



THE BIRTHDAY OF THE INFANTA

PART I

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It was the birthday of the Infanta. She was just twelve years of age, and the sun was shining brightly in the gardens of the palace.

Although she was a real Princess and the Infanta of Spain, she had only one birthday every year, just like the children of quite poor people, so it was naturally a matter of great importance to the whole country that she should have a really fine day for the occasion.

And a really fine day it certainly was. The tall tulips stood like long rows of soldiers, and looked through the grass at the roses, and said: "We are quite as splendid

as you are now." The purple butterflies fluttered about with gold dust on their wings, visiting each flower in turn; the little lizards crept out and lay basking in the white glare; and the *pomegranates split and cracked with the heat, and showed their bleeding red hearts.*⁽¹⁾ Even the pale yellow lemons seemed to have caught a richer colour from the wonderful sunlight, and the magnolia trees opened their great globe-like blossoms, and filled the air with a sweet heavy perfume.

The little Princess herself walked up and down the terrace with her companions, and played at hide and seek round the stone vases and the old moss-grown statues. On ordinary days she was only allowed to play with children of her own rank, so she had always to play alone, but her birthday was an exception, and the King had given orders that she was to invite any of her young friends whom she liked to come and amuse themselves with her. There was a stately grace about these slim Spanish children as they glided about, the boys with their large-plumed hats and short cloaks, the girls holding up the *trains of their long gowns*⁽²⁾, and *shielding the sun from their eyes*⁽³⁾ with huge fans of black and silver. But the Infanta was the most graceful of all, and the most tastefully attired, after the fashion of the day. Her robe was of grey satin, the skirt and the wide puffed sleeves heavily embroidered with silver, and the stiff corset studded with rows of fine pearls. Two tiny slippers with big pink rosettes

1) *pomegranates split and cracked with the heat, and showed their bleeding red hearts* – від спеки гранати лопались, відкриваючи свої мов криваві серця зернята.

2) *trains of their long gowns* – шлейфи своїх довгих суконь

3) *shielding the sun from their eyes* – затуляючи свої очі від сонячного світла

peeped out beneath her dress as she walked. Pink and pearl was her great gauze fan, and in her hair she had a beautiful white rose.

From a window in the palace the sad melancholy King watched them. Behind him stood his brother, Don Pedro of Aragon, whom he hated, and his confessor, the Grand Inquisitor of Granada, sat by his side. Sadder even than usual was the King, for as he looked at the Infanta bowing with childish gravity to the assembling counters, or laughing behind her fan at the grim Duchess of Albuquerque who always accompanied her, he thought of the young Queen, her mother, who but a short time before – so it seemed to him – had come from the gay country of France, and *had withered away in the sombre splendour of the Spanish court*,⁽⁴⁾ dying just six months after the birth of her child. So great had been his love for her that he had not suffered even the grave to hide her from him. She had been embalmed by a Moorish physician, who in return for this service had been granted his life, which for heresy and suspicion of magical practices had been already forfeited, men said, to the Holy Office, and her body was still lying on its tapestried bier in the black marble chapel of the Palace, just as the monks had borne her in on that windy March day nearly twelve years before. Once every month the King, wrapped in a dark cloak and with a lantern in his hand, went in and knelt by her side calling out, “*Mi reina! Mi reina!*”⁽⁵⁾ and sometimes breaking through the formal etiquette that in Spain governs

4) *had withered* ['wɪðəd] *away in the sombre splendour* ['sɒmbə 'splendər] *of the Spanish court* – зачахла в похмурій величі іспанського королівського двору

5) “*Mi reina! Mi reina!*” [mi: reina! mi: reina!] – «Моя королева! Моя королева!» (ісп.)

every separate action of life, and sets limits even to the sorrow of a King, he would *clutch at the pale hands in a wild agony of grief*,⁽⁶⁾ and try to wake by his mad kisses the cold painted face.

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Today he seemed to see her again, as he had seen her first at the Castle of Fontainebleau, when he was but fifteen years of age, and she still younger. They had been formally betrothed on that occasion by the Papal Nuncio in the presence of the French King and all the Court, and he had returned to the Escorial bearing with him a little ringlet of yellow hair, and the memory of two childish lips bending down to kiss his hand as he stepped into his carriage.

Later on had followed the marriage, hastily performed at Burgos, a small town on the frontier between the two countries, and the grand public entry into Madrid with the customary celebration of high mass at the Church of La Atocha, and a more than usually *solemn auto-da-fé*,⁽⁷⁾ in which nearly three hundred heretics, amongst whom were many Englishmen, *had been delivered over to the secular arm to be burned*.⁽⁸⁾

Certainly he had loved her madly, and to the ruin, many thought, of his country, then at war with England for the possession of the empire of the New World. He had hardly ever permitted her to be out of his sight; for her, he had forgotten, or seemed to have forgotten,

6) *clutch at the pale jewelled* ['dʒu:æld] *hands in a wild agony* ['æɡəni] *of grief* – в несамовитому страждання він хапав бліді руки [жінки]

7) *solemn auto-da-fé* ['sɒləm, ɔ:təʊ-da:-e'fi] – священне аутодафе (прилюдне спалення на вогнищі людей, оголошених інквізицією єретиками)

8) *had been delivered over to the secular* ['sekjələr] *arm to be burned* – були передані цивільній владі для виконання вироку – спаленні.