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CONSTANCIA DE GONSALVO; OR, THE TRUE HEIRESS. A TALE OF SPAIN.

I was commissioned by an eminent London firm, in the autumn of 1833, to proceed to the south west of Spain, for the purpose of establishing a commercial agency in connection with the curators and others who occupy the rich lands to the east and south of the Gaudalquivir, and skirted by the waters of the bay of Cadiz.

I was breakfasting one Sunday morning with Senor Manuel and his son Alfonso, a young man of frank and agreeable character and manners, at the merchant's country residence, about a couple of degrees inland from Cadiz, when the senior, who had been unusually silent and preoccupied, suddenly proposed that, in furtherance of the commission with which I was entrusted, I should pay a visit to Juan Alvarez, a vine grower near San Lucar de Barrameda, a small town by the entrance of the Gaudalquivir.

'I promised Alvarez yesterday,' said Senor Manuel, speaking slowly, whilst a grave smile played about his lips, excited apparently by the red flush which lit up the clear olive of his son's complexion, 'that I would call on him shortly. I am disposed to do so to-morrow, if that will suit your convenience.'

'It would,' I said, 'very well.'

'Then, Alfonso,' continued the merchant, 'you will have three horses ready saddled by daybreak, unless you decline accompanying us; in which case, two will of course suffice.'

A gay laugh from the son as he rose, bowed, and left the apartment, was a sufficient reply. As soon as his shadow disappeared from the open corridor, Senor Manuel said, in a confidential sort of way:—'The boy has fallen in love, but not so stupidly as I at first supposed.' As the merchant spoke, his glance reverted complacently to a recent number of El Cronista de Cadiz, which had previously, I noticed, engaged his attention in a remarkable manner.

'No! still it is well; one must be content. Everybody cannot have the luck to be Spaniards, but, to-morrow, my friend, you shall see a Dulcinea that might turn all mankind into Quixotes. By San Jago, there is not such a pair of eyes in all Spain as Dona Katerina's!'

'Dona Katerina! A lady of degree, it seems?'

'No, no,' laughed Senor Manuel, as he rose and carefully pocketed El Cronista; 'that is only a complimentary way of speaking, you understand. But you shall know all about it to-morrow, the more readily, my friend, that I wish to take your opinion on the subject. But mind and be here early, as there is a long journey before us. Adios.'

It was subsequently deposed that, in the afternoon of this same day (September 26, 1833), one of the numerous groups of busy politicians lounging about the Puerta del Sol, Madrid, and eagerly discussing the recent palace revolution consequent upon the resuscitation of the king, after he had been officially pronounced defunct by the royal physicians, was hastily approached by a middle-aged man, very shabbily attired, and further remarkable for a shy, slouching, though half-military air and bearing. He abruptly addressed himself to Senor Perez, a wealthy money-broker of Madrid, who appeared to feel anything but honored by the stranger's preferential notice.

salvo, that dare show themselves where a journal is read, or men talk openly with each other.'

'Calomarde has really fallen then,' said the person thus addressed, and still urging Perez slowly onwards. 'Come, tell me all about it.'

'Of course Calomarde has fallen, and very deservedly too, for the deception he attempted in the interest of Don Carlos to palm off upon the dying king. Zea Bermudez has been sent for by Christina, who in a few days, for Ferdinand cannot recover, will be queen-regent of Spain.'

'Malediction!' groaned the stranger, fiercely; 'I feared so.'

'Antonio de Gonsalvo,' sternly exclaimed Perez, a man of thoroughly respectable world politics, to whom no heresy was so detestable as that which refused obedience to the rising sun—'you are surely crazed.'

'Pardon! My words had no meaning.—See, this is the news I doubted you had heard of.'

'Senor Perez took the letter offered him, adjusted his glasses, and it was delightful to note the benignant graciousness which gradually overspread his previously forbidding aspect. Scarcely permitting himself to read to the conclusion, he hurriedly exclaimed:—'Dead! and so suddenly? Why, then, my dear Gonsalvo, you are your uncle's heir!'

'Unquestionably so; but,' he added with a half-ashamed glance at his thread-bare raiment, 'it is not in this guise I should appear at Cas tello.'

'Certainly not. You want money, and shall have it. Come with me; yet stay: was there not some talk, many years ago, of the marriage of that rebellious slip of a son, Enrique de Gonsalvo?'

'Yes: he married Constancia, an elder sister of Inez de Calderon, Queen Christina's present favorite lady of the palace; but he left no issue.'

'No issue, male or female? I remember now to have heard so. And since they are both long ago with the saints, you, senior, are the undoubted heir. Bravissimo! Come with me, excellent sir: I will furnish you with any sums you require. And, who would not lend anything he required to a nobleman with the best blood in Valencia in his veins? Come!'

A note to this freely rendered excerpt from the judicial archives of the Sevilla adds, that the deponent, Jose Perez, further recalls to mind, upon reflection, that, later in the day when the pre-acted conversation took place, Antonio de Gonsalvo suddenly asked him, if he knew how far it was from Madrid to San Lucar de Barrameda, in Andalusia; to which he, Jose Perez, replied that he had never heard of such a place, as indeed he never had till within these last few days.

I was punctual to the time agreed upon with Senor Manuel, and both father and son being in readiness, we mounted forthwith, and set off at a canter. The weather was delicious, the horses excellent, the roads nowhere impassible, and as we gaily caracolled along, I became more and more satisfied, from the merchant's thickening hints, that for all the inflated rubbish he had indulged in about love and romance, the charms by which Katerina, whoever she might be, had won his consent to her union with his son, were of a sufficiently tangible and solid kind to be plainly set forth and summed up in his ledger. Especially after we paused for rest and refreshment, and had imbibed a pint or so of excellent Xeres wine, did his confidence flow freely forth, all suggestive of mounting fortune, vastly increased commerce, and high social distinction, interspersed with rough but keen guesses at the value of the vine and olive grounds we were passing, and incessant injunction to secrecy and silence. However, it was a very agreeable ride, and we reached our destination in excellent time, preceded about an hour by Alfonso, whose impatience, as we neared the goal, could not brook our more sober pace.

The dwelling and grounds of Juan Alvarez were very pleasantly situated at a considerable distance in our favor from San Lucar and the Guadalquivir, but commanding a fine view of both, as well as of the broad Atlantic, whose surging murmurs, brought by the odorous south wind, struck faintly and soothingly upon an attentively listening ear. In the season of buds and flowers, the place must have been as fresh, blooming, and fragrant; as the two charming girls, who, with Juan Alvarez met us at the myrtle trellised gate. Let me here describe these youthful maidens—neither was yet eighteen—as I might have done a few hours after making their acquaintance. Luisa, slightly the taller and considerably the fairer, was the daughter and only child of Alvarez whom she, however, did not in the slightest manner resemble: not so much as her companion Katerina, who did so in some slightly appreciable degree, though, truly, it would have puzzled one to say in what particular feature; and she was no relative of his, nor

indeed of any other tangible person, and known simply as Katerina. Juan Alvarez to be sure, had always given out that she was the stray scion of an illustrious family of the old Gothic blood of Spain, consigned to his care under painful circumstances for a while, but certain to be ultimately claimed and restored to her rightful position with prodigious eclat and rejoicings. This was a kind of story that would never, under any circumstances, have gone down very well with me; and, in the present instance, the Gothic blood and parentage part of the romance was quite evidently a fiction. If ever there was a damsel of the genuine Andalusian race, Katerina was one. This her hair, complexion, glancing Arab eye, agile, slight, yet warmly rounded figure, quick gushing susceptibility of temperament, and keen eager enjoyment of life, unmistakably proclaimed. Luisa, now, judging from appearances, might have had a smart sprinkling of Gothic blood in her veins. She was fairer than Katerina; her hair, especially, was many shades lighter than the glossy ebony of Katerina's long plaited tresses; and her feet, though well formed enough, and by no means excessively large, were of nothing like such delicate symmetry as her companion's. Then her speech and manner, compared with the half-Moorish maidens, were unimaginative, cold, and formal. Luisa, in brief, although, it might be a handsomer person in a strict sense, was certainly not a more lovable one than Katerina, whose charming face shewed as many dimples as there were letters in her baptismal name. Good well principled girls both of them withal were, and ardently attached to each other—in fact, but for complexions of a deeper glow, and a certain foreign coloring of tone and demeanor, just such gentle, graceful, heart-breaking damsels as lead captive the ingenious youth of Britain, both north and south of the Tweed. Education, it is true, in a conventional sense, they possessed but little, except in the arts of reading, writing, spelling, and sewing acquired, I believe, at a nun's school, attached to the not very distant convent-church of Los Gozos de Nuestra Señora (the Joys of Our Lady); yet were they superior artists in two at least of the accomplishments that attract and fascinate mankind. But then dancing in Spain, in Andalusia at all events, positively does come by nature; and first-class scholars were they both, each after her distinctive bent of mind, in that primal academy. Music was also theirs by special gift of Heaven; for certainly they had no teacher in the science, if you except the organ-swell of the wind, and torrent-voices sweeping down from the forest clothed sierras in the not far distance, which might, perhaps, have given resonance and power to Luisa's rich and ringing tones in the heroic chants celebrative of the exploits of El Cid Campeador; and that you also ignore, as a preceptive influence, the murmured melody of the Guadalquivir, stealing its bright way through perfume breathing cistus and myrtle groves, of which ever a dull ear might detect a silver echo in Katerina's Romances Moriscos.

But I must have done with this damsel drawing, or I shall get carried off my feet into attitudes for which I have no wings—they went with my black hair and whiskers—and I turn, therefore, to Senor Juan Alvarez, a lithe, sinewy, black-eyed, black-haired, shrewd-faced individual of middle age, of neither repulsive nor prepossessing aspect and manners, according to my taste and impression. I was, moreover, very soon satisfied as we strolled through his old-world cultivated vine and olive fields, that he possessed neither more nor less of aptitude for business than the generality of his leisure loving countrymen, albeit there deep a glimmer now and then shoot forth from his deep-set, cavernous, flurried eyes, which convinced me that he was by no means indifferent to the matter of profit, if obtainable without much personal effort. One thing I rather like him for; he was evidently strongly attached to the orphan entrusted to his guardianship, and tenderly solicitous for her—Katerina's—welfare. This, admitting the story told of her family to be true, and that he had been a hereditary servant of the decayed house, as in that case I supposed it to be, was no doubt attributable to the strong feudal sentiment still prevalent in Spain. Alvarez, certainly, in my judgment, loved her far better than he did his own child, and was at pains, one could see, to conceal the preference he felt, lest it might give Luisa pain. But to resume this narrative; I found Alvarez to be in so unbusiness like a mood, so impatiently indifferent to my instructions and explanations relative to an improved mode of preparing and packing olives for the London market, that I was at length fain to conclude that his mind was, for the present at all events, hopelessly preoccupied with the Alfonso and Katerina marriage affair (which I knew from Senor Manuel he was extremely anxious to forward and hasten), to the exclusion of more important matters. I was right. Clearly discerning the uselessness of further business discourse, I proposed returning

to the house; and we had no sooner done so than the young people, with that singularly intuitive perception—common, I have observed to all countries—by which a word being spoken, they become aware that certain interesting arrangements will be best furthered by their absence, stole quietly off, and I was doing the same, when Senor Manuel caught me by the arm, and said: 'I beg you will not leave us. You English, who, I have read, buy and sell four wives at market with balers round their necks—no offence. I hope; every country has its customs, and why not, by San Jago! Still, you must be cool heads at such bargains; and I shall be glad of your advice and assistance in a rather out-of-the-way affair of the kind. My friend Alvarez will, I am sure, have no objection.'

The quick furtive glance of 'my friend Alvarez' said: 'Every objection' quite plainly; but as his lips said: 'None in the world,' I reseated myself, lit a cigar, and assumed a listening attitude.

'You see,' began the merchant with some hesitation, as if hardly knowing at which end of the story to commence—'you see—that is, you will presently—that Katerina is not Katerina at all, but Constancia de Gonsalvo.'

'Dona Constancia de Gonsalvo,' interposed Juan Alvarez.

'Yes, yes, of course. Dona Constancia de Gonsalvo, whose honored parents both died about fifteen years ago—one of grief, the other of gunpowder.'

'Enrique de Gonsalvo,' said Alvarez with dignity, 'colonel of cavalry in the forces of the heroic General Vidal, blew himself up rather than surrender to the troops sent against him by Ferdinand who had dismissed the Constitutional Cortes.'

'Yes, yes; we know all about that,' interrupted Manuel, who, unlike the majority of his class, was an Absolutist. 'He was a rebel against our lord the king, a setter-up of revolutions.'

'Of constitutions,' again interposed Alvarez. 'The English senior understands, no doubt.'

'To be sure he does! It would be odd if he did not, seeing they all come from his country! But, revolutionists or constitutions, the end is, that Colonel de Gonsalvo was a dead traitor, his wife and child proscribed outlaws.'

No, no—disinherited outcasts you mean.'

'Tell the story yourself, friend Juan; you will do it better than I shall. By San Jago! my head always spin round like a humming-top when I think of a sensible man risking his life for such nonsense.'

Juan Alvarez did so, with so much circumspection, that I had better perhaps relate its substance in my own words. Colonel de Gonsalvo, the only son of Don Lopez de Gonsalvo, a fanatical royalist, he himself being an equally fanatical Exaltado, perished in Vidal's outbreak against the government of Ferdinand, having about two years previously espoused, against the wishes of the families on both sides, Constancia de Calderon. Her husband's death preyed fatally upon the youthful widow, who, when dying, intrusted her only child, a girl then nearly three years old, to Juan Alvarez, an attached servant of the Calderon family with strict injunctions to keep its very existence a secret from Don Lopez, the grandfather, who, if he married again and had a son, would thereby nullify the otherwise indefeasible claim of the female heir to the Gonsalvo estates. This was done in the presence of a clergyman, one Juan Ortiz, since created a bishop, who had also at the same time witnessed and attested by his seal and signature a document drawn up in accordance with the dying wife's instructions, containing her wishes with respect to the future of the child, and a minute description of its person. About two years after this, Juan Alvarez, who was already a widower with a child of his own, of the same sex and age as that of his mistress—though it did not clearly appear to me that this fact was known to the mother of Constancia—came and settled in his present abode.

'The rest, which is plain sense,' said Senor Manuel, when we had got thus far, 'is soon told. My son, Alfonso, like a silly calf, as he and most young men are, choose to fall in love with, for aught he knew to the contrary, a moneyless, nameless Katerina. Parental watchfulness took the alarm, and I naturally insisted that the acquaintance should be broken off. What happened next? why this: my friend Juan, very anxious, as he ought to be, to settle his charge handsomely in the world, for, after all, the Gonsalvo estates, which are terribly dipped too, I hear, are not her's yet—perhaps never will be, God knows; there is nothing sure in this world; well, I say, my friend Juan, considering these things, comes to me and tells this story; which I, of course—for one must look at both sides of the cloth before buying—take time to consider. There is Don Lopez, I reflect, still in the prime of life.'

'Sixty-four, if he's a day,' interrupted Alvarez.

'You hear: a man scarcely ageing, and who may live, as I say, thirty or forty years longer. Then there is a varlet of a nephew, who knows, or at least suspects, that the heiress to the Gonsalvo estates is under the care of my friend Juan, and he may give trouble.'

'He lost his commission of Captain of artillery, as I told you whilst serving at Centa, for misconduct, more than a twelvemonth ago.— Besides, he will have no right in the matter whatever, and is not worth a real.'

'Well, be it as it may, I have made up my mind to brave all chances, in consideration of Katerina's charming qualities, and Alfonso's ardent attachment to her, provided that you, Juan Alvarez, furnish me with instant and incontestable proof—that the amiable girl is in very truth Dona Constancia de Gonsalvo, and heresumptive of the estates—admitting, at the same time, as I unhesitatingly and unreservedly do—that she is a nobility and a fortune in herself. If you do this, Juan, it is my wish that the marriage be celebrated without delay.'

'The proof is easy and conclusive,' said Alvarez, as he unlocked an iron bound box which he had placed upon the table. 'But, first, have you written to Father Ortiz—the bishop, that is to say?'

'Yes, and I have his letter in reply with me. He perfectly remembers the death of the Lady Constancia, and witnessing the document you speak of, although he can remember only its general tenor. This, however, by reason, as you shall presently hear, of the venerable man's praiseworthy precaution at the time of signing, can have no evil consequence whatever.'

'Is this like the signature in the letter?' said Alvarez, placing his finger upon a name at the bottom of a parchment he had unrolled.

'My eyes are not so good as they were.— Have the goodness to compare the two signatures,' said Senor Manuel, placing the letter in my hands. 'Not that there is any doubt, my good friend Juan,' he added, whilst I heedfully compared the two signatures, 'of your truth and honesty. Very far from that; but all matters of form, no one is better aware than you, should be gone through with minutely and formally.'

'The signatures,' I said, 'which are very peculiar, are identical. There can, I think, be no doubt of that.'

'And there are no erasures, blots, no alterations, Senor Inglese?'

'None whatever.'

'Then have the goodness, my dear sir, to read the document aloud?'

I did so. The first part related to some testamentary dispositions regarding the child; then came a list of some family ornaments. 'Here they are,' said Alvarez, taking them out of the box they were in and placing them on the table. They precisely corresponded with the inventory. The next and important lines, in my view of the matter, described the child's person minutely: 'Brunette complexion, black eyes and long eyelashes; small feet, one pock-mark over the right eyebrow, and two moles about an inch apart at the back of the neck.' Katerina, unquestionably! There could be no question upon the matter. She was a Goth, then, by descent! So much for my conceit in ethnological science.

'Capital!' exclaimed the merchant.—'Katerina's exact portrait. The moles I saw half an hour since. Still, friend Juan, your document might be a forgery; say don't look so fierce, man; it might, I say, be a clever imitation of the original instrument, altered only in a material part—the description of the child, for instance.'

'Senor Manuel,' said Alvarez faintly, 'what, what can you mean?' The man's countenance was as white as a tombstone, either with consternation or anger, I could not for the moment decide which. Presently, I felt assured that it could have been from anger only.

'I say,' resumed Manuel, 'that such a charge, but for the forethought of the excellent bishop, might have been insinuated, especially by that scamp of a nephew, Antonio de Gonsalvo. But that will be hereafter impossible if you agree—and I am sure you will readily—to submit the parchment to another test.'

'Test! What test?' murmured Juan Alvarez, still white, trembling, nerveless, as it seemed.

'The bishop says in his letter,' replied Senor Manuel, 'that being strongly impressed with the importance of the document he was witnessing, and having no time to copy it, he took a pen-knife and cut off in a zigzag direction a strip of black parchment about two inches wide, right across the top of the instrument, and just above where the writing commenced. He has preserved that strip. Now, if this your sheet or skin of parchment—which we see is cut zigzag (indented the lawyers call it) across the top—fits that in his lordship's possession, as well as matches it in grain, there cannot be the shadow of the doubt that we are in possession of the