

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**CALDERON THE
COURTIER, A TALE**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон
Calderon the Courtier, a Tale

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Calderon, the Courtier. A Tale

CHAPTER I. THE ANTE-CHAMBER

The Tragi-Comedy of Court Intrigue, which had ever found its principal theatre in Spain since the accession of the House of Austria to the throne, was represented with singular complication of incident and brilliancy of performance during the reign of Philip the Third. That monarch, weak, indolent, and superstitious, left the reins of government in the hands of the Duke of Lerma. The Duke of Lerma, in his turn, mild, easy, ostentatious, and shamefully corrupt, resigned the authority he had thus received to Roderigo Calderon, an able and resolute upstart, whom nature and fortune seemed equally to favour and endow. But, not more to his talents, which were great, than to the policy of religious persecution which he had supported and enforced, Roderigo Calderon owed his promotion. The King and the Inquisition had, some years before our story opens, resolved upon the general expulsion of the Moriscos the wealthiest, the most active, the most industrious portion of the population.

“I would sooner,” said the bigoted king—and his words were hallowed by the enthusiasm of the Church—“depopulate my kingdom than suffer it to harbour a single infidel.” The Duke de Lerma entered into the scheme that lost to Spain many of her most valuable subjects, with the zeal of a pious Catholic expectant of the Cardinal’s hat, which he afterwards obtained. But to this scheme Calderon brought an energy, a decision, a vehemence, and sagacity of hatred, that savoured more of personal vengeance than religious persecution. His perseverance in this good work established him firmly in the king’s favour; and in this he was supported by the friendship not only of Lerma, but of Fray Louis de Aliaga, a renowned Jesuit, and confessor to the king. The disasters and distresses occasioned by this barbarous crusade, which crippled the royal revenues, and seriously injured the estates of the principal barons, from whose lands the industrious and intelligent Moriscos were expelled, ultimately concentrated a deep and general hatred upon Calderon. But his extraordinary address and vigorous energies, his perfect mastery of the science of intrigue, not only sustained, but continued to augment, his power. Though the king was yet in the prime of middle age, his health was infirm and his life precarious. Calderon had contrived, while preserving the favour of the reigning monarch, to establish himself as the friend and companion of the heir apparent. In this, indeed, he had affected to yield to the policy of the king himself; for Philip the Third had a wholesome terror of the possible ambition of his son, who early evinced talents which might have been formidable, but for passions which urged him into the most vicious pleasures and the most extravagant excesses. The craft of the king was satisfied by the device of placing about the person of the Infant one devoted to himself; nor did his conscience, pious as he was, revolt at the profligacy which his favourite was said to participate, and, perhaps, to encourage; since the less popular the prince, the more powerful the king.

But all this while there was formed a powerful cabal against both the Duke of Lerma and Don Roderigo Calderon in a quarter where it might least have been anticipated. The cardinal-duke, naturally anxious to cement and perpetuate his authority, had placed his son, the Duke d’Uzeda, in a post that gave him constant access to the monarch. The prospect of power made Uzeda eager to seize at once upon all its advantages; and it became the object of his life to supplant his father. This would have been easy enough but for the genius and vigilance of Calderon, whom he hated as a rival, disdained as an upstart, and dreaded as a foe. Philip was soon aware of the contest between the two factions, but, in the true spirit of Spanish kingcraft he took care to play one against the other. Nor could Calderon, powerful as he was, dare openly to seek the ruin of Uzeda; while Uzeda, more rash, and, perhaps, more ingenuous, entered into a thousand plots for the downfall of the prime favourite.

The frequent missions, principally into Portugal, in which of late Calderon had been employed, had allowed Uzeda to encroach more and more upon the royal confidence; while the very means which Don Roderigo had adopted to perpetuate his influence, by attaching himself to the prince, necessarily distracted his attention from the intrigues of his rival. Perhaps, indeed, the greatness of Calderon's abilities made him too arrogantly despise the machinations of the duke, who, though not without some capacities as a courtier, was wholly incompetent to those duties of a minister on which he had set his ambition and his grasp.

Such was the state of parties in the Court of Philip the Third at the time in which we commence our narrative in the ante-chamber of Don Roderigo Calderon.

"It is not to be endured," said Don Felix de Castro, an old noble, whose sharp features and diminutive stature proclaimed the purity of his blood and the antiquity of his descent.

"Just three-quarters of an hour and five minutes have I waited for audience to a fellow who would once have thought himself honoured if I had ordered him to call my coach," said Don Diego Sarmiento de Mendo.

"Then, if it chafe you so much, gentlemen, why come you here at all? I dare say Don Roderigo can dispense with your attendance."

This was said bluntly by a young noble of good mien, whose impetuous and irritable temperament betrayed itself by an impatience of gesture and motion unusual amongst his countrymen. Sometimes he walked, with uneven strides, to and fro the apartments, unheeding the stately groups whom he jostled, or the reproving looks that he attracted; sometimes he paused abruptly, raised his eyes, muttered, twitched his cloak, or played with his sword-knot; or, turning abruptly round upon his solemn neighbours, as some remark on his strange bearing struck his ear, brought the blood to many a haughty cheek by his stern gaze of defiance and disdain. It was easy to perceive that this personage belonged to the tribe—rash, vain, and young—who are eager to take offence, and to provoke quarrel. Nevertheless, the cavalier had noble and great qualities. A stranger to courts, in the camp he was renowned for a chivalrous generosity and an extravagant valour, that emulated the ancient heroes of Spanish romaunt and song. His was a dawn that promised a hot noon and a glorious eve. The name of this brave soldier was Martin Fonseca. He was of an ancient but impoverished house, and related in a remote degree to the Duke de Lerma. In his earliest youth he had had cause to consider himself the heir to a wealthy uncle on his mother's side; and with those expectations, while still but a boy, he had been invited to court by the cardinal-duke. Here, however, the rude and blunt sincerity of his bearing had so greatly shocked the formal hypocrisies of the court, and had more than once so seriously offended the minister, that his powerful kinsman gave up all thought of pushing Fonseca's fortunes at Madrid, and meditated some plausible excuse for banishing him from court. At this time the rich uncle, hitherto childless, married a second time, and was blessed with an heir. It was no longer necessary to keep terms with Don Martin; and he suddenly received an order to join the army on the frontiers. Here his courage soon distinguished him; but his honest nature still stood in the way of his promotion. Several years elapsed, and his rise had been infinitely slower than that of men not less inferior to him in birth than merit. Some months since, he had repaired to Madrid to enforce his claims upon the government; but instead of advancing his suit, he had contrived to effect a serious breach with the cardinal, and been abruptly ordered back to the camp. Once more he appeared at Madrid; but this time it was not to plead desert and demand honours.

In any country but Spain under the reign of Philip the Third, Martin Fonseca would have risen early to high fortunes. But, as we have said, his talents were not those of the flatterer or the hypocrite; and it was a matter of astonishment to the calculators round him to see Don Martin Fonseca in the ante-room of Roderigo Calderon, Count Oliva, Marquis de Siete Iglesias, secretary to the King, and parasite and favourite of the Infant of Spain.

"Why come you here at all?" repeated the young soldier.

“Senor,” answered Don Felix de Castro, with great gravity, “we have business with Don Roderigo. Men of our station must attend to the affairs of the state, no matter by whom transacted.”

“That is, you must crawl on your knees to ask for pensions and governorships, and transact the affairs of the state by putting your hands into its coffers.”

“Senor!” growled Don Felix, angrily, as his hand played with his sword-belt.

“Tush!” said the young man, scornfully turning on his heel.

The folding-doors were thrown open, and all conversation ceased at the entrance of Don Roderigo Calderon.

This remarkable personage had risen from the situation of a confidential scribe to the Duke of Lerma to the nominal rank of secretary to the King—to the real station of autocrat of Spain. The birth of the favourite of fortune was exceedingly obscure. He had long affected to conceal it; but when he found curiosity had proceeded into serious investigation of his origin, he had suddenly appeared to make a virtue of necessity; proclaimed of his own accord that his father was a common soldier of Valladolid, and even invited to Madrid, and lodged in his own palace, his low-born progenitor. This prudent frankness disarmed malevolence on the score of birth. But when the old soldier died, rumours went abroad that he had confessed on his death-bed that he was not in any way related to Calderon; that he had submitted to an imposture which secured to his old age so respectable and luxurious an asylum; and that he knew not for what end Calderon had forced upon him the honours of spurious parentship. This tale, which, ridiculed by most, was yet believed by some, gave rise to darker reports concerning one on whom the eyes of all Spain were fixed. It was supposed that he had some motive beyond that of shame at their meanness, to conceal his real origin and name. What could be that motive, if not the dread of discovery for some black and criminal offence connected with his earlier youth, and for which he feared the prosecution of the law? They who affected most to watch his exterior averred that often, in his gayest revels and proudest triumphs, his brow would lower—his countenance change—and it was only by a visible and painful effort that he could restore his mind to its self-possession. His career, which evinced an utter contempt for the ordinary rules and scruples that curb even adventurers into a seeming of honesty and virtue, appeared in some way to justify these reports. But, at times, flashes of sudden and brilliant magnanimity broke forth to bewilder the curious, to puzzle the examiners of human character, and to contrast the general tenor of his ambitions and remorseless ascent to power. His genius was confessed by all; but it was a genius that in no way promoted the interests of his country. It served only to prop, defend, and advance himself—to battle difficulties—to defeat foes—to convert every accident, every chance, into new stepping stones in his course. Whatever his birth, it was evident that he had received every advantage of education; and scholars extolled his learning and boasted of his patronage. While, more recently, if the daring and wild excesses of the profligate prince were, on the one hand, popularly imputed to the guidance of Calderon, and increased the hatred generally conceived against him, so, on the other hand, his influence over the future monarch seemed to promise a new lease to his authority, and struck fear into the councils of his foes. In fact, the power of the upstart marquis appeared so firmly rooted, the career before him so splendid, that there were not wanted whisperers who, in addition to his other crimes, ascribed to Roderigo Calderon the assistance of the black art. But the black art in which that subtle courtier was a proficient is one that dispenses with necromancy. It was the art of devoting the highest intellect to the most selfish purposes—an art that thrives tolerably well for a time in the great world!

He had been for several weeks absent from Madrid on a secret mission; and to this, his first public levee, on his return, thronged all the rank and chivalry of Spain.

The crowd gave way, as, with haughty air, in the maturity of manhood, the Marquis de Siete Iglesias moved along. He disdained all accessories of dress to enhance the effect of his singularly striking exterior. His mantle and vest of black cloth, made in the simplest fashion, were unadorned with the jewels that then constituted the ordinary insignia of rank. His hair, bright and glossy as the

raven's plume, curled back from the lofty and commanding brow, which, save by one deep wrinkle between the eyes, was not only as white but as smooth as marble. His features were aquiline and regular; and the deep olive of his complexion seemed pale and clear when contrasted by the rich jet of the moustache and pointed beard. The lightness of his tall and slender but muscular form made him appear younger than he was; and had it not been for the supercilious and scornful arrogance of air which so seldom characterises gentle birth, Calderon might have mingled with the loftiest magnates of Europe and seemed to the observer the stateliest of the group. It was one of those rare forms that are made to command the one sex and fascinate the other. But, on a deeper scrutiny, the restlessness of the brilliant eye—the quiver of the upper lip—a certain abruptness of manner and speech, might have shown that greatness had brought suspicion as well as pride. The spectators beheld the huntsman on the height;—the huntsman saw the abyss below, and respired with difficulty the air above.

The courtiers one by one approached the marquis, who received them with very unequal courtesy. To the common herd he was sharp, dry, and bitter; to the great he was obsequious, yet with a certain grace and manliness of bearing that elevated even the character of servility; and all the while, as he bowed low to a Medina or a Guzman, there was a half imperceptible mockery lurking in the corners of his mouth, which seemed to imply that while his policy cringed his heart despised. To two or three, whom he either personally liked or honestly esteemed, he was familiar, but brief, in his address; to those whom he had cause to detest or to dread—his foes, his underminers—he assumed a yet greater frankness, mingled with the most caressing insinuation of voice and manner.

Apart from the herd, with folded arms, and an expression of countenance in which much admiration was blent with some curiosity and a little contempt, Don Martin Fonseca gazed upon the favourite.

“I have done this man a favour,” thought he; “I have contributed towards his first rise—I am now his suppliant. Faith! I, who have never found sincerity or gratitude in the camp, come to seek those hidden treasures at a court! Well, we are strange puppets, we mortals!”

Don Diego Sarmiento de Mendoza had just received the smiling salutation of Calderon, when the eye of the latter fell upon the handsome features of Fonseca. The blood mounted to his brow; he hastily promised Don Diego all that he desired, and hurrying back through the crowd, retired to his private cabinet. The levee was broken up.

As Fonseca, who had caught the glance of the secretary, and who drew no favourable omen from his sudden evanishment, slowly turned to depart with the rest, a young man, plainly dressed, touched him on the shoulder.

“You are Senior Don Martin Fonseca?”

“The same.”

“Follow me, if it please you, senior, to my master, Lou Roderigo Calderon.”

Fonseca's face brightened; he obeyed the summons; and in another moment he was in the cabinet of the Sejanus of Spain.

CHAPTER II. THE LOVER AND THE CONFIDANT

Calderon received the young soldier at the door of his chamber with marked and almost affectionate respect. "Don Martin," said he, and there seemed a touch of true feeling in the tremor of his rich sweet voice, "I owe you the greatest debt one man can incur to another—it was your hand that set before my feet their first stepping-stone to power. I date my fortunes from the hour in which I was placed in your father's house as your preceptor. When the cardinal-duke invited you to Madrid, I was your companion; and when, afterwards, you joined the army, and required no longer the services of the peaceful scholar, you demanded of your illustrious kinsman the single favour—to provide for Calderon. I had already been fortunate enough to win the countenance of the duke, and from that day my rise was rapid. Since then we have never met. Dare I hope that it is now in the power of Calderon to prove himself not ungrateful?"

"Yes," said Fonseca, eagerly; "it is in your power to save me from the most absolute wretchedness that can befall me. It is in your power, at least I think so, to render me the happiest of men!"

"Be seated, I pray you, *senor*. And how? I am your servant."

"Thou knowest," said Fonseca, "that, though the kinsman, I am not the favourite, of the Duke of Lerma?"

"Nay, nay," interrupted Calderon, softly, and with a bland smile; "you misunderstand my illustrious patron: he loves you, but not your indiscretions."

"Yes, honesty is very indiscreet! I cannot stoop to the life of the ante-chamber. I cannot, like the Duke of Lerma, detest my nearest relative if his shadow cross the line of my interests. I am of the race of Pelayo, not Oppas; and my profession, rather that of an ancient Persian than a modern Spaniard, is to manage the steed, to wield the sword, and to speak the truth."

There was an earnestness and gallantry in the young man's aspect, manner, and voice, as he thus spoke, which afforded the strongest contrast to the inscrutable brow and artificial softness of Calderon; and which, indeed, for the moment, occasioned that crafty and profound adventurer an involuntary feeling of self-humiliation.

"But," continued Fonseca, "let this pass: I come to my story and my request. Do you, or do you not know, that I have been for some time attached to Beatriz Coello!"

"Beatriz," replied Calderon, abstractedly, with an altered countenance, "it is a sweet name—it was my mother's!"

"Your mother's! I thought to have heard her name was Mary Sandalen?"

"True—Mary Beatriz Sandalen," replied Calderon, indifferently. "But proceed. I heard, after your last visit to Madrid, when, owing to my own absence in Portugal, I was not fortunate enough to see you, that you had offended the duke by desiring an alliance unsuitable to your birth. Who, then, is this Beatriz Coello?"

"An orphan of humble origin and calling. In infancy she was left to the care of a woman who, I believe, had been her nurse; they were settled in Seville, and the old *gouvernante's* labours in embroidery maintained them both till Beatriz was fourteen. At that time the poor woman was disabled by a stroke of palsy from continuing her labours, and Beatriz, good child, yearning to repay the obligation she had received, in her turn sought to maintain her protectress. She possessed the gift of a voice wonderful for its sweetness. This gift came to the knowledge of the superintendent of the theatre at Seville: he made her the most advantageous proposals to enter upon the stage. Beatriz; innocent child, was unaware of the perils of that profession: she accepted eagerly the means that would give comfort to the declining life of her only friend—she became an actress. At that time we were quartered in Seville, to keep guard on the suspected Moriscos."

"Ah, the hated infidels!" muttered Calderon, fiercely, through his teeth.

“I saw Beatriz, and loved her at first sight. I do not say,” added Fonseca, with a blush, “that my suit, at the outset, was that which alone was worthy of her; but her virtue soon won my esteem as well as love. I left Seville to seek my father and obtain his consent to a marriage with Beatriz. You know a hidalgo’s prejudices—they are insuperable. Meanwhile, the fame of the beauty and voice of the young actress reached Madrid, and hither she was removed from Seville by royal command. To Madrid, then, I hastened, on the pretence of demanding promotion. You, as you have stated, were absent in Portugal on some state mission. I sought the Duke de Lerma. I implored him to give me some post, anywhere—I recked not beneath what sky, in the vast empire of Spain—in which, removed from the prejudices of birth and of class, and provided with other means, less precarious than those that depend on the sword, I might make Beatriz my wife. The polished duke was more inexorable than the stern hidalgo. I flew to Beatriz; I told her I had nothing but my heart and right hand to offer. She wept, and she refused me.”

“Because you were not rich?”

“Shame on you, no! but because she would not consent to mar my fortunes, and banish me from my native land. The next day I received a peremptory order to rejoin the army, and with that order came a brevet of promotion. Lover though I be, I am a Spaniard: to have disobeyed the order would have been dishonour. Hope dawned upon me—I might rise, I might become rich. We exchanged our vows of fidelity. I returned to the camp. We corresponded. At last her letters alarmed me. Through all her reserve, I saw that she was revolted by her profession, and terrified at the persecutions to which it exposed her: the old woman, her sole guide and companion, was dying: she was dejected and unhappy: she despaired of our union: she expressed a desire for the refuge of the cloister. At last came this letter, bidding me farewell for ever. Her relation was dead; and, with the little money she had amassed, she had bought her entrance into the convent of St. Mary of the White Sword. Imagine my despair! I obtained leave of absence—I flew to Madrid. Beatriz is already immured in that dreary asylum; she has entered on her novitiate.”

“Is that the letter you refer to?” said Calderon, extending his hand.

Fonseca gave him the letter.

Hard and cold as Calderon’s character had grown, there was something in the tone of this letter—its pure and noble sentiments, its innocence, its affection—that touched some mystic chord in his heart. He sighed as he laid it down.

“You are, like all of us, Don Martin,” said he, with a bitter smile, “the dupe of a woman’s faith. But you must purchase experience for yourself, and if, indeed, you ask my services to procure you present bliss and future disappointment, those services are yours. It will not, I think, be difficult to interest the queen in your favour: leave me this letter, it is one to touch the heart of a woman. If we succeed with the queen, who is the patroness of the convent, we may be sure to obtain an order from court for the liberation of the novice: the next step is one more arduous. It is not enough to restore Beatriz to freedom—we must reconcile your family to the marriage. This cannot be done while she is not noble; but letters patent (here Calderon smiled) could ennoble a mushroom itself—your humble servant is an example. Such letters may be bought or begged; I will undertake to procure them. Your father, too, may find a dowry accompanying the title, in the shape of a high and honourable post for yourself. You deserve much; you are beloved in the army; you have won a high name in the world. I take shame on myself that your fortunes have been overlooked. ‘Out of sight out of mind;’ alas! it is a true proverb. I confess that, when I beheld you in the ante room, I blushed for my past forgetfulness. No matter—I will repair my fault. Men say that my patronage is misapplied—I will prove the contrary by your promotion.”

“Generous Calderon!” said Fonseca, falteringly; “I ever hated the judgments of the vulgar. They calumniate you; it is from envy.”

“No,” said Calderon, coldly; “I am bad enough, but I am still human. Besides, gratitude is my policy. I have always found that it is a good way to get on in the world to serve those who serve us.”

“But the duke?”

“Fear not; I have an oil that will smooth all the billows on that surface. As for the letter, I say, leave it with me; I will show it to the queen. Let me see you again tomorrow.”

CHAPTER III. A RIVAL

Calderon's eyes were fixed musingly on the door which closed on Fonseca's martial and noble form.

"Great contrasts among men!" said he, half aloud. "All the classes into which naturalists ever divided the animal world contained not the variety that exists between man and man. And yet, we all agree in one object of our being—all prey on each other! Glory, which is but the thirst of blood, makes yon soldier the tiger of his kind; other passions have made me the serpent: both fierce, relentless, unscrupulous—both! hero and courtier, valour and craft! Hein! I will serve this young man—he has served me. When all other affection was torn from me, he, then a boy, smiled on me and bade me love him. Why has he been so long forgotten? He is not of the race that I abhor; no Moorish blood flows in his veins; neither is he of the great and powerful, whom I dread; nor of the crouching and the servile, whom I despise: he is one whom I can aid without a blush."

While Calderon thus soliloquised, the arras was lifted aside, and a cavalier, on whose cheek was the first down of manhood, entered the apartment.

"So, Roderigo, alone! welcome back to Madrid. Nay, seat thyself, man—seat thyself."

Calderon bowed with the deepest reverence; and, placing a large fauteuil before the stranger, seated himself on stool, at a little distance.

The new comer was of sallow complexion; his gorgeous dress sparkled with prodigal jewels. Boy as he was, there was a yet a careless loftiness, a haughty ease, in the gesture—the bend of the neck, the wave of the hand, which, coupled with the almost servile homage of the arrogant favourite, would have convinced the most superficial observer that he was born of the highest rank. A second glance would have betrayed, in the full Austrian lip—the high, but narrow forehead—the dark, voluptuous, but crafty and sinister eye, the features of the descendant of Charles V. It was the Infant of Spain that stood in the chamber of his ambitious minion.

"This is convenient, this private entrance into thy penetralia, Roderigo. It shelters me from the prying eyes of Uzeda, who ever seeks to cozen the sire by spying on the Son. We will pay him off one of these days. He loves you no less than he does his prince."

"I bear no malice to him for that, your highness. He covets the smiles of the rising sun and rails at the humble object which, he thinks, obstructs the beam."

"He might be easy on that score: I hate the man, and his cold formalities. He is ever fancying that we princes are intent on the affairs of state, and forgets that we are mortal and that youth is the age for the bower, not the council. My precious Calderon, life would be dull without thee: how I rejoice at thy return, thou best inventor of pleasure that satiety ever prayed for! Nay, blush not: some men despise thee for thy talents: I do thee homage. By my great grandsire's beard, it will be a merry time at court when I am monarch, and thou minister!"

Calderon looked earnestly at the prince, but his scrutiny did not serve to dispel a certain suspicion of the royal sincerity that ever and anon came across the favourite's most sanguine dreams. With all Philip's gaiety, there was something restrained and latent in his ambiguous smile, and his calm, deep, brilliant eye. Calderon, immeasurably above his lord in genius, was scarcely, perhaps, the equal of that beardless boy in hypocrisy and craft, in selfish coldness, in matured depravity.

"Well," resumed the prince, "I pay you not these compliments without an object. I have need of you—great need; never did I so require your services as at this moment; never was there so great demand on your invention, your courage, your skill. Know, Calderon, I love!"

"My prince," said the marquis, smiling, "it is certainly not first love. How often has your highness—"

"No," interrupted the prince, hastily,—“no, I never loved till now. We never can love what we can easily win; but this, Calderon, this heart would be a conquest. Listen. I was at the convent chapel

of St. Mary of the White Sword yesterday with the queen. Thou knowest that the abbess once was a lady of the chamber, and the queen loves her.”

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