

Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775-1818)

8 *Durandarte and Belerma*

Sad and fearful is the story  
Of the Roncevalles fight;  
On those fatal plains of glory  
Perish'd many a gallant knight.

There fell Durandarte: never 5  
Verse a nobler chieftain nam'd;  
He, before his lips for ever  
Clos'd in silence, thus exclaim'd: —

“Oh, Belerma! oh, my dear one!  
For my pain and pleasure born! 10  
Seven long years I serv'd thee, fair one;  
Seven long years my fee was scorn.

“And when now thy heart, replying  
To my wishes, burns like mine,  
Cruel fate, my bliss denying, 15  
Bids me every hope resign.

“Ah! though young I fall, believe me,  
Death would never claim a sigh;  
'Tis to lose thee, 'tis to leave thee,  
Makes me think it hard to die! 20

“Oh, my cousin Montesinos!  
By that friendship firm and dear,  
Which from youth has liv'd between us,  
Now my last petition hear: —

“When my soul, these limbs forsaking, 25  
Eager seeks a purer air,  
From my breast the cold heart taking,  
Give it to Belerma's care.

“Say, I of my lands possessor  
Nam’d her with my dying breath; 30  
Say, my lips I op’d to bless her,  
Ere they clos’d for aye in death!

“Twice a-week, too, how sincerely  
I ador’d her, cousin, say: —  
Twice a-week, for one who dearly 35  
Lov’d her, cousin, bid her pray.

“Montesinos, now the hour  
Mark’d by fate is near at hand;  
Lo! my arm has lost its power;  
Lo! I drop my trusty brand! 40

“Eyes, which forth beheld me going,  
Homewards ne’er shall see me hie:  
Cousin, stop those tears o’erflowing,  
Let me on thy bosom die.

“Thy kind hand my eyelids closing, 45  
Yet one favour I implore:  
Pray thou for my soul’s reposing,  
When my heart shall throb no more.

“So shall Jesus, still attending,  
Gracious to a Christian’s vow, 50  
Pleas’d accept my ghost ascending,  
And a seat in heav’n allow,”

Thus spoke gallant Durandarte;  
Soon his brave heart broke in twain:  
Greatly joy’d the Moorish party, 55  
That the gallant knight was slain.

Bitter weeping, Montesinos  
Took from him his helm and glaive;  
Bitter weeping, Montesinos  
Dug his gallant cousin’s grave. 60

To perform his promise made, he

Cut the heart from out the breast,  
That Belerma, wretched lady!  
Might receive the last bequest.

Sad was Montesino's heart; he 65  
Felt distress his bosom rend. —  
“Oh, my cousin Durandarte,  
Woe is me to view thy end!

“Sweet in manners, fair in favour, 70  
Mild in temper, fierce in fight;  
Warrior nobler, gentler, braver,  
Never shall behold the light.

“Cousin, lo! my tears bedew thee;  
How shall I thy loss survive!  
Durandarte, he who slew thee, 75  
Wherefore left he me alive?”

1796

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