

CHAPTER VIII

THE SECOND MEETING

It may be thought that while I was employed thus I had forgotten the object of my coming to Spain, namely to avenge my mother's murder on the person of Juan de Garcia. But this was not so. So soon as I was settled in the house of Andres de Fonseca I set myself to make inquiries as to de Garcia's whereabouts with all possible diligence, but without result.

Indeed, when I came to consider the matter coolly it seemed that I had but a slender chance of finding him in this city. He had, indeed, given it out in Yarmouth that he was bound for Seville, but no ship bearing the same name as his had put in at Cadiz or sailed up the Guadalquivir, nor was it likely, having committed murder in England, that he would speak the truth as to his destination. Still I searched on. The house where my mother and grandmother had lived was burned down, and as their mode of life had been retired, after more than twenty years of change few even remembered their existence. Indeed I only discovered one, an old woman whom I found living in extreme poverty, and who once had been my grandmother's servant and knew my mother well, although she was not in the house at the time of her flight to England. From this woman I gathered some information, though, needless to say, I did not tell her that I was the grandson of her old mistress.

It seemed that after my mother fled to England with my father, de Garcia persecuted my grandmother and his aunt with lawsuits and by other means, till at last she was reduced to beggary, in which condition the villain left her to die. So poor was she indeed, that she was buried in a public grave. After that the old woman, my informant, said she had heard that de Garcia had committed some crime and been forced to flee the country. What the crime was she could not remember, but it had happened about fifteen years ago.

All this I learned when I had been about three months in Seville, and though it was of interest it did not advance me in my search.

Some four or five nights afterwards, as I entered my employer's house I met a young woman coming out of the doorway of the patio; she was thickly veiled and my notice was drawn to her by her tall and beautiful figure and because she was weeping so violently that her body shook with her sobs. I was already well accustomed to such sights, for many of those who sought my master's counsel had good cause to weep, and I passed her without remark. But when I was come into the room where he received his patients, I mentioned that I had met such a person and asked if it was any one whom I knew.

'Ah! nephew,' said Fonseca, who always called me thus by now, and indeed began to treat me with as much affection as though I were really of his blood, 'a sad case, but you do not know her and she is no paying patient. A poor girl of noble birth who had entered religion and taken

her vows, when a gallant appears, meets her secretly in the convent garden, promises to marry her if she will fly with him, indeed does go through some mummery of marriage with her--so she says--and the rest of it. Now he has deserted her and she is in trouble, and what is more, should the priests catch her, likely to learn what it feels like to die by inches in a convent wall. She came to me for counsel and brought some silver ornaments as the fee. Here they are.'

'You took them!'

'Yes, I took them--I always take a fee, but I gave her back their weight in gold. What is more, I told her where she might hide from the priests till the hunt is done with. What I did not like to tell her is that her lover is the greatest villain who ever trod the streets of Seville. What was the good? She will see little more of him. Hist! here comes the duchess--an astrological case this. Where are the horoscope and the wand, yes, and the crystal ball? There, shade the lamps, give me the book, and vanish.'

I obeyed, and presently met the great lady, a stout woman attended by a duenna, gliding fearfully through the darkened archways to learn the answer of the stars and pay many good pesos for it, and the sight of her made me laugh so much that I forgot quickly about the other lady and her woes.

And now I must tell how I met my cousin and my enemy de Garcia for the second time. Two days after my meeting with the veiled lady it chanced that I was wandering towards midnight through a lonely part of the old city little frequented by passers-by. It was scarcely safe to be thus alone in such a place and hour, but the business with which I had been charged by my master was one that must be carried out unattended. Also I had no enemies whom I knew of, and was armed with the very sword that I had taken from de Garcia in the lane at Ditchingham, the sword that had slain my mother, and which I bore in the hope that it might serve to avenge her. In the use of this weapon I had grown expert enough by now, for every morning I took lessons in the art of fence.

My business being done I was walking slowly homeward, and as I went I fell to thinking of the strangeness of my present life and of how far it differed from my boyhood in the valley of the Waveney, and of many other things. And then I thought of Lily and wondered how her days passed, and if my brother Geoffrey persecuted her to marry him, and whether or no she would resist his importunities and her father's. And so as I walked musing I came to a water-gate that opened on to the Guadalquivir, and leaning upon the coping of a low wall I rested there idly to consider the beauty of the night. In truth it was a lovely night, for across all these years I remember it. Let those who have seen it say if they know any prospect more beautiful than the sight of the August moon shining on the broad waters of the Guadalquivir and the clustering habitations of the ancient city.

Now as I leaned upon the wall and looked, I saw a man pass up the steps beside me and go on into the shadow of the street. I took no note of him till presently I heard a murmur of distant voices, and turning my head I discovered that the man was in conversation with a woman whom he had met at the head of the path that ran down to the water-gate. Doubtless it was a lovers' meeting, and since such sights are of interest to all, and more especially to the young, I watched the pair. Soon I learned that there was little of tenderness in this tryst, at least on the part of the gallant, who drew continually backwards toward me as though he would seek the boat by which doubtless he had come, and I marvelled at this, for the moonlight shone upon the woman's face, and even at that distance I could see that it was very fair. The man's face I could not see however, since his back was towards me for the most part, moreover he wore a large sombrero that shaded it. Now they came nearer to me, the man always drawing backward and the woman always following, till at length they were within earshot. The woman was pleading with the man.

'Surely you will not desert me,' she said, 'after marrying me and all that you have sworn; you will not have the heart to desert me. I abandoned everything for you. I am in great danger. I--' and here her voice fell so that I could not catch her words.

Then he spoke. 'Fairest, now as always I adore you. But we must part awhile. You owe me much, Isabella. I have rescued you from the grave, I have taught you what it is to live and love. Doubtless with your advantages and charms, your great charms, you will profit by the lesson.

Money I cannot give you, for I have none to spare, but I have endowed you with experience that is more valuable by far. This is our farewell for awhile and I am brokenhearted. Yet

"Neath fairer skies Shine other eyes,"

and I--' and again he spoke so low that I could not catch his words.

As he talked on, all my body began to tremble. The scene was moving indeed, but it was not that which stirred me so deeply, it was the man's voice and bearing that reminded me--no, it could scarcely be!

'Oh! you will not be so cruel,' said the lady, 'to leave me, your wife, thus alone and in such sore trouble and danger. Take me with you, Juan, I beseech you!' and she caught him by the arm and clung to him.

He shook her from him somewhat roughly, and as he did so his wide hat fell to the ground so that the moonlight shone upon his face. By Heaven! it was he--Juan de Garcia and no other! I could not be mistaken. There was the deeply carved, cruel face, the high forehead with the scar on it, the thin sneering mouth, the peaked beard and curling hair. Chance had given him into my hand, and I would kill him or he should kill me.

I took three paces and stood before him, drawing my sword as I came.

'What, my dove, have you a bully at hand?' he said stepping back

astonished. 'Your business, senor? Are you here to champion beauty in distress?'

'I am here, Juan de Garcia, to avenge a murdered woman. Do you remember a certain river bank away in England, where you chanced to meet a lady you had known, and to leave her dead? Or if you have forgotten, perhaps at least you will remember this, which I carry that it may kill you,' and I flashed the sword that had been his before his eyes.

'Mother of God! It is the English boy who--' and he stopped.

'It is Thomas Wingfield who beat and bound you, and who now purposes to finish what he began yonder as he has sworn. Draw, or, Juan de Garcia, I will stab you where you stand.'

De Garcia heard this speech, that to-day seems to me to smack of the theatre, though it was spoken in grimmest earnest, and his face grew like the face of a trapped wolf. Yet I saw that he had no mind to fight, not because of cowardice, for to do him justice he was no coward, but because of superstition. He feared to fight with me since, as I learned afterwards, he believed that he would meet his end at my hand, and it was for this reason chiefly that he strove to kill me when first we met.

'The duello has its laws, senor,' he said courteously. 'It is not usual to fight thus unseconded and in the presence of a woman. If you believe that you have any grievance against me--though I know not of what you

rave, or the name by which you call me--I will meet you where and when you will.' And all the while he looked over his shoulder seeking some way of escape.

'You will meet me now,' I answered. 'Draw or I strike!'

Then he drew, and we fell to it desperately enough, till the sparks flew, indeed, and the rattle of steel upon steel rang down the quiet street. At first he had somewhat the better of me, for my hate made me wild in my play, but soon I settled to the work and grew cooler. I meant to kill him--more, I knew that I should kill him if none came between us. He was still a better swordsman than I, who, till I fought with him in the lane at Ditchingham, had never even seen one of these Spanish rapiers, but I had the youth and the right on my side, as also I had an eye like a hawk's and a wrist of steel.

Slowly I pressed him back, and ever my play grew closer and better and his became wilder. Now I had touched him twice, once in the face, and I held him with his back against the wall of the way that led down to the water-gate, and it had come to this, that he scarcely strove to thrust at me at all, but stood on his defence waiting till I should tire. Then, when victory was in my hand disaster overtook me, for the woman, who had been watching bewildered, saw that her faithless lover was in danger of death and straightway seized me from behind, at the same time sending up shriek after shriek for help. I shook her from me quickly enough, but not before de Garcia, seeing his advantage, had dealt me a coward's

thrust that took me in the right shoulder and half crippled me, so that in my turn I must stand on my defence if I would keep my life in me. Meanwhile the shrieks had been heard, and of a sudden the watch came running round the corner whistling for help. De Garcia saw them, and disengaging suddenly, turned and ran for the water-gate, the lady also vanishing, whither I do not know.

Now the watch was on me, and their leader came at me to seize me, holding a lantern in his hand. I struck it with the handle of the sword, so that it fell upon the roadway, where it blazed up like a bonfire. Then I turned also and fled, for I did not wish to be dragged before the magistrates of the city as a brawler, and in my desire to escape I forgot that de Garcia was escaping also. Away I went and three of the watch after me, but they were stout and scant of breath, and by the time that I had run three furlongs I distanced them. I halted to get my breath and remembered that I had lost de Garcia and did not know when I should find him again. At first I was minded to return and seek him, but reflection told me that by now it would be useless, also that the end of it might be that I should fall into the hands of the watch, who would know me by my wound, which began to pain me. So I went homeward cursing my fortune, and the woman who had clasped me from behind just as I was about to send the death-thrust home, and also my lack of skill which had delayed that thrust so long. Twice I might have made it and twice I had waited, being overcautious and over-anxious to be sure, and now I had lost my chance, and might bide many a day before it came again.

How should I find him in this great city? Doubtless, though I had not thought of it, de Garcia passed under some feigned name as he had done at Yarmouth. It was bitter indeed to have been so near to vengeance and to have missed it.

By now I was at home and bethought me that I should do well to go to Fonseca, my master, and ask his help. Hitherto I had said nothing of this matter to him, for I have always loved to keep my own counsel, and as yet I had not spoken of my past even to him. Going to the room where he was accustomed to receive patients, I found he had retired to rest, leaving orders that I was not to awake him this night as he was weary. So I bound up my hurt after a fashion and sought my bed also, very ill-satisfied with my fortune.

On the morrow I went to my master's chamber where he still lay abed, having been seized by a sudden weakness that was the beginning of the illness which ended in his death. As I mixed a draught for him he noticed that my shoulder was hurt and asked me what had happened. This gave me my opportunity, which I was not slow to take.

'Have you patience to listen to a story?' I said, 'for I would seek your help.'

'Ah!' he answered, 'it is the old case, the physician cannot heal himself. Speak on, nephew.'

Then I sat down by the bed and told him all, keeping nothing back. I told him the history of my mother and my father's courtship, of my own childhood, of the murder of my mother by de Garcia, and of the oath that I had sworn to be avenged upon him. Lastly I told him of what had happened upon the previous night and how my enemy had evaded me. All the while that I was speaking Fonseca, wrapped in a rich Moorish robe, sat up in the bed holding his knees beneath his chin, and watching my face with his keen eyes. But he spoke no word and made no sign till I had finished the tale.

'You are strangely foolish, nephew,' he said at length. 'For the most part youth fails through rashness, but you err by over-caution. By over-caution in your fence you lost your chance last night, and so by over-caution in hiding this tale from me you have lost a far greater opportunity. What, have you not seen me give counsel in many such matters, and have you ever known me to betray the confidence even of the veriest stranger? Why then did you fear for yours?'

'I do not know,' I answered, 'but I thought that first I would search for myself.'

'Pride goeth before a fall, nephew. Now listen: had I known this history a month ago, by now de Garcia had perished miserably, and not by your hand, but by that of the law. I have been acquainted with the man from his childhood, and know enough to hang him twice over did I choose to speak. More, I knew your mother, boy, and now I see that it was the

likeness in your face to hers that haunted me, for from the first it was familiar. It was I also who bribed the keepers of the Holy Office to let your father loose, though, as it chanced, I never saw him, and arranged his flight. Since then, I have had de Garcia through my hands some four or five times, now under this name and now under that. Once even he came to me as a client, but the villainy that he would have worked was too black for me to touch. This man is the wickedest whom I have known in Seville, and that is saying much, also he is the cleverest and the most revengeful. He lives by vice for vice, and there are many deaths upon his hands. But he has never prospered in his evil-doing, and to-day he is but an adventurer without a name, who lives by blackmail, and by ruining women that he may rob them at his leisure. Give me those books from the strong box yonder, and I will tell you of this de Garcia.'

I did as he bade me, bringing the heavy parchment volumes, each bound in vellum and written in cipher.

'These are my records,' he said, 'though none can read them except myself. Now for the index. Ah! here it is. Give me volume three, and open it at page two hundred and one.'

I obeyed, laying the book on the bed before him, and he began to read the crabbed marks as easily as though they were good black-letter.

'De Garcia--Juan. Height, appearance, family, false names, and so on. This is it--history. Now listen.'

Then came some two pages of closely written matter, expressed in secret signs that Fonseca translated as he read. It was brief enough, but such a record as it contained I have never heard before nor since. Here, set out against this one man's name, was well nigh every wickedness of which a human being could be capable, carried through by him to gratify his appetites and revengeful hate, and to provide himself with gold.

In that black list were two murders: one of a rival by the knife, and one of a mistress by poison. And there were other things even worse, too shameful, indeed, to be written.

'Doubtless there is more that has not come beneath my notice,' said Fonseca coolly, 'but these things I know for truth, and one of the murders could be proved against him were he captured. Stay, give me ink, I must add to the record.'

And he wrote in his cipher: 'In May, 1517, the said de Garcia sailed to England on a trading voyage, and there, in the parish of Ditchingham, in the county of Norfolk, he murdered Luisa Wingfield, spoken of above as Luisa de Garcia, his cousin, to whom he was once betrothed. In September of the same year, or previously, under cover of a false marriage, he decoyed and deserted one Donna Isabella of the noble family of Siguenza, a nun in a religious house in this city.'

'What!' I exclaimed, 'is the girl who came to seek your help two nights

since the same that de Garcia deserted?'

'The very same, nephew. It was she whom you heard pleading with him last night. Had I known two days ago what I know to-day, by now this villain had been safe in prison. But perhaps it is not yet too late. I am ill, but I will rise and see to it. Leave it to me, nephew. Go, nurse yourself, and leave it to me; if anything may be done I can do it. Stay, bid a messenger be ready. This evening I shall know whatever there is to be known.'

That night Fonseca sent for me again.

'I have made inquiries,' he said. 'I have even warned the officers of justice for the first time for many years, and they are hunting de Garcia as bloodhounds hunt a slave. But nothing can be heard of him. He has vanished and left no trace. To-night I write to Cadiz, for he may have fled there down the river. One thing I have discovered, however. The Senora Isabella was caught by the watch, and being recognised as having escaped from a convent, she was handed over to the executories of the Holy Office, that her case may be investigated, or in other words, should her fault be proved, to death.'

'Can she be rescued?'

'Impossible. Had she followed my counsel she would never have been taken.'

'Can she be communicated with?'

'No. Twenty years ago it might have been managed, now the Office is stricter and purer. Gold has no power there. We shall never see or hear of her again, unless, indeed, it is at the hour of her death, when, should she choose to speak with me, the indulgence may possibly be granted to her, though I doubt it. But it is not likely that she will wish to do so. Should she succeed in hiding her disgrace, she may escape; but it is not probable. Do not look so sad, nephew, religion must have its sacrifices. Perchance it is better for her to die thus than to live for many years dead in life. She can die but once. May her blood lie heavy on de Garcia's head!'

'Amen!' I answered.