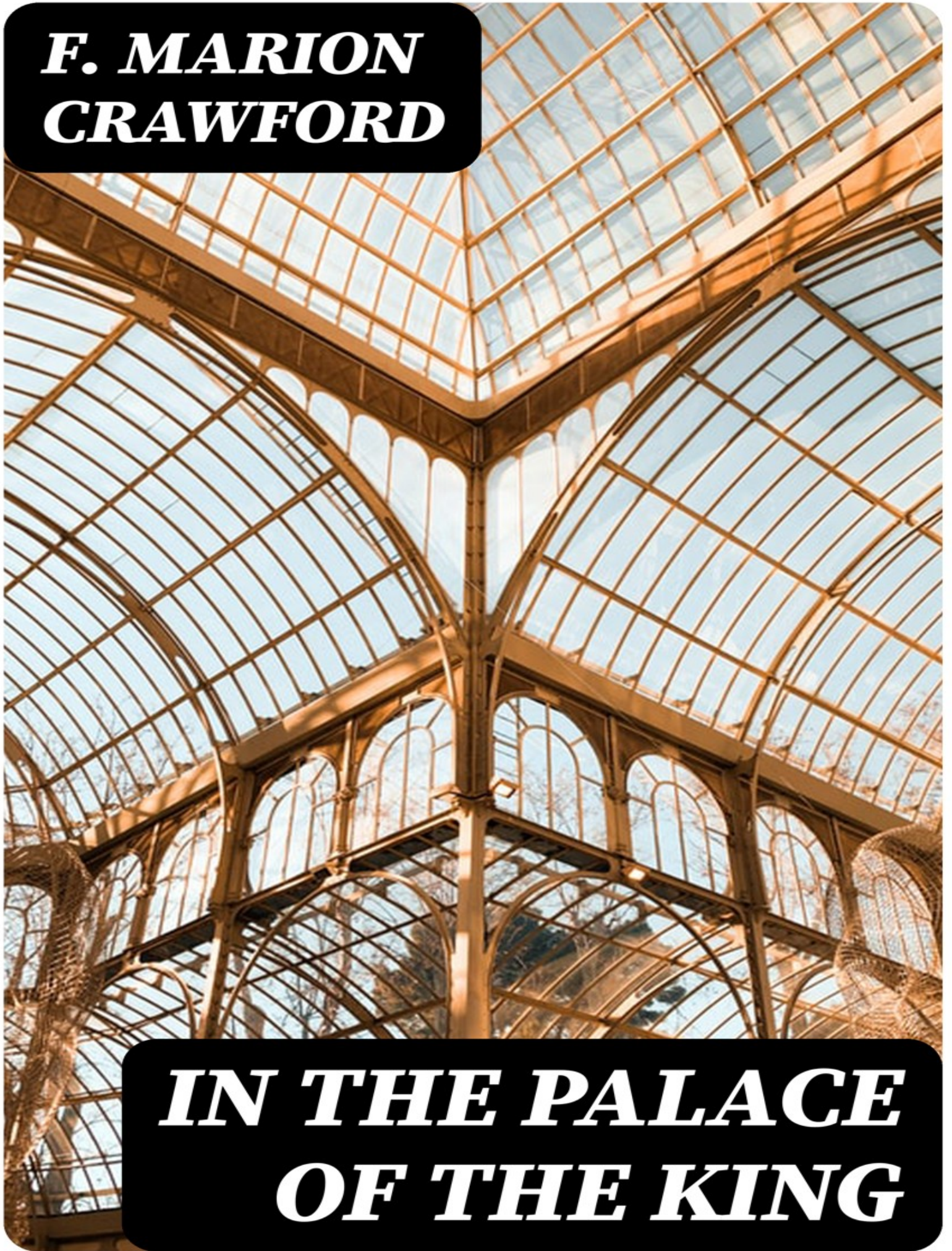


***F. MARION
CRAWFORD***

***IN THE PALACE
OF THE KING***



F. Marion Crawford

In the Palace of the King

A Love Story of Old Madrid

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CHAPTER I

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Two young girls sat in a high though very narrow room of the old Moorish palace to which King Philip the Second had brought his court when he finally made Madrid his capital. It was in the month of November, in the afternoon, and the light was cold and grey, for the two tall windows looked due north, and a fine rain had been falling all the morning. The stones in the court were drying now, in patches, but the sky was like a smooth vault of cast lead, closing over the city that lay to the northward, dark, wet and still, as if its life had shrunk down under ground, away from the bitter air and the penetrating damp.

The room was scantily furnished, but the few objects it contained, the carved table, the high-backed chairs and the chiselled bronze brazier, bore the stamp of the time when art had not long been born again. On the walls there were broad tapestries of bold design, showing green forests populated by all sorts of animals in stiff attitudes, staring at one another in perpetual surprise. Below the tapestry a carved walnut wainscoting went round the room, and the door was panelled and flanked by fluted doorposts of the same dark wood, on which rested corbels fashioned into curling acanthus leaves, to hold up the cornice, which itself made a high shelf over the door. Three painted Italian vases, filled with last summer's rose leaves and carefully sealed lest the faint perfume should be lost, stood symmetrically on this projection, their contents slowly ripening for future use. The heap of white ashes, under which the wood coals

were still alive in the big brazier, diffused a little warmth through the chilly room.

The two girls were sitting at opposite ends of the table. The one held a long goose-quill pen, and before her lay several large sheets of paper covered with fine writing. Her eyes followed the lines slowly, and from time to time she made a correction in the manuscript. As she read, her lips moved to form words, but she made no sound. Now and then a faint smile lent singular beauty to her face, and there was more light in her eyes, too; then it disappeared again, and she read on, carefully and intently, as if her soul were in the work.

She was very fair, as Spaniards sometimes are still, and were more often in those days, with golden hair and deep grey eyes; she had the high features, the smooth white throat, and the finely modelled ears that were the outward signs of the lordly Gothic race. When she was not smiling, her face was sad, and sometimes the delicate colour left her clear cheek and she grew softly pale, till she seemed almost delicate. Then the sensitive nostrils quivered almost imperceptibly, and the curving lips met closely as if to keep a secret; but that look came seldom, and for the most part her eyes were quiet and her mouth was kind. It was a face that expressed devotion, womanly courage, and sensitiveness rather than an active and dominating energy. The girl was indeed a full-grown woman, more than twenty years of age, but the early bloom of girlhood was on her still, and if there was a little sadness in the eyes, a man could guess well enough that it rose from the heart, and had but one simple source, which was neither a sudden grief nor

a long-hidden sorrow, but only youth's one secret--love. Maria Dolores de Mendoza knew all of fear for the man she loved, that any woman could know, and much of the hope that is love's early life; but she knew neither the grief, nor the disappointment, nor the shame for another, nor for herself, nor any of the bitterness that love may bring. She did not believe that such things could be wrung from hearts that were true and faithful; and in that she was right. The man to whom she had given her heart and soul and hope had given her his, and if she feared for him, it was not lest he should forget her or his own honour. He was a man among men, good and true; but he was a soldier, and a leader, who daily threw his life to the battle, as Douglas threw the casket that held the Bruce's heart into the thick of the fight, to win it back, or die. The man she loved was Don John of Austria, the son of the great dead Emperor Charles the Fifth, the uncle of dead Don Carlos and the half brother of King Philip of Spain--the man who won glory by land and sea, who won back Granada a second time from the Moors, as bravely as his great grandfather Ferdinand had won it, but less cruelly, who won Lepanto, his brother's hatred and a death by poison, the foulest stain in Spanish history.

It was November now, and it had been June of the preceding year when he had ridden away from Madrid to put down the Moriscoes, who had risen savagely against the hard Spanish rule. He had left Dolores de Mendoza an hour before he mounted, in the freshness of the early summer morning, where they had met many a time, on a lonely terrace above the King's apartments. There were roses there, growing almost wild in great earthen jars, where

some Moorish woman had planted them in older days, and Dolores could go there unseen with her blind sister, who helped her faithfully, on pretence of taking the poor girl thither to breathe the sweet quiet air. For Inez was painfully sensitive of her affliction, and suffered, besides blindness, all that an over-sensitive and imaginative being can feel.

She was quite blind, with no memory of light, though she had been born seeing, as other children. A scarlet fever had destroyed her sight. Motherless from her birth, her father often absent in long campaigns, she had been at the mercy of a heartless nurse, who had loved the fair little Dolores and had secretly tormented the younger child, as soon as she was able to understand, bringing her up to believe that she was so repulsively ugly as to be almost a monster. Later, when the nurse was gone, and Dolores was a little older, the latter had done all she could to heal the cruel wound and to make her sister know that she had soft dark hair, a sad and gentle face, with eyes that were quite closed, and a delicate mouth that had a little half painful, half pathetic way of twitching when anything hurt her,--for she was easily hurt. Very pale always, she turned her face more upwards than do people who have sight, and being of good average woman's height and very slender and finely made, this gave her carriage an air of dignity that seemed almost pride when she was offended or wounded. But the first hurt had been deep and lasting, and she could never quite believe that she was not offensive to the eyes of those who saw her, still less that she was sometimes almost beautiful in a shadowy, spiritual way. The blind, of all their sufferings, often feel most keenly the impossibility of

knowing whether the truth is told them about their own looks; and he who will try and realize what it is to have been always sightless will understand that this is not vanity, but rather a sort of diffidence towards which all people should be very kind. Of all necessities of this world, of all blessings, of all guides to truth, God made light first. There are many sharp pains, many terrible sufferings and sorrows in life that come and wrench body and soul, and pass at last either into alleviation or recovery, or into the rest of death; but of those that abide a lifetime and do not take life itself, the worst is hopeless darkness. We call ignorance 'blindness,' and rage 'blindness,' and we say a man is 'blind' with grief.

Inez sat opposite her sister, at the other end of the table, listening. She knew what Dolores was doing, how during long months her sister had written a letter, from time to time, in little fragments, to give to the man she loved, to slip into his hand at the first brief meeting or to drop at his feet in her glove, or even, perhaps, to pass to him by the blind girl's quick fingers. For Inez helped the lovers always, and Don John was very gentle with her, talking with her when he could, and even leading her sometimes when she was in a room she did not know. Dolores knew that she could only hope to exchange a word with him when he came back, and that the terrace was bleak and wet now, and the roses withered, and that her father feared for her, and might do some desperate thing if he found her lover talking with her where no one could see or hear. For old Mendoza knew the world and the court, and he foresaw that sooner or later some royal marriage would be made for Don John of Austria, and that even if Dolores were married to him, some tortuous

means would be found to annul her marriage, whereby a great shame would darken his house. Moreover, he was the King's man, devoted to Philip body and soul, as his sovereign, ready to give his life ten times for his sovereign's word, and thinking it treason to doubt a royal thought or motive. He was a rigid old man, a Spaniard of Spain's great days, fearless, proud, intolerant, making Spain's honour his idol, capable of gentleness only to his children, and loving them dearly, but with that sort of severity and hardness in all questions where his authority was concerned which can make a father's true affection the most intolerable burden to a girl of heart, and which, where a son is its object, leads sooner or later to fierce quarrels and lifelong estrangement. And so it had happened now. For the two girls had a brother much older than they, Rodrigo; and he had borne to be treated like a boy until he could bear no more, and then he had left his father's house in anger to find out his own fortune in the world, as many did in his day,--a poor gentleman seeking distinction in an army of men as brave as himself, and as keen to win honour on every field. Then, as if to oppose his father in everything, he had attached himself to Don John, and was spoken of as the latter's friend, and Mendoza feared lest his son should help Don John to a marriage with Dolores. But in this he was mistaken, for Rodrigo was as keen, as much a Spaniard, and as much devoted to the honour of his name as his father could be; and though he looked upon Don John as the very ideal of what a soldier and a prince should be, he would have cut off his own right hand rather than let it give his leader the letter Dolores had been writing so long; and she knew this

and feared her brother, and tried to keep her secret from him.

Inez knew all, and she also was afraid of Rodrigo and of her father, both for her sister's sake and her own. So, in that divided house, the father was against the son, and the daughters were allied against them both, not in hatred, but in terror and because of Dolores' great love for Don John of Austria.

As they sat at the table it began to rain again, and the big drops beat against the windows furiously for a few minutes. The panes were round and heavy, and of a greenish yellow colour, made of blown glass, each with a sort of knob in the middle, where the iron blowpipe had been separated from the hot mass. It was impossible to see through them at all distinctly, and when the sky was dark with rain they admitted only a lurid glare into the room, which grew cold and colourless again when the rain ceased. Inez had been sitting motionless a long time, her elbow on the table, her chin resting upon her loosely clasped white hands, her blind face turned upward, listening to the turning of the pages and to the occasional scratching of her sister's pen. She sighed, moved, and let her hands fall upon the table before her in a helpless, half despairing way, as she leaned back in the big carved chair. Dolores looked up at once, for she was used to helping her sister in her slightest needs and to giving her a ready sympathy in every mood.

"What is it?" she asked quickly. "Do you want anything, dear?"

"Have you almost finished?"

The girl's voice would almost have told that she was blind. It was sweet and low, but it lacked life; though not weak, it was uncertain in strength and full of a longing that could never be satisfied, but that often seemed to come within possible reach of satisfaction. There was in the tones, too, the perpetual doubt of one from whom anything might be hidden by silence, or by the least tarn of words. Every passing hope and fear, and every pleasure and pain, were translated into sound by its quick changes. It trusted but could not always quite promise to believe; it swelled and sank as the sensitive heart beat faster or slower. It came from a world without light, in which only sound had meaning, and only touch was certainty.

"Yes," answered Dolores. "I have almost finished--there is only half a page more to read over."

"And why do you read it over?" asked Inez. "Do you change what you have written? Do you not think now exactly as you did when you wrote?"

"No; I feel a great deal more--I want better words! And then it all seems so little, and so badly written, and I want to say things that no one ever said before, many, many things. He will laugh--no, not that! How could he? But my letter will seem childish to him. I know it will. I wish I had never written it I Do you think I had better give it to him, after all?"

"How can I tell?" asked Inez hopelessly. "You have never read it to me. I do not know what you have said to him."

"I have said that I love him as no man was ever loved before," answered Dolores, and the true words seemed to thrill with a life of their own as she spoke them.

Then she was silent for a moment, and looked down at the written pages without seeing them. Inez did not move, and seemed hardly to breathe. Then Dolores spoke again, pressing both her hands upon the paper before her unconsciously.

"I have told him that I love him, and shall love him for ever and ever," she said; "that I will live for him, die for him, suffer for him, serve him! I have told him all that and much more."

"More? That is much already. But he loves you, too. There is nothing you can promise which he will not promise, and keep, too, I think. But more! What more can you have said than that?"

"There is nothing I would not say if I could find words!"

There was a fullness of life in her voice which, to the other's uncertain tones, was as sunshine to moonlight.

"You will find words when you see him this evening," said Inez slowly. "And they will be better than anything you can write. Am I to give him your letter?"

Dolores looked at her sister quickly, for there was a little constraint in the accent of the last phrase.

"I do not know," she answered. "How can I tell what may happen, or how I shall see him first?"

"You will see him from the window presently. I can hear the guards forming already to meet him--and you--you will be able to see him from the window."

Inez had stopped and had finished her speech, as if something had choked her. She turned sideways in her chair when she had spoken, as if to listen better, for she was seated with her back to the light.

"I will tell you everything," said Maria Dolores softly. "It will be almost as if you could see him, too."

"Almost--"

Inez spoke the one word and broke off abruptly, and rose from her chair. In the familiar room she moved almost as securely as if she could see. She went to the window and listened. Dolores came and stood beside her.

"What is it, dear?" she asked. "What is the matter? What has hurt you? Tell me!"

"Nothing," answered the blind girl, "nothing, dear. I was thinking--how lonely I shall be when you and he are married, and they send me to a convent, or to our dismal old house in Valladolid."

A faint colour came into her pale face, and feeling it she turned away from Dolores; for she was not speaking the truth, or at least not half of it all.

"I will not let you go!" answered Dolores, putting one arm round her sister's waist. "They shall never take you from me. And if in many years from now we are married, you shall always be with us, and I will always take care of you as I do now."

Inez sighed and pressed her forehead and blind eyes to the cold window, almost withdrawing herself from the pressure of Dolores' arm. Down below there was tramping of heavy feet, as the companies of foot guards took their places, marching across the broad space, in their wrought steel caps and breastplates, carrying their tasselled halberds on their shoulders. An officer's voice gave sharp commands. The gust that had brought the rain had passed

by, and a drizzling mist, caused by a sudden chill, now completely obscured the window.

"Can you see anything?" asked Inez suddenly, in a low voice. "I think I hear trumpets far away."

"I cannot see--there is mist on the glass, too. Do you hear the trumpets clearly?"

"I think I do. Yes--I hear them clearly now." She stopped. "He is coming," she added under her breath.

Dolores listened, but she had not the almost supernatural hearing of the blind, and could distinguish nothing but the tramping of the soldiers below, and her sister's irregular breathing beside her, as Inez held her breath again and again in order to catch the very faint and distant sound.

"Open the window," she said almost sharply, "I know I hear the trumpets."

Her delicate fingers felt for the bolts with almost feverish anxiety. Dolores helped her and opened the window wide. A strain of distant clarions sounding a triumphant march came floating across the wet city. Dolores started, and her face grew radiant, while her fresh lips opened a little as if to drink in the sound with the wintry air. Beside her, Inez grew slowly pale and held herself by the edge of the window frame, gripping it hard, and neither of the two girls felt any sensation of cold. Dolores' grey eyes grew wide and bright as she gazed fixedly towards the city where the avenue that led to the palace began, but Inez, bending a little, turned her ear in the same direction, as if she could not bear to lose a single note of the music that told her how Don John of Austria had come home in triumph, safe and whole, from his long campaign in the south.

Slowly it came nearer, strain upon strain, each more clear and loud and full of rejoicing. At first only the high-pitched clarions had sent their call to the window, but now the less shrill trumpets made rich harmonies to the melody, and the deep bass horns gave the marching time to the rest, in short full blasts that set the whole air shaking as with little peak of thunder. Below, the mounted officers gave orders, exchanged short phrases, cantered to their places, and came back again a moment later to make some final arrangement--their splendid gold-inlaid corslets and the rich caparisons of their horses looking like great pieces of jewelry that moved hither and thither in the thin grey mist, while the dark red and yellow uniforms of the household guards surrounded the square on three sides with broad bands of colour. Dolores could see her father, who commanded them and to whom the officers came for orders, sitting motionless and erect on his big black horse--a stern figure, with close-cut grey beard, clad all in black saving his heavily gilded breastplate and the silk sash he wore across it from shoulder to sword knot. She shrank back a little, for she would not have let him see her looking down from an upper window to welcome the returning visitor.

"What is it? Do you see him? Is he there?" Inez asked the questions in a breath, as she heard her sister move.

"No--our father is below on his horse. He must not see us." And she moved further into the embrasure.

"You will not be able to see," said Inez anxiously. "How can you tell me--I mean, how can you see, where you are?"

Dolores laughed softly, but her laugh trembled with the happiness that was coming so soon.

"Oh, I see very well," she answered. "The window is wide open, you know."

"Yes--I know."

Inez leaned back against the wall beside the window, letting her hand drop in a hopeless gesture. The simple answer had hurt her, who could never see, by its mere thoughtlessness and by the joy that made her sister's voice quaver. The music grew louder and louder, and now there came with it the sound of a great multitude, cheering, singing the march with the trumpets, shouting for Don John; and all at once as the throng burst from the street to the open avenue the voices drowned the clarions for a moment, and a vast cry of triumph filled the whole air.

"He is there! He is there!" repeated Inez, leaning towards the window and feeling for the stone sill.

But Dolores could not hear for the shouting. The clouds had lifted to the westward and northward; and as the afternoon sun sank lower they broke away, and the level rays drank up the gloom of the wintry day in an instant. Dolores stood motionless before the window, undazzled, like a statue of ivory and gold in a stone niche. With the light, as the advancing procession sent the people before it, the trumpets rang high and clear again, and the bright breastplates of the trumpeters gleamed like dancing fire before the lofty standard that swayed with the slow pace of its bearer's horse. Brighter and nearer came the colours, the blazing armour, the standard, the gorgeous procession of victorious men-at-arms; louder and louder blew the trumpets, higher and higher the clouds were lifted from the lowering sun. Half the people of Madrid went before, the

rest flocked behind, all cheering or singing or shouting. The stream of colour and light became a river, the river a flood, and in the high tide of a young victor's glory Don John of Austria rode onward to the palace gate. The mounted trumpeters parted to each side before him, and the standard-bearer ranged his horse to the left, opposite the banner of the King, which held the right, and Don John, on a grey Arab mare, stood out alone at the head of his men, saluting his royal brother with lowered sword and bent head. A final blast from the trumpets sounded full and high, and again and again the shout of the great throng went up like thunder and echoed from the palace walls, as King Philip, in his balcony above the gate, returned the salute with his hand, and bent a little forward over the stone railing.

Dolores de Mendoza forgot her father and all that he might say, and stood at the open window, looking down. She had dreamed of this moment; she had seen visions of it in the daytime; she had told herself again and again what it would be, how it must be; but the reality was beyond her dreams and her visions and her imaginings, for she had to the full what few women have in any century, and what few have ever had in the blush of maidenhood,--the sight of the man she loved, and who loved her with all his heart, coming home in triumph from a hard-fought war, himself the leader and the victor, himself in youth's first spring, the young idol of a warlike nation, and the centre of military glory.

When he had saluted the King he sat still a moment on his horse and looked upward, as if unconsciously drawn by the eyes that, of all others, welcomed him at that moment; and his own met them instantly and smiled, though his face

betrayed nothing. But old Mendoza, motionless in his saddle, followed the look, and saw; and although he would have praised the young leader with the best of his friends, and would have fought under him and for him as well as the bravest, yet at that moment he would gladly have seen Don John of Austria fall dead from his horse before his eyes.

Don John dismounted without haste, and advanced to the gate as the King disappeared from the balcony above. He was of very graceful figure and bearing, not short, but looking taller than he really was by the perfection of his proportions. The short reddish brown hair grew close and curling on his small head, but left the forehead high, while it set off the clear skin and the mobile features. A very small moustache shaded his lip without hiding the boyish mouth, and at that time he wore no beard. The lips, indeed, smiled often, and the expression of the mouth was rather careless and good-humoured than strong. The strength of the face was in the clean-cut jaw, while its real expression was in the deep-set, fiery blue eyes, that could turn angry and fierce at one moment, and tender as a woman's the next.

He wore without exaggeration the military dress of his time,—a beautifully chiselled corslet inlaid with gold, black velvet sleeves, loose breeches of velvet and silk, so short that they did not descend half way to the knees, while his legs were covered by tight hose and leather boots, made like gaiters to clasp from the knee to the ankle and heel. Over his shoulder hung a short embroidered cloak, and his head covering was a broad velvet cap, in which were fastened the black and yellow plumes of the House of Austria.

As he came near to the gate, many friends moved forward to greet him, and he gave his hand to all, with a frank smile and words of greeting. But old Mendoza did not dismount nor move his horse a step nearer. Don John, looking round before he went in, saw the grim face, and waved his hand to Dolores' father; but the old man pretended that he saw nothing, and made no answering gesture. Some one in the crowd of courtiers laughed lightly. Old Mendoza's face never changed; but his knees must have pressed the saddle suddenly, for his black horse stirred uneasily, and tried to rear a little. Don John stopped short, and his eyes hardened and grew very light before the smile could fade from his lips, while he tried to find the face of the man whose laugh he had heard. But that was impossible, and his look was grave and stern as he went in under the great gate, the multitude cheering after him.

From her high window Dolores had seen and heard also, for she had followed every movement he made and every change of his expression, and had faithfully told her sister what she saw, until the laugh came, short and light, but cutting. And Inez heard that, too, for she was leaning far forward upon the broad stone sill to listen for the sound of Don John's voice. She drew back with a springing movement, and a sort of cry of pain.

"Some one is laughing at me!" she cried. "Some one is laughing because I am trying to see!"

Instantly Dolores drew her sister to her, kissing her tenderly, and soothing her as one does a frightened child.

"No, dear, no! It was not that--I saw what it was. Nobody was looking at you, my darling. Do you know why some one

laughed? It hurt me, too. He smiled and waved his hand to our father, who took no notice of him. The laugh was for that--and for me, because the man knew well enough that our father does not mean that we shall ever marry. Do you see, dear? It was not meant for you."

"Did he really look up at us when you said so?" asked Inez, in a smothered voice.

"Who? The man who laughed?"

"No. I mean--"

"Don John? Yes. He looked up to us and smiled--as he often does at me--with his eyes only, while his face was quite grave. He is not changed at all, except that he looks more determined, and handsomer, and braver, and stronger than ever! He does each time I see him!"

But Inez was not listening.

"That was worth living for--worth being blind for," she said suddenly, "to hear the people shout and cheer for him as he came along. You who can see it all do not understand what the sound means to me. For a moment--only for a moment--I saw light--I know I saw a bright light before my eyes. I am not dreaming. It made my heart beat, and it made my head dizzy. It must have been light. Do you think it could be, Dolores?"

"I do not know, dear," answered the other gently.

But as the day faded and they sat together in the early dusk, Dolores looked long and thoughtfully at the blind face. Inez loved Don John, though she did not know it, and without knowing it she had told her sister.



CHAPTER II

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When Don John had disappeared within the palace the people lingered a little while, hoping that something might happen which would be worth seeing, and then, murmuring a little in perfectly unreasonable disappointment, they slowly dispersed. After that old Mendoza gave his orders to the officers of the guards, the men tramped away, one detachment after another, in a regular order; the cavalry that had ridden up with Don John wheeled at a signal from the trumpets, and began to ride slowly back to the city, pressing hard upon the multitude, and before it was quite dark the square before the palace was deserted again. The sky had cleared, the pavement was dry again, and the full moon was rising. Two tall sentinels with halberds paced silently up and down in the shadow.

Dolores and her sister were still sitting in the dark when the door opened, and a grey-haired servant in red and yellow entered the room, bearing two lighted wax candles in heavy bronze candlesticks, which he set upon the table. A moment later he was followed by old Mendoza, still in his breastplate, as he had dismounted, his great spurs jingling on his heavy boots, and his long basket-hilted sword trailing on the marble pavement. He was bareheaded now, and his short hair, smooth and grizzled, covered his energetic head like a close-fitting skull cap of iron-grey velvet. He stood still before the table, his bony right hand resting upon it and holding both his long gloves. The candlelight shone upward into his dark face, and gleamed yellow in his angry eyes.

Both the girls rose instinctively as their father entered; but they stood close together, their hands still linked as if to defend each other from a common enemy, though the hard man would have given his life for either of them at any moment since they had come into the world. They knew it, and trembled.

"You have made me the laughing-stock of the court," he began slowly, and his voice shook with anger. "What have you to say in your defence?"

He was speaking to Dolores, and she turned a little pale. There was something so cruelly hard in his tone and bearing that she drew back a little, not exactly in bodily fear, but as a brave man may draw back a step when another suddenly draws a weapon upon him. Instantly Inez moved forward, raising one white hand in protest, and turning her blind face to her father's gleaming eyes.

"I am not speaking to you," he said roughly, "but you," he went on, addressing Dolores, and the heavy table shook under his hand. "What devil possessed you that you should shame me and yourself, standing at your window to smile at Don John, as if he were the Espadero at a bull fight and you the beauty of the ring--with all Madrid there to look on, from his Majesty the King to the beggar in the road? Have you no modesty, no shame, no blood that can blush? And if not, have you not even so much woman's sense as should tell you that you are ruining your name and mine before the whole world?"

"Father! For the sake of heaven do not say such words--you must not! You shall not!"

Dolores' face was quite white now, as she gently pushed Inez aside and faced the angry man. The table was between them.

"Have I said one word more than the very truth?" asked Mendoza. "Does not the whole court know that you love Don John of Austria--"

"Let the whole world know it!" cried the girl bravely. "Am I ashamed to love the best and bravest man that breathes?"

"Let the whole world know that you are willing to be his toy, his plaything--"

"His wife, sir!" Dolores' voice was steady and clear as she interrupted her father. "His wife," she repeated proudly; "And to-morrow, if you and the King will not hinder us. God made you my father, but neither God nor man has given you the right to insult me, and you shall not be unanswered, so long as I have strength and breath to speak. But for you, I should be Don John of Austria's wife to-day--and then, then his 'toy,' his 'plaything'--yes, and his slave and his servant--what you will! I love him, and I would work for him with my hands, as I would give my blood and my life for his, if God would grant me that happiness and grace, since you will not let me be his wife!"

"His wife!" exclaimed Mendoza, with a savage sneer. "His wife--to be married to-day and cast off to-morrow by a turn of the pen and the twisting of a word that would prove your marriage void, in order that Don John may be made the husband of some royal widowed lady, like Queen Mary of the Scots! His wife!" He laughed bitterly.

"You have an exalted opinion of your King, my father, since you suppose that he would permit such deeds in

Spain!"

Dolores had drawn herself up to her full height as she spoke, and she remained motionless as she awaited the answer to what she had said. It was long in coming, though Mendoza's dark eyes met hers unflinchingly, and his lips moved more than once as if he were about to speak. She had struck a blow that was hard to parry, and she knew it. Inez stood beside her, silent and breathing hard as she listened.

"You think that I have nothing to say," he began at last, and his tone had changed and was more calm. "You are right, perhaps. What should I say to you, since you have lost all sense of shame and all thought of respect or obedience? Do you expect that I shall argue with you, and try to convince you that I am right, instead of forcing you to respect me and yourself? Thank Heaven, I have never yet questioned my King's thoughts, nor his motives, nor his supreme right to do whatsoever may be for the honour and glory of Spain. My life is his, and all I have is his, to do with it all as he pleases, by grace of his divine right. That is my creed and my law--and if I have failed to bring you up in the same belief, I have committed a great sin, and it will be counted against me hereafter, though I have done what I could, to the best of my knowledge."

Mendoza lifted his sheathed sword and laid his right hand upon the cross-bar of the basket hilt.

"God--the King--Spain!" he said solemnly, as he pressed his lips to it once for each article of his faith.

"I do not wish to shake your belief," said Dolores coldly. "I daresay that is impossible!"

"As impossible as it is to make me change my determination," answered Mendoza, letting his long sword rest on the pavement again.

"And what may your determination be?" asked the girl, still facing him.

Something in his face forewarned her of near evil and danger, as he looked at her long without answering. She moved a little, so as to stand directly in front of Inez. Taking an attitude that was almost defiant, she began to speak rapidly, holding her hands behind her and pressing herself back against her sister to attract the latter's attention; and in her hand she held the letter she had written to Don John, folded into the smallest possible space, for she had kept it ready in the wrist of her tight sleeve, not knowing what might happen any moment to give her an opportunity of sending it.

"What have you determined?" she asked again, and then went on without waiting for a reply. "In what way are you going to exhibit your power over me? Do you mean to take me away from the court to live in Valladolid again? Are you going to put me in the charge of some sour old woman who will never let me out of her sight from morning till morning?" She had found her sister's hand behind hers and had thrust the letter into the fingers that closed quickly upon it. Then she laughed a little, almost gaily. "Do you think that a score of sour old duennas could teach me to forget the man I love, or could prevent me from sending him a message every day if I chose? Do you think you could hinder Don John of Austria, who came back an hour ago from his victory the idol of all Spain, the favourite of the people--brave, young,

powerful, rich, popular, beloved far more than the King himself, from seeing me every day if he chose, so long as he were not away in war? And then--I will ask you something more--do you think that father, or mother, or king, or law, or country has power to will away the love of a woman who loves with all her heart and soul and strength? Then answer me and tell me what you have determined to do with me, and I will tell you my determination, too, for I have one of my own, and shall abide by it, come what may, and whatsoever you may do!"

She paused, for she had heard Inez softly close the door as she went out. The letter at least was safe, and if it were humanly possible, Inez would find a means of delivering it; for she had all that strange ingenuity of the blind in escaping observation which it seems impossible that they should possess, but of which every one who has been much with them is fully aware. Mendoza had seen Inez go out, and was glad that she was gone, for her blind face sometimes disturbed him when he wished to assert his authority.

"Yes," he said, "I will tell you what I mean to do, and it is the only thing left to me, for you have given me no choice. You are disobedient and unruly, you have lost what little respect you ever had--or showed--for me. But that is not all. Men have had unruly daughters before, and yet have married them well, and to men who in the end have ruled them. I do not speak of my affection for you both, since you have none for me. But now, you are going beyond disobedience and lawlessness, for you are ruining yourself and disgracing me, and I will neither permit the one nor suffer the other." His voice rose harshly. "Do you understand

me? I intend to protect my name from you, and yours from the world, in the only way possible. I intend to send you to Las Huelgas to-morrow morning. I am in earnest, and unless you consent to give up this folly and to marry as I wish, you shall stay there for the rest of your natural life. Do you understand? And until to-morrow morning you shall stay within these doors. We shall see whether Don John of Austria will try to force my dwelling first and a convent of holy nuns afterwards. You will be safe from him, I give you my word of honour,--the word of a Spanish gentleman and of your father. You shall be safe forever. And if Don John tries to enter here to-night, I will kill him on the threshold. I swear that I will."

He ceased speaking, turned, and began to walk up and down the small room, his spurs and sword clanking heavily at every step. He had folded his arms, and his head was bent low.

A look of horror and fear had slowly risen in Dolores' face, for she knew her father, and that he kept his word at every risk. She knew also that the King held him in very high esteem, and was as firmly opposed to her marriage as Mendoza himself, and therefore ready to help him to do what he wished. It had never occurred to her that she could be suddenly thrust out of sight in a religious institution, to be kept there at her father's pleasure, even for her whole life. She was too young and too full of life to have thought of such a possibility. She had indeed heard that such things could be done, and had been done, but she had never known such a case, and had never realized that she was so completely at her father's mercy. For the first time in her life

she felt real fear, and as it fell upon her there came the sickening conviction that she could not resist it, that her spirit was broken all at once, that in a moment more she would throw herself at her father's feet and implore mercy, making whatever promise he exacted, yet making it falsely, out of sheer terror, in an utter degradation and abasement of all moral strength, of which she had never even dreamed. She grew giddy as she felt it coming upon her, and the lights of the two candles moved strangely. Already she saw herself on her knees, sobbing with fear, trying to take her father's hand, begging forgiveness, denying her love, vowing submission and dutiful obedience in an agony of terror. For on the other side she saw the dark corridors and gloomy cells of Las Huelgas, the veiled and silent nuns, the abomination of despair that was before her till she should die and escape at last,--the faint hope which would always prevent her from taking the veil herself, yet a hope fainter and fainter, crossed by the frightful uncertainty in which she should be kept by those who guarded her. They would not even tell her whether the man she loved were alive or dead, she could never know whether he had given up her love, himself in despair, or whether, then, as years went by, he would not lose the thread that took him back to the memory of her, and forget--and love again.

But then her strong nature rose again, and the vision of fear began to fade as her faith in his love denied the last thought with scorn. Many a time, when words could tell no more, and seemed exhausted just when trust was strongest, he had simply said, "I love you, as you love me," and somehow the little phrase meant all, and far more than the

tender speeches that sometimes formed themselves so gracefully, and yet naturally and simply, because they, too, came straight from the heart. So now, in her extreme need, the plain words came back to her in his voice, "I love you, as you love me," with a sudden strength of faith in him that made her live again, and made fear seem impossible. While her father slowly paced the floor in silence, she thought what she should do, and whether there could be anything which she would not do, if Don John of Austria were kept a prisoner from her; and she felt sure that she could overcome every obstacle and laugh at every danger, for the hope of getting to him. If she would, so would he, since he loved her as she loved him. But for all the world, he would not have her throw herself upon her father's mercy and make false promises and sob out denials of her love, out of fear. Death would be better than that.

"Do as you will with me, since you have the power," she said at last, quite calmly and steadily.

Instantly the old man stopped in his walk, and turned towards her, almost as if he himself were afraid now. To her amazement she saw that his dark eyes were moist with tears that clung but half shed to the rugged lids and rough lashes. He did not speak for some moments, while she gazed at him in wonder, for she could not understand. Then all at once he lifted his brown hands and covered his face with a gesture of utter despair.

"Dolores! My child, my little girl!" he cried, in a broken voice.

Then he sat down, as it overcame, clasped his hands on the hilt of his sword, and rested his forehead against them,

rocking himself with a barely perceptible motion. In twenty years, Dolores had never understood, not even guessed, that the hard man, ever preaching of wholesome duty and strict obedience, always rebuking, never satisfied, ill pleased almost always, loved her with all his heart, and looked upon her as the very jewel of his soul. She guessed it now, in a sudden burst of understanding; but it was so new, so strange, that she could not have told what she felt. There was at best no triumph at the thought that, of the two, he had broken down first in the contest. Pity came first, womanly, simple and kind, for the harsh nature that was so wounded at last. She came to his side, and laid one hand upon his shoulder, speaking softly.

"I am very, very sorry that I have hurt you," she said, and waited for him to speak, pressing his shoulder with a gentle touch.

He did not look up, and still he rocked himself gently, leaning on his sword. The girl suffered, too, to see him suffering so. A little while ago he had been hard, fierce, angry, cruel, threatening her with a living death that had filled her with horror. It had seemed quite impossible that there could be the least tenderness in him for any one--least of all for her.

"God be merciful to me," he said at length in very low tones. "God forgive me if it is my fault--you do not love me--I am nothing to you but an unkind old man, and you are all the world to me, child!"

He raised his head slowly and looked into her face. She was startled at the change in his own, as well as deeply touched by what he said. His dark cheeks had grown grey,