

## CHAPTER VI

### FAREWELL

D'Aguilar came to supper that night as he had promised, and this time not on foot and unattended, but with pomp and circumstance as befitted a great lord. First appeared two running footmen to clear the way; then followed D'Aguilar, mounted on a fine white horse, and splendidly apparelled in a velvet cloak and a hat with nodding ostrich plumes, while after him rode four men-at-arms in his livery.

"We asked one guest, or rather he asked himself, and we have got seven, to say nothing of their horses," grumbled Castell, watching their approach from an upper window. "Well, we must make the best of it. Peter, go, see that man and beast are fed, and fully, that they may not grumble at our hospitality. The guard can eat in the little hall with our own folk. Margaret, put on your richest robe and your jewels, those which you wore when I took you to that city feast last summer. We will show these fine, foreign birds that we London merchants have brave feathers also."

Peter hesitated, misdoubting him of the wisdom of this display, who, if he could have his will, would have sent the Spaniard's following to the tavern, and received him in sober garments to a simple meal.

But Castell, who seemed somewhat disturbed that night, who loved,

moreover, to show his wealth at times after the fashion of a Jew, began to fume and ask if he must go himself. So the end of it was that Peter went, shaking his head, while, urged to it by her father, Margaret departed also to array herself.

A few minutes later Castell, in his costliest feast-day robe, greeted d'Aguilar in the ante-hall, and, the two of them being alone, asked him how matters went as regarded de Ayala and the man who had been killed.

"Well and ill," answered d'Aguilar. "Doctor de Puebla, with whom I hoped to deal, has left London in a huff, for he says that there is not room for two Spanish ambassadors at Court, so I had to fall back upon de Ayala after all. Indeed, twice have I seen that exalted priest upon the subject of the well-deserved death of his villainous servant, and, after much difficulty, for having lost several men in such brawls, he thought his honour touched, he took the fifty gold angels--to be transmitted to the fellow's family, of course, or so he said--and gave a receipt. Here it is," and he handed a paper to Castell, who read it carefully.

It was to the effect that Peter Brome, having paid a sum of fifty angels to the relatives of Andrew Pherson, a servant of the Spanish ambassador, which Andrew the said Peter had killed in a brawl, the said ambassador undertook not to prosecute or otherwise molest the said Peter on account of the manslaughter which he had committed.

"But no money has been paid," said Castell.

"Indeed yes, I paid it. De Ayala gives no receipts against promises."

"I thank you for your courtesy, Señor. You shall have the gold before you leave this house. Few would have trusted a stranger thus far."

D'Aguilar waved his hand.

"Make no mention of such a trifle. I would ask you to accept it as a token of my regard for your family, only that would be to affront so wealthy a man. But listen, I have more to say. You are, or rather your kinsman Peter, is still in the wood. De Ayala has pardoned him; but there remains the King of England, whose law he has broken. Well, this day I have seen the King, who, by the way, talked of you as a worthy man, saying that he had always thought only a Jew could be so wealthy, and that he knew you were not, since you had been reported to him as a good son of the Church," and he paused, looking at Castell.

"I fear his Grace magnifies my wealth, which is but small," answered Castell coolly, leaving the rest of his speech unnoticed. "But what said his Grace?"

"I showed him de Ayala's receipt, and he answered that if his Excellency was satisfied, he was satisfied, and for his part would not order any process to issue; but he bade me tell you and Peter Brome that if he caused more tumult in his streets, whatever the provocation, and

especially if that tumult were between English and Spaniards, he would hang him at once with trial or without it. All of which he said very angrily, for the last thing which his Highness desires just now is any noise between Spain and England."

"That is bad," answered Castell, "for this very morning there was near to being such a tumult," and he told the story of how the two Spaniards had waylaid Peter, and one of them been knocked down by the serving-man with a stone. At this news d'Aguilar shook his head.

"Then that is just where the trouble lies," he exclaimed. "I know it from my people, who keep me well informed, that all those servants of de Ayala, and there are more than twenty of them, have sworn an oath by the Virgin of Seville that before they leave this land they will have your kinsman's blood in payment for that of Andrew Pherson, who, although a Scotchman, was their officer, and a brave man whom they loved much. Now, if they attack him, as they will, there must be a brawl, for Peter fights well, and if there is a brawl, though Peter and the English get the best of it, as very likely they may, Peter will certainly be hanged, for so the King has promised."

"Before they leave the land? When do they leave it?"

"De Ayala sails within a month, and his folk with him, for his co-ambassador, the Doctor de Puebla, will bear with him no more, and has written from the country house where he is sulking that one of them

must go."

"Then I think it is best, Señor, that Peter should travel for a month."

"Friend Castell, you are wise; I think so too, and, I counsel you, arrange it at once. Hush! here comes the lady, your daughter."

As he spoke, Margaret appeared descending the broad oak stairs which led into the ante-room. Holding a lamp in her hand, she was in full light, whereas the two men stood in the shadow. She wore a low-cut dress of crimson velvet, embroidered about the bodice with dead gold, which enhanced the dazzling whiteness of her shapely neck and bosom. Round her throat hung a string of great pearls, and on her head was a net of gold, studded with smaller pearls, from beneath which her glorious, chestnut-black hair flowed down in rippling waves almost to her knees. Having her father's bidding so to do, she had adorned herself thus that she might look her fairest, not in the eyes of their guest, but in those of her new-affianced husband. So fair was she seen thus that d'Aguilar, the artist, the adorer of loveliness, caught his breath and shivered at the sight of her.

"By the eleven thousand virgins!" he said, "your daughter is more beautiful than all of them put together. She should be crowned a queen, and bewitch the world."

"Nay, nay, Señor," answered Castell hurriedly; "let her remain humble

and honest, and bewitch her husband."

"So I should say if I were the husband," he muttered, then stepped forward, bowing, to meet her.

Now the light of the silver lamp she held on high flowed over the two of them, d'Aguilar and Margaret, and certainly they seemed a well-matched pair. Both were tall and cast by Nature in a rich and splendid mould; both had that high air of breeding which comes with ancient blood--for what bloods are more ancient than those of the Jew and the Eastern?--both were slow and stately of movement, low-voiced, and dignified of speech. Castell noted it and was afraid, he knew not of what.

Peter, entering the room by another door, clad only in his grey clothes, for he would not put on gay garments for the Spaniard, noted it also, and with the quick instinct of love knew this magnificent foreigner for a rival and an enemy. But he was not afraid, only jealous and angry. Indeed, nothing would have pleased him better than that the Spaniard should have struck him in the face, so that within five minutes it might be shown which of them was the better man. It must come to this, he felt, and very glad would he have been if it could come at the beginning and not at the end, so that one or the other of them might be saved much trouble. Then he remembered that he had promised to say or show nothing of how things stood between him and Margaret, and, coming forward, he greeted d'Aguilar quietly but coldly, telling him that his

horses had been stabled, and his retinue accommodated.

The Spaniard thanked him very heartily, and they passed in to supper. It was a strange meal for all four of them, yet outwardly pleasant enough. Forgetting his cares, Castell drank gaily, and began to talk of the many changes which he had seen in his life, and of the rise and fall of kings. D'Aguilar talked also, of the Spanish wars and policy, for in the first he had seen much service, and of the other he knew every turn. It was easy to see that he was one of those who mixed with courts, and had the ear of ministers and majesty. Margaret also, being keen-witted and anxious to learn of the great world that lay beyond Holborn and London town, asked questions, seeking to know, amongst other things, what were the true characters of Ferdinand, King of Aragon, and Isabella his wife, the famous queen.

"I will tell you in few words, Señora. Ferdinand is the most ambitious man in Europe, false also if it serves his purpose. He lives for self and gain--that money and power. These are his gods, for he has no true religion. He is not clever but, being very cunning, he will succeed and leave a famous name behind him."

"An ugly picture," said Margaret. "And what of his queen?"

"She," answered d'Aguilar, "is a great woman, who knows how to use the temper of her time and so attain her ends. To the world she shows a tender heart, but beneath it lies hid an iron resolution."

"What are those ends?" asked Margaret again.

"To bring all Spain under her rule; utterly to crush the Moors and take their territories; to make the Church of Christ triumphant upon earth; to stamp out heresy; to convert or destroy the Jews," he added slowly, and as he spoke the words, Peter, watching, saw his eyes open and glitter like a snake's--"to bring their bodies to the purifying flames, and their vast wealth into her treasury, and thus earn the praise of the faithful upon earth, and for herself a throne in heaven."

For a while there was silence after this speech, then Margaret said boldly:

"If heavenly thrones are built of human blood and tears, what stone and mortar do they use in hell, I wonder?" Then, without pausing for an answer, she rose, saying that she was weary, curtseyed to d'Aguilar, her father and Peter, each in turn, and left the hall.

When she had gone the talk flagged, and presently d'Aguilar asked for his men and horses and departed also, saying as he went:

"Friend Castell, you will repeat my news to your good kinsman here. I pray for all your sakes that he may bow his head to what cannot be helped, and thus keep it safe upon his shoulders."



"What meant the man?" asked Peter, when the sound of the horses' hoofs had died away.

Castell told him of what had passed between him and d'Aguilar before supper, and showed him de Ayala's receipt, adding in a vexed voice:

"I have forgotten to repay him the gold; it shall be sent to-morrow."

"Have no fear; he will come for it," answered Peter coldly. "Now, if I have my way, I will take the risk of these Spaniards' swords and King Henry's rope, and bide here."

"That you must not do," said Castell earnestly, "for my sake and Margaret's, if not for yours. Would you make her a widow before she is a wife? Listen: it is my wish that you travel down to Essex to take delivery of your father's land in the Vale of Dedham and see to the repairing of the mansion house, which, I am told, needs it much. Then, when these Spaniards are gone, you can return and at once be married, say one short month hence."

"Will not you and Margaret come with me to Dedham?"

Castell shook his head.

"It is not possible. I must wind up my affairs, and Margaret cannot go with you alone. Moreover, there is no place for her to lodge. I will

keep her here till you return."

"Yes, Sir; but will you keep her safe? The cozening words of Spaniards are sometimes more deadly than their swords."

"I think that Margaret has a medicine against all such arts," answered her father with a little smile, and left him.

On the morrow when Castell told Margaret that her lover must leave her for a while that night--for this Peter would not do himself--she prayed him even with tears that he would not send him so far from her, or that they might all go together. But he reasoned with her kindly, showing her that the latter was impossible, and that if Peter did not go at once it was probable that Peter would soon be dead, whereas, if he went, there would be but one short month of waiting till the Spaniards had sailed, after which they might be married and live in peace and safety.

So she came to see that this was best and wisest, and gave way; but oh! heavy were those hours, and sore was their parting. Essex was no far journey, and to enter into lands which only two days before Peter believed he had lost for ever, no sad errand, while the promise that at the end of a single month he should return to claim his bride hung before them like a star. Yet they were sad-hearted, both of them, and that star seemed very far away.

Margaret was afraid lest Peter might be waylaid upon the road, but he

laughed at her, saying that her father was sending six stout men with him as an escort, and thus companioned he feared no Spaniards. Peter, for his part, was afraid lest d'Aguilar might make love to her while he was away. But now she laughed at him, saying that all her heart was his, and that she had none to give to d'Aguilar or any other man. Moreover, that England was a free land in which women, who were no king's wards, could not be led whither they did not wish to go. So it seemed that they had naught to fear, save the daily chance of life and death. And yet they were afraid.

"Dear love," said Margaret to him after she had thought a while, "our road looks straight and easy, and yet there may be pitfalls in it that we cannot guess. Therefore you must swear one thing to me: That whatever you shall hear or whatever may happen, you will never doubt me as I shall never doubt you. If, for instance, you should be told that I have discarded you, and given myself to some other husband; if even you should believe that you see it signed by my hand, or if you think that you hear it told to you by my voice--still, I say, believe it not."

"How could such a thing be?" asked Peter anxiously.

"I do not suppose that it could be; I only paint the worst that might happen as a lesson for us both. Heretofore my life has been calm as a summer's day; but who knows when winter storms may rise, and often I have thought that I was born to know wind and rain and lightning as well as peace and sunshine. Remember that my father is a Jew, and that to the

Jews and their children terrible things chance at times. Why, all this wealth might vanish in an hour, and you might find me in a prison, or clad in rags begging my bread. Now do you swear?" and she held towards him the gold crucifix that hung upon her bosom.

"Aye," he said, "I swear it by this holy token and by your lips," and he kissed first the cross and then her mouth, adding, "Shall I ask the same oath of you?"

She laughed.

"If you will; but it is not needful. Peter, I think that I know you too well; I think that your heart will never stir even if I be dead and you married to another. And yet men are men, and women have wiles, so I will swear this: That should you slip, perchance, and I live to learn it, I will try not to judge you harshly." And again she laughed, she who was so certain of her empire over this man's heart and body.

"Thank you," said Peter; "but for my part I will try to stand straight upon my feet, so should any tales be brought to you of me, sift them well, I pray you."

Then, forgetting their doubts and dreads, they talked of their marriage, which they fixed for that day month, and of how they would dwell happily in Dedham Vale. Also Margaret, who well knew the house, named the Old Hall, where they should live, for she had stayed there as a child, gave

him many commands as to the new arrangement of its chambers and its furnishing, which, as there was money and to spare, could be as costly as they willed, saying that she would send him down all things by wain so soon as he was ready for them.

Thus, then, the hours wore away, until at length night came and they took their last meal together, the three of them, for it was arranged that Peter should start at moonrise, when none were about to see him go. It was not a very happy meal, and, though they made a brave show of eating, but little food passed their lips. Now the horses were ready, and Margaret buckled on Peter's sword and threw his cloak about his shoulders, and he, having shaken Castell by the hand and bade him guard their jewel safely, without more words kissed her in farewell, and went.

Taking the silver lamp in her hand, she followed him to the ante-room. At the door he turned and saw her standing there gazing after him with wide eyes and a strained, white face. At the sight of her silent pain almost his heart failed him, almost he refused to go. Then he remembered, and went.

For a while Margaret still stood thus, until the sound of the horses' hoofs had died away indeed. Then she turned and said:

"Father, I know not how it is, but it seems to me that when Peter and I meet again it will be far off, yes, far off upon the stormy sea--but what sea I know not." And without waiting for an answer she climbed the

stairs to her chamber, and there wept herself to sleep.

Castell watched her depart, then muttered to himself:

"Pray God she is not foresighted like so many of our race; and yet why is my own heart so heavy? Well, according to my judgment, I have done my best for him and her, and for myself I care nothing."