

The Man at the Door

By Fitz-James O'Brien

I.

How joyous to-day is the little Old town,
With banners and streamers as cheery as spring
They flutter on turrets and battlements brown,
And the ancient cathedral is fine as a king.
The sexton a nosegay has put in his breast,
And his face is as bright as a Jericho rose,
That, after a century's withering rest,
Unwrinkles its petals and suddenly blows.

II.

The brown-breasted swallows aloft and alow
Swoop faster and further than ever before,
And I'm sure that the cock on the steeple will crow
When he hears from the city the jubilant roar.
The girls are as gay as a holiday fleet,
Their ribbons are streaming from bosom and hair,
And they laugh in the face of each young man they meet,
And the young men reply with an insolent stare.

III.

'T is not without reason the old town is gay,
And banners and ribbons are reddening the air,
For beautiful Bertha will marry to-day
With gallant young Albert, the son of the Mayor.
He is brown as a nut from the hazels of Spain
Her face, like the twilight, is pensive and sweet
As they march hand in hand through the murmuring lane,
Low blessings, like flowers, fail unseen at their feet.

IV.

While they sweep like twin barks through the waves of the crowd,
A story is falling from ninny a tongue,
Of the young gypsy prince who, a year ago, bowed
At the shrine where a hundred their passion had sung;
And how Bertha heaped scorn on his love and his race,
How she flung in the street the rich presents he sent,
Until he, with the hatred of hell in his face,
Went sullenly back to his tribe and his tent.

V.

Soon all stories are hushed in a gathering roar,
And the people sway back like the ebb of a tide,
And the rosy old sexton stands by the church-door,
To merrily welcome the bridegroom and bride
But his glee is so great that he does not behold
The tall man that stands near the pillar, hard by,
Nor the flash of the dagger that's hafted with gold,
Nor the still keener flash of the lowering eye.

VI.

On they come, and the sexton bows low to the ground,
The bride smiles a welcome, the bells ring a chime,
While a grand acclamation, in surges of sound,
Thrills up through the sky like a sonorous rhyme.
They are under the porch —when, one dash through the crowd,
One flash of a dagger, one shriek of despair,
And Bertha falls dead; while, stern-visaged and proud,
The swarthy-skinned prince of the gypsies is there

VII.

How sombre to-day is the little old town,
With mourning, and sables, and funeral display;
Long weepers are hanging from battlements brown,
And the ancient cathedral is haggard and gray.
The sexton a white rose has put in his breast,
While his face is as blank as a snow-laden sky;
For Bertha and Albert have gone to their rest,
And the prince of the gypsies is swinging on high.