

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HOLY HERMANDAD

Down the long passages, through the great, fretted halls, across the cool marble courts, flitted Inez and Margaret. It was like a dream. They went through a room where women, idling or working at tapestries, looked at them curiously. Margaret heard one of them say to another:

"Why does the Dona Margaret's cousin leave her?" And the answer, "Because she is in love with the marquis herself, and cannot bear to stay."

"What a fool!" said the first woman. "She is good looking, and would only have had to wait a few weeks."

They passed an open door, that of Morella's own chambers. Within it he stood and watched them go by. When they were opposite to him some doubt or idea seemed to strike his mind, for he looked at them keenly, stepped forward, then, thinking better of it, or perhaps remembering Betty's bitter tongue, halted and turned aside. That danger had gone by!

At length, none hindering them, they reached the yard where the escort and the horses waited. Here, standing under an archway, were Castell and Peter. Castell greeted Margaret in English and kissed her through her veil, while Peter, who had not seen her close since months before he

rode away to Dedham, stared at her with all his eyes, and began to draw near to her, designing to find out, as he was sure he could do if once he touched her, whether indeed this were Margaret, or only Betty after all. Guessing what was in his mind, and that he might reveal everything, Inez, who held a long pin in her hand with which she was fastening her veil that had come loose, pretended to knock against him, and ran the point deep into his arm, muttering, "Fool!" as she did so. He sprang back with an oath, the guard smiled, and she began to pray his pardon.

Castell helped Margaret on to her horse, then mounted his own, as did Peter, still rubbing his arm, but not daring to look towards Margaret, whose hand Inez shook familiarly in farewell as though she were her equal, addressing her the while in terms of endearment such as Spanish women use to each other. An officer of Morella's household came and counted them, saying:

"Two men and a woman. That is right, though I cannot see the woman's face."

For a moment he seemed to be about to order her to unveil, but Inez called to him that it was not decent before all these Moors, whereon he nodded and ordered the captain to proceed.

They rode through the arch of the castle along the roadway, through the great gate of the wall also, where the guard questioned their escort, stared at them, and, after receiving a present from Castell, let them

go, telling them they were lucky Christians to get alive out of Granada, as indeed they were.

At the brow of the rise Margaret turned and waved her handkerchief towards that high window which she knew so well. Another handkerchief was waved in answer, and, thinking of the lonely Betty watching them there while she awaited the issue of her desperate venture, Margaret went on, weeping beneath her veil. For an hour they rode forward, speaking few words to each other, till at length they came to the cross-roads, one of which ran to Malaga, and the other towards Seville.

Here the escort halted, saying that their orders were to leave them at this point, and asking which road they intended to take. Castell answered that to Malaga, whereon the captain replied that they were wise, as they were less likely to meet bands of marauding thieves who called themselves Christian soldiers, and murdered or robbed all travellers who fell into their hands. Then Castell offered him a present, which he accepted gravely, as though he did him a great favour, and, after bows and salutations, they departed.

As soon as the Moors were gone the three rode a little way towards Malaga. Then, when there was nobody in sight, they turned across country and gained the Seville road. At last they were alone and, halting beneath the walls of a house that had been burnt in some Christian raid, they spoke together freely for the first time, and oh! what a moment was that for all of them!

Peter pushed his horse alongside that of Margaret, crying:

"Speak, beloved. Is it truly you?"

But Margaret, taking no heed of him, leant over and, throwing her arm around her father's neck, kissed him again and again through her veil, blessing God that they had lived to meet in safety. Peter tried to kiss her also; but she caused her horse to move so that he nearly fell from his saddle.

"Have a care, Peter," she said to him, "or your love of kissing will lead you into more trouble." Whereon, guessing of what she spoke, he coloured furiously, and began to explain at length.

"Cease," she said--"cease. I know all that story, for I saw you," then, relenting, with some brief, sweet words of greeting and gratitude, gave him her hand, which he kissed often enough.

"Come," said Castell, "we must push on, who have twenty miles to cover before we reach that inn where Israel has arranged that we should sleep to-night. We will talk as we go." And talk they did, as well as the roughness of the road and the speed at which they must travel would allow.

Riding as hard as they were able, at length they came to the venta, or

rough hostelry, just as the darkness closed in. At the sight of it they thanked God aloud, for this place was across the Moorish border, and now they had little to fear from Granada. The host, a half-bred Spaniard and a Christian, expected them, having received a message from Israel, with whom he had had dealings, and gave them two rooms, rude enough, but sufficient, and good food and wine, also stabling and barley for their horses, bidding them sleep well and have no fear, as he and his people would watch and warn them of any danger.

Yet it was late before they slept, who had so much to say to each other--especially Peter and Margaret--and were so happy at their escape, if only for a little while. Yet across their joy, like the sound of a funeral bell at a merry feast, came the thought of Betty and that fateful marriage in which ere now she must have played her part. Indeed, at last Margaret knelt down and offered up prayers to Heaven that the saints might protect her cousin in the great peril which she had incurred for them, nor was Peter ashamed to join her in that prayer. Then they embraced--especially Peter and Margaret--and laid them down, Castell and his daughter in one room, and Peter in the other, and slept as best they could.

Half an hour before dawn Peter was up seeing to the horses while the others breakfasted and packed the food that the landlord had made ready for their journey. Then he also swallowed some meat and wine, and at the first break of day, having discharged their reckoning and taken a letter from their host to those of other inns upon the road, they pressed on

towards Seville, very thankful to find that as yet there were no signs of their being pursued.

All that day, with short pauses to rest themselves and their horses, they rode on without accident, for the most part over a fertile plain watered by several rivers which they crossed at fords or over bridges. As night fell they reached the old town of Oxuna, which for many hours they had seen set upon its hill before them, and, notwithstanding their Moorish dress, made their way almost unobserved in the darkness to that inn to which they had been recommended. Here, although he stared at their garments, on finding that they had plenty of money, the landlord received them well enough, and again they were fortunate in securing rooms to themselves. It had been their purpose to buy Spanish clothes in this town, but, as it happened, it was a feast day, and at night every shop in the place was closed, so they could get none. Now, as they greatly desired to reach Seville by the following nightfall, hoping under cover of the darkness to find and come aboard of their ship, the *Margaret*, which they knew lay safely in the river, and had been advised by messenger of their intended journey, it was necessary for them to leave Oxuna before the dawn. So, unfortunately enough as it proved, it was impossible for them to put off their Moorish robes and clothe themselves as Christians.

They had hoped, too, that here at Oxuna Inez might overtake them, as she had promised to do if she could, and give them tidings of what had happened since they left Granada. But no Inez came. So, comforting

themselves with the thought that however hard she rode it would be difficult for her to reach them, who had some hours' start, they left Oxuna in the darkness before any one was astir.

Having crossed some miles of plain, they passed up through olive groves into hills where cork-trees grew, and here stopped to eat and let the horses feed. Just as they were starting on again, Peter, looking round, saw mounted men--a dozen or more of them of very wild aspect--cantering through the trees evidently with the object of cutting them off.

"Thieves!" he said shortly. "Ride for it."

So they began to gallop, and their horses, although somewhat jaded, being very swift, passed in front of these men before they could regain the road. The band shouted to them to surrender, and, as they did not stop, loosed a few arrows and pursued them, while they galloped down the hillside on to a plain which separated them from more hills also clothed with cork-trees. This plain was about three miles wide and boggy in places. Still they kept well ahead of the brigands, as they took them to be, hoping that they would give up the pursuit or lose sight of them amongst the trees. As they entered these, however, to their dismay they saw, drawn up in front of them and right across the road, another band of rough-looking men, perhaps twelve in all.

"Trap!" said Peter. "We must ride through them--it is our only chance," at the same time spurring his horse to the front and drawing his sword.

Choosing the spot where their line was weakest he dashed through it easily enough but next second heard a cry from Margaret, and pulled his horse round to see that her mare had fallen, and that she and Castell were in the hands of the thieves. Indeed, already rough men had hold of her, and one of them was trying to tear the veil from her face. With a shout of rage Peter charged them, and struck so fierce a blow that his sword cut through the fellow's helmet into his skull, so that he fell down, dying or dead, Margaret's veil still in his hand.

Then they rushed at him, five or six of them, and, although he wounded another man, dragged him from his horse, and, as he lay upon his back, sprang at him to finish him before he could rise. Already their knives and swords were over him, and he was making his farewells to life, when he heard a voice command them to desist and bind his arms. This was quickly done, and he was suffered to rise from the ground to see before him, not Morella, as he half expected, but a man clad in fine armour beneath his rough cloak, evidently an officer of rank. "What kind of a Moor are you," he asked, "who dare to kill the soldiers of the Holy Hermandad in the heart of the King's country?" and he pointed to the dead man.

"I am not a Moor," answered Peter in his rough Spanish. "I am a Christian escaped from Granada, and I cut down that man because he was trying to insult my betrothed, as you would have done, Señor. I did not know that he was a soldier of the Hermandad; I thought him a common

thief of the hills."

This speech, or as much as he could understand of it, seemed to please the officer, but before he could answer, Castell said:

"Sir Officer, the señor is an Englishman, and does not speak your language well--"

"He uses his sword well, anyhow," interrupted the captain, glancing at the dead soldier's cloven helm and head.

"Yes, Sir, he is of your trade and, as the scar upon his face shows, has fought in many wars. Sir, what he tells you is true. We are Christian captives escaped from Granada and flying to Seville with my daughter, to whom I pray you to do no harm, to ask for the protection of their gracious Majesties, and to find a passage back to England."

"You do not look like an Englishman," answered the captain; "you look like a Marano."

"Sir, I cannot help my looks. I am a merchant of London, Castell by name. It is one well known in Seville and throughout this land, where I have large dealings, as, if I can but see him, your king himself will acknowledge. Be not deceived by our dress, which we had to put on in order to escape from Granada, but, I beseech you, let us go on to Seville."

"Señor Castell," answered the officer, "I am the Captain Arrano of Puebla, and, since you would not stop when we called to you, and have killed one of my best soldiers, to Seville you must certainly go, but with me, not by yourselves. You are my prisoners, but have no fear. No violence shall be done to you or the lady, who must take your trials for your deeds before the King's court, and there tell your story, true or false."

So, having been disarmed of their swords, they were allowed to remount their horses and taken on towards Seville as prisoners.

"At least," said Margaret to Peter, "we have nothing more to fear from highwaymen, and have escaped these soldiers' swords unhurt."

"Yes," answered Peter with a groan, "but I hoped that to-night we should have slept upon the Margaret while she slipped down the river towards the open sea, and not in a Spanish jail. Now, as fate will have it, for the second time I have killed a man on your behalf, and all the business will begin again. Truly our luck is bad!"

"I think it might be worse, and I cannot blame you for that deed," answered Margaret, remembering the rough hands of the dead soldier, whom some of his comrades had stopped behind to bury.

During all the remainder of that long day they rode on through the

burning heat, across the rich, cultivated plain, towards the great city of Seville, whereof the Giralda, which once had been the minaret of a Moorish mosque, towered hundreds of feet into the air before them. At length, towards evening, they entered the eastern suburbs of the vast city and, passing through them and a great gate beyond, began to thread its tortuous streets.

"Whither go we, Captain Arrano?" asked Castell presently.

"To the prison of the Holy Hermandad to await your trial for the slaying of one of its soldiers," answered the officer.

"I pray that we may get there soon then," said Peter, looking at Margaret, who, overcome with fatigue, swayed upon her saddle like a flower in the wind.

"So do I," muttered Castell, glancing round at the dark faces of the people, who, having discovered that they had killed a Spanish soldier, and taking them to be Moors, were marching alongside of them in great numbers, staring sullenly, or cursing them for infidels. Indeed, once when they passed a square, a priest in the mob cried out, "Kill them!" whereon a number of rough fellows made a rush to pull them off their horses, and were with difficulty beaten back by the soldiers.

Foiled in this attempt they began to pelt them with garbage, so that soon their white robes were stained and filthy. One fellow, too, threw a

stone which struck Margaret on the wrist, causing her to cry out and drop her rein. This was too much for the hot-blooded Peter, who, spurring his horse alongside of him, before the soldiers could interfere, hit him such a buffet in the face that the man rolled upon the ground. Now Castell thought that they would certainly be killed, but to his surprise the mob only laughed and shouted such things as "Well hit, Moor!" "That infidel has a strong arm," and so forth.

Nor was the officer angry, for when the man rose, a knife in his hand, he drew his sword and struck him down again with the flat of it, saying to Peter:

"Do not sully your hand with such street swine, Señor."

Then he turned and commanded his men to charge the crowd ahead of them.

So they got through these people and, after many twists and turns down side streets to avoid the main avenues, came to a great and gloomy building and into a courtyard through barred gates that were opened at their approach and shut after them. Here they were ordered to dismount and their horses led away, while the officer, Arrano, entered into conversation with the governor of the prison, a man with a stern but not unkindly face, who surveyed them with much curiosity. Presently he approached and asked them if they could pay for good rooms, as if not he must put them in the common cells.

Castell answered, "Yes," and, by way of earnest of it, produced five pieces of gold, and giving them to the Captain Arrano, begged him to distribute them among his soldiers as a thankoffering for their protection of them through the streets. Also, he said loudly enough for every one to hear, that he would be willing to compensate the relatives of the man whom Peter had killed by accident--an announcement that evidently impressed his comrades very favourably. Indeed one of them said he would bear the message to his widow, and, on behalf of the rest, thanked him for his gift. Then having bade farewell to the officer, who told them that they would meet again before the judges, they were led through the various passages of the prison to two rooms, one small and one of a fair size with heavily barred windows, given water to wash in, and told that food would be brought to them.

In due course it came, carried by jailers--meat, eggs, and wine, and glad enough were they to see it. While they ate, also the governor appeared with a notary, and, having waited till their meal was finished, began to question them.

"Our story is long," said Castell, "but with your leave I will tell it you, only, I pray you, suffer my daughter, the Dona Margaret, to go to rest, for she is quite outworn, and if you will you can question her to-morrow."

The governor assenting, Margaret threw off her veil to embrace her father, thus showing her beauty for the first time, whereat the governor

and the notary stared amazed. Then having given Peter her hand to kiss, and curtsied to the governor and the notary, she went to her bed in the next room, which opened out of that in which they were.

When she had gone, Castell told his story of how his daughter had been kidnapped by the Marquis of Morella, a name that caused the governor to open his eyes very wide, and brought from London to Granada, whither they, her father and her betrothed, had followed her and escaped. But of Betty and all the business of the changed bride he said nothing. Also, knowing that these must come out in any case, he told them his name and business, and those of his partners and correspondents in Seville, the firm of Bernaldez, which was one that the governor knew well enough, and prayed that the head of that firm, the Señor Juan Bernaldez, might be communicated with and allowed to visit them on the next morning. Lastly, he explained that they were no thieves or adventurers, but English subjects in misfortune, and again hinted that they were both able and willing to pay for any kindness or consideration that was shown to them, of all of which sayings the governor took note.

Also this officer said that he would communicate with his superiors, and, if no objection were made, send a messenger to ask the Señor Bernaldez to attend at the prison on the following day. Then at length he and the notary departed, and, the jailers having cleared away the food and locked the door, Castell and Peter lay down on the beds that they had made ready for them, thankful enough to find themselves at Seville, even though in a prison, where indeed they slept very well

that night.

On the following morning they woke much refreshed, and, after they had breakfasted, the governor appeared, and with him none other than the Señor Juan Bernaldez, Castell's secret correspondent and Spanish partner, whom he had last seen some years before in England, a stout man with a quiet, clever face, not over given to words.

Greeting them with a deference that was not lost upon the governor, he asked whether he had leave to speak with them alone. The governor assented and went, saying he would return within an hour. As soon as the door was closed behind him, Bernaldez said:

"This is a strange place to meet you in, John Castell, yet I am not altogether surprised, since some of your messages reached me through our friends the Jews; also your ship, the Margaret, lies refitted in the river, and to avoid suspicion I have been lading her slowly with a cargo for England, though how you will come aboard that ship is more than I can say. But we have no time to waste. Tell me all your story, keeping nothing back."

So they told him everything as quickly as they could, while he listened silently. When they had done, he said, addressing Peter:

"It is a thousand pities, young sir, that you could not keep your hands off that soldier, for now the trouble that was nearly done with has

begun anew, and in a worse shape. The Marquis of Morella is a very powerful man in this kingdom, as you may know from the fact that he was sent to London by their Majesties to negotiate a treaty with your English King Henry as to the Jews and their treatment, should any of them escape thither after they have been expelled from Spain. For nothing less is in the wind, and I would have you know that their Majesties hate the Jews, and especially the Maranos, whom already they burn by dozens here in Seville," and he glanced meaningly at Castell.

"I am very sorry," said Peter, "but the fellow handled her roughly, and I was maddened at the sight and could not help myself. This is the second time that I have come into trouble from the same cause. Also, I thought that he was but a bandit."

"Love is a bad diplomatist," replied Bernaldez, with a little smile, "and who can count last year's clouds? What is done, is done. Now I will try to arrange that the three of you shall be brought straight before their Majesties when they sit to hear cases on the day after to-morrow. With the Queen you will have a better chance than at the hands of any alcalde. She has a heart, if only one can get at it--that is, except where Jews and Maranos are concerned," and again he glanced at Castell. "Meanwhile, there is money in plenty, and in Spain we ride to heaven on gold angels," he added, alluding to that coin and the national corruption.

Before they could say more the governor returned, saying that the Señor

Bernaldez' time was up, and asking if they had finished their talk.

"Not altogether," said Margaret. "Noble Governor, is it permitted that the Señor Bernaldez should send me some Christian clothes to wear, for I would not appear before your judges in this soiled heathen garb, nor, I think, would my father or the Señor Brome?"

The governor laughed, and said he thought that might be arranged, and even allowed them another five minutes, while they talked of what these clothes should be. Then he departed with Bernaldez, leaving them alone.

It was not until the latter had gone, however, that they remembered that they had forgotten to ask him whether he had heard anything of the woman Inez, who had been furnished with his address, but, as he had said nothing of her, they felt sure that she could not have arrived in Seville, and once more were much afraid as to what might have happened after they had left Granada.

That night, to their grief and alarm, a new trouble fell on them. Just as they finished their supper the governor appeared and said that, by order of the Court before which they must be tried, the Señor Brome, who was accused of murder, must be separated from them. So, in spite of all they could say or do, Peter was led away to a separate cell, leaving Margaret weeping.