

Seven Knights; or, Tales of Many Lands. Being Certain Romances

J. H. Ingraham

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The Seven Knights; or, Tales of Many Lands. Being Certain Romancers of Chivalry

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THE STORY OF DON FERNANDO DE VALOR.

At the close of a summer's day, sometime near the end of the fourteenth century, a party of young knights, seven in number, were returning to their several countries from attending a great tournament held in the lists of the Moorish palace of the Alhambra, then occupied by John, king of Castile. This tournament was held in honor of the nuptials of the Prince with the Infanta, and from its magnificence had drawn together the flower of the chivalry of many lands. The company of knights alluded to, consisted of one of Spain, whose castle lay northward, near the Pyrennees; one of France; one of England; one of Germany; one of Rome; of a Scottish knight, and a knight of Venice, all journeying homeward from the jousts, with their esquires and retinues.

At the end of the first day's travel, they pitched their tent near the banks of a pleasant river; and after having removed their heavier armor, and refreshed themselves, holding the whilst much pleasant discourse touching the feats of knighthood that had been done at the tournament, each began to laud the prowess of the chivalry of his own land. After some dispute, it was agreed between them that each should recount some achievement of his own knights; and the palm of knightly honor be awarded to that country which furnished the knight of greatest prowess and skill in arms. The lot to commence the narration, fell upon the Spanish knight, whose name was Don Fernando de Valor, who, though young in years, had performed many deeds of great bravery, both in the lists and in the field.

The rich Castilian moonlight fell pleasantly upon the group of knights seated upon the verdant sward before their tent, the door of which was hung with burnished shields and casques, which gleamed resplendent in its beams, while their spears and lances were stacked in the gleaming moonshine, on either side of the entrance. At their feet was the bright stream beside which they were encamped, moving past in alternate light and shadow, like gliding steel. Behind them reclined their esquires, and others of their retainers, prepared to listen to the recounting of deeds of arms, while farther in the rear, beneath a group of majestic cork trees, were tethered and unharnessed steeds, their steel saddles and chain armor hanging about upon the branches, or piled upon the ground. To the south, the lofty Sierras of Granada, shining with snow, rose sublimely like marble pillars, upholding the sky; and in the midst of this scene, Don Fernando thus began his story.

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE YOUNG COUNT ALARCOS IN WINNING HIS SPURS.'

"The sun of an autumn evening was gilding the towers of Seville, when a youthful knight, attended by a stout esquire, reined up his road-worn steed upon the summit of a hill. Before him, lay the fair city, with its Moorish banners topped with the silver crescent, floating above her battlements. The lofty walls were lined with steel-clad men-at-arms, whose spearheads gleamed in the western sun like points of flame. Encircling the walls, having a fair verdant space of three good bow-shots' breadth between, were pitched the christian tents, looking like a snowy girdle woven with red banners, in which was emblazoned the cross; while burning shields of gold and silver hanging at the numerous tent doors, seemed to the eye of the young cavalier, meet gems for this warlike cincture. Knights in resplendent armor were riding hither and thither; and before the king's tent, which was conspicuous by its height and magnificence, a tournament was in progress; for there were visible, from the distance at which he stood, two knights in shining casques, with scarlet mantles waving in the wind, tilting at each other within lists formed on the green, before the royal tent door; while ladies were discovered seated around, gracing with their presence and beauty this martial pastime.

"Over all the mingled and varied prospect of battlement, tent and plain, of warriors, banners and steel, glowed the refulgence of the mellow sunset, peculiar to the south of Spain, the whole fair scene looking as if bathed in an atmosphere of liquid gold.

"Now, by the golden girdle of our lady of Bivar! but this is a fair sight, good Perico," said the young knight, addressing his attendant, yet without turning his head from the scene. "See how bravely the accursed green banner of the infidel floats over our good christian city of Seville. They are strongly shut up there, and methinks it will be many a long week, ere the cross take the place of the crescent on you high towers. But God wot, our good king will be sure ne'er to leave her gates till he hath the key in his gauntlet."

"And that key, Master Alarcos, will have more steel than iron in it, and a good cross for the handle," said the esquire, speaking through the bars of his shut visor.

"Thou meanest his sword, Perico, and so do I. But save me, if yon camp is not a brave show for a youth who hath never, till now, seen a martial host a-field, larger than a castle's retainers.

"Let us spur! The sun is touching the summits of the Sierras, and I would fain get to the camp ere the night set in."

The two horsemen then put their animals to their speed, and rapidly descended the winding road into the plain, on their way to the christian camp. In the mean while, we will describe their general appearance and bearing. The young cavalier was not above twenty years of age, and of handsome person, and possessed a noble, though youthful countenance. His hair was of a rich dark brown hue, and escaping beneath his blue riding bonnet, flowed in waves over his shapely shoulders. His eye was large, full, and very dark, and, while he surveyed the embattled plain beneath, beamed with the proud spirit of ambitious youth, while his cheek flushed with excitement and hope. He was clad in a suit of russet link armor, that yielded to his body as pliantly as the velvet surcoat he wore above it. His fine neck was bare, save that a white linen band, clasped by a cross of diamonds, encircled it close to the border of his surcoat. A short horseman's mantle hung loosely off his left shoulder, and his mailed boots were encased in buff-colored overhauls of chamois leather. At his belt, in a steel scabbard, hung a sword, with a jewelled cross for the hilt. He carried in his uncovered hand, an ivory riding switch, to which was attached a white silken ribbon. His gauntlets hung dangling by their chain wristbands over his saddle-bow, on which also was suspended a light shield, richly embossed and inlaid, and bearing for its device the crest and talons of a black eagle. His casque hung by its chainlets, also to his saddle, while his esquire carried his spear and the heavy war garniture, needful for camp service. The horse of the young knight was securely mailed in scale armor for the breast and head, and in chain armor for his body. Though slight of limb, and elegant rather than strong, he was harnessed like a knight's steed intended for service; and the youth himself, though wearing a jewelled throat clasp, and displaying diamonds on his sword hilt, was harnessed like an experienced warrior, rather than like young cavaliers of his age and day, who much delighted to glitter in gowns of soye with gold profusely ornamenting their arms and armor; wore gloves of kid skin delicately perfumed within their gauntlets, and donned bonnets

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when the helmet was laid aside, richly brodered and set off with gay and flaunting plumes. His man-at-arms was all in iron; no gold was upon his crest or crosslet, but from gauntlet to heel he sat upon his steed a bulwark of iron mail; while his stout brown steed was black with the heavy proof mail that was laid upon him.

The young knight was the youthful count Alarcos, nearly allied to the royal blood of Castile. He had passed his youth in retirement with his mother, who only the week previous, had given her consent that he should don armor and join the king's army at the leaguer of Seville. Sad had been the parting between the noble parent and the young soldier; and when we now encounter him on his way, though three days' journey have separated him from his paternal roof, the thoughts of her lonely state in the castle of Lanuza had cast such a heavy cloud over his spirits that the sight of the christian camp and the beleaguered city alone had power to dissipate it.

The road by which they descended the summit, wound for some distance along the mountain side, and ere it turned into the valley towards the camp, approached within long cross-bow shot of the walls, so that travellers at that point were placed in great danger from any bolt sped from the battlements. There was no way to turn aside from this menacing peril, as a precipice rose to a great height on one hand, and a deep and angry river foamed on the other. The only alternative, therefore, was to ride bravely forward, or turn cowardly back, and gain the camp by going many leagues about and approaching it from the south quarter. This peril the young count and his esquire did not discover until they came near the bottom of the hill, when they saw several travellers on horseback, and peasants on mules, grouped beneath a large cork tree that overhung the way, and seeming to be in fearful and anxious consultation. The young knight and his esquire were riding by them at a round pace, when one of them, who by his costume and the bales with which his nag was laden, was a *bujonero*, or travelling merchant, rode out into the path, and said, in a loud tone of warning.

"Hold rein, fair knight, and you my good esquire, for there is peril in the way. We were journeying toward the christian camp, and on our way, not many paces in advance, we were shot at from the walls, and one of our number was wounded. He lies there beneath the tree, where you see the group, nigh his death, without priest to shrive him. So we turned bastily back, and are in consultation what to do. If you ride forward, brave cavalier, you will surely be shot with a shaft a good yard and ell long. We have commodities in our packs for the king's camp, and sorry are we our way is stopped."

"Thou, thyself, dealest in yards and ells, *bujonero*; therefore, thou should'st little heed thine own measuring rods, though the Moor may give something more honest length of measure in his steel-headed yard than thou and thy craft are wont to dispense to thy customers. But," added the young cavalier, riding a little forward, where an opening through the trees gave him a view of the walls, towering skyward, and of the road before him, after passing near them, making an abrupt turn up the valley, "the highway, as you say, cometh full nigh to you battlements. By the red rood! But there is temptation for a maiden knight to win his spurs by a little bold venture. See the green turbans, and the serried spear-heads how they bristle above the rampart. They are watching us Perico. I can see their glittering eyes even at this distance! "Heaven save us," said the pedler; "if they should make a sally from yonder gate—"

"Thy rich goods then," said Count Alarcos, laughing, "would shortly deck the infidels' bodies; and thy head and those of thy comrades grace the iron pinnacles of yonder gate-head."

"Holy Saint Peter and his sword defend us," exclaimed the *bujonero* in alarm, which was equally shared by the promiscuous company with which he travelled; and laying his staff stoutly across his nag's back, he took the lead of a general escapade that soon left the knight and his esquire sole occupants of the spot.

"There goes a brave company of christians," said the esquire, "first calling on Saint Peter's sword for aid, and then trusting to their beasts' legs for safety. We are well rid of them. Now, good master, how shall we get to the king's camp without being shot at like deer, from the walls?"

"I do confess, Perico, that I should have been better pleased had the road given wider space for the Moor's shafts to fly across. As it is we may not turn back like you scampering horde of Jews, pedlars and other money-getting rogues. Let us keep the road at an easy trot, like cavaliers journeying unsuspecting of danger. It will be a far shot-bolt that reaches us, and we can so watch them as they fly, as to receive them in time upon our shields. Let us on, but not quicken our pace one jot beyond the ordinary gait of travellers."

"Our Lady guard you, my noble master," said the esquire. "It is a dangerous ride we have to take, but I would rather see thee perish, and lie myself by thy side, than have thee turn back for a Moorish lance."

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"At my first outset in a knightly career, it might never be without infamy. Were an old and tired soldier here, he could choose his own way without dishonor. My way lies in the path before me. Let us on, good Perico, putting our trust in Heaven."

"Don your casque, my lord, and brace your shield," said the esquire, as they prepared to move forward.

"No, I will ride in unsuspecting guise. If danger come I will be soon ready."

Thus speaking, the fearless and adventurous young knight, true to the principles of chivalry, which enjoin its devotees to court rather than turn aside from danger that lay in the path, rode easily forward, followed a few paces behind by his faithful esquire. They soon came to the foot of the hill, and entered upon the level ground, over which the road wound, approaching in one of its angles very near the walls. They trotted forward some time in silence, intently watching the battlements lined with armed Moors, over whose heads floated the standard of the Prophet.

"I yet hope to live, my good Perico," said the young cavalier, as the shadow of a tower before them fell across their road, "to see the day, when yon green banner, with its haughty crescent, emblem of a false faith, shall no more flash back the setting sun's beams in all the fair land of Spain. How calmly the blue sky bends above it! Methinks over the standard of the infidel, the heavens should ever lower black and menacing. But God is good; and, as the priests tell us, hath wisdom in sending rain and sunshine, both upon Christian and infidel!"

"He hath put their judgment into the Christians' hand," said the esquire, devoutly; "and he who slayeth an infidel doeth God service. Don your helm, my lord, I see them fitting shafts to their cross-bows. We are now within range."

"Nay," said the young Count, stoutly, "I will not, by taking precaution, show the Moor that I fear danger ere danger come." They had now arrived where the road made the nearest approach to the wall, and where blood upon the ground, and a broken arrow lying near, indicated the spot where the companion of the *bujonero* had fallen.

"These peddling varlets were full bold to come thus near a leaguered city with its walls bristling with steel points," said the knight; "but these men will, for a score or two of *bezants'* value of merchandise, peril life and limb. Shall not, then, forsooth, a cavalier, for his country, his faith, and his knightly troth, put himself in jeopardy. How is this? They have suffered us to ride on, unmolested, for full three hundred paces. Do they mistake us for their own?"

"They have ell yards for trading pedlers, and knight's weapons for knights," said the esquire; "for see, my lord! Yonder gate, before us, is thrown open, and there ride forth two — nay five knights. Let us spur ere they place themselves across our path between us and the Christian camp."

"Nay, good esquire," said Count Alarcos, turning his looks quietly towards the sally port, whence a company of five Moorish knights had issued. "Neither let us press nor slacken speed. They have withheld their cross-bow-men's shafts to give us reception due to our degree. We will not refuse their hospitality, but meet them."

"'Tis too great peril, my good lord; and I did swear upon my sword's crosslet to thy lady mother as well not to advise thee to peril, as to defend thee from danger. Let us ride forward while the way is open. See! to the king's camp is not a third of a mile, and we can soon reach it in safety."

"Nay, I have never seen a Moor close at hand, and fain would gratify my curiosity. But I will not meet them without knightly covering to my head."

Thus saying, the young count removed his woolen cap, and placing his helmet upon his head, closed the vizor. He then braced his shield to his arm, received from his esquire his lance, and placing it in easy rest, rode on as before. In the meantime, the Moorish knights had left the gate, and galloping across the plain, drew rein, and stood in the path by which the Count and his esquire were approaching.

The advance of the knight and his esquire by the road beneath the walls, had been observed from the Christian camp, and much interest was awakened by their quiet and easy journeying in the face of such danger.

"By my halidom," said the king, as his attention was drawn to them by one near him while watching the jousts before his tent, "but yonder cavalier taketh it coolly. The Moors do not molest him. He hath a charm. See! the cross-bow-men are levelling their shafts, yet they do not launch them! Who knoweth yonder gallant knight?"

No one replied; when the princess Beatriz, his daughter, whose attention had also been drawn from the lists by the approach of the two horsemen, said, "He is youthful by his figure and carriage, sire, and doubtless hath come

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to offer service in our camp."

"He is a brave gallant. Look, caballeros! the gates are thrown open, and five knights come forth to withstand his journey. Now heaven favor his escape from the infidel."

"See, he flies not, sire!" said the beautiful Beatriz, who with her ladies, as well as all the knights present, had turned their attention from the now neglected lists, to watch the single knight's adventure.

"No, by the mass," cried Ferdinand, "he hath donned his casque and braced his shield; and now his esquire, fearless as his master, delivereth to him his lance. 'Fore God he doth mean to give them battle. He thinketh one Christian knight an even match for five infidels. I would I knew him. But such a brave cavalier must not fall by such odds. Ho! what four knights will take stand by his side and help him give good account of these Moors?"

The king had hardly spoken ere half a score of cavaliers were in the saddle, lance in rest.

"Hold!" cried the princess; "whoever he be, let him have, alone, the honor of the field he hath so bravely challenged. If he be unhorsed, then, brave knights, hie ye swift to his rescue."

"Aye," said the king, "if he wanted help he would make a signal. Let him have the achievement. If he fall he could never do so in a better fray. But, by my crown, if he do get worsted, you infidel crew shall pay for his life, if I have to take stirrup in person."

In the meanwhile, the object of so great interest in the christian camp, all eyes in which were watching him, rode on, with his visor down and lance in rest, at the same quiet pace he held before the Moors appeared. He came within fifty paces of them, and seeing that they quite closed up the beaten path, he coolly turned his horse aside and took the sword, but neither quickening nor slackening his pace. Steadily he rode on, as unmoved as if turning out of the way to avoid a slough or mule drove that blocked the road. The Moors, all five tall and iron harnessed knights, had their visors raised and lances levelled. As he approached so coolly, and turned aside so quietly, they surveyed him with surprise, wondering, and expecting that each moment he should charge them or turn to flee. In this expectation, and deceived by such unwonted conduct, they had let him ride till he and his esquire were abreast of them; when seeing that he would escape, one of them raised the Moorish war cry and charged upon him.

"The villains have some courtesy," said the king as he beheld this. "If they set upon him but one at a time, I do not fear but he will make them bite the dust. He is but a slight person — but God wot! but he has a true soul. There rolls the Moor upon the ground, horse and rider! Brave lance! skilful knight!" and a shout rung the air from the christian camp.

Two more of the Moors, then furiously charged the victorious young Count Alarcos, one of whom his trusty esquire unhorsed and slew, the knight himself, after breaking his lance, and taking his sword, overthrowing the other.

"Alla-il-allah!" shouted the remaining two Moors, and both rode against the youth, who for a few moments was engaged with them ere his esquire could extricate his sword from a crevice in the mail of him he had slain, and come to his aid.

The contest was brief, but terrific, and fatal to the Moors; and Count Alarcos and his stout esquire, taking from the conquered infidels their swords and shields, as trophies of their prowess, left them, two of them slain and three of them wounded, lying at length upon the path where they had drawn themselves up to oppose their progress.

"Now by the iron sword of El Cid," cried the king, with animation, having, with his nobles and knights around him, witnessed with intense interest the issue of this contest, "Christian knighthood hath had honor this day! Ride forward, knights, and meet the victor, lest the Moors sally forth to avenge on him their foul dishonor. 'Fore Heaven! but he and his esquire ride on their way again at the same easy pace as if they had not rode over the bodies of five infidels! But see, he turns back!"

Count Alarcos had not proceeded far towards the camp when he discovered that in the contest he had lost his ivory riding switch, with the white silken ribbon appended to it. When he learned this, he stopped his horse and turning round, said to his esquire, "I must not purchase knightly honor at the expense of filial faith, good Perico. The scarf was given me by my noble mother as a guerdon and memento at parting from her not four days since. I could not lose it so soon, and did I not make the effort to recover it, I should be unworthy to replace it by a maiden's gift. I must go back. Halt thou here."

"Nay, I shall not leave thee, my noble master. But let us hasten and return at speed — for the Moors will be upon us."

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"To please thee I will ride at thy own pace." Count Alarcos and his esquire then galloped back, and notwithstanding, when the Moors on the walls saw them returning, they darkened the air with arrows, they kept on their course. The bolts, save two, fell far short of them; one of these piercing the neck of Perico's horse, inflicting a slight wound; the other striking against the Count's shield, and falling, its force being nearly spent, harmlessly to the ground. On reaching the spot, they saw that one of the Moors had raised himself up and was stanching with his mantle, a wound in his side. Near him, on the ground, stained with drops of blood, lay the white ribbon and switch, Count Alarcos ventured so much to recover. He dismounted, and taking it up, pressed it to his lips, breathing his mother's name.

"Now let us to horse and spur to preserve the glory won this day," said his esquire. "A troop of Moorish knights, seven in number, are galloping from the gates towards us."

"Count Alarcos turned his head and seeing them approaching, mounted his horse, saying,

"Softly, good esquire, let us not hasten our pace, but ride at ease. Shall we one moment conquer, to flee the next? Those who come are but Moors, like those we have just overthrown. If there be two more, there will be two more swords and two more shields to carry away as trophies."

"This is rash, my lord."

"It is cowardly to fly. I am just entering upon achievements of knighthood, and while I am a Christian knight and Castilian gentleman, I will never save my life by turning my back. They shout and mock us! Let us turn and face them."

The party of Moors were galloping furiously towards the two horsemen, when, seeing them stop and turn towards them, they were surprised at their fearlessness; and suddenly reining up, seemed to hold a consultation. In the meanwhile, Count Alarcos and his esquire, with their faces towards their foes, backed their horses, and in this way, stop by step backwards, moved in the direction of the royal camp. The king, seeing their bold procedure, recalled the knights that were going forth, and bade them wait the issue. "It were a pity," he said to his nobles, "so brave a knight should not have all the honor this propitious day chooses to bring him. By the rood! I look to see him charge and discomfit the whole seven infidels and despoil them of their armor; when he shall be called the knight of the Twelve shields."

The Moors, after a few moments' deliberation, turned their horses' heads and rode to the spot where their friends lay. A loud shout of triumph hereupon broke from the Christian host, while the silence of the Moors crowding the battlements indicated their chagrin.

"Now, by my kingly faith, I will ride forth and meet this champion who hath done such honor this day to knighthood, and brought such glory to the Christian arms," said Ferdinand.

"I will accompany thee, royal sire," said the princess Beatriz, and with my own hands reward his chivalry."

The king forthwith took horse and so did his daughter, and at the head of a troop of knights they rode forth the camp to meet and receive the unknown knight. When the Count Alarcos saw the approach of the king, whom he knew by his stately bearing and the fashion of his helmet, as well as by the rank and circumstance of power with which he was attended, his modesty would not let him harbor the thought that it was to do him honor that this royal procession advanced. He therefore said to his esquire,

"We will turn aside, good Perico, and so avoid this meeting with such royal and knightly company, in our present soiled and way-worn condition; for, what with travel and fighting, we are in unseemly plight. I would fain present myself with my mother's letter before the king in a more befitting fashion. So we will ride aside."

Ferdinand divining this intention by seeing them turn their horses to the left as if to gain the camp by another direction, sent two gentlemen forward, who conveyed to him in courtly phrase, the king's command that he and his esquire should forthwith ride forward in his presence.

Blushing with embarrassment, the brave Count Alarcos, bidding his esquire keep close to him, rode forward between the two gentlemen, wondering what the king should want; for his humility would not let him believe that he had done aught beyond a true knight's duty, and had thus merited reward. The king, seeing him advance, rode forward to meet him; the princess riding on a milk-white palfrey by his side.

"I will reverse my shield, and the king shall not know me by its device," said the Count to himself; for as yet I know not the reception I shall have at his hands, as there hath been long coldness between him and my noble mother."

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"Thou art welcome, stranger knight," said king Ferdinand. "Thou hast achieved deeds this day worthy of Rodrigo de Bivar, the Cid, of whose blood I will be sworn, thou hast something in thy veins. Thou art welcome to our camp, and to honor thy valor, which we have witnessed, we have come out to meet thee. Wilt thou lift thy visor that we may know what renowned knight we have with us."

"My noble leige," replied the youthful Count Alarcos, surprised yet pleased at this gracious reception from his sovereign, "I fear when thou shalt know my name, and that I have for the first time drawn a maiden sword to win my spurs, thou wilt repent the honor thou hast unwittingly done an unknown youth."

"Ne'er a bit! for if thou art young, so much more is thy credit. Lift thy visor."

The youthful warrior raised the bars of his visor, and showed the beholding king and admiring princess the modest and conscious face of a youth of scarce twenty summers. The king gave utterance to a round oath of surprise, and Beatriz, with the ladies attending her, uttered exclamations of delight; while the nobles and cavaliers around in various ways manifested their astonishment that such achievements as they had beheld, should have been performed by a beardless youth.

"Thy face, as well it may be, for its youth, is unknown to me," at length spoke Ferdinand. "What device bearest thou?"

Count Alarcos turned his shield and the king beheld the Black Eagle's crest and talons, the insignia of the royal house of Castille.

"By the holy rood!" he exclaimed, "this device and thy deeds prove thee none else than the son of my royal cousin, that brave knight Perez Garci, Count of Alarcos. Art thou he?"

"I am, my leige," answered the Count, with diffidence at being the centre of so many observing eyes. "I bear for your royal hands this packet from the Countess of Alarcos."

"Then hast this hour ennobled even thy proud lineage, noble and youthful Count. Thou art from this day a part of our royal household and near my person. Give him thy hand, daughter, for he is thy blood cousin. I will also honor him."

The princess, scarce nineteen, extended her hand to the young knight, who reverently pressed his lips to it; and then Ferdinand dismounting, unbuckled his own spurs, and placed them with his own royal hands upon the iron heel of the Count, who fain would have withheld him from conferring upon him so great an honor.

"Now, knight in deed as well as in courtesy and by birth; come thou to sup with us in our tent and tell me of my cousin, the fair Countess; who hath so many years absented herself from court, we had well nigh forgot her. But we forgive her since she sends thee her representative. Pray thee, why didst thou return after thou and thy trusty esquire had overthrown the Moors? I would fain know, for mere bravado could not make so brave a man thrust himself back where he might endanger the laurels so nobly won?"

"To recover this silken scarf which I had missed, and which had fallen upon the ground in the fray."

"The gift of some true maiden — thou art loyal in love as well as brave in war," said the king, smiling.

"Nay, my leige," answered the youth, coloring, "I shall ne'er think of love till I achieve something worthy a maiden's regard. The scarf is my mother's parting gift, and I would not lightly lose it where a few paces return would restore it to me."

"Better still! By my knighthood thou art a good son, and filial honor is great knightly merit, for he who honoreth his mother is worthy of a mistress. Beatriz, were it not a shame to thee and thy ladies that so true a knight should were only a mother's gage?"

"Fair cousin," said Beatriz, with downcast eyes, as he rode by her side, the king being on the other hand, "you, who have so gallantly preserved a mother's memento, knowest how to defend that of a maiden princess. Receive this scarf and wear it in honor of her who bestows it. For never braver knight wore maiden's favor."

Thus speaking, the princess removed from her throbbing bosom her blue scarf, and with a blush of virgin shame and pride, cast it across his mailed breast.

"Gallantly and fairly done, daughter," said Ferdinand. "Behold! knights and gentlemen, the reward beauty bestows upon valor. Now let us enter our royal tent, fair cousin, and there we will listen to what thou mayst have to say touching this thine adventurous visit to us."

Thus speaking, the King and Beatriz escorted Count Alarcos into the royal tent, where a kingly entertainment was provided, at which, after taking a luxurious bath and changing his coat of mail for a velvet robe, he sat down on Ferdinand's right hand; the princess, whose stealing glances betrayed her deepening interest in him, being

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seated on the left.

Late at night he was conducted to a tent prepared near by for him, where his faithful and happy esquire Perico, waited to receive him and perform his duties as esquire to his person. Bewildered by the distinguished reception he had met with, the young knight threw himself upon a sumptuous couch; and while listening to the tales in his praise which Perico averred he had heard from every lip, he fell asleep dreaming that the princess Beatriz was carried off by seven Moorish knights, and that he and Perico had rescued her and brought her back to the camp, for which deed the king gave him her hand in marriage, she having beforehand, as he dreamed, given him her heart.

THE STORY OF THE SIEUR LOUIS DE LINANT.

She was a comely maiden, she was surpassing fair,
All loose upon her shoulders hung down her golden hair;
From head to foot her garments were white as white could be,
Oh, ne'er to fairer ladye hath knight e'er bent the knee,

Old Spanish Ballad.

When Don Fernando de Valor, the Spanish knight, had ended his tale, there arose a general murmur of approbation, not only from the six knights, but also from their esquires, who had listened with no little pride and satisfaction to the account given of the doughty deeds of the faithful and brave Perico, and which they took most account of, he being of their degree. When the knights had each of them spoken his opinion of the achievement of Don Alarcos, and greatly admired his valor and modesty, and his honorable reception of the king and the princess, and were in their hearts ready to give the palm of honor to Spain for excellence in knighthood, up rose the French knight, who had not yet spoken, and said:

'The tale of our knightly brother of Spain hath been listened to with that attention its entertainment, and the heroic deeds it recounted, demanded; and all have been full ready to bestow on Don Alarcos the praise due to gallant deeds. But he, alone, is a true knight, who is one not only in arms but in honor; who not only can do achievements of renown, but maintain the purity of his name and fame till death. One blot can deface an escutcheon, though emblazoned in gold with the deeds of a long life of knightly valor. This Don Alarcos were well worthy to represent Spanish chivalry, and give it the palm by this deed of his, over that of other lands, did his life not furnish an act that should not only set aside what he hath herein done, but blot his name from the roll of chivalry.'

The knights heard with surprise this address of Sieur Louis de Linant, and wondered much what dishonor a young knight with so brave a beginning, could have been guilty of, that should degrade his fair fame; and all eyes were turned towards Don Fernando. This cavalier was not a little hurt at Sieur de Linant's words, and looking haughtily around, at length said:

'If the Sieur de Linant can lay aught to the charge of Don Alarcos, whose deeds I have just narrated, in proof of the superior prowess of the knights of Spain, disparaging his knighthood, I will withdraw my challenge for the laurels of chivalry for Spain, and let that country take them, which shall, in the issue, better prove its title thereto. Let the Sieur de Linant tell this tale of his, that shall render Don Alarcos's claim unworthy of your countenance.'

After some little debate, it was agreed that Sieur de Linant should, the next evening, when they were encamped, give them the story, on hearing which, they were to decide whether Don Ferdinand should or no, give up his claim in Don Alarcos's behalf. The knights then retired to rest within the tent, for the story of Don Alarcos, and their subsequent discourse thereupon, had consumed much of the space between sunset and midnight.

The following evening, after having quartered within the walls of a ruined and roofless castle, once belonging to the Moors, they seated themselves, after supper, beneath a broken arch, through which the moonlight streamed in broad beams of silvery fulgence, bringing into bright light the knights, but leaving in black shadow the esquires, horses and armor. A dark forest stood around the castle; and through the arch in the distance could be discerned an oval lake, lying like a gigantic shield of silver, at the foot of a dark mountain; and with this fair scene before them, the Sieur de Linant thus began his story, which he called 'THE KNIGHT OF TWO BETROTHALS, OR THE FAIR GERTRUDIS DE ROQUEBETYN.

'As the tale I have to relate,' said the French knight, courteously looking around, and speaking in an agreeable voice, 'has for its hero this Garci Perez, Count of Alarcos, I shall take up the story but a few months subsequent to his achievement with the five Moors; and as the lady of the tale was related to one of my remote ancestors, I have reason to know the particulars of the incidents I am about to narrate.

It was a dark and tempestuous night, about five months after the reception of Count Alarcos by the king and

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princess, as hath been faithfully related by Don Ferdinando de Valor, that Gertrude, the fair, blue-eyed daughter of the Vicompte de Roquebetyn, was awakened from sleep by the bursting in of her lattice. At first she was greatly alarmed, for fear of mischief; but hearing the tempest howl about the castle, and seeing the lightning and hearing the thunder roll, she knew it was the wind which had made such violent entry into her chamber. She rose, and casting a white dressing robe about her, sat on the bed-side, too much agitated at the terrific tempest raging without, to sleep. Not wishing to call her attendant, who slept in the adjoining closet, she sat alone watching the sublime spectacle of a midnight storm among the passes of the Pyrennes, for near them was situated the castle of the Count Roquobety. A faint lamp that hung near her bed's head, cast upon her person its soft light. She was not more than eighteen summers old, a sweet bud just blooming into flower. Her eyes were blue like the sky in a June afternoon, when no wind is stirring. Her hair, escaped from her cap, fell upon her ivory shoulders in abundant tresses, a river of gold flowing over a bank of lilies. Her complexion was like the snow of the Sierras, when warmed and glowing into life by the rosy sunshine of a Florentine autumn. Her mouth was the model of Love's bow, and two dimples on either cheek were filled with his arrows. Her figure was slight and spirited, reminding the beholder of a gazelle or an antelope, ready to fly on discovering the hunter. Her hand, as she folded together the front of her virgin bosom, was like pearl moulded into a hand; and so delicately veined was it, so rosy the nails, that you would have sworn a master's cunning pencil had been drawing and tinting the finished workmanship; for ne'er in woman was ought before seen so sweetly perfect. Her foot, which was now thrust into a broided slipper, was the peer to her hand, and both were the standard of the divine shape which her envious robes hid from mortal eyes. Such was the outward seeming of the lady Gertrudis de Roquebetyn. Her mind was finished by the graces of maidenly scholarship, such as befitted her birth and sex, while her heart was the throne of all that is gentle, and noble, and good. She was spirited and fearless, like her noble father, and patient, religious, and full of affection, like her deceased mother. No Arabian bulbul e'er sang with sweeter strain than she, no troubadour but composed songs in her praise.

As yet she had appeared neither a court nor tournament; a few weeks only having clapsed since her sire withdrew her from the convent of *Nuestra Senora de la Pena*, where she had been placed from early girlhood. Her heart—nay, she hardly knew she had one, save for happiness, as the birds have—was free and untouched by love's sweet and painful emotion. Yes, there was one object she loved—her singing-bird, Froilan. She was a bright, pure flower of the mountain cliff, which had budded and blown unseen.'

'Happy the good knight who should be so blessed, as to find it and wear it on his own bosom,' said Sir Henry Percie, the English knight. 'I do know in England a Grace Plantagenet, who answereth thy description of Gertrudis de Roquebetyn But I interrupt thy tale, and so crave thy pardon, fair knight.'

'While the maiden sat upon her bed-side, listening to the wild voices of the sweeping blast, as it went shrieking by, she thought she distinctly heard a man's shout, mingling with the tempest. She bent her ear, shrinking within herself the whilst, and again heard it, as if calling for aid from without the gate that led to the pass of the mountains. Knowing no fear, she left her bed-side, and hastened to the fallen casement and looked forth. All was dark, and she waited for a flash of lightning to reveal objects; in the meanwhile the voice rose distinctly to her ear, and she could hear the words,

'Shelter, for the sake of the Virgin, for a knight and his retinue.'

At the instant, a bright flash revealed to her, standing beyond the draw-bridge, which her window commanded, a small party of horsemen in armor, upon which the red glare of the lightning vividly gleamed. Obeying the generous impulse of her feelings, the fearless maiden waved her hand, and shouted back that they should be admitted; but finding the wind bore her voice away ere it reached them, she bethought herself of her lamp, and getting it, she hung it high in her window, as a token of their having been heard. The signal was answered by a glad shout from the storm-beset party. Gertrudis, then waking her maids, bade them call up her father, while she hastened to the porter's lodge to rouse him to unbar the castle gates and raise the draw-bridge. It was not long before the party were admitted, and refreshments having been set before them by order of the hospitable master of the castle, they, being four in number, a knight, his esquire, and two men-at arms, were lodged as became their degree.

The lady Gertrudis did not delay, after waking the porter, to see the entrance of the travellers, but happy at having been instrumental in affording shelter from such a fearful tempest, amid so wild a country, to those in need of it, she hastened back to her chamber, and was not long in going to sleep.

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It was late the next morning when she awoke, and as she opened her eyes, she was conscious of having been awakened by a song, which some one was still singing in a rich but careless voice, upon the terrace below her casement. A single reflection brought the events of the past night to her recollection, and with a conscious emotion of she knew not what feeling, she rose and stole, with a fluttering heart, to the window. The storm had passed away, and the sun shone with dazzling splendor. Did the maiden hope—did she believe she should see the strange knight for whom she had obtained shelter? The deep, rich voice, thrilled to her soul as she listened, arresting her timid steps at a little distance from the casement, as the singer seemed to be pacing to and fro, directly beneath it. Thus he sang: `My ornaments are arms, My pastime is in war, My bed is cold upon the wold, My lamp yon star. `My journeyings are long, My slumbers short and broken; From hill to hill I wander still, Kissing thy token. `I ride from land to land, I sail from sea to sea; Some day more kind I fate may find, Some night kiss thee!—"

The voice was sweet, and the cancionero was idly sung; but the words told Gertrudis that the voice was not sweet for her, e'en if he was, as she believed while she listened, young and handsome. Softly she approached the casement and leaned over. Beneath her, about twelve feet, stood a young cavalier, without helm or bonnet, his dark brown hair falling in ringlets over the jewelled collar of his cuirass, which was of Milan steel. He was tall and elegant in person, but his face she could not discern, as it was turned from her as well as beneath her. He was leaning against the casement of his sleeping apartment, which opened upon the terrace that overlooked the mountain passes, and commanded a far prospect of a valley dotted with hamlets, and snow-white *casae*. He was gazing musingly upon the scene, and watching the foaming torrents raised by the rains, rushing downward from the hills. The air which he had just sung was yet lingering on his lips, in a scarce audible humming of the notes.

The curiosity of the maiden was excited, and she became interested to learn who was this stranger guest; for she knew full well that he must be the knight who had been driven to the castle by the storm. In the casement hung a cage containing a favorite *ruisenor*, who, at her presence, trilled his voice in a few glad notes, which drew the attention of the knight, who, looking up, whistled a gay air, as if inviting the songster to imitate it. He at the same time stepped back to have a better view of the bird, when he caught sight of the skirt of the maiden's white robe, who had lingered to throw a few seeds to her favorite.— He now stepped farther along the terrace to get sight of the wearer, when the lady Gertrudis looking down, beheld him gazing upward. Blushing at being discovered, she hastily fled into her room, with the image of the handsomest youth impressed upon her mind she had ever looked upon or dreamed of. Her little heart seemed too large for her bosom, it throbbed so, between shame, pleasure, and the novelty of the new and undefined feelings the sight of a handsome young knight is likely to awaken in the breast of a susceptible young maiden, who has been all her life buried in a convent.

She had hardly retreated to her toilet-table to arrange her hair and person, consciously with greater care than ever before, ere she heard a rushing sound past her window, and turning with alarm, she saw her bird shrinking terrified upon the balustrade of her casement, from the swoop of a hawk which had just swept by. Flying to the relief of the bird, whose door she had just left open in her hurried retreat from the window, she had nearly placed her hand upon the little trembler, when the hawk returned, and with an unerring flight pounced upon him, and seizing him in his talons, bore him screaming through the air towards the cliffs. In her anxiety and distress she quite forgot herself and her exposure in her robe du chambre, to the gaze of the knight. He, however, having been the witness of the scene, and divining that the bird was the pet of the maiden whom he had discovered, had, after the first swoop of the hawk, begun to climb the stone abutments of the window, to rescue the bird when it was borne off. Surprised, as well he might be, at the surpassing beauty of the lady, as she now appeared at the casement, with her snowy arms outstretched towards her lost bird, he felt too much sympathy for her distress, and too deep an interest, on her account, in the fate of the bird, to regard her, at such a moment, with more than a hasty glance, which was, however, sufficient to inflame his bosom with love.

`My bird—bird—my poor Froilan!' cried Gertrudis, standing in her balcony with tears in her eyes, and her hair dishevelled over her bosom.

`Fear not. I will rescue him, unhurt, lady,' said the knight instantly disappearing within his casement. The poor maiden beheld the hawk soar higher and higher in wheeling circles, with Froilan in his talons, and then uttering a fierce cry, shoot off towards the cliff, in the top of a scathed pine, upon which was visible his eyrie, distant a third of a mile from the castle. In a few moments, ere the hawk had reached half way to his destination, the distressed Gertrudis beheld the young knight galloping from beneath the archway of the castle, followed by two

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cross-bow-men afoot. He pursued the direction taken by the falcon, whom his quick eye had discovered making for his lofty perch. Waving his hand to lady Gertrudis, and lightly bringing it to his lips, he dashed forward in chase. The eyes of the maiden followed his wild course, with intense interest. Now he disappeared in a ravine, now his snowy plume waved above the ridge of a low hill; now he was fording a torrent—her prayers for his safety following him—now he was climbing the precipice beyond. As she watched him, her anxiety for Froilan was lost in her fears for his safety.

'The Virgin protect the noble youth,' she cried, clasping her hands together as she saw his horse twice fall with her rider! 'Oh I would rather lose Froilan, than so brave a knight should come to harm, in his generous efforts to rescue him! Poor bird! he is dead by this time, from fright, even if the sharp talons of the halcon have not pierced him. The bird hath nearly reached his eyrie! The bowman—shoots! The halcon is unharmed, and soars higher. Now he settles upon his eyrie! Poor Froilan! thy delicate breast will be torn by his voracious blood! I could die to save thee from thy terrible fate. See! he dismounts, and ascends the cliff! He is at the summit! now he mounts the tree! God speed him! He ascends higher and higher, lightly he mounts from limb to limb, and branch to branch! He is near the top, three score feet from the earth. He will reach it! Froilan *may* be saved! Oh how can I be enough grateful! Holy Virgin, two fierce halcons attack him! He battles with them! He has struck one with his steel, and he tumbles headlong over the cliff. The other assails him more fiercely, and he fights him, still ascending. He pauses—he is wounded or wearied—oh that ruisenor had perished, ere he should have put such life in jeopardy. Ha! the other bird shrieks, and falls down to the foot of the tree, the glittering steel flashing in his side as he flutters and plunges. The bow-men shout! He has reached the nest! He places something in his bosom, and rapidly descends! He remounts his steed and returns to the castle on the wings of the wind.'

She fell upon her knees and with a grateful heart, thanked Heaven for *his* preservation. She thought not of Froilan—a deeper feeling than ever a favorite bird could awaken had, in that last half hour of anxiety and peril, taken possession of her bosom, She rose from her knees, a sense of maidenly propriety bid her to arrange her person, and not meet the knight in her morning robe, though she could have worn nothing so becoming. So she delayed to learn if Froilan was safe, to prepare her toilet to meet the young knight. This was a great change to be brought about in so short a time in a maiden's heart; but maidens love singing birds well enough, till young cavaliers come in their way, and then the poor birds, like Froilan, have a powerful rival.

Ere she had quite completed her toilet, her father entered with her bird safe, and the compliments of Garci Perez, the Count of Alarcos.

'Was he hurt, dear father?' she said, blushing at her own earnestness.

'Yes, in the wing, with a scratch of the hawk's talons.'

'I—meant the knight, sir.'

'Oh, the knight,' repeated her father, smiling; 'ah, poor Froilan, thou mightest as well have been eaten by the halcon's brood.'

Gertrudis dropped her eyes, while her whole face was suffused with a soft, rich glow, like sunset mingling with moonlight in the sky. She took her bird from his hand, and smoothing its plumage, kissed it, and laid it upon her bosom with many a tender word of endearment, but she could not disguise from her heart that she had now a deeper emotion in regarding it—that it had been lying near the heart of the youth who had so gallantly rescued it.

At the breakfast-hour she was presented to the knight by her father, and thanked him so sweetly for his brave rescue of her bird, that the youth's first admiration of her beauty was deepened into love, which he did not forbid his eyes out-speaking; and though she, for modesty, did not let him see the tale her own eyes would have told about her heart, had she dared to lift the fringed lids, she could not quiet the agitated undulations of that sea of love beneath her vesture, which caused the heart to speak for itself its own emotion at his presence.

Day after day the Knight of Alarcos lingered in the castle, unable to tear himself away from the lady Gertrudis; and, I wot the two met often upon the terrace, when the mellow moon shone, and the winds whispered, and the stars watched, and the murmur of waters came fully to the ear; and so Gertrudis gave her heart to Count Alarcos, and he laid his at her feet in return. The third week of the Count's sojourn, poor Froilan died in his cage—for sadly had his mistress neglected him of late. The lady Gertrudis sighed once, but shed not a tear, and, bidding her maid cast him into the moat, gave Count Alarcos her hand to lift her to the saddle; for, when it was told to her Froilan was dead, she was preparing to ride a hawking. Thus the young Knight, in the end, caused the death of the favorite he had risked his life to save; but poor Froilan was his rival, and he felt no grief that Gertrudis could not

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soothe; and she for Froilan had got a loving knight—which she thought far better than a singing-bird.

As the Vicompte de Roquebetyn well knew the rank and family of Count Alarcos and his relationship to the royal House of Castille, the alliance between him and his daughter was in every way desirable; and as he was waxing in years, he was solicitous to have his child well married ere his death should leave her an orphan. He, therefore, gave his consent to their union, when it was asked by the devoted knight, and that it should take place on his return from Paris, whither he was going, on a private embassy from the king, when the storm and love withal stayed his journey. He then took leave of his betrothed wife and proceeded on his way towards France.

'So brave a knight as Count Alarcos hath thrice shown himself to be, was well worthy to pluck the flower of the cliffs and wear it in his bosom,' said the Roman knight.

'He was, nevertheless, a false and craven knight, as thou shalt hear,' said the Sieur Linant.

'The day on which he had achieved so gallant a deed against the Moors, the Princess Beatriz, as Don Fernando in his tale hath well told, witnessing his bravery and seeing afterwards that it was matched by the beauty and manliness of his person, became enamored of him. As he was afterwards stationed near the person of the king, she often saw him; and he being young and having no ladye-love, whose name could give suitable lustre and incentive to his achievements, he easily fell into admiration of her in return; though, if left to himself, there was nothing in her that would have greatly captivated, beyond mere outward gallantry, a person like the young Count Alarcos. Though beautiful to look at, with dark expressive eyes and hair like a raven's plumage, and a queenly figure, she was haughty, and had little softness of manner. Nevertheless, Count Alarcos, flattered by her attention before the whole court, and fancying himself in love, when his heart was not touched, it being only his vanity, he was led, on one unhappy occasion, to make a vow of betrothal to her; she having artfully brought him to the point to do this, being desirous of securing him before he should see other maidens; for she knew there was not in Castille, save her cousin, another knight her equal in lineage—and that, unless she wedded him, she might never wed.

Thus was Count Alarcos artfully bound to a designing woman, whom he loved not; but yet, knew not that he was a stranger to true love, until he beheld, a few weeks afterwards, in her father's castle, the lovely Gertrudis de Roquebetyn. When he saw her face from the terrace, he, for the first time, felt that he had a heart! A torrent of novel and tumultuous emotions filled his soul! It remained for her to break up the deep fountains of his feelings, unlock the wealth of his affections, and discover to him powers of his being he was ignorant that he was possessed of. From that day he looked back to his betrothal with the haughty Princess Beatriz with grief and contempt, felt that in the presence of Gertrudis, she was nothing to him, and he wondered that she should ever have succeeded in binding him in such delusive chains. As the power of his love grew, it swallowed up all other feeling with it; and obeying its influence, he resolved, after a brief but severe struggle between his vow and his love for Gertrudis, to commit himself to the current of his deep and irresistible, but pure and holy passion, and forgetting the Princess Beatriz, offer himself with all his heart and soul to the shrine of his heart's idolatry.

He spoke not to Gertrudis of his betrothal to the princess, which was known only to themselves! and he trusted on his return from France, to be able to release himself with her consent, failing to obtain which, he determined to break his vow of betrothal, which was drawn from him rather than given, by the insidious princess, and when he was ignorant of the true state of his own heart.'

Here several of the knights spoke, and delivered their opinions upon the conduct of Count Alarcos in this instance; the English and German knights, as well as the Sieur Linant, censuring and condemning it, while the Roman, Venetian and Spanish knights were for excusing him, on the two-fold ground of the artfulness of the princess, and his inexperience. The Scottish knight, whose name was Sir Roy Bruce, being silent, was asked for his opinion, when he replied, that as he was at that present time in the same dilemma with regard to two maidens, as Count Alarcos, he could not give his opinion till he himself had decided how to act, as his love went not with his vow. The English knight therefore said haughtily, that a gentleman would keep his oath, let what betide—that a knight's vow is a knight's life.'

Sir Roy Bruce rose angrily at these words, which he took to himself, and a hot quarrel had well nigh come of it, but for the interference of the other knights; and Sir Henry Percie having disclaimed allusion in his speech to the Scottish knight, peace was restored again, and the matter passed. Sieur Linant then continued his story of Count Alarcos, as follows:

'Not many weeks passed, ere this knight of two bethrothals, having fulfilled his mission into France, returned,

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spending a day at the castle of his ladye—love and fixing upon the day for the bridal, for which ceremony he was to return immediately after seeing the king and surrendering his mission. On his arrival at court, king Ferdinand graciously received him. The princess was present, and instead of receiving from him a smile of love and lealty of troth, he seemed not to notice her presence, being, as it were, so much absorbed with his business with the king. After the audience, she privately sent for him, but he excused himself with the plea of fatigue, and she became alarmed for the fate of her love.

‘This comes of riding to Paris,’ she said, with mingled grief and anger.— ‘He hath there seen some maiden who hath made him play me false, I fear.’

For three days he came not near her, fearing to see her. The third day he had private audience of the king, and told him of his love for the lady Gertrudis, and his wish to take her to wife. The king listened well pleased, and not suspecting how the matter stood between the Count and his daughter, the princess, he gave his consent, congratulating him upon his good fortune, and inviting him and his bride to court. Having obtained the royal permission, Count Alarcos sent a page, and solicited an interview with the princes, with the design of asking a release from his engagement. Angry at his marked neglect of her for three days, the princess refused to see him, thinking that his message implied repentence and a desire of atonement, and so determining to punish him. But soon she rued that refusal, for the same evening she was told that Count Alarcos had left the court for the castle of Vicompte de Roquebetyn.— The king entered her boudoir, and found her pacing it, her cheeks bathed in tears of grief and anger.

‘How is this, daughter Beatriz?’ he asked with surprise.

Too proud to confess her love for one who cared not for it, the princess was silent.

‘Well, whate’er hath made thee weep, I have news will make thee merry,’ said the king. ‘We are to have a brave bridal.’

‘A bridal, sire?’

‘A brave knight and a sweet maiden are to be soon mated, and are to grace our court. I ‘faith, when he getteth his fair wife, he will break less Moors’ heads for a twelvemonth, I’ll warrant me,’ said king Ferdinand, laughing.

‘Who meanest thou, father?’ gasped the princess, half—suspecting, yet not daring to believe all her fears suggested.

‘Our cousin, the gallant Count of Alarcos, who, it seems, on his way Franceward, was driven for shelter to the castle of Vicompte de Roquebetyn, whose lovely daughter, not satisfied with the protection her father’s roof gave his person, took herself charge of his heart, and I ‘faith, it seems would not surrender it when he left, and so he journeyed to France without it. He hath to day asked my assent to his marriage, and I have—’

‘Not given it—by the cross,’ exclaimed the princess Beatriz, with eyes of fire.

‘I have, and he hath ridden away with a brave company of knights, and a gallant retinue, to bring his bride.’

The princess was for a few minutes paralyzed with this intelligence of the false faith of her treacherous cousin. Her first impulse was to confess all to the king, and despatch a horse in pursuit of the recreant knight. But her woman’s pride came to her aid. The thought of her degradation was madness; yet she felt she must not make known the dishonor done her, unless she would experience the scorn of all the ladies of her court. She would not have it known that the proud princess Beatriz with all her royal rank and beauty, could not keep the heart she had chosen, but had been deserted from another, inferior in rank. The idea, too, of having it whispered, that she gave her love where it was not requited, was acutely mortifying to her.

The considerations, which flashed across her mind in an instant, at once governed her conduct, and without betraying her feelings further, she complained of being ill, and desired to be left alone. That night the deserted and slighted princess slept not for her rage, grief and shame. She had truly loved Count Alarcos, and to lose even the object of her affection was to her sufficiently painful. But to lose him under such humiliating circumstances, was not patiently to be borne. After a night of alternate suffering and plans of vengeance, she finally calmed herself, for she had come to her determination.

‘Yes, let him marry—I will wait—let him marry! Then my revenge will be double—barbed, and the wound deeper. He shall marry, and then, if he love *her*, will I have his punishment in my hands; and, by our lady, he shall be the instrument of his own misery and of my vengeance!’

Count Alarcos married. But fearing the vengeance of the princess, he delayed bringing his bride to court; and so for several months kept her close at her father’s castle, where he lived with her perfectly happy. The princess at

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length artfully prevailed on the king to command the count to leave his castle with his wife, and take up his abode for the ensuing winter near the court. Count Alarcos obeyed. The beauty of his bride was the theme of all tongues. None gave her so gracious a reception as the princess Beatriz, who, beneath an outside of forgiveness towards him, and attachment for his bride, concealed the most dangerous intentions. Wondering at her free forgiveness, the thoughtless count was, nevertheless, well pleased, and she managed to lull asleep in his bosom all suspicion. But, my idle romance hath consumed the evening, gentle knights, without coming to an end,' said the Sieur de Linant; 'if it have sufficient interest, and you would fain learn the issue of the Count Alarcos's treachery to the princess Beatriz, and her revenge therefor, I will, with your consent, conclude the tale to-morrow night. I thank you for the courtesy and grace with which you have listened to me, fair sirs!'

The knights, one and all, expressed themselves greatly entertained with the story, and unanimously signified to Sieur de Linant their wish that he should, when next they pitched their camp, go on with it. They then retired within their spacious tent, the esquires laying themselves down by the outside; and soon all was still, save the *ruisenor* singing to his mate on a neighboring tree; the sighing of the night breezes through the arches of the old Moorish tower, and the liquid gurgle of a brook that crept among the ruins.

THE STORY OF THE SIEUR LOUIS DE LINANT, CONCLUDED.

Early the ensuing morning, the knights mounted with their retinue of esquires and men at arms, and throughout the day journeyed pleasantly amid a fertile valley; their road winding beside a river, on whose banks stood many a fair castle, and rural hamlet. At eventide they arrived at a noble wood of palm-trees, the lofty and gigantic trunks of which, springing into the air, noble columns, a hundred feet in height, expanded like the arches of a cathedral, presenting a canopy which shut out the skies over their heads, while beneath stretched arcades of the most magnificent dimensions. The nakedness of the tall shafts was relieved by luxuriant tendrils of the wild grape vine, twining in masses of verdure around them, or hanging in immense festoons from tree to tree. Through the spacious avenues of this noble wood, the knights advanced on horseback without obstruction. The declining sun penetrated at intervals through the far asunder columns of the trees, in broad lanes of light, like carpets of sun-gold unrolled along the level sward. On all sides, cool and pleasant shades invited to repose; and, tempted by the beauty of the spot, the travel-worn cavaliers resolved to pitch their tents for the night. Having ended their frugal evening repast, they reclined before the tent, each falling into such attitude for listening, as was his habit, and Sieur de Linant then resumed his story which he called,

'THE REVENGE OF THE PRINCESS BEATRIZ, OR THE GRIEVOUS CRIME OF COUNT ALARCOS.'

'The bride of the false knight,' said the French knight, 'by her beauty and grace, and superior excellence, served to deepen the wound in the breast of the princess Beatriz. She could not be insensible to the charms either of her person or mind. Yet, as these were the allurements which had drawn Count Alarcos away from her, she looking at them through her jealous mind, regarded them only as so many deformities. If the sweet countess smiled, the Infanta cursed the smile, because such had robbed her of her betrothed knight. If she sung, her voice, though sweet as a bulbul's, was discordant to her ears, and filled her soul with rage and torment. The lovely bride could not but perceive that the princess, much as she strove to hide it till the time of her revenge was ripened, was disaffected towards her; and prompted by her gentleness, and loving nature, she strove to conciliate her; but the more gently she deported herself, so much the more the princess hated her. She at length told her husband with great grief, how she feared she had done some evil thing which had sorely displeased the princess Beatriz, who, though she outwardly showed her courtesy she knew to be inwardly but ill-content with her.

The cheek of Count Alarcos burned with rising shame, from the consciousness of the true cause, on hearing these words from his innocent bride, and in his heart he felt ill at ease; for he now knew that however the princess had seemed to pass over his defection, she had secretly cherished evil thoughts in her heart, both towards him and his bride. He, however, laughed, and tapping her forehead, said playfully,

'Tis nought, sweet wife, but thy own beauty that hath made the princess envious. Thou must not heed it; for she is a woman! So, hereafter, keep thou more by my side, and in thy own bower; for I would have thee and Beatriz meet seldom.'

Though the husband spoke thus to his unsuspecting wife, he became alarmed for her safety, not thinking of his own. He therefore resolved to obtain leave of the king, to return to his castle for a while; on the plea of an approaching event, on the occurrence of which, as a husband, and an expectant father, he was desirous of having his wife in her own abode. To this the king gave his consent, and the same evening the count left the dangerous atmosphere of the court, for the peaceful retreat of his castle.

When the princess Beatriz learned his sudden departure, she became excited to such a degree of rage and disappointment, that for several hours she was nearly distracted. At length she grew calm, and seated alone in her chamber, thus she spoke to herself.

'It is better it were so; better far! This delay will give me threefold vengeance. This was the night, and this the hour in which my long-matured revenge was to have had its consummation; and they have escaped! Now there will be three bosoms to pierce instead of two! Count Alarcos, thou false knight and perjured lover! I heed not thy flight, nor will it save thee! I bide my time?'

Impatiently did the princess wait from day to day, to hear that the Count Alarcos had been made a father. At length word came that the fair countess Gertrudis had given birth to a son. This intelligence, strange as it would seem, filled the princess with joy. She now resolved to lose no time in consummating her plan of vengeance. She would have carried it out on the first day she saw the bride after her marriage; but her heart and hand shrunk, day by day, from the deed, while her hatred grew deeper with the lingering execution of her purpose. It was by this prolonged indecision, that they had for the time escaped her, and the wife had become a mother, and the deserted betrothed still unavenged. But this event, which at first view appeared to her so unpropitious, gave new inspiration to her cruel soul.

At her suggestion the king was prevailed upon to stand sponsor for the boy, and forthwith to send to Count Alarcos, bidding him bring his wife and heir to the capital. Gratified with the honor intended him, the Count, so soon as his lady recovered, and when the child was in his fourth month, left his castle and brought her up to Court. The christening took place with great pomp and joy, and none seemed more happy at the event, or more sincere in congratulating the lovely mother, than the princess Beatriz. 'Now comes the pitiful part of my tale. fair knights,' said the *Sieur de Linant* in a sad tone, and sighing as he thought of the woeful history he was about to relate.

The christening was over, and the king and his brave retinue of knights and nobles, the infanta, with her

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brilliant train of ladies, pages, gentlemen in velvet and gold had returned from the cathedral; the Count Alarcos and his fair wife, the brightest stars of this royal galaxy. The palace was reached, and each retired from the pageant; the king to his chamber, the princess to her bower, the Count, and his wife and child, to their own furnished mansion, in a *plaza* not far from the royal palace. It was now evening. The mellow glow of sunset had given place to the deep blue of night with its stars. The princess Beatriz sat in her window, looking forth with her eyes, but not with her mind. Her thoughts were tumultuous and evil. Her bosom heaved restlessly, beneath her crimson vesture, and her cheek was pale. The expression of her lips was close and decided, as if with the concentration of some strong and single passion. Her eye was dark as the depth of a sunless well, in the noontide; the lid immovable, and the look steady and fearful. Long, long, she sat by her casement, in this strange mood and aspect of visage; her lips at times moving, but giving forth no articulate sound. At length she rose up, and entering her ante-room, despatched a page for the king.

When he entered her apartment, she received him reclining upon a couch, with a robe thrown around her. From her face every trace of emotion had been withdrawn into the recesses of her heart; but still her cheek was white.

'Well, my child,' said the king, seating himself near; 'thy page hath brought me a message, saying you desired to see me. You are pale! Art thou ill, daughter?'

'Nay, sire,' she said quickly; 'I have sent to speak with thee, touching a matter that lieth very near my heart. How likest thou this fair countess of Alarcos?'

'Passing well,' answered the king; she hath a beauteous face and a heart full of gentleness and love. Didst observe, to-day, the bright look of her proud maternal eye, when the cardinal praised the beauty of her noble babe; and the young father, how proudly he glanced around. I would thou wert well married girl, and had so brave a boy to bring to the font, and inherit my throne.'

'And how like you, sire, this Count, my cousin?'

'He is the best knight in Spain! and she the fairest wife. But thou art ill at ease? What mean those questions you put to me! There is a depth to them, my child, beyond my plummet's reach. Out with thy mind.'

'Thou hast just said thou didst wish me wed. Listen. I will not hide longer my dishonor and my grief. Thou shalt know the wrong done thy daughter, king.'

Thus spoke the injured princess: and then, raising herself from her couch, she recounted her wrongs:

'Know, king of Castile, that thou art degraded in thy child. A knight—'tis shame for me to speak it, but it is to a father's ears, and my vengeance must not die for want of words, and ears to hear them! A knight of no mean degree, whom thou hast loved to honor, hath long since plighted to me his troth. I gave him all my love—all the affection of a woman's bosom poured I into his! I loved him better than my life, dwelt on his looks and words with foolish fondness, and in his footstep's faintest sound heard sweetest music.—'Twere not maidenly to love unwooed; but love, my father, once awakened in a woman's heart, knoweth no rest to its wing till it nestle where it would.—Noble, proud, and gay-lived, he did not so deeply requite my passion as I would he should do; yet, still I believed he loved me. At length, secretly, we plighted troth, and our betrothal was registered in heaven. After this, his love grew cold, while mine became a flame, consuming me. We often met, and I as oft did chide him for his indifference; but he would swear his love unchanged, and so, measuring it by my own, I did believe his oath.'

'And I knew nothing of this love—passage within my very household,' said the king, who had listened with surprise and impatience. 'Who was this bold knight?'

'Nay, let me go on. He was at length sent from court on a message to France, and in his absence saw a maiden whose beauty lured him from his love's allegiance; and, forgetful of his oath, his plighted troth and hundred vows of love betrothed her. On his return he saw me not; but getting thy consent in the very face of his oath to thy daughter, the traitorous knight hastened to his father's castle, and there wedded her.'

'By the sword of Cid Ruy he dies!' exclaimed the king, rising up and stamping the floor with indignation and fury. 'Who was this perjured knight—nay, thou couldst place thy love on none beneath thee in blood—'tis Count Alarcos! Speak, daughter? He alone of all the knights is thy peer!'

'Thou hast named him, sire! Gertrudis de Roquebetyne was the maiden for whom a princess of Castile is dishonored.'

'Santiago!' but this false traitor shall be well punished. His head shall roll from the scaffold by to-morrow's sun. A king's daughter is not to be lightly dishonored, nor a knight's vow lightly broken.'

'Nay, father, let me have this retribution in my own hand. Maiden shame would withhold the confession, but I

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still love this recreant knight, and if he redeem his pledge to me, I can still forgive the past.'

'Stands the matter so,' said the king with surprise, 'Then, by the rood!— Don Alarcos—for he is thy peer—shall wed thee! He shall on the morrow divorce this countess Gertrudia. If he hath bound himself in new vows, old oaths he may not break. Thou shalt not lose a loyal spouse, for a false lover's treachery. You have erred daughter, in loving as you did; and this conduct of Don Alarcos hath brought shame on you as a maiden princess, and on my gray hairs. While the countess lives she dishonors thee. Would thy royal mother was living to counsel thee and me, in this new care that hath come upon me. Speak, thou, my daughter, and give thy counsel in this matter.'

'Nay, father,' said the artful princess, who well knew what counsel she had long cherished for this occasion, 'Nay, I have little wit and wisdom to advise; but, certes, I think the Count Alarcos may cause this usurping countess to die.'

'The fair countess perish!' exclaimed the king with a look of surprise and pain.

'She *must die*. Let it be noised that sudden disease shortened her tender life; for her health is now delicate and the rumor would be believed. Then let the Count Alarcos come to me and redeem his broken vow.'

The king sat for a long space confounded, but at length said sorrowfully,

'It were a pity to put out of life so fair a lady, and she so lately a mother. It were two murders with one stroke! Nay, I cannot command her death. Let him be divorced.'

'No!' said the princess sternly; 'she must die and Count Alarcos shall come and ask me for his wife.'

'I would rather this false count were slain, for he alone hath done this foul wrong, and she is innocent.'

'The Count shall live to be my husband! she is not innocent—her peerless beauty is her guilt. I insist, good king, that she dies.'

The king walked the chamber in great perplexity, for he was much troubled in mind, having a great desire to spare the sweet and innocent lady; also to please his daughter, and wipe away her wrong. At length he said;

'Good daughter, if divorce and a convent for the countess will not gratify thy revenge, thou shalt have thy will, for foully a king's daughter hath been wronged? I will order her execution privately, and let it be given out that sudden sickness took her breath. The Count shall then wed you, and so none shall know your dishonor?'

'Command that the *Count himself* be her executioner!' said the princess with a look that it would seem only an evil angel could give the full depth of expression to

'*Himself?*' repeated king Ferdinand 'I will no *less* revenge—no lighter punishment.' With his own hand shall he divide the chain that bound him to another, when he was bounden to me. This is my vengeance and his punishment! Long have I cherished it—long have I waited for it? I would have told them my dishonor ere this, and asked her death of thee, but waited till the father should, in the mother of his child, bind himself to her with new and fresher bonds of affection, that the task I was to give him to do might weigh heavier upon his hand, the blow sink deeper into his herat.'

'Thou hast well ripened thy vengeance, Infanta,' said the king, who, although of a stern and vindictive temper himself, could not listen without surprise to her plan of finished revenge. 'But thou wilt be defeated. The Count loves her, and will not take her life.'

'Thou must give him the alternative, her life or his own. The block, or redeem his vow to me,' said the inexorable princess. 'Do not hesitate, my father. Art thou king of this realm, and the head of chivalry, that thou wilt let pass this wrong to a princess of the realm, or this stain on the honor of knighthood.'

'No. By my own kingly honor and knightly faith, this shall not go unpunished! The countess, who hath been the means of this dishonor, shall die, and the count who inflicted it, shall execute thy vengeance upon her, therein suffering most thy punishment in himself. By my faith, daughter, none but a woman would have ripened such a plan. It should be done. Early to-morrow I will have speech in private with the Count of Alarcos. Ere long thou shalt know the issue. A sweet good night, daughter. As a knight and father, I will avenge the woman and daughter.

'God speed thee,' answered the Infanta, 'and soon bring the Count Alarcos to my feet.'

The following day the Count Alarcos and his wife were seated in her bower, playing with their boy, tossing and praising it, he comparing its eyes to the eyes of its mother, and she proudly likening his dimpled mouth to his. While they were thus happily engaged, feeling that much as they loved each other before, they now loved a great

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deal more, since the birth of their boy, in whom both saw their loves meeting, there came a king's page with a message, saying, that the king desired the Count Alarcos to dine with him that day.

'Now, haste thee early from the banquet, love,' said the sweet lady, when the time came for him to go away: 'the hours you pass with me are all sunlight, while those that keep you absent are alternate clouds and tears.

Count Alarcos smiled fondly at these words, promised, and embracing her, kissed his boy which she held up to him, and went his way to the king's banquet; little guessing, I wot, why the king desired his company. The feast was a sumptuous one, served in a vast hall hung round with tapestry of silk and cloth of gold. At each guest's chair stood a page holding a golden goblet of wine oft replenished, and servitors many a one in gay apparel, waited at the kingly board. The Count Alarcos sat by the king's right hand, and was by him well entertained with courteous cheer; so well did Ferdinand disguise his intent.

At length, when the banquet was at an end, and the guests had withdrawn to listen to the singers, or witness the voluptuous motions of the *danzarines*, as they danced to the tinkling tabor: the king and the Count of Alarcos being left alone, the monarch thus began:

'I have heard, Alarcos, strange news since yester e'en. What is this tale, that you plighted your word and knightly troth to a lady, ere you wedded your wife?' And the king fixed his glance closely on the face of Count Alarcos. The knight started and dropped his eyes, fearing to look at the king, who at once saw by his guilty look that the Infanta had told only what was true of him. 'This is a sad thing I hear, Count, that you did plight yourself to be a husband to my daughter. If more passed, you yourself know the truth; but thou hast broke thy vow, and brought shame upon a maiden. Now, by the cross! there is a lady fair doth lie within my daughter's place! Two wives are not allowed in Spain; yet certes! thou must wed my child! Let it be noised that sudden illness seized the countess' breath, and cut short her tender life; then come and woo my daughter! If ought had passed between you, more than I know, let nothing be said, so none my dishonor shall know, and you both shall wed in honor.'

'Most gracious liege,' said the Count Alarcos, 'I confess the truth, nor will deny what I have done. I to the princess did plight my troth, and vowed to wed her. I have broken my vow in a most unknighly manner, and deserve punishment. But spare the innocent—let my wife escape the vengeance! Slay not the sinless, for the sin of the guilty. Avoid that wicked deed!' And the Count of Alarcos was full of sorrow.

'Be the deed and its guilt fastened upon thine own treachery, false knight,' said the king. 'If guiltless blood must wash out thy stain, be thou answerable therefor, for thou hast made the blot that asks such atonement. The tarnished honor of kings, must have innocent blood to restore its purity. Thy wife dies, Count.'

'Nay, my liege!' and the Count of Alarcos threw himself at the feet of the king.

'She dies, false and treacherous knight! She must not live to behold another sun. Ere morning dawn, her life must have its end, and thine own hand must do the deed.'

'Pardon! grace! your majesty! spare the wife of my bosom!' implored the Count, bathing his feet with tears.

'There is no remede! she dies, *thou her executioner*, or thy own head, shorn of its locks, shall be brought to the block!' And thus speaking, the king disengaged himself from his grasp, and left the banquet room.

'Alas! alas!' said the Count of Alarcos, rising to his feet, 'how wretched is my lot. My Gertrudis—my life—my love. I cannot think of thee! Doomed, adjudged to death, and I to do the deed! Wo is me! I have stained the blood of a king by my broken troth, and now my poor innocent lamb's blood must flow to blot out the dishonor! alas! from my own sin springs this cruel fate! my wife—my Gertrudis—my child! oh Christ Jesu! have pity on me!' He crossed the hall with a staggering step, he scarce knew whither. He leaned against a column near the portal, unable to move farther, for blindness came over him, and his heart weighed like lead in his bosom.

'Put to death my dear wife!' he muttered again, moving forward, talking to himself in tones most pitiful to hear; 'it is the king's command. I dare not disobey it, for treason would blot my name. It must be done—I must slay her—God blame me not, but look upon my great strait! Alas! that one so young and sinless—the life of my life, should bleed for my sin! alas, that my love should be her death! Henceforth, sorrow, be thou my bride!'

Thus spoke the wretched and guilty Count of Alarcos; and after staying to gather strength of heart and body, he dejectedly bent his steps homeward. It was a weary way, and he could wish he ne'er might reach its end. He thought of his fair countess, how tenderly she loved him; of his sweet babe, and how fondly she cherished it. He at length came to the portal and paused earing to enter.

'How, alas!' he said, 'shall I meet the cheerful countenance and welcoming smile of my kind Gertrudis? To see

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her coming forth with smiles to meet me, who soon must be her murderer.'

She heard his footstep, for she was up and watching his return and ere her page could hasten to announce him, she flew and met him in the gate. Her babe was at her breast, and all the fond hope and love of the wife and mother beamed in the kind lady's face.

'Thou art come, my husband,' she said, advancing to receive his wonted embrace; 'welcome, my beloved Alarcos—my lord—my life!'

He drops his head and in silent. She arrests her step and gazes on him with looks of anxiety. 'What hath happened, my lord! Your brow looks sad, and your eyes are read with weeping. Tell, oh, tell your wife!'

'I'll tell thee, sweet wife,' answered Count Alarcos, with a breaking heart; 'I will tell thee; but not now!' He did not look up while he spoke, for he could not brook in his the gaze of the sweet eyes which so soon his own deed would seal in death; he could not look on the fair form which so soon was to be a corpse. 'I'll tell thee,' said he sadly, 'when we are in your bower. Let us sup together, and bring me wine for my heart is sick.'

The Countess, though heavy at his sorrow, not knowing how soon she need weep for herself, set about his repast, and furnished it with her own hands; nor willing her maids should serve her lord when he was sorrowful, her love telling her the wife doth the best at such a season. He sat by his board and she sat beside him. But he could eat nothing for his grief at which the king had commanded him to do, and sat by her side pale and sad, nor ate she any thing for his sorrow. She then gently asked him what ailed him. He did not answer her, but laid his throbbing head upon the board and the tears flowed fast from his eyes.

'Gertrudis,' he said at length, 'I would retire—come thou with me to our chamber. I fain would sleep.'

She followed him in silence to her bower, where they were wont to sleep; but I ween there was little sleep that night in that place. The Countess laid herself weeping upon her couch, with the babe upon her breast. Never had she lain down with so heavy a heart. Her husband, whose untold grief—alas, full soon he made her known its cause—had made her sorrowful, walked the chamber long and with a troubled step. Her eye followed each step he made with anxious tenderness. Suddenly he barred the chamber door, and with a dark and heavy visage came near her as she lay, her baby upon her breast, for though it had two nurses, it loved best the nourishment its mother gave it. Poor babe! how should this have plead for thy mother's life with thy cruel sire! She looked up and smiled as he came near. He heeded not the look of love, but said,

'Alas, unhappy lady—thou art of all wives the most to be pitied; I of all men!'

'Nay, my lord and noble husband,' she said, smiling sweetly; 'she who is Count Alarcos's wife can never be unhappy!'

'In that very word, unhappy woman, lies all your misery—is gathered all your wo. Ere I beheld you I was betrothed to the Princess Beatriz. Shame and seeking opportunity for revenge hath kept her silent until now. She has to-day divulged it to my lord the king, and claims me for her own! Alas! the right is on their side! The king has this day said that since you hold his daughter's rightful place, you this night must die! It was with pain and anguish Count Alarcos spoke these words of shame, and the tears flowed while he spoke. The Countess rose up in her couch and said bitterly,

'Are these the wages of my long and fond affection, my noble husband? Have I not been to thee a leal and lowly wife? Reward not my true love with death!'

'It may not be,' said the count sternly.

'Oh, slay me not! see I kneel at thy feet! spare my life—spare thy sweet boy's life, which is lodged within my breast! Send me back to my noble father's from whence you took me not two years ago, a gleeful bride! there will I live a chaste and secluded life, and rear my noble boy to manhood for thee! Oh, kill me not, noble Count!'

'My oath is given—I've sworn to the king thy death! Ere dawn of day you die!'

'Thou wilt not slay me, my husband!'

'I would not—for thou art my life! But else knightly dishonor and disgrace, and the infamy of the ignominious block await me. I take thy life to save my honor not my life!'

'Alas!' said the lovely Countess, rising from her knees, her brown hair falling loosely adown her snowy robe, and the tears flowing from her eyes; 'alas! this is because I am alone, and my father is far distant, and old and frail! Were my brave brother alive, thou wouldst not do this wicked deed! It is my helplessness that maketh this coward king to force my death. But 't is not death that terrifies me. No. I fear it not—for my soul with God's at peace; but I am at loth to leave my dear babe so!' and she pressed the infant to her bosom, and kissed it, as if her

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heart were breaking.

‘Now, be thou ready,’ said the Count looking away. ‘Give me the child!’

‘One more kiss!’ she cried, and clung to it as if she would never separate from it. But he took it from her and lay it upon the bed. She knelt, and folding her hands across her bosom, said a prayer. She then rose up and said, stretching her hands towards her babe, which cried a little at missing her,

‘Let me, kind Alarcos, give my poor boy one drink more; one farewell drink before my breast be cold!’

‘Why prolong the bitterness and pain of this hour,’ he said, ‘Prepare, sweet wife, there is no time to give, for the dawn already is breaking in the east.’

‘Be kind, thou wicked Count, yet still-loved husband; be kind, I pray thee, to my poor dear babe! See, he sleeps!’

‘Be ready, Gertrude.’

‘Hear me, Count of Alarcos! I give thee my forgiveness for this cruel deed, for the love's sake wherewith I have loved thee, since first we met.— Thee, I freely pardon! But the king and cruel princess, here, in God's sight, I call His curse upon them for their unchristian deed of slaughter! I charge them with my last dying word, to meet me in the realm of death, and at God's throne, ere the moon, which now is new, makes her round complete!’

She knelt before him, and gave him her scarf, which had been his birth-day gift, and saying softly, ‘shed not my blood, but with this stop my breath,’ awaited her piteous doom.

He looked not in her face; he sought no parting glance from her sweet blue eyes, upturned to their own azure heaven; but putting the scarf around her snowy neck, which gently bent to meet the death, he drew it tight and strong, and held her thus, until the heart which so often had beat against his, ceased; and stiff and cold she lay extended along upon the floor. He raised her then upon the couch, and covering her with a white robe, knelt by her side, and cried in misery and woe to Jesu and Mary mother. But dark and iron were the heavens above him, and his black and guilty soul found no hope or comfort from its fell remorse. He rose up to his feet, and unbarring his chamber door, called loudly for his esquires. When they came in, and looked with dismay upon her, as she lay before them dead, he said,

‘Look on and weep! In her innocence she hath died. Ne'er was sweeter lady in all Spain, nor one more void of wrong! In her innocence they have slain her, and God will take heed of their offence!’

Thus died by a cruel king's command, a haughty princess' vengeance, and a false knight's haughty treachery, a sweet, innocent lady, and sooth, God's vengeance staid not long!

Ten days thereafter, while the princess Beatriz was seated in her hall, with her maids and gentlemen around her, thinking in her heart how soon she would wed the Count Alarcos, there was seen by all present, to enter the hall, a knight in black armor, with his visor down, who strait approached her. She looked up, and saw him, and instantly turned pale, and a look of mortal fear came over her countenance. The knight strode near and silently took her hand, which she unresisting gave him.

‘Thou would'st wed, princess,’ he said in a deep tone; ‘come with me, I will be thy bridegroom!’

She uttered not a word, made no effort to remain, but with her eyes set in horror, her cheeks like marble, and a tottering step, she suffered him to lead her forth through the hall. Without stood two steeds, a black and a white one.— Placing her upon the white one, he leaped upon the other, and taking her bridle in his hand, they dashed away from the palace, towards the gates at full speed; but well, I ween, no horses with such riders passed through the gates that day, and never was the Princess Beatriz heard of more. She had obeyed the call of the innocent Countess, and gone to meet her ‘in the realms of death!’

Ten days after the fearful doom of the hapless princess, the king, who ceased not to mourn for her, and tremble for himself, was riding at the head of his knights, on his way to say mass at the cathedral, for the deliverance of the soul of his unhappy daughter. At the door of the church, a gigantic knight in black armor, mounted on a black horse, stood in his path. When the king saw him, his heart trembled, and his spirit failed him.

‘If thou would'st say mass, king Ferdinand,’ said the black knight, ‘ride with me.’

‘Whither?’ demanded the astonished king.

‘Into the realms of death.’

And thus speaking, the black knight took the bridle of the king's steed in his hand, and the two horsemen, in the sight of all present, galloped away in the direction of the gates: but, I wot, no porter saw such riders pass forth the city gates that day.

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The moon was waning into her decreasing horn, when the Count of Alarcos, who had not ceased to weep the deep he had so cruelly done, and had kept his chamber, was startled by the appearance before him, of the spirit of his slaughtered wife. Her face was grave, but the look was not angry

‘Count Alarcos, the moon has waned, and the guilty king and princess have been summoned before the awful bar of God. Thou art wanted to bear witness at their judgment and be thyself adjudged. Come, my husband, thou art summoned before the judgment-seat of Christ.

Thus ended the tale of the Sieur de Linant, in which all the knights were deeply interested. After having thanked him for the entertainment he had afforded them, they began to speak their several opinions of the conduct of the Count of Alarcos. They all condemned him for breaking his faith to the princess at the first; but having broken it and married the fair lady Gertrudis, it became him to keep faith to her. Respecting his duty in obeying the king, and thereby slaying his own wife, there was a difference of sentiment; the German and Venetian knights saying that he could do no otherwise; the Roman and Scottish knights saying that he was guilty of cowardly murder, and should have withstood the king, and rather been slain; and the Roman knight, with whom Sieur de Linant sided, averring that if he did kill her, he should have killed himself also, over her body.

The English knight, however, rising up, said with great warmth,

‘From first to last, this Count Alarcos hath proved himself a false knight, and base knave! He was false in vowing to love the princess, when he loved her not; but having plighted his troth, he was pledged to redeem it. The beauty, gentleness, and peerless charms of the lady Gertrudis, whom he saw afterwards, were no excuse for breach of faith towards one less lovely, or less loved. By his marriage he was false to both; for while his oath had been given to the princess, he could not bind himself to the Countess Gertrudis. His old oath stood, and he could make no new one. When, at length, the king, inspired by the Infanta, commanded him to slay her, he should rather have held his spurs to the armorer’s axe, bent his head to the block, and suffered the ignominy and the death. But, instead, he sacrifices innocence, that he may preserve his knighthood untainted. By the lion heart of Richard Plantagenet! he did bring upon himself and knighthood greater dishonor, by his craven and guilty deed, than the rolling of a hundred knights’ heads from the scaffold. He was a treacherous, base, and craven knight, and unworthy of name or place in the roll of chivalry. God judge him; for, by the cross, methinks he hath greater guilt than those who set him on.’

The English knight, Sir Henry Percie, having thus spoken, all the knights, including the Spanish knight, agreed with him. And so Don Fernando having failed to prove the precedence of Spanish knighthood, as represented in the person and prowess of the Count of Alarcos, it fell to the lot of Signor Pier Farnese, the Venetian knight, to relate a tale of Venetian chivalry, at their next encampment. The hour then waxing close upon midnight, the knights begat themselves to their repose.

THE TALE OF ROTHER DE ERNEST, THE GERMAN KNIGHT.

At the close of the fifth day of the journey of the seven knights, they came to a convent situated in the bosom of a delightful vale, and surrounded with meadows, groves and broad fields waving in the evening sun rays, like seas of golden waves. Attached to the convent was a spacious court, overshadowed with olive trees, which was appropriated, like the caravanserai of the east, to the accommodation of travellers. Hither the knights turned in just as the sun set, and were hospitably received by the Lady Superior, who, from a wicket above the gate, gave them welcome. Between the outer court and the court of the castle, was a very high wall, which prevented all communication with the sacred retirement of the sisterhood. Provisions, in hospitable profusion were lowered down to the knights from the wicket, and as the place was large and well roofed, the travellers fared well. After their repast had been made, the Roman cavaliers, Vitelli de Braganti, seeing sundry bright eyes peeping down through the lattice, and willing to entertain the fair nuns in their loneliness as well, may be, as to display his rich voice, sung a Romancero, which however, was better fitting beneath a lady's bower than the lattice of a holy convent. This is one of the stanzas: "All the stars are glowing In the gorgeous sky; In the stream scarce flowing Mimic stars do lie: Blow, gentle, gentle breeze! But bring no cloud to hide Their dear resplendencies; Nor chase from Zara's side Dreams bright and pure as these."

'Such songs of love ill become a convent's walls,' said the Spanish knight Don Fernando de Valor. 'If we must be in a merry mood, let us sing some ballad recounting the doughty deeds of good Christian knights against the Moors. I remember a ballad recounting the achievement of Garci Perez de Vargas, that showeth how he got the name of *Machuca*, or 'The Pounder;' for, he having broken his sword in battle, pulled up by the roots, a wild olive tree, and with the trunk thereof performed such wondrous deeds, that the holy maidens will esteem themselves happy in having had the pleasure to hear them.'

'Nay,' said the Scottish knight, 'this were too warlike for a convent's ear. If you will listen, I will, by your leave, fair cavaliers, sing you a famous Scottish ballad, recounting a deed of charity of that good and gentle-hearted knight, King Robert the Bruce, and for which the Spanish bards have given credit to Rodrigo de Bivar. It is a holy ballad and befitting this place.' Being requested to sing it, the Scottish knight thus began;

"The Bruce has taken some twenty knights along with him to go, For he will pay that ancient vow he doth St. Andrew owe; To Holyrood, where erst the shrine did by the altar stand, The good Robert of the Bruce is riding through the land. "Where'er he goes, much along he throws, to feeble folk and poor; Beside the way for him they pray, him blessings to procure: For God and Mary mother, their heavenly grace to win, His hand was ever bountiful: great was his joy therein. "And there, in the middle of the path a leper did appear! In a deep slough the leper lay; to help none would appear; Though earnestly he thence did cry, 'For God our Savior's sake, From out this fearful jeopardy a Christian brother take.' "When Robert heard that piteous word, he from his horse came down; For all they said, no stay he made, that holy champion; He reached his hand to pluck him forth, of fear was no account, Then mounted on his steed of worth, and made the leper mount. "Behind him rode the leprous man; when to their hostelrie They came, he made him eat with him at table cheerfully; While all the rest from that poor guest with loathing shrunk away, To his own bed the wretch he led, beside him there he lay. "All at the mid-hour of the night, while good Roberto slept, A breath came from the leprosite, which through his shoulders crept; Right through the body by the heart, poured forth that breathing cold; I wot he leapt up with a start, in terrors manifold. "He groped for him in the bed, but him he could not find, Through the dark chamber groped he, with very anxious mind; Loudly he lifted up his voice, with speed a lamp was brought, Yet nowhere was the leper seen, tho' far and near they sought "He turned him to his chamber, God wot! perplexed sore With that which had befallen—when lo! his face before, There stood a man all clothed in vesture shining white; Thus said the vision, 'Sleepest thou, or wakest thou, Sir Knight?' "I sleep not,' quoth Roberto; but tell me who art thou, For, in the midst of darkness, much light is on thy brow?' 'I am the holy Lazarus, I come to speak with thee; I am the same poor leper thou savest for charitie. "Not vain the trial, nor in vain thy victory hath been; God favors thee, for that my pain thou didst relieve yestreen. There shall be honor with thee, in battle and in peace, Success in all thy doings, and plentiful increase. "Strong enemies shall not prevail thy greatness to undo; Thy name shall make

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men's cheek full pale—Scot and Southron too; A death of honor shalt thou die, such grace to thee is given, Thy soul shall part victoriously and be received in Heaven.' "When he these gracious words had said, the spirit vanished quite. Roberto rose and knelt him down,—he knelt till morning light; Unto the heavenly Father and Mary mother dear, He made his prayer right humbly till dawned the morning clear."

This ballad was listened to by all present with great attention; and when the Scottish knight had ended, the character of King Robert was commended in terms of great praise. It now being the turn, on this night, of Rother de Ernest to relate a tale in proof of the superiority of German knighthood over that of the other lands whose chivalry had been illustrated by the three foregoing tales, he placed himself in an attitude to command their attention, and the regard of the listening nuns from the casement around, and thus, in a pleasant voice, began his story:

`Next to deeds of great valor in a knight, are those noble acts which have for their base the gentler feelings of the heart, and which are shown, not so much by deeds of warlike character and high emprise of arms, as in relieving the distressed and averting wrong. The story of Sieur de Linant, in the history of Don Alarcos, has shown us that a knight may achieve the greatest acts of valor and strength and excel in skill of arms all his fellow knights, yet stain the glory and excellence of his brilliant deeds by moral actions that will degrade him as low as his bravery hath before elevated him. My story, therefore, fair dames and gentle cavaliers, will not touch so much upon doughty deeds, though we can show our share of these in Germany, I wot, but upon those higher attributes of chivalry which adorn a knight.

Olof St. Morin was the son of a woodman who dwelt in the black forest of Baden. He was, when in his eighteenth year, a tall, manly, handsome lad, with flowing brown hair, a brilliant eye and finely shaped features looking, save his sun-browned cheek and coarse attire, rather like a prince's son than a peasant's. He had already evinced great courage both to do and to endure, which latter is the nobler quality! In his disposition he was mild and amiable to a fault, in his manners gentle, but in spirit firm and indomitable. His mind was also above his birth, and his skill in books, which the good monks in a neighboring convent loaned him, was by no means to be despised even by the holy fathers themselves! It was a marvel how, amid the gloom of the forest, the wildness of its cataracts, and the savage character of the scenes around him, he should have become what he was; but nature sometimes goes out of her path to strike out her best achievements.

One morning Olof was roaming the forest in search of kine which had strayed from his father's cot, when the distant winding of a bugle fell upon his ears, and in a few moments he caught a glimpse of a party of knights who were passing along the imperial road which wound through the forest. Instigated by curiosity he turned back to take a place on the high way whence he might behold the passage of the cavalcade. It came prancing on with the sound of bugles, the ringing of steel, and clangor of shields, swords and spurs. In advance, rode an imperial herald on his gorgeously emblazoned *tabard*; then came two knights abreast attended by their esquires bearing their shields and spurs; then pranced a company of the gentlemen of the court in gallant costume, in high and merry converse. But what especially drew the eyes of the young forester as he stood leaning upon a tree, was a beautiful palanquin with curtains of azure silk spangled with silver and canopy of cloth of gold, beneath which sat a lovely lady whom he was assured could be none less than a princess. It was followed a few paces behind by a score of mounted men—at-arms! He saw that amid all her splendor, her face was sad, and immediately his heart felt sympathy for her. On either hand of the palanquin which was borne on the shoulders of four strong serfs, rode in silence a lady on a white palfrey, one of whom was elderly and stern, the other a dark-eyed beauty whose dazzling charms at once struck the peasant lad with a sort of bewildering fascination; for he could not keep from her his eyes; and as she saw him she smiled upon him with such dazzling power that, for a moment, in the wild rushing of blood to his brain he lost all consciousness. At this moment the chief of the party riding up to the palanquin spoke to the occupant and then ordered a halt and beckoned to the young forester who alertly yet modestly advanced towards him where he sat upon his horse beside the palanquin.

`Thou seemest as if thou shouldst know these forest's well,' said the old knight, `canst thou tell us how far it is to the convent of St. Mark?'

`It is half a league, turning to the left after you ford the wolf's glen and keeping the beaten path,' he answered, embarrassed, for the large sweet eyes of the lady in the palanquin were fixed upon him with an expression of interest. His own fell beneath them, and he felt as if tears would come to his eyes, he knew not wherefore. The

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other female whose dark glance had flashed upon him so vividly was forgotten, and his thoughts were filled with the pale and beautiful creature who appeared to him like some of the celestial beings he had seen in dreams. He looked up an instant under the influence of these feelings, and his eye met hers fixed upon him so large, blue and tearful, that for the first time in his life he felt unhappy.

The cavalcade was passing on again when a strange noise to the left in the depths of the forest drew all eyes. It mereased; and though at first faint and far distant, advanced rapidly nearer and louder, till there fell upon their appalled ears the prolonged and continuous yell of pursuing wolves, mingled with loud crackling of the underbrush and a wild indiscrible cry that at intervals rose above all!

'Knights to your defence! Men at arms rally before the Princess!' cried the chief of the party. 'Come they along the high-way or across the forest, peasant?' he cried to Olof, who, on first hearing the well known sound had instantly run forward to a rising ground and was now intently looking in the direction in which they seemed to be coming.

'They will cross the way,' he shouted. 'They are in pursuit of a horse who is flying this way. Let me advise you, my lord, to have open-spaces between your men-at-arms that they may have clear pathway before them! There are above three hundred in the pack, and nothing can resist them!'

'Let us defend the princess with our lives, knights,' said the knight, 'and throw ourselves in a body before her with our spears in rest! Hear their infernal yells! The ground shakes! Nay, lady, keep seated till this fierce storm go by!'

The forests now fairly echoed with the yells of the approaching pack, and the moment after he had spoken they beheld advancing along a glade that intersected the road, a dark cloud of wolves in close pursuit of a flying steed, who, with his mane erect, his eyes starting from their sockets, and every muscle strained, was making supernatural exertions to escape from them. Beneath his belly was a knight's saddle and his bridle and stirrups were flying in the wind. Upon his bleeding flanks hung a huge wolf, and ever and anon the victim would give vent to a wild agonizing cry that seemed human in its mortal terror.

In silence and horror the little band stood in the paths awaiting their fate. The yells of the wolves were now so clear and deafening that no voice could be heard. At this crisis Olof, who had stood in advance awaiting them, as if first to offer his body a sacrifice, bounded towards a man-at-arms who held a scarlet banner aloft, and snatching it from him, placed himself a few rods in advance of them and waved it.

The maddened steed came plunging on, and, startled by the flutter of the streamer shaken in his path by the fearless youth, turned slightly aside from his course which was directly for the palanquin, and was dashing past in his furious career, when suddenly at the sight of men and horses, he checked his speed and threw himself bleeding and exhausted upon the ground in front of them, and cast upon the party a glance of human supplication.

There was no time, however, for regarding him, as the peril of all was equal, though each good knight, as he gazed on him, felt as if he would cheerfully do battle in his defence had he none other to defend. The wolves came up at headlong leaps and the head of the pack were speared, or fell beneath blows of sword, while many rushed through the spaces left, and alarmed by the sudden encounter, by the shouts of the knights and men and the shrill shriek of the larum bugles, kept on in flight. About a score, however, gave desperate battle around the fugitive steed, and many of the horses were thrown down and their riders dragged to the earth.

Olof, immediately on seeing the horse turn aside, had placed a tree between him and the fierce current, which, parting on either side, rushing on leaving him unharmed! He now hastened to the assistance of the party, when he saw a wolf of enormous size, who had fled beyond the spot, turn back and make with fierce determination towards the palanquin, which was in the rear. The next instant he was flying over the shoulders of the terrified bearers and lighted upon its side.

With a cry of horror the young forester bounded to her rescue, for all around were appalled and motionless, and the palanquin had been thrown down. He was unarmed; but regardless of this he sprung upon the wolf as he laid his huge paw upon the bosom of the insensible lady, and fastening his hands upon his open jaws, broke the lower; and then grappling with the furious beast, who howled with pain, he fell with him to the ground. For a few moments a terrific contest ensued, but the courageous youth, grasping a knight's dagger from the earth, which had been dropped in the fray, succeeded in thrusting the brute through the gorget and slaying him! This act was witnessed by the princess, who had recovered from her swoon on the fall of the wolf from the palanquin, and by all the knights who, having beaten off the rest of the pack, were spectators of his achievement. The princess

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thanked him warmly for the preservation of her life; and after the knights had got their party together again, and each had his wounds bound up, and the march was resumed, she detained him by the palanquin and inquired his name and parentage.

When she found that he was as modest as he was brave, and had wit and gentle manners, she was greatly pleased with him, more than she dared suffer herself to express in that company.

‘This forest life befits you not,’ she said gazing upon his blushing cheek and downcast eyes. ‘Will you not come to court and serve me?’ she asked with a gentle voice and winning smile.

‘I will serve you, noble lady, in court or forest,’ he answered warmly; ‘so that my poor services may be accepted with one so high and lovely.’

‘He is a courtier already, your Highness,’ laughed and said the dark-eyed horsewoman who had all the while been riding near. ‘He bath the court’s tongue.’

‘Hush, Rachel,’ said the princess; ‘be not pert.’

The Jewess, for such she was, and the confidential maid of the princess Brynhilda, looked vexed and displeased to be rebuked so openly, let her palfrey fall back a pace and rode moodily along.

The noble steed which had been rescued, though wounded sorely, was led behind by a man-at-arms, and numerous were the conjectures as to the fate of the unfortunate rider, for nothing of his rank could be told from his soiled and torn accoutrements, when a man was seen advancing through the forest, hailing the party. As he came nearer, it was discovered that he was a knight in a plain suit of russet mail and that he was bare headed. On his nearer approach the chief knight exclaimed with astonishment,

‘It is the emperor!’ and instantly spurring forward into the forest, he threw himself to the ground and kneeled before him.

At his exclamation there was a general murmur of surprise and recognition. The effect of the announcement upon the princess was remarked with marvel by the peasant. Her face became deadly pale, and she seemed to him to be stricken with fear.

The emperor mounted the knight’s horse, and came forward saluting the company, and riding up and seeing the beautiful Jewess mounted on her palfrey, which she had switched to bring him nearer the emperor, he bent towards, and gallantly saluting her upon the cheek, said, while he gazed admiringly upon her dark and voluptuous beauty;

‘By my halidom, Sir Bertrand, but you have brought me a brave wife!’

‘Your majesty,’ said the knight, who with all the company had witnessed with surprise the king’s salutation, to which, be it said, the Jewess seemed nothing loth, ‘Your majesty has fallen into a great error! The Princess Brynhilda is in the palanquin! She whom you have honored is but a Jewess,

‘Fore heaven. Bertrand, were the princess fairer than the Jewess, she were an angel,’ said Otho.

As he spoke he lifted the curtain and looked in, where, pale, injured in feelings, and instinctively feeling repugnance towards the emperor, reclined the princess. She had been married by proxy, at her father’s court, three weeks before, and was now on her way to her husband’s court, who, having taken a fancy to surprise her, whom he had never seen, rode alone into the forest, three leagues from the capital, to meet them, clad in plain armor

He gazed upon his lovely bride an instant, with a look of evident disappointment, slightly pressed his cheek, not his lips, to hers, and dropped the curtain, leaving her in tears of grief and indignation.

‘Ha, here is my horse! How rescued you him?’ he inquired, with surprise, ‘I believed he had been, ere this, food for wolves. I was set upon, a half league hence by a hungry pack, and only saved myself by springing from his back into the branch of a tree, when he took flight, with the whole horde in full cry after him!’

The knight narrated their adventure, and the escape of the princess, by the gallantry of the forester, whom the emperor, after casting a searching look upon him as he stood aloof from the company, beckoned to advance.

‘I am told thou art a forester, and hast shown bravery of no mean degree. I need such youths about me! Go, take leave of thy father, and follow me to court.’

Thus speaking, the emperor, remounting his own horse, rode forward; and Olof saw as he followed them with his eyes, that he talked and laughed with the Jewess, as he rode, without taking notice of the palanquin, or its occupant.

The young peasant went to court the next day, in obedience to the command of the emperor, and was made a page of his person, to attend him in hunting.— His courage, his manliness, and his superior excellence in all

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things appertaining to his new station, as if born and educated to it, won for him the emperor's regard, who did not fail to heap honors upon him. Nevertheless, Olof remained the same modest and unassuming person as before. He had been but a few weeks in the palace when he discovered that the emperor neglected the youthful empress, whom he kept almost a prisoner in her own apartments; while he spent many of his leisure hours in the company of the beautiful, artful and ambitious Jewess. Olof's heart bled for her, and he was daily contriving ways to do her kindnesses, which his position enabled him to do. At length, for some bold deed, in which he saved the emperor's life from an assassin, he was ennobled, and made a knight of the first order in the empire.

Two years he had remained attached to the emperor's person—a bold soldier and gallant warrior in the field, and a polished courtier in the palace,—when it was discovered by some means, and with certain proof, that he was a nephew of the emperor! being the son of his younger brother, who had been taken from its nurse's arms in the forest, by a bear, and borne into the wilderness, where he was supposed to have been devoured, or to have perished. He was, however, found by the forester's wife, who nurtured him as her own. This discovery produced a great change in the condition of Olof, but none in his heart! He modestly assumed the honors of his high rank, yet wore them as became his birth. During the two years he had become loyally attached to the empress, whom the emperor had now deserted for the beautiful Jewess, who became his concubine, and held great influence over his mind. At length she succeeded in prevailing upon him to imprison Brynhilda in a remote castle on the Rhine, on the accusation of an attempt to poison him.

This act roused the indignation of the nobles, for the mild and gentle character of the empress had won their attachment, and enlisted their sympathy; and being also incensed that a Jewess should be elevated to her place in the imperial palace, they drew up a formidable petition of remonstrance at this injustice done to the empress. This bold procedure incensed the haughty and reckless emperor; and, determined, under the smarting rage of the insult, to be revenged on both her and the nobles, for their interference, he sent for Olof, who was now nearest his throne and his confidential adviser. The young prince appeared before him, tall, noble and commanding in person, the first knight, already, in arms and gentle deeds, in all Germany, though scarce twenty two.

'Olof,' said the emperor, 'you are my next of blood, and heir of an empire! If this wicked empress lives, she will seek your life as she has mine! Go to her, and take with you a trusty slave, and see that she be put to the death! It is the only course I have of ensuring my own life, or you the imperial sceptre?'

The young prince started, and his eloquently-speaking countenance showed his compassion and grief. The emperor observing this, said sternly,

'On your obedience hangs your own life, and thence your crown!'

The prince bowed low, and left the imperial presence. The same night he took horse and attendants, and the third day reached the fortress, in which the hapless empress was cruelly confined.

The lady beholding him approach, from her grated lattice, and recognizing him, began to hope her deliverance had come, for she could not believe she could receive evil from his gentle hands. He alighted; the warder opened the heavy barriers! the locks gave back at his onward course through the passages! she heard his step upon the paved hall without, and the next moment the young forester—prince stood in her presence. He closed the door, and they were alone! She stood still, uncertain whether to advance or not, when he came forward, and, kneeling silently at her feet, took her hand, and she felt hot tears drop upon it!

'What means this grief, Olof!' she said, as he rose to his feet and gazed upon it!

'What means this grief, Olof?' she said, as he rose to his feet and gazed upon her with pity.

'It is the emperor's commands, lady, that you prepare to die! I am commissioned to put them into execution!'

'And will you be so cruel? I am innocent, Olof, of all he could charge against me! My guilt lies in his own dark heart! I am innocent!' and she fell on her knees and looked up to heaven!

'I know it, lady!' he said, with deep grief; it is the emperor's command that I slay you presently.

'Then give me a moment, Olof, to make my peace with God,' said the patient lady.

'Nay, I shall not harm thee! *Your* death or *mine* is my alternative! It becomes not a knight to harm woman—a subject to lay his hand upon his empress! Thus, lady, I show my loyalty and maintain my honor!'

Thus speaking the noble youth threw himself forward upon his naked sword, and died at the feet of her whom he had been commanded to slay!

Here the German knight paused!

A murmur of surprise and admiration rose both from the knights and the listening sisterhood in the casement

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above, and it was acknowledged, without a dissenting voice, that Olof of St. Morin had shown himself worthy the appellation of a true knight; inasmuch as this deed of his was inspired by the noblest sentiments that can inhabit the bosom of a man, or give glory to chivalry

[1] Vide Lockhart's Spanish Ballads.

THE STORY OF PIER FARNESE, THE VENETIAN KNIGHT.

`No amethyst or garnet now shineth on his brow,
No crimson sleeve, which damsels weave at Tunis, decks him now;
The belt is black, the hilt is dim, but the sheathed blade is bright;
He has mailed his barb in an iron garb, but yet her hoofs are light.'

The fourth day of their journey, as the sun was declining below the Sierra Moeda, leaving a golden effulgence suffusing all the sky, the company of cavaliers approached a stately castle, the abode of a famous knight, Don Alonzo de Aguilar, now stricken in years. He was seated in his hall, before an open casement, looking forth upon the highway, as they slowly wound up the valley. His grand-daughter was reading to him an ancient ballad called 'The Lady of the Tree;' for though no longer able to engage in knightly achievements, and do chivalrous deeds for love and lealty, he delighted to sit in his oaken chair and listen to the sweet voice of Donna Violante; and certes, never were ballads given in sweeter melody than discoursed in her low musical tones. This is the ballad the maiden was reading to the old knight: "THE LADY OF THE TREE."* "The knight had hunted long, and twilight closed the day. His hounds were weak and weary—his hawk had flown away; He stopped beneath an oak, an old and mighty tree, Then out the maiden spoke, and a comely maid was she. 'The knight' gan lift his eye the shady bough between, She had her seat on high, among the oak leaves green; The golden curls lay clustering above her breast of snow, But when the breeze did freshen around it they did flow. "Oh fear not, gentle knight! these is no cause for fear; I am a good king's daughter, long years enchanted here; Seven cruel fairies found me—they charmed a sleeping child, Seven years their charm hath bound me, a damsel un defiled. "Seven weary years are gone since o'er me charms they threw; I have dwelt here all alone, I have seen no one but you My seven sad years are spent; for Christ that died on rood, Thou noble knight consent, and lead me from the wood! "Oh bring me forth again from out this darksome place! I dare not sleep for terror of the unholy race. Oh, take me, gentle sir! I'll be a wife to thee; I'll be thy lowly leman, if wife I may not be.' "Till dawns the morning, wait thou lovely lady! here; I'll ask my mother, straight, for her reproof I fear.' 'Oh, ill becomes thee, knight!' said she, that maid forlorn, The blood of kings to slight, a lady's tears to scorn!

'He came when morning broke, to fetch the maid away, But could not find the oak wherein she made her stay; All through the wilderness he sought, in bower and in tree; Fair lordlings, well ye guess what weary heart had he. 'There came a sound of voices from up the forest glen, The king had come to find her, with all his gentlemen; They rode in merry mood, in joyous cavalcade, Fair in their midst rode she, but never word she said. 'Though on the green he knelt, no look on him she cast, His hand was on the hilt ere all the train were past. 'Oh, shame to knightly blood! oh, scorn to chivalry! I'll die within the wood; no eye my death shall see!"

'He was a false knight, child,' said the old noble, when Donna Violante had ended; 'he should have forthwith delivered the charmed maiden from her thralment. For such emprises is chivalry maintained.'

'She rightly treated him, sire, by not speaking to him, for all his kneeling on the sward,' said Donna Violante; 'no doubt this shameful knight killed himself in the wood as he promised.'

'He should ha' done it, daughter. But what company journeyeth hitherward? Look—thy eyes are young. I see the glancing of steel and the flutter of bonnets.'

'It is a brave company of knights and men—at-arms, sire,' exclaimed Donna Violante, clapping her hands and looking delighted as she gazed forth. 'One, two, five, seven brave knights are riding in advance, on prancing steeds, and their esquires and retinue come up behind!'

'They doubtless come from the tournament, and journey homeward. It is evening, and they should soon encamp. Let us go forth to the castle gate, and as they ride past I will offer them hospitality.'

When the knights got opposite the great gate of the castle, not knowing its lord, they were riding by, when suddenly they beheld it thrown open, and the old noble appear, his locks white as wool, leaning on his sweet grand-daughter's arm.

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'God save you all, gentle knights,' he said, waving his hand for them to stop; 'the day is past, and it is many a mile to hamlet or hotel; and I should bring shame upon my head to let so brave a company take lodging in the forest, when my castle hath roof and room. So alight, fair cavaliers, and share the hospitality of Alonzo de Aguilar.'

When the knights heard this name, and so knew who the fine old knight was, they one and all lifted their travelling bonnets and did him reverence, for chivalry acknowledged no better or nobler name than his. Donna Violante modestly seconded the hospitable invitation of her grandsire, and the knights, thanking them for their courtesies, which would not be said nay, rode into the court of the castle, and became their guests for the night.

After the hospitable meal which Donna Violante and her maids had quickly provided for them, was over, the whole party remained seated in pleasant talk around the board. Sir Henry Percie, whose heart was deeply smitten by the gentle beauty of the fair hostess, being seated near her, was entertaining her with accounts of the tournament, and of his journey, and how they had beguiled the hour of their encampment, by tales of each other's lands. On hearing this, Donna Violante signified her desire that the Venetian knight, whose lot Sir Henry Percie had told her it was, should relate his story for the evening's pastime. The old knight of Aguilar, also pressing him to tell it, he thus began:

'It was in the year 1204,' began the handsome and gallant signor Pier Farnese, looking respectfully towards the maiden, 'when the combined chivalry of France and Venice lay before Constantinople. The bosom of the Golden Horn was covered with the war galleys of the Venetians, and its shores were white with the warlike tents of their allies, the Franks. The seige had lasted long, and yet the infidel Turks held their city untouched by a Christian foot, though a hundred thousand soldiers of the cross were encamped around her gates within bolt shot. One brilliant morning the rising sun shimmered the rippling Bosphorus with liquid gold, flashed back from a hundred minarets of silver, and blazed from myriads of lances, helmets and banners. The fleet of numerous war galleys looked like burnished barks in the radiant splendor of its beams, and the satin tents of the princess and chief knights lining the green shores of the Bosphorus, shone like palaces of pearl. Never such morning beamed on such gallant show; while from the minarets was heard the loud cry of the muezzin of '*Allah il allah*,' calling the infidel to prayer, mingling with trumpets of the Christian hosts assembling to battle outside the walls. It was the fortieth day of the seige, and the Turks had kept themselves so close within their city that no warlike deed had yet been done. There was many a brave knight who, riding up to the city gate, threw defiance at the Saracen, and challenged a combatant, but none up to this time had appeared to answer any of these numerous invitations to fair and open battle.

'In the midst of this brilliant and stirring scene on the morning I have described, the attention of Turk, Gaseon and Venetian was drawn to a superb galley that shot round a point of the Golden Horn, and gallantly and swiftly approached the Doge's galley of state. It was a fair and stately vessel, with three banks of plashing oars, and it skimmed the waters as if its feathery sweeps were living wings. On all sides, as it advanced into the port, were heard exclamations of delight and surprise at its great velocity, as well as at its splendor; for many a morn one would look seaward and not such a bark behold!— It had three tall masts of cedar, polished like ivory; broad sails of blue satin: a burnished poop of beaten gold, and on her lofty prow was perched the bronzed eagle of St. Marc. Her decks were bristling with casques, cuisses and shields, and ever and anon a shout would be borne therefrom over the water, which was answered back from galley and camp.

'By the good rood, messieurs,' said Charles of Anjou, who from his tent beheld the approach of the galley; 'this is a fair show! Hath Cleopatra risen from the sea to visit us? 'Tis a Venetian bark by her sign of the lion of San Marco. Who knoweth her?'

'It must be the nephew of the Doge, my liege, the young knight Medici de Contavini, who is daily looked for to join us,' answered one.

'He must be a rare youth to come in such guise! By my beard, I would have sworn that a maiden sailed in yon pretty toy! Yet, fore God! there is good warlike show of steel heads on her decks, and her rowers have sinews!'

'Tis said he is a gay gallant, my liege, and spendeth great incomes upon his apparel; yet I have heard he knoweth how to hse steel as well as glitter in gold.'

'Certes, he shall here have an opportunity,' said the French king, 'Methinks such garrish outside should be a braggart's! We will try him. See, he hath anchored his gilded plaything by the Doge's galley, which with its iron prow, steel plated poop, tall black sides and warlike garments contrasts well.'

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The Doge, in the meanwhile, the brave, blind old Dandolo, received the newly arrived knight on board his galley with an affectionate embrace, and leading him into his room of state, there discoursed with him of Venice. The same afternoon, Charles of Anjou gave an entertainment to the chief knights of Venice and of France, in his princely tent. The young knight Medici di Contavini was invited and came. He was a tall, finely moulded young man, clad in armor of Damascus steel, embossed and inlaid with gold. His hose were silk, worked with gold; he wore a collar of diamonds clasped with an emerald, and jewels of great beauty sparkled on the cross of his sword. The pole of his lance was of cedar wood, inlaid with silver, and an amethyst was set in its handle. Gloves of chamois, worked with the needle in brilliant devices, and scented with perfumes, were on his hands, and a gorgeous cap, adorned with a priceless pearl, was upon his head. He was mounted on a snow-white palfrey, with housings of cloth of gold, with a tread as dainty as a lady's. When Charles of Anjou, who was clad in mailed steel, without ornament, saw him approach, he spoke some words of contempt to those around him, and when he came up received him with ill grace, not concealing his dislike. The Venetian knight did not heed this manner; but gracefully saluted him, and dismounting, gave his palfrey in charge to a page, who, scarce less richly attired than his master, had attended him, riding a slender-limbed snow-white Arabian.

'Now, by my knighthood,' said Anjou to an English knight, 'I have not seen in Christendom such discredit to Christian arms. He bringeth contempt on chivalry, and is only fit for spoil to these musselmen, who, if they know what a gay popinjay we had in camp, would make a special sally for his capture. So long as they know they would get only steel and iron knocks, they have kept close enough.'

Thus spoke the brave and rough French prince before the banquet began; and took thence no further heed of the knight of Venice; who mating with cavaliers of his own age, soon made himself quite at his ease.

The entertainment was sumptuous and hospitable as became a princess's board. The discourse among the guests was of the long leaguer that probably was before them ere they could take the city. Many a plan was discussed for shortening the seige; but none pleased the prince, who, knowing the strength of the walls, was content to get the victory by and by with patient waiting for it. After several knights had spoken their mind of the matter, the young Venetian knight, Medici di Contavini, having listened to each with great attention rose up and said,

'It were no difficult matter, methinks, to take this city! The infidels are brave only in their defences! A well-directed attack upon the gate over against St. Sophia, would be successful, and entrance once made, the place would fall into our hands.'

'It were easy to get words, sir Venetian,' scornfully answered Charles of Anjou, who with all the knights present, had looked on the speaker with surprise; 'words are easily got: but deeds we want!'

'My liege!' said a young French knight present; 'this gilded cavalier did openly boast without the tents, before we sat down to repast, that he with a thousand men could easily take the city; and wondering much that we should lay thus quietly before its gates.'

'Said he so?' shouted Anjou fiercely.

'I did, noble prince,' said the young Medici in a firm tone.

'Then by the throne of France you shall not want the occasion to put your words to proof!'

'If you will place at my command one thousand men, I will, ere to-morrow's sun, plant the standard of St Marc where over yonder gate now waves the crescent of the infidel!'

'Good words these, fair sir,' said Charles, who was not a little astonished to hear such come from a 'boudoir knight,' as he had contemptuously termed him when he first beheld him. 'Seven times we have been driven back from her gates with great loss of life.'

'Give me the men I ask, and the deeds they betoken shall be as good,' answered Medici de Contavini, with quiet determination. 'If I fail, let my head answer it.'

'By Saint Dennis! but his speech rings like good metal, if there be gilt atop,' said the prince to those near by.

'Thou shalt have thy wish, sir knight. 'As this is a venture of thy seeking, and in which we have little faith, and do consent to it only to punish thy vain boasting, the condition of thy failure shall be the loss of thy spurs; they being of gold will serve the soldiers better than they will have done thee, by being coined into sterling bezants.'

The Venetian knight little heeded the contemptuous manner of the French king, nor the smiles of the knights, who could not help comparing his bravery of words with the foppishness of his apparelling.

'When wilt thou go on this emprise to take the city for us, sir knight of the casket?' asked the king's fool.

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'I am now ready, good fool; wilt be my esquire?' replied the knight, playfully; so that all wondered that he kept his temper so coolly.

'Art ready, sayst thou?' demanded the king. 'Tis two hours to the setting of the sun, a short time, forsooth, in which to take a city. But so doughty a knight need not have many minutes in achieving the exploit he boasts of. If thou art ready, I will soon have not only one, but five thousand halberds, and a hundred lances a saddle!'

The young Venetian smiled haughtily, and rising from the table, went out, the knights and gentlemen also going after him. At the prince's command, a thousand stout men—at—arms, all in iron breast and back pieces, filed before his tent; and a hundred knights, mounted on proud and pawing horses, with great bravery of targets and glittering lances, their banners all displayed, pranced by with waving of plumes, and beneath each corselet a buoyant heart and bold.

All the while the young Venetian knight, whose words had called forth this warlike cavalcade, stood near the prince, calm and unmoved, watching the brave show of war. When he saw that all had passed by, and were ready marshalled on the plain, he turned to his page and spoke low in his ear. The boy left him, and the prince said,

'Now, sir Venetian, the lances I lend thee are in rest, waiting thee to mount. By the mass, I look to see thy jewelled mail rolling in the dust beneath yon der towers, if thou darest trust thy perfumed locks so near them. But the issue be thine!'

'Noble prince of Anjou, that a knight's valor lieth not in his apparel, but in his heart, I trust this day to teach thee and thy gentlemen,' answered Medici di Contavini.

The prince was about to reply hastily, when his attention was drawn to an esquire of gigantic stature, armed cap—a—pie, in plain iron mail, mounted upon a brown horse of large size, and leading a jet black steed glittering with Milan mail. This esquire rode up to the Venetian knight, and dismounting, gave him a polished steel helmet in place of his golden one, which his page took from him; an iron collar for the jewelled one he wore; a cuirass of proof mail, and a sword with an iron hilt, in exchange for the one with the jewelled handle; stout gauntlets of steel replaced his perfumed chamois gloves; and iron boots with iron spurs, the embroidered hose. The transformation was soon made; and the late beau cavalier stood before the surprised Charles of Anjou, a well-appointed knight, clad in steel from head to heel. Ere he could express his surprise, Medici di Contavini receiving his horse from his esquire, leaped into his steel saddle and sat erect thereon, before the prince and the whole camp of warriors.

Charles of Anjou gazed a moment upon the warlike and knightly figure which the Venetian presented, then struck his gauntlet—armed hand upon his thigh, and swore ne'er knight of braver presence had sat on horseback bore him.

'Fore God! brave Venetian. I have done thee wrong, I fear me,' said Anjou, bluntly.

'Let the issue of this day tell,' answered the knight of Venice quietly. 'If you have given me these brave knights and soldiers to aid me in my enterprise, let me at once lead them forth.'

The knight of Medici then placed himself at the head of the troops, the trumpets sounded with loud and stirring notes; and in sight of the whole French army and fleet of Venetian galleys, the young Venetian knight rode at easy pace across the plain, toward the city walls. When the Mussulmen, from the towers and battlements, beheld this warlike array approaching the principal gate of their city, the alarm flew round that the whole christian army was moving to the attack. The infidel leaders gathered their forces at the weakest points, the walls were trebly manned, and every preparation was made to meet the anticipated assault.

The entrance of an old seneschal, with a fresh supply of wine, here caused the cavalier to pause in his narrative.

'There is but little more to add, fair maiden and gentle knights,' continued Pier Farnese, after old Alonzo de Aguilar had drunk the health of all the cavaliers present; 'there is little more to add. The brave young Venetian fulfilled to the letter his boast. Under a shower of arrows, lances, and fiery darts, hurled from the walls and gate tops, this courageous youth pressed forward alone to the gate, after his men—at—arms had shrunk back or stood still appalled.— With his battle—axe in his hand, Contavini assailed the plated gate, and in tones of defiance called upon them to open to their master.

Seeing his courage and gallant bearing, the soldiers, who had been arrested by the flights of arrows and lances, covering their bodies with their shields and pressing close together, rushed on to his aid. When they came up he had already made a breach in the gate with the blows of his ponderous battle—axe, with the edge of which he cut through the iron plates with which it was sheathed. In a few minutes, aided by the rest who came up, he achieved an entrance into the city and drove the Saracen defenders back from street to street. Entering the palace the

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victorious Venetian captured the Sultan with his own hand, after a terrible combat, in which great deeds of valor were done on both sides.

Charles of Anjou who, from his camp, saw the valiant attack of the knight upon the gate of St. Sophia, and seeing how he was deserted by his men-at-arms, sounded the trumpet for a general charge to his rescue; for that the brave knight would perish, he surely believed, before he could make good his pledge to take the city.

But before the King had got three hundred bows' lengths from the camp, he saw the gate hacked down by the battle axes of the knight, and his men-at-arms and the way open into the city; which from the walls and towers the Musslemen were flying in the greatest consternation.

This feat of the Venetian Knight placed the rich metropolis of the East in the hands of the Christian hosts, and its ultimate effect upon the destinies of the Europe and of the world were incalculable. The Venetians erected a monument in honor of their Champion, and every European count heaped honors upon his head, and to crown the whole, Anjou gave him his niece the Princess Castele in marriage.'

With these words Pier Farnese the Venetian knight ended his Romance, expressed his wishes that the lovely Donna Violante should decide which knight should have the palm.

'That I may give fair judgment, noble knights,' said the maiden, 'I must also hear your stories repeated as you have given them to each other in your nightly encampment.

'This would take us full three evening's more, fair lady,' answered the English knight bluffly.

'Then let it take three and thirty more, an' you will, brave knights and gentlemen,' answered old Don Alonzo de Aguilon with hearty hospitality in his tones. 'I would gladly have you my guests as long as you will make my poor castle your abode!'

'Then we will e'en remain with you, the three days,' said the Scottish knight; 'for there is no time that presses any of us. What shall we say, gentle cavaliers?'

'We will all abide as guests with the noble de Aguilar, and his lovely daughter Donna Violante, three days more,' answered all the knights with one voice.

The three following evenings, then, the three knights who had told their stories over again, in hearing of the old knight and his sweet daughter.

At the close of the third evening the decision of the matter of respective merit was submitted to the fair judge who, after mingling with the testimony on all sides gave in her judgment in favor of the Spanish knight, Don Fernando de Valor.

This decision was approved by two of the three knights who had taken no part in the debate; and also the veteran warrior, the brave old Alonzo de Aguilar. The Roman knight, however, did not fully assent to the judgment that gave precedency to Spanish knighthood over all others, and said that he and the English and Scottish knight, would as they traveled, also narrate deeds of of their own lands which would show that there were as brilliant ornaments of chivalry in England, Rome or Scotland, as in any court in Europe. This challenge was not accepted by the four knights, though the three cavaliers warmly urged that they had a right to be heard; and as it now waxed late, they retired each to his apartment, preparatory to refreshing themselves for resuming their journey early on the morrow. THE END