

CHAPTER XXXVIII

OTOMIE'S FAREWELL

Thus then did I accomplish the vengeance that I had sworn to my father I would wreak upon de Garcia, or rather, thus did I witness its accomplishment, for in the end he died, terribly enough, not by my hand but by those of his own fears. Since then I have sorrowed for this, for, when the frozen and unnatural calm passed from my mind, I hated him as bitterly as ever, and grieved that I let him die otherwise than by my hand, and to this hour such is my mind towards him. Doubtless, many may think it wicked, since we are taught to forgive our enemies, but here I leave the forgiveness to God, for how can I pardon one who betrayed my father to the priests, who murdered my mother and my son, who chained me in the slave-ship and for many hours tortured me with his own hand? Rather, year by year, do I hate him more. I write of this at some length, since the matter has been a trouble to me. I never could say that I was in charity with all men living and dead, and because of this, some years since, a worthy and learned rector of this parish took upon himself to refuse me the rites of the church. Then I went to the bishop and laid the story before him, and it puzzled him somewhat.

But he was a man of large mind, and in the end he rebuked the rector and commanded him to minister to me, for he thought with me that the Almighty could not ask of an erring man, that he should forgive one who

had wrought such evils on him and his, even though that enemy were dead and gone to judgment in another place.

But enough of this question of conscience.

When de Garcia was gone into the pit, I turned my steps homewards, or rather towards the ruined city which I could see beneath me, for I had no home left. Now I must descend the ice cap, and this I found less easy than climbing it had been, for, my vengeance being accomplished, I became as other men are, and a sad and weary one at that, so sad indeed that I should not have sorrowed greatly if I had made a false step upon the ice.

But I made none, and at length I came to the snow where the travelling was easy. My oath was fulfilled and my vengeance was accomplished, but as I went I reckoned up the cost. I had lost my betrothed, the love of my youth; for twenty years I had lived a savage chief among savages and made acquaintance with every hardship, wedded to a woman who, although she loved me dearly, and did not lack nobility of mind, as she had shown the other day, was still at heart a savage or, at the least, a thrall of demon gods. The tribe that I ruled was conquered, the beautiful city where I dwelt was a ruin, I was homeless and a beggar, and my fortune would be great if in the issue I escaped death or slavery. All this I could have borne, for I had borne the like before, but the cruel end of my last surviving son, the one true joy of my desolate life, I could

not bear. The love of those children had become the passion of my middle age, and as I loved them so they had loved me. I had trained them from babyhood till their hearts were English and not Aztec, as were their speech and faith, and thus they were not only my dear children, but companions of my own race, the only ones I had. And now by accident, by sickness, and by the sword, they were dead the three of them, and I was desolate.

Ah! we think much of the sorrows of our youth, and should a sweetheart give us the go by we fill the world with moans and swear that it holds no comfort for us. But when we bend our heads before the shrouded shape of some lost child, then it is that for the first time we learn how terrible grief can be. Time, they tell us, will bring consolation, but it is false, for such sorrows time has no salves--I say it who am old--as they are so they shall be. There is no hope but faith, there is no comfort save in the truth that love which might have withered on the earth grows fastest in the tomb, to flower gloriously in heaven; that no love indeed can be perfect till God sanctifies and completes it with His seal of death.

I threw myself down there upon the desolate snows of Xaca, that none had trod before, and wept such tears as a man may weep but once in his life days.

'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!' I cried with the ancient king--I whose

grief was greater than his, for had I not lost three sons within as many years? Then remembering that as this king had gone to join his son long centuries ago, so I must one day go to join mine, and taking such comfort from the thought as may be found in it, I rose and crept back to the ruined City of Pines.

It was near sunset when I came thither, for the road was long and I grew weak. By the palace I met the Captain Diaz and some of his company, and they lifted their bonnets to me as I went by, for they had respect for my sorrows. Only Diaz spoke, saying:

'Is the murderer dead?'

I nodded and went on. I went on to our chamber, for there I thought that I should find Otomie.

She sat in it alone, cold and beautiful as though she had been fashioned in marble.

'I have buried him with the bones of his brethren and his forefathers,' she said, answering the question that my eyes asked. 'It seemed best that you should see him no more, lest your heart should break.'

'It is well,' I answered; 'but my heart is broken already.'

'Is the murderer dead?' she said presently in the very words of Diaz.

'He is dead.'

'How?'

I told her in few words.

'You should have slain him yourself; our son's blood is not avenged.'

'I should have slain him, but in that hour I did not seek vengeance, I watched it fall from heaven, and was content. Perchance it is best so. The seeking of vengeance has brought all my sorrows upon me; vengeance belongs to God and not to man, as I have learned too late.'

'I do not think so,' said Otomie, and the look upon her face was that look which I had seen when she smote the Tlascalan, when she taunted Marina, and when she danced upon the pyramid, the leader of the sacrifice. 'Had I been in your place, I would have killed him by inches. When I had done with him, then the devils might begin, not before. But it is of no account; everything is done with, all are dead, and my heart with them. Now eat, for you are weary.'

So I ate, and afterwards I cast myself upon the bed and slept.

In the darkness I heard the voice of Otomie that said, 'Awake, I would

Speak with you,' and there was that about her voice which stirred me from my heavy sleep.

'Speak on,' I said. 'Where are you, Otomie?'

'Seated at your side. I cannot rest, so I am seated here. Listen. Many, many years ago we met, when you were brought by Guatemoc from Tobasco. Ah! well do I remember my first sight of you, the Teule, in the court of my father Montezuma, at Chapoltepec. I loved you then as I have loved you ever since. At least I have never gone astray after strange gods,' and she laughed bitterly.

'Why do you talk of these things, Otomie?' I asked.

'Because it is my fancy to do so. Cannot you spare me one hour from your sleep, who have spared you so many? You remember how you scorned me--oh! I thought I should have died of shame when, after I had caused myself to be given to you as wife, the wife of Tezcat, you told me of the maid across the seas, that Lily maid whose token is still set upon your finger. But I lived through it and I loved you the better for your honesty, and then you know the rest. I won you because I was brave and lay at your side upon the stone of sacrifice, where you kissed me and told me that you loved me. But you never loved me, not truly, all the while you were thinking of the Lily maid. I knew it then, as I know it now, though I tried to deceive myself. I was beautiful in those days and this is something with a man. I was faithful and that is more, and once

or twice you thought that you loved me. Now I wish that those Teules had come an hour later, and we had died together there upon the stone, that is I wish it for my own sake, not for yours. Then we escaped and the great struggle came. I told you then that I understood it all. You had kissed me on the stone of sacrifice, but in that moment you were as one dead; when you came back to life, it was otherwise. But fortune took the game out of your hands and you married me, and swore an oath to me, and this oath you have kept faithfully. You married me but you did not know whom you married; you thought me beautiful, and sweet, and true, and all these things I was, but you did not understand that I was far apart from you, that I was still a savage as my forefathers had been. You thought that I had learned your ways, perchance even you thought that I revered your God, as for your sake I have striven to do, but all the while I have followed the ways of my own people and I could not quite forget my own gods, or at the least they would not suffer me, their servant, to escape them. For years and years I put them from me, but at last they were avenged and my heart mastered me, or rather they mastered me, for I knew nothing of what I did some few nights since, when I celebrated the sacrifice to Huitzel and you saw me at the ancient rites.

'All these years you had been true to me and I had borne you children whom you loved; but you loved them for their own sake, not for mine, indeed, at heart you hated the Indian blood that was mixed in their veins with yours. Me also you loved in a certain fashion and this half love of yours drove me well nigh mad; such as it was, it died when you saw me distraught and celebrating the rites of my forefathers on the

teocalli yonder, and you knew me for what I am, a savage. And now the children who linked us together are dead--one by one they died in this way and in that, for the curse which follows my blood descended upon them--and your love for me is dead with them. I alone remain alive, a monument of past days, and I die also.

'Nay, be silent; listen to me, for my time is short. When you bade me call you "husband" no longer, then I knew that it was finished. I obey you, I put you from me, you are no more my husband, and soon I shall cease to be your wife; still, Teule, I pray you listen to me. Now it seems to you in your sorrow, that your days are done and that there is no happiness left for you. This is not so. You are still but a man in the beginning of middle age, and you are yet strong. You will escape from this ruined land, and when you shake the dust of it off your feet its curse shall fall from you; you will return to your own place, and there you will find one who has awaited your coming for many years. There the savage woman whom you mated with, the princess of a fallen house, will become but a fantastic memory to you, and all these strange eventful years will be as a midnight dream. Only your love for the dead children will always remain, these you must always love by day and by night, and the desire of them, that desire for the dead than which there is nothing more terrible, shall follow you to your grave, and I am glad that it should be so, for I was their mother and some thought of me must go with them. This alone the Lily maid has left to me, and there only I shall prevail against her, for, Teule, no child of hers shall live to rob your heart of the memory of those I gave you.

'Oh! I have watched you by day and by night: I have seen the longing in your eyes for a face which you have lost and for the land of your youth. Be happy, you shall gain both, for the struggle is ended and the Lily maid has been too strong for me. I grow weak and I have little more to say. We part, and perhaps for ever, for what is there between us save the souls of those dead sons of ours? Since you desire me no more, that I may make our severance perfect, now in the hour of my death I renounce your gods and I seek my own, though I think that I love yours and hate those of my people. Is there any communion between them? We part, and perchance for ever, yet I pray of you to think of me kindly, for I have loved you and I love you; I was the mother of your children, whom being Christian, you will meet again. I love you now and for always. I am glad to have lived because you kissed me on the stone of sacrifice, and afterwards I bore you sons. They are yours and not mine; it seems to me now that I only cared for them because they were yours, and they loved you and not me. Take them--take their spirits as you have taken everything. You swore that death alone should sever us, and you have kept your oath in the letter and in the thought. But now I go to the Houses of the Sun to seek my own people, and to you, Teule, with whom I have lived many years and seen much sorrow, but whom I will no longer call husband, since you forbade me so to do, I say, make no mock of me to the Lily maid. Speak of me to her as little as you may--be happy and--farewell!'

Now as she spoke ever more faintly, and I listened bewildered, the light of dawn grew slowly in the chamber. It gathered on the white shape of Otomie seated in a chair hard by the bed, and I saw that her arms hung down and that her head was resting on the back of the chair. Now I sprang up and peered into her face. It was white and cold, and I could feel no breath upon her lips. I seized her hand, that also was cold. I spoke into her ear, I kissed her brow, but she did not move nor answer. The light grew quickly, and now I saw all. Otomie was dead, and by her own act.

This was the manner of her death. She had drunk of a poison of which the Indians have the secret, a poison that works slowly and without pain, leaving the mind unclouded to the end. It was while her life was fading from her that she had spoken to me thus sadly and bitterly. I sat upon the bed and gazed at her. I did not weep, for my tears were done, and as I have said, whatever I might feel nothing could break my calm any more. And as I gazed a great tenderness and sorrow took hold of me, and I loved Otomie better now that she was dead before me than ever I had done in her life days, and this is saying much. I remembered her in the glory of her youth as she was in the court of her royal father, I remembered the look which she had given me when she stepped to my side upon the stone of sacrifice, and that other look when she defied Cuitlahua the emperor, who would have slain me. Once more I seemed to hear her cry of bitter sorrow as she uncovered the body of the dead babe our firstborn, and to see her sword in hand standing over the Tlascalan.

Many things came back to me in that sad hour of dawn while I watched by the corpse of Otomie. There was truth in her words, I had never forgotten my first love and often I desired to see her face. But it was not true to say that I had no love for Otomie. I loved her well and I was faithful in my oath to her, indeed, not until she was dead did I know how dear she had grown to me. It is true that there was a great gulf between us which widened with the years, the gulf of blood and faith, for I knew well that she could not altogether put away her old beliefs, and it is true that when I saw her leading the death chant, a great horror took me and for a while I loathed her. But these things I might have lived to forgive, for they were part of her blood and nature, moreover, the last and worst of them was not done by her own will, and when they were set aside there remained much that I could honour and love in the memory of this most royal and beautiful woman, who for so many years was my faithful wife. So I thought in that hour and so I think to this day. She said that we parted for ever, but I trust and I believe that this is not so. Surely there is forgiveness for us all, and a place where those who were near and dear to each other on the earth may once more renew their fellowship.

At last I rose with a sigh to seek help, and as I rose I felt that there was something set about my neck. It was the collar of great emeralds which Guatemoc had given to me, and that I had given to Otomie. She had set it there while I slept, and with it a lock of her long hair. Both shall be buried with me.

I laid her in the ancient sepulchre amid the bones of her forefathers and by the bodies of her children, and two days later I rode to Mexico in the train of Bernal Diaz. At the mouth of the pass I turned and looked back upon the ruins of the City of Pines, where I had lived so many years and where all I loved were buried. Long and earnestly I gazed, as in his hour of death a man looks back upon his past life, till at length Diaz laid his hand upon my shoulder:

'You are a lonely man now, comrade,' he said; 'what plans have you for the future?'

'None,' I answered, 'except to die.'

'Never talk so,' he said; 'why, you are scarcely forty, and I who am fifty and more do not speak of dying. Listen; you have friends in your own country, England?'

'I had.'

'Folk live long in those quiet lands. Go seek them, I will find you a passage to Spain.'

'I will think of it,' I answered.

In time we came to Mexico, a new and a strange city to me, for Cortes

had rebuilt it, and where the teocalli had stood, up which I was led to sacrifice, a cathedral was building, whereof the foundations were fitly laid with the hideous idols of the Aztecs. The place was well enough, but it is not so beautiful as the Tenochtitlan of Montezuma, nor ever will be. The people too were changed; then they were warriors and free, now they are slaves.

In Mexico Diaz found me a lodging. None molested me there, for the pardon that I had received was respected. Also I was a ruined man, no longer to be feared, the part that I had played in the *noche triste* and in the defence of the city was forgotten, and the tale of my sorrows won me pity even from the Spaniards. I abode in Mexico ten days, wandering sadly about the city and up to the hill of Chapultepec, where Montezuma's pleasure-house had been, and where I had met Otomie. Nothing was left of its glories except some of the ancient cedar trees. On the eighth day of my stay an Indian stopped me in the street, saying that an old friend had charged him to say that she wished to see me.

I followed the Indian, wondering who the friend might be, for I had no friends, and he led me to a fine stone house in a new street. Here I was seated in a darkened chamber and waited there a while, till suddenly a sad and sweet voice that seemed familiar to me, addressed me in the Aztec tongue, saying, 'Welcome, Teule.'

I looked and there before me, dressed in the Spanish fashion, stood a lady, an Indian, still beautiful, but very feeble and much worn, as

though with sickness and sorrow.

'Do you not know Marina, Teule?' she said again, but before the words had left her lips I knew her. 'Well, I will say this, that I should scarcely have known YOU, Teule. Trouble and time have done their work with both of us.'

I took her hand and kissed it.

'Where then is Cortes?' I asked.

Now a great trembling seized her.

'Cortes is in Spain, pleading his suit. He has wed a new wife there, Teule. Many years ago he put me away, giving me in marriage to Don Juan Xaramillo, who took me because of my possessions, for Cortes dealt liberally with me, his discarded mistress.' And she began to weep.

Then by degrees I learned the story, but I will not write it here, for it is known to the world. When Marina had served his turn and her wit was of no more service to him, the conqueror discarded her, leaving her to wither of a broken heart. She told me all the tale of her anguish when she learned the truth, and of how she had cried to him that thenceforth he would never prosper. Nor indeed did he do so.

For two hours or more we talked, and when I had heard her story I told

her mine, and she wept for me, since with all her faults Marina's heart was ever gentle.

Then we parted never to meet again. Before I went she pressed a gift of money on me, and I was not ashamed to take it who had none.

This then was the history of Marina, who betrayed her country for her love's sake, and this the reward of her treason and her love. But I shall always hold her memory sacred, for she was a good friend to me, and twice she saved my life, nor would she desert me, even when Otomie taunted her so cruelly.