

THE MARQUIS OF CARABAS

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The Marquis of Carabas by Harriet Prescott Spofford

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HARRIET PRESCOTT SPOFFORD

**THE MARQUIS
OF CARABAS**

THE
MARQUIS OF CARABAS.

BY
HARRIET PRESCOTT SPOFFORD,
AUTHOR OF
"THE AMBER GODS," "THE THIEF IN THE NIGHT," ETC.



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THE MARQUIS OF CARABAS.

I.

IN the intense lights and shadows of the high noon of a summer day there is a consciousness of the fulness of life, the brooding power of creation, absent from all the purple pencillings of twilight, the blushing promises of dawn.

One could hardly be more sensible of this than when rocking in a boat off Coastcliff that day and gazing at the hillside known by sailors out at sea. One saw there, midway in air, the cottage with its many gables and its quaint casements full of flowers and blowing clouds of muslin, with its grapery and orchid-house at hand, half hidden in its honeysuckles, in the sweetbrier that intoxicated the air about it, in the white rose of that perfect race whose presence is a patent of nobility, that climbed almost to the low roof and thrust its blossoms of living perfumed snow in any win-

dow that gave them passport. And all around the cottage were the gardens between their walls once mortised with earth, in whose interstices every threadlike grass had sprung, and over which a web of vines was thrown, falling and catching and clinging everywhere in green content. There were alleys of shade, with the boughs pleached overhead and with moss beneath the feet; there were spaces purple with the periwinkle and the pansy; through them all a brook danced down the hill, a fall of sunshine, of amber-colored ripples and creamy foam. Ending in front upon the strand into which ran the elm-fringed highways of the town under the hill, behind the house they climbed in terraces and sloping stretches of blossom till the blazing beds of geranium vignettied the whole in fragrant fire against the sky. Far in the upper air a hawk, soaring on motionless wings, sailed in his superb flight till distance wrapped him, and the fleeting breeze darkened and brightened every leaf and spray as it followed in pursuit. One felt, in looking there, the presence and suggestion of nothing but abounding life,—life overflowing in color and warmth and splendor.

But was it life indeed? Was it life or death that ruled the spell in that charmed spot? The spirit of the hour answered, as a wind from the sea lifted the curtain like the banner of a conqueror, and a sheet of glory cast up from its silver panoply filled the room with the sudden light on which two great violet eyes for the first time opened. A robin lit upon the white rose stem and swelled its throat to warble a rapture of song. Then the wind swept out again with the tidings, to the geraniums that might have deepened all their flames, to the hyacinths tossing loose their mist of sweetness, to the breast-high hedges of spicy box which little hands should one day part, and into whose sheltered nests a little face should peer, rustling and rioting among them all with *debonair* freedom ere it fled back to the swinging sea. And the weary, happy mother within laid her cheek on Adelaide's and led her away down the pleasant path of her earliest dream.

II.

FROM noon deepening into afternoon above a sea bloom-bathed in veils of vapor; from sunset smouldering in the west and outblazing in a double world of scarlet glory; from pensive summer twilight sown with stars, whose cool air is a bewilderment of odor in this garden, with its beginnings of new being in such peace and gladness, the mind will wander across many an horizon of calm and of commotion, through many an arching heaven full of varying weather, over the tumultuous tract where the crowded surges of a sudden storm are crushing among themselves as the mid-sea tempest drives northward on its way, ere it pauses in the night of this same noon on low equatorial waters weltering weightily in the midnight darkness of the after-storm.

A vessel rides there. So dark herself as to be unguessed, she seems but a high value on the shadow of the night. If she flies a flag at all, it is

duskier than the ragged cloud that floats before that struggling star and extinguishes its spark. She carries no light fore or aft. A swift and sharp-stemmed craft, she is a thing that hides herself in the elements, that haunts horizons and that mingles with the tints of evening,—an outlaw of the waters.

She rests now in the havoc that the tropical fury has wrought, that she may discover into what neighborhood she has been driven, and make some slight repair. The sighs that rise from below might fill her sails and waft her slowly on, the moans there might betray her; but they that guide her helm take care no stranger comes near enough to regard the one or the other, and her head has been steadily pointed toward the low lagoons of the coral reefs, where her freight shall be discharged and her gold counted down. As she lies deep in the sea, one wave rolling after another turns up its broad back of phosphorescent light, and for an instant all her blackness starts out on the gloomy field of the night—the skeleton of shrouds and yards with something ominous of all disaster in their every line—and is lost again in