

**ПРОСПЕР  
МЕРИМЕ**

CARMEN

Проспер Мериме

**Carmen**

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# Содержание

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# Prosper Mérimée

## Carmen

### CHAPTER I

I had always suspected the geographical authorities did not know what they were talking about when they located the battlefield of Munda in the county of the Bastuli-Poeni, close to the modern Monda, some two leagues north of Marbella.

According to my own surmise, founded on the text of the anonymous author of the *Bellum Hispaniense*, and on certain information culled from the excellent library owned by the Duke of Ossuna, I believed the site of the memorable struggle in which Caesar played double or quits, once and for all, with the champions of the Republic, should be sought in the neighbourhood of Montilla.

Happening to be in Andalusia during the autumn of 1830, I made a somewhat lengthy excursion, with the object of clearing up certain doubts which still oppressed me. A paper which I shall shortly publish will, I trust, remove any hesitation that may still exist in the minds of all honest archaeologists. But before that dissertation of mine finally settles the geographical problem on the solution of which the whole of learned Europe hangs, I desire to relate a little tale. It will do no prejudice to the interesting question of the correct locality of Monda.

I had hired a guide and a couple of horses at Cordova, and had started on my way with no luggage save a few shirts, and Caesar's *Commentaries*. As I wandered, one day, across the higher lands of the Cachena plain, worn with fatigue, parched with thirst, scorched by a burning sun, cursing Caesar and Pompey's sons alike, most heartily, my eye lighted, at some distance from the path I was following, on a little stretch of green sward dotted with reeds and rushes. That betokened the neighbourhood of some spring, and, indeed, as I drew nearer I perceived that what had looked like sward was a marsh, into which a stream, which seemed to issue from a narrow gorge between two high spurs of the Sierra di Cabra, ran and disappeared.

If I rode up that stream, I argued, I was likely to find cooler water, fewer leeches and frogs, and mayhap a little shade among the rocks.

At the mouth of the gorge, my horse neighed, and another horse, invisible to me, neighed back. Before I had advanced a hundred paces, the gorge suddenly widened, and I beheld a sort of natural amphitheatre, thoroughly shaded by the steep cliffs that lay all around it. It was impossible to imagine any more delightful halting place for a traveller. At the foot of the precipitous rocks, the stream bubbled upward and fell into a little basin, lined with sand that was as white as snow. Five or six splendid evergreen oaks, sheltered from the wind, and cooled by the spring, grew beside the pool, and shaded it with their thick foliage. And round about it a close and glossy turf offered the wanderer a better bed than he could have found in any hostelry for ten leagues round.

The honour of discovering this fair spot did not belong to me. A man was resting there already—sleeping, no doubt—before I reached it. Roused by the neighing of the horses, he had risen to his feet and had moved over to his mount, which had been taking advantage of its master's slumbers to make a hearty feed on the grass that grew around. He was an active young fellow, of middle height, but powerful in build, and proud and sullen-looking in expression. His complexion, which may once have been fine, had been tanned by the sun till it was darker than his hair. One of his hands grasped his horse's halter. In the other he held a brass blunderbuss.

At the first blush, I confess, the blunderbuss, and the savage looks of the man who bore it, somewhat took me aback. But I had heard so much about robbers, that, never seeing any, I had ceased to believe in their existence. And further, I had seen so many honest farmers arm themselves to the teeth before they went out to market, that the sight of firearms gave me no warrant for doubting

the character of any stranger. “And then,” quoth I to myself, “what could he do with my shirts and my Elzevir edition of Caesar’s *Commentaries*?” So I bestowed a friendly nod on the man with the blunderbuss, and inquired, with a smile, whether I had disturbed his nap. Without any answer, he looked me over from head to foot. Then, as if the scrutiny had satisfied him, he looked as closely at my guide, who was just coming up. I saw the guide turn pale, and pull up with an air of evident alarm. “An unlucky meeting!” thought I to myself. But prudence instantly counselled me not to let any symptom of anxiety escape me. So I dismounted. I told the guide to take off the horses’ bridles, and kneeling down beside the spring, I laved my head and hands and then drank a long draught, lying flat on my belly, like Gideon’s soldiers.

Meanwhile, I watched the stranger, and my own guide. This last seemed to come forward unwillingly. But the other did not appear to have any evil designs upon us. For he had turned his horse loose, and the blunderbuss, which he had been holding horizontally, was now dropped earthward.

Not thinking it necessary to take offence at the scant attention paid me, I stretched myself full length upon the grass, and calmly asked the owner of the blunderbuss whether he had a light about him. At the same time I pulled out my cigar-case. The stranger, still without opening his lips, took out his flint, and lost no time in getting me a light. He was evidently growing tamer, for he sat down opposite to me, though he still grasped his weapon. When I had lighted my cigar, I chose out the best I had left, and asked him whether he smoked.

“Yes, señor,” he replied. These were the first words I had heard him speak, and I noticed that he did not pronounce the letter *s*<sup>1</sup> in the Andalusian fashion, whence I concluded he was a traveller, like myself, though, maybe, somewhat less of an archaeologist.

“You’ll find this a fairly good one,” said I, holding out a real Havana regalia.

He bowed his head slightly, lighted his cigar at mine, thanked me with another nod, and began to smoke with a most lively appearance of enjoyment.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, as he blew his first puff of smoke slowly out of his ears and nostrils. “What a time it is since I’ve had a smoke!”

In Spain the giving and accepting of a cigar establishes bonds of hospitality similar to those founded in Eastern countries on the partaking of bread and salt. My friend turned out more talkative than I had hoped. However, though he claimed to belong to the *partido* of Montilla, he seemed very ill-informed about the country. He did not know the name of the delightful valley in which we were sitting, he could not tell me the names of any of the neighbouring villages, and when I inquired whether he had not noticed any broken-down walls, broad-rimmed tiles, or carved stones in the vicinity, he confessed he had never paid any heed to such matters. On the other hand, he showed himself an expert in horseflesh, found fault with my mount—not a difficult affair—and gave me a pedigree of his own, which had come from the famous stud at Cordova. It was a splendid creature, indeed, so tough, according to its owner’s claim, that it had once covered thirty leagues in one day, either at the gallop or at full trot the whole time. In the midst of his story the stranger pulled up short, as if startled and sorry he had said so much. “The fact is I was in a great hurry to get to Cordova,” he went on, somewhat embarrassed. “I had to petition the judges about a lawsuit.” As he spoke, he looked at my guide Antonio, who had dropped his eyes.

The spring and the cool shade were so delightful that I bethought me of certain slices of an excellent ham, which my friends at Montilla had packed into my guide’s wallet. I bade him produce them, and invited the stranger to share our impromptu lunch. If he had not smoked for a long time, he certainly struck me as having fasted for eight-and-forty hours at the very least. He ate like a starving wolf, and I thought to myself that my appearance must really have been quite providential for the poor fellow. Meanwhile my guide ate but little, drank still less, and spoke never a word, although in

<sup>1</sup> The Andalusians aspirate the *s*, and pronounce it like the soft *c* and the *z*, which Spaniards pronounce like the English *th*. An Andalusian may always be recognised by the way in which he says *senor*.

the earlier part of our journey he had proved himself a most unrivalled chatterer. He seemed ill at ease in the presence of our guest, and a sort of mutual distrust, the cause of which I could not exactly fathom, seemed to be between them.

The last crumbs of bread and scraps of ham had disappeared. We had each smoked our second cigar; I told the guide to bridle the horses, and was just about to take leave of my new friend, when he inquired where I was going to spend the night.

Before I had time to notice a sign my guide was making to me I had replied that I was going to the Venta del Cuervo.

“That’s a bad lodging for a gentleman like you, sir! I’m bound there myself, and if you’ll allow me to ride with you, we’ll go together.”

“With pleasure!” I replied, mounting my horse. The guide, who was holding my stirrup, looked at me meaningly again. I answered by shrugging my shoulders, as though to assure him I was perfectly easy in my mind, and we started on our way.

Antonio’s mysterious signals, his evident anxiety, a few words dropped by the stranger, above all, his ride of thirty leagues, and the far from plausible explanation he had given us of it, had already enabled me to form an opinion as to the identity of my fellow-traveller. I had no doubt at all I was in the company of a smuggler, and possibly of a brigand. What cared I? I knew enough of the Spanish character to be very certain I had nothing to fear from a man who had eaten and smoked with me. His very presence would protect me in case of any undesirable meeting. And besides, I was very glad to know what a brigand was really like. One doesn’t come across such gentry every day. And there is a certain charm about finding one’s self in close proximity to a dangerous being, especially when one feels the being in question to be gentle and tame.

I was hoping the stranger might gradually fall into a confidential mood, and in spite of my guide’s winks, I turned the conversation to the subject of highwaymen. I need scarcely say that I spoke of them with great respect. At that time there was a famous brigand in Andalusia, of the name of Jose-Maria, whose exploits were on every lip. “Supposing I should be riding along with Jose-Maria!” said I to myself. I told all the stories I knew about the hero—they were all to his credit, indeed, and loudly expressed my admiration of his generosity and his valour.

“Jose-Maria is nothing but a blackguard,” said the stranger gravely.

“Is he just to himself, or is this an excess of modesty?” I queried, mentally, for by dint of scrutinizing my companion, I had ended by reconciling his appearance with the description of Jose-Maria which I read posted up on the gates of various Andalusian towns. “Yes, this must be he—fair hair, blue eyes, large mouth, good teeth, small hands, fine shirt, a velvet jacket with silver buttons on it, white leather gaiters, and a bay horse. Not a doubt about it. But his *incognito* shall be respected!” We reached the *venta*. It was just what he had described to me. In other words, the most wretched hole of its kind I had as yet beheld. One large apartment served as kitchen, dining-room, and sleeping chamber. A fire was burning on a flat stone in the middle of the room, and the smoke escaped through a hole in the roof, or rather hung in a cloud some feet above the soil. Along the walls five or six mule rugs were spread on the floor. These were the travellers’ beds. Twenty paces from the house, or rather from the solitary apartment which I have just described, stood a sort of shed, that served for a stable.

The only inhabitants of this delightful dwelling visible at the moment, at all events, were an old woman, and a little girl of ten or twelve years old, both of them as black as soot, and dressed in loathsome rags. “Here’s the sole remnant of the ancient populations of Munda Boetica,” said I to myself. “O Caesar! O Sextus Pompeius, if you were to revisit this earth how astounded you would be!”

When the old woman saw my travelling companion an exclamation of surprise escaped her. “Ah! Senor Don Jose!” she cried.

Don Jose frowned and lifted his hand with a gesture of authority that forthwith silenced the old dame.

I turned to my guide and gave him to understand, by a sign that no one else perceived, that I knew all about the man in whose company I was about to spend the night. Our supper was better than I expected. On a little table, only a foot high, we were served with an old rooster, fricasseed with rice and numerous peppers, then more peppers in oil, and finally a *gaspacho*—a sort of salad made of peppers. These three highly spiced dishes involved our frequent recourse to a goatskin filled with Montella wine, which struck us as being delicious.

After our meal was over, I caught sight of a mandolin hanging up against the wall—in Spain you see mandolins in every corner—and I asked the little girl, who had been waiting on us, if she knew how to play it.

“No,” she replied. “But Don Jose does play well!”

“Do me the kindness to sing me something,” I said to him, “I’m passionately fond of your national music.”

“I can’t refuse to do anything for such a charming gentleman, who gives me such excellent cigars,” responded Don Jose gaily, and having made the child give him the mandolin, he sang to his own accompaniment. His voice, though rough, was pleasing, the air he sang was strange and sad. As to the words, I could not understand a single one of them.

“If I am not mistaken,” said I, “that’s not a Spanish air you have just been singing. It’s like the *zorzicos* I’ve heard in the Provinces,<sup>2</sup> and the words must be in the Basque language.”

“Yes,” said Don Jose, with a gloomy look. He laid the mandolin down on the ground, and began staring with a peculiarly sad expression at the dying fire. His face, at once fierce and noble-looking, reminded me, as the firelight fell on it, of Milton’s Satan. Like him, perchance, my comrade was musing over the home he had forfeited, the exile he had earned, by some misdeed. I tried to revive the conversation, but so absorbed was he in melancholy thought, that he gave me no answer.

The old woman had already gone to rest in a corner of the room, behind a ragged rug hung on a rope. The little girl had followed her into this retreat, sacred to the fair sex. Then my guide rose, and suggested that I should go with him to the stable. But at the word Don Jose, waking, as it were, with a start, inquired sharply whither he was going.

“To the stable,” answered the guide.

“What for? The horses have been fed! You can sleep here. The senor will give you leave.”

“I’m afraid the senor’s horse is sick. I’d like the senor to see it. Perhaps he’d know what should be done for it.”

It was quite clear to me that Antonio wanted to speak to me apart.

But I did not care to rouse Don Jose’s suspicions, and being as we were, I thought far the wisest course for me was to appear absolutely confident.

I therefore told Antonio that I knew nothing on earth about horses, and that I was desperately sleepy. Don Jose followed him to the stable, and soon returned alone. He told me there was nothing the matter with the horse, but that my guide considered the animal such a treasure that he was scrubbing it with his jacket to make it sweat, and expected to spend the night in that pleasing occupation. Meanwhile I had stretched myself out on the mule rugs, having carefully wrapped myself up in my own cloak, so as to avoid touching them. Don Jose, having begged me to excuse the liberty he took in placing himself so near me, lay down across the door, but not until he had primed his blunderbuss afresh and carefully laid it under the wallet, which served him as a pillow.

I had thought I was so tired that I should be able to sleep even in such a lodging. But within an hour a most unpleasant itching sensation roused me from my first nap. As soon as I realized its nature, I rose to my feet, feeling convinced I should do far better to spend the rest of the night in the open air than beneath that inhospitable roof. Walking tiptoe I reached the door, stepped over

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<sup>2</sup> The *privileged Provinces*, Alava, Biscay, Guipuzcoa, and a part of Navarre, which all enjoy special *fueros*. The Basque language is spoken in these countries.

Don Jose, who was sleeping the sleep of the just, and managed so well that I got outside the building without waking him. Just beside the door there was a wide wooden bench. I lay down upon it, and settled myself, as best I could, for the remainder of the night. I was just closing my eyes for a second time when I fancied I saw the shadow of a man and then the shadow of a horse moving absolutely noiselessly, one behind the other. I sat upright, and then I thought I recognised Antonio. Surprised to see him outside the stable at such an hour, I got up and went toward him. He had seen me first, and had stopped to wait for me.

“Where is he?” Antonio inquired in a low tone.

“In the *venta*. He’s asleep. The bugs don’t trouble him. But what are you going to do with that horse?” I then noticed that, to stifle all noise as he moved out of the shed, Antonio had carefully muffled the horse’s feet in the rags of an old blanket.

“Speak lower, for God’s sake,” said Antonio. “You don’t know who that man is. He’s Jose Navarro, the most noted bandit in Andalusia. I’ve been making signs to you all day long, and you wouldn’t understand.”

“What do I care whether he’s a brigand or not,” I replied. “He hasn’t robbed us, and I’ll wager he doesn’t want to.”

“That may be. But there are two hundred ducats on his head. Some lancers are stationed in a place I know, a league and a half from here, and before daybreak I’ll bring a few brawny fellows back with me. I’d have taken his horse away, but the brute’s so savage that nobody but Navarro can go near it.”

“Devil take you!” I cried. “What harm has the poor fellow done you that you should want to inform against him? And besides, are you certain he is the brigand you take him for?”

“Perfectly certain! He came after me into the stable just now, and said, ‘You seem to know me. If you tell that good gentleman who I am, I’ll blow your brains out!’ You stay here, sir, keep close to him. You’ve nothing to fear. As long as he knows you are there, he won’t suspect anything.”

As we talked, we had moved so far from the *venta* that the noise of the horse’s hoofs could not be heard there. In a twinkling Antonio snatched off the rags he had wrapped around the creature’s feet, and was just about to climb on its back. In vain did I attempt with prayers and threats to restrain him.

“I’m only a poor man, *senor*,” quoth he, “I can’t afford to lose two hundred ducats—especially when I shall earn them by ridding the country of such vermin. But mind what you’re about! If Navarro wakes up, he’ll snatch at his blunderbuss, and then look out for yourself! I’ve gone too far now to turn back. Do the best you can for yourself!”

The villain was in his saddle already, he spurred his horse smartly, and I soon lost sight of them both in the darkness.

I was very angry with my guide, and terribly alarmed as well. After a moment’s reflection, I made up my mind, and went back to the *venta*. Don Jose was still sound asleep, making up, no doubt, for the fatigue and sleeplessness of several days of adventure. I had to shake him roughly before I could wake him up. Never shall I forget his fierce look, and the spring he made to get hold of his blunderbuss, which, as a precautionary measure, I had removed to some distance from his couch.

“*Senor*,” I said, “I beg your pardon for disturbing you. But I have a silly question to ask you. Would you be glad to see half a dozen lancers walk in here?”

He bounded to his feet, and in an awful voice he demanded:

“Who told you?”

“It’s little matter whence the warning comes, so long as it be good.”

“Your guide has betrayed me—but he shall pay for it! Where is he?”

“I don’t know. In the stable, I fancy. But somebody told me—”

“Who told you? It can’t be the old hag—”

“Some one I don’t know. Without more parleying, tell me, yes or no, have you any reason for not waiting till the soldiers come? If you have any, lose no time! If not, good-night to you, and forgive me for having disturbed your slumbers!”

“Ah, your guide! Your guide! I had my doubts of him at first—but—I’ll settle with him! Farewell, señor. May God reward you for the service I owe you! I am not quite so wicked as you think me. Yes, I still have something in me that an honest man may pity. Farewell, señor! I have only one regret—that I can not pay my debt to you!”

“As a reward for the service I have done you, Don Jose, promise me you’ll suspect nobody—nor seek for vengeance. Here are some cigars for your journey. Good luck to you.” And I held out my hand to him.

He squeezed it, without a word, took up his wallet and blunderbuss, and after saying a few words to the old woman in a lingo that I could not understand, he ran out to the shed. A few minutes later, I heard him galloping out into the country.

As for me, I lay down again on my bench, but I did not go to sleep again. I queried in my own mind whether I had done right to save a robber, and possibly a murderer, from the gallows, simply and solely because I had eaten ham and rice in his company. Had I not betrayed my guide, who was supporting the cause of law and order? Had I not exposed him to a ruffian’s vengeance? But then, what about the laws of hospitality?

“A mere savage prejudice,” said I to myself. “I shall have to answer for all the crimes this brigand may commit in future.” Yet is that instinct of the conscience which resists every argument really a prejudice? It may be I could not have escaped from the delicate position in which I found myself without remorse of some kind. I was still tossed to and fro, in the greatest uncertainty as to the morality of my behaviour, when I saw half a dozen horsemen ride up, with Antonio prudently lagging behind them. I went to meet them, and told them the brigand had fled over two hours previously. The old woman, when she was questioned by the sergeant, admitted that she knew Navarro, but said that living alone, as she did, she would never have dared to risk her life by informing against him. She added that when he came to her house, he habitually went away in the middle of the night. I, for my part, was made to ride to a place some leagues away, where I showed my passport, and signed a declaration before the *Alcalde*. This done, I was allowed to recommence my archaeological investigations. Antonio was sulky with me; suspecting it was I who had prevented his earning those two hundred ducats. Nevertheless, we parted good friends at Cordova, where I gave him as large a gratuity as the state of my finances would permit.

## CHAPTER II

I spent several days at Cordova. I had been told of a certain manuscript in the library of the Dominican convent which was likely to furnish me with very interesting details about the ancient Munda. The good fathers gave me the most kindly welcome. I spent the daylight hours within their convent, and at night I walked about the town. At Cordova a great many idlers collect, toward sunset, in the quay that runs along the right bank of the Guadalquivir. Promenaders on the spot have to breathe the odour of a tan yard which still keeps up the ancient fame of the country in connection with the curing of leather. But to atone for this, they enjoy a sight which has a charm of its own. A few minutes before the Angelus bell rings, a great company of women gathers beside the river, just below the quay, which is rather a high one. Not a man would dare to join its ranks. The moment the Angelus rings, darkness is supposed to have fallen. As the last stroke sounds, all the women disrobe and step into the water. Then there is laughing and screaming and a wonderful clatter. The men on the upper quay watch the bathers, straining their eyes, and seeing very little. Yet the white uncertain outlines perceptible against the dark-blue waters of the stream stir the poetic mind, and the possessor of a little fancy finds it not difficult to imagine that Diana and her nymphs are bathing below, while he himself runs no risk of ending like Acteon.

I have been told that one day a party of good-for-nothing fellows banded themselves together, and bribed the bell-ringer at the cathedral to ring the Angelus some twenty minutes before the proper hour. Though it was still broad daylight, the nymphs of the Guadalquivir never hesitated, and putting far more trust in the Angelus bell than in the sun, they proceeded to their bathing toilette—always of the simplest—with an easy conscience. I was not present on that occasion. In my day, the bell-ringer was incorruptible, the twilight was very dim, and nobody but a cat could have distinguished the difference between the oldest orange woman, and the prettiest shop-girl, in Cordova.

One evening, after it had grown quite dusk, I was leaning over the parapet of the quay, smoking, when a woman came up the steps leading from the river, and sat down near me. In her hair she wore a great bunch of jasmine—a flower which, at night, exhales a most intoxicating perfume. She was dressed simply, almost poorly, in black, as most work-girls are dressed in the evening. Women of the richer class only wear black in the daytime, at night they dress *a la francesa*. When she drew near me, the woman let the mantilla which had covered her head drop on her shoulders, and “by the dim light falling from the stars” I perceived her to be young, short in stature, well-proportioned, and with very large eyes. I threw my cigar away at once. She appreciated this mark of courtesy, essentially French, and hastened to inform me that she was very fond of the smell of tobacco, and that she even smoked herself, when she could get very mild *papelitos*. I fortunately happened to have some such in my case, and at once offered them to her. She condescended to take one, and lighted it at a burning string which a child brought us, receiving a copper for its pains. We mingled our smoke, and talked so long, the fair lady and I, that we ended by being almost alone on the quay. I thought I might venture, without impropriety, to suggest our going to eat an ice at the *neveria*.<sup>3</sup> After a moment of modest demur, she agreed. But before finally accepting, she desired to know what o’clock it was. I struck my repeater, and this seemed to astound her greatly.

“What clever inventions you foreigners do have! What country do you belong to, sir? You’re an Englishman, no doubt!”<sup>4</sup>

“I’m a Frenchman, and your devoted servant. And you, senora, or senorita, you probably belong to Cordova?”

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<sup>3</sup> A *café* to which a depot of ice, or rather of snow, is attached. There is hardly a village in Spain without its *neveria*.

<sup>4</sup> Every traveller in Spain who does not carry about samples of calicoes and silks is taken for an Englishman (*inglesito*). It is the same thing in the East.

“No.”

“At all events, you are an Andalusian? Your soft way of speaking makes me think so.”

“If you notice people’s accent so closely, you must be able to guess what I am.”

“I think you are from the country of Jesus, two paces out of Paradise.”

I had learned the metaphor, which stands for Andalusia, from my friend Francisco Sevilla, a well-known *picador*.

“Pshaw! The people here say there is no place in Paradise for us!”

“Then perhaps you are of Moorish blood—or—” I stopped, not venturing to add “a Jewess.”

“Oh come! You must see I’m a gipsy! Wouldn’t you like me to tell you *la baji*?<sup>5</sup> Did you never hear tell of Carmencita? That’s who I am!”

I was such a miscreant in those days—now fifteen years ago—that the close proximity of a sorceress did not make me recoil in horror. “So be it!” I thought. “Last week I ate my supper with a highway robber. To-day I’ll go and eat ices with a servant of the devil. A traveller should see everything.” I had yet another motive for prosecuting her acquaintance. When I left college—I acknowledge it with shame—I had wasted a certain amount of time in studying occult science, and had even attempted, more than once, to exorcise the powers of darkness. Though I had been cured, long since, of my passion for such investigations, I still felt a certain attraction and curiosity with regard to all superstitions, and I was delighted to have this opportunity of discovering how far the magic art had developed among the gipsies.

Talking as we went, we had reached the *neveria*, and seated ourselves at a little table, lighted by a taper protected by a glass globe. I then had time to take a leisurely view of my *gitana*, while several worthy individuals, who were eating their ices, stared open-mouthed at beholding me in such gay company.

I very much doubt whether Senorita Carmen was a pure-blooded gipsy. At all events, she was infinitely prettier than any other woman of her race I have ever seen. For a woman to be beautiful, they say in Spain, she must fulfil thirty *ifs*, or, if it please you better, you must be able to define her appearance by ten adjectives, applicable to three portions of her person.

For instance, three things about her must be black, her eyes, her eyelashes, and her eyebrows. Three must be dainty, her fingers, her lips, her hair, and so forth. For the rest of this inventory, see Brantome. My gipsy girl could lay no claim to so many perfections. Her skin, though perfectly smooth, was almost of a copper hue. Her eyes were set obliquely in her head, but they were magnificent and large. Her lips, a little full, but beautifully shaped, revealed a set of teeth as white as newly skinned almonds. Her hair—a trifle coarse, perhaps—was black, with blue lights on it like a raven’s wing, long and glossy. Not to weary my readers with too prolix a description, I will merely add, that to every blemish she united some advantage, which was perhaps all the more evident by contrast. There was something strange and wild about her beauty. Her face astonished you, at first sight, but nobody could forget it. Her eyes, especially, had an expression of mingled sensuality and fierceness which I had never seen in any other human glance. “Gipsy’s eye, wolf’s eye!” is a Spanish saying which denotes close observation. If my readers have no time to go to the “Jardin des Plantes” to study the wolf’s expression, they will do well to watch the ordinary cat when it is lying in wait for a sparrow.

It will be understood that I should have looked ridiculous if I had proposed to have my fortune told in a *café*. I therefore begged the pretty witch’s leave to go home with her. She made no difficulties about consenting, but she wanted to know what o’clock it was again, and requested me to make my repeater strike once more.

“Is it really gold?” she said, gazing at it with rapt attention.

When we started off again, it was quite dark. Most of the shops were shut, and the streets were almost empty. We crossed the bridge over the Guadalquivir, and at the far end of the suburb we

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<sup>5</sup> Your fortune.

stopped in front of a house of anything but palatial appearance. The door was opened by a child, to whom the gipsy spoke a few words in a language unknown to me, which I afterward understood to be *Romany*

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