

CHAPTER XX

ISABELLA OF SPAIN

On the afternoon following his first visit, Castell's agent, Bernaldez, arrived again at the prison of the Hermandad at Seville accompanied by a tailor, a woman, and a chest full of clothes. The governor ordered these two persons to wait while the garments were searched under his own eye, but Bernaldez he permitted to be led at once to the prisoners. As soon as he was with them he said:

"Your marquis has been married fast enough."

"How do you know that?" asked Castell.

"From the woman Inez, who arrived with the priest last night, and gave me the certificates of his union with Betty Dene signed by himself. I have not brought them with me lest I should be searched, when they might have been taken away; but Inez has come disguised as a sempstress, so show no surprise when you see her, if she is admitted. Perhaps she will be able to tell the Dona Margaret something of what passed if she is allowed to fit her robes alone. After that she must lie hidden for fear of the vengeance of Morella; but I shall know where to put my hand upon her if she is wanted. You will all of you be brought before the queen to-morrow, and then I, who shall be there, will produce the writings."

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth when the governor appeared, and

with him the tailor and Inez, who curtsayed and glanced at Margaret out of the corners of her soft eyes, looking at them all as though with curiosity, like one who had never seen or heard of them before.

When the dresses had been produced, Margaret asked whether she might be allowed to try them on with the woman in her own chamber, as she had not been measured for them.

The governor answered that as both the sempstress and the robes had been searched, there was no objection, so the two of them retired--Inez, with her arms full of garments.

"Tell me all about it," whispered Margaret as soon as the door was closed. "I die to hear your story."

So, while she fitted the clothes, since in that place they could never be sure but that they were watched through some secret loophole, Inez, with her mouth full of aloe thorns, which those of the trade used as pins, told her everything down to the time of her escape from Granada. When she came to that part of the tale where the false bride had lifted her veil and kissed the bridegroom, Margaret gasped in her amaze.

"Oh! how could she do it?" she said, "I should have fainted first."

"She has a good courage, that Betty--turn to the light, please, Señora--I could not have acted better myself--I think it is a little

high on the left shoulder. He never guessed a thing, the besotted fool, and that was before I gave him the wine, for he wasn't likely to guess much afterwards. Did the señora say it was tight under the arm? Well, perhaps a little, but this stuff stretches. What I want to know is, what happened afterwards? Your cousin is the bull that I put my money on: I believe she will clear the ring. A woman with a nerve of steel; had I as much I should have been the Marchioness of Morella long ago, or there would be another marquis by now. There, the sit of the skirt is perfect; the señora's beautiful figure looks more beautiful in it than ever.

Well, whoever lives will learn all about it, and it is no use worrying.

Meanwhile, Bernaldez has paid me the money--and a handsome sum too--so you needn't thank me. I only worked for hire--and hate. Now I am going to lie low, as I don't want to get my throat cut, but he can find me if I am really needed.

"The priest? Oh, he is safe enough. We made him sign a receipt for his cash. Also, I believe that he has got his post as a secretary to the

Inquisition, and began his duties at once as they were short-handed, torturing Jews and heretics, you know, and stealing their goods, both of which occupations will exactly suit him. I rode with him all the way to Seville, and he tried to make love to me, the slimy knave, but I paid him out," and Inez smiled at some pleasant recollection. "Still, I did not quarrel with him outright, as he may come in useful. Who knows? There's the governor calling me. One moment, Excellency, only one moment!

"Yes, Señora, with those few alterations the dress will be perfect. You shall have it back tonight without fail, and I can cut the others that you have been pleased to order from the same pattern. Oh! I thank you, Señora, you are too good to a poor girl, and," in a whisper, "the Mother of God have you in her guard, and send that Peter has improved in his love making!" and, half hidden in garments, Inez bowed herself out of the room through the door which the governor had already opened.

About nine o'clock on the following morning one of the jailers came to summon Margaret and her father to be led before the court. Margaret asked anxiously if the Señor Brome was coming too, but the man replied that he knew nothing of the Señor Brome, as he was in one of the cells for dangerous criminals, which he did not serve.

So forth they went, dressed in their new clothes, which were as fine as money could buy, and in the latest Seville fashion, and were conducted to the courtyard. Here, to her joy, Margaret saw Peter waiting for them under guard, and dressed also in the Christian garments which they had begged might be supplied to him at their cost. She sprang to his side, none hindering her, and, forgetting her bashfulness, suffered him to embrace her before them all, asking him how he had fared since they were parted.

"None too well," answered Peter gloomily, "who did not know if we should ever meet again; also, my prison is underground, where but little light

comes through a grating, and there are rats in it which will not let a man sleep, so I must lie awake the most of the night thinking of you. But where go we now?"

"To be put upon our trial before the queen, I think. Hold my hand and walk close beside me, but do not stare at me so hard. Is aught wrong with my dress?"

"Nothing," answered Peter. "I stare because you look so beautiful in it. Could you not have worn a veil? Doubtless there are more marquises about this court."

"Only the Moors wear veils, Peter, and now we are Christians again. Listen--I think that none of them understand English. I have seen Inez, who asked after you very tenderly--nay, do not blush, it is unseemly in a man. Have you seen her also? No--well, she escaped from Granada as she planned, and Betty is married to the marquis."

"It will never hold good," answered Peter shaking his head, "being but a trick, and I fear that she will pay for it, poor woman! Still, she gave us a start, though, so far as prisons go, I was better off in Granada than in that rat-trap."

"Yes," answered Margaret innocently, "you had a garden to walk in there, had you not? No, don't be angry with me. Do you know what Betty did?" And she told him of how she had lifted her veil and kissed Morella

without being discovered.

"That isn't so wonderful," said Peter, "since if they are painted up young women look very much alike in a half-lit room----"

"Or garden?" suggested Margaret.

"What is wonderful," went on Peter, scorning to take note of this interruption, "is that she could consent to kiss the man at all. The double-dealing scoundrel! Has Inez told you how he treated her? The very thought of it makes me ill."

"Well, Peter, he didn't ask you to kiss him, did he? And as for the wrongs of Inez, though doubtless you know more about them than I do, I think she has given him an orange for his pomegranate. But look, there is the Alcazar in front of us. Is it not a splendid castle? You know, it was built by the Moors."

"I don't care who it was built by," said Peter, "and it looks to me like any other castle, only larger. All I know about it is that I am to be tried there for knocking that ruffian on the head--and that perhaps this is the last we shall see of each other, as probably they will send me to the galleys, if they don't do worse."

"Oh! say no such thing. I never thought of it; it is not possible!" answered Margaret, her dark eyes filling with tears.

"Wait till your marquis appears, pleading the case against us, and you will see what is or is not possible," replied Peter with conviction.

"Still, we have come through some storms, so let us hope for the best."

At that moment they reached the gate of the Alcazar, which they had approached from their prison through gardens of orange-trees, and soldiers came up and separated them. Next they were led across a court, where many people hurried to and fro, into a great marble-columned room glittering with gold, which was called the Hall of Justice. At the far end of this place, seated on a throne set upon a richly carpeted dais and surrounded by lords and counsellors, sat a magnificently attired lady of middle age. She was blue-eyed and red-haired, with a fair-skinned, open countenance, but very reserved and quiet in her demeanour.

"The Queen," muttered the guard, saluting, as did Castell and Peter, while Margaret curtsied.

A case had just been tried, and the queen Isabella, after consultation with her assessors, was delivering judgment in few words and a gentle voice. As she spoke, her mild blue eyes fell upon Margaret, and, held it would seem by her beauty, rested on her till they wandered off to the tall form of Peter and the dark, Jewish-looking Castell by him, at the sight of whom she frowned a little.

That case was finished, and other suitors stood up in their turn, but the queen, waving her hand and still looking at Margaret, bent down and asked a question of one of the officers of the court, then gave an order, whereon the officer rising, summoned "John Castell, Margaret Castell, and Peter Brome, all of England," to appear at the bar and answer to the charge of murder of one Luiz of Basa, a soldier of the Holy Hermandad.

At once they were brought forward, and stood in a line in front of the dais, while the officer began to read the charge against them.

"Stay, friend," interposed the queen, "these accused are the subjects of our good brother, Henry of England, and may not understand our language, though one of them, I think"--and she glanced at Castell--"was not born in England, or at any rate of English blood. Ask them if they need an interpreter."

The question was put, and all of them answered that they could speak Spanish, though Peter added that he did so but indifferently.

"You are the knight, I think, who is charged with the commission of this crime," said Isabella, looking at him.

"Your Majesty, I am not a knight, only a plain esquire, Peter Brome of Dedham in England. My father was a knight, Sir Peter Brome, but he fell at my side, fighting for Richard, on Bosworth Field, where I had this

wound," and he pointed to the scar upon his face, "but was not knighted for my pains."

Isabella smiled a little, then asked:

"And how came you to Spain, Señor Peter Brome?"

"Your Majesty," answered Peter, Margaret helping from time to time when he did not know the Spanish words, "this lady at my side, the daughter of the merchant John Castell who stands by her, is my affianced----"

"Then you have won the love of a very beautiful maiden, Señor," interrupted the queen; "but proceed."

"She and her cousin, the Señora Dene, were kidnapped in London by one who I understand is the nephew of the King Ferdinand, and an envoy to the English court, who passed there as the Señor d'Aguilar, but who in Spain is the Marquis of Morella."

"Kidnapped! and by Morella!" exclaimed the queen.

"Yes, your Majesty, cozened on board his ship and kidnapped. The Señor Castell and I followed them, and, boarding their vessel, tried to rescue them, but were shipwrecked at Motril. The marquis carried them away to Granada, whither we followed also, I being sorely hurt in the shipwreck. There, in the palace of the marquis, we have lain prisoners many weeks,

but at length escaped, purposing to come to Seville and seek the protection of your Majesties. On the road, while we were dressed as Moors, in which garb we compassed our escape, we were attacked by men that we thought were bandits, for we had been warned against such evil people. One of them rudely molested the Dona Margaret, and I cut him down, and by misfortune killed him, for which manslaughter I am here before you to-day. Your Majesty, I did not know that he was a soldier of the Holy Hermandad, and I pray you pardon my offence, which was done in ignorance, fear, and anger, for we are willing to pay compensation for this unhappy death."

Now some in the court exclaimed:

"Well spoken, Englishman!"

Then the queen said:

"If all this tale be true, I am not sure that we should blame you over much, Señor Brome; but how know we that it is true? For instance, you said that the noble marquis stole two ladies, a deed of which I can scarcely think him capable. Where then is the other?"

"I believe," answered Peter, "that she is now the wife of the Marquis of Morella."

"The wife! Who bears witness that she is the wife? He has not advised us

that he was about to marry, as is usual."

Then Bernaldez stood forward, stating his name and occupation, and that he was a correspondent of the English merchant, John Castell, and producing the certificate of marriage signed by Morella, Betty, and the priest Henriques, handed it up to the queen saying that he had received them in duplicate by a messenger from Granada, and had delivered the other to the Archbishop of Seville.

The queen, having looked at the paper, passed it to her assessors, who examined it very carefully, one of them saying that the form was not usual, and that it might be forged.

The queen thought a little while, then said:

"That is so, and in one way only can we know the truth. Let our warrant issue summoning before us our cousin, the noble Marquis of Morella, the Señora Dene, who is said to be his wife, and the priest Henriques of Motril, who is said to have married them. When they have arrived, all of them, the king my husband and I will examine into the matter, and, until then, we will not suffer our minds to be prejudiced by hearing any more of this cause."

Now the governor of the prison stood forward, and asked what was to be done with the captives until the witnesses could be brought from Granada. The queen answered that they must remain in his charge, and be

well treated, whereon Peter prayed that he might be given a better cell with fewer rats and more light. The queen smiled, and said that it should be so, but added that it would be proper that he should still be kept apart from the lady to whom he was affianced, who could dwell with her father. Then, noting the sadness on their faces, she added:

"Yet I think they may meet daily in the garden of the prison."

Margaret curtsayed and thanked her, whereon she said very graciously:

"Come here, Señora, and sit by me a little," and she pointed to a footstool at her side. "When I have done this business I desire a few words with you."

So Margaret was brought up upon the dais, and sat down at her Majesty's left hand upon the brodered footstool, and very fair indeed she looked placed thus above the crowd, she whose beauty and whose bearing were so royal; but Castell and Peter were led away back to the prison, though, seeing so many gay lords about, the latter went unwillingly enough. A while later, when the cases were finished, the queen dismissed the court save for certain officers, who stood at a distance, and, turning to Margaret, said:

"Now, fair maiden, tell me your story, as one woman to another, and do not fear that anything you say will be made use of at the trial of your lover, since against you, at any rate at present, no charge is laid.

Say, first, are you really the affianced of that tall gentleman, and has he really your heart?"

"All of it, your Majesty," answered Margaret, "and we have suffered much for each other's sake." Then in as few words as she could she told their tale, while the queen listened earnestly.

"A strange story indeed, and if it be all true, a shameful," she said when Margaret had finished. "But how comes it that if Morella desired to force you into marriage, he is now wed to your companion and cousin? What are you keeping back from me?" and she glanced at her shrewdly.

"Your Majesty," answered Margaret, "I was ashamed to speak the rest, yet I will trust you and do so, praying your royal forgiveness if you hold that we, who were in desperate straits, have done what is wrong. My cousin, Betty Dene, has paid back Morella in his own false gold. He won her heart and promised to marry her, and at the risk of her own life she took my place at the altar, thereby securing our escape."

"A brave deed, if a doubtful," said the queen, "though I question whether such a marriage will be upheld. But that is a matter for the Church to judge of, and I must speak of it no more. Certainly it is hard to be angry with any of you. What did you say that Morella promised you when he asked you to marry him in London?"

"Your Majesty, he promised that he would lift me high, perhaps

even"--and she hesitated--"to that seat in which you sit."

Isabella frowned, then laughed, and said, as she looked her up and down:

"You would fit it well, better than I do in truth. But what else did he say?"

"Your Majesty, he said that not every one loves the king, his uncle; that he had many friends who remembered that his father was poisoned by the father of the king, who was Morella's grandfather; also, that his mother was a princess of the Moors, and that he might throw in his lot with theirs, or that there were other ways in which he could gain his end."

"So, so," said the queen. "Well, though he is such a good son of the Church, and my lord is so fond of him, I never loved Morella, and I thank you for your warning. But I must not speak to you of such high matters, though it seems that some have thought otherwise. Fair Margaret, have you aught to ask of me?"

"Yes, your Majesty--that you will deal gently with my true love when he comes before you for trial, remembering that he is hot of head and strong of arm, and that such knights as he--for knightly is his blood--cannot brook to see their ladies mishandled by rough men, and the wrappings that shield them torn from off their bosoms. Also, I pray that I may be protected from Morella, that he may not be allowed to touch or

even to speak to me, who, for all his rank and splendour, hate him as though he were some poisoned snake."

"I have said that I must not prejudge your case, you beautiful English Margaret," the queen answered with a smile, "yet I think that neither of those things you ask will cause justice to slip the bandage that is about her eyes. Go, and be at peace. If you have spoken truth to me, as I am sure you have, and Isabella of Spain can prevent it, the Señor Brome's punishment shall not be heavy, nor shall the shadow of the Marquis of Morella, the base-born son of a prince and of some royal infidel"--these words she spoke with much bitterness--"so much as fall upon you, though I warn you that my lord the king loves the man, as is but natural, and will not condemn him lightly. Tell me one thing. This lover of yours is brave, is he not?"

"Very brave," answered Margaret, smiling.

"And he can ride a horse and hold a lance, can he not, at any rate in your quarrel?"

"Aye, your Majesty, and wield a sword too, as well as most knights, though he has been but lately sick. Some learned that on Bosworth Field."

"Good. Now farewell," and she gave Margaret her hand to kiss. Then, calling two of her officers, she bade them conduct her back to the

prison, and say that she should have liberty to send messages or to write to her, the queen, if she should so desire.

On the night of that same day Morella galloped into Seville. Indeed he should have been there long before, but misled by the story of the Moors who had escorted Peter, Margaret, and her father out of Granada and seen them take the Malaga road, he travelled thither first, only to find no trace of them in that city. Then he returned and tracked them to Seville, where he was soon made acquainted with all that had happened. Amongst other things, he discovered that ten hours before swift messengers had been despatched to Granada, commanding his attendance and that of Betty, with whom he had gone through the form of marriage.

On the following morning he asked an audience with the queen, but it was refused to him, and the king, his uncle, was away. Next he tried to win admission into the prison and see Margaret, only to find that neither his high rank and authority nor any bribe would suffice to unlock its doors. The queen had commanded otherwise, he was informed, and knew therefrom that in this matter he must reckon with Isabella as an enemy. Then he bethought him of revenge, and began a search for Inez and the priest Henriques of Motril, only to find that the former had vanished, none knew whither, and the holy father was safe within the walls of the Inquisition, whence he was careful not to emerge, and where no layman, however highly placed, could enter to lay a hand upon one of its officers. So, full of rage and disappointment, he took counsel of lawyers and friends, and prepared to defend the suit which he saw would

be brought against him, hoping that chance might yet deliver Margaret into his hands. One good card he held, which now he determined to play. Castell, as he knew, was a Jew who for years had posed as a Christian, and for such there was no mercy in Seville. Perhaps for her father's sake he might yet be able to work upon Margaret, whom now he desired to win more fiercely than ever before.

At least it was certain that he would try this, or any other means, however base, rather than see her married to his rival, Peter Brome. Also there was the chance that this Peter might be condemned to imprisonment, or even to death, for the killing of a soldier of the Hermandad.

So Morella made him ready for the great struggle as best he could, and, since he could not stop her coming, awaited the arrival of Betty in Seville.