

Shalise

Shalise was the beautiful pride and joy of the great king Almeiro, who reigned over an ancient land many centuries ago. She brought him his evening beverage of choice wine, and he delighted in showing her off to courtiers and delegates who would remark on her sparkling splendour. Upon seeing her, people would describe her as “scintillating,” “perfectly formed” and “exquisite”—although she was *fourteen hundred years old*!

But Shalise was not a woman; she was not even a *person*. She was a goblet, a

vessel—yes, an inanimate object; a silver chalice intricately engraved with delicate floral designs. And despite her age, no trace of wear, tear or tarnish, nary a scratch marred her loveliness.

A few centuries ago, a Moorish army captured Shalise from the crusaders, but some years later, one of Almeiro’s ancestral kings rescued her and took her into his royal court, where she had remained ever since. Due to her mystique, many wondered if she was the Holy Grail from which Christ and His disciples had supped the night of His betrayal!

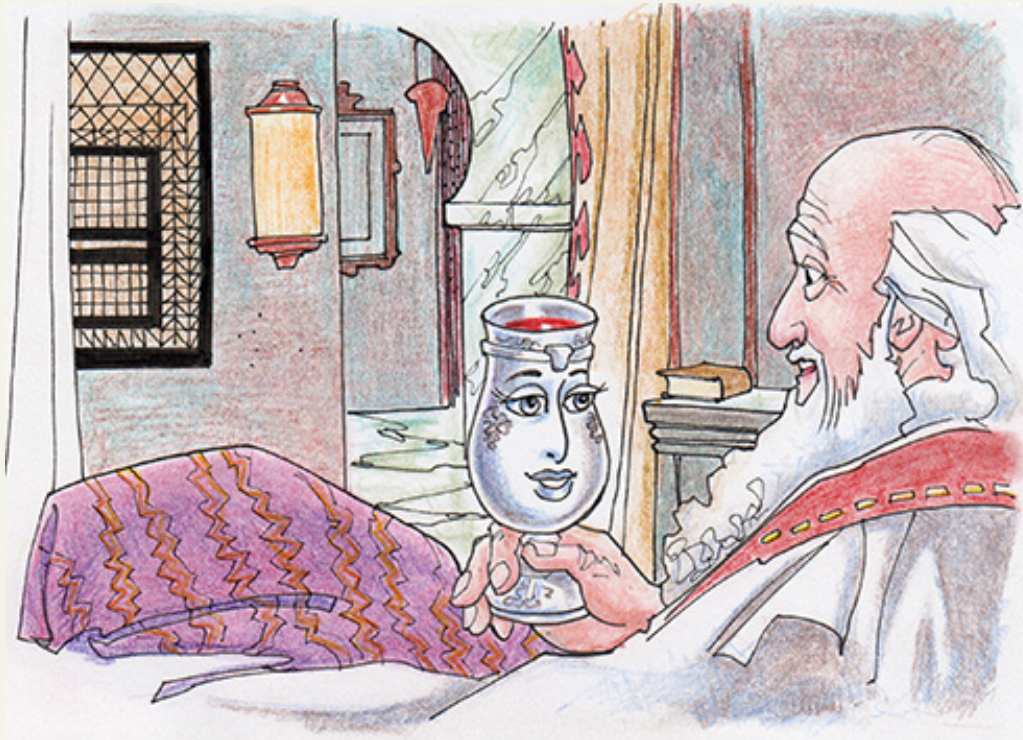
She was no such thing, of course. But such speculation aside, Shalise did convey a magnetic aura—“charisma,” as it is sometimes called—and those beholding her, especially the women, attributed that quality to the possible employment of a special silver burnishing liquid or polish. It was due to none of these things; Shalise possessed



natural beauty and resilience that defied such assumption. What’s more, she could *communicate*. Yes, Shalise could speak to certain people through their thoughts, and only they could hear her.

One of those certain people was good King Almeiro. Now, when she first “spoke” to the king, he thought he was imagining things and presumed he was going mad or that the vessel was possessed of an evil spirit. He was of a mind to dispose of Shalise, but she assured him that she was good and proved it by giving him wise counsel on court matters. Furthermore, because the king had recently lost his wife to a fatal disease, Shalise became a clandestine source of insight, solace, and even entertainment for him.





“From whence comes your power and wisdom, Shalise?” he inquired late one night.

The good and gracious God, Your Majesty. I am your angel in a cup.

“Well, I must admit that since I brought you into the court, only good fortune has come to us. You must be a charmed vessel. A talisman, perhaps?”

The king could have sworn he heard Shalise chuckle when she replied, *Nay, Your Majesty. Rather a taliswoman.*



One day, King Almeiro and his army, while on their return from conquests, were

travelling through an arid wilderness that was known for being difficult to navigate due to fierce windstorms. They were fainting from thirst, and had it not been for the king espying a fortuitous sparkle on a wadi¹ hidden in the shade of a looming rock formation, he and his parched company would have traipsed by

to certain death. So grateful was he that he attributed their good fortune to the mercy of God, and upon returning to the palace, King Almeiro decided to have Shalise chained to that giant rock, which he dubbed “Gran Roca.”

Why? she asked when the king told her of his design. *You wish to be rid of me?*

“Nay, Shalise. It pains me to do this, but I feel compelled to return the divine favour bestowed upon me by placing my most treasured earthly possession in a position where it ... *she* can bless and even save the lives of those who would perish from thirst should they fail to glimpse a sparkle of hope.

You can be that hope shining in the sand under the shadow of the Gran Roca—no one could pass you by unnoticed.”

But surely you can use someone ... something else. A jewel, even a trinket ... a looking glass perhaps?

The king shook his head. “Jewels, trinkets, and looking glasses can be of little service in such grim circumstances. What perishing travellers need is a vessel that attracts them to the wadi and from which they can assuage their thirst. Ah, such joy...”

Joy, Your Majesty?

“Yes. For you.”

For me?

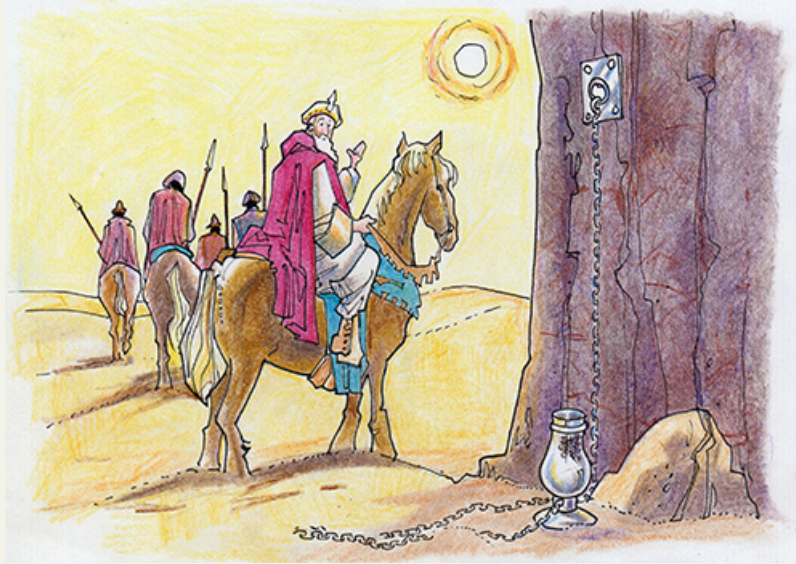
“You will see.”



So King Almeiro himself took Shalise to Gran Roca, where one of his ironsmiths affixed a long heavy chain to the wall of the rock and attached it to an iron fetter around her stem.

“Have no fear, Shalise,” the king whispered after placing her in the sand and quietly blessing her. “I will pass by regularly en route to and from affairs involving my recent conquests to see how you do.”

¹ a valley, ravine, or channel that is dry except in rainy seasons



I will look forward to that with much eagerness, Your Majesty. But you need never fear for my welfare, for I sense a strange and wonderful security in the shadow of Gran Roca.

"I anticipated as much, Shalise. Farewell."



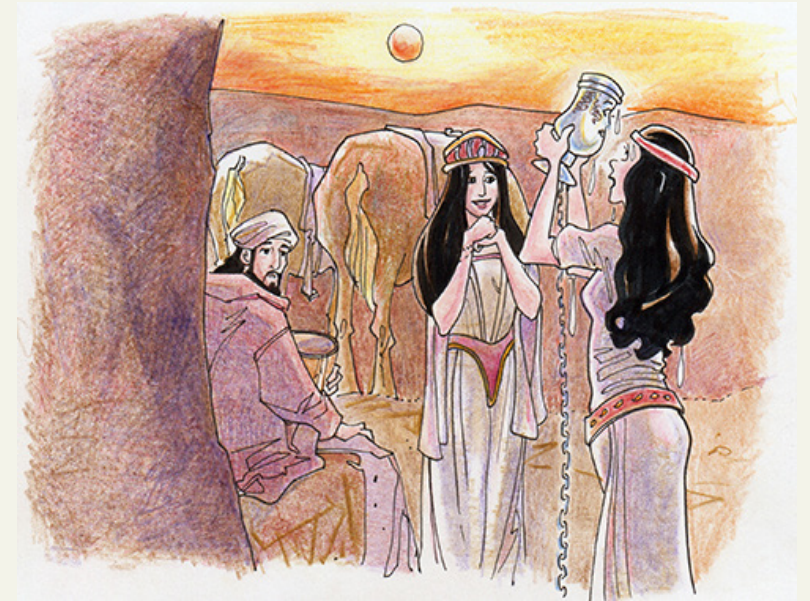
From the very first day of being chained to the great rock by the wadi, Shalise found that even in her restricted circumstances, she experienced unflagging delight in refreshing parched and weary travellers. It mattered little to her whether her beneficiaries were rich or poor, coarse or refined, ugly or fair, for all faces reflected the same overwhelming relief at having their thirst slaked, and especially the faces of those having had their lives saved.

And at night when the travellers were fewer and would be sleeping, Shalise communicated with Gran Roca. His thoughts toward her were resonant and intelligent; sometimes salted with humour, sometimes peppered with poignancy, but always sweetened with deep tenderness and comfort. Shalise's thoughts towards him were sometimes inquisitive, occasionally petulant, and oftentimes (as she got to know him more) a little giddy and light, but always graced with awe and love.

If you remember, Shalise could communicate with certain people through thoughts. Those certain people were few, and she never knew who they were to be, or of what age or status. From among the many thirsty wayfarers stopping at Gran Roca, she communicated with a wealthy trader, a war-ravaged warrior, a wizened old sage, a wandering minstrel, a world-weary courtier, a winsome young nun, and many charming children. She realised that in her long life, those individuals with whom she was allowed to communicate were in some way instrumental in the fulfilment of her seemingly stationary destiny; some by

shaping her thoughts, some by giving her understanding and compassion, some by imparting wisdom, and some by giving her encouragement, or even—as in the case of the minstrel—entertainment.

One evening, a lawyer and his two maiden daughters, all fainting from thirst, happened by, and they too would have perished without Shalise's reflection in the setting sun attracting them to the wadi.



"Oh, Father, what a beautiful goblet!" one of the girls exclaimed as she and her sister gratefully guzzled and doused themselves from Shalise. "It has *amazing* charm."

"Most certainly," said the lawyer, and grasping Shalise by her stem, took a long draught of water from her.

"If it wasn't for thy radiance, oh sacred chalice," he said with a laugh, as he held her aloft, "we would have died of thirst!"

You are most welcome, sir. It is a pleasure for me to see you and your daughters so refreshed.

"Is something the matter, Father?" one of his daughters asked, seeing he appeared astonished.

"N-no. Er, maybe it was my imagination, b-but did you hear a w-woman speak just then?"

"No."

"Then I suppose it could be a touch of the sun ... it has been a long trek."

"But it is true what you said, Father. We owe our very *lives* to this goblet."

"Yes," said the other daughter. "What a shame it is chained up. It is much too lovely to just be lying out here in the sand. I wish there was a way to unshackle it."

"Well ... I do have a pertinent tool amongst our baggage," said the lawyer.

"Oh, *please*, Father. We could take it home and put it on the best shelf in the villa. Mother would just adore it!"

"I'll think about it."

Do not give it a second thought, sir.

The lawyer gave a start, and seeing that his daughters had set about bedding down for the night, he picked up Shalise.

"Are you really speaking to me?" he whispered.

I am, but only you can hear me.

"Evidently. But why?"

I know not, except that there must be a reason. Maybe I play a significant part in your destiny, or you do in mine.

"Could be. My name is Lexus, by the way."

My name is Shalise. And I have no wish to be removed from my place here, by the way.

"Very well, Shalise, but did you hear what my daughters said?"

I did.

"Do you realise how beautiful you are?"

Shalise said nothing. She was actually surprised to discover that she had been rather flattered by their remarks, when normally such compliments would have run off her like the waters of the wadi.

"Are you happy, Shalise?" Lexus asked. "Truly happy?"

Assuaging others' thirst causes me to shine from inside—if that's the right way to put it.



“Yes, people quench their thirst from you, but do they take the time to *thank* you and truly appreciate you?”

Seldom, but seeing the pleasure on their faces is reward enough for me. I am merely a vessel carrying what is most important to them.

“Ah, then any old clay vessel will do, Shalise.”

A clay vessel would be dashed against the rock, sir. Besides, it would not reflect the sunlight.

“Very well. What about a steel cup?”

Steel rusts in water.

“A wooden bucket?”

Again it would not reflect the sunlight. It is my purpose to attract.

“I see.”

Besides, wood rots in water. And the water would taste foul.

Lexus the lawyer laughed. “Well said! I must admit the water tasted exceptionally delicious being borne in a vessel such as yours. But I could have you gleaming in a place where your splendour would *truly* be admired.”

I have been and am truly admired, sir.

“By whom?”

*That which looms above you even now.
Gran Roca.*

Lexus looked up. “What? This imperious formation of dark granite?”

Yes, but he is more than...

“But wouldn’t you rather enjoy the warmth and closeness of a family that would appreciate your beauty and truly love you for who you are?”

Shalise did not answer. Over the years, many a crafty character with an eye for gain had returned with implements to sever Shalise from her chain to Gran Roca, but their plans were thwarted because they were unable to find the spot. Even the few like Lexus, who happened to be carrying such tools when they first drank from her, found that when attempting to use them to liberate her for their own advantage, Gran Roca’s shadow obscured her from their sight and his presence struck them with such foreboding that they would fear to pursue their objective.

So why was Shalise suddenly finding herself discovered by and even communicating with such a person? Well, she had recently been wishing that she could enjoy what Lexus was offering, and her desires were no secret to Gran Roca, who she knew was silently considering them with patience and understanding. Furthermore, overhearing the lovely maidens remarking on her beauty compounded Shalise’s longing for freedom and a chance to enjoy the adulation they said she deserved. Her imaginations had now opened a door of opportunity to satisfy that longing in reality, and the next morning, Lexus, to the delight of his daughters, unshackled Shalise and they took her home.



During the time that Shalise had been there at the wadi, King Almeiro had been true to his word and had often taken that familiar route, stopping at Gran Roca to drink from Shalise and communicate with her out of sight of his entourage.

“Oh my,” he would always say. “My subjects would deem me mad if they were to find me conversing with a goblet!”

After his last meeting with Shalise, however, the king had been concerned at having noticed a restless wistfulness about her and, upon his journey’s return, was overwhelmingly distressed at her disappearance. He offered a kingly reward for her recovery to no avail, and so he replaced Shalise with another silver goblet, which soon became tarnished and failed to reflect the sun and attract the thirsty wanderers.

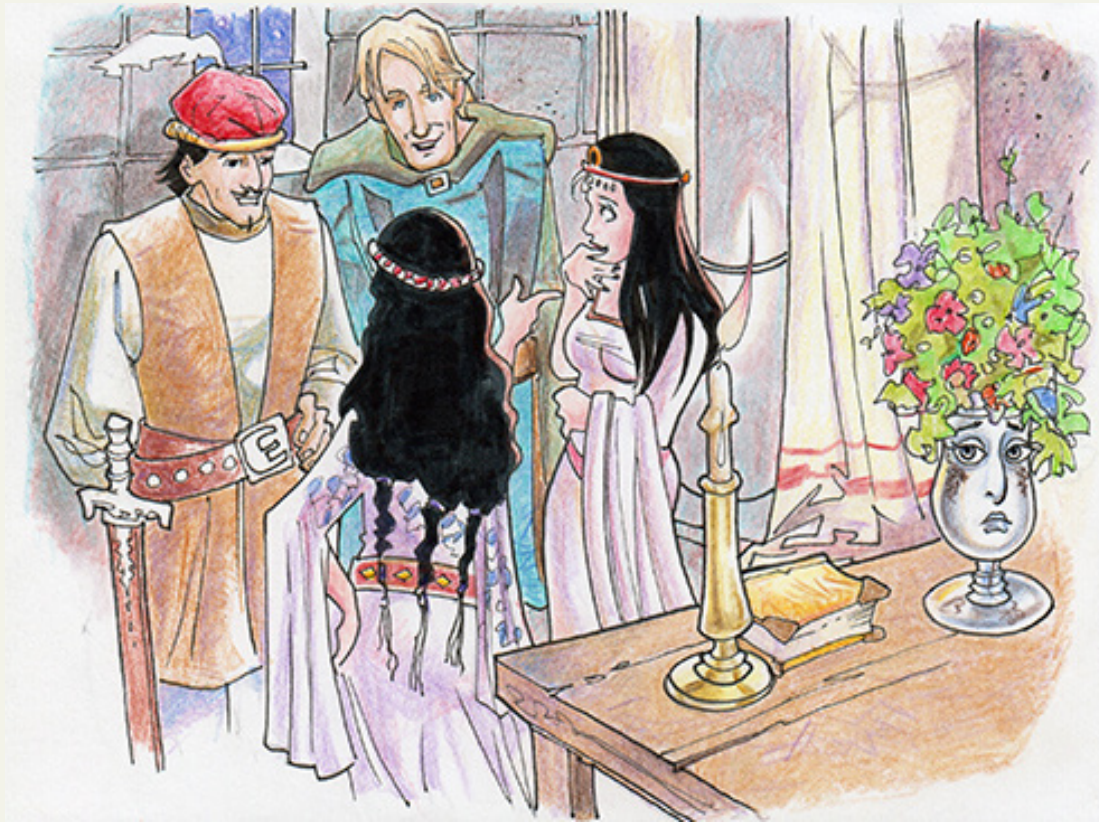
Meanwhile, Shalise revelled in the maidens’ and their mother’s doting. For many months, they displayed her here and there for their family and certain selected friends, but Shalise began to lose her lustre, causing the girls’ interest in her to wane and to use her merely as a flower vase. Nevertheless, Lexus, as busy as he was and more so every day, still clandestinely communicated with her, but these occasions became briefer and less frequent.

One evening, looking concerned and rather sheepish, he took Shalise down from her shelf and carried her to the cellar. There, he set her on a table and addressed her as he polished her with a velvet cloth.

“You are unhappy, are you not, Shalise?”
Somewhat, sir, I must admit. Why?

“You have lost much of your lustre.”

Of that I am unaware. I only know that I have lost it inside.



“I think I know why,” said Lexus.
“You see, I understand that you, being intrinsically self-abnegating, and may I say ... *holy* in nature, appreciate the company, and more importantly, the *admiration* of like-minded souls.”

You, your wife, and your daughters have been very gracious, sir.

“Thank you. However, I am speaking of others even more worthy. I can ensure that you are in a loftier position where the pious and the faithful like yourself will not merely

admire you, but *venerate* you.”

I am not sure what you mean, sir.

Lexus shifted nervously and dropped his already lowered voice to a whisper. “Look, Shalise. Maybe you have noticed that financial straits have necessitated that I sell

many of my family’s assets, and you are one of our most valuable ones. I regret to inform you that I have decided to sell you to a church.”

A church?

“Yes, a sacred place where you can be used as a holy chalice. A cathedral where the devout can have you in reverence that neither my wife, daughters, nor even I could ever bestow upon you.”

I look for no reverence, sir. I only wish to see...



"I understand. Then think of the holy joy on the faces of those gazing upon you; maybe even regarding you as being the very grail from which Christ and His disciples supped! Your agelessness itself could attest to such assumption."

I have no interest in fostering such a ludicrous assumption.

"Very well, Shalise. But would not such holy service be for you more rewarding than even our comforting care and especially the gratitude—if any—of self-serving riffraff who are only bent on satisfying their thirst?"

Shalise said nothing in reply.

"Anyway," Lexus continued, "the council of the city's grandest cathedral has offered me a

healthy sum in exchange for you. Be comforted, my dear Shalise, to know that that sum will save my family from certain ruin."

For that, I am truly grateful, sir, said Shalise, and the next day she found herself in the hands of a priest who reverently set her amongst the Eucharistic elements.

And so, for many months, Shalise was raised aloft, blessed, and used as the principal object in the cathedral's most holy ceremony, a service for which she felt consecrated yet strangely unfulfilled. Nevertheless, she was pleased to discover that her outward lustre returned, and she attributed this to her again being able to contribute towards people's happiness.

Shalise also found that the wine in her vessel would make her giddy and insensible to her solemn lot, but she started to resent the fact that after the congregation had gone home, the priest would drink of her, and leave her empty and more dissatisfied. He took little notice of her, let alone thanked her. Yes, she had enjoyed the transcendent

reverence of the congregation and especially the rare and silent euphoric reception of a few of its members, but she missed the truly ecstatic reactions of the desperate and thirsty travellers. Sadly, her frustration and resentment increased until she wished above all that she would be delivered from her sanctimonious servitude and placed she cared not where.

Fortunately, every night Shalise was still comforted through communications with her beloved, majestic Gran Roca, who, although distant in location, now seemed strangely closer and even more attentive to her longings.

Shalise's desire for deliverance was granted when one night, after swigging from her a more than adequate measure of the communion wine, the priest collapsed and Shalise tumbled off the altar.



He had neglected to lock up the sacraments, which enabled a couple of thieves to ransack them, and Shalise found herself tossed into a big leather bag along with the other precious devotional artefacts. She later humorously conjectured that she felt somewhat akin to the biblical prophet Jonah, when after three days and nights, she was delivered from her dark abode! She was delivered not onto a beach, though, but into the hands of a rich doctor, who esteemed her the most attractive and valuable curio amongst the thieves' sacrosanct booty and paid them a handsome sum for her.

"Fourteen hundred years old!" he was soon announcing to distinguished dinner guests as he brought Shalise out for display. "See? It is engraved on the underside."

"Really?" some women would remark. "It looks as though it was fashioned but yesterday. What's its secret?"

"I have no idea," the doctor would reply. "Some say that it is due to it having been much used over the centuries—being supped from in banquets, king's courts, and even churches. In other words, usefulness has supposedly preserved its perfection. I contend with such a theory. Such handling would by now have manifested itself in unseemly scratches, dents, and even tarnish. I believe it must have been treated with the most delicate and privileged care. Even now, when not bringing it out for my guests' viewing pleasure, I keep it swaddled in black velvet."



Having known of other silver goblets requiring serious scouring as a result of disuse, Shalise disagreed with the doctor's premise, but she had to admit to herself that she delighted in the compliments afforded her—especially from the female observers. Before long, however, despite such coddling and swaddling, Shalise grew dissatisfied and bored, and the doctor noticed a loss of her lustre.

"I cannot explain it," he said when asked about her beauty's evident decline. "I have employed the finest silver restoration solvents, yet it has only deteriorated the more."

"So I can see," said a woman. "It is starting to show its age."

"Then your most profitable action would be to sell it to a museum," the woman's husband suggested. "Age reigns over fine craftsmanship and even beauty in such an institution. After all, fourteen hundred is no small length of years."

The doctor agreed and sold Shalise for a handsome sum to a museum in a city far removed from the cathedral out of which she had been stolen.

It should be better than being suffocated in a black velvet cloth most of the time, Shalise mused. And I will at least get to see the light of day or, at the most, be illuminated on display. I may even see the joy of discovery on the faces of history students and even children.

Poor Shalise! Within but a few days of being exhibited, she experienced only the indifference of the general passers-by, the cold scrutiny of curious curators, and sadder still, the unforeseen bored disinterest of children.

A museum ... alas! I may as well be in a mausoleum, she thought, and concluded that she would rather be robbed for her worth than suffer such a forlorn existence. If it were possible for a precious chalice to do so, I am sure you would have seen Shalise shed tears.

Many months passed, until one day city officials brought a handsome prince and his entourage to the museum on a guided tour. After wandering through the galleries and surveying the exhibits, he stopped in front of Shalise.

Good morning, Your Majesty.

At the sound of Shalise's greeting, the prince's eyes widened, and he let out a gasp.

"Is everything all right, Your Majesty?" inquired a valet.

"Er ... did you hear someone ... a woman greet me just then?"

The valet shook his head.

"Then I must be tired; it has been a long and stressful day. I would appreciate a few minutes alone with ... m-my thoughts."



"As you wish, milord," said the valet, and beckoned for the rest of the prince's entourage to join him in leaving the room.

Ah. Now we can talk, Shalise said once they were alone.

"Am I hearing things?" the prince whispered to her.

Yes, Your Majesty. My thoughts.

"Do I know you?"

You did, when you were but a lad. My, how handsome you have grown!

"Thank you, milady, but from whence do you know me?"

I am Shalise. I was the favourite goblet of your father, King Almeiro. I brought him his choice wine.

The prince smiled. "That I do remember. You were most dear to him, and I saw him grieve much over your disappearance from Gran Roca."

I have since grieved much, also, Your Majesty.

"Well, my father speaks of you to this day," the prince went on. "Alas, he is well advanced in years and is now bedridden. I fear that shortly he will..."

Then it would mean so much to the three of us if I could be with him again.

"Listen, Shalise, folks would deem me mad if they were to find me conversing with an ancient goblet."

Shalise giggled. *You sound like your father!*

The prince had spoken not a moment too soon when the museum's chief curator entered.

"All is well, Your Majesty?"

"Very well, sir. I wish to purchase this chalice."

"Really?"

"Most assuredly. I will pay a princely sum for her ... it."

The curator stroked his chin. "With all due respect, Your Majesty, this is far from being the most engaging of exhibits—could be if there was a way to restore the silver's original lustre. But of course, being fourteen hundred years old makes it a fascinating and worthy curio."

"Of course. But as I said, I will pay a princely sum."

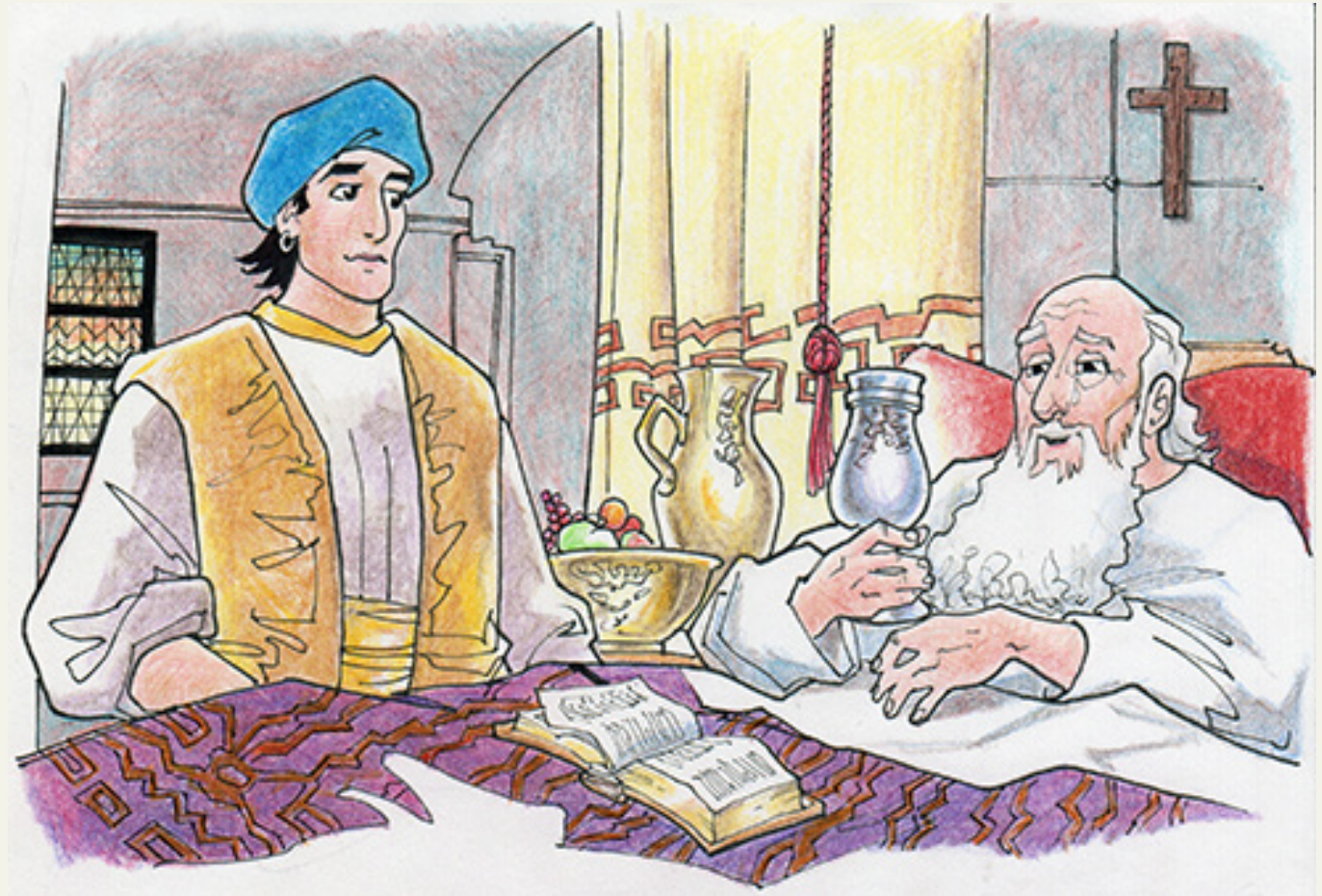
"Very well, Your Majesty," said the curator. "But tell me, is it my imagination? For it seems that since you have been taking an interest in it, the chalice has regained some of what must have been its former splendour! Oh, foolish me, Your Majesty. It has been a long day..."

"For me too," said the prince. "Yet it does appear that such is the case. Shalise ... er ... the chalice does seem to be sparkling. So, we should settle the transaction before you change your mind!"

The curator laughed, shook the prince's hand, and the prince returned home the following morning happy with his precious, and equally happy, trophy.



"Shalise! Shalise!" King Almeiro exclaimed as his son handed him his long-lost treasure. "You are alive—if such could be said of a chalice—and *well*. I, however, as you can plainly see..."



I am so very sorry, Your Majesty.

“Do not be. I can pass on happy that I can enjoy my last earthly supps of my favourite beverage in my favourite chalice. Did you know that is why I named you ‘Shalise?’”

Yes, Your Majesty. It means “chalice.”

“But before I bid my last farewells,” the king continued, “I will decree that you are to be placed in the loftiest position in the palace, where all who pass by will admire you.”

“She deserves no less,” said the prince.

“Absolutely,” said the king. “What more could you ask for, Shalise?”

Little more, Your Majesty.

“Little more?” said the king, perceiving a wistful tone in Shalise’s communication. “Name it and I will grant it you.”

I wish, Your Majesty, that you will decree that I be chained once more to Gran Roca, so that I can again enjoy seeing the pleasure of

the weary and thirsty travellers when they drink from me, no matter what their character or station.

Tears filled the king’s eyes, and he turned to his son. “Call the butler and have him fill her from a cask of the finest reserve in the cellar.

“Your gallantry has warmed my heart,” the king said to Shalise. “I can do no other with a clean conscience than grant you your request. I will, however, decree that a sentinel be posted to keep watch that you come to no further harm.”

I appreciate your concern for my care, Your Majesty, but I will need no more guardian of my safety than Gran Roca himself. Any peril can only befall me through my own thinking, which even a thousand sentinels would be unable to prevent should Gran Roca withdraw his protection.



And so, to this day, should you be travelling through that ancient land and chance upon the wadi at Gran Roca, you will see Shalise, looking not a minute older than on the day she was created, still happily quenching the thirst of many travellers. She will quench yours too and, who knows, she may even communicate with you as well!

On the other hand, it is unlikely that you or I will ever see Shalise, but can you think of a person you know who is like her? Somebody seemingly insignificant who people may fail to notice, yet who always seems to be happy making others happy? Maybe it is even you.

The End