs? Pardon me, my lord, I speak in the interest of Castile. As far as your Highness’s pleasure is concerned, I have shown that I grudge not my own kinswoman Maria.” At her name the king turns paler than was his wont and reseats himself. “Were I ambitious, I might scheme for a crown on her head and on her son’s. But I appeal to your Highness if I have not ever preferred your honour to my own? But reasons of State and the unsettled condition of the kingdom demand not only that you espouse a great princess, but that her hand should bring a strong alliance.”

“And the princess is called?” asks Don Pedro, with a sarcastic smile. “Doubtless her name is ready.”

“Yes, my lord, the Lady Blanche, daughter of the Duke of Bourbon, and niece of the most Christian King of France. Repute says she is comely, and her great youth and motherless condition under a warlike father promises her submissive. What says your Highness?”

“And in my turn I desire to ask *you* a question, Albuquerque,” replies Don Pedro, who sits in deep thought as sentence after sentence falls from the great minister. “When do you intend afterwards to return to Seville?”

“I, to Seville, my lord? I do not catch your Grace’s meaning. Whenever the service of your Highness permits me.”

“I would advise you,” replies the young king, sardonically, “for your safety, to delay it as long as possible. If you affianced me

to the Lady Blanche, you will find a warm welcome from Maria at your return. What her revenge may hatch, you best know. I warn you. You are a bold man, Albuquerque. Better face a lioness robbed of her whelps than an outraged woman.”

The grave Albuquerque laughs outright. “A woman’s fury is a small matter, your Highness, and court report says that you yourself hold it cheap. The welfare of my master is what I regard. If your Highness holds the obstacles as light as I do, we will have the espousals at the Alcazar, and Maria shall hold the new queen’s robe.”

“No, no, never!” cries Don Pedro, stung into real feeling by the remembrance of her he loved and the insult to be put on her. “If this is done at all, it must be distant and secret. *She* shall be spared the knowledge until all is over. I would rather lead a dozen campaigns against the French and Du Guesclin into the bargain in open field, than lend my hand to this matter. I a wife – a queen – a consort – what am I to do with her? Will she replace that other who nestles in my breast?” and a look of love comes into his eyes which softens them into real beauty. No one can tell what that hard face can express until that one chord is struck to which his whole being vibrates.

“The princess will bring France in her hand and peace in your councils. Your Highness is not bound to separate from – ”

“Yes, yes, I understand; but would Maria’s proud heart accept it? ‘Peace in my councils and strife at my board!’ I cannot undertake it. An older man might do it, but, Albuquerque, I am

young, and though men call me *El Cruel*, I am also *El Justiciar*. Now that is not justice. She has borne me children. She is like no other woman – I love her.”

“Leave my kinswoman to me, sire; only consent and I will answer for her. But, my lord, forgive me if I say that if you thus *half-hearted* enter into this scheme, you will bring more calamity on Castile, more war and misery than we have now to battle with. Women, my liege, are but cheap in your eyes as yet. But any wrong done to a royal princess such as the Lady Blanche, any insult, *any dishonour*” – the king looks up sharply – “would bring on us the whole power of France. Your Highness knows it,” he adds deprecatingly, watching the king’s grave face. “If done, it must be *well* done, or let alone.”

“And who says *no*?” answers the inscrutable young sovereign. “Who says that I shall not become, under the Lily of France, the most adoring of husbands; a very Hercules to his Omphale? Methinks the scene rises before me in the *patio* below – the daughter of France and I seated under the palms, Nubian slaves waving feather fans over us, lest any fly or insect touch her soft cheek, while your kinswoman Maria” – (here the king gives a discordant laugh) – “watches behind a screen, subdued and gentle.”

Albuquerque frowned. To this, then, had come all his wise reasonings, his statecraft, his far-seeing policy; a jest, worse than a jest, a scoff in the mouth of that sardonic youth whose service he held. Well he knew him, and that once in that mocking mood

no more was to be done with him.

Raising his eyes to the cynical young face which faced him, a low laugh still on his lips, somewhat of the contempt he felt looked out, spite of himself, and Don Pedro marked it and for a moment yielded to the influence of his powerful mind.

“Albuquerque, I will consider your reasons and give you my decision,” he says, with a natural majesty of manner he knows well how to assume. “Until then, let this matter rest. As soon as I can ride I shall order my further progress towards Burgos. There we will hold a council as to the threatened rising of Enrique de Trastamare. He has many followers at Toledo and will endeavour to take the city and garrison. But my friends the Jews, headed by Samuel Levi, will take care of my interests.”

The haughty bearing of the young king strangely jarred upon the feelings of Albuquerque.

After all, the discussion of the marriage might be called (seeing his relationship to Maria de Padilla) almost a *personal* question, and that he had been and was acting magnanimously in the matter he felt to his heart's core. The ill-concealed contempt of the king wounded and offended him as it had never done before. He reddened under the mocking glance of Don Pedro, his eyes half in jest, half in anger, fixed on him as if reading the embarrassment of his thoughts.

At length, with a silent dignity no ridicule could reach, he slowly gathered up his papers, and bowing low craved leave to depart. “God preserve your Highness,” were his words. “You

need not to be told I hold your commands absolute, but, sire, as your servant, I once more crave you to remember the prophecy of which I spoke – ‘*To be stabbed and succeeded by his brother.*’ The Gitano died for these traitorous words against your Grace, but still dying he persisted in repeating them.”

“An excellent joke, a capital pleasantry! Adieu, good Albuquerque, God have you in His holy keeping till we next meet and you bring me some new command,” are the king’s laughing words, to all appearance as light-hearted as a bird.

And as Albuquerque disappears under the shadow of the Moorish arches beyond the door, he laughs still louder.

“That parting shaft of his about the prophecy was not so bad,” he mutters. “All the same, I wonder if it will come true. A man can but die once, and that his worst enemy should kill him is but natural and just. Still, most noble bastard, Don Enrique, we will have a tussle for it ere it comes to that, and if the Lady Blanche strengthens my arm, why then, *por Dios*, we will marry her!”

How Albuquerque’s project prospered will now appear; the present upshot being that it was secretly arranged between the king and himself to despatch his half-brother, the Infante Fadique, “the Grand Master” as he was called, to Narbonne to ask the hand in marriage of the Lady Blanche, niece of the King of France.

A mission which prospered marvellously, seeing that within a month Don Fadique acted as his brother’s proxy at their solemn espousals in the Gothic Cathedral of St. Just, the darkly painted

figures of saints and angels in the flamboyant windows of the choir casting down mystic shadows on the form of a pale young girl in the very bud of youth, kneeling at the altar beside a royal youth with the sweetest and softest eyes, his elegant figure set off by the magnificent robes of the Grand Master of Santiago, so stiff with gold embroidery and jewels, on mantle and *justaucorps*, that they stood up of themselves.

CHAPTER III

Blanche de Bourbon

THE Princess Blanche de Bourbon, sister to the Queen of France, wife of Charles V., lived in the old fortress of Narbonne, beside the sea, in those romantic days when ladies' robes were sewn with *fleur-de-lis* and heraldic devices, dragons, and coats of arms – wore pointed shoes, long chains from the waist, and high coifs and head draperies incredible in our eyes.

She was young, only fifteen, small and delicate in stature, with a tender, beseeching look, as seeking for fondness and protection from those around her. By nature she was little fitted to command or to dazzle, but rather to creep into the heart of manly affection and nestle there.

The very name of the King of Castile gave her the horrors, and when called into the presence of her father and told she was to marry him, she lay three days on her bed without speaking. Imagine her feelings when she took courage to look at his proxy, of all his brothers the most like the king!

But Don Fadique was altogether cast in a slighter mould, fitted rather for a lady's bower than the stern ranks of the battle-field. His address was soft and gentle, and no amount of provocation could call up on his features any resemblance to that tempest-torn expression that so often disfigured the countenance of Don

Pedro. It is true that at the time of his mother's death, when certain suspicious circumstances pointed to foul play, he had joined in the rebellion of his brother, Enrique, but he had rallied afterwards to the king, and was the only one of his family who gave him a loyal allegiance. As the nearest relation of Don Pedro, he was selected by Albuquerque as proxy for the king.

In such haste was the great minister to avail himself of the half-promise of marriage he had obtained – hastened by the ravages of the Free companies of France in the north – that he immediately despatched Don Fadique with a splendid retinue, without ever reflecting upon his personal fitness for the mission; fitness indeed as a consort, but not as a proxy, for he was specially created to please a lady's eye. His large brown eyes had the sweetest expression, and there was a womanly softness about him, united to the manly bearing of a knight, that suited exactly his half-military, half-religious position as Grand Master of the order of Santiago.

Of all created beings Blanche was the simplest and the best; unselfish, trusting, relying on the faith of others, utterly inexperienced and easily impressed by kindness, of which she had not known much.

Her mother died at her birth. Her brothers were always away at the court, in Touraine, or in the camp. Her women and her friend, Claire de Coucy, were her only companions, so that when the brilliant cortège of knights and nobles arrived at Narbonne, and Don Fadique, Grand Master of Santiago, most becomingly

attired in the splendid robes of his order, a great jewelled cross on his breast, and a heavy chain of gems sparkling around his neck, advanced to kiss her hand, so happy was she in the respite from the dreaded Don Pedro, so frankly affectionate in her sisterly confidence, that the very charm of her innocence became a fatal snare to him.

Not that Don Fadique nourished any thought of treason towards his brother's bride. No plan or project of supplanting him had entered his brain when selected by Albuquerque as nearest of blood to the king. He had neither foreseen nor imagined the danger in which he was placed by reason of the manifold charms of the Lady Blanche, and that he would be more than man to resist them.

Alas for the fair-haired Grand Master! Hour by hour he yielded. Did she love him? was the question that rang through his brain day and night. On the answer his life depended. But how could he ask? Honour, loyalty, chivalry forbade. Yet the time must come when he would have to know. Could he see this innocent creature delivered over a prey to his licentious brother without one word of warning? Without one devoted friend to shield her from the deadly intrigues of a court wholly under the spell of Maria de Padilla?

And that warning. What did it mean? Love to himself? Great Heaven! And if she did not love him in return? The doubt brought agony. A woman would have been more easily deciphered, but this royal girl was all simplicity and guilelessness. When her little

hand rested in his as, attired with all the pomp of the Queen of Castile, and blazing with the rich jewels sent by Don Pedro, he, with a wildly beating heart, led her to the nuptial supper, it lay as trustingly in his as though he had been her brother.

Poor young Grand Master! How was he to know if that young heart fluttered alone for him, or if those pulses beat to the music of another voice?

A thousand good resolutions were formed when Blanche was absent. But they were all scattered to the winds when her soft eyes rested on his, with that appealing look that was so touching. After all, he meant no harm, only he *must* know whether she loved him or not. Life was intolerable without; and as the putting of this question grew more and more difficult as time wore on, he left Narbonne without asking it.

Now Blanche is at Valladolid, in the Gothic palace, with its dark *patio* and big angular casements, which still jut out over the street just as they did then.

She is expecting the king, who is to arrive that very night. Need I say that she is quite beside herself with terror? Resistance is vain; as well might the helpless lamb resist the butcher's knife.

The dreadful hour has come when she is to be eaten up by the royal ogre, and she can only lie and sob in the quaint painted chamber prepared for her. Claire de Coucy, quite unconscious of what is really breaking Blanche's little heart (for she has kept her own counsel in all but hatred of Don Pedro), is busying herself about her, with many entreaties not to make herself look a fright.

Even if she does hate the king, is there not Don Fadique, and all those other splendid Sevillianos, specially Don Juan de Mañara, whose fame has reached Narbonne, as the boldest lover in Spain?

“Surely it is not so hard to be a queen, and live in sunny Seville, in the beautiful Alcazar!” says Claire, turning over the marriage ring all the time, an uncut emerald of priceless value, which Blanche has flung on the floor and, unlike her gentle self, stamped on.

There lie the marriage gifts. The jewelled diadem and sceptre, as Queen of Castile; the Oriental combs and bracelets, cut in antique silver, the collar of sapphire, the solid links of sequins, the rare Tunisian lace and Algerine embroideries, jewelled fans, and veils of rarest lace of such delicate texture, no one had ever seen the like before. All sent in perfumed chests of sandalwood, covered with royal crowns.

To Claire, who is just out of a convent, and has never seen a marriage or a bride, it does occur that Blanche is strangely still and sad; but she supposes it is the proper thing, and that Blanche knows best, so she goes on turning over the marriage gifts with little exclamations of delight, as each fresh object seems to her more lovely than the last.

But when, all in a moment, as Claire is winding round her waist a light Moorish scarf, worked in a perfect kaleidoscope of silken thread and pearls, Blanche (unable any longer to keep silent) staggers up and falls upon her neck, sobbing as if her heart would break, it is the most astonishing event her small experience

has ever conceived.

Much more, when Blanche, putting her rosy lips to Claire's shell-like ear, whispers in a voice choked with tears: "I love him, I love him! I cannot go to Don Pedro. I know he will kill me. I hate him. I won't go! Be kind to me, Claire, and help me, for I love him!" – her astonishment turns into terror, for she thinks Blanche is gone quite mad.

"Love whom?" she gasps, feeling cold all over, and letting the scarf drop to support the quivering form of Blanche.

"Who? Why, Don Fadique to be sure," she answers, blushing all over. "Why – you must be blind, Claire, not to see it – at Narbonne. Who else could it be?"

And Blanche's fair head, covered with small child-like curls, drops upon Claire's friendly neck and buries itself there, as she clings to her tighter and tighter.

"Oh, Blanche!" was all Claire could say, being too utterly staggered to remonstrate. "Don Fadique! Why, he is your husband's brother? Oh, Blanche, do you mean what you say?"

"Yes, I do," falters out Blanche, in an almost inaudible voice "I love him, oh, I love him!"

The very uttering of these words gave her courage. The secret had passed her lips. The spell of silence was broken.

"Don Fadique!" exclaims Claire. "Why, he must be the greatest traitor in the world."

"He does not know it!" returns Blanche, reddening to the roots of her hair. "He does not guess it. He is an angel." As she speaks,

a quick, warm light comes into her eyes, a soft flame rises on her cheeks, kindling up her whole face with an inexpressible glow. Even her slender figure seems to gather strength and height. "No! no! you must say nothing against him! He is perfect."

Claire, who was very pious, and just out of a convent, where the nuns had taught her all men were dangerous and to be avoided, actually recoiled. That a wife should love her lord and receive presents from him and letters was admissible, even among the nuns – but another man!

Her pretty hands dropped from Blanche's waist, and for some moments she could not speak.

"What!" she exclaims at last. "Holy Mary, what a horror!" at which the poor little queen takes courage to reply:

"A husband, Claire, why you seem to forget I have never seen him. How can I love a man I do not know? I have seen Don Fadique. That makes a great difference. If Don Pedro is what they say, and strangles women, I do not see how I can ever love him. So I told my father. I did say *that*, Claire. I suffered very much. You know it, you cruel girl. I was brought here against my will. I shall die when I see the king, I shall die," she repeats shuddering. "Besides, why did he send Don Fadique to marry me in his name? If I had never seen him, I could not love him."

A sweet pout came over her childish face as she gazed into Claire's eyes, confident that these arguments must convince her.

But Claire only shook her head, and continued to stand aloof. The teaching of the nuns still held her. Was it not better that

Blanche *should* die and be buried, sooner than not love her husband? Yet the gentle little queen had used a mighty weapon in talking of her death. Death was so awful, so far away from the fresh rosy life of Claire, that with the charming inconsistency of youth, Claire, impetuous and ardent in all things, in a moment forgetting all about the nuns, flung her arms round Blanche's neck.

“Dear, dear princess,” was all she could utter, “don't talk of death. I know it is very wrong, but I love you too well to chide you. Promise me that you will not speak to Don Fadique any more. Say an *Ave* when he comes near you, and make the sign of the Cross when you feel his eyes. Remember, whether you like it or not, you are Don Pedro's wife. No! no! don't push me away. It is true. Great princesses and queens must learn to command themselves more than other folk. My father said so, before I left Navarre, and that I was not to follow what you did, because you were of royal blood.”

Then Blanche and Claire, fully reconciled, sat down side by side to talk under the shadow of the Gothic casement, which lit up the room; the freckled colour of the painted glass falling upon them in patches of glowing light, as the trees outside swayed to and fro; Claire going on about her duty to her husband and to her new country. She was quite eloquent, and repeated all the fine things which had been taught her out of history. Not only *Aves* and crossings, but fasting and penance were suggested by the ingenious Claire, as helps against temptation, until poor

Blanche, quite stupefied, took up a lute which lay upon the seat and hummed a French love song; and Claire, remembering there was a string of pearls loose in the wedding robe in which Blanche was to appear before the king, kissed her and went out.

CHAPTER IV

Don Fadique's Declaration of Love

WHILE Blanche sat all alone, the arras gently lifted and Don Fadique stood before her. Not gay and triumphant as she had seen him at Narbonne, but pale and grave and habited in a grey *justaucorps* with a simple hood – more in the guise of a penitent than a gay young knight.

“My princess,” and he kissed her hand, carefully looking round to assure himself that they were alone, “I am come to ask you a last favour before the king arrives. Already his presence is signalled on the outskirts of the city.”

At that dreaded name, Blanche, whose soft face had broken into the sunniest of smiles as Don Fadique entered, trembled and sank back against the wall. At that one word, “the king,” the soft glamour her imagination had conjured up, vanished. She was the bride of the cruel tyrant all men hated. He was at hand to claim her. She burst into tears.

“Sweet Blanche,” and Don Fadique's eyes melted at her distress, as taking her tenderly by the hand, upon which he impressed another fervent kiss, he knelt on the floor before her, “be comforted, and listen to me. The time is come when we must part. For a moment, it seemed to me a dream of heavenly bliss, and that, standing in my brother's place, I could claim you for

ever. But now I am less than nothing in your eyes. Tell me, oh, tell me,” and a sigh broke from him, so deep, his very soul seemed poured out in it, “tell me quickly, for our time is short. You will not quite hate me?”

Some wild words were on Blanche’s lips, but remembering the expostulations of Claire she checked them, blushed hotly over brow and neck, hesitated, and said nothing.

“Your pity is all I dare ask,” he continues, drawing nearer and leaning over her, as she shrinks away among a pile of embroidered cushions, anxiously turning her eyes towards the drapery behind which Claire had disappeared. “Of all men I am the most wretched. There is one whom I love more than anything on earth, and I am nothing to her. If it were not so – ”

He broke off abruptly, but there is something so bitter and hopeless in his tone that, spite of an involuntary pang of jealousy, Blanche’s eyes turned on him full of sympathy.

“I am so sorry,” she replies, simply. “I think all the world should care to please you. But” – the jealous feeling is growing spite of herself – “if any one – ”

At this moment Don Fadique stooped and grasped her arm with such a wild look that she stopped. “If,” lowering his voice, “if this lady,” and he paused to touch her hand, “loved me – could love me at all; if I could hold her for an instant as mine own – though the whole kingdom of Spain were between us – ”

Blanche’s gaze has grown dreamy. This was love then. Simple as she was she understood it. Oh! Claire, Claire. If he felt so, what

would she think of her, and her face paled and her lips quivered.

“Do I know the lady?” she asks, then pauses to steady her voice, while Fadique gazes down at her with a swift searching glance, terrified by one word to shatter the rapturous conviction which her trouble gave him.

“Yes, you know her well,” is all he says, and he seizes her hand and covers it with kisses. “Do you love me?”

No word comes to her blanched lips, but she bows her head and softly answers to the pressure of his fingers. On the imprisoned hand is the diamond ring of her espousal. It *would* gleam out, though she tries not to see it. Oh! where was Claire? What would she say to her? Alone with Don Fadique, she feels all her good resolves melting.

For nearly a minute Blanche let Fadique hold her hand. There was no sound below in the *patio* to distract them, only the chiming of the great bells of San Pablo close by across the square, the beautiful flamboyant portal reared against the sky.

Blanche lay quite still while Fadique covered her little hand with kisses, even the lace ruffles she wore at her wrist he kissed.

A moment before no words could express how she dreaded the king, but with her hand in his, listening to his muttered words of love, the earth seemed to melt away, and she was suddenly transported to some unknown paradise, full of infinite felicity.

She knew she was doing wrong and that Claire would bitterly reproach her – perhaps go away in disgust and leave her.

But for all that she could not help it; and after all, what was

a crown, or Claire, or Castile, or France, or the most Christian king, her kinsman, or her father, compared to the lover with angelic eyes kneeling before her?

It might be that they never should be alone again, and that she might not be allowed to speak to him, for Don Pedro was, they told her, a devil of jealousy —*that* she could readily believe — and that he possessed every vice human nature can compass. If this was indeed the last time, would it not be too cruel to be cold to Fadique in this *one hour* when his heart spoke to hers?

Blanche was but a child, cause and effect were unknown to her; but love, first love, that blessed light direct from heaven, had transformed her whole being, and from a simple, tranquil-hearted girl, content to pass her days joyously as the birds do, without thought, she had become a sensitive, anxious woman, trembling beneath that terrible prescience that comes with the first lesson of life; and when Fadique, after a long silence, asked her again: “Are you sure you love me? Say it once more, Blanche, and that you will never love another man,” in a low voice she answered earnestly: “Yes, I love you. I did not know what love was, until you came to Narbonne,” and then, unable to bear the strain upon her, she hid her pale face on his shoulder. “What will Don Pedro do to me?” she cried, trembling all over with a sudden revulsion. “What will he say to me? I feel so treacherous and wicked, and yet it is not my fault.”

“No,” answers Fadique, pressing her slight form to his and still holding her imprisoned hand. “It is the fault of those who forced

you into such a marriage. That is the sin; but remember, my own Blanche, though silent, I am ever near you at the Court. One heart at least bleeds for you.”

“I am sure I hear footsteps!” cries Blanche, starting back and standing upright listening – “What will Claire say? Am I indeed such a sinner?”

“Claire? By Santiago! what has she to do with us? Claire? Ah! do not look at me so, Blanche, or you will break my heart.”

“Oh, that mine was broken too, and I were dead!” she sobs.

“Then let us die together,” replies Don Fadique.

They are standing hand in hand, backed by the high Gothic casement. The fretted frame, filled with devices, crowns, and coats of arms, casts a pale reflex on them. The sun is setting behind the castellated towers of San Pablo, opposite, and soft fragrant shadows gather in the chamber. Both in their hearts are longing that this moment may last for ever.

Deeper and deeper the shadows fell, engulfing the two young figures in its gloom, save where a shaft of vivid light fell upon them like a sword, the point turned towards them.

“My love,” murmurs Don Fadique, passionately, “do you hear me?”

As Blanche moved in response, a sudden light was in her eyes that had never been there before – a Moorish scarf Claire had placed around her fell from her waist.

“This shall be my talisman,” cries Don Fadique, stooping to pick it up, “the token of your love, and my safeguard in battle.

You will not refuse me?"

"Oh! hide it, hide it," whispers Blanche under her breath. "Claire may come in and miss it."

Then there was a dead silence which neither of them broke.

Suddenly, with a crash like thunder, the clatter of horses' feet rises up from the *patio*; the clang of armed men is in the air, the roll of cumbrous equipages, and the shrill voice of drums and clarions. Now a single horseman rides in and challenges the guard. Then there is the sound of marching of many feet and the far-off blare of trumpets.

Blanche rose to her feet, speechless with terror. Was the king already there? Where could Claire be?

Then comes the echo of many steps in the antechamber, and Claire rushes in through the arras as Don Fadique disappears by a door on the other side.

Following Claire appears a tall and stately *jefe*, holding a white wand of office, with many crosses and decorations on his breast, and a high plumed hat in his hand, which he doffs, bowing low.

"Madam, the Queen," says he, in a sonorous voice, again inclining himself to the ground, "it is my duty to apprise your Majesty that the king is now passing the drawbridge outside the city. A royal page bears his greeting to your Grace."

"Claire, oh, Claire!" sighs Blanche, casting herself into her arms. "Oh! *why did you leave me?*"

CHAPTER V

Marriage at Valladolid

THE ancient city of Valladolid lies on low ground and is watered by the Pisuerga, a broad river for this waterless land.

Although so far in the north, Valladolid was at this time considered the official capital of Castile, and therefore it was there that Blanche had come to meet her much dreaded bridegroom.

A more uninviting city does not exist in Spain, as we see it now, and although it suffered cruelly from the invasion of the French in the Peninsular War, uninteresting it must always have been. No charm leads one's thoughts lovingly to Valladolid. The cathedral is hideous. Only the front of San Pablo and the Collegiata de San Gregorio, a magnificent gift of Cardinal Ximenes, dwell in the mind.

Of course, with the exception of San Pablo, these buildings were erected centuries after Don Pedro's reign, and one asks oneself what Valladolid could have been then?

There are no environs. The river flows through flat banks with no timber except long lines of thin poplars, the poorest of all trees, and beyond, the eye wanders over endless plains towards Burgos and Salamanca to the borders of Portugal.

But now, forgetting the present aspect of the city, we must

go back to the 3d of June, 1375, the day on which Don Pedro was to arrive to meet the new queen, espoused in his name by his brother, the Grand Master of Santiago, to be kept as a great festival, for which thousands had assembled from all parts of the kingdom. For indeed, in those days of perpetual warfare, a *fiesta* was well esteemed, as they were very rare, especially in the north, inhabited by a more serious and impassioned race of hardy men than the lighthearted southerners of Andalusia.

Now this occasion had been seized as a gift from heaven, especially as it was to take the form of a tournament, in which the Infante Don Fadique was to take part, as well as the Infante of Aragon, and Don Juan de Mañara, known in all ages as "Don Juan," the favourite of the king, gambler, reveller, and seducer, and that graceful but treacherous knight, Don Garcia de Padilla, brother of Maria, both being in attendance on the king. The queen-mother, Doña Maria of Portugal, had also journeyed from Seville to welcome the young queen, and Albuquerque followed her, full of alarm for the result of the alliance he had brought about.

Much had been heard of the strange qualities of the young king, about whom men's minds were divided. Such mysterious crimes were attributed to him, such unheard-of brutalities, that it was generally supposed he acted under the influence of magic spells, wrought on him by his mistress, Maria de Padilla, held by the populace as a witch accursed by God and man.

Those who had not seen him, and they were many, and

the women especially, who had heard harrowing tales of his misdeeds, crowded into Valladolid, where, accommodation not being easily obtained except for the rich, the season being summer, had built themselves huts of branches along the river, and camped out there, as near as possible to the green *vega* where the tournament was to be held.

And a wonderful sight it is, and almost beautiful to behold, under a heaven one sheet of unbroken blue, golden lights resting on the gaudy colours within the enclosed space, carpeted with grass; lofty gateways, making the four entrances, adorned with coloured tiles in blue and gold; tents of variegated rich stuffs, luxuriously fitted up for the convenience of each knight about to take part in the tilt; galleries hung with brocade and cloth of gold; turreted towers in silk striped black and yellow, from which hang banners; fountains furnished with bowls of silver to refresh the knights, over which court pages keep guard; stands for the musicians, covered balconies for the ladies, where the sparkle of dark eyes and rounded arms peep out of delicate draperies; and in the centre, the gaudiest of all, the royal pavilion, “as high as three lances,” blazing with cloth of gold, trimmed with feathers and flowers, the flag of Castile and Leon floating overhead, beside the emblazoned Nudo of Castile, and the French lilies impanelled on the same shield – the interior protected from the sun by tinted awnings, under which rise three crimson thrones, for the king, queen, and queen-mother, “Matrique” to the bride, and all around the soft whispering of leaves, the cooing of doves

and pigeons, brought, Moorish fashion, in cages, and the splash of abundant waters.

The time fixed for the tournament was at the setting of the sun, but from the earliest dawn the populace had crowded into every available space, and been entertained with *seguidillas* and *zambras* danced by bronzed *gitanas* to the clink of castanets, and there were races of tame elephants with silken howdahs, jumpers and tossers of ball, and Moorish jugglers whose tricks were wonderful and set all the peasants agape with joy.

It was known that the king's brother, the Grand Master, would break a lance, and it was thought that the young king himself would run at the ring in honour of his bride. But this was said only by those who did not know, for in the first place Don Pedro, a young warrior full of conceit and constantly risking his life in battles, disdained all these courtly pageants; and in the second place, he had arrived at Valladolid in so bad a temper that his attendants feared to approach him.

Never was a royal bridegroom so ill-disposed for mirth as Don Pedro when, habited in a royal mantle draped over a crimson surcoat trimmed with fur, and wearing a helmet encircled by a crown, *panached* with snowy feathers, he took his seat on his throne in the centre of the pavilion, Albuquerque, his *padrino* or god-father, behind him, to the cry of "Castilla! Santiago! Santiago! *Viva el Rey Justiciar!*"

Beside him, on a less elevated seat, sat his mother, Queen Maria.

As the bride-queen, white as her name, and trembling in every limb, advances to place herself on a chair of state on his right hand, the king – who now sees her for the first time, having purposely delayed his entrance into Valladolid until the last possible moment – rises to salute her; when, at the aspect of terror depicted on her face, in evident wrath he suddenly turns to address Albuquerque, pointing contemptuously to the poor princess who sinks back into the arms of Claire.

“*Sangre de Dio!* Signor Conte,” mutters the king, loud enough to be heard, “a pretty consort you have chosen. I am not wont to be considered an ogre in ladies’ eyes, but doubtless the Lady Blanche, spite of her baby-face, has met some *damoisel* at her father’s court whose remembrance turns me to a monster in her eyes. By my Patron Saint (if I have one), before the day is over I will assure myself who is the cuckoo who has soiled my nest.”

“My lord, these are most unworthy suspicions,” returns Albuquerque, with that calm dignity of manner before which the king’s petulant humour so often yields. But not so now. Surrounded by those who have fostered his evil passions, he knows that his every look and movement will be duly reported by her brother, Don Garcia, to Maria de Padilla.

From this moment to the end of the pageant he hardly addresses himself to Blanche or turns towards her, but with an angry scowl, his steely eyes wander unceasingly over the crowd of brilliant knights who, singly or together, gallop past the royal *estrado* to salute him and the queen.

Spite of herself, Blanche, revived by the strong essences Claire used to restore her, begins to be attracted by the brilliant show. She is the chief figure in this mimic war; the noblest dames of Castile are there to do her homage; the queen-mother comforting her with gentle words, and when Claire, who stands behind her chair, whispers into her ear, "Do you see him, there under the flag-staff in the centre? He wears a long white mantle over his armour, and your scarf upon his arm. Oh! is he not charming?" a mist passes before her eyes, the tell-tale colour mounts to her cheeks, and forgetting Don Pedro and all her fears past, present, and to come, she leans forward, a wild look in her eyes, towards the spot where Don Fadique has reined up his charger, to head the knights of Santiago preparing to salute the king and the new queen. This passed in an instant, but not before Don Pedro had noted it, and his naturally pallid face grows white with rage.

"Madam," says he, addressing Blanche for the first time, who, at the sound of his harsh voice, starts back aghast, "it seems that the favour you deny me, you accord to my brother. Happy youth! Doubtless he will know how to profit by it."

Utterly unable to reply, Blanche shrank back, as if about to faint, but terror so far gave her strength that she found voice to reply that at Narbonne it was her duty towards his Grace to receive his brother well.

"I doubt it not, madam," answers Don Pedro with a bitter sneer. "Yes, at Narbonne you made good use of your time,

doubtless. I was a cursed fool to send him there," he mutters. Then, turning his back upon her, he addresses himself to Don Juan, the big tears streaming slowly down poor Blanche's cheeks.

Alas! alas! This insult seems the last drop in her cup of misery. Poor little queen! her heart is bursting, and nothing but her horror of the king, whose cold eyes follow her wherever she turns, prevents her sobs from being heard by all the court.

At this moment, amid the blare of trumpets, the roll of drums and clash of cymbals, the chimes of all the bells of the city clashing, and the frantic shouts of the mob, pressing forward at every point where they can find standing room along the barriers, a gallant company of knights, attended by their esquires, galloped into the centre of the field in a general *mêlée*; the Knight of the Dragon, Don Juan de Cerda – who, could he have foreseen the future, would then and there have forfeited his fealty to a recreant king; the Knight of the White Rose, Don Diego de Guzman; the unknown knight, his turban protected by chains of finest steel interwoven with the folds of dazzling white, and white his tunic and mantle, on his left arm a shield, in his right hand a slender lance, mounted on a raven-black charger, and attended by two slaves in Moorish dress, black from casque to toe, his visor down – said to be the Moorish king of Granada, Ben Hade, come in disguise, to break a lance with the Christians; the two Medinas, Celi and Sidonia, a tribe of Aguilar, every man of the name a hero in the track of war, the de Cuevas, Cipuntes, Cabras, Perez del Pulgar, and the great southern noble,

Ponce de Leon, arrived from the plains of Xeres, where he ruled more powerful than the king; the judges of the lists, stranger knights, marshals, swordsmen, bowmen; pages, gorgeous in silk and samite, heralds in gold and embroidered tabards; and last, and chiefest, in splendid armour, the Lord of the Tournament, the Grand Master de Santiago, attended by the knights of his order in the absence of the king.

Small of stature, but light and elegant, his heavy accoutrements can not conceal the grace of every movement, or the mastery with which he manages his horse, a fiery chestnut, curveting and prancing, as he takes his place in the centre of the lists amid cries of "*Plaza! Plaza por los Infante! Santiago! Santiago!*"

Conscious that Blanche's eyes are upon him, and knowing nothing of what has just passed between her and Don Pedro, and that her poor little heart is melting in fear, he takes advantage of every opportunity to place himself before the royal pavilion, thirsting for one look of her sweet eyes, a gesture, a sign, to feel the assurance of her love; but he looks in vain.

Many tilts are run. The stranger knight unhorses several riders. When called on by the herald to raise his visor he courteously declines, rides three times round the field, displaying his colours, the Moorish cognisance of yellow on a black ground, then vanishes through the open gates, his black slaves after him. Many sharp blows are then exchanged and wounds inflicted in this mimic warfare, to the delight of the king, who rises to his feet

loudly laughing and clapping his hands as the vanquished knights are carried from the field.

Then, to the cries of *Dios y España*, four cavaliers ride forth, with violet surcoats over their coats of mail, and run a Moorish tilt with reeds instead of lances, an elegant pastime of Granada worthy of the courtly Moslems with whom Don Pedro is so much in league, while stringed instruments strike up a joyful measure, and castanets are played by the *gitanos* who dance a *seguidilla* before the king.

Many of the great nobles, offended at the insolent bearing of Don Pedro, have not, as yet, taken their lances out of rest, but have only ridden round at the opening of the lists, at which great wonder is expressed among the spectators, and much discontent amid their followers.

Now, all are in honour bound to break a lance, in the *Grande Mêlée*, with Don Fadique, who takes his place in the centre of the field. Whether it is out of courtesy to his youth and royal rank, or that, by a kind of miracle, his lady-love being present, his arm is strengthened to do wonders in her eyes, many a famous noble has the worst of it, at which wild cries are again heard of "*Santiago! Viva el Gran Maestro! Viva el Infante!*"

A grand procession ends the tournament, around the golden pole set up in the centre, from which depends a laurel crown woven with pearls, which, according to the rules, ought to be presented to the victor by the young queen. But Don Pedro, in savage mood (for the success of his brother has deeply angered

him), has willed it otherwise.

With his large eyes fixed in a disdainful stare he gives no heed to the tilting, and scarcely responds to the salutations of the noble knights who gather under the pavilion.

When Don Fadique stations himself in front to salute him and the two queens, Don Pedro – who at that moment is talking eagerly with the Lord of Monteney, from time to time turning towards Albuquerque, as if to inform him of some important fact – turns and fixes his eyes upon him with such a glare of rage that Don Fadique never advances at all to claim the guerdon he was to receive, and retreats to his tent, the king at the same time suddenly rising, and signalling to the gaudy herald, displaying his particoloured costume in the last rays of the sunset which light up the west, to the delight of the townsfolk, to approach.

Like all the world the herald dreads the king, and comes riding as fast as his horse can carry him.

“Vain knave!” says Don Pedro surveying his brilliant garb, “can you find nothing better with which to fill your time, than serving as a popinjay to the people? Break up the lists. I have had enough of it; and see you do it quickly.”

And now, slowly, as the day falls, along the river bank under the shade of the poplar avenues, passes the procession, winding into the deep and narrow streets of Burgos.

Before the cathedral, public tables are spread with highly flavoured viands such as Spaniards love, to be washed down by strong Xeres wine served out of great earthen jars, so big it seems

as if thousands could be satisfied.

Don Pedro would have ridden alone into the city, but for the remonstrances of Albuquerque and of his mother, who, with tears implored him not to rouse the suspicions of his subjects by such a disregard of royal custom as to allow his bride to return alone.

Thus while all the citizens wait beside the tables (none caring to fall to until the king's return) a flourish of clarions and trumpets suddenly announces his presence, preceded by a troop of men-at-arms in the low cap and close-setting jerkin of that warlike time. Don Pedro himself mounted on a coal-black war-horse, the jewelled reins held by two great nobles, the Lord of Bertrayo and the Sevillian Don Enrique de la Cerda, husband of Doña Maria de Coronel.

Beside him, but somewhat in the rear, rides the queen, her bridal veil enveloping her like a shroud, and it is well so, for her ashen cheeks and sunken eyes would tell a tale of suffering no words could express.

Following after her comes the queen-mother, mounted on a white mule shod with gold, her eyes cast down, and with a visage full of sorrow.

As the young queen passes, the word goes round that she is an unwilling bride. "And no wonder, poor soul," answers a richer burgher, who has pushed himself forward and looks into her white face, "if she knows the sort of husband she is espousing. He kills all who come to him."

“An ill-omened couple,” whispers a fat countrywoman into his ear. “Look at the king, he never turns his eyes on the poor young thing, but rides straight on, and so fast her horse cannot keep pace with him. Why does he marry her? It is plain to see he hates her. I wonder how the young queen will like his *harem*? They say he lives like a Moor, and keeps a whole bevy of slaves shut up in the castle of Carmona.”

“Poor soul, I would not be in her shoes, and have to face his mistress, Maria de Padilla,” says another woman; “and after all, why should the king flout her if he likes a pretty face?”

“Belike some one has cast a spell on him,” observes a little man in a black *capa* and mantle, the city *medico*.

“Aye,” is the reply, “a jealous woman has overlooked her.”

And so it came to be understood among the crowd that the king had been bewitched and never would care for his girl queen.

“God grant he may not murder her,” are the last words of the fat countrywoman as they all move on to where the tables are spread.

The king meanwhile is hurrying in the most unseemly fashion, indifferent to the discomfort he causes to those behind, especially to the Lady Blanche, who with her two royal rein-holders, the Grand Master Don Fadique and the Infante of Aragon, not daring to look up, is now separated from him, which greatly mars the effect of the pageant.

The knights, having changed their armour while Queen Blanche was in her retiring room, reappear in fanciful suits

of many-coloured silk and brocade, their helmets replaced by graceful caps, ornamented with gems and pearls, in readiness for the nuptial banquet.

Don Juan de Mañara is most conspicuously attired in the excess of the mode, of no great beauty, but with so bold an eye, it is said of him he fears neither the living nor the dead. In all his wildest excesses Don Juan is the king's companion, but never for murder, injustice, or spoil. No wantonness is too great for him where women are concerned, and woe to the wife or maid who takes his fancy.

No one can rival Don Juan in the jewels he wears except the southern lord, Ponce de Leon, whose robe of pale silver tissue is covered with uncut stones, and his head encircled by a wreath of orient pearls taken from a Moorish emir whom he has slain.

Don Enrique de la Cerda, the king's favourite before Don Juan, but so much better than he that the people of Seville call him jeeringly *El Santo*, is attired in a dark velvet suit quite at variance with his usual magnificence. It is rumoured that he is out of favour on account of his beautiful wife, Doña Maria de Coronel, upon whom the king has cast eyes of love, a distinction which, contrary to fealty and allegiance as understood in those times, Cerda has not appreciated, and has not only shut her up in his castle of Cerda, but is inclined to listen to the overtures of Enrique of Trastamare and forsake the king altogether.

The board blazes with flowers, Moresque porcelain, and glittering plate; precious candelabras of sculptured silver shed

a soft light, and jewelled vases and golden cups give it back in intensest colours, as the king and queen enter to the sound of trumpets and take their place in the centre, beside them the royal princes and the Infante of Aragon, the ministers of state, and such ambassadors and envoys as have been invited to the tournament.

Wonderful to relate, Blanche is wreathed in smiles. This is Claire's doing. She has contrived to convey to her a message from the Grand Master, promising an interview for the morrow, when the king rides to Segovia. As the brother of the king, Don Fadique sits at her side. For an instant their hands meet, and such a thrill of pleasure shoots through her little heart as gives her courage to face every mishap. Child as she is, she clings to happiness. The future is an unveiled mystery. Why despair?

From Don Fadique her eyes wander to Don Pedro, placed on her other side. He has the same smooth face as his brother, but sterner and loftier, and a majesty of expression all his own. He is not frowning now, and the change is marvellous. No one could compare the two brothers.

"Who knows," Blanche begins to ask herself, peeping at him from under her long eyelashes, "if he really is such a monster as report gives out? Can anything be more perfect? His long wavy hair hanging in heavy curls." At this moment he is leaning over her in conversation with Don Fadique. No shade of displeasure is on his face, as he casts on her such a glance as brings blushes to her cheek. Alas! alas! could she but read the treachery of his

heart as he plays with the lace tissue of her robe, and lowers his voice to a soft whisper as he addresses her, she would flee from the hall, the city, and the land.

Little did the light-hearted daughter of Navarre understand the passions, deep down and fierce, of the Spaniards. Not voluble and capricious like the French, but sullen, silent, sinister, hiding all emotion under a mask. This she did not understand, nor that she had mortally offended Don Pedro, who but dissembled his revenge, storing up each word and look she thoughtlessly addressed to Don Fadique.

Poor Blanche! – her bright little head, encircled with the regal diadem – let her enjoy her brief moment of triumph. Little by little her heart is yielding to the fascinations of Don Pedro, the most brilliant cavalier she could have conjured up even in her dreams, and she feels that if he would but take her to his arms, she would tell him all her tale; how every one has frightened her, and that now she is ready to love him for ever and aye. It is all right now, and she feels so happy, she talks incessantly to Don Fadique in the pauses, telling him all she feels, which makes him inexpressibly wretched, and he casts on her the most longing glances, as a precious treasure he has lost, and heaves great sighs as he raises his eyes to her laughing face – at which she is really grieved, trying by all possible means to console him.

Don Pedro looks on with a strange, fixed smile. Now and then he even joins in the conversation with a loud harsh laugh, which, to say the truth, frightens Blanche, but, delighted at the change in

his bearing towards herself, she interprets it all as “men’s ways,” and hopes in time to grow accustomed to him. Every one could not be so gentle as the Grand Master, who, after all, was half a priest, so Claire said; and of the two, ignorant Blanche said in her heart, how much more she admired the rough blunt ways of the king.

Once indeed, when talking with Don Fadique, she turned round quickly to address Don Pedro, and met his eyes riveted on her with such a cruel stare, she grew cold all over. And it was strange that when he gave the signal for the company to separate, instead of leading her to the bridal chamber, as she had been told he would, he made her a low bow and retired attended by Don Juan de Mañara and Don Garcia de Padilla.

“I wonder if I have offended him,” she whispers to Claire, who is in waiting behind her chair. “I am afraid something must be wrong. Surely he ought not to have left me on our wedding night? What have I done? In the morning he was wroth without a cause, to-night he is gracious with still less reason.”

“You might have spoken less with the Grand Master,” is Claire’s reply. “I cannot abide Don Pedro,” Claire says, when they have reached the solitude of the queen’s apartment. “I am sure he has some secret chamber where he hangs up those who do not please him, like Blue Beard in his castle. For the sake of your life be on your guard, my queen. You may depend on the Grand Master, but the king is *not* to be trusted.”

“Oh, dear Claire, I am sure you are mistaken! Now I am as

unhappy as ever, just when I thought all was coming right! Why did not the queen-mother come to the banquet? She is kind and gracious. I could have taken courage to consult her. I have no friend but Fadique, and now I am afraid even of him.”

And once again the tell-tale tears gather in her eyes, as she buries herself in Claire’s arms.

“Mind, Claire, we must not meet Fadique to-morrow. It might anger the king. And oh! he is so charming, I would do anything to please him.”

“Who?” asks Claire, leaning down to where the queen’s curly head rests on her arm.

“Why, Don Pedro, of course,” is the answer. “No one can compare to him! Terrible but beautiful! Oh! if he would but love me! Alas! why did he go?” So, murmuring to each other, the queen calls in her tiring women, and prepares for rest.

CHAPTER VI

Cloister, Valladolid. – Castle of Talavera

ALL sleep, save that within a most lovely cloister of Gothic arches, over which the clustering branches of many vines tremble in the night air, comes the sound of voices, now near, now far, as the speakers pass and repass from opposite sides along the marble floor, and the echo of a harsh, discordant laugh breaks the silence.

“*Por Cristo!* I will go!” cries a loud voice, desecrating the fair night by its rough accent, as three muffled figures emerge for a moment into the light, where a lofty portal opens into the centre of the cloister, filled with the graves of monks, who even in death cling to the sacred precincts.

“I will go, and no man shall hinder me! With me shall come my trusty Don Juan and our brother Garcia. Ha! ha! Mañara,” addressing the tallest of the three figures, “you are always ready. How many ladies expect you in Seville at the Calle near the Lonja? See how sober a man is your sovereign. One lady love is all I claim. One, ineffable, divine! Now, I ask in all fairness, and I appeal to you, Mañara, can Albuquerque here (who has limed me like a falcon) reproach me if I fly back to the nest of love, after I have seen the baby-faced traitress he has chosen? *Sangre*

de Dio! The thought of Maria makes me mad.”

His speech was succeeded by a dead silence. Don Juan did not answer. There was a brutal coarseness of expression in the king which, as a knight and a caballero, he disapproved. Not so the third figure, Don Garcia de Padilla, standing a little aloof, as waiting to be addressed, who bowed to the ground, then further retreated into the gloom cast by the shadow of the clustered columns.

Then the grave voice of Albuquerque responds: “My lord, you have no just cause of suspicion against the queen. She is very young, and could be moulded like wax in your hand.”

“That is my affair!” answers the king, whose choleric temper is rising. “As facile as a dancing-girl. Nay, more so, for aught I know – for those devils of *gitanas* have a code of honour of their own. I have proved her. Even in my presence she could not conceal her love for the cursed bastard. I never wanted a wife; you forced her on me. But such a one as this is not worthy to mate with our jester. We will duly dispose of her, were she a thousand times cousin to the King of France.”

“Beware, my lord, what you do,” interposes Albuquerque, with the unhesitating frankness he alone dared use.

But Don Pedro continues without heeding him: “There is a prophecy about me, you say, of which you think much, ‘*I must kill or be killed.*’ Excellent reasoning! We will see to it by-and-by. For the present, the Lady Blanche shall spend her honeymoon in the strong castle of Talavera, and the Grand Master may find the

air of exile favourable to his health.”

To all this, spoken in a hard, grating voice, with the incessant and uneasy movement which always marked Don Pedro's bursts of fury, Albuquerque, his arms folded under his mantle, listened in silence.

Whether Don Pedro had expected some violent reproaches and was angered that they did not come, or whether, knowing the madness of what he was about to do, he had laid himself out to combat argument and reason, the effect of enraging him was all the same. He trembled with passion, and struck upon the pavement with his heel.

At length, unfolding his arms, Albuquerque speaks: “My liege, I have guided the councils of your kingdom in the time of your father, called ‘the Wise,’ and in the regency of your mother, called ‘the Good’; I have been your own pilot in many a stormy sea. Now I resign these gracious powers with which you have invested me into your hands, much worthier than mine. But before taking my leave, allow me to remind your Highness that the truce with Aragon is expired; that by divers hostile acts you have angered your old ally, the King of Granada, and that Enrique de Trastamare, with his army, is marching on Toledo, where he has many and powerful partisans. His alliance with His Most Christian Majesty was known to me, and therefore I wrought on your Grace to espouse the Lady Blanche, which would have traversed this scheme, and brought France to your aid; but as – ”

“Have you done?” thunders the king, so loud as to send a flight of night birds scudding across the sky.

“No, my lord, I have not done. Behind all this is His Holiness the Pope – long angered by the favour you show Mussulmen and Jews – seeking a cause to place you and Castile under an interdict; the Lady Blanche of Bourbon will serve him well for this. And as to your Castilian subjects, I warn your Highness to proffer no offers of advancement to Cerda, husband of Doña Maria Coronel. To my certain knowledge he is engaged in treasonable practices with Don Enrique; and the lady, my lord – here a cold smile for an instant lit up Albuquerque’s face —*will never yield!*”

“To hell with them and you,” roars Don Pedro, beside himself with rage. “You too, as report says, hold your papers in the hands of my brother, and will meet other traitors at his camp. Cursed hypocrite and treacherous counsellor, begone from my presence! Tread not Castilian soil again, I warn you.”

“Except as a conqueror,” is the calm reply. “May your Highness raise the glory of Castile as high as my desire, and you will win the world.” And the great minister passed down the dark aisle as tranquil as on a gala day, the shadow of the light vine-trellis clinging to the groined arches striking upon his mantle – the sound of his footsteps growing fainter and fainter, until finally they were lost in the murmurs of the night breeze.

Spite of his passion a spell of silence sat upon the king. The voice of his guardian angel rose within him, and on his lips was

the cry, "Return, return, Albuquerque;" but the good impulse promptly vanished, and with a mocking laugh he turned to Don Juan. "Have the horses saddled and the escort ready, I ride at break of day." Then, striding down the aisle, he disappeared.

Poor Blanche! Her dream is over. She awoke to find Don Pedro gone – Don Fadique fled – and a bench of bishops appointed to consult upon her supposed misdeeds. Proof there was none against her – not even of witchcraft, which was the popular accusation at times when all others failed. But, for all that, the bishops were much too terrified at the king not to pronounce her guilty.

The Duke of Bourbon, her father, and the most Christian king, her brother-in-law, by the mouth of a herald sent to Seville, storm and threaten – but what could be said against the judgment of these holy men?

Both justice and knowledge in those days lay in the Church, and Don Pedro had managed so cunningly, and Maria de Padilla had so carefully spread abroad diabolical accusations, that Blanche was held to be guilty of incest.

If the marriage by proxy common among kings and great princes were not respected as a point of chivalrous honour, by the person selected by the husband to represent him in the sacred rite, no crowned head would be safe. It was usual for a man of mature years to be chosen on such occasions, not a gay young *infante* like Don Fadique; but, on the other hand, his near relationship to the king was deemed sufficient guarantee for

his honour, and knightly honour in those days was much more considered than either virtue or religion.

Thus this accusation against Blanche appealed to the most violent prejudices of the time. She was supposed to have offended against that unwritten code which is the safeguard of kings.

No one cared for details. Degraded into a criminal, laden with contempt, she was sent under a strong escort to the castle of Talavera de la Reina on the Tagus, not far distant from Toledo; and Don Fadique saved his life by flight into Portugal.

Vainly did the queen-mother warn her son of the risk he ran in thus offending a French princess, and endeavour to procure for Blanche some gentler treatment. Don Pedro mocked at her as he had mocked at Albuquerque. He told her plainly that if she importuned him she should follow Blanche into a prison. "There were plenty of castles," he said, "in Castile for troublesome queens, as there were cords and daggers for traitors!"

Had Claire not been left her, Blanche would have died. Her horror of the king returned greater than ever. "He will kill me! He will kill me!" she kept repeating, "with a Moorish bowstring. His cruel blue eyes pierce me like a knife. Oh! Claire, I wish it were over!"

Then she raved of Navarre and Narbonne. Called on Don Fadique for help, and implored Claire to carry her to the convent, and bury her out of sight.

For two days they rode over the plains, avoiding the steep

defiles of the Guadarrama Mountains, expecting death at every halting-place. The faint hope of a rescue haunted the mind of Claire, but she did not speak of it to Blanche. Where were the Grand Master and all the noble knights of Santiago? Surely they would not allow such a crime? But no white-mantled horsemen came galloping over the plain; no flag of knight or esquire fluttered in the grey atmosphere. The same dull lines seemed endless.

At length they descended into the gorges of a deep treeless valley, through which the broad Tagus flows by rocky boundaries, very different from the laughing river which runs by the leafy groves of Aranjuez, and reflects that bright and elegant palace of the Bourbons in its crystal flood.

On a height, to the right, rose the castle of Talavera de la Reina, built of small bricks faced with stone, an irregular fortress of Gothic times.

As the portcullis was raised to admit Queen Blanche, Claire, whose eyes were everywhere, was delighted to observe that it was in a ruinous condition, having lately sustained a siege, and that it appeared slenderly garrisoned for a royal fortress. A wild hope of escape possessed her, especially when the governor, who advanced to hold the queen's bridle on bended knee, appeared in the person of a gracious young cavalier, wearing on his breast the cross of Santiago.

Even Blanche roused herself to bestow on him a sweet smile, and graciously replied to his words of welcome.

Conducted by him, and followed by serving-men and seneschals, Blanche casting uneasy looks around, mounted the narrow turning stair, which led to the dreary suite of rooms known as "the royal chambers." At every door stood a man-at-arms, halberd in hand, immovable as a statue.

"It seems I am considered a dangerous prisoner," she said, turning with a winning smile towards the governor, who walked at her left hand. "What care two poor women require to keep fast locked up! A good watch-dog, such as we have in Narvarre to guard the sheep, would be sufficient."

"Madam, I grieve in aught to displease your Highness," is the reply; "but I act under strict command, as the king's officer. The presence of armed troops near Toledo gives some alarm –"

"Armed troops!" interrupts Claire, arresting Blanche's progress with her hand; "and who commands them?"

The governor hesitated. Claire's eyes, a pair of brilliant orbs with glancing Gallic fire, were turned full upon him.

"Oh, tell me, is it the Grand Master of Santiago?" cries Blanche, thinking that Don Fadique might be near. "You are not bidden to imprison our souls."

"Madam," answers the young governor, bowing to the ground, "I dare not refuse the command of the Queen of Castile. The armed bands I speak of are the skirmishers of Don Enrique de Trastamare, who is advancing from the north on the city of Toledo. It is said that some French mercenaries are with him."

"Oh! thank the blessed Virgin for that," ejaculates poor

Blanche, clasping her hands and uttering a silent prayer. "They have thought of me at last. Oh, the dear French; it seems to me I could embrace the roughest of the soldiers! Oh, that I were with them, and had never left that pleasant land! Are they far off? Can I see them pass? Is there no tower or battlement from which I could wave a greeting to them? Oh, say – ?"

"Madam," answers the governor, gravely – Claire finds him extremely sympathetic, with his dark moustache and pointed beard, small aristocratic head, and dark black eyes, capable of saying so many things – "I have already overstepped my duty. Your Grace must be merciful, and press me no further. Believe me, madam, did it depend on me, not only this wish of yours, but all others, would be met even before expressed. I, too, come of French blood. My mother was from Bayonne."

"Your name?" asks Blanche. "The king is happy in possessing so loyal an officer."

"Alvarez de Varga," is the reply. "As a boy, I was reared at Seville, as one of the pages of the queen."

"What queen?" asks Claire, hastily. "Not – "

"No, madam; my gracious mistress was Mary of Portugal. I was chosen among many as the companion of Don Pedro."

"Oh! the Saints protect me! then you love him?" exclaims Blanche, shrinking back against the wall.

"Not more than is set down in my duty, madam," is his quick reply. "In my hands you are as safe as in the palace of Narbonne. Rather would I sever limb from limb, than that harm should come

to your Highness under my charge.”

“Thank heaven!” was all that Blanche could murmur, for her lips had turned bloodless from terror.

“Tell me, Don Alvarez,” asks Claire, who never let a propitious occasion slip, “did you know Don Fadique, the Grand Master, at the Court?”

“Right well; he is my master. We were playmates together, until the death of his mother scattered the Infantes far and wide. Don Fadique,” he adds, reading the breathless interest expressed in both the fair ladies’ eyes, now riveted upon him, “is of a temper to attach all who approach him. Even the queen, with so many causes of displeasure against the children of Doña Eleanor de Guzman, who led away the fancy of her consort, always cherished him.”

“Tell me,” says Claire, in her eagerness placing her hand upon his arm, “does Don Fadique ride with his brother, Don Enrique, against the king? Will he join in the siege of Toledo?”

“Noble *demoiselle*, whom I account French from her accent,” answers Don Alvarez, again bowing low, a great admiration breaking into his face as his eyes wander over Claire’s tall and supple form, “your zeal for your royal mistress touches me to the soul. But, by my faith, I do not know where the Grand Master is; but if I did, it is not my place to tell.”

“Oh, say not so, Sir Governor,” answers Claire, “you are our only friend. We are of all ladies the most dejected. Do not treat us prisoners who as have done ill, but as innocent sufferers

consigned to your care.”

“Such is my conviction, fair lady,” is Don Alvarez’s answer, “but prisoners you are. In all that I can, count on me as your slave. Will it please your Grace” – addressing Blanche – “to pass up to the second storey, and view the apartments which have been prepared for you?”

With a deep sigh, Blanche followed him. Her arms fell to her side. To be so near rescue, yet bound within these walls!

As to Claire, the affairs of state did not affect her at all. She was fully occupied in considering what advantage she could take of the evident admiration of the governor.

Discreet as he meant to be, he could not control his eyes; one look had betrayed him to the astute pupil of the nuns, whose zeal for Blanche wanted no stimulating.

“I will make the governor love me, and free the queen,” was her thought, and as, step by step, she followed Blanche up the stairs, passing by narrow lancet windows that let in the light, the whole project simplified itself so marvellously in her brain that already they were careering forth upon the plains on two fleet Spanish barbs, accompanied by Don Alvarez, to the outposts of Don Enrique de Trastamare.

CHAPTER VII

Don Pedro and Maria de Padilla

THE inner *patio*, on the left hand, as you enter the Alcazar, where trees of magnolia and pomegranate wave together among hedges of red roses, has always been called the *Patio de Maria Padilla*.

It is known that her royal lover raised rooms on the flat, Moorish roof, and decorated them magnificently for her use.

Charles V. took his chapel from them, and his comfortable bed-rooms where he could at least, with convenient surroundings, encounter his formidable attacks of gout.

Maria's tiring-room, with its long range of *miradores* (windows), immediately over Don Pedro's gorgeous portal, is not only a capital post of observation, but a wonder to behold. The walls, a snowy mass of lace-work cut in stone, are relieved by encrusted tiles of a deep and ruddy colour. Beneath the golden cupola of fretted stalactites, a perfumed fountain sheds clouds of spray, and banks of flowers and myrtle scent the air.

On each of the four sides are recesses for divans, on which lie piled up cushions wrought in the looms of Granada, the walls covered with Eastern stuffs, stiff with gold and tissue, Gothic characters wrought into borders and tessellated edgings, each recess supported by pillars, round which twist serpents of gold

and enamel, with eyes of enormous emeralds giving a life-like glare. Behind screens of golden trellis, woven with the brilliant blossoms of fresh flowers, are the heavy draperies which shroud the doorways, bearing the royal monogram and *nodo*, and in one corner a hidden entrance leading into the apartments of Don Pedro. But one step of her light feet, and Maria is in the presence of the king!

So lived for years this terrible beauty – a fan her sceptre, and love's seat her throne!

Some are born queens; others achieve greatness. There are peasant princesses and baseborn empresses; sultanas of the buskin, and *kadines* of the lute; modest violets, born in the purple, and imperial beauties like the rose, unapproachable and supreme; but if ever a woman was created to reign, it was this haughty and cynical tyrant who, under the most enticing form, concealed a will of steel, remorseless, fearless, merciless, and cold.

Maria has been called a witch, and her power over Don Pedro attributed to magic, but she dealt in no charms save those that nature had bestowed on her, and an intelligence far above her age.

Now she sits desolate, the pillared *miradores* are closed, the heavy curtains drawn. Not that it is night, for the summer sun blazes over the city, and such as are abroad in the streets seek the narrow Moorish alleys and the shadow of deep *patio* gates to breathe.

But the lady of love is sorrowful. A heavy presentiment of

evil is in her soul. She has long known through her spies, that Albuquerque is engaged in a conspiracy against her. What it exactly is she has been long in finding out. Like Damocles' sword it hung over her head, and now she knows it! And a mad fury possesses her which she no longer cares to control.

Not only has she overwhelmed Albuquerque with accusations, but she has branded him as a traitor and renegade against the king.

Up to this time outward observances of courtesy have been observed between them, especially in the presence of Don Pedro, but now words of direct menace have passed, received on the part of Albuquerque in dignified silence, as the paltry onslaught of an enemy he disdains.

It is war to the knife between the cool-headed minister and a passionate woman, blinded by a sense of wrong to herself and the children she has borne the king. Many weeks have passed since she has seen Don Pedro, who left her in displeasure anent the burning question of his marriage. He was going to hunt, he told her, in the mountains of Segovia, in obvious subterfuge, for he had not been there at all, nor can she learn for certain whether he is at Burgos or Valladolid, nor when he will return. And this treatment from a lover, whom she has hitherto swayed with absolute power!

As the name of Pedro rises to her lips, she raises herself and sits upright.

“He dared to talk to me of marriage,” she cries, clenching her

hands until the henna-tipped fingers mark the palm. "Alliance with France! Before, it was I who was to wear the crown; I, whose beauty he said was to work miracles upon the people; I, whose craft was to sway his councils; I, Maria de Padilla, to crush out rebellion, and now he would bring in a stranger to put me to open shame – me and the son I have borne him! Oh, Pedro! Pedro! Was it for this you lured me to you? No, no! This wrong does not come from you, but from that crafty knave, Albuquerque, who has been bribed to ruin me!"

As she spoke, all her tears seemed in an instant to dry up. Her face grew dark, as she put back the long black hair that veiled her cheeks, and gathered herself together where she lay.

"If it is a duel between us two, I accept it. One must fall. It shall not be Maria de Padilla. To dare to bring a wife to Pedro. A wife! ha! ha! Blanche of Bourbon! She shall never reign in Castile! I will prevent it! Alliance, indeed, and marriage! I will light up such a war that they shall curse the day they named her. What? Come into Spain to rob me of my Pedro? Never! No, not if I call Beelzebub himself to help me!"

As she sits there, her widely opened eyes fixed on the shadowed splendour of the walls, the gold, and the panels, the waving filagree work, and the arches, she looks like a beautiful demon.

Then a flood of tender recollections comes to her. She thinks of the first days when she came a young girl to her kinsman's house in Seville, how Albuquerque threw her in the king's path

as a humble flower he was invited to pick up. The glory of his love, the triumph of her power, almost a queen – more than a sultana – the crown within her grasp – and now, fallen so low that he has left her without a word. Yes! He has sacrificed her to his ambition; what more has she to hope? By this act Albuquerque's ascendancy is proclaimed. This royal marriage is a proof of it. Pedro has many enemies – Aragon, Navarre, France, brothers and ambitious nobles. Slowly the truth comes to her, and again she flings herself back in an agony of despair. Again the fountain of her tears is poured out. "Pedro! oh, Pedro!" is all she can utter.

As the king's name passes her lips, a mailed hand puts back the arras which hangs before the door, and he himself stands before her, the dark steel helmet on his head, and the loose auburn locks worn long making his naturally pallid face look whiter. Save for his breastplate, he is in complete armour, travel-stained and mud-besplashed as one who had ridden long and furiously. Nor does his countenance denote a mind at ease. Every feature in his face betrays an anxiety and care seldom seen there. Instead of that upright, masterful bearing which strikes fear into his enemies, his manner of entering is hurried and agitated.

"You called me, Maria," he says tenderly, gathering her prostrate form into his arms, "and I am here."

But ere the words have passed his lips, Maria has sprung to her feet.

"What, my lord!" she cries, with a mocking laugh, "so soon from Valladolid? Where is the Lady Blanche? Have you tired of

her already? Is Albuquerque with you, listening behind the arras? If *he* is a traitor to me, *you* are a greater.”

Then her mood changes, and tearing herself away from his outstretched arms she flings herself back upon the divan. “Oh, you are cruel, cruel!” she sobs. “For years you have enjoyed the treasure of my love – all I could give you. Who swore to make me his queen before the Church? to name my child his successor? And now you have wedded, stealthily, secretly, treacherously, and Albuquerque has helped you! Oh, Pedro, you have broken my heart! Go to your white-faced princess. She will deceive you, as you have me. Let me go!” she shrieks, as the king endeavours to draw her closer to him, and the sound of her voice echoes in the painted vestibules as she struggles to free herself. “Touch me not. Not with a finger. You shall not stay me; I will die as proudly as I have lived in this palace where I have triumphed. Here, on this pavement our feet have pressed so long together; within these halls where you have so often dallied with me!”

Then, by a sudden movement flinging back the curtains, she rushes forward into the open gallery of the *mirador*, but in an instant the strong arms of Pedro are round her.

All that tenderness could devise he essays to calm her. Slowly and sadly she yields to his touch, and listens to his entreaties for forgiveness. No one could have recognised the cruel Pedro in this impassioned youth. Truly it might be said she had bewitched him!

“Maria,” he whispers, covering her with kisses, as she lies faint

and exhausted in his arms, “believe me, if I am married, it is for your good.”

“‘*My good,*’ false one? What good can come to me by losing you?”

“By making you greater than the queen!” answers, Pedro, looking down with glowing eyes upon the lines of her exquisite figure, and that royal contour of neck and brow that marks her supreme among women.

“But I *am* queen,” she answers, looking up at him, as the colour returns slowly to her cheeks. “Your queen. There is no other. Why did you listen to Albuquerque and put that woman between us?”

“Ah! sweet love, why?” sighs the love-sick Pedro, his whole soul melting as he gazes at the enchantress.

Who is like her? Who? By heaven, this black-browed Andalusian would put the pale daughters of the north to shame, were she but a beggar!

“Yes, Maria, I hate Blanche of Bourbon as much as you! She shrank from me with loathing. Not a smile, not a word – all were for Fadique, the treacherous boy. *Por Dios!* he shall be stripped of his honours, and your brother Garcia shall take his place as Grand Master of Santiago. By this time Fadique is on his way to Portugal. I have rooted out the viper, and scorned the royal *demoiselle*. Mark that, Maria, *scorned her*, and left her. Your voice called me and I am here. And I am glad of it. Come what may. Let Du Guesclin and the French avenge her. Kings,

queens, and powers – though the whole world stands before me, I will have none of her, I have sworn it on the Gospel.” And in a passion of newly awakened love, he strains Maria to him in a wild embrace.

“But how can I trust you,” she whispers, her eyes meeting his. “You have deceived me once, you may again.”

“But you are not the only one, Maria. I am also deceived, cajoled. *Por Dios!* my vengeance shall fall on more than her. Don Fadique – ” He paused.

“Away with these half-words,” cries Maria, the feeling of power coming to her again as, eagerly seizing the king’s hands, she draws him to her and brings her glowing face close to his. “What of Fadique? How could you trust him?”

“Yes,” answers Pedro slowly. “The Judas! It was Albuquerque who insisted on sending him as my proxy, ‘devoted to *me*,’ he said. Ha! ha!” and he burst into a harsh laugh. “He met her at Narbonne, and passed the nuptial ring on her finger. Let God judge the hand that smites her, for smitten she shall be for her treason, and that speedily.”

“What?” cried Maria, her dark eyes kindling with light. “Do you really mean – ?”

“I mean what I say,” answers the king, sullenly. “The Queen of Castile and Leon is not as a trump in a hand of cards to be passed from brother to brother. It is a foul crime on my throne and person. At Valladolid I saw it at a glance. So I took horse, and I am here. At least one woman is true to me, and that is

you, Maria.” And again he clasps her to his breast. “Lie there, sweetheart, it is your home.”

“And Don Fadique?” asks Maria, her face hardening as she remembers how the handsome Grand Master has always treated her with scant courtesy. “Is he long to taste the bliss provided for him? Methinks that the sons of Eleanor de Guzman live but to play tricks upon your Grace.”

“Would that they had but one neck,” roars Don Pedro, “that I could finish them at a blow! Maria, I know you have a grudge against Fadique; console yourself. A choice revenge awaits him and the Lady Blanche shall pay for *all!*”

A gleam of hate passed into his eyes, and was reflected in those of Maria, who, breathlessly listening, drank in every word.

“Some day, who knows? Life is short. A draught of Xeres wine – a silken thread – even the too heavy pressure of a scarf. All these kill well (accidentally of course) and may send the soul of Blanche to heaven! God rest her soul! Do you say *Amen*, Maria? Ha! ha!” – how hollow and mocking is his laugh! – “Are you happy now?” he asks, twisting her long fingers in his own, and gazing at her with his full merciless eyes. “All your enemies have fallen Maria; I wait but to strike sure.”

“And shall Blanche really die?” again whispers Maria, her eyes glittering like a snake. “Die by some swift death? Swear it to me, Pedro.”

He did not speak, but smiling down on her as he held her in one arm, with his right hand, he unsheathed the jewelled dagger he

wore beneath his girdle, until the steel, catching a ray of sunlight imprisoned in the dark room, flashes with a dangerous reflex.

“This shall settle all, love,” he answers. “Now let me go to the bath to refresh me. See how the dust lies on me for I rode hard. I have done sixty miles without drawing rein, with relays of horses, to come to you. Let me go,” as she clings to him as though terrified to lose him. “We will meet anon in the gardens, and the Moorish slaves from Granada shall dance to us.”

One more embrace, and he had picked up his plumed helmet and placed it on his head, and down the narrow steps of the private stair his mailed feet clanked.

Maria stood erect before the fountain which seemed to sing in the marble basin to a wild rhythm as the spray fell, and such a murderous look came upon her face as would have turned to stone all who were in her power. Then, sounding a golden whistle, her slaves came running in, and with a gesture she commanded that the curtains before the *mirador* should be withdrawn.

Like a conqueror, the setting sun comes blazing in, engulfing all the gorgeous tints of wall, dome, draperies, and pavement in its rays, while cythers, flutes, and viols make harmony without – she, moving to her toilette, as one whose thoughts are far away, while the long locks of her ebon hair are delicately smoothed with golden combs before a silver mirror, ere she descends to the garden to join the king.

CHAPTER VIII

Don Fadique Goes to Seville

THE Grand Master Don Fadique was not with his brother Enrique. In the first moment of his flight from Valladolid he had crossed the frontier into Portugal.

There, among goatherds and shepherds, for awhile he lay concealed, and when reflection came to him in this solitude, his conscience sorely pricked him for his disloyalty to the king. Whatever punishment his brother and sovereign inflicted on him he felt would be his due. It was not that he mistook Don Pedro's mind in his treatment of the Lady Blanche, nor did his love and pity for her suffer any diminution, but he could not rid himself of the conviction that he had been a traitor. Blanche's innocence alone had preserved him from a crime.

His upright and loyal nature revolted against the thought, and in his flight, as he struck the rowels into the glossy sides of the sorrel jennet on which he was mounted, causing it to rear and prance, he felt he could not put distance enough between himself and the dear object of his love.

Poor Blanche! Sweet Blanche! Where was she now? How fared it with her? Did she love him still? And then he checked himself for these guilty thoughts, and drawing from his doublet his jewelled rosary, he vainly tried to drown his thoughts in

prayer.

Arrived within the strong fortress of Coimbra, on the coast of Portugal, he heard that his brother Enrique was advancing, at the head of an army, on Toledo, while Don Pedro lingered inactive at Seville. This seemed most strange!

There were rumours that he was waiting for the advance of the English to support him against the French king, furious at the imprisonment of Blanche in the castle of Talavera on the Tagus.

At length a royal messenger arrived at Coimbra direct from the king, an honourable messenger, wearing the *noda* and *banda*, the bearer of a letter from Don Pedro.

“Come to Seville,” he wrote, “dear brother, and let us live at peace. I am about to hold a tourney and tilt of reeds on the plains of the Guadalquivir, near the city, and I can ill lack the absence of the Grand Master of Santiago among my knights. A friendly greeting to you, and a safe conduct on the road. Your quarters are at the Alcazar at Seville, from whence I write. – Pedro.”

“And I will go!” cried Don Fadique. “It may perhaps give me the occasion to help the queen. Perhaps Pedro has come to a better mind; he changes suddenly. Or it may be that at this time of risings and rebellions, he may desire the support of the knights of Santiago and the presence of their Grand Master.”

Those of his friends and attendants at Coimbra strove vainly to dissuade him from putting faith in the friendship of the king. It was, at best, they represented, a rash resolve, especially to go to Seville and the Alcazar. If he would join him, let them meet

in the open camp, not put himself into danger within a palace inhabited by Maria de Padilla.

At this Don Fadique grew wroth. "What!" he answered, "do you take me for a craven that cannot defend himself? Maybe, surrounded by enemies, he may think of me more kindly. Read the gracious words. Look at the royal messenger, whom we all know as a man who would not lend himself to fraud or treachery. My brother generously sets me free, and I can use that freedom as well at Seville as at any other place. Let Maria de Padilla do her worst. Rather than consume my life in this fortress, I would face the devil himself. Enrique may join with the enemies of Castile and bring Du Guesclin's free lances to spoil the land, but my place is by my brother in tournament or battle – I will go!"

Buckling on his richest suit of armour, over which he wore the short crimson mantle of his order, with the cross of Santiago embroidered on his breast, he set forth, accompanied by a goodly band of followers hastily armed; also with him he took a little page, his foster-brother, who had never left him, and loved him with the affection of a child.

On the eighth day from his departure he reached the banks of the Tagus, at an old town called Castel Bianco, where he rested.

Now the tale runs, and I will neither deny nor assert it, that the Grand Master received here a message from Queen Blanche, informing him how near she was, and that at night he went out disguised, and, taking a boat, dropped down the river to Talavera, and there saw the Lady Blanche, thanks to the complaisance of

the gallant governor – who was so wildly in love with Claire, he could refuse her nothing. This is *said*, and that a plan of escape was formed by which Blanche could reach Toledo, on which the French were advancing to reinforce the army of Don Enrique el Cavalier, and that Don Fadique at Seville should apprise her of Don Pedro's movements by means of the little page.

Speaking personally, I do not believe that the Grand Master ever went to the castle or saw Blanche at all, after the remorse he had felt and the confessions he had made, to say nothing of the danger to the queen if Don Pedro found it out. And Don Pedro did find out everything in the most extraordinary way, as people said, by black magic, and that Maria de Padilla looked upon a crystal and saw all she desired to tell the king.

CHAPTER IX

Murder of Don Fadique

ON the fifteenth day from his departure from Coimbra, Don Fadique beheld the domes and pinnacles of Seville – proud Seville as it is called – the Empress of the Plains.

The weather is dark and stormy. Even in the sunny South such changes occur, especially towards the equinox, to which the time approaches. As far as the eye can reach black clouds drive angrily before a northern blast, rushing as it were to bank themselves together towards the sea, and the wind rattles among the windows of the few pleasure-houses which stand outside the walls, swaying the fronds of the palms and the bamboos as if to tear them from the ground.

By the time Don Fadique, riding faster and faster, has reached the fork in the road beside the Hospital del Sangre, the heavens look like a second Deluge.

“Cover yourself well, my boy,” said he to the little page, as he drew his own dark *manto* over his armour. “The hurricane will be soon upon us. We shall be fortunate if we reach the Alcazar in time.”

As they passed what are now the boulevards, such trees as there were swayed and bowed to the fierce blast, and quickly succeeding thunder was heard among the hills. Not a sound

reached them as they struck through the streets to where the beautiful cathedral stands, consecrated as a Christian church by Fernando el Santo, and as yet but little altered from the mosque it was before.

It was part of Don Pedro's policy in all things to favour the Moors. Indeed, there were times in his strange moods when he swore he was a Mohammedan himself.

As the herald sounds his trumpet-call before the gate of the Alcazar, waiting for the portcullis to be raised, an aged pilgrim in tattered raiment rises up suddenly before Fadique.

"Turn back, my son. Turn while you may," and he lays his hand on his horse's bridle. "Take warning by the heavens! The elements are at war. So is man. For the sake of your dead mother I speak. Enter not the Alcazar. Warned by a vision, I girded up my loins, and have walked from the Sierra Morena here. As the blood of Eleanor de Guzman was shed on the stones of Seville, so shall be yours."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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