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CONSTANCIA DE GONSALVO;

OR, THE TRUE HEIRESS.

A TALE OF SPAIN.

(From the N. Y. Metropolitan Record.)

I found Alvarez alone, and in a very disconsolate, or, more properly speaking, oppressed mood. I don't know any other word that better expresses the sullen angry dejection he appeared to labor under; whilst the quick glancing, hurried expression I had at first remarked, shot more frequently than ever from out the depths of his dark, deep set, cunningly intelligent eyes. He appeared glad to see me; but so hesitating, dispirited, and often contradictory was his talk, that I had great difficulty in arriving at the following facts: The nephew of Don Lopez was gone to Sevilla, to examine the document registered there, the authenticity of which he had the audacity, according to Alvarez, to dispute, notwithstanding the bishop's voucher which, I have omitted to mention, had reached Senor Manuel in due course of post. Katerina, however, was the daughter of Enrique and Constanca de Gonsalvo, then he, the nephew assumed to be her legal guardian; and as to her marriage with a vulgar trader's son, however rich, that he would not bear of; and till the young lady came of age—and it wanted nearly four years of that—his, Antonio de Gonsalvo's word, would be law in the matter. He had also, I partly gathered by dint of a searching cross examination, made other overtures and conditions, though of what precise nature Alvarez would not divulge; except that, for the present, the existence of the said heiress should be kept, after what had passed, a close secret from the world. 'You had better, therefore,' Alvarez was saying, at the close of a long, unsatisfactory interview, 'not attempt to see Katerina—Donna Constanca, I mean—as there is a servant left here who would no doubt inform his master. Ah, here he is. Prudence—silence!' he added in a hurried whisper, 'or all will go wrong.' This sudden break in our colloquy was occasioned by the entrance, by a gate opening from the Sevilla high road, of a gentleman handsomely habited in deep mourning. It was Antonio de Gonsalvo, just returned from that city, and looking, as it struck me from the slight glance I obtained of his jaundiced and bloated countenance, particularly well pleased with the result of his journey. He beckoned to Alvarez with the air of a master, and I heard the latter say, deprecatingly: 'An Englishman in the wine and olive trade on business.' In another minute they disappeared within the house; and I turned away for a stroll through the grounds, but had not taken a dozen steps when Pedro, a sharp lad whom I had seen about the place, and who, I believe, was gardener, groom, waiter, errand man, and housemaid to the establishment, smilingly confronted me. He had a remarkably speaking countenance, had Pedro—so much so that I instantly, in reply to his mute but quite intelligible query, said: 'To be sure I have a letter—here it is, and mind you tell the senoreta, to whom it is addressed, that I must have an answer within an hour from this, as I do not intend remaining later than that.' He nodded with quick intelligence, and disappeared, but returned again very shortly with a flask of wine, a bundle of cigars, and some choice fruit, which he arrayed upon a rustic table, near which I stood. 'This done, he merely said, 'You will have the answer, senor, in good time,' and once more disappeared.

I do not know when I have passed a much pleasanter hour than the immediately succeeding one. The weather was delightful—as fresh and much more balmy than an English June. The Atlantic gambled and glittered in the far south; it seemed for my especial amusement, for not another soul was anywhere to be seen; and the silver estuary of the Gaudalquivir did the same on my right. The wine was capital, the cigars superb; and thus circumstanced, it is not surprising that I quickly subsided into a state of single blessedness, which, in my opinion, the happiest husband would have no objection to find himself in now and then—that is, by way of change only. The woes and worries I have been relating were, it will be remembered, other people's—not mine; and that is a burden, I have remarked, which, other matters being pleasant, may be borne with equanimity. Presently I began to consider whether the firm in the city would, if they knew all, exactly approve of a man of business, as Alvarez had truly said, in the wine and olive line, mixing himself up with the affairs of distressed jameels and mysterious dons, and nobody knew what mischief besides. This train of thought again led naturally to Mrs. Brown and the young barbarians all at play—if the weather were at all favorable—it being Saturday afternoon, at Highgate; and I had just finished a mental memorandum to the effect that it would be as well, on my return home, to draw

it rather mild when talking of bright and black-eyed Luissas, and Katerinas, and Constanças, when my drowsy ear became slowly conscious of the tones of Louisa's rich voice, somewhat roughly sharpened, exclaiming:

'Hist, hist, Senor Ingles! He must be asleep. And at such a time, too! Senor Ingles! Englishman! hist, hist!'

'I beg a thousand pardons, senoreta; but really this charming weather, and—'

'Hush! Step this way, if you please. They can see you from the house.'

I obeyed, and Luissas, placing a letter in my hand, said softly:

'From Donna Constanca-Isabella de Gonsalvo, or you know whom.'

'It shall be delivered safely, be assured; but you have some more important communication to make than any contained in the letter. Or I misread the meaning of two of the brightest eyes in Spain.'

'No silly compliments, senor, if you please,' retorted the offended maiden. 'That which I have further to say,' she continued, after grave acceptance of my gestured apology, 'concerns, though as yet I have not spoken to her of it, the Lady Constanca-Isabella de Gonsalvo intimately, deeply.'

'Bless your pretty, affectionate punctilio,' thought I, as she ceased speaking. 'You would not, I think, abate a syllable of one of Katerina's new names and titles if they reached the length of a racer's pedigree.'

'I would say,' resumed Luissas Alvarez, in a quick, beating voice, 'that a dark cloud menaces not only her so lately brilliant prospects, but—the voice sank so low that I could hardly bear the words—but her very life!'

'Merciful Heaven!'

'Listen to me. This Antonio de Gonsalvo is a bad, reckless man. I have overheard words that—I have overheard him, I say,' faintly continued the terrified girl, who was momentarily becoming paler and paler, 'make half suggestions to my father which induce me to believe that the least evil she may have to dread will be confinement, perhaps forever, in a convent; and even if that were all, she has, I assure you, senor, not the slightest vocation for such a life.'

'That, I will be sworn, she has not.'

'I might say more; but this is enough to put you—her friends, I mean—upon their guard.—Nothing must be done, however, rashly, as he is her legal guardian. Should there be necessity, I will send Pedro for you—for you, who would not perhaps be suspected; and if you were, you would not, I think, be afraid of the bad man, tiger as he seems? You English heretics, I have heard my father say, are afraid of nothing; not even of—the Sancta Maria ora pro me!'

she added, crossing herself, suddenly breaking off, and hurrying away; but whether as an expiation for the thought which seemed about to pass her lips, or as a prayer for protection against Antonio de Gonsalvo, who, with her father, came a minute after in view, I could not easily determine. She had, I conjectured, heard their footfall; but they, it was plain, had not observed her when conversing with me.

'I will see you presently, and endeavor to conclude our bargain,' said Alvarez, as he passed me with his sinister looking companion. I bowed and they went away by the outer gate. Alvarez returned alone. He looked, it seemed to me, still more perplexed and cowed, and was certainly quite as unintelligible as at our previous interview; and all I could make out with tolerable distinctness was, that he, Alvarez, should be rather pleased than otherwise if the young people could manage to make a stolen match of it in such a way that he could not be suspected of complicity in the proceeding; but else, not for the world. Antonio de Gonsalvo had, he said, suddenly determined upon going to Madrid, and would not return before a fortnight had passed at the earliest.

The few scraps of information and conjecture with which I returned to Cadiz, greatly annoyed, as I anticipated, my expectant friends there.—But as neither the angry irritation of Senor Manuel, nor the fretful despondency of his son, appeared to avail anything in the way of remedy to the actual state of things, I withdrew as speedily as I could from the bootless conference, half resolved in my own mind neither to make nor meddle further in the matter. This partially formed purpose did not hold, partly because I continued to have so much idle time upon my hands, but chiefly that a deeper interest, a more tragic foreboding, that is involved in the anxieties and crosses of lovers, however dismal and agonising they may be gradually overgrew the action of the domestic drama in which I had become unwittingly a somewhat prominent actor, determining me to go through with my part to the end, whether it was written that the curtain should fall upon the spectra of a criminal court and a death-scaffold, or the festivities of a happy marriage and a wedding-supper.

We heard one day through Pedro, that Antonio de Gonsalvo had returned from Madrid before he was expected, and that a furious quarrel had immediately ensued between him and Juan Alvarez which was, however, mended up a few hours afterwards, and the two worthies had become more closely intimate than ever. Three days subsequent to this news, a hurried note reached Senor Manuel, in Luissas's hand writing, but not subscribed by her, stating, in general terms, that a great peril was suspended over the head of Lady Constanca de Gonsalvo, and that no time ought to be lost in extricating her from the custody of her unscrupulous guardian.

It was immediately resolved, in compliance with Alfonso's passionate entreaties, that an eminent lawyer of Cadiz should be consulted as to the steps it would be advisable to take. Alfonso and I—the gout still held the senior in duration—proceeded forthwith to the legal gentleman's office, and laid the entire matter before him as clearly and with as little prolixity as possible. The man of pleas and precedents listened to all we—I, rather, for Alfonso confined himself to the mute eloquence of pale looks and neglected hair—had to say; remarking, when I had quite finished, that it seemed a hard case for the young couple; but such wrinkles in one's lot always smooth out with time and patience; that Antonio de Gonsalvo bore, he knew, a very indifferent reputation, and might certainly, under the influence of so strong a temptation, exceed even our worst anticipations; nevertheless, he was undoubtedly the young lady's natural guardian; and he, Martin Gomez, did not at all see how she could be got out of his hands. 'Even this note which has so frightened you' he added, 'is not, you perceive, signed; and if it were, it could not avail, confined as it is to mere vague, indefinite assertion.' This was cold comfort; but as nothing better seemed to be forthcoming, we were taking quite a nap fallen leave, when Martin Gomez, relaxing his wrinkles, said:—

'Stay a moment. Why do you not apply to the young lady's maternal aunt, the Lady Inez de Calderon? She is, all Spain knows, very powerful at court—the queen-regent's favorite lady, in fact. She could interfere with effect; and it strikes me, from what I have heard of the character of Donna Inez that she would do so.'

This was quite a new as well as luminous idea. Alfonso caught at it eagerly, and so did his father the moment we reported it, not a little thereby surprising me; for should the great and lady interpose in behalf of her youthful niece, it would not be, I guessed, in order to marry her to Alfonso Manuel.—This view of the subject I, however, kept to myself; and it was at length arranged that I should at once proceed to Madrid—obtain, if possible, an interview with this Lady Inez de Calderon—Senor Manuel to delect all expenses, of course—and endeavor to interest her in favor of the distressed lovers. Alfonso wished to accompany me, but this the merchant would not listen to, his presence being required in the counting house; besides, he would do far more harm than good if he went, his father flatteringly added.

I had fallen in with this proposal the more easily, that I had a great desire to see the Spanish capital; and I did so for the first time on the 21st of November, 1833, after a long and tedious journey; the discomfort, and danger of which, only those who have travelled in Spain or in the B-douin Desert can correctly appreciate. I speak of Spain as it was twenty years ago; what improvements have been since effected is of course another question, upon which I am not competent to offer an opinion. The day after my arrival in Madrid, I dispatched, by one of the waiters at El Rey, near the Piazza Mayor, where I had taken up my temporary abode, a carefully and elaborately worded missive to the palace, addressed to Her Excellency the Lady Inez de Calderon. Three days passed without an answer—a fourth, up till a late hour in the afternoon, when I was met, on returning from a walk, with the intelligence that a court messenger had been waiting upwards of an hour for me, and was stamping the floor with impatience. This was, I found, quite true; and the irate and hasty gentleman would not allow me even five minutes to change my dress—a short, rough, winter's coat, cloth knees, and continuations ditto—the Lady Inez de Calderon, who had just returned with the court from La Granja, would, he said, excuse my strange attire; she had been in England or Iceland, he hardly knew which perhaps both, and knew how people dressed in those countries; and, at all events, to the palace I must go, valens volens, and at once.—I was preciously hurried, I know; and this feeling increased to an intensely uncomfortable pitch, as I hastily traversed the spacious quadrangle, ascended one of the magnificent staircases, and shuffled along the stately corridors of the gorgeously solemn palace; passing here and there, and occasionally glancing in the distance, a number of silent figures, looking, in their

velvet mourning dress, like so many melancholy Hamlets gliding about in pursuit of invisible ghosts. At length, my conductor stopped at the door of an anteroom, and rang a small silver bell lying on a marble table just on the outside. A page admitted us, and in another minute I was in the presence of Donna Inez de Calderon and another lady, whose name I did not hear. The novel and imposing aspect of the magnificent apartment, with its pillars, statues, and massively gorgeous furniture, brilliantly lit up from innumerable antique candelabra, so dazzled and confounded me that it was some minutes before I was fully conscious that the Lady Inez, painfully agitated, and holding my letter in my hand, was assailing me with an avalanche of questions, which, spoken as they were with intense volubility, and in a tongue which, though I knew very well, was not my own vernacular. I should have had considerable difficulty in following at any time. Presently, the speaker perceiving my embarrassment, gave herself breath and me a few moments to rally my bewildered faculties. I succeeded in doing so more quietly than I expected, and replied to the lady's renewed and still impetuous interrogatory pretty well. 'A strange story,' she murmured musingly, after exhausting every form of query she could think of—a strange story. Constanca had reason to think her uncle lived for not confiding in me, but that as many years, should have been permitted to pass—'I cannot,' she continued with quite audible abruptness, 'I cannot recognize any resemblance to the families on either side in the description you give of the supposed niece of mine. Have the goodness to follow me, and I will show you admirable likeness of my sister taken previous to her marriage.'

Her companion, who I comprehended was an attendant in waiting, hastened to open a door at the further end of the apartment, through which the great lady—she was a handsome woman and under forty I should say—stepped with stately grace, the attendant and myself following. The Lady Inez de Calderon led the way to a picture gallery, and pausing before a full length picture, said, in a slightly agitated voice:

'That is Donna Constanca de Gonsalvo's likeness, taken when she was, I think, not more than thirteen.'

I started with uncontrollable surprise, and burst out: 'Good Heaven! why, that is Luissas Alvarez!'

'Luissas Alvarez!' echoed the lady. 'The daughter of the man you speak of?'

'Yes, lady, so it is said—but this portrait, for the likeness is too complete, too unmistakable to admit of a doubt on the matter, revives a suspicion I had before entertained, that Katerina is the true daughter of Juan Alvarez—Luissas the true Constanca de Gonsalvo.'

'Your's is not a nation of plotters,' said the lady, after fixedly, almost sternly, regarding me for one or two embarrassing minutes; 'nor have you the air of either a dupe or a tool, or I should imagine—but follow me; we will talk further on this matter, which shall, at all events, be thoroughly sifted.'

'Who gave permission in my absence, and without my leave?'

'The Camarera Mayor,' replied the lady.

'This is a significant circumstance coupled with—' But your letter, sir, states—and you confirmed the statement just now—that the paper or parchment, the authenticity of which the bishop, whose testimony cannot be for an instant questioned, vouches for, describes the person of Katerina with the nicest accuracy, even to a slight scar on the forehead, and moles in the neck.'

'That is strictly true; and, since I have seen the Lady's Constanca's portrait, utterly confounds me.'

'There are no erasures in the document, you say? Clever tricks of that sort are sometimes played.'

'I examined it with scrupulous care, I may say, suspiciously, and I am positive there are no erasures or alterations—no—'

A bustle at the entrance from the grand corridor, and the exclamation of the attendant, 'El Rey's Christina,' interrupted me; and a lady attired as if just returned from a carriage drive, entered the apartment, followed by a number of attendants of both sexes. I rebled my distance, already sufficiently respectful, from Donna Inez, towards whom the queen regent advanced with a kind and familiar greeting; but my movement was not executed so quickly as to escape her majesty's glance of surprise, followed, I was sure, by the query, though I could not hear the words, of whom the remarkable figure in drab shorts,

and garters of the same, might be. At the same moment, all the other eyes in the room, among which there were at least a dozen of the brightest in Spain, glittered with the same expression; while I, frightfully isolated in about the centre of the brilliant apartment—there was nothing, not even a statue or a chair within half a dozen yards of me, remained helplessly rooted where I stood—the observed of all observers, and alternately a flame and an icicle, in a profuse heat or a cold perspiration. The queen's attendants formed a segment of a circle out of earshot of her majesty and Donna Inez, and I was about equidistant from both—the centre figure, in fact, of the stately tableau; and hang me if I knew, when I came to think of it, how to place my legs or what to do with my arms, notwithstanding I had the advantage of seeing every change of attitude I adopted about every half minute, I should say, or less, repeated with faithful instantaneousness by about twenty John Browns brilliantly revealed by the tall mirrors as the central personages of as many courtly circles.—This purgatory lasted about ten minutes, during which the queen and Donna Inez conversed with great eagerness upon, I rightly guessed the subject which had brought me into my present distinguished position. I may here mention that, confused as I was, it instantly and forcibly struck me—and the truth of the impression I have since heard confirmed by persons who have had many opportunities of judging—that the queen-regent, at the time I saw her, about, I should suppose, seven or eight and twenty, greatly resembled in figure, face carriage and general expression, save that her features and person were somewhat fuller, Miss Ellen Tree, the eminent actress, now Mrs. Charles Kean. 'This, by the way, I was at length waved forward by Donna Inez, and had the honor of replying to a number of questions by her majesty, who appeared to take a lively interest in the Alvarez Gonsalvo business. To add to my embarrassment, her majesty, whenever my Castilian halted a little, condescended to help me out by a sentence or two, of what must have been intended for English—I am a tolerable linguist, and quite sure it was not French, Italian, German or Dutch—of which it was necessary to affect immediate and grateful comprehension. I however, got through pretty well; 'Los Ingleses' were in high favor just then—thanks to the hostile proceedings of Don Carlos—at the Spanish court; and a dismissing gesture to that effect being at last vouchsafed, I backed away, as I had been a mangled and feathered Don do just before, and with, I flatter myself, much imitative celerity, till brought up with a bump by one of the marble columns, in the shadow of which I remained in some sort perdu till the audience terminated.

The conversation between Christina and Donna Inez quickly terminated after I was done with, and I heard the queen regent say, on rising to go: 'That, I think, will be the best, the most prudent course, to take; and I will take care that the Captain General of Andalusia shall have orders to assist to the utmost of his power.'—Her majesty and then disappeared, and I was once more in close conference with Donna Inez. The conclusion came to was, that I should set out the next day for Cadiz; and on arriving there, inform Senor Manuel and his son that Lady Inez de Calderon would speedily follow, in order to the thorough investigation of the matter I had been deputed to lay before her, but I was not to say one word of the resemblance of Luissas Alvarez to the portrait of the deceased Lady Constanca; it being of the utmost importance, in the opinion of Donna Inez that no hint should reach Alvarez of the suspicion which that circumstance had engendered.

On arriving at Cadiz, I found the Manuels in a state of high excitement. Sure intelligence had reached them that Katerina—or Donna Constanca, as they still of course implicitly believed her to be—would never be Alfonso's wife if many days were suffered to elapse without bringing about the accomplishment of that great fact; and my news, that the Lady Inez, armed with the full powers of the Captain General, would shortly arrive, greatly stimulated the eagerness of both father and son to conclude the affair before so potent a personage arrived on the scene—a dim inkling of the view she would be likely to take of the plebeian alliance having at least dawned on their minds. Their plan, as detailed to me by Alfonso, was feasible and likely enough; and not later than the next day, but one had, I found, been fixed upon for carrying it into execution. It was this: Luissas Alvarez had been for some years accustomed to make a votive journey to the church of the convent of Los Gocos, de Nuestra Señora, on the anniversary of, I believe, her reputed mother's death. This was the day fixed upon, as no impediments—although both the damsels were now closely confined and watched—would be offered to her purpose, Alvarez having incidentally asked her at what hour she intended setting out and returning; Katerina was to dress herself in Luissas's clothes, and thus