

DON SEBASTIAN
OR
THE HOUSE OF
BRAGANZA
AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE

VOLUMES II

Table of Contents

CHAP. I.

CHAP. II.

CHAP. III.

CHAP. IV.

CHAP. V.

CHAP. VI.

CHAP. VII.

CHAP. VIII.

DON SEBASTIAN,
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Take Physic, Pomp!
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
So shalt thou shake the superflux to them,
And shew the Heavens more just.
KING LEAR.

CHAP. I.

THE first day on which Gaspar was able to walk out, Sebastian obtained leave for him to breathe the air of the gardens in the cool of evening: all the slaves were retired to supper, when the grateful soldier hesitatingly accepted the support of his King, and slowly proceeded from his chamber.

“At moments like these,” whispered he, “I cannot believe myself awake.—So supported—so attended,—oh sire! in Portugal this would have been impossible.”

“Only because in Portugal I should not have known your value.” Sebastian could not forbear sighing as he spoke—but quickly smiling, he added, “Trust me, Gaspar, I shall not feel less a King when again seated on the throne of my ancestors, for having administered to your sufferings and shewn my gratitude for your rare attachment. I take your heart as a sample of all my people’s; and the reflections your generous sensibilities have given rise to, shall teach me to respect their feelings, though at the expense of my own extravagant desires.”

They now moved slowly on: a gentle breeze just stirred the leaves of the umbrageous plane trees, mingling their murmurs with the cooling sound of fountains and water-falls; a balmy smell from fruits and flowers delighted the senses of Gaspar; his eyes wandered with pleasure over the beautiful gardens, and the consciousness of reviving health diffused through his heart and over his face an air of grateful complacency. His pale cheek and feeble frame presented an interesting contrast to the yet vigorous

youth of Sebastian: like a young cedar of Libanus, flourishing in eternal spring, his manly beauty seemed formed for duration.

Having conducted Gaspar into the labyrinth, the King laid him down upon one of its mossy couches; fearing to exhaust him by conversation, he took out his flute, and played several soft airs.

The music, the profound tranquillity, and his extreme weakness, by degrees stole upon the senses of Gaspar; and he dropt to sleep: Sebastian observed it in silence; then fearing to awake him, rose to seek some other slave who might assist in conveying him to his chamber.

For this purpose he quitted the labyrinth: the pale evening star twinkling through innumerable boughs, alone lighted him on his way. Glowing with benevolent and friendly joy, he trod with a lighter step, and looked even in the gardens of El Hader as he had done in the magnificent precincts of Xabregas: though wrapt in a homely dress, the kingly air was still visible. There is a gracefulness of mind which ennobles the meanest habit; that grace now gave picturesque grandeur to the coarse drapery of Sebastian. His neck and head were bare; but the crown of Portugal itself, could not have added majesty to that commanding brow, nature's hand had encircled it with a crown: his dark brown hair glowing with living gold, hung in glossy curls over his forehead and his cheek, discovering at intervals, as the breeze lifted it, those eyes and that mouth whose sweetness had once been proverbial in a court.

Hastening onwards, he was startled by the sight of Kara Aziek standing alone, as if she had been listening to the sound of his flute: after an instant's confusion, the impetuous monarch flung himself

at her feet, and uttered in Moresco a hasty expression of gratitude, then remembering what Hafiz had said of her accomplishments, and fearing to be overheard, he changed his accent, and spoke to her in Italian.

She answered him courteously, though not fluently, in the same language; but her soft voice was so broken by timidity, so mixed with sighs, and interrupted by hesitation, that she was scarcely intelligible. Sebastian remained at her feet, and she had time to recover herself.

“What is it I can do for thee, amiable Christian?” she resumed, “my heart is touched with thy situation.—So young, so brave, so generous as I hear thou art, thou must have many friends in thine own country, the remembrance of whom increases thy present sorrow: would I could restore thee to them! but I cannot; my power extends only to ameliorating thy condition.—What is it I can do for thee?”

“Alas, nothing!” exclaimed the King, pierced with disappointment, “banished from my country, without hope of return, I no longer desire life. I was born, lady, in the midst of power, riches, and honors; I had the means and the will of blessing multitudes; I was surrounded by relations and friends. I am now a slave! if forced at last to abandon the hope of release, do you imagine that any thing can reconcile me to such a destiny? To your heavenly goodness I already owe all the comfort of which my miserable fate is susceptible: ah! could I persuade you to pity me yet further—to procure for me permission to inform one friend of my captivity, and so be ransomed from the Almoçadem!”

“Christian!” said Kara Aziek, after a pause, “thy noble disregard of selfish considerations since thou hast been under the charge of Hafiz, deserves the exertions of all who love virtue; be assured, from this moment, that thou hast made a friend in Kara Aziek: she will continue to protect thee, she will cautiously labour to obtain thy release; but thou must not be impatient if the time be long, and the object lost. My father will not bear either too frequent or too earnest urging: if I would serve the Christians, I must do it prudently.”

Sebastian put the embroidered hem of her kaftan to his lips: “You are my guardian angel, he exclaimed, and there are hearts in Portugal worthy of knowing yours, that shall one day bless you!”

The young monarch’s emotion interested Kara Aziek, she wished to see him again more distinctly, and for this purpose lifted up her veil; the instant their eyes met, she dropt it with a modest blush. But her soft beauty, like that of the summer moon, instantaneously changed the impetuous ardour of Sebastian; a serene and delightful admiration succeeded to his agitation; her shape, her voice, her countenance, were all lovely, they breathed the tenderness and the purity of an angel, and though the radiant image of Donna Gonsalva outshone the Moorish Beauty in splendor, it could only have been preferred by a lover.

Every thing in Gonsalva was gay, resistless, triumphant; in Kara Aziek, touching, yielding, and humble; the one seemed a divinity to be worshipped, the other a tender creature to be loved.

Every endearing quality of woman’s fond and faithful heart, beamed from the dewy eyes of Kara Aziek; those eyes bespoke a soul capable of wholly losing itself in the happiness and honour of

one beloved object; they promised heroic devotedness, disinterested goodness, virtuous submission: they had never yet known how to express disdain, anger, or desire of rule. It was sufficient to have beheld Kara Aziek but for a moment, to be convinced that she was the sweetest and the gentlest of human beings.

Lost in the remembrance of a countenance so engaging, the young King did not remark that his companion heaved several deep sighs: at length, she spoke to him again. "It is then to Portugal that thou wishest to return? It was my mother's country—perhaps thou hast a mother and sisters there—or a wife—art thou married, Christian?—"

Sebastian answered in the negative with a sigh deeper than her own; Aziek eagerly resumed. "If thou, hast neither mother, sister, nor wife, thou should'st not be so very unhappy at thy present misfortune: think how much keener would have been thy sorrows, had they been increased by the memory of such beloved relations. Learn to be grateful, Christian, to the *Great Being* for his smallest mercies!"

Sebastian was about to own that Portugal contained one as dear to him as a wife, when she asked after his sick countryman; on hearing that he was then in the labyrinth, she grieved at having detained his friend, and bade him pursue his way to the house. "Pray warn this poor fellow," she added, "never again to attempt so rash an enterprize: he may get beyond my father's walls 'tis true, but wherever he goes he must encounter Moors, or perish for want among solitary places.—Adieu, Portuguese! endure patiently, pray often, hope constantly."—So saying, the lovely Moor turned away, leaving Sebastian standing where they had first met.

He could not forbear ejaculating a thanksgiving for this fortunate meeting, which licensed him in all those sanguine expectations that otherwise had been fantastic: he blessed the amiable Aziek repeatedly, while hastening to the hall of the household slaves, he procured an assistant, and returned for Gaspar.

The motion, in carrying him, quickly awakened Gaspar, but Sebastian would not rouse him further by speaking then of his adventure, and shortly afterwards left him to repose for the night.

The next time Kara Aziek saw the King of Portugal, it was again in the gardens, supporting his still-languid friend: she stopt in the midst of her women and asked after the invalid.

Sebastian seized this opportunity of describing his delicate constitution, and beseeching her to order him some less hazardous labour than that of working through all weathers in the open air: at the same time he ventured to solicit indulgence for some other sick captives. Kara Aziek fixed her luminous eyes on him through her veil, with a look of soft admiration.

“How is it,” she said, “that thou dost never ask any thing for thyself?—hast thou been taught to live solely for others?”

“It was the first lesson I ever learnt,” replied Sebastian, “would to God, that I had always practised it! but my heart, lady, has not room at present for minor wishes; I languish for liberty. While I am a slave, every personal good is indifferent to me.”

“I pity thee, Christian, indeed I pity thee!” said Aziek in a tone of touching sincerity, “if I were the sole arbiter of thy fate, of all fates, there is not a Christian groaning throughout Africa that should remain in his bonds—but, though my father indulges me

beyond what any other parent allows, he does not leave me absolute. I must win favours from him by degrees; while thou askest these indulgencies for others, thine own suit remains unurged: choose then between them and thyself! am I to plead for their comfort, or thy freedom?"

"For them! for them!" cried Sebastian.

"Generous Christian!" she exclaimed, extending her arm by an involuntary impulse: Sebastian threw himself at her feet, and ventured to seize and kiss her hand; it was a hand so lovely soft, that it seemed to melt in the pressure: though his ardour was chastized by respect, Kara Aziek drew back in confusion. "I will learn of thee to be generous," she added, "to be so, I must risk something, conquer my timid nature, and be importunate for thy sake." She then earnestly besought Sebastian to concert some mode of ameliorating the condition of all the slaves, and yet rendering them useful to El Hader: if a plan were formed, embracing a variety of objects suited to different degrees of strength and ingenuity, she thought its profitableness would recommend it to her father, and make a strong argument for her to use in urging its adoption.

Delighted with her benevolent idea, Sebastian readily promised to sketch such a plan with Hafiz, and then to submit it for her approval: he accompanied this promise with an animated eulogium upon her mind and heart. At this she blushed timidly, telling him that she owed her thoughtfulness to a few good books which her mother had taught her to read, and which perhaps might now be a solace to him: the King was gladdened by this offer, and gratefully accepted it.

He then ventured to ask whether Kara Aziek could give him any information about the state of Portugal; she replied with benevolent minuteness. From her answers he learnt that his throne was filled by the Cardinal, Don Henry, and that his own supposed body (obtained through the King of Spain) had been buried at Belem, with royal honours. "Do they lament their late king?" asked Sebastian, with extreme emotion.

"I hear he was in many things worthy to be regretted," replied Aziek, "but his ill-advised enterprize nearly desolated Portugal; for of the few families he left in it, there was not one that has not lost some relative, either on the field, or by captivity. In this weight of private grief, I suppose a public loss is scarcely felt. Thou didst love thy monarch, I think, that starting tear honours his memory." The eyes of the gentle Moor filled with answering tears while she spoke.

Overcome by her obvious remark, Sebastian stifled a groan: again he saw the bloody plain of Alcazar, and again conscience accused him of countless murders. Heart-wrung, even to torture, he leaned in silent agony upon the shoulder of Gaspar, who being ignorant of Italian (in which they spoke) was now surprized and disturbed at his sovereign's agitation. Kara Aziek regarded him with a mixture of terror and pity.

"Alas! what have I said!" she exclaimed, "that has thus afflicted thee? compose thyself, amiable Christian! thou shalt see thy country again, if Kara Aziek parts with every comfort of her life to obtain thee that felicity."

Without waiting to receive his thanks, she withdrew hastily, leaving Gaspar to make unsuccessful attempts at soothing his royal friend.

Aziek had unconsciously planted the dagger of the furies in the very bosom she would fain have shielded from every shaft: care for others, constant occupation, and ceaseless projects of escape, had lately banished from Sebastian's mind, all self-accusing recollections; but now he saw at one glance his name forgotten or execrated in the land which he loved with parental tenderness, his throne filled by another, his people sunk in funereal gloom, and Donna Gonsalva learning to hate his name, while she wept for her murdered father!

These images were heightened to the wildest excess by a passionate imagination, fruitful in self-tormenting, and as it hurried him in thought from object to object, he sacredly vowed never again to unsheathe the sword but in defence, or for the succour of others: this virtuous vow checked the torrent of sorrow.

The last words of Kara Aziek had escaped his ear; and desperate of release through her means, (since she herself was so doubtful of it,) he came to the resolution of making some personal effort for his own deliverance: warmed by this new project, he gradually recovered himself, and returned back with Gaspar.

On entering his chamber he found several volumes of Italian and Portuguese authors, which he took up and looked at, without knowing one of their titles; for his mind was otherwise occupied, and he laid himself on his pallet, not to sleep, but to think.

It was now that Sebastian found his first visit to Barbary likely to produce benefit; by it he was made acquainted with all the coast,

and much of the interior, he had also acquired information from the persons he redeemed, which now promised to serve him essentially.

In those days the Emperors of Morocco had a right to every captive beyond a certain rank, taken either in battle, or on the seas, and the Moors therefore, frequently secreted their noble slaves and conveyed them privately away for the sake of high ransoms: one of these gentlemen who was the property of a low man, had been conducted by him to the castle of Massignan, by a road which the King now tried to recollect. It had lain through a track of more than a hundred miles: Sebastian calculated on being able to pursue the same route undiscovered, as it led principally through desert mountains.

It is true, that before he could reach Massignan, he must cross the river Ardea, the fords of which were all guarded by Moorish posts, for the express purpose of frustrating the escape of run-aways. But he had been told of a safe passage in one part where the river narrowed among the Green mountains, and which on account of its remoteness was left unwatched: once there, he might cross, and make directly down to the coast; could he gain Massignan he should be safe.

Neither the savage beasts infesting the country he must thus traverse unarmed, nor the apprehension of starving, staggered the resolution of Sebastian; he felt that a mighty spirit has something of omnipotence in it; and believed that the all-seeing parent who feeds the fowls of the air, would provide for his limited wants: if he were destined to perish, better to die free, than to linger out life in slavery.

At first he thought of making Gaspar his companion, but a moment's consideration forbade him to indulge so dangerous a wish: Gaspar could not endure the fatigue and peril to which they must be subjected during such an enterprize, and would in all probability prove the cause of their eventual re-capture: better therefore, to hasten to Masignan and from thence send a King's offer to El Hader. Long did the generous Sebastian pause upon this obstacle: he abhorred the appearance of abandoning his friend, and would not have resolved on it at last, had he not justly deemed that the only method of procuring his ultimate liberation.

The next object of consideration was how to get beyond the walls of the Almoçadem: so indulged as he had long been, it seemed almost perfidious to repay the lenity of El Hader, and the reliance of Hafiz, by using them for the purpose of escape; yet liberty, sacred liberty, is the birth-right of every man; and he who would enslave his fellow-man, however softly he may weave his chains, has perhaps no legitimate claim to his fidelity.

Sebastian felt the force of this assertion: he had ever scorned dissembling his thirst for freedom, and therefore believed himself still privileged to attempt obtaining it by any bold measure. Ere he finally digested this sudden plan, he endeavoured to obey the humane injunction of Kara Aziek; from the day on which they first met, he had employed himself after work-hours in visiting the different quarters of the Cassavee, and making such inquiries and observations as were necessary for his purpose. Hafiz accompanied him, completely satisfied with acting in obedience to his mistress. In a short time the King had perfected the theory of a new establishment infinitely more advantageous to the Almoçadem, and far milder for his Christian associates: this project he delivered to Kara Aziek, through Hafiz, who was recommended in it, to be

made Governor of the whole. Aziek studied it attentively, and assented to its excellence with all the ardour of her benevolent nature; soon afterwards she sought and obtained her father's approval.

Transported with this success, she urged El Hader to send for that enlightened Christian, who thus united regard for his interest with pity for his own countrymen; El Hader had not forgotten their last interview, but no longer apprehensive of seeing a madman, he yielded to his daughter's wish.

The Almoçadem received Sebastian with his usual good-natured indolence; and after having suggested one or two alterations, and demanded a few explanations, he pronounced the desired acquiescence. Sebastian would not have prostrated himself to any mortal for a favor merely selfish; but at this mercy to so many sufferers, he cast himself at the feet of Kara Aziek, who sat wrapt up in her veil, exclaiming in Italian.

"It is to you, amiable Lady! that the Christians owe these blessings; henceforth I will believe myself *your* slave, and then bondage will be no longer abhorrent."

"Ah Christian!" cried the lovely Moor, and stopping abruptly, she averted her eyes with a palpitating heart.

Sebastian knew not the soft confusion his ardent speech had caused; he forgot the woman in Kara Aziek, and saw only the pure and disinterested spirit of an angel.

El Hader now made some remarks upon the improvements in his domain, which he was told were the effects of his Portuguese slave's exertions, adding, "Thou must surely be satisfied with the

miraculous kindness with which thou are treated, and consequently pleased with thy situation?”

This observation afforded Sebastian the opportunity he sought. “Many and important favors,” he said “I gratefully acknowledge in my own person, and in that of every Christian inhabiting this place, but while I labour to shew my sense of your indulgence by a peaceable demeanour and voluntary acts of service, remember El Hader, that I do not conceive myself bound to forego the hope of liberty: my heart is filled with it;—day and night my thoughts are on it; I warn you therefore not to suppose that any thing can make me abandon a resolution to break my bonds, if possible. You refuse a ransom, therein you are merciless and tyrannical, and by that act free me from the obligation honour would otherwise impose: would you accept money as an equivalent for me (however exorbitant the sum) I would not steal myself away, and defraud you of your rightful gain, though liberty tempted me from a thousand avenues; now, I hold my conscience unshackled: if I can escape, I will, but wherever I go, be assured I shall bear with me a salutary remembrance of Moorish virtues.”

“Is not this fellow a madman?” asked El Hader, turning with a smile to his daughter. “This confession of his may clip his wings. Christian, (he added) dost thou not believe I can abridge thy present freedom, and so prevent thy escape?”

“Assuredly I do, returned the impetuous monarch, but that consideration ought not to deter me from asserting my right to use every means of restoring myself to my country. I tell it you, that you may not hereafter call me a base, ungrateful hypocrite; I tell it you, that you may not impute to others my imagined guilt. God forbid that I should be the occasion of any man’s disgrace! should I

effect my purpose, recollect it will be all my own work, and that neither your slaves nor your servants will have had the smallest share in it.

“Rash, but amiable man!” exclaimed Kara Aziek, regarding him with a look of admiration, “O that thou couldst forget thy country and be happy in Africa!”

The tenderness of her tone penetrated the heart of Sebastian, he did not reply by words, but his eloquent eyes fixed for a moment upon her, spoke only too ardently the gratitude she inspired: again the soft bosom of Kara Aziek palpitated with an unknown emotion, and covering her figure still more with her veil—as if fearing her soul was visible—she hastily withdrew.

El Hader detained the King a few moments longer, jesting him on his extravagant hopes, and assuring him, that though still indulgently used, he should be well watched. Sebastian listened in silent majesty, then quitted him, completely satisfied with their mutual understanding.

While he returned to toil and the society of Gaspar, who was now able to bear a moderate part in the work of the gardens, Kara Aziek retired to her own apartments agitated with pain and pleasure: unknown to herself, the pity with which she had at first regarded the young and handsome Christian was now changed into a sentiment less disinterested but more animated; his situation and character were alike interesting; his conversation insensibly stole her from herself; and his graceful image contrasted with the swarthy Moors and pallid slaves around, was ever present to her eyes: at the sound of his voice or his flute, (heard at a distance from the gardens,) she would feel her heart throb tumultuously;

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