

LEGEND
OF
THE THREE BEAUTIFUL PRINCESSES

IN old times there reigned a Moorish king in Granada whose name was Mohamed, to which his subjects added the appellation of *El Hayzari* or «The Left-handed». Some say he was so called on account of his being really more expert with his sinister than his dexter hand; others because he was prone to take everything by the wrong end or in other words to mar wherever he meddled. Certain it is either through misfortune or mismanagement, he was continually in trouble; thrice was he driven from his throne and on one occasion barely escaped to Africa with his life in the disguise of a fisherman. Still he was as brave as he was blundering and, though left-handed, wielded his scimitar to such purpose that he each time reestablished himself upon his throne by dint of hard fighting. Instead, however, of learning wisdom from adversity, he hardened his neck and stiffened his left arm in wilfulness. The evils of a public nature which he thus brought upon himself and his kingdom may be learned by those who will delve into the Arabian annals of Granada; the present legend deals but with his domestic policy.

As this Mohamed was one day riding forth with a train

of his courtiers by the foot of the mountain of Elvira, he met a band of horsemen returning from a foray into the land of the Christians. They were conducting a long string of mules laden with spoil and many captives of both sexes, among whom the monarch was struck with the appearance of a beautiful damsel, richly attired, who sat weeping on a low palfrey and heeded not the consoling words of a *dueña* who rode beside her.

The monarch was struck with her beauty and, on inquiring of the captain of the troop, found that she was the daughter of the *alcaide* of a frontier fortress that had been surprised and sacked in the course of the foray. Mohamed claimed her as his royal share of the booty and had her conveyed to his harem in the Alhambra. There everything was devised to soothe her melancholy and the monarch, more and more enamoured, sought to make her his queen. The Spanish maid at first repulsed his addresses—he was an infidel; he was the open foe of her country; what was worse, he was stricken in years!

The monarch, finding his assiduities of no avail, determined to enlist in his favour the *dueña* who had been captured with the lady. She was an Andalusian by birth, whose Christian name is forgotten, being mentioned in Moorish legends by no other appellation than that of the discreet Kadiga, and discreet in truth she was, as her whole history makes evident. No sooner had the Moorish king held a little private conversation with her than she saw at once the cogency of his reasoning and undertook his cause with her young mistress.

«Go to, now!» cried, she «what is there in all this to weep and wail about? Is it not better to be mistress of this beautiful palace with all its gardens and fountains than to be shut up within your father's old frontier tower? As to this Mohamed being an infidel, what is that to the purpose? You marry him, not his religion; and if he is waxing a little old, the sooner will you be a widow and mistress of yourself. At

any rate, you are in his power, and must either be a queen or a slave. When in the hands of a robber, it is better to sell one's merchandise for a fair price than to have it taken by main force».

The arguments of the discreet Kadiga prevailed. The Spanish lady dried her tears and became the spouse of Mohamed the Left-handed; she even conformed in appearance to the faith of her royal husband and her discreet *dueña* immediately became a zealous convert to the Moslem doctrines. It was then the latter received the Arabian name of Kadiga and was permitted to remain in the confidential employ of her mistress.

In due process of time the Moorish king was made the proud and happy father of three lovely daughters, all born at a birth; he could have wished they had been sons, but consoled himself with the idea that three daughters at a birth were pretty well for a man somewhat stricken in years and left-handed!

As usual with all Moslem monarchs, he summoned his astrologers on this happy event. They cast the nativities of the three princesses and shook their heads. «Daughters, O King» said they, «are always precarious property, but these will most need your watchfulness when they arrive at a marriageable age; at that time gather them under your wings, and trust them to no other guardianship».

Mohamed the Left-handed was acknowledged to be a wise king by his courtiers and was certainly so considered by himself. The prediction of the astrologers caused him but little disquiet, trusting to his ingenuity to guard his daughters and outwit the Fates.

The threefold birth was the last matrimonial trophy of the monarch; his queen bore him no more children and died within a few years, bequeathing her infant daughters to his love and to the fidelity of the discreet Kadiga.

Many years had yet to elapse before the princesses would

arrive at that period of danger—the marriageable age. «It is good, however, to be cautious in time», said the shrewd Monarch; so he determined to have them reared in the royal Castle of Salobreña. This was a sumptuous palace incrusted, as it were, in a powerful Moorish fortress, on the summit of a hill that overlooks the Mediterranean sea. It was a royal retreat, in which the Moslem monarchs shut up such of their relations as might endanger their safety, allowing them all kinds of luxuries and amusements, in the midst of which they passed their lives in voluptuous indolence.

Here the princesses remained, immured from the world, but surrounded by enjoyments and attended by female slaves who anticipated their wishes. They had delightful gardens for their recreation, filled with the rarest fruits and flowers, with aromatic groves and perfumed baths. On three sides the castle looked down upon a rich valley, enamelled with all kinds of culture and bounded by the lofty Alpuxarra Mountains; on the other side it overlooked the broad sunny sea.

In this delicious abode, in a propitious climate and under a cloudless sky, the three princesses grew up into wondrous beauty, but, though all reared alike, they gave early tokens of diversity of character. Their names were Zayda, Zorayda and Zorahayda, and such was their order of seniority, for there had been precisely three minutes between their births.

Zayda, the eldest, was of an intrepid spirit and took the lead of her sisters in everything, as she had done in entering first into the world. She was curious and inquisitive and fond of getting at the bottom of things.

Zorayda had a great feeling for beauty, which was the reason, no doubt, of the delighting to regard her own image in a mirror or a fountain, and of her fondness for flowers and jewels and other tasteful ornaments.

As to Zorahayda, the youngest, she was soft and timid and extremely sensitive, with a vast deal of disposable tender-

ness, as was evident from her number of pet-flowers and pet-birds and pet-animals, all of which she cherished with the fondest care. Her amusements, too, were of a gentle nature and mixed up with musing and reverie. She would sit for hours in a balcony, gazing on the sparkling stars of a summer's night or on the sea when lit up by the moon, and at such times the song of a fisherman, faintly heard from the beach or the notes of a Moorish flute from some gliding bark, sufficed to elevate her feelings into ecstasy. The least uproar of the elements, however, filled her with dismay, and a clap of thunder was enough to throw her into a swoon.

Years rolled on smoothly and serenely; the discreet Kadiga, to whom the princesses were confided, was faithful to her trust and attended them with unremitting care.

The Castle of Salobreña, as has been said, was built upon a hill on the sea-coast. One of the exterior walls straggled down the profile of the hill, until it reached a jutting rock overhanging the sea with a narrow sandy beach at its foot, laved by the rippling billows. A small watch-tower on this rock had been fitted up as a pavilion with latticed windows to admit the sea-breeze. Here the princesses used to pass the sultry hours of mid-day.

The curious Zayda was one day seated at one of the windows of the pavilion, as her sisters reclining on ottomans were taking the *siesta* or noontide slumber. Her attention had been attracted to a galley which came coasting along with measured strokes of the oar. As it drew near, she observed that it was filled with armed men. The galley anchored at the foot of the tower; a number of Moorish soldiers landed on the narrow beach, conducting several Christian prisoners. The curious Zayda awakened her sisters and all three peeped cautiously through the close jalousies of the lattice which screened them from sight. Among the prisoners were three Spanish cavaliers, richly dressed. They were in the flower of youth and of noble

presence, and the lofty manner in which they carried themselves, though loaded with chains and surrounded with enemies, bespoke the grandeur of their souls. The princesses gazed with intense and breathless interest. Cooped up as they had been in this castle among female attendants, seeing nothing of the male sex but black slaves or the rude fishermen of the sea-coast, it is not to be wondered at that the appearance of three gallant cavaliers in the pride of youth and manly beauty should produce some commotion in their bosoms.

«Did ever nobler being tread the earth than that cavalier in crimson?» cried Zayda, the eldest of the sisters. «See how proudly he bears himself, as though all around him were his slaves!»

«But notice that one in green!» exclaimed Zorayda. «What grace! what elegance! what spirit!»

The gentle Zorahayda said nothing, but she secretly gave preference to the cavalier in blue.

The princesses remained gazing until the prisoners were out of sight; then heaving long-drawn sighs, they turned round looked at each other for a moment and sat down, musing and pensive on their ottomans.

The discreet Kadiga found them in this situation; they related to her what they had seen, and even the withered heart of the *dueña* was warmed. «Poor youths!» exclaimed she, «I'll warrant their captivity makes many a fair and high-born lady's heart ache in their native land. Ah! my children, you have little idea of the life these cavaliers lead in their own country. Such pranking at tournaments! Such devotion to the ladies! Such courting and serenading!»

The curiosity of Zayda was fully aroused; she was insatiable in her inquiries and drew from the *dueña* the most animated pictures of the scenes of her youthful days and native land. The beautiful Zorayda bridled up and slyly regarded herself in a mirror, when the theme turned upon the charms of

the Spanish ladies; while Zorahayda suppressed a struggling sigh at the mention of moonlight serenades.

Every day the curious Zayda renewed her inquiries and every day the sage *dueña* repeated her stories, which were listened to with profound interest, though with frequent sighs, by her gentle auditors. The discreet old woman at length awakened to the mischief she might be doing. She had been accustomed to think of the princesses only as children, but they had imperceptibly ripened beneath her eye and now bloomed before her three lovely damsels of the marriageable age. 'It is time, thought the *dueña*, to give notice to the king'.

Mohamed the Left-handed was seated one morning on a divan in one of the cool halls of the Alhambra, when a slave arrived from the fortress of Salobreña with a message from the sage Kadiga, congratulating him on the anniversary of his daughters' birth-day. The slave at the same time presented a delicate little basket decorated with flowers within which on a couch of vine and fig-leaves lay a peach, an apricot and a nectarine with their bloom and down and dewy sweetness upon them, and all in the early stage of tempting ripeness. The monarch was versed in the Oriental language of fruit and flowers, and readily divined the meaning of this emblematical offering.

«So», said he, «the critical period pointed out by the astrologers is arrived; my daughters are at a marriageable age. What is to be done? They are shut up from the eyes of men; they are under the eyes of the discreet Kadiga—all very good—but still they are not under my own eye, as was prescribed by the astrologers; I must gather them under my wing and trust to no other guardianship».

So saying, he ordered that a tower of the Alhambra should be prepared for their reception, and departed at the head of his guards for the fortress of Salobreña to conduct them home in person.

About three years had elapsed since Mohamed had beheld his daughters and he could scarcely credit his eyes at the wonderful change which that small space of time had made in their appearance. During the interval they had passed that wondrous boundary line in female life which separates the crude, uniformed and thoughtless girl from the blooming, blushing, meditative woman. It is like passing from the flat, bleak, uninteresting plain of La Mancha, to the voluptuous valleys and swelling hills of Andalusia.

Zayda was tall and finely formed with a lofty demeanour and a penetrating eye. She entered with a stately and decided step, and made a profound reverence to Mohamed, treating him more as her sovereign than her father. Zorayda was of the middle height with an alluring look and swimming gait, and a sparkling beauty heightened by the assistance of the toilette. She approached her father with a smile, kissed his hand and saluted him with several stanzas from a popular Arabian poet with which the monarch was delighted. Zorahayda was shy and timid, smaller than her sisters and with a beauty of that tender beseeching kind which looks for fondness and protection. She was little fitted to command like her elder sister or to dazzle like the second, but was rather formed to creep to the bosom of manly affection, to nestle within it and be content. She drew near her father with a timid and almost faltering step, and would have taken his hand to kiss, but on looking up into his face and seeing it beaming with a paternal smile, the tenderness of her nature broke forth and she threw herself upon his neck.

Mohamed the Left-handed surveyed his blooming daughters with mingled pride and perplexity, for while he exulted in their charms, he bethought himself of the prediction of the astrologers. «Three daughters! three daughters!» muttered he repeatedly to himself, «and all of a marriageable age! Here's tempting Hesperian fruit, that requires a dragon watch!»

He prepared for his return to Granada by sending heralds before him, commanding every one to keep out of the road by which he was to pass, and that all doors and windows should be closed at the approach of the princesses. This done, he set forth, escorted by a troop of black horsemen of hideous aspect and clad in shining armour.

The princesses rode beside the king closely veiled on beautiful white palfreys with velvet caparisons embroidered with gold and sweeping the ground; the bits and stirrups were of gold, and the silken bridles adorned with pearls and precious stones. The palfreys were covered with little silver bells that made the most musical tinkling as they ambled gently along. Woe to the unlucky wight, however, who lingered in the way when he heard the tinkling of these bells!—the guards were ordered to cut him down without mercy.

The cavalcade was drawing near to Granada, when it overtook, on the banks of the river Xenil, a small body of Moorish soldiers with a convoy of prisoners. It was too late for the soldiers to get out of the way, so they threw themselves on their faces on the earth, ordering their captives to do the like. Among the prisoners were the three identical cavaliers whom the princesses had seen from the pavilion. They either did not understand or were too haughty to obey the order and remained standing and gazing upon the cavalcade as it approached.

The ire of the monarch was kindled at this flagrant defiance of his orders. Drawing his scimitar and pressing forward, he was about to deal a left-handed blow that would have been fatal to at least one of the gazers, when the princesses crowded round him and implored mercy for the prisoners; even the timid Zorayda forgot her shyness and became eloquent on their behalf. Mohamed paused with uplifted scimitar, when the captain of the guard threw himself at his feet. «Let not your highness», said he, «do a deed that may cause great scan-

dal throughout the kingdom. These are three brave and noble Spanish knights who have been taken in battle, fighting like lions; they are of high birth and may bring great ransoms». —«Enough!» said the king; «I will spare their lives, but punish their audacity—let them be taken to the Vermilion Towers and put to hard labour».

Mohamed was making one of his usual left-handed blunders. In the tumult and agitation of this blustering scene, the veils of the three princesses had been thrown back and the radiance of their beauty revealed, and in prolonging the parley, the king had given that beauty time to have its full effect. In those days people fell in love much more suddenly than at present, as all ancient stories make manifest; it is not a matter of wonder, therefore, that the hearts of the three cavaliers were completely captured, especially as gratitude was added to their admiration; it is a little singular, however, though no less certain, that each of them was enraptured with a several beauty. As to the princesses, they were more than ever struck with the noble demeanour of the captives and cherished in their breasts all that they had heard of their valour and noble lineage.

The cavalcade resumed its march; the three princesses rode pensively along on their tinkling palfreys, now and then stealing a glance behind in search of the Christian captives, and the latter were conducted to their allotted prison in the Vermilion Towers.

The residence provided for the princesses was one of the most dainty that fancy could devise. It was in a tower somewhat apart from the main palace of the Alhambra, though connected with it by the main wall that encircled the whole summit of the hill. On one side it looked into the interior of the fortress, and had at its foot a small garden filled with the rarest flowers. On the other side it overlooked a deep embowered ravine that separated the grounds of the Al-

hambra from those of the Generalife. The interior of the tower was divided into small fairy apartments, beautifully ornamented in the light Arabian style, surrounding a lofty hall, the vaulted roof of which rose almost to the summit of the tower. The walls and ceiling of the hall were adorned with arabesques and fret-work, sparkling with gold and with brilliant pencilling. In the centre of the marble pavement was an alabaster fountain, set round with aromatic shrubs and flowers, and throwing up a jet of water that cooled the whole edifice and had a lulling sound. Round the hall were suspended cages of gold and silver wire, containing singing-birds of the finest plumage or sweetest note.

The princesses had been represented as always cheerful when in the Castle of Salobreña; the king had expected to see them enraptured with the Alhambra. To his surprise, however, they began to pine and grow melancholy and dissatisfied with everything around them. The flowers yielded them no fragrance, the song of the nightingale disturbed their night's rest, and they were out of all patience with the alabaster fountain with its eternal dropdrop and splash-splash from morning till night and from night till morning.

The king who was somewhat of a testy, tyrannical disposition took this at first in high dudgeon, but he reflected that his daughters had arrived at an age when the female mind expands and its desires augment. «They are no longer children», said he to himself «they are women grown, and require suitable objects to interest them». He put in requisition, therefore, all the dress-makers and the jewellers and the artificers in gold and silver throughout the Zacatín of Granada, and the princesses were overwhelmed with robes of silk and of tissue and of brocade, cashmere shawls and necklaces of pearls and diamonds, rings and bracelets and anklets and all manner of precious things.

All, however, was of no avail; the princesses continued pale

and languid in the midst of their finery, and looked like three blighted rose-buds, drooping from one stalk. The king was at his wits' end. He had in general a laudable confidence in his own judgment, and never took advice. «The whims and caprices of three marriageable damsels, however, are sufficient», said he, «to puzzle the shrewdest head». So for once in his life he called in the aid of counsel.

The person to whom he applied was the experienced *dueña*.

«Kadiga», said the king, «I know you to be one of the most discreet women in the whole world, as well as one of the most trustworthy; for these reasons I have always continued you about the persons of my daughters. Fathers cannot be too wary in whom they repose such confidence; I now wish you to find out the secret malady that is preying upon the princesses and to devise some means of restoring them to health and cheerfulness».

Kadiga promised implicit obedience. In fact she knew more of the malady of the princesses than they did themselves. Shutting herself up with them, however, she endeavoured to insinuate herself into their confidence.

«My dear children, what is the reason you are so dismal and downcast in so beautiful a place where you have everything that heart can wish?»

The princesses looked vacantly round the apartment and sighed.

«What more then would you have? Shall I get you the wonderful parrot that talks all languages and is the delight of Granada?»

«Odious!» exclaimed the princess Zayda. «A horrid, screaming bird that chatters words without ideas; one must be without brains to tolerate such a pest.»

«Shall I send for a monkey from the rock of Gibraltar to divert you with his antics?»

«A monkey, faugh!» cried Zorayda; «the detestable mimic of man. I hate the nauseous animal».

«What say you to the famous black singer Casem, from the royal harem in Morocco? They say he has a voice as fine as a woman's.»

«I am terrified at the sight of these black slaves», said the delicate Zorahayda, «besides, I have lost all relish for music.»

«Ah! my child, you would not say so», replied the old woman slyly, «had you heard the music I heard last evening from the three Spanish cavaliers, whom we met on our journey. But, bless me, children! what is the matter that you blush so and are in such a flutter?»

«Nothing, nothing, good mother; pray proceed.»

«Well, as I was passing by the Vermilion Towers last evening, I saw the three cavaliers resting after their day's labour. One was playing on the guitar, so gracefully, and the others sang by turns, and they did it in such style that the very guards seemed like statues or men enchanted. Allah forgive me! I could not help being moved at hearing the songs of my native country. And then to see three such noble and handsome youths in chains and slavery!»

Here the kind-hearted old woman could not restrain her tears.

«Perhaps, mother, you could manage to procure us a sight of these cavaliers», said Zayda.

«I think», said Zorayda, «a little music would be quite reviving».

The timid Zorahayda said nothing, but threw her arms round the neck of Kadiga.

«Mercy on me!» exclaimed the discreet old woman, «what are you talking of, my children? Your father would be the death of us all if he heard of such a thing. To be sure, these cavaliers are evidently well-bred and high-minded youths, but

what of that? They are the enemies of our faith and you must not even think of them but with abhorrence».

There is an admirable intrepidity in the female will, particularly when about the marriageable age, which is not to be deterred by dangers and prohibitions. The princesses hung round their old *dueña* and coaxed and entreated and declared that a refusal would break their hearts.

What could she do?—She was certainly the most discreet old woman in the whole world and one of the most faithful servants to the king, but was she to see three beautiful princesses break their hearts for the mere tinkling of a guitar? Besides, though she had been so long among the Moors and changed her faith in imitation of her mistress, like a trusty follower, yet she was a Spaniard born and had the lingerings of Christianity in her heart. So she set about to contrive how the wish of the princesses might be gratified.

The Christian captives, confined in the Vermilion Towers, were under the charge of a big-whiskered broad-shouldered *renegado*, called Hussein Baba, who was reputed to have a most itching palm. She went to him privately and, slipping a broad piece of gold into his hand, «Hussein Baba», said she, «my mistresses, the three princesses who are shut up in the tower and in sad want of amusement have heard of the musical talents of the three Spanish cavaliers and are desirous of hearing a specimen of their skill. I am sure you are too kind-hearted to refuse them so innocent a gratification».

«What! and to have my head set grinning over the gate of my own tower! for that would be the reward, if the king should discover it.»

«No danger of anything of the kind; the affair may be managed so that the whim of the princesses may be gratified and their father be never the wiser. You know the deep ravine outside of the walls, that passes immediately below the tower. Put the three Christians to work there, and at the intervals of

their labour let them play and sing, as if for their own recreation. In this way the princesses will be able to hear them from the windows of the tower and you may be sure of their paying well for your compliance.»

As the good old woman concluded her harangue, she kindly pressed the rough hand of the *renegado* and left within it another piece of gold.

Her eloquence was irresistible. The very next day the three cavaliers were put to work in the ravine. During the noontide heat when their fellow-labourers were sleeping in the shade and the guard nodding drowsily at his post, they seated themselves among the herbage at the foot of the tower and sang a Spanish roundelay to the accompaniment of the guitar.

The glen was deep, the tower was high, but their voices rose distinctly in the stillness of the summer noon. The princesses listened from their balcony; they had been taught the Spanish language by their *dueña* and were moved by the tenderness of the song. The discreet Kadiga, on the contrary, was terribly shocked. «Allah preserve us!» cried she, «they are singing a love ditty, addressed to yourselves. Did ever mortal hear of such audacity? I will run to the slave-master and have them soundly bastinadoed».

«What! bastinado such gallant cavaliers and for singing so charmingly!» The three beautiful princesses were filled with horror at the idea. With all her virtuous indignation the good old woman was of a placable nature and easily appeased. Besides, the music seemed to have a beneficial effect upon her young mistresses. A rosy bloom had already come to their cheeks and their eyes began to sparkle. She made no further objection therefore to the amorous ditty of the cavaliers.

When it was finished the princesses remained silent for a time; at length Zorayda took up a lute and with a sweet, though faint and trembling voice, warbled a little Arabian air, the burden of which was, «The rose is concealed among her

leaves, but she listens with delight to the song of the nightingale».

From this time forward the cavaliers worked almost daily in the ravine. The considerate Hussein Baba became more and more indulgent, and daily more prone to sleep at his post. For some time a vague intercourse was kept up by popular songs and romances which in some measure responded to each other and breathed the feelings of the parties. By degrees the princesses showed themselves at the balcony, when they could do so without being perceived by the guards. They conversed with the cavaliers also by means of flowers, with the symbolical language of which they were mutually acquainted; the difficulties of their intercourse added to its charms and strengthened the passion they had so singularly conceived, for love delights to struggle with difficulties and thrives the most hardily on the scantiest soil.

The change effected in the looks and spirits of the princesses by this secret intercourse surprised and gratified the left-handed king, but no one was more elated than the discreet Kadiga who considered it all owing to her able management.

At length there was an interruption in this telegraphic correspondence; for several days the cavaliers ceased to make their appearance in the glen. The three beautiful princesses looked out from the tower in vain. In vain they stretched their swanlike necks from the balcony. In vain they sang like captive nightingales in their cage. Nothing was to be seen of their Christian lovers; not a note responded from the groves. The discreet Kadiga sallied forth in quest of intelligence and soon returned with a face full of trouble. «Ah, my children!» cried she, «I saw what all this would come to, but you would have your way; you may now hang up your lutes on the willows. The Spanish cavaliers are now ransomed by their families; they are down in Granada and preparing to return to their native country».

The three beautiful princesses were in despair at the tidings. The fair Zayda was indignant at the slight put upon them in thus being deserted without a parting word. Zorayda wrung her hands and cried and looked in the glass and wiped away her tears and cried afresh. The gentle Zorahayda leaned over the balcony and wept in silence, and her tears fell drop by drop among the flowers of the bank where the faithless cavaliers had so often been seated.

The discreet Kadiga did all in her power to soothe their sorrow. «Take comfort, my children», said she, «this is nothing when you are used to it. This is the way of the world. Ah! when you are as old as I am, you will know how to value these men. I'll warrant these cavaliers have their loves among the Spanish beauties of Cordova and Seville, and will soon be serenading under their balconies and thinking no more of the Moorish beauties in the Alhambra. Take comfort therefore, my children, and drive them from your hearts».

The comforting words of the discreet Kadiga only redoubled the distress of the three princesses and for two days they continued inconsolable. On the morning of the third, the good old woman entered their apartment, all ruffling with indignation.

«Who would have believed such insolence in mortal man!» exclaimed she, as soon as she could find words to express herself, «but I am rightly served for having connived at this deception of your worthy father. Never talk more to me of your Spanish cavaliers».

«Why, what has happened, good Kadiga?» exclaimed the princesses, in breathless anxiety.

«What has happened! Treason has happened! or, what is almost as bad, treason has been proposed, and to me, the most faithful of subjects, the trustiest of *dueñas*! Yes, my children, the Spanish cavaliers have dared to tamper with me, that I

should persuade you to fly with them to Cordova and become their wives!»

Here the excellent old woman covered her face with her hands and gave way to a violent burst of grief and indignation. The three beautiful princesses turned pale and red, pale and red, and trembled and looked down and cast shy looks at each other, but said nothing. Meantime the old woman sat rocking backward and forward in violent agitation, and now and then breaking out into exclamations. «That ever I should live to be so insulted!—I, the most faithful of servants!»

At length the eldest princess who had most spirit and always took the lead approached her and laying her hand upon her shoulder, «Well, mother», said she, «supposing we were willing to fly with these Christian cavaliers, is such a thing possible?»

The good old woman paused suddenly in her grief, and looking up, «Possible!» echoed she, «to be sure, it is possible. Have not the cavaliers already bribed Hussein Baba, the *renegado* captain of the guard, and arranged the whole plan? But, then, to think of deceiving your father, your father who has placed such confidence in me!» Here the worthy woman gave way to a fresh burst of grief and began again to rock backward and forward, and to wring her hands.

«But our father never placed any confidence in us», said the eldest princess, «but has trusted to bolts and bars, and treated us as captives».

«Why, that is true enough», replied the old woman, again pausing in her grief; «he has indeed treated you most unreasonably, keeping you shut up here to waste your bloom in a moping old tower, like roses to wither in a flower-jar. But, then, to fly from your native land!»

«And is not the land we fly to the native land of our mother where we shall live in freedom? And shall we not each have a youthful husband, in exchange for a severe old father?»

«Why, that again is all very true, and your father, I must confess, is rather tyrannical. But, what, then», relapsing into her grief, «would you leave me behind to bear the brunt of his vengeance?»

«By no means, my good Kadiga; cannot you fly with us?»

«Very true, my child, and, to tell the truth, when I talked the matter over with Hussein Baba, he promised to take care of me, if I would accompany you in your flight. But, then, bethink you, my children, are you willing to renounce the faith of your father?»

«The Christian faith was the original faith of our mother», said the eldest princess, «I am ready to embrace it, and so, I am sure, are my sisters».

«Right again!» exclaimed the old woman, brightening up, «it was the original faith of your mother, and bitterly did she lament on her death-bed that she had renounced it. I promised her then to take care of your souls, and I rejoice to see that they are now in a fair way to be saved. Yes, my children, I too was born a Christian and have remained a Christian in my heart, and am resolved to return to the faith. I have talked on the subject with Hussein Baba who is a Spaniard by birth and comes from a place not far from my native town. He is equally anxious to see his own country and to be reconciled to the Church, and the cavaliers have promised that, if we are disposed to become man and wife, on returning to our native land, they will provide for us handsomely».

In a word, it appeared that this extremely discreet and provident old woman had consulted with the cavaliers and the *renegado*, and had concerted the whole plan of escape. The eldest princess immediately assented to it, and her example, as usual, determined the conduct of her sisters. It is true the youngest hesitated, for she was gentle and timid of soul, and there was a struggle in her bosom between filial feeling and youthful passion; the latter, however, as usual, gained the

victory, and with silent tears and stifled sighs she prepared herself for flight.

The rugged hill on which the Alhambra is built, was in old times perforated with subterranean passages, cut through the rock, and leading from the fortress to various parts of the city and to distant sally-ports on the banks of the Darro and the Xenil. They had been constructed at different times by the Moorish Kings, as means of escape from sudden insurrections or of secretly issuing forth on private enterprises. Many of them are now entirely lost, while others remain, partly choked up with rubbish and partly walled up, monuments of the jealous precautions and warlike stratagems of the Moorish government. By one these passages, Hussein Baba had undertaken to conduct the princesses to a sally-port beyond the walls of the city, where the cavaliers were to be ready with fleet steeds to bear the whole party over the borders.

The appointed night arrived; the tower of the princesses had been locked up as usual and the Alhambra was buried in deep sleep. Towards midnight the discreet Kadiga listened from the balcony of a window that looked into the garden. Hussein Baba, the *renegado*, was already below and gave the appointed signal. The *dueña* fastened the end of a ladder of ropes to the balcony, lowered it into the garden and descended. The two eldest princesses followed her with beating hearts; but when it came to the turn of the youngest princess, Zorahayda, she hesitated and trembled. Several times she ventured a delicate little foot upon the ladder and as often drew it back, while her poor little heart fluttered more and more the longer she delayed. She cast a wistful look back into the silken chamber; she had lived in it, to be sure, like a bird in a cage, but within it she was secure. Who could tell what dangers might beset her, should she flutter forth into the wide world! Now she bethought her of her gallant Christian lover and her little foot was instantly upon the ladder, and anon she thought of

her father, and shrank back. But fruitless is the attempt to describe the conflict in the bosom of one so young and tender and loving, but so timid and so ignorant of the world.

In vain her sisters implored, the *dueña* scolded and the renegado blasphemed beneath the balcony; the gentle little Moorish maid stood doubting and wavering on the verge of elopement, tempted by the sweetness of the sin, but terrified at its perils.

Every moment increased the danger of discovery. A distant tramp was heard. «The patrols are walking the rounds», cried the *renegado*; «if we linger, we perish. Princess, descend instantly or we leave you».

Zorahayda was for a moment in fearful agitation; then loosening the ladder of ropes with desperate resolution she flung it from the balcony.

«It is decided!» cried she; «flight is now out of my power! Allah guide and bless ye, my dear sisters!»

The two eldest princesses were shocked at the thoughts of leaving her behind and would fain have lingered, but the patrol was advancing; the *renegado* was furious and they were hurried away to the subterraneous passage. They groped their way through a fearful labyrinth, cut through the heart of the mountain, and succeeded in reaching undiscovered an iron gate that opened outside of the walls. The Spanish cavaliers were waiting to receive them, disguised as Moorish soldiers of the guard, commanded by the *renegado*.

The lover of Zorahayda was frantic when he learned that she had refused to leave the tower, but there was no time to waste in lamentations. The two princesses were placed behind their lovers, the discreet Kadiga mounted behind the *renegado*, and all set off at a round pace in the direction of the Pass of Lope which leads through the mountains towards Cordova.

They had not proceeded far when they heard the noise of drums and trumpets from the battlements of the Alhambra.

«Our flight is discovered», said the *renegado*.

«We have fleet steeds, the night is dark and we may distance all pursuit», replied the cavaliers.

They put spurs to their horses and scoured across the Vega. They attained to the foot of the mountain of Elvira which stretches like a promontory into the plain. The *renegado* paused and listened.

«As yet», said he, «there is no one on our traces, we shall make good our escape to the mountains». While he spoke, a pale fire sprang up in a light blaze on the top of the watch-tower of the Alhambra.

«Confusion!» cried the *renegado*, «that fire will put all the guards of the passes on the alert. Away! away! Spur like mad; there is no time to be lost!»

Away they dashed. The clattering of their horses' hoofs echoed from rock to rock, as they swept along the road that skirts the rocky mountain of Elvira. As they galloped on, they beheld that the pale fire of the Alhambra was answered in every direction; light after light blazed on the *atalayas* or watch-towers of the mountains.

«Forward! forward!» cried the *renegado* with many an oath, «to the bridge, to the bridge, before the alarm has reached there!»

They doubled the promontory of the mountains and arrived in sight of the famous Puente de Pinos that crosses a rushing stream often dyed with Christian and Moslem blood. To their confusion, the tower on the bridge blazed with lights and glittered with armed men. The *renegado* pulled up his steed, rose in his stirrups and looked about him for a moment; then beckoning to the cavaliers, he struck off from the road, skirted the river for some distance and dashed into its waters. The cavaliers called upon the princesses to cling to them and did the same. They were borne for some distance down the rapid current; the surges roared round them, but the beautiful prin-

cesses clung to their Christian knights and never uttered a complaint. The cavaliers attained the opposite bank in safety, and were conducted by the *renegado* by rude and unfrequented paths and wild *barrancos* through the heart of the mountains, so as to avoid all the regular passes. In a word, they succeeded in reaching the ancient city of Cordova where their restoration to their country and friends was celebrated with great rejoicing, for they were of the noblest families. The beautiful princesses were forthwith received into the bosom of the Church and after being in all due form made regular Christians, were rendered happy wives.

In our hurry to make good the escape of the princesses across the river and up the mountains, we forgot to mention the fate of the discreet Kadiga. She had clung like a cat to Hussein Baba in the scamper across the Vega, screaming at every bound and drawing many an oath from the whiskered *renegado*; but when he prepared to plunge his steed into the river, her terror knew no bounds. «Grasp me not so tightly», cried Hussein Baba, «hold on by my belt and fear nothing». She held firmly with both hands by the leathern belt that girded the broad-backed *renegado*, but when he halted with the cavaliers to take breath on the mountain summit, the *dueña* was no longer to be seen.

«What has become of Kadiga?» cried the princesses in alarm.

«Allah alone knows!» replied the *renegado*, «my belt came loose when in the midst of the river and Kadiga was swept with it down the stream. The will of Allah be done! But it was an embroidered belt and of great price».

There was no time to waste in idle regrets, yet bitterly did the princesses bewail the loss of their discreet counsellor. That excellent old woman, however, did not lose more than half of her nine lives in the stream. A fisherman who was drawing his nets some distance down the stream brought her

to land and was not a little astonished at his miraculous draught. What further became of the discreet Kadiga, the legend does not mention; certain it is that she evinced her discretion in never venturing within the reach of Mohamed the Lefthanded.

Almost as little is known of the conduct of that sagacious monarch when he discovered the escape of his daughters and the deceit practised upon him by the most faithful of servants. It was the only instance in which he had called in the aid of counsel and he was never afterwards known to be guilty of a similar weakness. He took good care, however, to guard his remaining daughter who had no disposition to elope. It is thought indeed that she secretly repented having remained behind. Now and then she was seen leaning on the battlements of the tower and looking mournfully towards the mountains in the direction of Cordova, and sometimes the notes of her lute were heard accompanying plaintive ditties, in which she was said to lament the loss of her sisters and her lover, and to bewail her solitary life. She died young and, according to popular rumour, was buried in a vault beneath the tower, and her untimely fate has given rise to more than one traditionary fable.