

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**LEILA OR, THE SIEGE
OF GRANADA, BOOK
II**

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of Granada, Book II

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Edward Bulwer Lytton

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Book II

CHAPTER I

THE ROYAL TENT OF SPAIN.— THE KING AND THE DOMINICAN —THE VISITOR AND THE HOSTAGE

Our narrative now summons us to the Christian army, and to the tent in which the Spanish king held nocturnal counsel with some of his more confidential warriors and advisers. Ferdinand had taken the field with all the pomp and circumstance of a tournament rather than of a campaign; and his pavilion literally blazed with purple and cloth of gold.

The king sat at the head of a table on which were scattered maps and papers; nor in countenance and mien did that great and

politic monarch seem unworthy of the brilliant chivalry by which he was surrounded. His black hair, richly perfumed and anointed, fell in long locks on either side of a high imperial brow, upon whose calm, though not unfurrowed surface, the physiognomist would in vain have sought to read the inscrutable heart of kings. His features were regular and majestic: and his mantle, clasped with a single jewel of rare price and lustre, and wrought at the breast with a silver cross, waved over a vigorous and manly frame, which derived from the composed and tranquil dignity of habitual command that imposing effect which many of the renowned knights and heroes in his presence took from loftier stature and ampler proportions. At his right hand sat Prince Juan, his son, in the first bloom of youth; at his left, the celebrated Rodrigo Ponce de Leon, Marquess of Cadiz; along the table, in the order of their military rank, were seen the splendid Duke of Medina Sidonia, equally noble in aspect and in name; the worn and thoughtful countenance of the Marquess de Villena (the Bayard of Spain); the melancholy brow of the heroic Alonzo de Aguilar; and the gigantic frame, the animated features, and sparkling eyes, of that fiery Hernando del Pulgar, surnamed "the knight of the exploits."

"You see, senores," said the king, continuing an address, to which his chiefs seemed to listen with reverential attention, "our best hope of speedily gaining the city is rather in the dissensions of the Moors than our own sacred arms. The walls are strong, the population still numerous; and under Muza Ben Abil Gazan, the

tactics of the hostile army are, it must be owned, administered with such skill as to threaten very formidable delays to the period of our conquest. Avoiding the hazard of a fixed battle, the infidel cavalry harass our camp by perpetual skirmishes; and in the mountain defiles our detachments cannot cope with their light horse and treacherous ambuscades. It is true, that by dint of time, by the complete devastation of the Vega, and by vigilant prevention of convoys from the seatowns, we might starve the city into yielding. But, alas! my lords, our enemies are scattered and numerous, and Granada is not the only place before which the standard of Spain should be unfurled. Thus situated, the lion does not disdain to serve himself of the fox; and, fortunately, we have now in Granada an ally that fights for us. I have actual knowledge of all that passes within the Alhambra: the king yet remains in his palace, irresolute and dreaming; and I trust that an intrigue by which his jealousies are aroused against his general, Muza, may end either in the loss of that able leader, or in the commotion of open rebellion or civil war. Treason within Granada will open its gates to us."

"Sire," said Ponce de Leon, after a pause, "under your counsels, I no more doubt of seeing our banner float above the Vermilion Towers, than I doubt the rising of the sun over yonder hills; it matters little whether we win by stratagem or force. But I need not say to your highness, that we should carefully beware lest we be amused by inventions of the enemy, and trust to conspiracies which may be but lying tales to blunt our sabres,

and paralyse our action."

"Bravely spoken, wise de Leon!" exclaimed Hernando del Pulgar, hotly: "and against these infidels, aided by the cunning of the Evil One, methinks our best wisdom lies in the sword-arm. Well says our old Castilian proverb:

'Curse them devoutly,
Hammer them stoutly.'

The king smiled slightly at the ardour of the favourite of his army, but looked round for more deliberate counsel. "Sire," said Villena, "far be it from us to inquire the grounds upon which your majesty builds your hope of dissension among the foe; but, placing the most sanguine confidence in a wisdom never to be deceived, it is clear that we should relax no energy within our means, but fight while we plot, and seek to conquer, while we do not neglect to undermine."

"You speak well, my Lord," said Ferdinand, thoughtfully; "and you yourself shall head a strong detachment to-morrow, to lay waste the Vega. Seek me two hours hence; the council for the present is dissolved."

The knights rose, and withdrew with the usual grave and stately ceremonies of respect, which Ferdinand observed to, and exacted from, his court: the young prince remained.

"Son," said Ferdinand, when they were alone, "early and betimes should the Infants of Spain be lessoned in the science

of kingcraft. These nobles are among the brightest jewels of the crown; but still it is in the crown, and for the crown, that their light should sparkle. Thou seest how hot, and fierce, and warlike, are the chiefs of Spain— excellent virtues when manifested against our foes: but had we no foes, Juan, such virtues might cause us exceeding trouble. By St. Jago, I have founded a mighty monarchy! observe how it should be maintained—by science, Juan, by science! and science is as far removed from brute force as this sword from a crowbar. Thou seemest bewildered and amazed, my son: thou hast heard that I seek to conquer Granada by dissensions among the Moors; when Granada is conquered, remember that the nobles themselves are at Granada. Ave Maria! blessed be the Holy Mother, under whose eyes are the hearts of kings!" Ferdinand crossed himself devoutly; and then, rising, drew aside a part of the drapery of the pavilion, and called; in a low voice, the name of Perez. A grave Spaniard, somewhat past the verge of middle age, appeared.

"Perez," said the king, reseating himself, "has the person we expected from Granada yet arrived?"

"Sire, yes; accompanied by a maiden."

"He hath kept his word; admit them. Ha! holy father, thy visits are always as balsam to the heart."

"Save you, my son!" returned a man in the robes of a Dominican friar, who had entered suddenly and without ceremony by another part of the tent, and who now seated himself with smileless composure at a little distance from the

king.

There was a dead silence for some moments; and Perez still lingered within the tent, as if in doubt whether the entrance of the friar would not prevent or delay obedience to the king's command. On the calm face of Ferdinand himself appeared a slight shade of discomposure and irresolution, when the monk thus resumed:

"My presence, my son, will not, I trust, disturb your conference with the infidel—since you deem that worldly policy demands your parley with the men of Belial."

"Doubtless not—doubtless not," returned the king, quickly: then, muttering to himself, "how wondrously doth this holy man penetrate into all our movements and designs!" he added, aloud, "Let the messenger enter."

Perez bowed, and withdrew.

During this time, the young prince reclined in listless silence on his seat; and on his delicate features was an expression of weariness which augured but ill of his fitness for the stern business to which the lessons of his wise father were intended to educate his mind. His, indeed, was the age, and his the soul, for pleasure; the tumult of the camp was to him but a holiday exhibition—the march of an army, the exhilaration of a spectacle; the court as a banquet—the throne, the best seat at the entertainment. The life of the heir-apparent, to the life of the king possessive, is as the distinction between enchanting hope and tiresome satiety.

The small grey eyes of the friar wandered over each of his royal companions with a keen and penetrating glance, and then settled in the aspect of humility on the rich carpets that bespread the floor; nor did he again lift them till Perez, reappearing, admitted to the tent the Israelite, Almamen, accompanied by a female figure, whose long veil, extending from head to foot, could conceal neither the beautiful proportions nor the trembling agitation, of her frame.

"When last, great king, I was admitted to thy presence," said Almamen, "thou didst make question of the sincerity and faith of thy servant; thou didst ask me for a surety of my faith; thou didst demand a hostage; and didst refuse further parley without such pledge were yielded to thee. Lo! I place under thy kingly care this maiden—the sole child of my house—as surety of my truth; I intrust to thee a life dearer than my own."

"You have kept faith with us, stranger," said the king, in that soft and musical voice which well disguised his deep craft and his unrelenting will; "and the maiden whom you intrust to our charge shall be ranked with the ladies of our royal consort."

"Sire," replied Almamen, with touching earnestness, you now hold the power of life and death over all for whom this heart can breathe a prayer or cherish a hope, save for my countrymen and my religion. This solemn pledge between thee and me I render up without scruple, without fear. To thee I give a hostage, from thee I have but a promise."

"But it is the promise of a king, a Christian, and a knight,"

said the king, with dignity rather mild than arrogant; "among monarchs, what hostage can be more sacred? Let this pass: how proceed affairs in the rebel city?"

"May this maiden withdraw, ere I answer my lord the king?" said Almamen.

The young prince started to his feet. "Shall I conduct this new charge to my mother?" he asked, in a low voice, addressing Ferdinand.

The king half smiled: "The holy father were a better guide," he returned, in the same tone. But, though the Dominican heard the hint, he retained his motionless posture; and Ferdinand, after a momentary gaze on the friar, turned away. "Be it so, Juan," said he, with a look meant to convey caution to the prince; "Perez shall accompany you to the queen: return the moment your mission is fulfilled—we want your presence."

While this conversation was carried on between the father and son, the Hebrew was whispering, in his sacred tongue, words of comfort and remonstrance to the maiden; but they appeared to have but little of the desired effect; and, suddenly falling on his breast, she wound her arms around the Hebrew, whose breast shook with strong emotions, and exclaimed passionately, in the same language, "Oh, my father! what have I done?— why send me from thee?—why intrust thy child to the stranger? Spare me, spare me!"

"Child of my heart!" returned the Hebrew, with solemn but tender accents, "even as Abraham offered up his son, must I offer

thee, upon the altars of our faith; but, O Leila! even as the angel of the Lord forbade the offering, so shall thy youth be spared, and thy years reserved for the glory of generations yet unborn. King of Spain!" he continued in the Spanish tongue, suddenly and eagerly, "you are a father, forgive my weakness, and speed this parting."

Juan approached; and with respectful courtesy attempted to take the hand of the maiden.

"You?" said the Israelite, with a dark frown. "O king! the prince is young."

"Honour knoweth no distinction of age," answered the king. "What ho, Perez! accompany this maiden and the prince to the queen's pavilion."

The sight of the sober years and grave countenance of the attendant seemed to re-assure the Hebrew. He strained Leila in his arms; printed a kiss upon her forehead without removing her veil; and then, placing her almost in the arms of Perez, turned away to the further end of the tent, and concealed his face with his hands. The king appeared touched; but the Dominican gazed upon the whole scene with a sour scowl.

Leila still paused for a moment; and then, as if recovering her self-possession, said, aloud and distinctly,—"Man deserts me; but I will not forget that God is over all." Shaking off the hand of the Spaniard, she continued, "Lead on; I follow thee!" and left the tent with a steady and even majestic step.

"And now," said the king, when alone with the Dominican and

Almamen, "how proceed our hopes?"

"Boabdil," replied the Israelite, "is aroused against both his army and their leader, Muza; the king will not quit the Alhambra; and this morning, ere I left the city, Muza himself was in the prisons of the palace."

"How!" cried the king, starting from his seat.

"This is my work," pursued the Hebrew. coldly. "It is these hands that are shaping for Ferdinand of Spain the keys of Granada."

"And right kingly shall be your guerdon," said the Spanish monarch: "meanwhile, accept this earnest of our favour." So saying, he took from his breast a chain of massive gold, the links of which were curiously inwrought with gems, and extended it to the Israelite. Almamen moved not. A dark flush upon his countenance bespoke the feelings he with difficulty restrained.

"I sell not my foes for gold, great king," said he, with a stern smile:

"I sell my foes to buy the ransom of my friends."

"Churlish!" said Ferdinand, offended: "but speak on, man, speak on!"

"If I place Granada, ere two weeks are past, within thy power, what shall be my reward?"

"Thou didst talk to me, when last we met, of immunities to the Jews."

The calm Dominican looked up as the king spoke, crossed himself, and resumed his attitude of humility.

"I demand for the people of Israel," returned Almamen, "free leave to trade and abide within the city, and follow their callings, subjected only to the same laws and the same imposts as the Christian population."

"The same laws, and the same imposts! Humph! there are difficulties in the concession. If we refuse?"

"Our treaty is ended. Give me back the maiden—you will have no further need of the hostage you demanded: I return to the city, and renew our interviews no more."

Politic and cold-blooded as was the temperament of the great Ferdinand, he had yet the imperious and haughty nature of a prosperous and long-descended king; and he bit his lip in deep displeasure at the tone of the dictatorial and stately stranger.

"Thou usest plain language, my friend," said he; "my words can be as rudely spoken. Thou art in my power, and canst return not, save at my permission."

"I have your royal word, sire, for free entrance and safe egress," answered Almamen. "Break it, and Granada is with the Moors till the Darro runs red with the blood of her heroes, and her people strew the vales as the leaves in autumn."

"Art thou then thyself of the Jewish faith?" asked the king. "If thou art not, wherefore are the outcasts of the world so dear to thee?"

"My fathers were of that creed, royal Ferdinand; and if I myself desert their creed, I do not desert their cause. O king! are my terms scorned or accepted?"

"I accept them: provided, first, that thou obtainest the exile or death of Muza; secondly, that within two weeks of this date thou bringest me, along with the chief councillors of Granada, the written treaty of the capitulation, and the keys of the city. Do this: and though the sole king in Christendom who dares the hazard, I offer to the Israelites throughout Andalusia the common laws and rights of citizens of Spain; and to thee I will accord such dignity as may content thy ambition."

The Hebrew bowed reverently, and drew from his breast a scroll, which he placed on the table before the king. "This writing, mighty Ferdinand, contains the articles of our compact."

"How, knave! wouldst thou have us commit our royal signature to conditions with such as thou art, to the chance of the public eye? The king's word is the king's bond!"

The Hebrew took up the scroll with imperturbable composure, "My child!" said he; "will your majesty summon back my child? we would depart."

"A sturdy mendicant this, by the Virgin!" muttered the king; and then, speaking aloud, "Give me the paper, I will scan it."

Running his eyes hastily over the words, Ferdinand paused a moment, and then drew towards him the implements of writing, signed the scroll, and returned it to Almamen.

The Israelite kissed it thrice with oriental veneration, and replaced it in his breast.

Ferdinand looked at him hard and curiously. He was a profound reader of men's characters; but that of his guest baffled

and perplexed him.

"And how, stranger," said he, gravely,— "how can I trust that man who thus distrusts one king and sells another?"

"O king!" replied Almamen (accustomed from his youth to commune with and command the possessors of thrones yet more absolute),—"O king! if thou believest me actuated by personal and selfish interests in this our compact, thou has but to make, my service minister to my interest, and the lore of human nature will tell thee that thou hast won a ready and submissive slave. But if thou thinkest I have avowed sentiments less abject, and developed qualities higher than those of the mere bargainer for sordid power, oughtest thou not to rejoice that chance has thrown into thy way one whose intellect and faculties may be made thy tool? If I betray another, that other is my deadly foe. Dost not thou, the lord of armies, betray thine enemy? The Moor is an enemy bitterer to myself than to thee. Because I betray an enemy, am I unworthy to serve a friend? If I, a single man, and a stranger to the Moor, can yet command the secrets of palaces, and render vain the counsels of armed men, have I not in that attested that I am one of whom a wise king can make an able servant?"

"Thou art a subtle reasoner, my friend," said Ferdinand, smiling gently.

"Peace go with thee! our conference for the time is ended. What ho, Perez!" The attendant appeared.

"Thou hast left the maiden with the queen?"

"Sire, you have been obeyed."

"Conduct this stranger to the guard who led him through the camp. He quits us under the same protection. Farewell! yet stay—thou art assured that Muza Ben Abil Gazan is in the prisons of the Moor?"

"Yes."

"Blessed be the Virgin!"

"Thou hast heard our conference, Father Tomas?" said the king, anxiously, when the Hebrew had withdrawn.

"I have, son."

"Did thy veins freeze with horror?"

"Only when my son signed the scroll. It seemed to me then that I saw the cloven foot of the tempter."

"Tush, father, the tempter would have been more wise than to reckon upon a faith which no ink and no parchment can render valid, if the Church absolve the compact. Thou understandest me, father?"

"I do. I know your pious heart and well-judging mind."

"Thou wert right," resumed the king, musingly, "when thou didst tell us that these caitiff Jews were waxing strong in the fatness of their substance. They would have equal laws—the insolent blasphemers!"

"Son!" said the Dominican, with earnest adjuration, "God, who has prospered your arms and councils, will require at your hands an account of the power intrusted to you. Shall there be no difference between His friends and His foes—His disciples and His crucifiers?"

"Priest," said the king, laying his hand on the monk's shoulder, and with a saturnine smile upon his countenance, "were religion silent in this matter, policy has a voice loud enough to make itself heard. The Jews demand equal rights; when men demand equality with their masters, treason is at work, and justice sharpens her sword. Equality! these wealthy usurers! Sacred Virgin! they would be soon buying up our kingdoms."

The Dominican gazed hard on the king. "Son, I trust thee," he said, in a low voice, and glided from the tent.

CHAPTER II

THE AMBUSH, THE STRIFE, AND THE CAPTURE

The dawn was slowly breaking over the wide valley of Granada, as Almamen pursued his circuitous and solitary path back to the city. He was now in a dark and entangled hollow, covered with brakes and bushes, from amidst which tall forest trees rose in frequent intervals, gloomy and breathless in the still morning air. As, emerging from this jungle, if so it may be called, the towers of Granada gleamed upon him, a human countenance peered from the shade; and Almamen started to see two dark eyes fixed upon his own.

He halted abruptly, and put his hand on his dagger, when a low sharp whistle from the apparition before him was answered around—behind; and, ere he could draw breath, the Israelite was begirt by a group of Moors, in the garb of peasants.

"Well, my masters," said Almamen, calmly, as he encountered the wild savage countenances that glared upon him, "think you there is aught to fear from the solitary santon?"

"It is the magician," whispered one man to his neighbour—"let him pass."

"Nay," was the answer, "take him before the captain; we have

orders to seize upon all we meet."

This counsel prevailed; and gnashing his teeth with secret rage, Almamen found himself hurried along by the peasants through the thickest part of the copse. At length, the procession stopped in a semicircular patch of rank sward, in which several head of cattle were quietly grazing, and a yet more numerous troop of peasants reclined around upon the grass.

"Whom have we here?" asked a voice which startled back the dark blood from Almamen's cheek; and a Moor of commanding presence rose from the midst of his brethren. "By the beard of the prophet, it is the false santon! What dost thou from Granada at this hour?"

"Noble Muza," returned Almamen—who, though indeed amazed that one whom he had imagined his victim was thus unaccountably become his judge, retained, at least, the semblance of composure—"my answer is to be given only to my lord the king; it is his commands that I obey."

"Thou art aware," said Muza, frowning, "that thy life is forfeited without appeal? Whatsoever inmate of Granada is found without the walls between sunrise and sunset, dies the death of a traitor and deserter."

"The servants of the Alhambra are excepted," answered the Israelite, without changing countenance.

"Ah!" muttered Muza, as a painful and sudden thought seemed to cross him, "can it be possible that the rumour of the city has truth, and that the monarch of Granada is in treaty

with the foe?" He mused a little; and then, motioning the Moors to withdraw, he continued aloud, "Almamen, answer me truly: hast thou sought the Christian camp with any message from the king?"

"I have not."

"Art thou without the walls on the mission of the king?"

"If I be so, I am a traitor to the king should I reveal his secret."

"I doubt thee much, santon," said Muza, after a pause; "I know thee for my enemy, and I do believe thy counsels have poisoned the king's ear against me, his people and his duties. But no matter, thy life is spared a while; thou remainest with us, and with us shalt thou return to the king."

"But, noble Muza—"

"I have said! Guard the santon; mount him upon one of our chargers; he shall abide with us in our ambush." While Almamen chafed in vain at his arrest, all in the Christian camp was yet still. At length, as the sun began to lift himself above the mountains, first a murmur, and then a din, betokened warlike preparations. Several parties of horse, under gallant and experienced leaders, formed themselves in different quarters, and departed in different ways, on expeditions of forage, or in the hope of skirmish with the straggling detachments of the enemy. Of these, the best equipped, was conducted by the Marquess de Villena, and his gallant brother Don Alonzo de Pacheco. In this troop, too, rode many of the best blood of Spain; for in that chivalric army, the officers vied with each other who should most

eclipse the meaner soldiery in feats of personal valour; and the name of Villena drew around him the eager and ardent spirits that pined at the general inactivity of Ferdinand's politic campaign.

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