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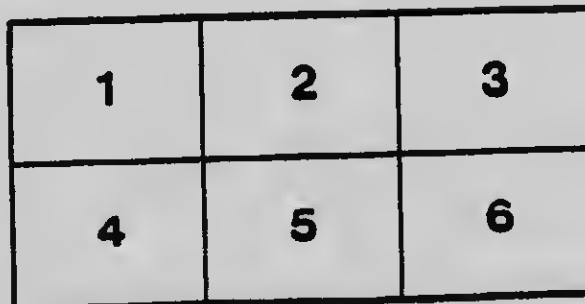
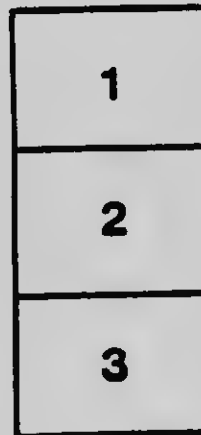
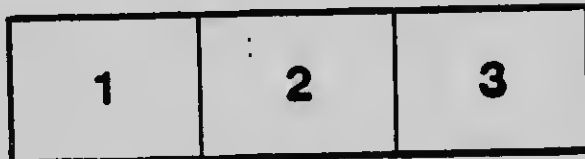
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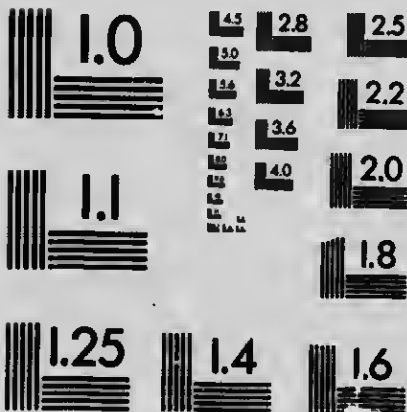
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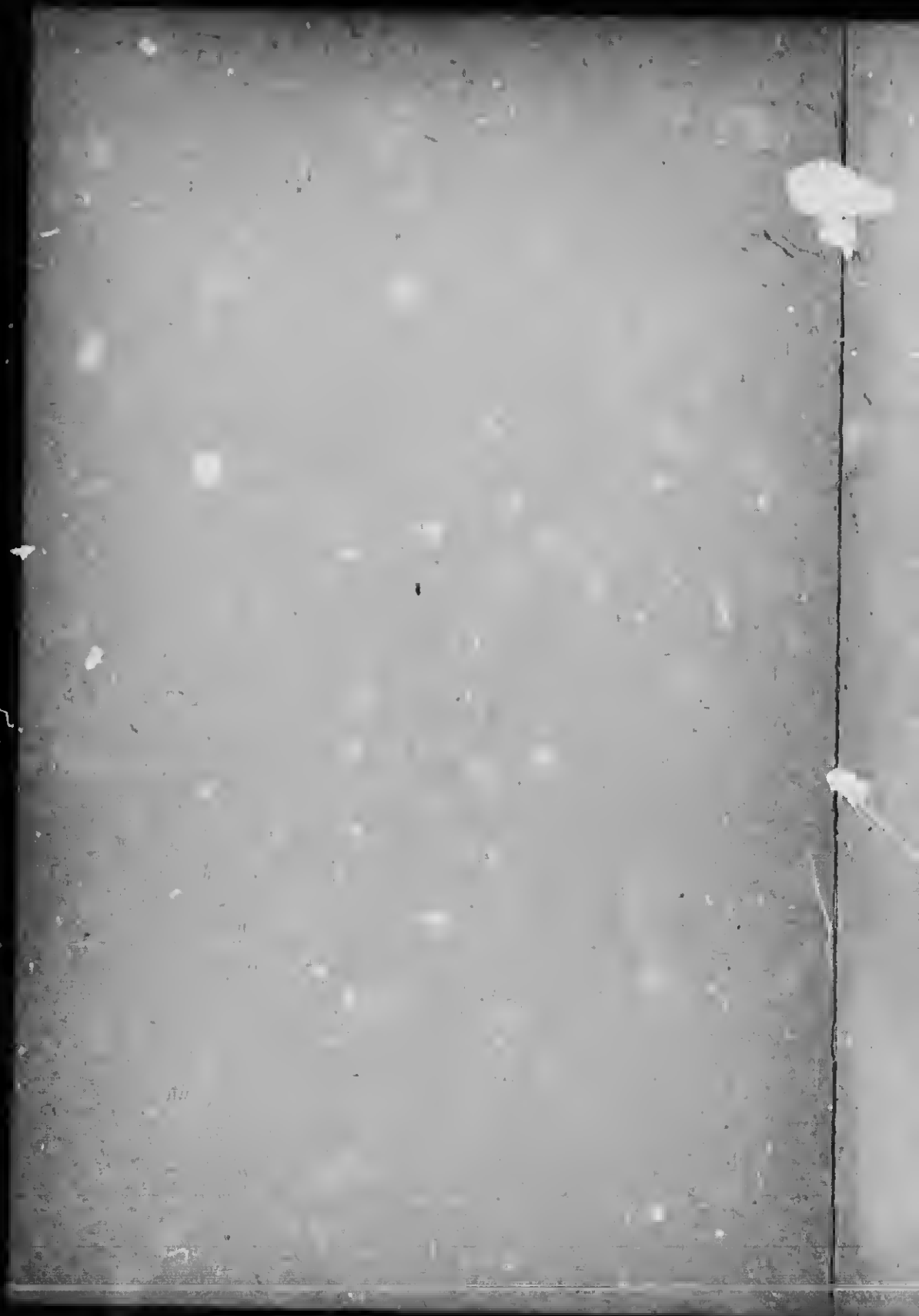
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Lamb. Eugene
Feb 15th 1904



"I WAS FILLED WITH THAT RAGE OF MINE"

See page 170

GOD, THE KING, MY BROTHER

BY

MARY F. NIXON

Author of "*With a Pessimist in Spain*," "*Lasca, and other
Stories*," "*A Harp of Many Chords*,"
"*The Blue Lady's Knight*."



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"I WAS FILLED WITH THAT RAGE OF MINK"

See page 170

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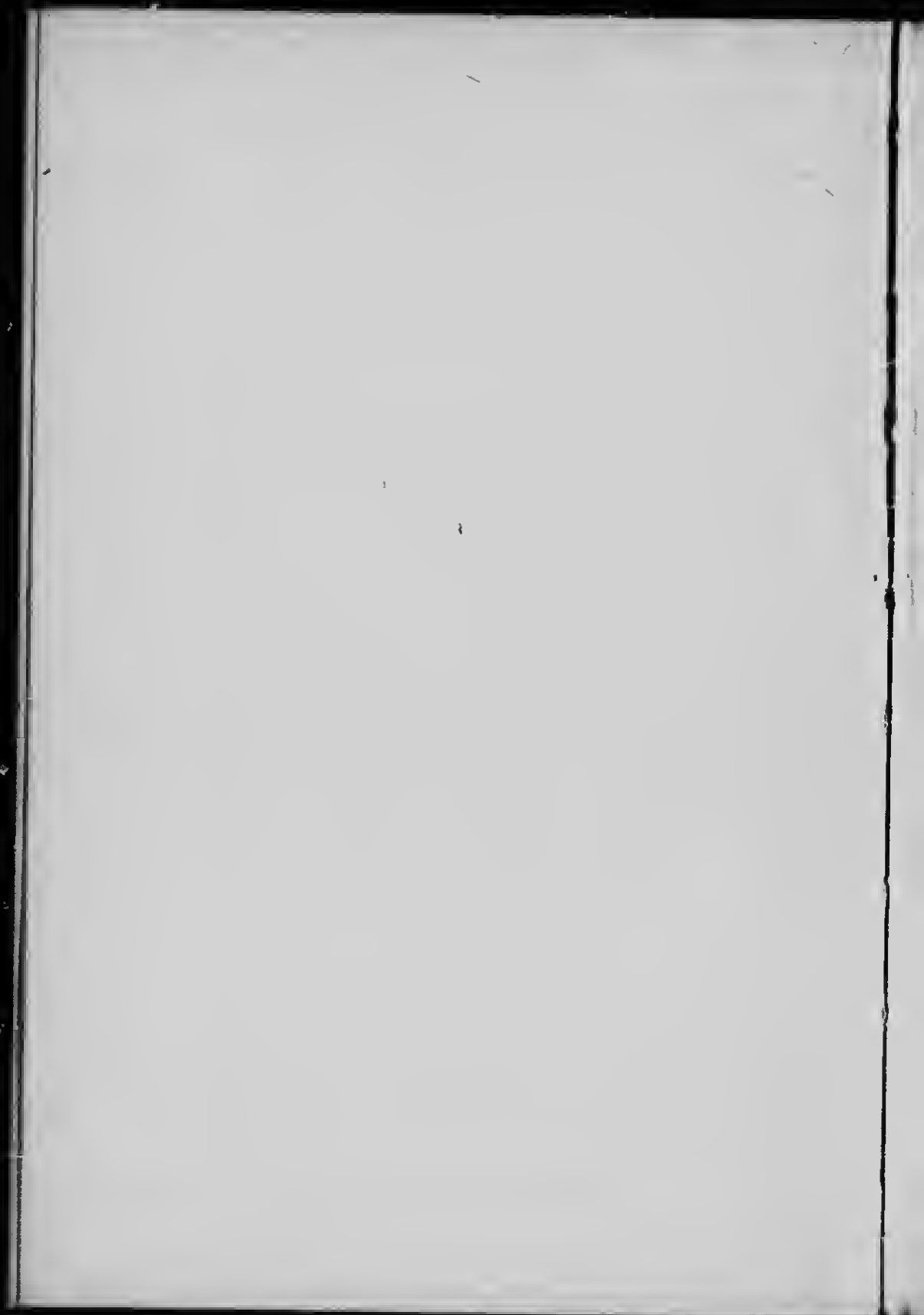
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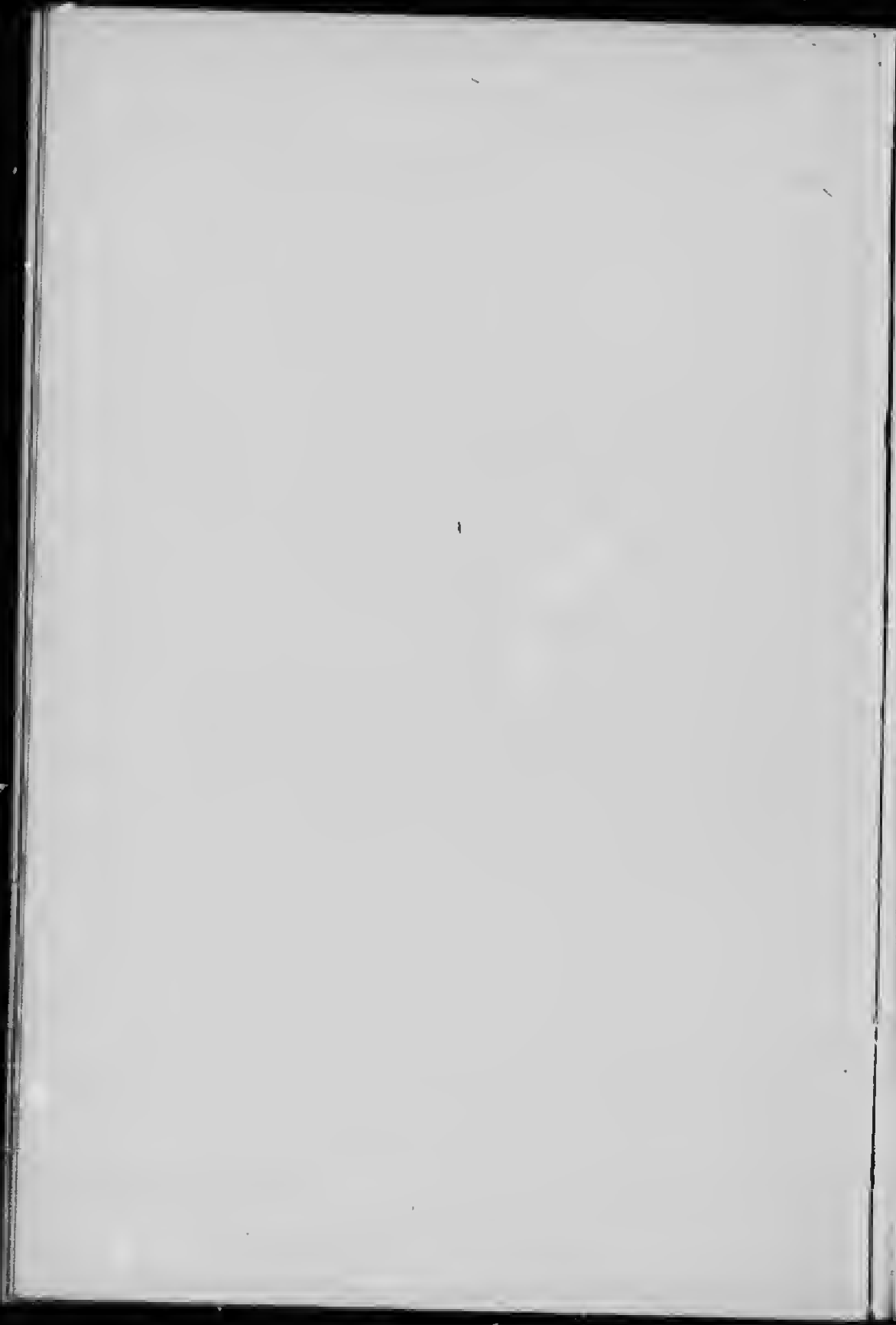
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TO
THE BEAUTIFUL MEMORY OF
MY FATHER
THE REV. J. HOWARD NIXON, D.D.



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God, The King, My Brother



CHAPTER I

"DIEUS, LI REIS, MIEN FREDRE!"

I ANDREW PEMBRIDGE, Knight, do with mine own quill and parchment write these chronicles of many strange things which chanced in the year of Our Lord 1366, in the reign of His Gracious Majesty, Edward the Third.

I have often thought how different my life would have been had my cousin Eustace never come to Hazelcroft, or had Agnes been less ready in her liking for him. Methinks it had gone by in the quiet ways of a country squire; I had never passed through terrible dangers, or in sooth known what it is to win honour and happiness at the point of my sword.

Eustace's father was my father's youngest brother, who was killed by a spear-thrust

from one of King John's three hundred knights, in the battle of Poitiers. He left Eustace to my father's care, feeling, no doubt, that the follies of my fine court-lady aunt would leave scant treasure for their son, or perchance he wished Eustace to be reared far from the court. Or it may be, again, that he foresaw what shortly happened, — scarce a twelvemonth being by after his death when the lady 'Aélix took unto herself another lord.

My cousin came to Hazelcroft a tall boy of fifteen, only four years the better of Anthony and me, yet ten more in knowledge of the world. He had been page to my Lord Denny, had seen the king (God rest his soul!), and had even known some fighting; for my uncle, being in the Black Prince's train, had taken Eustace with him when he went into Gascony.

Better than wars, methinks, the lad liked the French king's court, for he was a handsome page and a favourite of dames.

I am not ready with my likings, and I always hated Eustace. For that I have

had more penance from Father Bevil than for anything I ever did in all my years. "Lads," said my father, "your cousin must be well fared amongst us on many counts. He is our guest, our kin, an orphan: see to 't there is no quarrel. He is to be another brother unto your sisters and you both."

When my father spoke we listened, for though he was a kindly man he was one to be much respected.

The first thing which I disliked in my cousin was that Agnes fancied him. Barbara, Dorothy, Meg, my three younger sisters, were all well enough, but it was Agnes whom I ever loved the most.

She was as lovely as a June day, and I say this because, though I have journeyed much and seen many lands, it seems to me that there is nothing so lovely as a June morning, when the sun shines on the hawthorn hedges and the air is laden with the delicious scent of clover.

The lady my mother was always fair and gracious. My feeling toward her was one akin to reverence, as a boy is wont regard

what is above and beyond him. Everybody loved her, even the rude serving-men; for there was that in her face which compelled love, a something more beautiful than beauty, a sort of inward light as though she talked with angels.

I remember, too, that she was always busy. There were the young maids at service with us, and these had to be instructed in all manner of feminine gear, lest they fall into idle ways.

Hazelcroft is a great place, with many serfs and villeins, and my mother being from the Scottish lands upon the Border, had certain strange, un-English notions, and held that the manor-lady should have personal care for the welfare of those upon the estate.

"Have they not souls, my lord?" she asked, when my father would fain that she should not weary herself about the churls; so he ever let her have her will.

She and good Father Bevil, who came each day from Wenlock Abbey to say Mass in the chapel at Hazelcroft, wearied from dawn to dark about the serfs and thralls.

Often did my father say, laughing, that an she had her will, my mother would find a proper reason why each villein within the estate should be manumitted, and every year he gave her a choice to set free and quit from the yoke of servitude one or another of the churls.

When my mother was busied at her prayers or works it was to Agnes that I went. It was Agnes here and Agnes there, until Anthony and I were known as "Agnes' lads;" and from this it came about that when I saw Agnes' sweet eyes grow dim with pity for our orphan cousin, I felt quick spring within me a hatred fierce and strong, and not all Agnes' gentle pleadings nor good Father Bevil's penances ever dulled the feeling.

Anthony liked him; but every one pleased Anthony, and all the world esteemed him well. He was tall and strong, with a handsome face, a merry tongue, a careless smile, and, withal, a heart tender and womanish for the pain of others.

Albeit my father was a younger son of

younger son, he had yet a goodly holding from his mother. He was a cousin to that Sir Richard Pembridge who was with the Earl of Hereford in the king's army when His Majesty went into France, King John, the French king, being held a prisoner in the Tower at London town.

In his younger days my father himself had gone to the wars, and it was when he fought on the Scottish border that he found the lady my mother. In the sack of a town he saved her life, but being sore wounded in his sword arm he could never fight again. For this and other deeds of valour did the king make him a knight-banneret.

All the story of that which befell my mother and my noble father, if meetly told, would make as fair a chronicle as that which the Fleming, Messire Froissart, has written in the grand virelay he gave to the good Queen Philippa.

It was close to the feast of Corpus Christi when my twin brother and myself came into this world.

Nothing would please my father but that

his eldest son should be called for Saint Andrew, "The good Scottish saint who brought me great fortune when he sent me to you," he said to my mother; and she wished the second boy to bear the name of Anthony, for a young Portuguese of whom Father Bevil had told her much, and who is the patron of Padova, in Italy. So were we Andrew and Anthony, at which the dead Pembridge knights in Hereford church might well have turned in their stone graves, for never was a Pembridge aught but Geoffrey, or Richard, or Hugh.

I have said that I did not like Eustace from the beginning, and this feeling did not decrease as we grew into manhood; indeed, it rather increased, for I observed that he became a favourite with my people. It was not that I believed him to be a rogue, but rather for something in his manner, a certain sneering hint of superiority. He had come to us from the court where he had been made much of, and our country ways were ill suited to him. Then, too, I think it galled his pride that he must be a mere

dependent, and that one so far beneath him in strength and skill as I, should have so high a place. I was my father's heir, and though I should have been satisfied had Anthony been born to such estate and I been but the second son, since the place was mine, I meant to fill it as was my due.

Time passed away quickly at Hazelcroft, and until Anthony and I were one and twenty there was little change in our lives. I say "our," because¹ being twins we were never apart, and what chanced to one came to the other.

The simple life went on upon the estate. We rode to the mere with old Harpin, the falconer, and Robin, the huntsman, was our greatest friend.

Often I went to Wenlock to read the chronicles of the monks, for I was not like Anthony, who loved best of all the horse and hounds, and sword-play.

At Wenlock was Saint Milburgh buried, she that was the granddaughter to King Penda of Mercia, and there was not a finer monastery in all the country round. It was,

certes, a fair sight to see the huge buildings, — the church with festoons of ivy all about it, the great refectory, the fine library, and the Lord Abbot's lodgings near to the giant ash-tree which swayed in the breezes.

I could lie for hours reading from red-lettered parchments, beneath the quaint Norman arches of the chapter house which one Roger Montgomery built when he came over the Manche with Duke William, afterwards the king.

My father sometimes frowned upon my love of book-lore, and had it not been that my lady mother favoured it, I should have fared ill.

Eustace said one day that I would make a good monk, and I saw my father start, and heard him reply sternly, “How now, lad! Do you think the heir of Hazelcroft is born to wear a cowl?”

We gathered always in winter time in the great hall, a mighty room with pillars and arches of oak wood, a groined roof of rafters, and so large a fireplace that a whole ox could roast in it.

It was a brave sight to see the goodly company which gathered here, the floor being strewn with fresh rushes each day.

We had much light from the fireplace, and, too, there were pine torches aflame and thrust into the window ledges.

In the summer we were ever out of doors, and on the terrace where the wallflowers bloomed we were gathered one day, Agnes, Eustace, Anthony, and I.

I listened impatiently to Eustace as he talked with my sister, telling her that she was the fairest maid in all the world, fairer even than the dame of Aquitaine, she whom they at the French court call "La Fleur de Lys." I could ill brook his pretty compliments, yet Agnes did but laugh and call him "silly fellow." She was but two years the older of Anthony and me, and yet mother to us in her sweet dignity.

The manor-house at Hazelcroft was large, and by far the finest in all the country round. It stood upon a knoll, with daisy-covered meadows stretching away to the abbey, where the Cistercians had been since Nor-

man times began in England. Beyond our fields, where we could see the meere¹ of the land of a neighbouring knight, was the Wrekin, a high hill, and between were many hawthorn hedges and vast woods with oak-trees and giant elms.

“In truth, a fine domain,” I murmured, half unconscious of what I said. I loved every foot of the ground with that deep love and pride a man feels for that which is his own, and such a feeling brooks no slighting word or look.

“Fair enough,” said Eustace, somewhat doubtingly, it seemed to me, “and yet, methinks, there are some fairer and nearer to London town than this wild wold of yours.”

All the world knows that the “proud Salopian” can bear any taunt better than one against his shire, and the words angered me.

“Fair enough!” I cried, hotly. “Ay, fair enough to shelter a penniless lad whose fine London folk made not even an offer so to do!” I knew it was an ungenerous taunt,

¹ Border.

and wished it unsaid as soon as spoken, until Agnes cried, "Fie, Andrew!" and then I was angrier than ever.

Eustace flushed, and then as suddenly grew white.

"So these are Salop manners!" he said, with a cool sneer. "My faith! it is a thousand pities that Anthony had not come tumbling into this world a few moments earlier! It seems to me that the next lord of Pembridge bids fair to be a boor!"

We were standing close beside the old stone wall above the moat, which long since had been dry (my father being at good terms with all the country side), and as Eustace spoke I stepped up to him, scarce knowing what I did. "Will you fight the 'Salop boor,' my fine-feathered cousin?" I cried, my hand to my dagger, my ire surging over me like a hot sea wave at midsummer.

"Fight a lad like you!" he said, giving me a push aside. At that I sprang toward him wildly and struck a blow which held all the intensity of my rage. I have killed many a man in a fair fight since then, but

never in all my life can I remember a more murderous feeling than that which made me strike at my cousin.

I saw nothing for an instant, but I heard a scream from Agnes, the sound of a heavy fall, a deep groan, then — silence.

As the mist cleared from my brain and I once more saw clearly, oh! what terrible thing was it that met my eyes! Eustace indeed stood unharmed, but there — there in the moat below, prone on his face and motionless, lay Anthony, my brother. I had no need to ask what had happened. It came to me in a flash. He had stepped between us and received the full weight of my blind fury. For aught I knew I was my brother's murderer.

I cried to Eustace in the name of Heaven not to stand there like a stone, and without waiting another instant I ran to the stables, saddled the dun mare, and rode at full speed to the abbey, to fetch their good leech, Father Bevil.

When I returned, what relief was mine to find that Anthony was still alive. He was

swathed for several wounds in his head and left shoulder, and his left arm hung limp and useless.

Anthony did not die, thank the good God! but it was many weeks before he recovered sufficiently even to rise from his bed.

There was much talk of the accident, but none save ourselves knew how it had happened. Eustace went away to a neighbouring manor; Anthony could not, and Agnes would not speak.

It all lay heavy enough upon my soul, but Father Bevil, to whom I told the whole story, forbade my speaking of it to my father.

"Thy father has enough to trouble him without need of hearing thy noisy penitence," he said.

I thought this hard, but since then I have come to see that he was right. Father Bevil was wise enough to know that if I went hastily to my father with some wild and extravagant story of my misdoing, there was in danger of being spoiled what should prove a good lesson for my jealous nature. Either

he would be angered and blame me too fiercely, thus turning my penitence to sullen anger; or else he would deem me over sorrowful, and make light of what was a serious fault.

I was left to brood in secret, and never in my life was I so wretched as in those days.

When Anthony grew better he must have me near him, and it somewhat consoled me that he loved me still, and would have none of my self-reproaches. There was ever a sweetness about Anthony which held him from a grudge.

The feast of Martinmas came and went, with Anthony still fettered in his chamber. It was the time for salting the meats for winter use, always a season of rejoicing among us, for the peasants came from far and near to help my mother. Many were the brews of wine and mead she gave to them.

In all such things was the manor of my father unlike to the households of other gentry, and I think that this was due to my mother.

It was not that my father was ill-disposed to the common people, but a man thinks not as women-folk, and he takes the things he finds and leaves them, as his father left them to him.

Many of the neighbouring knights paid no heed to their churls, and often we heard horrid tales of evil deeds done to the serfs. In truth, there were even noble ladies of a far higher degree than my mother, who beat their tiring-women, and slit their ears and noses.

At the salting time all was hurry. The salt came from the great pits at Droitwich, near Worcester, and a half seam or more was needed for the meat.

The beeves, sheep, and pigs were of our own meadows, and even the red deer in the forest near by fell before the skilled shaft of the cross-bowman.

The hides were given to the peasants, and of them they made sandals, rough jerkins, and belts.

The fat was soon turned into candles and huge pots were filled with tallow, cooking over a fire of thorns from the woods.

For days the house was fragrant with the scents of saffron and spices from all the sweet stuffs which were brewed and baked.

Why did I note these homely things? It seems to me that a foreboding of the great changes which were to come to me must have given me more interest in my home. I know there have been since then many days in which I would have given all but my hopes of Paradise to have been again among those simple scenes.

Anthony's hurt proved slow in the mending, so that our father grew anxious about the lad. And one day, as he walked within the mews, his pet gerfalcon on his wrist, and Boris, the Welsh hound, by his side, he called me to him.

"Andrew," he said, "I have a word to say to you. Do you love your brother?"

"Ay, father," was all I could say to so unexpected a question.

"He is not faring well," he went on, "and Father Bevil is of the opinion that a voyage beyond the seas would help his hurt. For

some years I have known that the day would come when Anthony would need to seek his fortune in foreign parts, since there is not here upon the estate enough for all. A soldier's life is to his taste, as it was to his father's before him. But now he is not fit for fighting, and I will that you shall go with him, tarrying until you see that he is meetly placed and in his health again. No one will so well care for him as you, and the travel among strange scenes will be of great interest to you. With all your books you are a good lad, Andrew," and my father laid his hand kindly upon my shoulder.

At this so great a condescending upon his part I could keep silent no longer, albeit a fierce struggle had arisen within me to hold back the words which flew to my lips. If I spoke, my father might change his will to send me with Anthony; but I felt I needs must speak, and in a moment I had told him the story of my anger and the cause of Anthony's hurt.

He listened very gravely, and then said:

"'T is true that there was a provocation;

yet it was unmannerly and unknighly to taunt a guest in your own father's house. Will you do penance as I deem right, my lad?"

"Ay, father," I made answer stoutly, though my voice choked somewhat, "even though Eustace go with Anthony."

At this my father smiled.

"Methinks," he said, "that were to punish Anthony as well as you; and, on the other hand, I doubt if he would go without you. Nay, let the penance be but this: try ever to put your brother first, and be not so ready to have your rightful place as eldest son. If Anthony take the lead, let be, let be! You are too anxious to have that which you think your due in the world, and 't is well to learn that honour comes not to those who seek it for themselves. Tame your haughty spirit, boy, and remember the motto of our house."

"*'Dieus, li Reis, mien Fredre,'*"¹ I murmured, and my father said with great kindness:

¹ "God, the King, my Brother."

“Never forget it, and may God protect and aid you.”

When the news was told within the manor, all was confusion. Agnes fell to weeping sore, yet busied herself in helping the lady my mother to make ready for our going.

The very thought of it seemed to give Anthony new strength, and he could scarce contain himself with impatience to depart and see those strange lands of which Father Bevil had so often told us.

We were to take but a small retinue, and travel first to London town; thence to journey into foreign parts, to see the world in Holland, Italy, and Spain. In this last country abode our grand-dame's people, to whom we looked for aid in advancing Anthony's fortunes.

The Yule-tide came and went, and we waited only that the roads might be smooth enough for travel, and that my father himself might have leisure to go with us as far as our great capital.

It was as late as the early spring ere we were well prepared, and one perfect day in

"DIEUS, LI REIS, MIEN FREDRE!" 29

April, when the green fields about my home looked fair and sweet, we bade farewell to Hazelcroft.

It seemed to me that I had naught but kindly feelings to the whole world, and yet I knew within my stubborn heart that I thanked God that Eustace was not there.

CHAPTER II

THE SERVING-MAID OF LAS DELICIAS

THERE are some things one never forgets, and until I close my eyes upon all the fair scenes of earth, methinks I shall ever see before me the Bay of Cadiz as it was when Anthony and I sailed into it, on a bright day in the spring of 1366.

The waters of the bay were as blue as the sky; the town seemed like a white cloud upon the ocean's breast; the sunlight flashed and sparkled on the sea like the glittering of topaz and diamonds.

We had travelled a full year in various lands, yet we had seen no sight more wonderful than the harbour between the rocks of Cochinos and Puercos, in reaching which many a good ship has gone down, for the passage is narrow and full of danger to the unwary.

My father's mother's mother was a Spanish Doña, and a trace of her spirit must have

lurked in me, for I have ever loved her country and her people.

Anthony and I had letters to the great Martin Lopez de Cordova, my father's kinsman, and we were not to tarry at Cadiz, but go at once to Seville, where lay the fleet. So, leaving the ship which had brought us by way of the Mediterranean Sea from the port of Genoa, we straightway went to an inn to sup.

It was late in the day, being four of the clock when we landed.

In the year that we had been from home Anthony had grown strong and well, and although he was my twin brother, I could not help but think how unlike was his manner to mine as he strode into the inn, — Las Delicias, I think it was called, — ordering all before him as if he were a prince of the blood royal and not a mere English squire.

His tall frame was firm and well knit; his cheeks were glowing with health, and his dark eyes sparkled with the fire of youth. In truth, he was a comely sight with the dark locks and open brow of our race,

for the Pembridge lineage boasts Norman blood from one of the Conqueror's belted knights.

I, the elder, and my father's heir, was only just above the middle height, with yellow, curling locks and the deep blue eyes of my mother's people. My nature seemed a quiet one, albeit the spirit below was hot enough, as was quickly seen when some insult, real or fancied, stirred me to a passion utterly beyond control.

Anthony ever took the lead, and much as I loved him, it rasped me sore, and cut to the quick my mighty pride, to see how well the air of command was suited to him, and how little people noticed me: but Anthony's careless humour never thought of this.

Within the inn a pretty maid brought us wine, bread, and a joint of meat, with cool, green leaves, and we were served in the *patio*, a square court with a fountain and many flowers.

"This is a strange inn," said Anthony. "Everything is out of doors. We see not in Salop a house built around a garden, with

orange-trees in fruit, and palm leaves to shade."

"The place seems good enough for all its oddities," I answered, as I looked up at the low white walls of the house, where small balconies with closed jalousies overhung the *patio*.

"I fain would linger a little here," said my brother; "but we must on to Seville before the Lord Lopez departs, for they say here that he may soon go to join the king in Castile. I tell you, Andrew, we are like to see some good fighting, if it be true that there is trouble with Prince Henry of Trastamara. The innkeeper has told Humphrey of late news that the king had been forced to flee south of the Guadaramas, where one Sir Bertrand du Guesclin has encamped his men."

"What does he here?" I asked. "Is not he a Frenchman, and is not the king him they call 'Peter the Cruel'?"

"As to Du Guesclin," Anthony replied, with a frown, "methinks it were an ill deed for him to come to Spain to put the rightful

king from the throne. It seems that he does but want a booty for the Free Companies which have ravaged France. Yes, it is the same 'Pedro el Cruel,' 't is true, and yet, I know not why, I have a feeling for him."

At this I needs must laugh, and say :

"'T is easy for me to know the why of that. It is that he is now the under wrestler in the game. When was there ever yet a ragged hound that Anthony did not champion?"

"My faith! Be careful, lad; this is not merry England! The next thing, you will be tied hand and foot within a Spanish dungeon for that you have called the King of Castile and Leon a 'ragged hound,'" said Anthony, laughing.

"Since when or by what miracle became you cautious," I began, for Anthony's heedlessness of danger, and his calm mode of fancying that all the world meant well to him, was a thing much talked of among us at home; but I said no more, for he interrupted me by crying, "What was that?"

and I caught the sound of a woman's voice in a half-stifled cry for aid.

Drawing his sword, my brother rushed to the passage which led into the street, I following. There we saw a little Spanish maid struggling fiercely to be free from the arm of Humphrey Wager, one of our serving-men.

"Let be, let be!" cried Anthony, angrily. "For shame, Humphrey, to hold a maid against her will."

"Sir Squire, 't is but a serving-wench," said Hugh Litchfield, half angry, half amused.

"Nay, but a serving-maid shall not be kissed but by her leave," said Anthony, and I saw the young maid's eyes flash upon him a quick look of gratitude. They were wonderful eyes, and they burned like cedar coals in the flaming beauty of her face.

"Odds, zounds!" said Humphrey, sullenly. He was an old servitor of my father, and much given to the speaking of his mind, a practice which I can never recommend, and least of all in a dependent,

although in such, a long and faithful service does entitle them to much considering.

"Methinks, my young master, that the maid would tell a different tale did my lord squire ask for those same kisses he will not have us take," grumbled Hugh, ever strong to uphold his fellow servant.

"I will break the pate of him who dares molest the maid again," said Anthony, silencing Hugh with a threatening look, as he held aside the swinging door to let the damsel pass.

"Sir Squire," she said in a low voice, as she turned to enter the inn, "I would thank you for your gentleness, and beg you not to think I am a froward jade in that the men-at-arms have talked with me."

"Nay, nay, it was their fault, not yours," he said, kindly, and with a gentle "*Gracias,*¹ Señor," she slipped away.

"It seems to me that our adventures do begin," I said, as we sat down to finish the meal. "Are you to succour every distressed damsel whom you see, Anthony?"

¹ Thank you.

“You know that you would not have me do otherwise,” he replied; “and if it costs me no more than in this case, certes, I am well fared in my knightly deeds. Make haste and finish, Andrew, for we must needs see the host and make ready for our journey.”

So did we, seeing that the small shallop, called by the Spanish men a *chalupa*, was well stocked with water, wine, and food, the stout captain promising to take us to Seville upon the morrow.

We were to travel by the river, that being the better way to go quickly, since the roads were drenched with rains and the melting snows which come down from the mountains at this season. Then, too, the nearness of the infidel Moors made it not safe for those who travelled in a small company or in haste.

We were to sleep at the inn that night, and go on board the shallop at five of the clock next day.

My frame was so weary that when I threw myself upon the wooden settle with which

the little chamber was supplied, I soon fell into a doze, and then deep sleep came to rest my tired eyes.

It seemed but a short moment to me, and yet it was near midnight, when I was awakened by a grip on my arm. I started up, my hand to my dagger in a trice, but saw only Anthony, who motioned to me to rise quietly.

Drawing me to a far corner of the room he said in a low voice :

"There is work for us to do. Humphrey has just told me of a plot against a woman here at this inn, and we must warn her, and then try to save her, if possible. She is escaping in great haste from some enemy, and he is in pursuit. A man of her own train has attempted to betray her, and it is his intention to keep her here upon one pretext or another until her pursuer shall come up with her. Is it not a foul thing for a man to war against a woman?" He looked at me in such a fury of indignation that I could not help but smile as I answered :

"Of a truth it is. But how do you know that this woman does not deserve ill?"

"I know naught save that she is a woman and needs succour," he answered. "She is lodged in the next chamber to our own, and but a short while ago I heard sobbing come from thence. I know not what to do, whether boldly to warn her of her danger or merely to offer our aid. What think you, Andrew? You have a head upon your shoulders."

"Thank you," I said, drily. It irked me to be considered but a counsellor, for I fancied that my brother thought me incapable of action. We ever desire to be that which we are not, and I cared far more to be thought a gallant fighter than to have my reputation as good adviser.

"We will go and offer our services, saying nothing of her flight until she herself mentions it," I answered, and to this Anthony agreed. Accordingly we went to the door of the next room, and tapped softly.

"Who comes?" cried an affrighted voice.

"Friends!" answered my brother.

There was a moment of silence, and then the door was drawn slightly open and we saw the face of an old dame who stared at us in amaze.

"I cry you mercy, Señora," said Anthony, doffing his plumed hat with his own stately grace. "We would speak with your mistress. Tell her two Englishmen desire to do her service, an she will permit them that privilege." He spoke slowly, for his tongue never lent itself readily to the soft Spanish, while to mine it oftentimes seemed more native than our harsher English speech. So I added a word to his:

"Pardon our intrusion, Señora, but we have heard from the serving-men that you and your mistress are to take a journey on the morrow. The ways are rough for women. If we can help you toward your destination, we shall be glad to lend you aid, and will hope to prove faithful squires."

"Señors," she made reply, with much tremor in her voice, "I will speak to my mistress." She turned away and we heard

a low murmur of voices; then she reappeared.

"Enter," she said, briefly.

We obeyed, and presently stood within the low-roofed chamber. At the further end, and leaning against a rude bench, we saw a young maid. At a glance we recognised her. She was none other than the damsel whom Anthony had rescued from Humphrey but a few hours before.

A flaming torch thrust in a niche in the wall made a flickering light which but faintly outlined the dim and gloomy room, but showed her dark eyes and darker hair beneath the soft black cloud of her mantilla. Her figure was slight, and disguised in the dress of a serving-wench, the which, methought, ill became her. There was a spirit animating the slender frame which no mean costume could hide, and her voice, though it trembled somewhat when she began, grew firm as she said:

"You are welcome, señors," adding to Anthony, who stood as one amazed, "Sir Knight, I already owe you a debt for that you

saved me from the rudeness of the men-at-arms, while I waited in the passage for my tire-woman."

She gave him her hand as she spoke, and my brother, who was not a squire of dames, and rather wont to fear a woman as some angelic creature he knew not what, bent low before her, saying naught.

On me too she let fall a friendly glance as she said:

"Since you have heard so much, 't is meet that you should hear more. I pray you, gentlemen, be seated and listen to my tale; then judge if it were well to befriend so unfortunate a maid as Inez de Viras."

"Nay, Señorita," I made reply, "we do not need to listen or to wait. We are two English squires, Anthony and Andrew Pembridge, travelling to Seville to our kinsman, a gentleman of your fair Castile. It ill be-seems a man to praise himself, and yet I do assure you that my brother and I are true and loyal squires, and as we look for knight-hood we will succour any woman. Gladly will we aid you an we can."

“I thank you, Señor Ingles,” she said, “and yet I would have you listen. I am an orphan; my father, who was a favoured courtier of our lord the king, left me as maid-in-waiting to the late Queen Blanche, God rest her soul!” and she blessed herself reverently. “I have been little at the court, and my father’s estates go by right of law to my cousin, Don Diego de Viras, but the jewels and treasures of our house, a vast inheritance, belong to me. These Don Diego has much desired, and these he hath taken.”

“The scoundrel!” cried Anthony. “But had you none to uphold you?”

“My cousin is powerful,” she answered, — “but I have not yet told you the worst. He desires me also, and hath petitioned the king that His Majesty give me to him to wife. In this I will not yield, and so in a mean disguise, as you have seen me here to-day, I fled from Seville, with only one man-at-arms and this my dame of company to guard my person. Here we thought to take ship to the city of Bordeaux, where I had hoped to rest until the war should be at an end.

"If Don Enrique comes to the throne," she went on, "I shall be in safety, for I have word of late that many of my kinsmen have joined his army. This does but make my favour with the king the less and my danger here more. Reaching this city yester-eve we found no ship to sail until the coming week, and something in the mien of Juan, the man-at-arms, has made me fear that he will betray us.

Here Anthony gave me a quick glance.

"So it is you find us awake and anxious at this hour. If I tarry longer my cousin Diego may find me out, and once in his power what could a poor maid do against one who has the king behind him? I do not fear death, — I have one trusty friend," as she spoke she drew from her girdle a small dagger of Toledo steel, and the jewels on its tiny hilt gleamed not more brightly than her eyes; "but I do fear life with such an one as would wed a young maid whether she will or no. For me one thing alone remains. I will seek sanctuary, for even Diego will not touch me there. At San Lucar, near to Seville, is the convent

of Santa Maria, and not only is it a place of refuge for any distressed damsel, but my aunt is the lady abbess, and for my mother's sake she would hold me 'gainst the word of the king himself. Rather a thousand times would I be a nun than the wife of Diego de Viras!"

This she said with so much of vigour that I felt it argued ill for any cavalier who did displease her, for gentle though she appeared, her sweetness clothed a stubborn will.

Anthony spoke quickly, and it seemed to me that I had never seen my brother look so knightly:

"Señorita, to-morrow — nay, it is to-day, methinks, for the first hint of dawn breaks through that window light — we set sail on the shallop 'La Reina' to reach Seville by the Guadalquivir. The convent you name is close beside the river, and if so be your will, I pray you take our escort by the way."

"You are good, Señor Ingles," she made reply, her bright eyes softening as she spoke.

"Are all the Englishmen like you?"

Smiling, but colouring under her gaze,

Anthony shook his head and the old dame spoke.

"I pray you, Señorita, *querida*,¹ let us go by the river. That will be best."

"If you fear pursuit, fair lady," I interposed, "say not that you go with us. Bid your man make ready in all haste for a journey, but tell him not whither. Meet us upon the quay at the appointed time, and give no chance to say a word of your departing. Nay, Señorita," — this I added smilingly, as she began to speak of our chivalry in such a way as made the colour fly to my face, — "it were best to leave such words until we bring you safe unto your sanctuary."

And with some more parley as to the morrow's journey, we left them to prepare as best they might in so little time for another hasty flight.

¹ Dear.

CHAPTER III

A MAD BETROTHAL

THE sun rose hot as we left the inn, and we rejoiced in the prospect of a fair day. But it soon began to change. They say that here in Spain, near the Pillars of Hercules, is the end of the world, and I could not help but fancy as the sun disappeared in a heavy sky, that having reached the end of his journey, he had retired to rest awhile before starting again on his daily round.

However that may be, we saw him not as we left Cadiz. The damp air blew chill from the sea as we hurried to the shallop lying at anchor in the bay. The white houses looked desolate and cold in the uncertain light, and I know not why, but I felt not my wonted interest in the travel.

I knew that my father and Anthony counted much upon our coming to Seville, for since Anthony had no holding in Eng-

land, he would be of the army of the King of Spain, and here carve out for himself a name and fortune. He was in advancement somewhat behind his years, for it was the custom to place a young squire at the manor of some neighbouring lord, there to learn the knightly exercises, and to be taken by his master to the wars.

My father had often desired this for both my brother and myself, but by gentle pleadings my lady mother had won him from his purpose.

“Who so fit to train the lads as you, my knight?” said she, and my father could not say her nay in anything.

Now I knew that the time had come when Anthony must be disposed, and that this journey was but the beginning of great changes. Anthony and I had always been together, and the hint of a coming separation cast a shadow over me.

Indeed, there seemed a blight upon us all.

The serving-man of the señorita was a surly fellow who answered ill the jests of our men-at-arms and sailors. The damsel

herself, covered in a long, dark cloak like a cowled Capuchin, spoke not at all, but bestowed herself in a corner of the boat, her maid beside her.

Only Anthony was as merry as ever, with a gay word here and there for men and sailors, as we shipped anchor and sped down the bay.

There was a breeze which sent us bravely on our way, and ere we reached the mouth of the Guadalquivir the clouds had blown away, the sun shone, the sea sparkled, and the men sang at their work.

Anthony drew me aside at length, and said:

“What think you? Will all go well? I like not that man Juan. He hung back upon the quay, and methought he willed not to come with us.”

“I thought I saw something amiss,” I answered. “It may be that he would work some treachery against his mistress and ’t will do no harm if he is well watched. She is a fair damsel, the Spanish *doncellita*,¹ is she not, Anthony?”

¹ Little damsel.

This I said to my brother of a purpose, for it was to me a marvel that in all our wanderings he had never seen a face he counted so fair as was that of our Agnes. For myself this was not strange. I had never cared for young maids. It seemed to me the romantics were mere nonsense when they told of a man's risking all, even his knightly honour, for one damsel. Were there not plenty more of them? And yet the goodliest knight of all would pine and fret for a maid not the half so beauteous as another by his side, at whom, forsooth, he would not look, an she were dying of love for him. I can see that a man should ever do his *devoir* for any maid, well or ill favoured as the black death did make the folk of London town that year that the murrain was upon the people. A maid is a maid, as was once the mother who bore us, and any true knight should remember that and do her reverence.

Yet I wondered if Anthony, whom all women favoured and who himself loved none, would see the beauty in the señorita, who was more than usual fair, though

not with the sweet English loveliness of Agnes.

Looking surprised, Anthony knit his brows at my question as he answered with the air of one who thinks of that of which he has not thought before:

"Fair? Is she so? I know not, by my faith. She stood up well and bravely spoke, and methought I liked her spirit; but she looked pale, and I care not for these southern dames with their great black eyes."

I needs must laugh at this, for the seño-rita's eyes were as soft as brown Genoese velvet, and though her cheeks had not the English roses, there was upon them a rich bloom, as if the sun had kissed a ripened peach upon a garden wall.

"I fear," said I, "that we scarcely do our *devoir* to leave the damsel so long alone. Come, we will amuse her with stories of our journeyings."

"Go you," said Anthony, "I must see that all is right with the horses and the men." A poor excuse was this, for stout Humphrey Wager, though a careless fellow enough

where a woman was concerned, was as good a man for man's work as one could find.

In a sheltered corner of the shallop I tarried long with the señorita, telling her of our travels in the fair land of Italy, and more especially of the strange things we saw in the city of Venice at the time of the marriage of the Doge to the Adriatic, a scene they enact each year to do honour to the great victory of Ziani. The señorita in turn told me of the Spanish court, where she had once been before she was dame of company to the poor queen, which last service had kept her wandering from castle to castle.

Anthony joined us, asking courteously how she fared, and I bethought me to demand if it is true that the king, Don Pedro, is so cruel as men do say, and how it chanced that there is the war of which we heard at Cadiz.

"Sir Squire," she said, looking about as if in fear lest she be overheard, "that he is cruel I cannot deny, though to me he was as gracious as a summer breeze. Methinks he is cruel but to such as come across his path

to injure him. He has great fondness for the people, and will be known as *El Justiciero*,¹ and punishes fiercely those who do wrong. I have heard my father say that the king was kindly dispositioned as a lad, but that he has been much troubled by many of his own kin, with treacheries and leasing.

“But was he not hard with the queen?”
put in Anthony.

“Alas, I knew her for a good mistress,” she replied; “and yet methinks the king had some cause to feel amiss. It was in this wise. The king has three half-brothers, Don Tello, Don Fadrique, and Don Enrique, and these three had been far more beloved by their father than was his rightful heir. Nevertheless Don Pedro felt kindly to them and treated them as his kin, albeit they were but left-handed with the bar-sinister upon their scutcheons. It was not until they requited him so ill as to many times conspire against His Majesty that he turned thus bitterly against them. Then came the time of the king’s marriage to the lady

¹ The dispenser of justice.

Blanche of Bourbon, and, to do him honour, the king sent Don Fadrique into France to marry the damsel as proxy. Men say that the prince was so enamoured of her beauty that he made offers to her on his own account, so winning her liking that she did beseech to be let from marrying with the King of Spain for the sake of his brother. By some tale-telling this came to the ears of Don Pedro, and his anger was like to a whirlwind. We have a proverb, 'No hay peor cuña, que la del mismo palo,'¹ and His Majesty vowed vengeance."

"It was an unknighly trick," said I, with some warmth.

"There was, too," she went on, "ever Maria de Padilla to whisper in his ear that she could never be his wife while Queen Blanche lived, and she urged him to show himself a man, and put away the white-faced child whom Albuquerque — the minister he hated — had thrust upon him. Some say that he killed the Lady of Bourbon at the last, and some that she put an end to her own un-

¹ "The worst enemy is he who was once a friend."

happy life. The truth I know not, for my term of service was ended before she went to the castle of Medina Sidonia, where she met her death. She was but sixteen years of age and no fit mate for the king. Even when I was at her side she did naught but weep and lament and beg the empty air to waft her Fadrique to her side. It was a sore hurt to Don Pedro that his bride preferred his base-born brother to himself."

"I blame him not," cried Anthony, with sudden fire. "An 't were my own brother I could not forgive the man who stole my lady's love away from me. And yet, methinks, it was a foul, unmanly deed to vent his anger on the woman. 'T were better to have been dispensed and given her in all honour to his brother."

"Mayhap that would be an English fashion, Sir Squire," said the lady, "but scarce becoming to our Spanish temper. Should he have given up her rare dower as well?" This she asked a little scornfully, and yet with a laugh which made her only more fair, for her teeth were as small pearls, and in one cheek

was a dimple which came and went with her laughter. All this Anthony seemed not to see, and he answered, with his eyes kindling:

“Ay, that too, Señorita; a true man wants not the maid’s gold without herself. Who is that Señorita Maria of whom you spoke?”

“An you had been at the court at Seville you would not need to ask that question,” she said. “She is dead, poor soul, unshriven and unhouselled, and I will say naught save that she was a woman, fair as the flowers at Navidad, and the one in all the world that the king ever loved.

“As to this war, it is due to three things. Don Pedro is not liked by many of his people because of his severity in enforcing the laws and his heavy punishings of such as do displease him. Moreover, he is at odds with France because of the queen’s death; and again, since he has been excommunicate he has dealt hardly by many of the clergy. Seeing these things, Don Enrique has thought it a fitting time to bring about a rebellion.

“He hath not the right on his side,” said

Anthony, hotly. "I hate —" but what my brother would have said I never knew, for as he spoke there came a rushing sound about us and the captain called loudly:

"Señors, Señors! Look to your safety! A *vendabal* wind is upon us!"

We sprang to our feet in alarm. Looking forward we saw our crew straining every nerve to get down the sails. Suddenly above our heads the sky grew black as ink. The wind, leaping into a furious gale, lashed the sea into a boiling froth, and our little shallop swung and tottered like a helpless thing.

Anthony hastily drew the señorita toward the rough cabin amidships, I following with Dame Elvira, but we had not yet reached the slight shelter when the clouds were torn asunder and the rain poured down in torrents.

There was a fierce chill in the air, and our peril was extreme, yet I could not but notice that the damsel bore herself most admirably. She was white to the lips; her clothing was drenched with the rain which, despite our

attempts to shield her, beat against her slight frame like whip-cords, but no word of fear escaped her, though the howling of the storm, the weird cries of the sailors, the stamping of the affrighted horses in the hold, and the fearful rocking of our vessel all combined to make up a most terrifying experience.

We may have endured all this for half an hour or more, when the storm showed signs of breaking. But the shallop was strained and leaking badly.

"I fear we cannot hold up much longer," said the captain to our anxious little group. "There is but one hope for us. We are now close to a small inlet. Yonder it lies, and could one but reach the shore with a cordon, all would be well. But," he added, despairingly, "who would venture such a task?"

"Will none go?" cried Anthony. "Then will I! Nay, Andrew, not a word," and off came his dagger-belt and cottehardie with his money-pocket. "If I fail," he said, "try to save the damsel, and care for her as though she were Agnes," and before I could do aught further to stay him he had gone from my side.

A moment later I saw him upon the taffrail, bare-headed, the wind blowing his dark curls about his face, the hempen cord about his waist, his lithe figure in hose and jerkin outlined against the angry sky.

"My duty to my father, Andrew!" he cried, then plunged boldly into the waters below.

It was a moment of terrible suspense. Yet well I knew that if mortal man could make that shore, Anthony was he, for many were the hours of swimming he had spent in the silver Severn at home. But so frightful was the storm, it seemed to me that even the strongest swimmer must fail, and I stood there in a great sweat of anxiety.

I saw him, though but dimly, buffeting the huge waves that threatened to overwhelm him. I saw him disappear and — and reappear, and again disappear — and once was I on the point of leaping over to share his fate, thinking to see him no more, when a small hand restrained me, and then — and then came a shout from the sailors. My brother had reached the shore.

The men sprang to the rope, which they hauled taut and made fast, and ere long the shallop was resting safely within the little harbour.

Anthony paid no heed to my eager questions as to how he fared, but cried :

“There is a house over yonder; lead the lady thither while I hasten on to ask for shelter and see what cheer we may find.”

A flash of lightning revealed to us upon a hilltop a church tower with long, low buildings near by, and thither we made our way after Anthony.

The señorita's footsteps lagged and she leaned somewhat heavily upon me as I led her over the rough path, her woman following with Juan.

“Courage, my lady,” I said, cheeringly. “We will have you soon in safety.”

She answered not for a moment's space, and then she murmured so softly that I scarce could hear :

“Señor, who is Agnes ? ”

“Agnes ! ” I cried, in some amaze. Then

as I remembered Anthony's words upon the shallop I smiled to myself as I answered:

"Agnes is our sister at home in England, Señorita, and we hold her most dear." Then could I have smiled more broadly still, for I felt sure that I heard her give a sigh of relief.

At that moment Anthony ran toward us crying gaily:

"Come, come! The curé bids us welcome. Hasten in to dry your garments by his *brazero*,"¹ and encouraged at this assurance of friendly aid we hurried toward the door of the weather-beaten building.

The priest was a tall, gray-haired man with a kind face and gentle mien, but a pair of black eyes deep set and piercing. Their steady gaze made me feel as if I had never done a mean deed but he could read the traces in my face, and yet I could see the generous nature behind them and was inspired with much of confidence in the man.

He drew me aside while the others warmed themselves at the charcoal and asked the

¹ A charcoal pan or foot-warmer.

reason of our strange plight, sending his servant to the river to bid the sailors make fast the shallop and come to the out-buildings for the night.

“Once I could have offered you a better shelter than this,” he said, “but our monastery was destroyed six months ago by the Moors, and I am left alone to care for the ruin that remains to us of what was once a great church, and a convent which afforded help to all the country round. They say that it was by the king’s connivance that the infidel despoiled our lands, yet will I not believe that a Christian king of Castile and Leon would do so foul a deed.

“You are welcome to my poor best, Señor Stranger. There is in the left wing one small room where the damsel and her serving-woman can dispose themselves for the night with some comfort, but for the rest of you I can give only bare shelter and warmth.”

Well was it that we fell into such kindly hands as those of good Padre Ignacio, for when the morning broke, as fair as if there ne’er had been a storm, the Dame Elvira

was very ill with a rheum, too ill to rise from off her bed. The señorita was pale with anxiety, and to add to her distraction of mind it was discovered that Juan, her rascally serving-man, had run away. That he had gone with black treachery in his wicked heart I felt a surety, and there arose within me a great pity for this maid so brave, so fair, and in so piteous a plight that sorely did she need a knight to do her succour.

“Anthony,” I said to my brother, “we must in some way save the señorita. If she remain here Juan will betray her to the villain who is ever on her track. She must go with us, and yet alone, within that rough boat, with no other woman to bear her company; how can it be?” I paused, and Anthony’s face grew thoughtful. As I gazed at him in wonderment that he who was ever so gay and oftentimes too quick to speak should have naught to say, a strange thing chanced.

Within the boyish face of my brother there came a change. I saw therein a look

of resolution and firmness, a look as if he saw before him a straight path beset with many dangers, yet perils not to be laughed at and rushed into carelessly as of yore, but to be met and vanquished for the sake of another. Methinks in that brief moment my brother became a man.

"Andrew," he said presently, "there is a way, and you will help me." His voice had a note of assurance in it, as though whatever chanced he was sure of my aid. To my questioning look he simply said, "Nay, brother, not now. First I must see the curé," after which he rose hastily and passed out of the room, leaving me in wonderment.

I think I am not of those who are particularly dull of wit, yet after turning over his words in my mind I was still at a loss what he intended to do. Many thoughts came to me, but I could settle with certainty upon none of them, and in this same quandary he found me when he returned.

"It is all arranged," he said, with a quietness that I saw at once was assumed. "An

the señorita consents, I shall be troth-plight to her ere the sun sets."

"You — Anthony — troth-plight to the señorita!" I stammered in astonishment. "You forget —"

"I forget nothing," he said with determination.

"But our father —"

"I am not our father's heir," he again interrupted. "And were I, he would say I did right were he here to see. But, brother, do you not stand with me?"

He had placed his hand on my shoulder as he spoke these last words, and was now looking appealingly into my eyes. There was ever a persuasive something about Anthony which made me yield to him whether I would or no. Perhaps it was because he ever seemed to me so well equipped to help himself that when he deigned to ask my aid, I needs must give it. Rather, methinks, it was the love I had for him, which, though warred upon by the selfishness of my nature, made me think of him before myself.

Something of timidness there was within me which made me slow to combat a swift decision, since my way was to ponder long before an action. In these later days I smile somewhat at remembering how each one gets in this world that which he needs. Anthony's headlong nature ever had to bear the trials of inaction and the weariness of waiting idly; to me was given the dash of warfare which left no space for aught but swiftest deeds. So in this case I did but stammer forth:

"The king — Don Pedro!"

"I have thought of that," he said. "All shall be kept secret until some lucky chance shall bring us into favour and I can win the king's consent. Padre Ignacio knows all. He has seen the letters to the Señor Lopez which show our lineage. A marriage he could not perform, as too sacred to be entered upon with so little reflection, but he will hear us plight our troth upon his obtaining my solemn oath that we enter upon this with the firm purpose to save the maid, and that as soon as it may be safe so to do we will

release her. Never will I claim her as my wife, save by her free consent. I shall bear her at once to sanctuary at San Lucar. There she may remain in safety until I carve a path to good fortune. When the war is over, the king's good-will ours, I will take as whatever guerdon I deserve from him, the safety of the damsel. Then may she have back her troth an she will."

It seemed a mad scheme, and yet no one could withstand Anthony, and in half an hour the trembling, half-frightened maid, Inez de Viras, was my brother's betrothed, and we once more were sailing up the mighty Guadalquivir toward San Lucar.

CHAPTER IV

SAINT ANTHONY TO THE RESCUE

NEXT day upon the little shallop all was tranquil, and it was hard to believe that we had but lately passed through such a terrible experience. A pleasant breeze sped us so fleetly onward that our captain thought we could reach San Lucar by four of the clock, leaving yet time to make Seville before night fell upon the city. This was well, for the setting of the sun is too often a signal for the rising of wickedness, and darkness a cloak to cover evil deeds.

Anthony busied himself in speaking to the men-at-arms, and the señorita seemed so to wish to be alone that I went not near to her.

To speak the truth, I could not. Try as I might, I felt a swift resentment spring within me whenever I glanced at the cloaked and hooded form and bowed head.

The change had come into our lives indeed, Anthony's and mine, and that it

should come thus gave me the keener pang. Though I hated myself that I could feel so ill toward a helpless girl and one who was under our protection, I found myself unable to subdue the jealous temper within my breast.

I think it was then, for the first time in my life, that I saw the truth of my father's saying, that I was ever prone to consider myself before others. Almost I wished that I had not been born the heir of that fair Salopian domain, since it was the precedence given to me by my birth which had made me feel my own importance. I know I had too much care and thought for my own feelings, while in Anthony the ready deed was ever at the fore. Father Bevil must have seen this failing in me, for he once said to me warningly, "My son, you do ever dwell upon yourself. Put this aside and be guided by simple duty."

What I had done had Anthony loved a maid and wedded her for love, in truth I know not. Methinks I could not have borne to be excluded from his heart, and no

less would I have called it. In this I would have been as foolish as the great white swan upon the mere at Hazelcroft, when she frets and cries because one of her large brood wanders from her side.

I have grown older and wiser too, I trust, — for the years come and pass to but sorry purpose an they show us not the foolishness of youth, — and I have learned that a true love does but make a man more loving to those of his own blood. No right love can crowd out another, for each has his place to fill in the lives of those he loves, and no other can usurp that place.

All this I had not the wit to see in those early days, and I comforted myself with the thought that Anthony had aided the Señorita Inez but from chivalry, and that as she was a care upon him he needed me the more. Then my ill feeling toward her softened and my brother seemed only the more dear.

For some leagues along the beautiful river there stretched away toward the west great *despoblados*, or waste lands, with no houses and only lentisk and palmettos growing

thereabouts. On the other side of the stream the country seemed more fertile. Here were many remains of the Moorish rule; half-ruined castles, the prey of some wicked free-booting company; hamlets with low, white houses; churches with open belfries, from which once the muezzin had called men to the worship of the foul Mahound. All about the land were ditches for irrigating the earth, which bloomed with vineyards and soft-hued olive groves. There were fields of corn with bright red *ababas*,¹ and I caught glimpses of gardens and blossoming shrubs, and flowers like those in our own fair land, save that here they grew larger and in greater abundance.

I stood beside my brother in silence for a time, and then, laying a hand upon his shoulder, I said, anxiously, "What will you do?"

He started, and his face wore the look of puzzled gravity of one who is used to do and not to think.

"In truth I know not," he said, simply. "I shall but wait the turn of events."

¹ Poppies.

I smiled at this. 'T was so like Anthony. Then I said, gravely :

"If we find not favour with the king it will go ill with us. There will then be no way but to join the army of the prince."

"Nay," said Anthony, "I will not fight for a usurper, and one who has wronged his brother. We must trust that the saints will send some lucky chance, if indeed they notice the things which happen here on earth. Perhaps they have other things to do than to cajole fortune for a squire who is not brave enough to carve it for himself. I tell you, Andrew, I *will* succeed!" There was a force and purpose in his tone which made me feel that he spoke truth.

"And now it is meet that I have a word with the sefforita," he added, and he strode with a feigned boldness up to where she was sitting. I watched her as he bent before her, and as she made room for him to sit by her side I thought I saw her pale face flush a little.

They talked long, or rather my brother talked, for the lady said but little. She

rested her head upon her hand so that I could not see her face. All at once she rose, and Anthony came to his feet after her. Even beside my brother's tall form she seemed stately, and upon her cheeks burned two bright spots of colour. Though I heard not what she said, her voice had a sharp ring in it, and the next moment Anthony left her side and came to me wearing a troubled face.

"How now?" I asked. "What is it you have done?"

"My faith! I know not," said he, giving me a puzzled look. "I talked of affairs with the maid for a space, and then I did but say that she must be sure that I would keep my word to the priest.

"What word?" she asked me quickly, and I said, 'The promise that I gave to him never to claim you as my wife.' 'You promised so,' she said, looking at me strangely. 'Certes, Señorita, and here I pledge my word again. I give you back your freedom once I have made your peace with the king, since 't was but to save your life that I was

betrothed to you;' this said I in all good faith, but she rose to her feet on a sudden with a bright colour flaming in her cheeks. Her eyes flashed with anger and she said with much sharpness, 'I shall hold you to your oath, Sir Squire, and now leave me, I do beseech of you.' At that I came away. What think you, Andrew; hath she an ill mood?" and he looked at me with so innocent an expression that I laughed until I could have wept. I had not read the old romaunts without knowing somewhat of the ways of womankind and the thought of my poor Anthony saying ever the things he should not, and all with such good-will, made me no longer wonder at his lady's resentment.

"Oh, foolish fellow!" I cried, "who would not have an ill mood at you! To tell a woman that you are troth-plight with her but to save her life! Cannot you see the hurt to her pride?"

"'T was true," he muttered, looking as shamefaced as when caught filching persicot¹

¹ Jam.

at home, and sore vexed with my laughter and chiding.

“An it were true, why tell her, Sir Maladroit? No wonder she did flout you. She will think you like her not, that you hold her not fair, that you are sorry for the deed, and would at first chance be quit of her. With a thousand things she will torment herself.”

With each count in my charge against his discretion, Anthony grew more shamefaced. He would hear no more.

“I will go and tell her she must not think those things and that I will not give her up,” he said, vehemently.

“Nay, that would be but adding oil to flame,” said I, restraining him. “Your words must be undone by deeds. You must show that you in truth esteem her.”

“Go you and talk with her; I am a dolt,” he said, in some despair, and to ease his mind I did so.

The señorita looked not up when I took my place at her side, and as I read in her downcast face a mingling of pain and

pride my heart went out to her with great tenderness.

"Will not the Señorita Inez speak to her brother?" I said, gently.

She remained silent.

"Methinks that Inez is the soft Spanish way to say Agnes. Is it not strange that I have now two sisters called by the same name? I would be more kind to the new one than to the old, for I have sore tormented the sweet Agnes at home." All this I said hoping to make her feel I was her friend, but she answered nothing, only I heard a choking sound as if she were fighting hard with tears.

I am no softer-hearted than many, and yet perhaps the training of my mother and Agnes had given me gentler feelings toward womankind. One thing I ne'er could endure, and that was to see a woman weep, and I said to her quickly:

"Señorita, why are you troubled? Surely you know that we are your loyal squires?"

Her frame shook as with a storm of sobs, and then she raised her lovely face all wet

with tears and like some flower bathed in the morning dew.

"Ah, you are good, Señor!" she said, her tones expressing true feeling. "I am a great trouble to you. As for him—it was all—it was all a jest. He does not want me!"

And her lip quivered like that of a child in grief.

"Nay, Señorita, you are wrong," I hastened to assure her. "You think thus because he said that he would give back your troth to you, do you not?"

Her eyes fell before my searching glance, but the proud lips curled as I went on.

"That was but a knightly promise because he thought that perhaps you would wish to be free. But wait until this war is past and all will be well. What is your Spanish proverb, 'Zamora was not taken in a day'?"

At that she smiled, and then somewhat adroitly I led the talk to other things, telling her of my home and merry England, and thus we chatted until the mid-day meal.

At this Anthony joined us, but as the maid was reserved in his presence and his own manner showed him to no good advantage, he remained near her only while breaking his fast.

We sped well upon our way, passing the islands great and small which lie in the stream, and which they call Isla Major and Isla Minor.

The sailors at their work broke into song. It was an old chanson they sung, but scarcely a merry one.

“Luego tomado el cuchillo,
Por cima el muro lo ha eschado,
Junto cayo del real
De que Tarifa es carcado,
Dijo ; ‘ Matadlo con esta,
Sulo habeis determinado,
Que masquero honra sin hijo,
Que hijo con mi honor manchado ! ’ ”

It was well along in the afternoon when we reached our first stopping place. This was a small harbour where the shallop might lie in the care of the sailors, while we conveyed the señorita to the convent.

Upon the boat all was hurry and confusion. Humphrey and stout Hugh Litchfield were getting ready the horses, my good chestnut Crispin and Anthony's dun gelding Bivat; these, with the small Barbe of the señorita, were arching their proud necks, and stamping impatiently to be gone, their flanks smooth and shining under their embroidered saddle-cloths.

At length all was in readiness for the start. Anthony helped the maid Inez into her saddle, and while he was doing so I noted a little thing which gave me much pleasure. Her horse turned his head and neighed to her, and well I knew that when dumb beasts love a woman it speaks well for her nature, for animals have their own way, and a sure one, of reading the souls of those they serve, while man is very apt to judge from the surface.

I tarried a moment to bid the captain have all in readiness to lift anchor the instant that we returned, and as I left the boat one of the sailors, a strong fellow, with a fine, open face, said to me:

"Have a care, Señor. These are rough parts, and it seems to me you go but scantily guarded."

"Thank you, good Arturo! I will speak of it to my brother," I made reply, and hastened to Anthony to repeat the warning. He listened to my words with an anxious look and cried to the captain to send two of his fellows with us. To swell our little band came Arturo and another lusty sailor, both well armed.

"Hark you," said my brother as we rode off, "it may be that we have an attack from some hostile force, and if so Humphrey must take the rein of the señorita and stay the horses for naught until she is safely lodged within the convent."

"Is there danger?" she asked, with calmness.

"We know of none," he made answer; "but 't is a travelling companion it were always well to be prepared for."

It seemed scarce possible that aught could threaten us, with refuge in our very sight. The white towers of the convent

gleamed on the hilltop, seemingly only a trivial distance away. The road before us led down a steep hill, across a small stream, by a narrow ford, and then up a bank which was sheltered by a thicket. Beyond this there were only some fields of corn before the convent hill was reached.

Moving at an easy pace we gained the stream and entered at the ford. Our horses seemed to enjoy the cool waters, for they snorted and splashed with pleasure. Suddenly we heard a great commotion ahead in the thicket, and next moment seven horsemen came dashing down the bank toward us.

"Ha!" cried Anthony, "Arturo spoke well! Humphrey, look to your task, while we hold off the scoundrels."

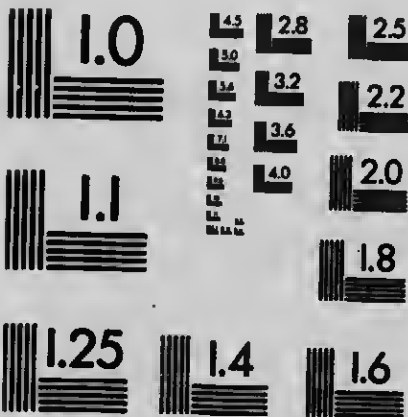
"Saint Andrew! Saint Andrew!" I shouted, and putting spurs to Crispin I rushed upon them waving my sword.

I met the foremost rider just at the shore, and with a furious lunge I aimed to make our foemen one the less. But he was ready for me, parried quickly, and in an



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instant had wounded me in the left arm. The touch of his steel woke in me a fury that seemed to double my strength. Again I struck at the fellow, and the blow was a fierce one, for beating down his guard as though he held up but a light rod, it made a great gash in his shoulder, and with a cry he dropped from his horse.

Meanwhile Anthony with Hugh Litchfield had dashed by and were engaging others of our foe. Without pausing an instant I spurred after them. My brother was facing two of our opponents, and my heart leaped to my mouth as I saw one burly fellow make a lunge at him which seemed to pierce his body. Hearing me coming up behind, the fellow drew out his sword and turned to meet me. I expected to see Anthony drop to the ground, but to my surprise (Hugh having come up to engage the other) my brother spurred forward and with a quick stroke sent his man toppling from the saddle.

"My God, Anthony, are you hurt?" I cried.

"A mere graze," he replied, to my great relief.

No sooner had Anthony's opponent fallen than the three others who were facing us dashed up the bank and disappeared.

"Have at them!" I cried hotly, the blood boiling in my veins, and after them we went.

I am not a friend to a quarrel for the quarrel's sake, yet once the blows begin to fall, there often seizes upon me a lust of battle such as makes me care for naught but the sound of clashing steel until the day shall be lost or won.

Reaching the top of the bank we saw that the three were hastening to join the remaining two of the seven, who had followed Humphrey and the maid. Humphrey had gained the foot of the convent hill, and here they were engaging him. The man was hard pressed, for not only had he himself to defend, but he must save the maid as well.

"Saint Anthony to the rescue!" shouted my brother.

"Santiago! Santiago!" shouted the knights.

We dashed on with Hugh close behind us, and seeing us Humphrey took fresh courage. We gained the spot close on the heels of the three we were pursuing, and now we stood four of us against five of our enemy.

Of the fight which followed I can tell but little. Scarce had I struck three blows when my horse stumbled, and I was pitched to the ground, where I lay stunned.

When I came to myself I lay upon a settle in a dimly lighted room, and strange faces were bending over me.

"What is the matter?" I asked feebly, striving to rise. "Where is my brother?"

"Here beside you, and safe," said Anthony's voice. I next found myself wondering why I was so weak and what made the strange ringing in my ears. It sounded like the abbey bells upon a summer morn, as the chimes came faintly to me across the daisy-covered meadows of my home.

"All is well, my brave brother, an you but recover from your hurt," said Anthony.

"What hurt?" My brain seemed numbed, but all at once I remembered the sudden fall of my horse in the midst of the fray.

"Tell me what has happened," I asked, trying again to rise, but sinking back with a great throbbing in my head. "The seño-rita, is she safe?"

"Thank Heaven, yes," said my brother. "Though when you fell and we stood three to five, it looked ill for us. And they were no mean swordsmen. The leader detached himself while the others held us in play, and succeeded, despite all our efforts, in securing the damsel. All seemed lost indeed, but help was at hand that we scarce thought of. Arturo and his companion had caught the horses of the two fallen men, and now came dashing up to our aid. Their coming turned the tide in our favour."

"Bravo, Arturo!" I cried, weak though I was. "And you recaptured the maid, brother?"

"Señor," put in Arturo, "I have seen much fighting in my time, but a more un-knightly deed than that of the stranger I

never saw. Seeing the day lost to him, he made a shield for his cowardly carcass of the señorita's body, so that the señor, your brother, could not strike him a single blow lest he harm the n . . .

"Ay, and more, he did put his dagger to her breast and cry out that she should die that moment unless the señor gave his oath that they should go free. Your brother cried back that an the lady were released, the fight should cease.

"At this the knight rode close and swung the damsel to the señor's saddle bow. Then he spurred off, calling his men to follow him, and we brought you and the lady to the convent."

I was much relieved at this, though I was too weak from loss of blood to say much. One of the kind sisters now came in and bound up my arm, where I had received quite a bad cut. Then I noticed that Arturo was also hurt, indeed he had fared the worst of all, for he had a deep wound in his breast.

Very soon I grew better of the accident which had stunned me, the ringing in my

ears grew less, but I still felt the quivering at my heart which always follows the excitement and rage that is mine in a hard fray.

In an hour, our hurts being all attended to, we left the convent, for it needed that we hasten back to the shallop and embark, if we were to reach Seville before night.

I could not help but wonder as I saw Anthony's parting with the señorita.

"Farewell, my lady," he said, looking earnestly at her. "The good God guard you! As soon as may be I will send a messenger to know how you do fare."

"*Adios, Señor,*" she made reply. "I can thank you but ill for this your service to me. But—" this she added in a low voice, "when the Señor Ingles wishes, he is free."

"And the Señorita Inez also," said Anthony, very gravely, and then he kissed her hand and was gone.

To me it seemed as if the two were fully bent each to read the other wrong. The damsel was far more gracious unto me as she thanked me warmly and bade me "God speed!"

CHAPTER V

AN INTERRUPTED DUEL

MY wound was still hot and painful, but reclining on the deck of the shallop as we sailed toward Seville, I fell asleep. So sound were my slumbers that I heard not even the casting of the anchor as we reached the shore. Thus I missed what Anthony told me was a most wondrous sight, the first glimpse of the city of Don Pedro, as it was outlined against the sunset sky, with the Torre del Oro close by the water's edge, and near by the great towers of the cathedral.

My brother would not have me wakened, and it was dark when I at last opened my eyes. I lay upon a pile of cloaks, and Anthony sat upon the deck beside me, his head upon his hand. I touched him gently to see if he were sleeping, and he started, bending anxiously o'er me.

"Are you better?" he asked, with so much care in his face, which I could see by the light of a huge lantern swung in the rigging, that I answered lightly, "Tush, lad, the hurt is but trifling. Why do not we go ashore?"

"It is late to enter the city and you are too worn with fatigue to be wearied further with seeking an inn. The captain did advise to tarry till the morning, when one of the sailors will help us to land. Poor Arturo lies yonder upon that coil of hemp. I fear he fares worse than you do."

"Let me go to him; I am sore tired of lying still," I said. Anthony, expostulating somewhat, helped me to my feet and across the deck to the wounded man.

"The señor is kind," Arturo said faintly, as I spoke to him; "were I but cured of this wound I should beg to take service with him."

"Since it was in our defence that you were cut down, 't is only meet that we should care for you, my good fellow. Think not that we shall leave you here," I said. "But what

is that?" as I heard the sound of a scuffle upon the wharf and a cry smote the night air.

Though it was now too dark to see the cause of the disturbance, Anthony was strongly for hastening ashore, thinking perchance to aid some one hard beset, but Arturo said:

"These are nightly scenes in Seville, Señor, and it were well, if one would live long, to learn not to interfere in every man's quarrel."

With my added persuasion Anthony was calmed down, and the rest of the night passed in silence.

Next morning we went ashore, but for some days I saw nothing of the city, for at an inn within a quiet street the serving-man and I lay very ill. A fever set into my wound and seemed to vex me sore. Night and day was Anthony beside me, and it irked me beyond the telling to see him tied like a hound in leash when he should be seeking the king's court. He would never listen to my pleadings that he leave me to Humphrey's nursing, and upon the fifth day

I began to mend. By the end of another week I fared well enough to sit in the *patio* in the cool of the day, and there we talked of many things.

Our store of gold, which had seemed vast enough when we set out from home, was almost exhausted. I knew not how we were to furnish more unless some lucky chance befell, and we decided that when the morrow came we must seek out our father's kinsman.

We spoke of the *señorita*, thinking to send Humphrey or Hugh next day to ask of her welfare.

Then, the night being fine, it seemed to me that I would sleep the better for a little stroll, for since my inaction I had rested but poorly. We were walking along quietly enough when at the corner of the street of San Alfonso we observed a cavalier accost a woman, addressing her with rude words and grasping her wrist, whereupon she screamed loudly for help. Of course Anthony must needs rush to her rescue, and he fell upon the stranger with such fury that the latter drew his sword to defend himself.

Anthony whipped out his also, and they went at it fierce and strong. My brother was no mean swordsman, nor indeed was his opponent, and Heaven knows what the issue would have been, had not the loud clashing of their weapons brought the quick tramping of feet.

"'Tis the Alcaide!" cried the stranger, springing away from a good thrust of Anthony's, and sheathing his sword in a trice. A company of men came swiftly up. The leader carried a naked blade in one hand and a lantern in the other. Flashing its light upon us, he said sternly:

"What means this uproar?"

"Señor," replied the cavalier quickly, "these two men have been disturbing the peace of His Majesty's fair city of Seville. Lodge them within the Torre del Oro, but see that the leech attend them, for methinks one of them hath a wound." With that he turned upon his heel and was gone.

Anthony was struck with astonishment and indignation. He would have cried out that the man lied in his teeth, but that a

look of mine silenced him. Somehow I felt that words would be of no avail, for there was an air of command about the stranger which made me feel that — however unjust it might seem — he had spoken but by his right.

In a short space we found ourselves in a small square room, dim of light and but scantily furnished. Anthony had let a little blood from a scratch of his opponent's sword, and I was too weakened from my exertion to do more than faintly answer the questions put to me by the leech. He gave me a soothing draught and left us, and my heart sank as the door closed behind him and I heard the rasping sound of iron bolts being shot into place and the slow step of a sentry passing to and fro outside our prison wall.

Anthony flung himself beside me. "It is ever my doing!" he cried. "Perhaps I do meddle too much in the business of others. I have caused you all this, and yet what could I do?" and he looked at me appealingly. "'T was for a woman's honour!"

"Do not fret yourself, dear lad," I said drowsily, for the sleeping potion had gone into my brain, and I fell asleep, to dream that Anthony would go to fight a dragon, like the brave Saint George, and that it turned to be a woman who hung about his neck and strangled him, as would a snake.

"How now, Señors Ingles! Will you burn, or serve the king of Castile?"

The voice woke me and I raised myself upon my rough pallet. The sun was streaming in between the bars of our turret window, and as I regained my full senses I made out the figure of a man standing at the door of the chamber.

He was slight and but of the middle height. His dress was in striking contrast with the surroundings. He was clad in a splendid doublet of blue Lyons satin, with white silk hosen, and a blue velvet mantle trimmed in ermine was carelessly flung over one shoulder. The hilt of his sword was heavy with jewels, as was also his dagger belt, and a superb ruby glittered where it clasped the long white plume of his blue cap.

Curls of a reddish golden hue floated to the shoulders; his great blue eyes were dark and wistful, never still, but roving restlessly from one object to another; his mouth was full and petulant of expression, yet his mien was so princely, that, springing up, I cried, ere my brother could speak:

“To your knees, Anthony! It is the king!”

Our visitor looked not ill pleased at this, and as we bent before him, he seated himself upon a rude settle, looking at us with strange blue eyes.

“Yes, it is the king come to see the two English squires who must needs disturb the peace of his realm by brawling in the streets at night.” He laughed a little, as if his own thoughts were jesting with him. “Know you not that the duel is forbidden by law in Seville? One who is found with drawn sword is burned in the Quemadero,¹ and this be he squire or hidalgo.”

“It were hard that one should come to this fate, your Majesty,” said Anthony, frankly,

¹ Burning-place.

"seeing that there was no set duel, and but a few strokes to aid a helpless woman."

At this the king smiled a little.

"Are not such things common in your English country?" he asked.

"Nay, Sire, there the women walk abroad unmolested."

"Or perchance," said the king, his eyes twinkling merrily, — "or perchance they are not wont to make an outcry. But come, Señor, what is your name and that of your companion here?"

"Anthony Pembridge I am called, and this is my brother Andrew. We are English squires of the manor of Hazelcroft in the Salopian country.

"We have journeyed thus far to seek our kinsman, Martin Lopez de Cordova, and from him we hoped to have a grant of service in your army. But, Sire," he added, as he glanced smilingly at the great bolts and bars with which the turret was made fast, "methinks we bid fair not soon to attain our purpose." At this the king smiled too, and methought I had never seen a fairer face than his when laughter was upon it.

“Anthony, — that is our Antonio, is it not?” he asked. “Hark you, young sir, I like your spirit. I know an honest man when I see him, and, by my head, ’t is seldom enough in these days. My temper is ill governed, and I am over suspicious at times, but I am not thus of nature.

“That foul fiend, Albuquerque, has never forgiven me that I would not be dandled at his knee, or led by my lady mother’s hand. They would have had me perched at her wrist like a gerfalcon. Santa Lucia! but I used to be a beardless boy, with no thought but that each man meant me well. I was not a king at fifteen, with each portion of my kingdom in arms against me, and my sweet brother Enrique longing to see me waste in gloomy dungeons, for naught.

“Betrayed I was, tricked and befooled, by mine own kin. Some would have me think it was by the will of my lady mother as well, but that I will not soon believe. A man were base indeed who listened to aught against the one who bore him.

“I tell you, good Antonio, all this has

wrought like fever in my blood. It breeds suspicion of those who come with fair words like the pomegranates from which Granada takes its name. I like you, hearty English squire, with your blunt words and open face. The English ever are my friends."

"Your Majesty can have no more loyal servants than my brother and myself," said Anthony. "Though our words are slow, our swords strike swift."

"So saw I in the Calle Alfonso last night," said Don Pedro, quietly. "Too swift, perhaps, Señor *Prieta!*"¹

"I cry you mercy," said Anthony in great surprise, flushing high. "Seville is indeed a strange city full of surprises, if, before I am within its gates a sen-night, I have the honour to cross swords with the king. Your pardon, Sire."

"The next time that the King of Castile fancies to kiss a fair maid, do you keep your sword in scabbard! How you did fly at me! I thought it was a fiend," said Don Pedro.

"I humbly crave your Majesty's pardon,

¹ Sir Hasty One.

yet had I even known it was yourself, must I not have answered the young maid's cry for help?" said Anthony, sturdily. Though proud of his courage, I listened in terror lest he offend the king.

"Perhaps, perhaps," he said, hastily. "I like you all the more in that you speak your mind. You say that you seek service with Castile, — have you heard of the war which is brewing in the north?"

"We have, your Grace, and we would fain see some of the fighting which is to drive the usurper away from your fair land, where all should be at peace."

"Well spoken, Señor Squire. You shall not be squire long. There shall be a place for you in my own guard, and for your long-faced brother too. Methinks a monk's dark cowl would suit him better than a soldier's cape."

Anthony flushed high at this, and said:

"Not so, my Lord. He is as brave as I. Even now he is wounded in as fierce a fight as young squire ever saw. An you wish me to serve you, he must come too."

“*Quita, quita,*¹ I take the two; and hark ye, lads, though I at times be sour and ill to deal with, I have a long mind for my friends, and I shall not forget those who serve me well and truly. *Adios, Señors Ingles;* a page shall attend you to the Alcaide.”

We made our obeisance as he left the room, and then we stood staring at each other.

Anthony, who since we had left the señorita seemed to be more like himself, spoke first.

“Now may Saint Anthony be praised, for methinks our very misfortunes turn to good. We are to be of the king’s own guard. Sooth, we shall lack wit indeed an we find not a way deep into his favour, for we have made a good beginning, have we not?”

“So it would seem, but by no fault of yours,” I answered, ready, now that all was well, to chide him for his thoughtlessness. “It seemed to me that I should sink in despair at your bold words. Each one was worse than the last, and not only our own lives but that of the señorita as well hung by a spider’s thread.”

¹ There, there.

"The señorita!" exclaimed Anthony, his face clouding. "I had forgotten. Once we are free we must despatch Hugh or Humphrey to see how she fares." He sighed deeply.

"Does your bondage gall you? Patience and you will be free," I said.

"I did not say that I wished for freedom," he replied, with a petulance foreign to his usual pleasant humour.

I turned away, not over pleased, and at that moment a page entered to conduct us to the Alcaide.

The greeting we received from that gentleman was most friendly.

"Your late adventure, señors, is like to make your fortunes," he said, "for the king has given command that you are to be well cared for among us. I have seldom seen His Majesty in such good humour.

"It is his habit often to walk abroad at night in disguise, that he may see if the laws be carried on as he has commanded. In this way he shows especial kindness to the poorer people, whose idol he is.

"He has given me orders that you are to be escorted to your lodgings, and as soon as the señor is mended of his wounds you are to repair to the Alcazar for the service of the king. To prepare you aright for this he bids you take this *henepée* of gold."

"Good Señor, we thank you for your courtesy," I made reply. "As I am still weak of my hurt, I beg that you will send us to our inn as soon as may be. Where are we now?"

"Within the famous 'Golden Tower,'" said the Alcaide. "It was the watch-tower of the Moors, and see what a fair city is our Seville!"

He led us to the window, where we saw indeed a wondrous sight. Upon one side rolled the Guadalquivir, while the great city lay before us to the east. The houses were low and flat; there were trees and many green spaces as if of meads, while the towers rose up against a sky as blue as the sea at mid-day.

"Yonder is the cathedral close by the Gente del Mar, where the seamen dwell; there is the Giralda, the golden balls of which men can see from four leagues away; beyond it

looms up the Alcazar, where dwell the king's court."

"My faith! 'Tis a goodly sight," said Anthony, and then he added, a little anxiously, "But I fear my brother here would more esteem a cushioned couch than all the towers and cities in the world, hey, Andrew?"

"In truth I can scarcely stand," I murmured, ashamed to show so poorly; but the Alcaide smiled kindly and gave orders that we be taken at once to the inn.

There we found our faithful men-at-arms sore put to it to know where we were gone.

Anthony could never handle pen and parchment, and I was by that time far too spent to write, so he bade Humphrey bear his duty to the señorita and bring back word of how she fared at San Lucar.

Riding with all speed he was back again before the night fell, to tell us that the maid was well, and asked that she might know from time to time how fared my wounds.

Then came there to our great surprise a messenger from His Majesty the king, with commands to ascertain how prospered the

Seffors Ingles? He brought with him a Moorish leech, who poured strange fluids down my throat and laid soft ointments on my wounds.

Methinks there must have been some charm or spell within the drugs, or else a sorcery about the leech, for in a week I was restored to health, and ready to begin my duty in the service of the king.

CHAPTER VI

“ON THE SERVICE OF THE KING I”

THE weather we had met upon the Guadalquivir had made our velvet jerkins fit only for a darksome night; our cloaks were torn and soiled, and our arms and accoutrements greatly needed burnishing. Anthony therefore busied himself with putting our equipment in order, and much new gear was purchased with the king's gift of good golden doblas.

Methought I had never seen a goodlier sight than was my brother the morning we set out to have our promised audience with Don Pedro. Anthony wore a close-fitting suit of chamois leather stitched in scarlet, a buff mantle embroidered in thread of gold, and boots of Moorish leather, well tanned. His dark curls floated from beneath a scarlet cap, while his sword and dagger hilts, from their burnished scabbards, shone bright as diamonds.

For myself, it seemed to me that I was as well provided, for my cloak and jerkin were of green, with embroideries of silver, my hosen of pearl-colour, and in my velvet cap was a plume of the hue of eralds.

"In truth, 'Fine feathers do make fine birds,'" thought I, smiling, and it was not a little proudly we rode out from the inn, our horses well caparisoned and behind us Humphrey, Hugh, and Arturo, — the last, since his wound was cured, having come into our service.

It was eleven of the clock when we reached the Alcazar. The warder at the *puerta* met us with courtesy, which did by no means displease us, and informed us that His Majesty had given orders that we were to be at once shown into his presence.

Leaving the horses to the care of our serving-men, we were conducted by a page to the royal tribunal, which was held in the Patio de las Banderas.

The king was seated upon a throne of marble, and there was so much of dignity and kingliness in his mien, that I could

scarce realize that he was one and the same with the gay knight who fought the duel, or the merry jailer of the Golden Tower.

He was dressed in robes of state, a crown upon his floating curls, and was surrounded by the chivalry of the Spanish court.

Whispering to a guard that we were come by the king's command, the smart page bade us await a summons to the throne, and we stood silent for some moments, too far away to hear aught but the murmur of voices.

As I looked about in interest at the curious scene I suddenly felt Anthony's grasp upon my arm and heard him say in an intense whisper, "All is lost!"

"What is it?" I demanded, in the same tone.

"There, close beside the king — the third man from the courtier in the red mantle — do you not see? That is the dastard knight, the one who would have carried off the *señorita* in the field of San Lucar!"

"So!" I said, eagerly looking at his face, which, however, I could not plainly distin-

guish. "Well, we cannot expect to have all our own way and meet no hindrances. Think you it is her cousin?"

"I know not what to think, but if it is, the cause is lost, for, being close to the throne, the fellow is, I doubt not, a favourite."

"An that were but all," I said, lightly, "a king's favourite meets too often the fate of poor Piers Gaveston, in the reign of the grandfather of our Black Prince. However, we can but wait and see."

At length we were called to the king, and made our obeisance to him right gladly. It filled me with pride to see how my brother bore himself, and that he looked not one whit the less noble than those Castilian knights who thronged about the throne.

Don Pedro greeted us with kindness, asking about my wound and if we still desired to take service with him.

"The times are such that I would fain have only friends about my person, good señors, for treachery is in the very air I breathe" (this he said with a ring of pathos in his voice which made my heart swell

within me); "but, an you will fight for Castile and Leon, the king will not forget you when again we shall have peace."

We assured him of our willingness to serve him, and knelt to kiss his hand. There was that charm of graciousness about him that — despite the fearful tales of his cruelty and evil ways — I felt a great joy in the thought of holding him for my liege. I rose from off my knees with a glow at my heart, and a readiness to do his will such as warms the blood, and makes a battle well nigh won ere it is but half begun.

Since then I have learned that it was ever thus with Don Pedro. He could be so cruel as to make his people fear the very sound of his name, and yet so full of charm that even those whom he had angered did often fight for him right loyally.

Near to the royal person stood an old man of noble mien. He was dressed in a suit of samite edged with fur of the marten, and to him the king said merrily, "Ah, my Lord Lopez! Here have I played you a sorry trick. These two young squires be

kinsmen of yours from England, and I have stolen them away from the service I doubt not that you would have given them. They are to abide near to my person until we leave this fair city of Seville. I pray you see them well disposed within the walls of the Alcazar."

Our kinsman welcomed us with good-will, and led us from the *patio*, than which I had never seen one more fair with flowers and fountains.

When he had read the letters which good Father Bevil had written for my father, he said:

"You are in great good fortune in that His Majesty has taken you into his service, for there will be brave fighting and much chance for booty. The king will come to his own again, and methinks those who serve him well will be well rewarded. An you lack for anything, lads, you must tell me so."

We thanked him, saying that the king had provided for us for the present, and he gave us to the care of a page to bestow us in our lodgings, two great chambers close to the

walls, and furnished with everything necessary for our ease after all our wanderings.

We learned from Humphrey that the horses were well stabled, and that our men-at-arms were comfortably bestowed in quarters beside those of the king's own.

Late in the day, as we wandered at will in the beautiful gardens and talked of the strange things we saw, a man approached and accosted us. It was the one we had seen beside the king.

"Hark you, Señor," he said, with a somewhat rude address, "it seems to me that you and I have met before, and will again. It will please me so, and I think you too, in that I see that you are a brave man. Meantime, we both are in the service of the king. I could do you an injury, and I doubt not that you could harm me. An you will keep silent concerning the field of San Lucar, so too will I."

"Señor," said Anthony, "I know not if I understand you aright. The Spanish language is kindly to you, as 't is to my brother here, but not to me. My English tongue

would fain speak its mother words. Howe'er that be, this much I say. I enter into no pact of silence but this, — so long as you leave unmolested the damsel I will speak naught against you. I fight not with my tongue, a woman's weapon!"

With a dark frown upon his handsome face the señor turned on his heel and left us.

"Who is that knight?" I asked of a page who stood by.

"That, Señor Ingles, is Don Diego de Viras, the favourite of the king."

"Methinks a king may have more than one favourite," I muttered, and determined to lose no chance to bring Anthony to the notice of our royal master. Then followed a brief period of inaction, which did fret Anthony sorely, but which to me was but an interval of pleasant rest.

We tilted in the court-yard with the other young esquires, learning and teaching many things.

The mode of fighting differed from the English not a little, yet we could tell the

Spaniards something of the cross-bow, the which they ill understood, and which Anthony and I had learned both to make and use from my father's uplandish men-at-arms.

Our comrades told us that the Moors could use the cross-bow as well as could ourselves. At the taking of Seville the infidels arranged themselves upon the high towers of the city and shot down the soldiers of Saint Ferdinand with such a fury and such skill, that for days no knight dared to come near the walls. This may be true of the Moors, of whom I have heard many tales of valour and of knightly courtesy as well, but I never saw a Castilian who could win a wager with an arbalest¹ until his quarrels were half spent.

Of our kinsman we saw but little, since he was ever engaged with the king, and we heard among the esquires that Don Diego was absent from the court on some royal mission.

There was at the court a great company of knights, with their retinues of squires, pages, and men-at-arms, of all those who being

¹ Arrow, or short steel bolt.

faithful to Don Pedro had come hither from the banks of the Ebro fleeing from Don Enrique.

Amongst these was Don Fernando de Castro, a most noble knight and one whom I well liked, a man of a fine countenance and pleasing mien. He was a good servant to the king's grace, and his privy councillor, and methought that he was one to whom treachery was a thing impossible.

Martin Lopez de Cordova was another of these knights, and there were also Don Garcia Alvarez de Toledo (the Master of Santiago), his brother, Don Fernando de Toledo, Don Garcia de Padilla, (Governor of Agreda), and many others, hidalgos and cavaliers.

Some of them I thought I would not trust for loyalty. They did but seem to think of their own advancement and not one whit of the king.

Then there were the wives and daughters of the knights, and many noble ladies in the train of the daughters of the king, the young damsels Isabella and Constanza — the last

of which was afterwards wife to our Duke of Lancaster.

I watched Anthony well to see if he noted one or another of these fair maids, but when I was with him he seemed to have no thought but to learn the duties of his service; and for me, I saw none so fair as Agnes or the little señorita in durance at San Lucar.

There were gay doings at the court, albeit the esquires did say that His Majesty had lost all heart for merriment of late. To me it looked that he was restless, and waited but for some tidings to change all this dallying into action.

"Methinks that he is excommunicate doth rest heavily upon his conscience," said one of the squires of my Lord Boccannegra. "Moreover this rebellion wounds him sore in that he has been betrayed by many of the knights in whom he had most trusted, especially Don Gomez Garilz."

"His Majesty has never been the same since the death of the Señorita de Padilla," said another. "She was the most fair damsel that ever lived, and the king did love her

much. They say now that he did wed her in secret, and when she died he fell into so violent a rage that he killed all who chanced upon his path, crying out that they should not, if she could not live! After that he repented himself and fell into a melancholy, ever since desiring absolution."

In spite of this talk, it seemed to Anthony and me that the court was gay enough, and we had the good fortune to serve the knights above us at many of the great feasts in the grand hall of the palace.

To eat, there were all the things which I had ever seen and many other which I had not, the serving-men coming in each day with sumpter-mules laden with provisions. There were lampreys; soups; gruels; salted greens; meadow-cress fresh from the streams; sheep; pigs' meat; deer; many strange fishes; geese, larks, and other birds; fat capon; bread and countless sweet stuffs in curious forms, the making of which had been learned from the Moors.

We drank from huge flagons sweet and sour wines, and it seemed to me that a clear

draught of spring water would better quench the thirst.

When we had been some weeks in the palace, at one of these feasts a page crept behind me as I served a golden platter filled with pomegranates to Don Juan de Gimenez. "A word with you, Señor Ingles," he said, and I followed him to one of the *agimaces*¹ within the wall.

"I bear a message to you, Señor. At the close of the supper, when you see His Majesty the king leave the hall, follow me. You and the señor your brother are to repair to the Patio de las Munecas, beyond the Sala de Embajadores."

"What to do there?" I demanded.

"To await a messenger. I can tell you no more save that it is on the service of the king."

These words were as a charm, and wondering much what it all could mean, I hastened to inform Anthony.

As soon as the king was gone, the page, who wore the livery of Don Fernando de

¹ An alcove used in Moorish architecture.

Castro, led us to the *patio* in which he bade us await his return.

Why this is called the "Patio of the Puppets," certes, I know not, but to me it seemed the fairest of all the wonderful sights of this palace. For the most part, the chambers were in many colours throughout the dwelling. All was well wrought, it is true, and in a harmony of hue which did not displease the eye; yet to one who has ever preferred simplicity to grand display, this small *patio* had a beauty which the others lacked.

It was all of white; the galleries above were held up by slender pillars, and stretching in curved lines from one marble column to the next were carved traceries that seemed like the draped mantillas of frost-like laces which the Spanish doñas wear upon their heads. I was gazing on all this with so rapt a delight that I did not know of the page's return until he spoke.

"Come," he said, simply.

He motioned for silence, and without a word we followed him through chambers we had never seen before, down long corridors,

past fountains and sunny *patios*. Strange thoughts filled my brain. Was there treachery in this? Whither were we bound? I glanced at Anthony, but he seemed unmindful of the possibility of evil, and before I could utter the word of remonstrance I had resolved upon, our guide had stopped at a curtained doorway.

Drawing his dagger he knocked with the hilt of it thrice upon the tessellated pavement. The sound was answered from within, and pushing aside the tapestry, which was of curious Moorish broidery, he motioned to us to enter, himself remaining at the door on guard.

Curious and startled at all this mystery, we yet had no course but to obey, and Anthony and I passed through the doorway in the same silence in which we had come thither.

We saw a small, dimly lighted chamber, plainly furnished, and quite in contrast with the magnificence through which we had passed. When our eyes became accustomed to the gloom which seemed like midnight

after the brilliance of the palace, we beheld the figures of Don Fernando de Castro and the king.

"Welcome, Señors," said His Majesty with much friendliness, giving Anthony his hand to kiss as we knelt before him. "I have sent for you hither to test that loyalty you promised to the King of Castile and Leon. To what length will you go in his service?"

Anthony coloured a little as he felt the searching glance of those blue eyes which could be so cruelly keen, but he said simply:

"What is it that the king requires of us? Almost any *devoir* will my brother and I undertake for your advancement, my Liege."

"Almost?" said the king, with a frown. "Then there are limits to your loyalty! Methinks I do not prize the zeal of one who speaks within such cautious bounds."

"Ah, say not so, Sire!" I cried, eagerly. "There are no bounds to the love we bear to you. 'Tis only that my brother swore an oath before he entered into your service. This are we both truly bounden to keep, but

a thing which does not cause us to break that oath will we perform with cheerfulness."

At this Don Pedro's face cleared somewhat, but he said, as if yet in doubt:

"How may I know if what I ask is contrary to this secret oath? How if you be pledged to aid some of my rebellious subjects? Where lies your loyalty to me?"

"We have naught to do with traitors, your Grace," cried Anthony, earnestly. "I do beseech you, Sire, believe that we wish to do your will! The oath is one your Majesty would bid us keep; it is—" he hesitated, flushing so hotly that the king laughed. It was so merry a laughter that I smiled in sympathy, though my heart had well nigh stood still lest we displease him and so lose the chance of service upon which so much depended.

"A woman, by my faith, Don Fernando! 'Tis a woman who takes precedence of the King of Castile and Leon, Caliph of Cordova and Seville!" Anthony looked so shamefaced at this that the courtier laughed also, and the mocking voice went on. "*Ventre*

de Dios! A mantilla is more esteemed than my golden crown! Ah, well! I too have seen the day when a woman was all the world to me!" He rested his head upon his hand and a far-away look came into his eyes. Then he seemed to rouse himself again with an effort. "What think you of my Englishman?" he asked the Don.

"My Liege," said the Spanish knight, with much of courtliness, "methinks that one who breaks not his word to commoner may well be trusted to keep the oath he swears to his king."

"Well said," cried the king, his brow clearing. "Draw near, señors, for that which I would say is for your ears alone. First give me an oath of secrecy."

We gave our word to speak of naught and well have we kept the oath, even at the peril of our lives. Even now I would not reveal it save that the matter has long since been known to all the world.

"I pray you listen well, for much depends upon the proper understanding of the matter.

"You must know," he began, "that in the reign of the late king, my father, there landed at Algeciras, a small seaport near to the Great Rock, a company of Moors under Prince Abomelique, a son of the King of Fez. These took possession of lands given to them by the Grenadine Moors, and there have they made a kingdom called 'the Kingdom of Algeciras and Ronda.'

"With these Benamarine Moors I have made a secret alliance, honourable and of great advantage to the Castilian Christians, by which their king is pledged to come to my aid with arms and treasure whene'er I so demand.

"My long wars with the King of Aragon have so wasted my treasure that at the present time I have not the wherewithal to furnish scarce a tenth of that which I need to carry on the conflict with Don Enrique.

"'T is true I have received much moneys from my people, and I could take more, but that I like not to seize their goods by force.

"Had I the riches of that rakehelly King of Aragon I would have naught to trouble

me. In truth I wish I were the king of the haughty Aragonese! 'Law first, king afterwards,' they say, and when their king is crowned they call him but the 'First among equals,' and they say, 'We, each of us as good as you, will hold you our king so long as you shall keep our *fueros*;¹ otherwise not!' Were I their king for a twelvemonth I would change all that!"

This he said with a fierceness which made me feel how cruel he could be an he so desired, but next moment he had resumed his softer tone.

"With my brave Castilians it is different. Those who are loyal to me give me all they have, and to take their treasure from such as are not, would make them among my bitterest foes. It has come to this pass that I must send a trusty messenger to the Moorish king asking his aid. Will you and your brother do my bidding in this? You shall be well rewarded," and the king looked at us anxiously as he waited for our reply.

I turned toward Anthony, and as his eyes

¹ Laws or rules.

met mine I read in them all that I required to know.

"Your Majesty," I replied, "we are proud that you would give us so high a proof of your good confidence. Gladly would we do your will, and yet, Sire, are there not others more worthy to be chosen for a task so important?"

"Señor Ingles," he answered, "there comes a time when one must needs trust some man. My councillor here hath told me that you English, once you give a promise, keep it well. Then, too, I like you and your blunt words. But there is yet another reason for sending you on this errand. It is a dangerous one. The country through which you pass is full of Moorish freebooters, Jews, and hostile Spaniards. I cannot give you a safe escort for the reason that this matter must be kept a close secret from all at the court. The disaffected Castilians accuse me ever of favouring the Jews, and were it noised abroad that I am in league with the infidel Moors as well, my crown would not be mine for long.

“ Being strangers, your sudden departure from my court with but your own small retinue will cause no wonderment. Two days hence you may come to bid me good-bye in the Sala de Embajadores, saying only that you go to seek your fortune in foreign parts.

“ Travel with all speed to Granada, to the court of Ismael, the king. He will give you a safe conduct to the cities of Guadix or Ronda, and in one of these you will find the Benamarine whom you seek.

“ To him present the token which Don Fernando shall give you, and say to him that you are come ‘on the service of the king,’ which is a pass-word between us.

“ Bear away with you what treasure you are able, and his promise to send me aid in the North. As for your guerdon, to that one of you which shall succeed I will give whatsoever he shall ask.

“ To you two strangers I intrust the safety of my realm and of my person; what say you, will you take the trust?” He looked from one to the other, but neither hesitated.

"I will, my Liege," cried Anthony eagerly, kneeling again before Don Pedro, his handsome face aglow with excitement.

"And for me, Sire," I said more quietly, "If I fail 't will be because death has stricken me."

The king's eyes filled with tears.

"How now, Don Fernando," he said, in a voice which trembled. "The King of Castile, whose brother conspires against his throne, has still some faithful friends, has he not? You are brave squires. May the saints protect you and bring you safely back, for your sakes as well as for my own."

"By the king's command I will provide you with all that you need for the journey," said Don Fernando, kindly, and I answered:

"We have horses, arms, and our three men, and still something left of the king's bounty, so that we lack for little. But one thing I would ask of your Majesty, what shall we say of this journey to our kinsman?"

"Say naught to any man," answered the king. "To-morrow he, with the admiral,

sails down the Guadalquivir toward Cadiz, and before he returns you will be gone. I will then tell him in great secrecy of your faring."

"Think you that all can be in readiness for your departure by the next day but one?" asked Don Fernando.

We answered that it would, and bade the king farewell, when the page led us back by another route to our chambers within the palace.

CHAPTER VII

A HIDDEN SHAFT STRIKES DEEP!

ANTHONY was so full of business on the day before we started for the Moorish country that it was ten of the clock before I could speak to him.

At last he came into our lodging, after I had sent Arturo no less than six times to summon him.

"I am as tired as though I had spent the night in prayer," he said, throwing himself down upon a bench.

"That stupid Hugh Litchfield is a dolt! Ten times have I shown him the right trick for mending my cuirass, and yet it is not finished. Arturo said that you would speak with me."

"You are a sorry squire," I answered, with much impatience. "In the thought of your journey to the Moors you seem unmindful of a nearer duty. Go you to Ronda without sending a message to the señorita?"

“By ’re lady, I had forgotten! Hugh and Humphrey are too full of work to go, and I like not to send a strange messenger. Do you go, Andrew, and bear my greetings to the damsel.”

“Why not you, yourself? ’T is your affair,” I said, with some malice to see him look so dismayed, whom no danger could affright.

“Nay, nay; I must needs see that the horses are made ready for the morrow.”

“With two grooms, methinks that you might well leave that.”

“Then, there are the arms — ”

“A pretty tale to tell at Hazelcroft that the son of the knight of Pembridge polishes his own arms! Arturo will help Humphrey attend to that. “I was determined that he should not abide by such foolishness.

“’T is true that the men-at-arms will attend to their own affairs, but I have a thousand things — ”

“A thousand fiddle-strings on which to play the fool!” I exclaimed, past all patience. “Methinks the damsel you be-

trothed would be overmuch flattered an she heard you give so many and such good reasons why you should not see her. You are right valiant at sword-play, but, by the shield of Saint Michael, it would seem that you fear to face a woman!"

"But you do not," he cried, eagerly. "Prove it to me by riding to San Lucar to see the señorita."

As I had naught to do, burnishing of arms and such gear being little to my taste, and the serving-men working with twice the zest for Anthony, who was their idol, I set out at about eleven of the clock.

"What token do you send to her?" I asked of Anthony, as he followed me to the portal to bid me "God speed."

"A token? Must I send her such?" he said, in much perplexity. Then, breaking off a spray of orange flower which grew upon the garden wall, "Give this to her, and tell her that before the tree from which this came shall bear fruit, I hope to bring to her the king's guerdon."

"By my faith! 't is not so bad. Thou 'lt

yet be a squire of dames!" I cried teasingly, laughing at Anthony's flushed face, and I rode away accompanied by our honest Arturo.

It was a beautiful morning, the air was as soft and sweet as a fair woman's kiss.

The country about Seville was green and luminous, and as I rode I felt the weight which had long been upon my spirits sink away.

My nature has ever loved the open country, and the life at the court, though pleasant, had cramped my soul as the torture cramps the body.

I grew weary of silence at last, and drew Arturo into talk. "From where are you, good Arturo? It seems to me that your speech has not the sound of the Castilian Spanish spoken at the court," I asked him.

"Nay, Señor, I was born near to San Fernando, of Formentera, one of the Mallorcan islands. The people of those parts being much disturbed by various wars, I took ship to go to Cadiz, hoping to find service in Andalusia. We met with vile weather be-

yond the Capa de Gata and our ship was wrecked. Those of us who escaped the fury of the waves were cast on the coast of Malaga, and sold as slaves among the Moors.

"Here I spent five weary years, and it was a miracle that I lived to tell of it, for my master was so cruel that he harnessed his slaves like horses with bit and bridle and kept them ever in chains.

"At last, by the mercy of God, I made good my escape to Cadiz, after much travel and adventure. There I found you, Señor, and I have only the wish to remain ever in your service."

"Perhaps you may, my faithful fellow," I said. "I trust that our fortunes will prosper and that we may keep you with us. See, our journey is well nigh at an end, for there are the convent towers. While I abide within, look you to the horses, for they must be fresh to bear us back to Seville."

As I knocked at the huge iron-bound gate of the convent the mid-day Angelus rang, and the portress who opened to us bade Arturo take the horses to the stables.

I followed her inside the great stone walls which seemed to shut out the sunlight. The court-yard was damp and chill, and the low, square chamber into which I was admitted was bare and scantily plished.

"I will tell the mother abess that you are here, Señor," she said, and left me to my thoughts, which were scarce pleasant ones.

This was very unlike our English monasteries, though a convent I had never seen before. The monks at Wenlock had much comfort, and even luxury, in their fine halls, with oak-raftered ceilings and pointed windows. They were famous for hospitality and good cheer, but here there was but a stone-flagged floor, a white-walled cell, with a dim light from small, lancet windows set high in the walls like a lammergeir-bird in an eyrie.

My heart grew heavy for the señorita, caged in a spot like this, and I did not hear the door open until a soft voice broke my revery.

"Señor, you desire to speak with me?"

I looked up quickly and saw a slender,

dark-robed nun with a pale and beautiful face. She stood before me with her eyes modestly cast down, her hands folded within the drapery of the long black sleeves which hung from her arms.

"Mother Abbess," I said, respectfully, "I desire to see the Señorita Inez de Viras, an it is your pleasure."

"You are then a friend of the señorita?" she demanded.

"I am a friend to the damsel," I answered. "It would need be that you ask her if I am a friend of hers, Mother."

"Call me not 'Mother,' Señor," she said, and methought I heard a little ripple of laughter break through the quiet of her voice which seemed strangely familiar. "I am 'sister' to you."

"I ask your pardon, Sister; then you have not long been a nun?"

"Nay, not long," she said, demurely.

"Too long, perchance," I muttered, for she was so fair I felt it a sad thing to see her face all swathed in black like grave clouts, and as if she were to be buried from

the world. To-day I think not thus, for I have lived long enough to know that the world is not so brave a place as the young do think it, and that there lurks in life no happiness save for those who live to do their *devoir*. One may do that no matter where one's life is spent.

"Does the señorita fare well?" I asked.

"Full well, methinks. She is a tiresome jade, and always into trouble, like a perverse child; think you not so?"

"I cry you mercy, Sister," I said with some displeasure.

It seemed to me an ill speech and full of rancour. A holy nun should be in charity with all the world.

"I have told you that I am a friend to the damsel; it would ill become me to call her a 'froward jade.'"

At this there met my ear the music of the merriest of laughter; there was a quick movement, and instead of the black-robed nun, there stood before me none other than the señorita, while beside her upon the floor lay her nun's garments.

"Bravo, Señor! well answered," she cried, in tones that matched her new garb. "Said I not soothly when I said I was your sister?"

It seemed to me I had never seen so fair a sight. She was pranked out in the fashion of the day in a tight-fitting bodice of gold-wrought samite, the train bordered in vair, her long sleeves of yellow sarcenet floating almost to the floor.

Her soft dark hair was not cut upon the brow as is our English fashion, but pushed away from the face like a soft cloud and hidden beneath a lace mantilla in a manner which I do much admire.

Her brown eyes looked so merrily at me as she made a deep courtesy, graceful and demure, though with a trace of mockery, that I could not help but smile through my astonishment.

Then as I stood silent before her, like an uplandish gawk when first at court, a strange thing chanced. Hitherto I had thought of the señorita as but a woman to be succoured because she was helpless and afraid.

She had been to me the same as my mother or Agnes or any distressed damsel. But in that moment when she stood there mocking at me as a "sister," so bright in all her dull surroundings, so brave through all her perilous plights, so fair in all the radiance of her girlish beauty, her sweet eyes seemed to pierce my heart as the blade of a *misericorde*.¹

Straight as an arrow to the prickles came word and glance, and as my eyes fell before hers I knew that for the first time love had come into my life; love with all its joys and pains and sacrifices, and it has always seemed to me that it is not love, but a far baser passion which will not sacrifice self for one beloved. In this I say no new thing, but to a youth when first he feels this wondrous emotion all things are new, and the wisdom of the ages seems to such an one to be discovered by himself.

The feeling in my breast choked the words which surged to my lips like a torrent. I could but look and look with I know not

¹ A sword used to quickly despatch a wounded man.

what within my gaze. Had she not been blinded by her own feelings she must have seen my love.

"How now, Señor, you do not speak?" The gay voice was a little anxious. "Perchance my foolish jest has angered you. Grammercy! it was a silly prank! I pray you of your grace to pardon it."

Still words came not to me. I could but feast my eyes upon the beauty of her hair and cheek and eyes; the curved crimson lips like the bow of an archer; the look so haughty and so sweet; the slender hands which toyed nervously at her girdle.

Was ever anything in all the world more fair than her black arched brows, perfect in their delicate tracing, and so far apart that they gave to her great dark eyes a look of childish wonderment?

"Señor, you will not speak? Tush! 'T were unmannerly so to resent a girl's merriment. There is little enough pleasure in this dull place, and you need not grow angry at my play." Then she grew annoyed, and turned from me with a little shrug like

a French demoiselle, tapping her tiny foot impatiently upon the stone floor.

I willed to speak, but I dared not trust myself, for the blood coursed so swiftly through my veins that I knew not what mad words might break forth. Sternly I held myself in leash like a led hound.

At last she said in a cold voice from which all merriment had fled, "Señor, I may not tarry longer. I cry you mercy in that I have offended you. Is the Señor Antonio, your brother, well?"

As she pronounced my brother's name, it came upon me as a blow of a curtal-axe that this damsel whom I loved with every thought of my soul was Anthony's betrothed, his before God and all the world. I had not remembered this in the sudden influx of wild joy, the joy that comes to one with the first coming of love. I had been conscious of nothing but the lovely vision before me, and now that the awakening came it for a moment unmanned me. I sank upon the settle with a groan and covered my face with my hands.

Fool! Fool that I had been! Anthony loved her not; she was nothing to him. Why had I not been troth-plight to her? Then she would have been my own, my wife!

With the agony of these thoughts there came the wish to spare her a knowledge that could but cause her pain, so I spoke at last, as best I could.

"Nay, Señorita, I crave your pardon. You do mistake; I am not angry. I have a wound which vexes me sorely, and it hath given me so fierce a pang that I could not speak a word." (In this I spoke the truth, albeit the wound was of the soul and not the body.)

"Your hand, Señor Ingles," she cried, giving me her own, and turning to me a face so gladsome that it seemed as if the sun had burst through April showers. "I had vexed myself an I had angered you."

The sound of her voice, the glance of her dark eyes looking at me kindly, the touch of her soft hand, made my pulses beat, and I longed to take her in my arms and tell her

of the love that was consuming me, that I would lay at her dear feet, not for my own pleasure, but wholly, wholly for her service. But I pulled my self-restraint about me like a cuirass, and said, "I pray you be seated and listen to the message that my brother sends, though perhaps you think me but a tardy messenger.

"He bade me give you this," drawing from my pouch the spray of orange blossoms, "and tell you that ere the sister flowers are fruit he hopes to bring to you the guerdon of the king."

She took the white flowers, and my heart sank within my breast as I saw with what care she placed them in her *aulmoniere*.¹

"This, too, he prays you take," I added, as I held out to her a ring of some price, set with a ruby of great value. Herein I somewhat stretched the truth, for Anthony, who never kept the purse, knew not that the gem was of our possessions. I thought that the damsel might somewhat lack for treasure whilst we were away, but I soon

¹ A side pocket hanging from a girdle.

saw that whatever she lacked it was not spirit.

Her fair cheek flushed, and her eyes flashed angrily at me as she put back the trinket, saying with a dignity which pleased me mightily :

"I thank you for your bounty, Señor Squire, but the Señorita Inez de Viras was not quite a beggar before she became the betrothed of a Pembridge."

"Nay, Sister," I said the word with meaning, though with a quick pain at my heart, "that I know full well. Yet keep the jewel, I pray you, as a token that you are the betrothed of my fair brother, and my sister that is to be, — though not a holy nun!" I added this so teasingly that she blushed and smiled, and taking the ring, found it so much too large for any of her slender fingers that she slipped it upon her thumb.

Thereat we both laughed, and a treaty of peace having come of our stormy interview, we entered into a more quiet converse.

She thanked me for having fought for her, and asked after my wounds so sweetly that

I could have fallen at her feet and told her that all wounds were gladly taken for her sake.

Ah, my lady! not then did you know that far deeper than all the wounds of battle and foray, siege or combat, was the wound you gave me. And yet not then nor at any moment of my life did I see a time when I did not gladly bear such pain; and this the more readily, since the great love I bore you made me fitter to serve you, my sweet *īnez*, or any one who needed succour of a knight.

To many it may seem a strange and scarce possible thing that one who had been indifferent to all of womankind, and who was not of a headlong nature, should thus have known so speedily and so surely that he loved.

I have lived some time since then, and I have found that but two things are necessary to make a love that is true and lasting, — a great respect for the nature of the person, and a certain subtle sympathy between the two.

The nature of the *señorita* had unfolded

before me as a flower opens to the light of day. She was brave in danger—a thing I much admire in women; patient when affairs were contrary; and with a spirit, if somewhat over proud and quick, still bright and sweet. Upon my side the sympathy or attraction—call it what you will—had been so great as to overcome my prejudice, my jealousy for Anthony, and I had felt it strong within me since I saw her in the ill-fitting disguise of the serving-maid in the inn of Las Delicias.

But of what use is it to talk? There may be reasons for loving, yet love needs no reasoning. I loved her, that was all; but though she bore herself well with modesty, as a young maid should, there was a dimpling of her cheek as she named my brother, which made me fear that her heart was not mine. A lover's eye is sometimes keen.

"Come, Señor," she said at length, "I must not tarry longer with a gay court gallant. But that my aunt, the abbess, is somewhat lenient with me I would not have been here even now. To speak soothly, I

fear that she does fancy me working tapestry with old Sister Paquita, beside the fountain in the garden."

She said this with so roguish a glance that I laughed, saying:

"Let us go thither at once, for I would not have you chidden for my visit."

She led me through a narrow passage, past a quiet *patio*, into a sunny garden, — walled, 't is true, and yet so bright and fair a wilderness of flowers and palms, that, methought, an the señorita had leave to spend her days therein, she need not lack for sunshine.

"Here will I be these many months to come, while you, Señor, are enjoying the gaieties of the court," she said, as we dallied beside the fountain.

"Not so," I answered; "and here is the news I came to bear to you. To-morrow my brother and I leave the palace to go in quest of fortune in the kingdom of the Moors."

"Señor, what means this?" she cried, with a startled look.

"'Tis but —" I hesitated, for a lie did ever stick in my throat, and the king's prohibition of silence lay heavily upon me.

"It is a quest for fortune, a wager that I have laid, and Anthony must needs go with me."

She looked at me with so searching a glance that my eye could not meet hers, and she seemed to compel the truth from me against my will.

"Señor," she said, "you are deceiving me. You are not one for leasing. There is a reason that you do not tell me. Ah! I know. 'Tis on the service of the king. But why do you go on so perilous a venture? 'Tis not for yourselves."

"Señorita," I stammered, "you do mistake —"

"Tush! Think you that you can befool a woman? I have guessed your riddle; your brother's message to me with the orange flower has told me all. You go — it is for me!"

I could not make denial, and she clasped

her hands and looked at me with her great eyes full of tears.

"Would that I were a man," she murmured. "It is because I am a maid that I make all this turmoil."

"Nay, nay, Señorita, say not so," I cried, touched by her grief -- "But, sooth, I would you were a lad that you might go with us on our journey. We look for many pleasant adventures. My faith! a pretty page would you make!" This I said right merrily, for I could never abide to see her in tears.

"I would that it could be so -- your page," she said, in a soft, quick tone.

"It was a light and foolish word," I hastened to say. "I thank the good God you are just what you are, that we may be your true knights;" and then I added, quoting from the old song:

" 'A woman good is mannes blisse,
When their love right stedfast is.' "

At this she blushed until her cheeks seemed like the crimson rose which clammers over the wall of the Lady Tower at home.

"Señor," she said, "methinks you well urge your brother's suit. Why came he not to bid me good-den?"

"He was ower full of business with the arms and accoutrements, and 't was like him to give me the pleasant task of riding hither, since the two of us could not come," I said, somewhat at a loss for an excuse for Anthony's negligence.

I might have spared myself the pains, for she lifted her brows in a most over-digne fashion, with a little scornful, pouting mouth. In another I might have called such unbecoming, but in my lady it seemed but another fascinating wile.

"Methinks the squire Antonio is but a laggard in love. I pray you bear a message to him," she began. "Tell him that there is a thing as bright as shield or halberd, which may grow dark if ill used, or rusty if neglected."

"And what is that?" I questioned.

"A woman's faith," she said, haughtily.

"Nay, my lady," I cried, loath to see her thus angered. "No such word will I bear

to your faithful servitor and loyal squire. We have an English saying, 'Words bredden bale,' and to hear that you have spoken thus would sorely grieve my brother.

"I must not reveal what is under an oath of secrecy, but this much I may tell you: Anthony goes upon this dangerous journey but for your sake. I pray you send him a message to cheer him on his way. Then I must depart, for the hour grows late."

"By which route do you set out, and when?" she asked, paying no heed to my request, wilful as young maids ever are.

"To-morrow before sext, by Ecija toward Granada," I replied.

At this moment there came to us a messenger from the abbess, requesting the señorita to bring me to the great hall, and thither we went.

The mother abbess was a stern-looking woman with a kindly smile, and a manner as of one who was born to rule and ill to cross. Methought this was greatly needed in her, for to rule over forty women was no easy task.

She offered me a light refreshment of cakes, salad, and wine, and then after some talk concerning the affairs of the señorita, whom she gently chid that she wore not the nun's garb, lent her the better to conceal her presence in the house, she said to me:

"It ill beseems one to speak badly of one's own kin. Yet for the sake of this child" (it pleased me well to see her lay her hand upon the shoulder of the damsel with some show of affection) "I would counsel you to beware of Diego de Viras. He is not all bad, Señor, but like others of our race, he is of an ill temper when crossed."

At this the señorita, though sitting demure and *point-de-vice*, made at me so wicked a *moué* (unseen of the lady abbess) that I had much trouble to restrain my laughter.

Shortly after this I took my leave, giving the nun some broad pieces of gold for her charities, and asking her prayers for the success of our undertaking.

The señorita's face clouded as I took her hand to say farewell, and a wild longing

arose within my breast to take her in my arms and comfort her.

But I only kissed the small white hand, and said :

“ *Bencite*, my lady ; may the holy angels guard you.”

She smiled a little, misty smile, responding sweetly :

“ *Adios*, Señor ; Our Lady keep you safe, and the señor your brother.” These last words she murmured so low that I scarce could hear them.

“ Will you not send him some word or token ? ” I whispered. Pleading thus for another, my poor heart spoke not. It seemed to me that it would break, so loudly did it beat against my breast.

I saw her hesitate, saw her colour come and go, and then the sweet eyes which had been frankly raised to mine fell as she broke a single flower from off the orange spray which Anthony had sent to her. She gave it to me with a shy grace which must have moved his cold heart had he been there to see, and she said :

“Take it, Señor. A Castilian maiden wears the orange flower but once in all her life. I shall keep these flowers till some one comes for them.”

It was enough. The faint hope that still lingered in my longing heart expired as she spoke these words, for well I knew what her meaning was, since the orange flower is only to deck the fair brow of a bride.

CHAPTER VIII

BY THE BROOK CALZADO

AT nine of the clock the morning on which we were to leave Seville there came a messenger from Don Fernando de Castro, bringing us a packet which he said he had been commanded to place in our own hands.

Upon our opening this we found that it contained two smaller packets, each tied with a silken ribbon in the colours of Castile and Leon, and sealed with the royal arms.

There was also a message from the Don to say that these packets were for us to bear to the Benamarine king, as a token of our being veritable servants of Don Pedro.

There were two of them, lest one be lost by some mischance. In case that one of us two should fall by the way, the other was bound by his oath to continue the enterprise until all ended well, or he too should be slain.

For our part we had told all our story to the king's chaplain, under seal of secrecy, and he had promised, in case we did not return, to be a friend to the señorita; to bring her to the notice of the king, and sue for her protection for the sake of those squires who had tried to serve Castile and Leon.

On no account, however, was he to reveal aught unless he received the certain information of our death. An hour later we went to bid farewell to the king, who sat at audience in the Sala de Embajadores.

We were pranked in our finest gear, and Hugh and our small retinue, impatient to be gone, waited in the court-yard.

The hall was full of courtiers, and I was somewhat disturbed to see behind the king the unwelcome face of Don Diego de Viras, who had returned from his mission. It seemed to me that his presence boded ill for the success of our undertaking, though I am not wont to be superstitious.

Strange was it that from the first I felt toward him as I had felt toward my cousin Eustace. It was not that I thought him

wholly bad, or filled with villainy, but that he was one of those persons who thought only of himself. It has always seemed to me that such do the most ill.

A villainous face must needs give warning, and such a one is trusted in no wise; but a man who seeks only selfish ends oftentimes has some charm of manner or grace of person which makes one look for good. When evil deeds come from him they take one unawares.

However, some there be who seem to have, as it were, another sense which enables them to distinguish, like an animal, between evil and good, and such has ever been my nature.

With Anthony it is not thus, for he is so generous of heart that he deems every man a saint until he shows himself to be otherwise. Then, ever headlong, he is as far wrong upon the other side, thinking that man a knave whom he has once proved false. As for me, I am too often wrong myself to think that any man, as I have said, is wholly bad.

As we moved nearer to the king I saw

that his face wore not its usual smile, and it grieved me to see that he seemed careworn and ill at ease.

“And so my English squires must leave me,” he said, as we knelt before him. “I cannot strive to keep you, Señors, for my court is a sorry place for such as seek to mend broken fortunes. When the King of Castile shall reign over all his disaffected subjects, I pray you return, and you shall find this as gay a place as any knight could wish.

“I trust that we may meet again, Señors; you shall be welcome, and under fairer skies you shall see how Don Pedro rewards his friends.”

There was a kindly gleam in his eyes, and we were not slow to catch his hidden meaning, so I replied:

“My Liege, we thank you for your kindness and for the good cheer and hospitality we have received. Your people, Sire, are our kin, and it grieves us that your Majesty should be beset by such perilous times. We take our leave with much regret.”

Anthony made his parting salute in silence, and as I knelt to kiss the king's hand, I felt his fingers give mine a slight pressure. His condescension sent a thrill of loyalty surging o'er my heart. Pressing his hand again to my lips with a sudden warmth I rose to my feet to see his eyes fixed upon me with a look which said more plainly than words, "This man loves me; I have well placed my trust!"

My eyes returned his glance with a silent vow of loyalty, and this passion was so strong within me, that, as I left the hall, I heard nothing, saw nothing, thought of nothing, but the beautiful face of the king, as his eyes, so full of pathos, met mine and bound me to him. This was like to bear unpleasant fruits, for as I went down the long passage which led to the court-yard I brushed carelessly against some one beside me.

"Your pardon, Señor," I said hastily, knowing well that it is ill to tread upon the dignity of a Castilian, and having no desire to quarrel with any man. Then, to my dis-

taste, I saw that it was the Señor de Viras who stood before me, and he met my courteous words with a sneering laugh.

"So!" he said, scornfully. "The señor is far more ready with his words than with his sword! *Mosca muerta!* 'T is ever thus with your countrymen; you are Gascons for plunder, Flemings for thrift, and — what are you for a combat?"

Flushing with sudden anger at his taunts I could have struck him to the earth, but haply I remembered our errand, and would do naught to delay our departure.

"I am in haste. Allow me to pass," I said.

He continued to bar my way.

"In haste! A pretty tale!" he cried, still more sneeringly. "In too much haste to fight the battles of that king who hath befriended you, I warrant. I saw the fine show of loyalty with which you kissed his hand. Methinks he hath charmed you too with his smiles and sweet words. Poor fool! do you not know that he wishes but to use you —" he went no further, for that

which his words implied against the king so enraged me that I flew at him like a wild creature. So sudden and fierce was my onslaught that he was borne to the ground, I on top of him. In another moment I believe I had despatched him, for my dagger was already drawn and raised to strike and avenge both myself and the señorita, when I was recalled to my senses by a voice — the voice of the king in stern displeasure.

“What means this, Señor? I gave you leave to quit my court and not to stay and kill my courtiers.”

Crestfallen I rose to my feet, too shamefaced to reply, but Don Diego found his voice and his feet at the same moment, saying, with that smiling courtliness of his (a manner which made me wish to fly at him again), “My Liege, I did but jest with the señor, and he fell upon me like the Barbary apes which play about the Great Rock.”

“Speaks he the truth, Señor?” asked the king.

I could make no answer, for my rage had not yet cooled, but Anthony spoke hotly in my defence.

"I cry you mercy, Sire, but the Señor de Viras' words were such that it was an affair of honour for my brother to strike." He could say no more, for it was not fitting to tell His Majesty that I had been brawling in his palace because one of his own courtiers had spoken slightly of the king's Grace.

It seemed as if the saints had us in especial care, for, as we stood in silence like serfs caught in some fault, Don Fernando de Castro stepped to the king and spoke in our favour.

"Your Majesty, I saw and heard all," he said, very gravely. "The señor did but strike for the honour of your Grace, whom all should love and defend!"

At this the king turned to me with a smile, saying:

"I thank you, Señor Pembridge, that you are ready to defend the King of Castile, though methinks you are too ready to per-

mit your steel to speak. Perhaps Don Diego did but jest" (here he cast a look full of keenness at the courtier, who could scarce meet his glance); "and now, Señors, enough! I pray you go in peace."

There was an end of the matter and we turned away. Don Fernando followed us to the court-yard, pressing into my hand, unobserved by others, a purse filled with gold pieces, lest, as he said, we should need more than we had thought.

We rode forth from the portal, over which was the inscription, "El conquistador Don Pedro, por la gracia de Dios, Rey de Castilla y de Leon."

"What say you, brother, this is a gayer plumage than we wore anon when we entered Seville," said Anthony. "Fortune has not dealt us so ill a turn. We are like to obtain that which we desire if all go well."

"Ay, if —" I said, dampening his ardour as a cold fog does the cheer of the sunlight.

"Why are you so full of doubts?" he asked. "Your face is as gloomy as Father Bevil's on Ash Wednesday."

"I feel a weight upon my spirits," I replied. "I am disturbed that we have made an open enemy of the Señor de Vitas. He may do us much evil at the court."

"Fie on you for a faint-heart, Andrew! You will frighten away good fortune by your gloomy face. Think you that the villain can do us harm and we bring to the king that which he so much desires?"

"No; but if as I suspect he knows whither we are bound, will he not strive to hinder our success by treachery and intrigue?"

"If, and if, and if—" cried my brother, in his old merry humour. "You are determined to see the clouds. We have to do our *devoir* and fight well, when the occasion arrives. Above all, we must see to it that the king's errand comes before all else. If one is taken captive or fall in a fray, the other must waste no time in rescue or mourning. It is not only for the king, but to keep our oath to aid the señorita."

At this I was silent and fell into bitter thought. In all the events of the morning

I had found little time to reflect upon my discovery of the day before. The memory rushed over me with a fierce pain, bringing with it a feeling of unrest that for the first time in my life I was concealing something from Anthony.

To some natures concealment seems ever wrong, and I felt ill at ease that anything should break the habit of perfect openness between us.

It was impossible for me to tell him that I loved his betrothed, for her sake as well as for my own.

I knew that Anthony loved her not, but I fancied that she loved him. Should his conscience permit him to break his betrothal vow in order to give the lady up to me, it might cause her great unhappiness. A woman's liking once fixed, there is little chance of turning it toward another; perhaps this is the more sure since her love comes no one knows whence or why, herself the least of all.

As we rode in silence it drew toward the none-meat, and halting in our rapid ride we

ate of the provisions which the king's own steward had provided for our journey, and which were in a huge hamper on a pack-mule.

Leaving Seville, we followed the road which led along the great aqueduct which the Romans built and which supplies the city with water. Here and there between its arches — four hundred in number — we saw lovely pictures of the gardens, valleys, and plains of that region, scenes so peaceful that they soothed my troubled spirit somewhat. I have ever found that the open country is the best medicine for a mind fretted and ill at ease. There is wine in the vigour of the fresh, cool air; mead in the joyous sounds of life; and the beauty and the glory of scenes which the hand of man has not despoiled, bring to the mind the memory of the Unseen Power which made it all.

The valley of the Guadiara was a pleasant vale and the air touched my cheek like a caress.

We passed the castle of Guandul, a fine Moorish place, and Alcala de Guadiara,

where the infidels turned traitors and betrayed the city to King Ferdinand.

Slowly the day wore away with no adventures, and toward night we stopped at a small inn on the outskirts of Marchena. We were all weary, having travelled nearly nine leagues.

When the morrow broke and as yet no ill fortune had come upon us, my spirits rose, and I hoped that my fears regarding Don Diego were groundless.

As it behooved us to make all speed we took the road which leads past Osuna and somewhat beyond the fine castle of the Giron family; being the middle of the day, we paused for our noonday meal.

I wandered a little from our small cavalcade to pluck some of the pinks which grow there in great abundance, and which the natives call *claveles*. Then I lay me down for a brief rest by the brook Calzado, and I must have fallen straightway into a doze, for I knew nothing more till I was suddenly aroused by voices.

I sprang to my feet and saw a tall knight

holding by the arm a youth who struggled in vain to be free.

"How now!" I exclaimed. "What has the lad done?"

The stranger started with, I thought, an air of guilt, but replied with courtesy:

"Señor, he is a page committed to my care and is ill disposed to my service. Methinks he must needs come under the yerde, for he is as wanting in sense as a cony."

At this the lad looked at me so pitifully that I would fain have taken him from the knight, who was of an ill countenance, while the page was fair and fetise.

It was scarce my place to interfere in the affairs of a stranger,—a privilege a man has to pay for with his badelaire oftentimes,—and so I turned to leave them.

At this moment the boy made so violent an effort to free himself, that on a sudden he broke away from the knight and flung himself at my feet.

"Ah, Señor!" he cried, in piercing tones. "Dear Señor, he doth speak leasing! I am no page of his, but a wandering lad whom he

has taken captive. I pray you, for the love of God, to rescue me !”

There was truth in the boy's tone and on his face ; I saw something in his great dark eyes which put me in mind of the señorita, and I felt my heart warm toward him.

Before I could speak, however, the stranger seized the page and struck him sharply.

“ You shall pay for this insolence, fool,” he cried, “ I shall sell you as a slave amongst the Moors ! ”

The lad made no sound, but he turned deadly white, and his great eyes sought mine with a look of such reproach that I could bear it no longer.

“ Señor,” I said, coolly, “ if you have a mind to sell him I will buy. I have heard that here in Spain even the Christians sell their own kin at times. I will give you a *mouton d'or*, ten spiked crowns, and a *dobla*¹ of gold.”

The man looked at me with so strange a glance that I saw I had done a foolish thing

¹ A gold coin, called “ lamb,” from the image of the Agnus Dei upon it.

to tell him that I had so much gold. Then he replied :

“Nay, I do not care to sell for such a price. If you will fight for him in single combat the victor shall have both the treasure and the boy.”

In thinking of this since that time I have seen that he made these proposals, believing that he would be the winner of so unequal a contest. He was of a fine stature and I but slight. I thought not of this at the moment, yet I doubt not that an I had, I should have fought the same. There was that about the man and his cruel face which filled me with such a rage that I could have killed him with a fierce joy. Ofttimes I have thought that I myself am as cruel as those persons I condemn, for the sight of this vice of cruelty in another — whether it be shown to horse or dog or human being — turns me into a raging demon who cares not what punishment he inflicts. I said with a seeming calmness, though my blood seemed like to burst my veins so quickly it ran :

“I will fight with pleasure, Señor España ;

but first I must have a witness to our bargain." At this he looked surprised, thinking no doubt that I was alone and at his mercy, but I blew a blast upon my bugle, and soon Anthony came running up.

"What now?" he cried. "Is there ill news?"

"Not so," I answered lightly; "the best of news for a brave man. This knight and I do battle for the person of this page. Come, Señor, on guard!" and I drew my sword and stood before him.

With this he ran at me so furiously that I could scarcely parry, and I heard the page cry out in dread. Then I heard no more. I was filled with that rage of mine, the same which came upon me on the terrace at home when I aimed at Eustace the blow which changed the whole course of my life.

I have been the victor in many a fight, but I believe through no great prowess of my own. Anthony is a better swordsman than I by all odds, and yet I win the day through the might of this very anger of mine which carries all before it.

Thus it was by the brook Calzado, for when I came to myself the knight lay upon the ground (dead for all my ken) and the page lay at my feet, weeping like a girl, and crying that he would serve no one but me in all the world.

"Get up, you foolish boy," I said, half angry that he should be so womanish. "You must serve my brother there as freely as you would me. Tell me how you chanced in this bad man's hands?"

"Señor," he made reply, "I am under an oath to reveal neither my name nor lineage until a thing shall have been done, the which I see no way to accomplish at this time. Leaving my friends to carry out my purpose, I fell into this knight's way and became his captive. When I tried to make my escape he beat me and then you came. Ah, I can never thank you that you rescued me. Take me with you and let me serve you as your page!"

"We do not need a page," I answered, "and yet — what say you, Anthony? Shall we take the boy? The larger the band, the greater safety."

"As you say, brother; 't is your conquest," said he, with a laugh.

"Come with us, then, and may you prove faithful," I said; and the page looked at me, whereupon I saw the lad's eyes gleam bright with pleasure. When he, in his southern fashion, seized my hand and kissed it, I felt an affection for him spring up within me. A certain triumph lurked in my breast that here was one who from the first loved me more than he did Anthony.

By this I do not mean that I had ever wished my brother to have less affection than was his due, but only that I had always longed for some one to love me, as it seemed to me at times all the world cared for Anthony.

To a nature like mine, which ever craved love, it had been bitter to find even the one whom I myself loved best, preferred before me at every turn.

Thus it was that from the first the page, Carlos,—for so he told us to call him,—came to me as a new interest, and his feeling for me was as a balm to my heart.

"What is to be done with this man?" said

Anthony, stooping to see if the knight still lived. As he spoke the man stirred, groaned, opened his eyes, and then fell again into unconsciousness.

We wrapped him in his cloak and strapped his inanimate form to his horse, which Carlos had fetched from near by.

The town of Pedrera being not far distant we carried him thither, and left him at an inn, where the landlord, though eyeing us with some suspicion, promised to care for him until he should be well.

In his saddle pouch we found a purse well filled with gold, and this we placed inside the knight's doublet.

Thus leaving him in the best plight we could, we hastened on our way, Arturo riding the sumpter-mule, and Carlos close by my side upon Arturo's horse.

One would have thought that there was cousinage between us twain, for the bright spirits of the lad did so bestir my blood that I was gayer than was my wont.

Anthony looked at me half vexed and wholly wondering, as I laughed merrily at

the tales with which Carlos beguiled the way. So pleasant was the travel that it was with surprise that I saw the white houses of La Roda gleaming in the distance. Here we were to stop for the night, and we found an inn where we were well cared for, and were glad to rest.

As we were served for supper in the *patio*, Carlos came to me and said:

"Señor, I cry you mercy, but your name you have not told to me, and perchance the man of the inn may think it strange that I know not whom I serve. He has been asking somewhat about our company."

"Tell him as little as may be, my lad," I made reply. "We do not wish that our true lineage should be known. Our journey is a secret one, and even for you 't is best to know little. My brother and myself are English squires, and you may call us Señors Anthony and Andrew."

At this he smiled and said, a little dimple in his cheek such as I had seen and loved in the señorita:

"If the Señor de Pembridge does not wish

his name and station known to all the world, he would better step to the court-yard, and tell that foolish Humphrey Wager not to shout out when in his cups that his master is lord of a vast domain in the fair shire of Salop!"

I sprang to my feet in dismay, and hastily sought Humphrey, whom I found surrounded with a company of serving-men, all brawling as if in an English tavern.

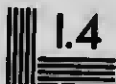
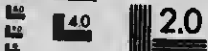
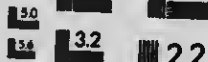
I chid our men sharply, sending them about their business, and, telling Carlos to call me an there was any more of the same, I retired to sleep with some forebodings as to what the morrow might bring forth.

Had I known what would be the result of such foolish boastings, methinks I would have given my servant a blow which would have stopped his mouth for many a day.



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CHAPTER IX

CAPTIVITY AND MYSTERY

ABOUT Antequera the roads became so bad that we were forced to journey slowly, and our next day of travel did not take us as far on our way as we had wished.

To the right rose huge peaks of the Sierra de Abdallajis, while the Sierra de Yeguas upon the other side made the defiles and passes difficult to traverse.

Carlos rode beside me, and, seeming to see the gloom which shrouded me, he tried to cheer me with tales and legends at every turn.

His likeness to the señorita grew upon me at each word and look, until, remembering her wish that she were a page, I wondered if it could be that she had come in such disguise. Did she wish to share our dangers? I liked not the thought, for though many tales there be of noble dames who have so

done for the sake of their lords, I did not deem the señorita one of these.

Not that I thought she lacked the courage, but to me it seemed an unfitting thing that a maid should don a page's habit and seek the country of the Moors. The Señorita Inez was so modest and maiden-like, that of all the things a woman might do, this was the most unlike to her.

Yet the boy bore a strong resemblance to her, of that I was certain. And there was another thing I could not understand. I am not wont to love with ease, and am like to have most rugged ways where young lads are concerned, yet this one had found a way swiftly into my heart, and so filled it that it felt not half so sorrowful for my lady. What did this mean? Was the page truly the señorita, or had I grown fickle even as other men?

Had such thoughts come to Anthony, his frank and headlong nature would have bade him forthwith speak and demand if the page were himself or the lady. This could I not do. I felt that I must respect her disguise,

an it were one ; and I had within me the fear lest, in proving the truth of my suspicions, I should lose something of that high esteem in which I held the damsel.

In thinking of all this my head grew weary, and we journeyed on in silence.

Presently Anthony drew near to me and motioned Carlos aside as if he wished to talk in private.

“ Do you trust that boy ? ” he asked, to my surprise.

“ Why not ? ” I demanded.

“ I know of little reason not to do so,” he answered, “ but you said so much of the need for caution that it seemed to me perhaps you were the first to lack that virtue.”

“ You do not like the lad ? ” I asked, at a loss to account for this sudden move on my brother’s part.

“ I like him well enough,” he answered, “ but a tale has come to my ears from Hugh, that Carlos was listening to all the talk in the serving-men’s hall yesternight, and that he went swiftly and quietly from the place.”

I had told Anthony nothing of what I had heard the night before, fearing to worry him, and at this reason for suspecting Carlos I could not but laugh. The matter was certainly droll enough.

"If that be all," said I, much relieved, "he is our best friend and guardian, for he acted thus but to do us a service."

Then I related the foolish actions of Humphrey in telling our names and station, and how the page had but come to give me warning.

"I shall be surprised if no harm comes of his bragging for every horse-boy to hear and chatter to our pursuers, and there be such," I said, with some warmth. "But as for the lad, rest easy, Anthony; I will answer for his loyalty with my life."

As I spoke I heard a sound behind me, and turning saw that the boy had heard my words as he came quickly toward us. I was about to chide him for his forwardness, when he said:

"Señors, for some time I have thought that I heard the sound of horses following us. I

rode to the brow of the hill to see. There are ten horsemen. They come at full speed. Their horses are fresher than ours. What shall we do?"

"Do!" cried Anthony. "There is but one thing for brave men to do, that is, to stand their ground, and that will we."

"But the señors will be killed," cried Carlos, with a terror which I could not but think unlike the señorita.

"Tush, lad!" said I lightly, to cheer him. "Here is no place for fears. Have at them! God will defend the right."

I had scarcely done speaking when the ten horsemen came round a bend of the road.

We halted and drew up our men. The leader of the newcomers called fiercely to us to surrender.

"That will we not!" cried I, boldly, and immediately they charged in upon us.

Now the road at this point had been cut through the foot of a hill, so that one side of it was bounded by a rocky wall. In this wall was a broad rugged niche or recess which offered some advantages of defence, and this

position we had hastily secured. We therefore received our enemy full front, and in converging their greater numbers upon us, so greatly did they hamper each other that Anthony and I, by good luck, struck down two of them, and Hugh another, ere the fray had lasted more than a minute or two.

Perhaps too much thinking had clouded my brain, for I had little of that wild joy with which a battle fills me even yet when I am nerved to fight for some great cause. I felt myself wondering, even in the midst of it all, if it could be the señorita fighting wildly beside me.

Presently I was roused by a shout from Anthony.

"Humphrey! Hugh! Fight for the honour of a Pembridge! Follow me!" and finding it now too close for good defence in the niche, he put spurs to Bivat and dashed across the road into the plain beyond.

We broke through the enemy without serious hurt, and they followed in close pursuit. On the plain we again faced them and then began a struggle which lasted well nigh

upon an hour. In numbers they still had the better of us, mounting seven men to our five. Often were we sore put to it to hold our own, but an inspiring shout of "Saint Anthony! Saint Anthony!" from my brother rallied us again and again.

The first of our men to fall was our good Arturo. who, being on the sumpter-mule, was somewhat at a disadvantage. Hugh and Humphrey both had many wounds, but still fought on bravely.

Suddenly I heard a cry from the page, and looking toward him saw that he was trying to evade two big fellows who were attacking him. Dealing the man I was engaged with a desperate stroke that found deep lodgment in his shoulder, I hastened to the lad's aid.

Even as I was galloping that short distance, I glanced over where Anthony was fighting and saw him do a bold thing. His opponent aimed at him a furious blow which seemed to cut his sword in two, for the blade snapped suddenly and the further half of it flew into the air. Then did I tremble for my brother,

but next moment Anthony spurred in upon him, and parrying the next stroke with the stump of his weapon, he then swiftly cast it away and in an instant had seized his foeman round the body. Seeing this I had less fear, for well I knew my brother's skill in wrestling, and felt that so long as he had no greater odds to contend with, he would come well out of the struggle.

All this passed in a moment, and with a shout of "Saint Andrew to the rescue!" I came up with the fellows who were attacking Carlos. Seeing me they left the lad and prepared to meet me. With these I engaged hotly, and doubtless would have made good showing had not the man who had unhorsed Arturo now dashed up to their aid, and in a moment I found myself hard beset. Then it was that something of the old rage stirred within me, but it was too late. I felt myself slowly weakening, my strokes lost precision, my guard became all but useless, I knew that the end must soon come.

All at once amid the clashing of the fray I heard a wild cry; something heavy was flung

against my breast and I was borne helplessly to the ground, which I had but reached when a dull blow sent me into unconsciousness.

I came to myself slowly with Carlos bending over me. The first thing I heard was a low moaning. If before this I had doubted that the page was the señorita, the words which followed dissipated all doubt.

"Inez! Inez! Unhappy girl!" said the pitiful voice. "What will become of you?"

Looking about me I saw a distressful sight. The plain around was torn and trampled; a man lay dead close by me; further away I saw the form of Humphrey, and still further the body of a third. The others were nowhere to be seen.

Seeing me stir, the page breathed a little prayer of thanks to the good saints and cried:

"You are not dead, Señor?"

"Dead! nay, lad," I replied, determined not to allow the señorita to see that I had penetrated her disguise. "I scarce think I am wounded even, thanks to my good Milanese armour. In sooth I know not how I came here save that some heavy

body weighed me down." At this the face before me turned so deep a red that I looked at it in astonishment.

"Señor," he said, with a shamefaced look, "I cry you pardon. I saw that the leader of the band tried to cut you down and I flung myself between. Hugh smote one of the enemy and his body fell on both of us, and so were you, as I thought, killed."

"You are wounded!" I cried. "There is blood on your doublet."

"Much of it is yon fellow's," he said, lightly. "I have but a scratch."

"But, saints! Here am I forgetting my own brother," cried I, starting up. "Where is Anthony?"

Ere he could reply, Hugh came up with water he had gone to fetch for my relief.

"Alas, master," said he. "the young squire is taken prisoner!"

My heart seemed to stand still at this, and I must needs take a draught of water to revive me. I thought rather would I have seen my brother dead before my eyes than hear such tidings as these.

"Think you that they were Moors?" I asked.

"No, Señor," said Carlos. "I heard them speaking as I lay motionless here beside you. Their leader said that since you had fallen and your brother was taken prisoner they need go no farther."

"Heard you no more?"

"No, Señor; with that they went away."

What a plight was this! What should be done? I was promised to the king's service. Even if I knew where Anthony was confined it would avail me naught, since I could not stay to attempt his rescue.

As I sat in a grief too deep for action, stupidly wondering what I should do next, Carlos spoke.

"Shall we continue our journey, or what do you intend to do, Señor?"

I looked at the boy in amazement. Not thus would the señorita have spoken at a danger which threatened Anthony. Yet an this were not she, what meant the cry which I had heard when I was coming to my senses?

"See to the horses, Hugh. Are they gone? Is Humphrey wounded sorely? Carlos, have that arm of yours bound up and prepare to start at once. Whatever comes we must lose no time," I said, hurriedly.

Turning over the enemy's two men we found that they were dead, — the other two who had fallen had been taken away, — and as we could spare no moment for their burial, we laid them beside the road, hoping that the charity of some passer-by would make a grave for them.

Hugh had many wounds, though as it happened none were of a disabling nature, but Humphrey was found to have a deep cut in his thigh. I determined to get him to the nearest inn and there to leave him with Hugh to care for him, for it was impossible to take him with us farther on our mission.

Pushing on to Archidona, I saw the two men-at-arms made comfortable there, and bade them remain till Humphrey had recovered of his hurt. If by that time I had not returned, they were to go to Don Fernando de Castro at Seville, tell him of my brother's

plight, and beg that he would aid them in finding him.

Carlos and I then pressed on, and by nightfall we reached Loja, and found that we had covered a distance of eight and twenty miles on our journey.

I arose next morning but little refreshed, and Carlos seemed to have rested poorly also. As we left the inn and rode on our way, I saw that the youth could scarcely sit his horse, and my heart smote me that I exposed him to weariness and danger.

"I should not have let you come," I said to him. "Turn back now before you are quite spent."

"No, no, I would stay with you, he cried. "Can I forget that you twice saved my life?"

"But, lad, you have already wiped out that debt," I urged. "Moreover, you may not stay with me always. If I return to my own country we shall be separated, though that were a pity, for England is a fair land, and methinks it would well please you."

"But, why do you go thither?" he asked.

"I needs must, for there lies my duty," I

responded. "When my father dies, which God forbid these many years, I must take his place upon the estate."

"You?" he said, with a perplexed look. "I do not understand! I have heard the men-at-arms speak as though it was your brother who was the squire. Is he not the elder?"

"Not so, lad. Anthony is the younger and I the heir to all the estate." As I said this, he seemed greatly disconcerted, and there rose within me a horrid suspicion. An this were the señorita, her disappointment must be because of the knowledge that her betrothed was not the heir to a goodly heritage. To think thus of her was torture, and yet,—but I would dwell no more upon the matter.

As I strove to turn my thoughts into less distressing channels, I heard a clatter of hoofs behind us. Ever on the alert for danger I turned to see who approached.

A rider came galloping swiftly towards us over the stony road. We were two and he but one, and yet I felt my heart beat quickly

as we drew up our horses and awaited his coming. My surprise was great when he neared us to see that it was Arturo.

A moment or two later he had flung himself from his horse and was kissing my hand.

"Whence came you? Where is the Señor Antonio?" I asked with great eagerness.

"Ah, Señor, glad am I to have found you. Believe me I fought as long as I could. Seeing you fall, and the señor your brother taken prisoner, I crept into some bushes and followed the men who attacked us. They took the señor away bound to his horse, and since he made no movement to escape I think that he was badly wounded."

"God forbid!" I cried anxiously; "but go on, man, go on!"

"After a while, Señor, they halted near to a bridge, and crawling nigh on my hands and knees I caught what they were saying. They had heard of your whereabouts at the inn where you left the wounded man. Better, Señor, you had left him to die by the

brook Calzado. Then later, from the talk at another place they learnt your very names."

"Ay, that fool Humphrey!" I put in. "He was ever a garrulous lout. But my brother, where is he?"

"He is to be kept a close captive in a castle upon the hill beside Utrera until some one comes from Seville," replied Arturo. "I heard some mention of a Señor de Viras, but I feared to remain longer and crept away to see if I might find some trace of you. Hugh, whom I found at the inn, told me that you were well, and I made after you as quickly as might be."

The faithful fellow having finished his story, I bestowed upon him a grateful look, and we stood there awhile in silence.

"Señor, what will you do?" asked Carlos, suddenly.

"I have but one duty," I answered, ruefully. "I am under oath to continue on this business until the issue. Were my brother in my place and I in his, he must do the same."

"Señor Ingles," he responded, his voice

sounding somewhat strangely, "Methinks that I should go and make some attempt to save your brother. Take Arturo with you and give me leave to depart."

I looked at him in amazement. Who was this, speaking to me freely, as to an equal?

"What could you do?" I asked, scornfully.

"I can do more than you think, perhaps," he said. "The hand of Diego de Viras is in all this. He is your enemy, and truly no friend of mine. But I know every castle of this valley, where I was bred and born. The place of which Arturo speaks is the castle of Zabida. The seneschal of that place is my foster-father. Through him I may obtain entrance to the señor; if he is wounded, nurse him and plan for his escape!"

The lad spoke earnestly, yet I knew not what to say. Whence came this sudden anxiety for Anthony's welfare?

I spoke in bitterness of spirit:

"Where is your great desire to stay with me?"

"I thought the Señor de Pembridge would place his brother first, and would be pleased

that I did do so as well," he answered, somewhat tartly.

At this I stood, thinking deeply.

Were this the page, I could not hold him; if it were my lady, her place was by the side of her betrothed, rather than by me. Yet how could I continue my journey and leave her to all the perils of so foolhardy an undertaking; how permit the lamb to put itself boldly into the lion's den?

Yet my oath to the king bound me, and Anthony might be dead before my return, if I did return.

Was ever man caught in so tangled a web?

At last I spoke in some impatience:

"My faith! I wish that you were safe in San Lucar!" My thoughts had run away with me, and I spoke as if I were sure that this were the señorita.

"Where is San Lucar, and why should I be safe there?" The brown eyes looked at me with a strange expression.

"Oh! 'tis a convent near to Seville, and the mother abbess is a friend of mine," was all I said, amazed at his coolness.

"We dally here too long in idle talk," he said, with sudden boldness. "I go to your brother, Señor, if without your consent, yet I trust not without your God-speed!"

"An you will go, then," I answered, "the saints go with you; but—" He gave me no chance to say more, for crying, "*Adios, adios,*" he put spurs to his horse and in a few minutes his lithe figure seemed but a speck upon the road.

Arturo and I gathered up our bridles and rode forward in silence. My heart was very heavy, for I had lost not only my brother, but one who, if not my lady, was a constant reminder of her, and at the least a pleasant youth whom I had thought loved me well and truly.

Our way led along the course of the Xenil, and then the beautiful Vega was reached. For many a league there were olive, mulberry, and orange trees, and many vines and flowers to delight the eyes, and from the white sierras in the distance came a cool and invigorating breeze. Not once through all this space was our journey interrupted.

By the time the sun set in golden glory over the green vales, and lighted up the landscape with a brilliance and beauty surpassing everything in its splendour, we reached the outskirts of the great city of Granada.

As I saw the red towers of the Alhambra loom above the city (a sight which stirred my sense of beauty and made me for the moment forget my many griefs in the joy of such perfection), I breathed a prayer of thankfulness that so much of my task was ended.

CHAPTER X

THE SCENT OF A WALL-FLOWER

THINKING it best not to enter the city that night, we slept outside. On the following morning Arturo begged me to allow him to go in alone in the disguise of a Moor. To this I agreed to, and he did; when, by listening to the converse which he well comprehended, he found out that the King of Granada was well disposed toward Christians, and from this I judged that I should not be molested in my embassy.

I hastened to an inn to remove the stains of travel and fray, and made ready to present myself to the Caliph.

At noon we started from the inn and rode through the streets of Granada. Coming to where the Alhambra sat proudly on its two hills, I was struck with the marvellous beauty of it. It is of little avail to describe the wonders of the Moorish palace, for to those

who have not seen it, the least that one would say must seem like leasing or a tale of feys.

Passing through the Alcazar we came at length to the great Red Castle, which in splendour surpassed all the rest.

I had been inclined to think myself well attired at the court of Don Pedro, but amidst the gold and gems of the Moorish knights who thronged the Puerta de Justicia I felt like a homely guinea-fowl amongst a flock of mocking peacock birds.

However, though dazzled, I was not struck dumb, and I at once demanded in a high and lofty manner (the which I was far from feeling!) that I be taken to the king.

So often is the dross of sheer insolence mistaken for the true gold of courage, that I felt sure that this address would not be without good effect. The Moorish attendants looked with surprise at the beardless youth, who, with so scant a following, was yet so sharp of speech; and then as they whispered amongst themselves, Arturo heard them say, "In truth, he must be wont to

being promptly served at home, since he is so bold abroad!"

As they talked and looked I played a still bolder stroke.

"In God's name, hasten!" I cried, impatiently. "Think you that I have ridden from daylight to dark these many days, only to cool my heels here like a slave? Bear my message to him forthwith, and say that I come 'on the service of the king;'" saying which I tossed them a few broad gold pieces.

Whether most it was the gold or my arrogance I know not, but at this speech the elder of the men bowed, and saying, "Your Highness' will be done," he hastened away.

Sooth, so tickled was I at this turn that I could have rolled upon the floor in laughter. Here was I, a plain English squire, haughtily demanding audience with one of the mightiest monarchs in Christendom, and being called "Your Highness" for my forwardness.

The messenger returned quickly.

"Señor Stranger," he said, "the Caliph

awaits you in the Hall of the Kings. Enter, and the Habjeb will conduct you to him."

With something of a trembling at my heart, I dismounted and followed the seneschal.

I was met by the Habjeb, an old man robed in crimson, who led me forward in silence. We went rapidly from room to room, my wonder and admiration increasing at every step. I had a confused sense of multi-coloured marbles, marvellous paintings, brilliant decorations, luxurious couches adorned with gold and silver, sparkling fountains, and superb vases from which arose strange and subtle perfumes. All this beauty seemed to float about my senses as if it were a foretaste of the joys of Paradise, so that reaching the Hall of the Kings I was ushered in even as one in a dream.

Here was the climax of all magnificence, and as I gazed around my dream seemed to be deepening into reality, when I was recalled to my senses by a voice from the further end of the chamber. I looked and saw a tall courtly man attired in a rich costume of white silk embroidered with gold, over which

was thrown a purple mantle. It was the great Yusef himself.

The Caliph listened to my tale with interest. As soon as he saw Don Pedro's seal upon the packet, he dismissed his courtiers, save only the Grand Vizier.

"You are but just in time, Señor," he said, "for the one you seek left us only yesterday. Had you not been delayed upon your journey you had found him here. Howsoever, a portion of my suite goes in an hour to follow the king to R..., as an escort to the women of his harem on going through the mountain passes.

"Go with them and you will have a safe journey. I will give orders to my knights that the Señor España is to be of their party, and may Allah go with you."

He bade a courtier see that I was well cared for, and said farewell with much kindness.

That afternoon we joined the cavalcade, and rode through a fair country until we halted for the night.

While the tents were being spread I

walked gloomily about. I could not speak the Moorish tongue, and to hear others laughing with a mirth I did not comprehend gave sadness to my thoughts, already sad from thinking of my unfortunate brother, pent in some vile dungeon, while I was free to serve the king and conquer fate.

Passing the royal tents, I heard the sound of music, the playing of a lute, and a chanson sung sweetly by a woman's voice.

Was it some Spanish captive singing that old familiar song?

“ En el tiempo que Zelinda
 Cerro ayrada la ventana
 A la desculpa i los zelos
 Que el Moro Ganzul le daya,
 Confusa y arrepentida
 De averse fingido ayrada,
 Por verle y desagra vialle,
 El corazon se le abraza !

Could it be that another needed sympathy amid these strangers, or was this a woman who had given up her people to follow the fortunes of the man she loved and thus found happiness?

Throwing myself upon the sward I gave way to utter despondence. At that moment I regretted all my undertaking. Here was I, weary and worn, many leagues from all who held me dear, upon a flying bittern's quest which led me into the very heart of a hostile country.

The thought of the señorita seemed well-nigh dulled as I remembered my brother's peril. Say what you will, there is that about one's own kin which holds through all the tangled affairs of life. Few loves can overmaster those which have grown with our bodies and souls from childhood, and to which we can do violence only with a sense of guilt.

Before me there arose the wicked, smiling face of Diego de Viras, and I ground my teeth with rage at my impotence, as I thought of Anthony in such evil hands.

Who was this distressed damsel, that I should be succouring her? Were it Anthony who aided her, it were well, for she was his betrothed. Why for me all this trouble and danger for one who was to be my

brother's wife? His wife! Naught could change that. To our simple English minds a betrothal was as sacred as a wedding, and a wedding was for aye. Oh, why had not the good impulse to save her by betrothal come to me who loved her, instead of to Anthony? and I groaned in spirit over my evil fortune.

I saw stretch out before me the long and weary years, unlightened by the love of woman. I saw my lady happy as the wife of Anthony, and I saw myself shut out from the first place in the hearts of the two I best loved, a place which my selfish nature needs must covet. I told myself that I could give up Anthony to happiness without me; I might even wish the *señorita* joy aside from me and that poor heart of mine which was so truly hers; but that they both should be happy together, without me,—that was more than my nature could endure!

As I thought, her face rose before me. I saw the roguish eyes which yet could seem so soft and misty, like the haze which hovers o'er a summer sunset's lingering glow. I

saw the waving curls, framed by her dark mantilla; the white throat, the little hands; I felt the proud, sweet spirit which illuminated her features and was their true beauty. Like a flame my passion leaped in my breast. An agony of love and longing rushed over me.

Gone were the doubts and fears of the day before. Gone were all my lofty thoughts of the duty of young maids to stay at home and tarry for the fate the good God sends.

What if my lady were the page, how dare I judge of that which seemed right to her?

I longed beyond words to hear her pretty voice, so full of sweet humour and merry jesting.

Whether she was page or nun or señorita, I loved her, I longed for her with all my soul.

Anthony was forgotten.

What was loyalty to a brother? A whim, a fancy, a mere romancer's lilt. I could gain her for my own — my very blood seemed on fire at the thought! Such love as mine could never be in vain! I would *make* her love me; and some devilish temptress called

up before my fevered vision the sight of myself at home in merry England, with my lady at my side, safe away from all this turmoil. I closed my eyes and yielded all my senses to the blissful dream.

Suddenly there was wafted to me a familiar perfume, sweet and haunting. It came from a flower near by, and scarce knowing what I did, with one of those strange impulses toward trifles which come to us all at times of great stress of mind or heart, I plucked the blossom and laid it to my face.

Was it an orange flower, I wondered idly; and with its pure beauty there sprang to my mind the look of my lady as she sent the spray of orange to Anthony, and her message. Stay — what had she said? Not that she would wait for him, but that she would keep the flowers until some one came. I would be that some one! How hotly my face flamed at the thought! I crushed the flower in my hand, raising it again and again to my face. It was not the orange blossom, but some such grew about the stony moat at home. It was a quaint English wall-flower,

and suddenly I seemed to see the tall towers of the Croft; I heard Eustace's taunting voice; I lived again the scene which had been fraught with so much consequence to us all. I seemed to hear my father's grave tones bidding me remember the motto of our house. It came to me as a shock that wakes one out of a dream. I rose to my feet and returned to Arturo, who chid me for wandering so far afield.

"I thank you," I said, "but I have a weapon here which is like to prove a constant friend." At this I touched my dagger-hilt and threw myself carelessly beside him on the grass, the night being too fair to be housed within a tent, though the Moors had meetly made preparations for my comfort.

There was that about the faithful fellow that I liked, and his manner was so full of friendly respect that I felt not the distance in our stations.

As we talked of many things I carelessly pushed a hand into my jerkin, feeling for the safety of the king's packet, which I wore upon a ribbon at my neck.

Then of a sudden Arturo spoke, as if recalled unawares to the memory of a thing which he had all but forgotten.

"Señor, I cry you mercy, but seeing you thrust your hand into your vest recalls to my mind something of which I meant to speak. As you lay swooning upon the plain of Ildefonso, and I hiding in the thicket, I saw two persons do that same thing to you. The last was the page, Carlos, and I thought that he but felt your heart to see if you still lived. The other was the leader of the strange band, and I saw in his hand the gleam of a bloody dagger, though he harmed you not. What think you that this meant?"

"Certes, I cannot tell," said I, wondering if any one had tampered with my packet. I drew it forth to find the seal unbroken, but in the uncertain light I could scarce tell if aught had been disturbed.

I find it hard to believe now that matters could have wrought so upon my nerves, yet thus it must have been, for that night I was like a frightened child in the dark, ready to find a monster in every shadow. I tossed

restlessly and could not sleep. However I might chide myself for terrors without reason, they left their mark upon my mind, and when the morning broke I again drew out the packet and examined it closely.

There was on the ribbon which bound it a small, dark tracing. It was of a dull reddish colour, faint enough to escape a careless glance, yet plainly to be read by one who looked at it with keen eyes. In a moment or two I had made out this sentence: "Kill the Bearer." It was in Spanish characters, and might have been traced with a dagger dipped in blood.

I stood and gazed at it like one fascinated.

Who had worked me this trick, sending me forward with hope to a certain death?

For a moment a horrible doubt came over me. Was it the king? Was this his promised guerdon? Surely not, came a truer thought, for more welcome to him were my safe return than my death.

Could it have been the page, then? Was Carlos the señorita? Did the lady wish for my death that Anthony might take my place

as my father's heir? Was the whole world full of treachery and mystery, and was there no way for me to answer these awful suspicions?

Then I bethought me it was the stranger knight; yet if so, why had he not slain me with one swift dagger-thrust when I lay utterly in his power?

Rousing myself from these perplexing thoughts, I carefully cut away the piece of ribbon which bore the treacherous message and replaced the packet in my breast. Soon after this our tents were struck and we continued our journey, reaching Ronda on the third day of our travel.

When things go smoothly there needs small chronicle. The King of Algeciras and Ronda greeted me with kindness, and upon reading Don Pedro's letter he inquired if I would tarry with him till he could send to my sovereign's aid a company of his best knights.

To this I made reply that if it pleased His Majesty I would at once hasten on with the good news to Seville.

“As you will, Señor Stranger,” the king said. “I trust that when my necessity arises I may find those as ready in my service as you are in that of my good brother, Don Pedro. Tarry but to rest your horses, and then bear my token to the King of Castile and Leon. But ere you go I would have you drink with me,” saying which he clapped his hands.

At this there appeared a slave bearing a huge flagon of wine. It was a vase of Almeria of marvellous design and wondrous workmanship, all of a blue colour, like a piece of the soft Spanish sky, with tracings of gold upon its surface.

The slave first tasted the liquor to guard against poison, then, pouring a brimming draught into a curiously shaped cup of glass, he handed it to the king.

The Moor touched the goblet with his lips, — which one has since told me was the Saracenic manner of doing much honour to a guest, — and methought I saw him drop something within the cup as he handed it to me, saying:

"Drink, Señor Stranger; may Aliah go with you on your journey and aid you in your endeavours."

I am not over suspicious by nature, but I confess that I took the cup with a sinking at the heart. Too often were there tales of poison lurking in the potions of kings, and the matter of the mysterious message on the ribbon still caused me some uneasiness.

Yet to refuse to drink meant to show deadly enmity. What could be done? The king must not be kept waiting.

With a sudden despair, for a great overwhelming sense of the world's wickedness had come upon me, I grasped the cup and drained it.

Something hard touched my lips. My heart bounded with relief. It was a ring, — a ring of gold set with a ruby of great value. I felt ashamed that I had entertained such ungenerous suspicions. And sooth, well I might, for I have never found a Moorish knight unfaithful to the laws of hospitality.

I tried to thank the king, but the words faltered on my tongue.

“Take that,” he said kindly, and his words only renewed my flush of shame. “Take that as a *requerdo* of a Moorish king who ever delights to honour the faithful!”

Next day, all being in readiness for our departure, I saw His Majesty again, when he placed in my hands a small packet. “This contains my answer to the king, your master,” he explained, “and lest you lose the letter, I will tell you of the contents. I send a greeting to Don Pedro, my brother of Castile, and a promise to send him a band of my best knights as soon as may be at all possible. Here is a jewel as a token, and it is a gem of such value that its price will go far to mend his broken fortunes. More he shall have, and he can repay them at such time as he will, according to the bargain which is between us. Guard well the packet, Señor, and may Allah go with you.”

CHAPTER XI

THE HERMIT OF THE CUEVA DEL GATO

ARTURO and I sped rapidly away from the rocky defile in which lies Ronda, down the four hundred steps cut from the solid rock by Christian slaves in the time of the cruel king, Abu Melec.

We dashed past the Casa del Rey of Al Motadhed, stopping not to listen to the songs of the birds, nor to gaze on the silvery water of the Tajo as it fell in white mist over the crags.

I thought not of these sights of beauty: I thought only, with a glowing feeling of elation, that my travels were half over; that I was on the way to Seville, successful and triumphant, to gain the king's favour and in the way to gain her whom I loved.

So changed was I in this seeming freedom of heart, that Arturo looked at me in wonderment as I cried:

"Press on, press on! But a few leagues and we shall be at the court."

We had been riding for some hours when we came to a place where two roads branched. Here we stood in a quandary. Which to take we knew not, but the sun being hot we at length chose the one which led through a shady wood.

At first we thought well of our choice, but soon this changed, for the road became as though it would be lost altogether in brush and foliage.

"Señor," said Arturo, uneasily, "methinks we would do better to turn back. The path grows faint, and who knows but that wolves lurk within these dark forests."

And then there chanced a strange thing, and hard to be believed. When we strove to see the path by which we had come, behold, there was no path! A thick wall of trees seemed to hem us in on every hand. It was as though the trackless forest had closed about us, as the green waves of the mighty sea close over the body of a drowning man, leaving no trace behind of where he lies.

"Santiago help us!" said Arturo, in a low, awe-struck whisper. "Are we in some *floresta encantada?*"¹ and he looked about him with frightened eyes.

"Saint Anthony is the one to whom to pray," I said, with a gaiety I was far from feeling. "Men say that he finds everything that is lost. He was a Portuguese youth so holy that but a month after he was dead he was called a saint."

"An he, or some other do not pray for us, we are lost," said Arturo, despairingly.

"Tush, man!" I cried, "we have but lost the path! Follow me!" and I urged Crispin boldly forward, making a way through the thicket.

Alas! it was the last service my faithful companion ever did for me. As I pushed across the ground, cut into great hummocks of tussac grass, I felt the noble fellow give a lurch, he reeled beneath me, came down upon his knees, there was a crashing sound—and then I knew no more.

When I came to myself it seemed to me

¹ Enchanted forest.

that I must have died, so unusual were my sensations, so peculiar my surroundings.

I lay upon a bed of rushes, spread upon the cold ground. The place was dark, save for the light of a single torch, which was thrust into a crevice of the wall. I looked about me, but could see no one.

As my eyes became more accustomed to the dim light I saw that I was in a subterranean cave or chamber. The walls were crusted with a white substance; long white crystals hung from the roof, while others sprang from the ground, and joining them in places made slender pillars like white marble. The air was cold and damp so that I shivered. I tried to raise my head, but fell back with pain and weakness.

Where was I? Had I been captured, and was this a Moorish dungeon? Suddenly I heard footsteps. Two men approached, as I thought, my gaolers.

"Methinks he has not stirred," said one of them.

"Alas, my poor master!" said the other; and I opened my eyes quickly, for the voice was Arturo's.

Seeing me returned to consciousness the good fellow seized my hand and cried eagerly:

"You are better, Señor? You will be well!"

"Please God," I said; "but where am I?"

"In the *Cueva del Gato*, three leagues from Ronda, a place of safety," said the stranger. "You must not talk, Señor, but drink this galanga; it will do you good."

Swallowing with some distaste the potion which he offered me, I fell away into a sweet sleep. So was it for some days, the which I passed betwixt sleeping and waking, often in much pain.

During my conscious moments, many things troubled my mind. The ways of God seemed past all knowing, and this world of ours too deep a problem for my solving.

When all depended upon my action, here was I helpless, longing fiercely to have the flight of the niebli, as the Spaniards call their swiftest falcons. It was a judgment for me that I had entertained temptation to other paths save those of duty, I thought

bitterly. It is strange how much more rapidly repentance comes to those who have failed in the wrong they would have done than to such as are successful. To these, indeed, it seems that only a surfeit of the sweets with which they have dallied to the staining of their honour brings any thought of their ill deeds.

At last the fever died away and I became stronger. The old man in whose care I was came and sat beside me.

“Tell me, Señor, who are you, and how came I here?” I asked.

“I am known as the ‘Hermit of the Cave.’” he answered. “One day as I sat at the mouth of my cavern here, which is at the foot of a sharp decline, and concealed by leaves and branches, I heard a sudden sound, and a horse crashed through the bushes and rolled to my feet, bearing a man with him in his fall. It was yourself, Señor, stunned and unconscious, while your leg—tangled in the stirrup-leather—was badly broken.

“Your servant managed to save himself

from a like fall, and with his aid I bore you hither. Having some little skill in surgery I set the leg, so that now an you but lie still awhile all will be well."

"I thank you, Señor Hermit, for your care," I said; "but lie here longer inactive I may not. My journey is one requiring much haste."

"The truest haste for you, Sir Squire," he responded, "is to lie thus upon your back. And now," he went on, "I would speak to you on another matter. It is but right that you should know that in your fever you said ~~any~~ things which I think you willed not ~~any~~ should hear."

"Say you so!" cried I, in alarm.

"Nay, you have nothing to fear," said the hermit assuringly. "It is safe with me; and perchance would you but tell me more, it is in my power to aid you."

Feeling drawn to the man and trusting him, soon I had begun my story. I told him of my home, of Anthony, of our adventures, indeed of everything save that which by oath I was bound to keep.

When I had finished he sat thoughtfully silent for some moments, and then he sighed as he said :

“ It is a curious world, and it seems to me that my angel guardian may have sent you hither that I might see the foolishness of my life.”

“ What mean you ? ” I asked.

“ Listen, boy, when I was at your age I was ever hot and hasty. I would be a monk in spite of my good confessors telling me that I had no vocation. I left my home and sought admittance at a monastery. But the strictness of the rule, which was but for the good of all, proved unacceptable to my wilful mind, and I came hither to save my own soul in my own way, leaving others to work their wicked will. Methinks it is time for me to return to that world from which I stole like a coward.”

“ But, Señor, I do not understand,” I said, in great perplexity of spirit. “ I thought it was a holy thing to leave the world and live the hermit life.”

“ That which is done for love of God and

an earnest purpose is pleasing to Him, dear lad," he returned, "and a life of prayerful self-sacrifice must needs come to all of those who wish to follow His Son. But, in life one should strive ever to do the duties which God has laid down for him. One must not flee from them in cowardice to seek ease or peace. If a man will wait in patience his path will be made plain.

"I was a coward to flee from the world because it was no longer sweet. The woman whom I loved as we Spaniards can love, with every passion of my life, loved me not and married my brother. Without her I could not bear the world. I still had my people, my house and lands, and many duties to my king and my country. For all this I cared naught. Remember what I say: the man's part is to live the life in which he has been placed, until some other path is plainly pointed out."

Surprise kept me silent.

The thought came to me as I pondered over his words that he must have guessed a purpose which was lurking in my brain, that

I would be a monk and give up my inheritance to Anthony and Inez. His words struck to my heart, making me feel that all my fine dreams of sacrifice were in vain. My duties had been given me by a higher power, to whom obedience was more acceptable than sacrifice.

As the days passed I gained, though with irksome slowness, in health and strength. One fair morning the hermit came to me and said :

“Methinks you are now well enough to proceed on your journey. Let us go, therefore, to Moron, where we can procure horses, for I shall travel with you.”

At this I was greatly pleased. We did so with as little delay as possible, and without further adventure we in due time reached Seville.

I hurried through the city, stopping at an inn where I was unknown, and deeming it well to be cautious, lest Don Diego had worked me mischief in my absence, I went secretly to the court chaplain.

I found him in a monastery close by

the Calle Alfonso, and at seeing me he cried:

“You! The Señor Ingles! We thought you dead!”

“Dead?”

“Ay,” he responded. “There came to the court a serving-man bearing a packet which he swore to have taken from your breast as you lay upon an open plain, killed by the Moors. Since the packet was sealed with the royal arms he brought it to me to give to the king, and from his converse I made sure that both you and your brother were dead.”

“Alas! the packet was from Anthony’s dead body,” my fears whispered; and the chaplain went on, “Then told I your story to His Majesty as you had commanded, and he was not unmoved thereat, and far from being ungrateful. He swore that at the end of the war the Lady Inez should come forth from her convent and wed with whom she pleased. This message I sent in all haste to San Lucar, and now, here you are, Señor, alive and well, though too late to see the king.”

"Where, then, is Don Pedro?" I demanded, much put to it by all this news.

"By the blessing of God and a fair wind, in the castle of Coruña, in Galicia, whither he went fearing that he was not safe in Seville, since the snares of Don Enrique reached even within his palace walls."

"Don Fernando de Castro, is he not here?" I asked. "And the lord admiral, and my noble kinsman, Martin Lopez de Cordova?"

"Alas! in these times it is difficult to know a friend from a foe. The Admiral Boccanegro is a traitor; with all his fleet he went over to the side of the usurper. Don Fernando and your kinsman, thank God, are true friends to the king and with him in his flight. With him, too, are those royal ladies his daughters, with all their retinues, and such knights and nobles as remained faithful are gone over seas."

"And the Lord de Viras?" I hazarded.

"A traitor, a double-dyed traitor, and worse than all the rest, since the king was

ever his kind master. This treachery in those of his own household has sore disturbed the king," and the good priest looked sad and anxious.

"You seem not to have heard the news," he continued.

"Burgos, Toledo, Cordova, and our own Seville have given themselves up to Prince Enrique. He reigns king in Castile, while our rightful lord waits for the coming of allies before he may reconquer his domain."

At this was I much surprised, for we had spoken to no one upon the route and so had heard naught.

I saw that nothing remained for me but to make all haste to reach the king. Both my own cause and his need required the utmost speed, and I returned to the hermit to tell him my news and ask if he still intended to travel with me to the king.

Upon his replying that he did, we sent Arturo to find a galleass which might take us to Coruña, and as luck would have it he came across and made terms with the same captain that had brought us to Seville.

But before going I owed a duty to the señorita. As I needed new gear for this, I left the ring given me by the Moor with the chaplain, and the good man lent me the money I needed, so that I was able to procure a plenishing of wardrobe. It was nothing new, — a mourning suit of black with gamashes of Moorish leather, and a pilch of black velvet against the cold air, but though sombre it made me feel less like a gaberliltic and for that I was not ill pleased.

In the early morning I set out with Arturo for San Lucar. I felt no tremors at the thought of seeing my lady. Since the certainty of Anthony's death had come upon me, she seemed to me as a person set apart from any earthly thought, one too sacred for earthly passion.

A strange portress opened the door and showed me into the same little room in which I had before seen the damsel, and where the knowledge had come to me that I loved her.

“I would speak with the mother abbess,”

I announced, and in a few moments a nun entered the room.

"I crave your pardon," I said, "it is the abbess I would see."

"Señor, I am she."

"Nay, but the one I would have is far older, — where is she?" I felt a sense of uneasiness steal over me.

"She died a sennight since, God rest her soul!" the nun made answer solemnly.

"Then where is the señorita her niece, she who took refuge here?" I demanded, anxiously.

"Weeks ago she left us, and where she is I know not. One day there came some one from the court, — her cousin, I heard it said, — and he tarried long, talking with the damsel and the mother abbess. Of what I know not. It is not our place to know of worldly things, Señor. The next day the señorita was gone, no one knew whither."

Her calm voice ceased and I groaned aloud.

Was I to be foiled at every point? There was left to me no room for doubt that my

lady and Carlos were one and the same. Ah! Where was she? What fiend's plot had Diego devised to lure her from her sanctuary? — Well, this was but another thing to add to his score, and with revengeful thoughts within my breast I bade the nun farewell, asking her to send tidings to the chaplain at Seville, should there come any news of my lady.

I rode back to my lodgings in moody silence. My spirit was sorely tried. Of what use were my efforts and resolves, since they always were too late? A great bitterness stole over me, such as I had not felt for weeks, and, reaching my lodging in the Calle de Plateros Sideros, I threw myself down in a mood to give up the entire struggle.

So much riding had sorely fatigued me, and my leg, not yet fully mended, pained me severely.

At last my very weariness and suffering brought sleep, the sleep of utter exhaustion.

Therein it seemed as if the angels sought to comfort me, for I dreamed a lovely dream, that Anthony was not dead, and that my

lady knelt beside me with tender ministrations. Then she bent and kissed my hands, and at last, methought, she seemed to turn into the page who called me his "dear master," his "dear, dear Señor Ingles!"

CHAPTER XII

A FRIEND IN NEED

SUDDENLY I awoke to find the dream no dream, but a reality, for upon his knees beside me, his lips upon my hand, and sobbing as though his heart would break for joy, was Carlos.

I sprang to my feet.

"Señor," he cried, "my own dear Señor! You are alive and well! I see you again after all these weary weeks!"

"Carlos!" I gasped. "Whence come you? Where is my brother?"

"Safe!" he exclaimed, with joy in his sparkling eyes and dimpling cheek. "Safe and well, dear Señor, and happy beyond measure when he shall come to know that you do live."

"Go look to the door," I said, "and then come and tell me all," forgetting for the nonce that this might be the señorita, and

that she should be the one to command and I obey.

“When I left you, Señor, I went with all speed to the inn where we had left Humphrey and Hugh, thinking that they might aid me in my somewhat desperate undertaking. I found Humphrey in such a fever’s frenzy from his wound that it was unfit for Hugh to leave him. Naught was there for me to do but to make what effort I could to save the Señor Antonio without their help, and it seemed that it was well for me to go alone. Their English speech would have betrayed them to be friends of the prisoner, and I could go where others could not, since I knew every field and hillside of that country. From what Arturo had said, I felt sure that your brother was confined in the Castle of Zabida, one of the De Viras’ estates.

“My foster-father, the seneschal, loved me as well as he hated Diego, and he would help me all that he could and not betray his trust. He is a faithful fellow, my good old Manuel.

“In the garb of a minstrel I hastened to

Zabida and found that the señor was confined in the Torre de Costa, close beside the wall; that he was ill, and like to die, at which all within the castle were much alarmed, since Diego had given orders that he was to be preserved in all safety until he himself might arrive to dispose of the captive.

“This made me tremble. I know Diego de Viras well. He is one who has ever, as we say, ‘The cross on his breast and the devil in his deeds,’ and full well I know that if he thought that king or commoner stood in his path he would brush him aside as one casts off a gnat. Torture, captivity, death awaited the señor if for any reason he was in Diego’s way. Not that he would do a villainy for the mere sake of evil. It was only that he would have his will at any cost.

“If I were to save the Señor Ingles, I must hasten.

“Manuel refused me a sight of the prisoner, and in despair I went to that convent of San Lucar of which you spoke, hoping that your friends there would devise some plan to aid me in the undertaking.

"I found that which I sought, and the scheme succeeded better than I could have hoped. The Señor Antonio will tell you all when next you meet. For me, it suffices to say that he is safe, cured of his wounds, and as impatient for news of you as you do long for him."

"Dear lad," I cried, "how can I ever thank you! It is my life that you have saved in saving that of my fair brother! Where is he? Let us go to him at once!"

"Nay, Señor, that is not so easy. While your brother lay in hiding, fearing to return to Seville lest Don Diego recapture him, or had wrought him some mischief with the king, His Majesty set out for Portugal. He hoped there to find a welcome from his uncle, King Pedro, but failing this he was to make all haste to the castle of Coruña, in Galicia.

"Hearing that you were dead, the same being common talk about the city, the Señor Antonio determined to follow the fortunes of Don Pedro. His packet having been stolen from his breast while he was in prison he

could not attempt the embassy to the Moors, and having heard of Don Diego's treachery to the King of Castile, he decided that from him he had nothing further to fear.

"He therefore set out for Galicia, taking with him Humphrey and Hugh, since by that time they had returned to Seville."

"But you," I asked, "why did not you go as well?" He coloured deeply.

"I—" he paused. "Perhaps I longed to find some trace of that other Señor Ingles—he who had saved my life."

Tears filled my eyes. Then I had not been quite forgotten! Once, such words from my lady would have filled me with a passionate rapture of thinking that she loved me, but in my long weeks of inaction—spent in the company of the wise and good hermit—I had come to see with clearer vision, and I felt that any thought of her, save as a friend and brother, were disloyalty to Anthony.

So I took in mine the little hand which ever toyed with the hilt of the dagger, as if unused to such a plaything, and said:

"Now we are friends for always!" Then, fearing to disconcert the damsel (I was sure that it was she) by allowing her to see that her secret was one no longer, I made haste to tell all my own adventures.

When this recital was at an end, I asked the page to tell me how he had found me in Seville, to which he replied:

"I was within an armourer's shop, when, to my surprise, Arturo entered, coming thither to attend to the burnishing of your weapons. You may well understand how joyfully I demanded to know of your welfare, and to be brought to you."

Don Pablo — for such the hermit bade me call him — entering at this moment I made known the page to him and told him all the news. Then we made ready for our departure.

What more had I to fear? Anthony was not dead, though here was I wearing a suit of sables for him; the señorita was close at my side, where I might care for and protect her — my love for her seemed no more the pitiful pain of passion, but a sweet and tender

brotherliness; and did I not hold within my breast a passport for us all into the good graces of Don Pedro, the king.

Next morning, with no hindrance, we embarked upon the galleass, which was well provisioned for the journey. The rowers bent to their work; the day was calm and fair, and as we glided gently down the Guadalquivir it seemed as if a truce had come into all our warfare with adverse fate.

Now rowing, now with all sails set to catch a pleasant breeze, we dropped down the Guadalquivir, up which I had come with Anthony so many months before, and ere long we reached Cadiz.

Now that I knew that my brother was safe I felt so light of heart that I gave myself up to the pleasure of the voyage. The days passed slowly, but not ill.

Ofttimes the hermit, whom we had learned to call Don Pablo (for such he told us was his name), read to us from a parchment roll. This he kept with much care within his breast, and he told us that it was a por-

tion of the Holy Scriptures, copied by a Carthusian monk. It contained the true and veritable history of Our Lord Jesu, the same time that he was here upon the earth.

When I asked how it chanced that he was allowed the possession of a thing so rare, he replied, with some indignation:

"How now, Señor Ingles, is it so rare a thing in England to have the Holy Scriptures? Do you not know that here in Spain the Bible is free to all? Our king, Alfonso el Sabio, made a vast book in the Castilian tongue, and it contains the same words that you English are crying for. In every church we have a huge book of the Scriptures, lest it be stolen, chained before the altar, and there he who runs may read. But, methinks I am as earnest as a preaching friar upon *Pentacostes*. These are, mayhap, too solemn words. Call hither yon page to tell you pleasant legends and tales. I am too wont to dwell alone to be of good cheer."

"One may not ever be as gay as at Yule-

“tide,” I made answer. “With Ash Wednesday comes serious talk.”

We had left the river some days and were sailing well up the coast when one afternoon, while a stiff wind was blowing, we spied in the distance a large ship which bore down upon us.

“*Ventre de Dios!* A pirate!” exclaimed the captain. “An we are taken captive, we shall all be sold to the Moors!”

“Make all speed,” I answered, and immediately our men got out their oars to assist the sails in driving us along.

At first we seemed to hold our own, but as the men grew exhausted with their efforts, we saw that the pirates were gaining on us. In a short space we must fall into their hands.

“In Heaven’s name, Captain!” I cried, “can nothing be done?” He thought a moment.

“There is but one chance, Señor,” he said at length. “It is a desperate one. Near the shore are many rocks where the ship dare not follow us. But the wind is high, and let us but strike and we go down.”

"Better death than torture or slavery," I replied.

The captain at this turned the galleass toward the shore, and soon we were out of the pirate's reach, but speeding through dangerous waters. The sailors now dropped the sails, and this being done we began to breathe more freely, for the greater the speed the greater our peril.

Suddenly we heard a cry from the captain, and then came a great shock which threw us off our feet.

"We are sinking! We are sinking!" came the shouts of the frightened people.

"God protect us!" was my prayer.

I felt a hand grasp mine, and looking round I saw Carlos with Don Pablo. The lad was pale and trembling, and methinks well he might be, for this was no death for either page or soldier.

Two minutes later, amid shouting and confusion, the galleass went down. Being a good swimmer I had little fear for myself, but there were two others I must save — these at least. Grasping the lad by the arm I leaped with

him from the sinking vessel, bidding Don Pablo follow quickly. The hermit on reaching the water had the presence of mind to grasp an oar floating near him, but Carlos, utterly beside himself with fear, clung to me like one distraught.

How I got ashore only the saints know, but though fairly spent with my efforts, reach it I did; and not without the dear lad I so loved. I laid him swooning on the shore and plunged again into the surf to help Don Pablo, who was still clinging to the oar. I pushed this ahead of me as I swam and with Arturo's aid brought him safe to land.

Carlos had not yet returned to consciousness. As I bent over the delicate lad (was it not my own dear lady?) my heart was filled with a great overwhelming love. I bent my lips to the small hand and kissed it.

Then I grew anxious and cried out that he must be dead. But, thank God! he was not, for just then his large eyes opened and he looked kindly up at me.

"You would be sorry to have me go?" he said. "You love me, then, Señor?" The voice was weak and faint.

"Ay, lad, as my own brother," I answered.

"There be those who wish me dead, yet would I live to be with you;" his feeble hand pressed mine as he said this, and his lips smiled sweetly upon me.

Rousing myself I lifted him in my arms and carried him to the nearest house, Don Pablo and the others following.

CHAPTER XIII

THE END OF TREACHERY

PARTLY from the shock, but more from the chill of lying there so long in his dripping garments, the page went shortly into a high fever. He lay between life and death for several days, while Don Pablo and I, assisted by the good woman of the house, watched over him anxiously.

When he had recovered beyond danger there came urgently upon me thoughts of my duty to the king. I spoke of this to the hermit.

"True, you must go," he said. "I have heard much of this enemy of yours, and methinks that he who fights with a De Viras must be swift of stroke and parry. Yet the lad cannot well be left alone. I will abide with him and do you go forth and seek the king. As soon as may be I will follow."

On the next day I was to set forth, Arturo having all in readiness, and when sunset came I betook myself into the church of Santa Maria del Rocomador, there to pray the blessing of God upon my journey and those I left behind. Coming out of the stone portal where the carved figures of saints and angels stood in solemn grandeur, some one took me by the arm and a voice said:

"Santiago help us! Is not this the Señor Ingles whom I saw at San Miguel? Where is the señorita?"

Turning in surprise, I saw the face of the old priest of San Miguel, who had sheltered us from the blast and betrothed the Lady Inez to my brother.

"Is it indeed you, Padre Ignacio? We are well met!" I cried. "I pray you come outside this holy place that I may tell you many things and strange."

His face had seemed full of a doubt which was well nigh distrust, but as I spoke in tones of great heartiness it grew clearer of expression, and he smiled assent and

followed me. As soon as we reached the open air I warmly clasped his hand and cried :

“ Tell me of the Dame Elvira, good Padre ; is she recovered ? ”

“ The dame is fully quit of her rheum and sent in safety to the convent at San Lucar to rejoin her lady. I am come from making a pilgrimage to the shrine of Santiago at Compostella, and am on the way to return home. But you, Señor Squire, what do you here ? Where is your betrothed ? ”

“ Nay, Reverend Sir, you do mistake me for my brother,” I made answer ; “ surely we do not look the same ? ”

“ In truth, now I see that you are not he,” was his answer, “ but with the evening light and the dimness of my old eyes I was deceived. The likeness is but one of expression, methinks.”

This pleased me much, and I felt it a good omen that my long months of weariness and pain had not been in vain, if I had gained somewhat of the sweetness of my brother's face.

"I must tell you that I have oft been troubled at the memory of that betrothal," said the priest. "It seemed to be the only way to save the damsel, and I thought that neither she nor your brother might prove unwilling to consummate their vows; otherwise I should not have permitted them to be taken. What has come of it?"

"Nothing, as yet," I answered; "but I think with you that all will be well, an the king's favour be obtained."

Then I told him the tale of our wanderings, of my fears that the page was the señorita, that I liked not to leave her even in such good hands as those of the hermit of the *Cueva del Gato*. Besides which, I needed that the hermit should go with me, since he seemed to have some secret hope of influence with the king. Padre Ignacio's face grew grave.

"You are sure that this is she?" he asked at length.

"Nay, I know not of a surety. When I am at the page's side it seems to me this cannot be the señorita. Then, when I am

away, I call to mind the likeness of face and mien, and I needs must think that it can be no other. How can I leave her here alone, and yet my duty to my oath calls me hence with all speed, does it not?" I asked.

"Fear not," he said. "Let Don Pablo go with you. I am now journeying toward Burgos and I will tarry here until the page may travel with me. If it be true that this is indeed the señorita, I will find some good dame to bear her company."

I started to thank him for his kindness when he broke in with, "Lead me to your friends."

Don Pablo received him with much kindness, and I then led him to where Carlos was lying and there left him. Their conference was long, but what passed I knew not. Methought I saw a look of amused satisfaction on the good priest's face as he came out, but he said nothing and I did not question him. Next morning Don Pablo, Arturo, and I took our departure.

Without adventure or delay of any kind we reached Coruña in good time ; but, alas! for the news that awaited us. The king was gone! He had sent an embassy to the Black Prince, our own knightly English lord, then at Bordeaux, but not hearing from these ambassadors, and fearing the power of Don Enrique, Don Pedro took ship and sailed to Bayonne. There he was to await the news from Guyenne.

Seeing that naught remained to us but to follow after him with what speed we could, we embarked upon a small sailing craft, and the weather being favourable (it being by then far into the month of February) in a somewhat short space of time we came to the port of Bayonne.

Here another sorry piece of news was our portion, for the king, with all his retinue, had gone thence to Bordeaux.

There are those who say that the Black Prince much wavered in his mind before he made promise to aid Don Pedro. This was in part, because he feared by so doing to displease the Church, for not only was the

king of Spain excommunicate, there was also an ugly rumour that he had murdered an archbishop. Moreover, the Pope had seemed to favour Don Enrique by giving his consent to the leading out of the Free Companies from la Belle France.

Fortunately for Don Pedro there was one near the English prince who was clever enough to whisper within his ear that men would say he was afraid to take the field against his sworn enemy, Sir Bertrand du Guesclin, a knight of Brittany, he whom men called "The Eagle."

At this taunt the prince turned white with rage.

"By my halidame!" he cried, "there lives not knight nor squire who dares to say that Edward the Black Prince fears eagle or lion! It is not meet that a bastard should reign while lives a lawful heir, and my cousin of Spain shall have no cause to complain that he has found me false either to knightly honour or kinsman's claims."

So with a vast array of homagers and allies the prince came to Bayonne, and, with

the retinue of Don Pedro, crossed the Pyrenees near to Roncesvalles, and was encamped in the valley of the Ebro.

“My faith!” I cried to Don Pablo. “Here are we like tiercel-gentles, flying over field and fen and fallow after our quarry. Haste! Haste! We may yet strike a blow for the king and the honour of merry England!”

“By Santiago!” the old man replied, with zest, “I care not so much for the honour of England — though a good ally she has been to us — but for my own fair land. To arms for the glory of Castile and Leon!”

“A Pembridge to the rescue!” I cried, and waiting for nothing we started once again and spurred onward, hoping to make our way to the army before it chanced upon either victory or defeat.

Of what passed till we came to the place of battle I need not tell. The sights we encountered as we approached were touching and pitiful. In a fair land where erstwhile was peace and happiness, now stood the black embers of ruined homes. A few maimed wretches we saw who fled from us

in terror, or, begging an alms, told us in voices faint with hunger of the fearful scenes that had passed.

Gazing on all these horrors, war seemed a terrible thing to me. While the love of fighting is in my blood, and I joy in the glory of a great battle, still there is something within my heart which bids me remember that glory is not all.

Riding on we came to a partly ruined village half hidden among the trees. Here we saw the bodies of a number of French soldiers, men of Du Guesclin's company. As we passed a tiny hut I fancied I heard a groan. Pulling up my horse I dismounted and went to the door.

"What's here?" I cried, looking in.

In the dusky light I could at first see nothing, but soon I made out the figure of a man lying on a bed of straw in the further corner. I went quickly up to him.

"Are you ill, friend?" I asked. "Can I aid you?" He answered not, and methought the poor fellow had expired. I stooped to draw away the torn cloak which hid his

face, when he roused and strove to prevent me.

"Let be!" he cried, and to my surprise in good English. "Let be! A man can die but once, and 't is my will to die now and in my own way — alone!"

"Nay," said I, "be not so set upon it. Here am I to do you a friend's service, ay, and a fellow countryman's."

On my saying this, he pushed aside his cloak and looked at me.

"Andrew!" he exclaimed, with instant recognition.

"Geoffrey — Geoffrey Kemp!" cried I, in astonishment. "What do you here in this sad plight?"

Was I dreaming? Could this be my boyhood friend who with his handsome face and gay attire had so often led the dance at the hall, — this poor creature with forehead encircled with a bloody band, with pale face and sunken eyes and look of utter wretchedness? What a change since I had last seen him!

"Yes, it is I, Andrew," he said, old memories lending pathos to his tone.

"What do you here?" I asked again, kneeling beside him.

"I was ever restless when you and Anthony left Hazelcroft," he said, "and I fretted to see something of the world; but my father could ill afford to send me. At length I prevailed upon him to allow me to go to a relative in France, there to learn the art of a soldier. My choice was well to his mind, and he did so. I joined the army of Messire du Guesclin. Ah, little I thought I should soon have to fight against my own good prince!"

I scarcely know how I listened to this closely enough to remember it, for I was well nigh bursting to ask about Agnes and my father and mother. Seeing that his exertion in talking had made him feel faint, I hastened out to fetch water and my wine flask, and staying but a moment to tell Don Pablo of this strange happening, I hurried back to the hut. Giving the poor fellow a reviving draught, I begged him to tell me of my people.

"Are they alive and in good health?"

"I know of little change," he said, "save that which befell your sister and Eustace."

"What of them?" I cried eagerly; "I have heard no news!"

"You and Anthony had not long left Hazelcroft," he began, "before it seemed to me that your cousin was making good use of your absence. He was ever a shrewd one, and had a fascinating way with women, so there were none to blame your fair sister when she accepted him."

"What! Agnes betrothed to him!—to Eustace!" I cried in alarm.

"Even so!"

"The scoundrel thinks us dead and but aims for our inheritance."

"Nay, Andrew, I think he loved her," said Geoffrey, in a soothing tone. "And I think she loved him."

"God forbid that he should wed my sister! Sooner would I kill him with my own hand!" I cried, with passion.

"God did forbid, and He has saved you the trouble," he said, mysteriously.

"What mean you?" I asked.

"The time had been set and all was in readiness, when, two days before the marriage was to take place, your cousin rode forth to the hunt. Just what happened no one knows, for being in high spirits Eustace had ridden so recklessly that no other rider was up with him. It is thought that his horse balked suddenly at a hedge, for they found the man lying on the ground stone dead. The fall had broken his neck."

As Geoffrey finished I was seized with a wild exultation. I could have danced for joy. Then suddenly came over me as deep a shame that I could so rejoice in another's death, even the death of one whom I hated. And then I thought of my poor Agnes. Did she love him? And after all, may he not have loved her truly and without guile, who was so fair and lovable? As I dwelt upon it all, I bowed my head in sorrow and self-reproach.

I was roused from this mood by the wounded man laying his hand upon my arm with a pressure of kindly sympathy. I dashed away my tears and rose to my feet.

"Forgive my weakness, Geoffrey," I said, "and forgive also my selfish inattention to your needs. I have with me a good hermit whom I will call to examine your condition."

We found my poor friend to have many wounds, but none of a very serious nature, his great weakness and despondency being due to loss of blood. We got him on his feet, and plying him with strengthening wine, we half led, half carried him to a house near by, where we paid the woman liberally to see that he was well cared for.

Then bidding him keep us informed of his whereabouts, we left him and proceeded on our way.

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE CASTLE OF BURGOS

AS we rode toward Navaretta we met stragglers from the army, from one of whom we heard that the king and all his retinue was at Burgos. With him was the Black Prince with all his knights, and there were also many prisoners.

Thither we hastened with all speed, and it seemed as if good fortune met us at every turn. We had no more delays and rode steadily onward, coming in sight of the city in a shorter space of time than one would have thought at all possible.

We dashed across the plains, riding between many tents and much soldiery, for the city was too small to harbour so vast a company. Under the blue sky the cathedral towers shone like winter frost, and we hurried past the gates and through the streets—gay with hangings in honour of the king

and his royal guest — with no farther delay — admittance to the castle where lodged the king.

“Open! Open! In the king’s name! I come on the service of Don Pedro!” I cried to the warder at the great gate, as I flung myself from my horse.

“By the beard of Santiago! It is the Señor Ingles! Whence come you? All thought you dead!” cried the seneschal, whom I recognised as a sturdy man-at-arms of Seville.

“By many a field and fen, good Morales,” I answered; “but hasten to His Majesty and beg admittance for me.”

“The king holds audience an hour hence in the great hall of the castle. Here, Corbell,” — this to a pert, young page, — “attend this gentleman to the hall. Tarry there, Señor, until I send word of your presence to His Majesty.”

Bidding Arturo await us, Don Pablo and I followed the page, a smart imp, who looked at me somewhat scornfully. Of a truth I was a sorry sight, for I wore the same suit in which I had left Seville, months before,

and my garments were stained by foul weather.

Arrived at the audience chamber, we found there a throng of knights and nobles, while gathered in the deep window embrasures were groups of youthful squires. Impatient for some news of Anthony, I scanned the faces eagerly, hoping to see some one who would tell me of his welfare. I saw no familiar face, however, but I observed that many curious glances were cast upon me by the English and Gascons and those Castilian señors who, pranked with trappings of scarlet and gold, seemed like gay popinjays, and I like a gaberliltie.

At length, but not before my patience was at an end, the door of the hall was thrown open, and to my great satisfaction I saw the wise, kind face of Don Fernando de Castro.

I started forward on an impulse to speak with him, but stopped as he raised his hand for silence, and said:

“His Majesty, Don Pedro, by the grace of God, King of Castile and Leon, desires to

grant a private interview to the Señor Don Andres Pembridge, an English esquire."

At this so high and unexpected an honour I felt for a moment greatly confused, but recovering quickly, I stepped forward with boldness and gave Don Fernando respectful greeting.

"Welcome, Señor, thrice welcome!" he said, warmly. "Truly your patron saint has had you in his keeping, for it seems that you have encountered grave perils. Indeed you come as one from the dead. But the king awaits you with much impatience. Follow me!"

"I thank you for your courtesy," I made reply, and we passed through the wondering crowd of courtiers into the presence of the king.

At first I was somewhat dazzled by the splendour of the chamber which we entered, for it was decked as if for a bridal, and at the further end, upon a magnificent dais, sat Don Pedro, robed in crimson velvet.

Methinks to toil and pass through danger for any person doth oftentimes give to one a

great affection for him. Thus was it with me, for as I saw the countenance of the king there swept over me so great a passion of joy that I could not contain myself. Scarce knowing what I did, I flung myself before him, and, seizing his hand in both my own (with no thought of court manners, and that I should wait until he spoke), I kissed it and cried:

“Sire! Sire! I am come! I bring good news! God be thanked that I see your Majesty again and that all is well!”

“Welcome, Señor Pembridge,” he said, with all his old kindness. “Tell me your news, I pray.”

Kneeling still, I drew from my breast the packet given me by the Moor, and handed it to him. He broke the seal in haste, and when he saw the jewel his eyes gleamed. The parchment within he scanned as eagerly as ever a lover the first letter from his lady, and having come to the end, he passed it over to Don Fernando. Then turning to me, he said:

“Señor, never came good news in a time

of greater need. The bearer of it shall not be forgotten. To-day, in full audience shall you receive the order of knighthood, as did your brother upon the field of Navaretta. Meantime, pray tell to me that thing in all the world which you most wish. It shall be yours, since well have you performed the service of the king."

"I thank your Majesty," I stammered. "My brother—he is well, and of your suite?"

"He most nobly stood my friend," answered Don Pedro. "*Sabe Dios!* I have need of such. But did you not seek him before you came to me?"

"Nay, your Highness; I made all speed to gain this audience, delaying not even so much as to make myself fit for the king's presence," and I glanced ruefully at my sorry attire.

"You are indeed a trusty messenger; would that I had many others like you! 'Muertos e idos no tienen amigos,'¹ our proverb says, and, alas! how often have I seen

¹ "The dead and the absent have no friends."

it true, but with you it is not so. Would that I had more such as you about me, Señor."

As he spoke thus in a low voice full of true pathos, it seemed to me that there was no sacrifice the king might ask of me that I would not willingly, ay, gladly, make.

Though since that time many tales of Don Pedro's evil passions and cruelty have come to my ears, I still must think, as I look back, that he had within him many of the qualities of a great and noble king.

"Señor," said the king, rousing from his brief despondency. "One other thing have we to talk over. I remember well that guerdon was promised you. It is yours to name what it shall be.

"Shall it be gold or land? Or perchance there is some desired fair one among our Castilian maids?" and at this sally he smiled.

"Your Majesty's favours have already exceeded the merit of my poor service," I said, with modesty.

"Nay, the guerdon! the guerdon!" he cried.

Still I hesitated, standing before them all

abashed, not from anything their curious eyes could see, but from the confusion of spirit within me. I had believed that what I had resolved upon would prove an easy task, but now that the great moment had arrived, there had come a chill pain at my heart that paralysed speech. I felt the hot blood flush my face, then leave it, then flush it again, as I strove to give tongue to my desire.

All at once it struck me that I was sorely trying the king's patience.

"Since the — since your Majesty is so gracious," I stammered, "there is one wish I have held within my heart this many a day. I pray you, Sire, that you grant me your gracious consent to the marriage of my brother Anthony and the Señorita Inez de Viras."

The king looked at me in great astonishment; then his face clouded with a frown.

"That name!" he said, sternly. "In this, Sir Squire, is nothing of your boasted loyalty. The De Viras are traitors."

"Not the señorita!" I protested warmly. "Her father, Sire, was your loyal servant

and —" a motion from Don Fernando caused me to stop suddenly. The old courtier advanced to the king's side and held him a moment in whispered converse.

Don Pedro's face was seen to grow less stern as they spoke together, and in a moment he broke into a hearty laugh.

"So, Sir Squire, and that is the tale? Bravo!" he cried. "I doubt me an a prettier one ever graced the tongue of romancero or minstrel. A marriage indeed there shall be. But, hark you, while you play so good a part for another, is there none of the fair that you desire for yourself?"

"Nay, my Liege, I would nothing more than see my brother well fared and know that I have served the king. Now that my task is ended I must hence to my own land."

"Of that we will speak anon," said he, pursuing this line of talk no further. "Tell me now what befell on your journey."

Before entering on an account of my adventures I asked permission to present to His

Majesty Don Pablo, the hermit. A page was sent to seek him, and ere he returned I had told the king of the perils of our travel and how the good saints had carried me safely through them.

When the hermit entered the audience chamber he was greeted by Don Pedro most cordially and I was graciously dismissed, the page having orders to see that I was in every manner well provided for.

Though irked at every delay that kept me from Anthony, I yet suffered myself to be befrilled and begroomed by the king's own lord of the bed-chamber, who, when he had completed his task, left me in a state of wonderment whether this were indeed Andrew Pembridge or some other. My tumbled hair was curled and lay upon my shoulders, my small clothes were of white silk, and my long pointed shoes of so foolish a fashion that the toes must needs be fastened to my cincture with small silver chains.

Then I was led to a generous repast, which, however, in my impatience I ventured to slight, rising at the very first opportunity.

But I was not yet to be free. Again the page came to conduct me to the king. I was led to a smaller hall, and while yet waiting for Don Pedro, there entered one whom I thought I knew, yet doubted it, so fine were the robes upon him.

"Señor," I ventured. "Don Pablo —" Nay, thought I, this cannot be he, for black velvet garnished with ermine is only for those of royal blood.

"My faith!" said Don Pablo, for it was no other. "Royal courts are not altogether unlike that far land of which the Scripture tells us, for sooth we are both changed, and in scarce longer than the twinkling of an eye."

"True, I owe you some explanation, lad," he said further, in answer to my puzzled look. "I am the cousin of the king, Don Pablo de Viras."

"De Viras!"

"Ay, none other than the uncle of the Señorita Inez and of that villain Diego. You see now why I said that you were sent — you with your talk, though but in delirium,

of my fair niece Inez — to win me back to that world from which I had fled. Who better can clear these tangled paths than I, the eldest brother of our house. Fear not! Don Diego shall atone for all his misdeeds, and if both of them will, my niece shall be your brother's bride."

"Señor," I said, grasping his hand, "I thank you, and I pray God the Señorita Inez is safe and —" On a sudden I was conscious of some one standing beside me, and turning I saw — Anthony.

There needs no talk of our greeting. Our hearts were too full for words to come thick at first. We held each other close, while Don Pablo stood by smiling benevolently.

"Well, brother," I said at length, "here are we both safe returned and with command of the king's guerdon; for all of which the saints be praised. But come, Sir Knight, I would learn from your lips all that befell you after your taking on the plains of Ildefonso."

"When I came to myself after the fray,

for I had fallen faint from loss of blood," Anthony began, "I was lying on a couch in an old turret room. Bending over me was a short, thick-set man, with a rough but not unkind face, and as he observed me stirring he called to some one in the adjoining chamber. In another moment I saw looking down upon me the gentle brown eyes of the little lad you had saved by the brook Calzado.

"'What place is this?' I asked him, striving to rise.

"My head reeled with even so small an exertion, and the page stroked my brow soothingly, bade me remain quiet, and told the man, who proved to be my gaoler, to bring a draught of wine. This gave me strength, and Carlos then made known to me everything which had happened since the fight, and hearing that you were safe and gone forward with the king's message was like another draught of good wine to me.

"But the stroke I had received in the fray was not soon mended. I required

much care, and no tenderer nurse could an ill man wish than that little lad Carlos. He moved about, clad always in his long, dark mantle, with so light a step, and his words were so cheering, that with such care I must needs have recovered of a much greater ailment.

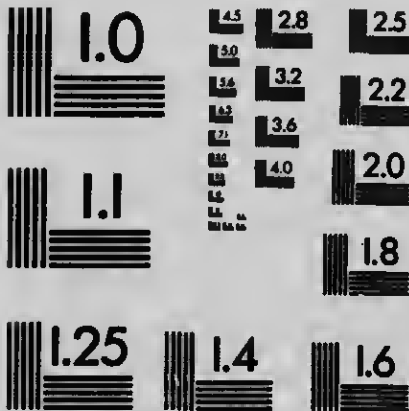
“One day the lad whispered to me that he had provided a means for my escape, and that as Don Diego was daily expected at the castle I must go quickly. That very night, using some strange drug that Carlos gave me to stupefy the gaoler, we both stole forth and with little difficulty gained our freedom.

“Hurrying to Seville we found there Hugh and Humphrey, but the king was gone. As my packet had been stolen from me, I determined to follow him, so leaving the page in Seville I journeyed to the army, reaching the Ebro in time to strike many a good blow for the honour of Castile. I would know of the fate of that gentle page, for I had learned to love the lad,” and Anthony sighed deeply.



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"Mayhap you will see him again," I said, smiling somewhat, "and meantime I have news for you. Don Pedro has consented to your marriage with the señorita."

At this my brother's face—which had greatly changed, being grown paler, thinner, and far older than when I had last seen him—grew dark with so sudden a look of distaste that I exclaimed:

"How now! What means this? Are you not glad that this guerdon is at last obtained?"

"I—" he hesitated; "I shall be faithful to my betrothal vow and marry the señorita, an she will," he said.

At this moment and ere more could be said there came a messenger from the king commanding my brother's presence, and asking me to await his return Anthony hurried away.

I was much distressed in mind, for plainly I saw that the last thing which Anthony wished was that the damsel should hold him to his vow.

Was it that he loved another, and was

my inward struggle and sacrifice for his happiness in vain?

Being near to a curtained recess I stepped therein to ponder over these contrary turns of fate.

“Is the Señor Ingles become so fine a courtier that he has quite forgot his — sister, shall I say?”

At the soft, sweet voice my heart leaped in my breast. There stood my lady clothed in all her loveliness, and lovelier far than I had ever seen her before.

A gown of golden satin heavy with jewels shimmered about her; one tiny hand held her *abanico*;¹ her waving hair was caught beneath her mantilla with a great ruby like a crimson rose.

How well her bravery became her! It seemed to me that I had never before known her, and that this was her proper sphere, from which she should never step. A court lady was she born to be, a princess, haughty and stately, and yet nothing could change the sweetness that lingered about her lovely

¹ Fan.

mouth and played in the glances of her eyes.

I fell on my knees before her and kissed her hand, as always her true homager and servant.

"Rise, Sir Knight that is to be," she said, playfully giving me a tap like an accolade with her closed fan.

"But come," she added, with a sudden pique, "methinks it is but a poor knight who needs to be informed of his lady's presence."

"That I was deep in thought must be my excuse," I pleaded. "Yet an it were not so, might I not well be forgiven if I knew not the lady of degree when I have before seen but the peasant, the would-be nun, and the page?"

"The page?" she said, surprised. "What know you of him?"

"Ah, my lady," I replied, "though one glance may fail, a second may discern something. Besides, had not my eyes an ally in my ears?"

"You speak in riddles, Señor," she said, with a puzzled look—and feeling scarce at

ease with this trend of our talk, I ventured to say boldly :

“ But I have great news for you, Señorita. His Majesty gives a full and free consent to your marriage with my brother.”

Had there lingered in my mind a single doubt that she loved Anthony it would have flown away as I spoke, for so great a glow of lovely maiden blushes overspread her face, that I felt as though I gazed upon something sacred, and I looked away.

For a moment she made no answer, and I saw that her eyes were full of tears, and then, like the sun through shower clouds, her gay humour came again.

“ My faith ! ” she said, merrily, “ and if the Señor Antonio will not have me, what then ? ” She pulled so long and droll a face that I must is laugh.

“ To-day is one for surprises,” she added, “ and I have one for you, Señor. Here is one who loves you best in all the world,” and from a recess behind her she drew a slight graceful boy who ran to me joyously, crying :

“Señor, my own dear Señor! It is I, Carlos!”

I thought myself to have been thrown upon so much adventure of late that nothing could surprise me; but at this so unexpected a sight I could but look from Carlos to the señorita, and from my lady back to the page, in silence and wonder.

When at last I found voice, it was but to stammer, like a fool:

“Then — then there are two of you!”

“Did you think that there was but one, or that each one were a half?” asked my lady, mockingly.

But Carlos, half sobbing, seized my hand and cried:

“Dear master, speak to me! Surely you are not angered that I am here? I grew quite well, and Padre Ignacio brought me hither to seek you. I found my fair cousin —” he stopped, for I had put my hand to my head with such a bewilderment that I must have seemed distraught.

At this the señorita spoke:

“I see it all; you have thought that I was

the page. Señor Ingles, you flatter me" — here she made a little disdainful courtesy — "to fancy that I would don a man's attire, and go about the country to *chozar*¹ a man! You mistake. Carlos is my cousin, Diego's brother, sent with you at my command. Would you know more, ask it of him." With which, making a gesture of displeasure, she turned from me, seated herself beside the window, and taking a piece of chine she began to broider as if the fate of two kingdoms depended upon each stitch.

I turned in despair to Carlos.

"Dear lad, tell me what all this means, and be assured that I rejoice in seeing you."

"Diego, my brother, always hated me," he said simply, though with sorrow, "and after the death of the señor, my father, I was kept like a coostril, clad in lockram, and housed meanly upon a far corner of the estate. At last I could endure it no longer, and ran away to seek the señorita, whom I had ever loved.

"Her I found at San Lucar, and she told me of her betrothal and your strange quest.

¹ Hunt.

"Knowing well that Diego would try to work you evil, she begged me to hasten after and endeavour to take service with you, that I might be upon the watch for danger to her betrothed. This I consented to do, but she spoke in so confused a way of her betrothed as the younger of the Señors Ingles, that I supposed it was yourself and not the Señor Antonio of whom she spoke.

"Rejoicing much that the señor to whom I owed my life was also that one whom I should serve, to keep my promise to my cousin I followed your fortunes.

"The talking of the servants had aided in confusing my mind, and when I learned from your own lips that you were the elder, I left you with sorrow because I must keep my oath to Inez, to aid her betrothed.

"The Señor Antonio rescued, and on his way to join the king, I was free to return to you, to my great joy.

"Dear Señor, may I not always remain with you?" and the boy flung himself at my feet, kissing my hand and clinging lovingly to me. Bidding him rise, I said:

"Thank God that you are well again, and believe that I should like to keep you at my side." Then turning to the señorita, knowing full well that she was in great choler, I spoke sadly:

"I cry you mercy, Señorita! Methinks that I do nothing to your liking. The likeness between you twain was so great it did deceive me. I thought not that you went, as you say, to hunt a man, but only that you feared for the safety of one well nigh your husband. Had such been done for me, I had in truth thought it a lovely deed. Am I forgiven?"

"Nay, I am not angry, Señor," she said, smiling kindly and holding out her hand. "When Carlos came to me to say that your brother was dying in my cousin's prison, and that his life was well nigh ebbd away for want of care, while you were gone upon my affairs, it seemed but just that I should try to send him aid. Carlos and I arranged it all, and the lad cared for him as tenderly as a woman. Did I do well, Señor?"

As I saw the sweet and tender beauty of

her face, my heart gave a great throb. It is easy to talk of conquering affection when the object of one's passion is not at hand, but in the presence of this living, breathing reality my fine theories flew away. I could with difficulty restrain myself as I made answer :

" Well indeed you did, fair lady ; but tell me, how is it that I find you here ? Is my brother acquainted with this fact ? "

" The sight of the Señor Antonio is not so keen as that of his brother," she said with great demureness, though her eyes laughed as though she had some secret jest which much amused her.

" When I was at San Lucar Diego came to me, demanding my hand in marriage. When I refused to listen to his proposals, he flew into so violent a rage that he lost all guard of his tongue, and from his talk I soon learned that he had vowed vengeance against you.

" My servant Juan had been Diego's tool, and when he left us at San Miguel fled to his master to warn him of our journey. To

this treachery we owed the fight upon the river bank, and nearly all the troubles of your journey were of Diego's planning.

"But from my cousin's talk I learned yet another thing, for he let fall unwittingly the news that Doña Costanza, the daughter of the king, was at the court. To her I despatched a trusty messenger. In the few times that I had been at court I was greatly in her favour, and to my joy she recalled me to her side. There I remained, preferring to follow her into exile, rather than return to the life of inaction at San Lucar. All this my aunt the abbess would have told you had you reached the convent before her untimely demise."

"Now all is well explained," I said, my hand on Carlos' shoulder, "and naught remains but for your betrothal to become a marriage and you will be my sister in very truth."

Half unconsciously I gave a heavy sigh, and she looked at me strangely.

"The prospect does not please you, Señor?" she said, slowly.

"Who but should be pleased to have so fair a sister?" I answered, taking her hand in mine in friendly fashion. She said nothing, but as I held the slender fingers lightly I thought I felt a slight pressure upon mine.

I looked up quickly, and there was something — I scarce knew what — within her eyes as she bent her gaze searchingly upon me, which set all the blood tingling through my veins.

I thought I saw a certain quick triumph spring to her face, and mingle there with a lovely tenderness — ah, Heaven! could it be for me? The mere fancy was more than flesh and blood could stand, and I grasped her hand more firmly, crying passionately:

"Ah, my lady, would God you never were my sister!"

Then she drew away from me, all aglow with blushes, and ere I could come to myself and beseech her pardon for my unseemly behaviour a messenger called me to my audience with the king.

CHAPTER XV

THE GUERDON OF THE KING

WHAT a gorgeous sight was that which met my eyes as I advanced within the grand audience chamber on that fair morning in May.

The walls were hung with tapestries so splendid in their Moorish colourings as to dazzle every eye.

A crowd of knights and nobles was assembled, each man in his finest array. There was Sir Hugh Calverly, Sir Eustace d'Anbrécourt, Sir Guiscard d'Angoulême, the Lords Neville, Beauchamp, and Willoughby, the Captal de Buch, and many more of the English retinue who were quite unknown to me.

Besides Don Fernando de Castro I saw the Lord of Calatrava, and scores of those brave Castilian knights who through all his evil fortunes had been faithful to Don Pedro.

As I stood awaiting my turn to be called before the king, who sat upon a dais beneath a superb canopy of gold and surrounded by the hidalgos, Don Pablo stood at my side, with Anthony, and we conversed in low tones.

"I have strange news for you," said the old Don. "Padre Ignacio has but now come from the monastery of San Benito at Valladolid, and he has brought news of my errant nephew. *Alas!* that one of my house should be so base as to dishonour the name he bears! Diego was in the fatal fight at Navaretta, and, wounded severely, he fled for sanctuary to the monastery."

Still further Don Pablo told me of how the abbot implored Don Diego to confess his sins, fearing that he might die impenitent. This and all good counsel he violently refused, but hearing that the priest of San Miguel was within the cloister, he demanded to see him.

"Padre, you know the Señor Ingles?" he asked. "Will you bear a message to him?"

"If I may find him again in all this turmoil," responded the good priest.

"Tell him," said Don Diego, "that I bore him no ill will until he must needs interfere with my plans. I tried to kill him on the plain of Ildefonso, but as I opened his jerkin that my trusty dagger might find a shelter in his heart, I found there the king's packet. I dared not kill a royal messenger, therefore I thought to trace upon the ribbon with my bloody dagger point words which would insure his death at the hands of the Moors.

"Tell him, furthermore, that I shall ever remember him, though at the world's end, for a De Viras never forgets a friend nor an enemy."

Soon thereafter he departed secretly from the monastery, and since the monks heard not to the contrary he must have escaped safely into France.

I marvelled much at this account of Don Pablo, for the matter of the ribbon had ever been one of great mystery to me.

"Upon what a slender thread hangs human life!" said I, to which Don Pablo replied:

"Your thread will break an you ever again meet Diego;" but as he spoke there was a truce to all talking, and a herald brought me to the fore, by crying :

"Andres, Esquire of Pembridge, of Salop in the fair country of England, by the command of His Majesty Don Pedro, by the grace of God, King of Castile and Leon, and Caliph of Cordova and Seville, come forth to receive the most noble order of knighthood!"

Except upon the field of battle it was not mannerly to be knighted without due preparation of fasting and watching one's arms all night, and of this I ventured to remind His Majesty the king, but he resolutely said that he doubted not I had fasted often enough upon his errands, and he willed that I should be knighted on that day in which I had shown to him my faithfulness. At that I made no more demur, and when I heard the call of the herald I went forward to receive the solemn accolade.

"Andres Pembridge, for loyal service done to me and my fair kingdom I desire to do

you honour," said the king. "I dub you knight, in the name of God, Our Lady, and Santiago! Arise, Sir Andres; be faithful, brave, and fortunate!"

He flung about my neck a rich chain of gold, while Anthony, my knight sponsor, girded on my sword. This had a golden handle, the disk-shaped pommel set with a ruby of great price, the quillons sparkling with gems in red and yellow, the colours of the king.

"Sir Knight, well have you kept the honour of your house, and ever fought for God, the king, and thy brother," said Don Pedro, kindly, and glancing again at the sword I was much moved to see engraven upon the hilt our noble motto.

"It is time that you received that reward which you say is more to you than house and lands," the king went on.

"Good cousin of Spain," interrupted a strong but singularly sweet voice, "an you steal from me all my fellow-countrymen I am like to quarrel with you, and that the more an they all be as brave as this new

knight. I pray you, permit me to bestow my spurs upon this faithful gentleman; and for your part, young sir, I do beseech you that you retain some loyalty for your own prince."

Scarce believing my eyes, I saw leaning toward me with a smile of great friendliness a nobleman of lofty stature. His brown hair was cut short as if for a helmet, and his hazel eyes were so frank and winning of look, that one loved them the moment of first looking into them.

The Saracenic Balax which Don Pedro had given to him blazed at his throat; his surcoat of velvet was embroidered with the arms of England, and his own device, three plumes erect and the motto, "Ich Dien."

It needed but this to assure me that it was our own Black Prince who spoke to me, and falling to my knee before him I said, with earnestness:

"An uncle of mine died fighting for your Highness at Crécy, and I would ask no better fate than his."

At this the prince looked at me more kindly still, and turning to Don Pedro he said:

"Fair cousin, I entreat you to deliver up to me this knight."

"Nay, Sir Prince," Don Pedro replied, with something of a frown which I was quick to see, albeit he strove to hide it. "This gentleman is neither captive nor hostage. I can restrain him not. For himself must he choose your service or mine."

"May it please your Majesty," I rejoined, "to serve either of such gracious and mighty lords were an honour for one so lowly as myself, but I crave permission for the nonce to retire to my own country of England, having there awaiting me urgent affairs."

"So be it," said the king, "and now — Hist! methinks I hear the sound of wedding bells!" Saying which he laughed and spoke aside to the prince, who joined him with laughter right merrily.

Beside him there sat a tall, dark man, with a face such as I had never seen for

a certain fierce valour, and as the Black Prince spoke this man said:

"By're Lady, had there been more such squires as this in my company, methinks your Majesty had not found victory so easy at Navaretta," and I coloured high with pleasure, for he who spoke was the great Du Guesclin, whom all France loved as a father. Praise from him was indeed honour for a new-made knight.

In a moment the king turned again and said in a loud voice:

"My lords and señors, Sir Andres Pembridge has demanded for his guerdon the marriage of his brother, Sir Antonio, knighted by me for prowess on the field of battle, to the Señorita de Viras. Sometimes it doth occur that the wills of king and commoner do play at cross purposes, and it is my desire that Sir Andres and not Sir Antonio wed the señorita. Speak, Lady, what say you?"

At this turn, so sudden and unexpected, such astonishment, mingled with indignation at being thus trifled with, seized me that

I could scarce contain myself. Don Fernando seeing my case, laid his head upon my arm and whispered me to be silent.

Then from out the crowd of noble dames there came a voice which well I knew, and which sent the blood coursing through my veins, as it said in tremulous tones:

"Nay, Sire, of a truth I wish to do your will, but is it meet that the maid should be the first to speak?"

"True, true enough," laughed the king. "Señor, hear you this? Will you have the lady for your wife?"

I stepped forward and said:

"Your Majesty, before Heaven, this would I count the greatest happiness in my life, but it may not be! She is troth-plight to my brother."

There was silence for a moment, and then the king, who seemed in a most merry humour, laughed again.

"Mayhap the lady will prove a more puissant pleader than your king," he said at length. "Go to yon turret room and let her choose. With the doncillita's dark

eyes upon your own, I warrant you we'll hear a different tale."

Disobey I dared not, and stepped toward the silken arras which concealed the turret door. But Anthony followed me, detaining me with a hand upon my arm.

"Tell me the truth," he said. "This is no time for concealments. Do you love her?"

"As my own soul," I answered; "but you — I will not take her from you. The betrothal —"

"She was never mine," he interrupted. "The betrothal does not hold. Such can only bind when entered upon with mutual love and the full intent to consummate. The first we never had — she never loved me. Moreover, Don Pablo tells me that Father Ignacio betrothed us under a misapprehension, believing that I was the elder son, and thus her equal in rank. He would never have consented to plight our troth had he supposed me to be a mere knight of fortune. Had the lady loved me, nothing would have persuaded me to be false to her, but

believe me, Andrew, she loves me not. I honour her only as any other fair lady. An she will wed you, take your happiness with a thankful heart."

Almost as in a dream I entered the turret. I dared not raise my eyes, and yet I felt her presence as she moved toward me.

Then she spoke, and there was all her old witchery of drollery in her tones.

"My faith, Señor! Methinks your unmannerly wish that I be not your sister bids fair to be fulfilled!"

"Thank God for that!" I made reply, more boldly than I felt.

"Methinks that you are somewhat scant of courtesy to a poor, lorn maid, whose betrothed seems over ready to break his vows!" The mocking tones trembled a little.

"That matters not—an it be true—which it is not," I made answer. "My brother is not one to break his vows, but there are those who would gladly stand in his stead."

"By my faith, a pretty speech! Methinks the Señor Andres has turned courtier." Her voice had a saucy, upward lift, a coquetry of tone which made my heart sink a little and fear she did but jest with me.

"A courtier but for you, my lady, yet one who dares not speak. She who loved not a better man could scarce love me!" I spoke sally, almost bitterly.

"And who is that 'better man,' *princee*?" she asked, saucily.

"My brother Anthony."

"There be ever two minds about which is the better man of two," she replied, composedly. "Were one to ask of me, I should say, 'He is best for me who loves me best, Sir Faint-heart.'" With that she turned to me with a loveliness of glowing beauty such as I had never beheld in her before.

"You speak not, Señor Andres," she added. "Why? Your tongue is wont to be prompt enough, as I recall. There was that time upon the shallop when you talked to cheer a lonely girl; the moments at San Lucar, when you spoke to assure her of her

betrothed's loyalty; the brook Calzado your words were followed by swift deeds; in the Moorish country, on the sea, through all your life up to the present day you could work and speak and act. Now that your purpose is gained, brave warrior, why stand you here abashed before a girl?"

"Because, my lady," still I dared not meet her eye, "there is that within my heart the which I may not say."

"What! The English knight has feelings of which he is ashamed? Fie!" cried the pretty, teasing voice.

"Not so," I answered, all aflame. "They are the joy as well as the pain of my life!"

"If joy—why pain?" I saw her eyes fixed upon mine with that strange triumph in their depths. I could bear no more.

"Joy—because loving you must be joy; pain—because—" I stopped.

"You love me, then?" she asked.

"I love you with all my soul!" I cried, my whole heart in my voice.

"I love you, Andres!" How softly she breathed the words. The teasing,

tones were changed. The merry girl was gone, and in her place stood the woman, sweet and pure and noble, crowned with the crown of truest love.

But even yet I could scarce believe such great happiness had come to me. "How can it be?" I cried; "Anthony—"

"Oh, Anthony — Anthony — Anthony!" she exclaimed with some impatience. "Ever Anthony! How little you know of women! It is love which begets love within a true woman's breast, Señor! Your brother never loved me — I love him not, save as your brother. I have heard from Carlos the story of your toil for me; yet it is not fair words and wondrous deeds which win a true maid's heart, it is to feel that for weal or woe a man is ever constant, ever kind. This it is that gains a woman's faith. I have loved you ever since you came to me that day upon the shallop. Gentlest knight and truest friend have you ever been to me! I love you, Andres, I love you!"

Bravely, sweetly she said it, albeit her cheek flushed high, and I took both her

hands in mine and held them to my beating heart.

"You will be mine — my wife?" I whispered, drawing her gently to me.

Her answer came lower still, and I clasped her close until I felt her dear heart throb against my own, and knew that she was mine forever.

What more is there to tell?

The years at Hazelcroft speed by in happiness and peace. Carlos, ever my true friend, inherited the De Viras lands, and grew to man's estate, to steal from me my youngest sister for his bride.

Between Anthony and me there has never been a cloud. He leads a busy life; a man of affairs is he, foremost in battle, high in the councils of the king, happy in that mode which best suits his active nature.

My happiness will ever be in my Inez, she who has been to me the one lady in the land.

Our boy, another Anthony, has her eyes and her smile, and it is for him that I have

written these chronicles, that, when all of us are passed away, he may know something of the true nobleness of his mother, and of what befell his uncle and me when fighting for the motto of our house, "God, the King, my Brother."

THE END

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