

CHAPTER XXI

BETTY STATES HER CASE

Seven days had passed, during which time Margaret and her father had rested quietly in the prison, where, indeed, they dwelt more as guests than as captives. Thus they were allowed to receive what visitors they would, and among them Juan Bernaldez, Castell's connection and agent, who told them of all that passed without. Through him they sent messengers to meet Betty on her road and apprise her of how things stood, and of the trial in which her cause would be judged.

Soon the messengers returned, stating that the "Marchioness of Morella" was travelling in state, accompanied by a great retinue, that she thanked them for their tidings, and hoped to be able to defend herself at all points.

At this news Castell stared and Margaret laughed, for, although she did not know all the story, she was sure that in some way Betty had the mastery of Morella, and would not be easily defeated, though how she came to be travelling with a great retinue she could not imagine. Still, fearing lest she should be attacked or otherwise injured, she wrote a humble letter to the queen, praying that her cousin might be defended from all danger at the hands of any one whomsoever until she had an opportunity of giving evidence before their Majesties.

Within an hour came the answer that the lady was under the royal protection, and that a guard had been sent to escort her and her party and to keep her safe from interference of any sort; also, that for her greater comfort, quarters had been prepared for her in a fortress outside of Seville, which would be watched night and day, and whence she would be brought to the court.

Peter was still kept apart from them, but each day at noon they were allowed to meet him in the walled garden of the prison, where they talked together to their heart's content. Here, too, he exercised himself daily at all manly games, and especially at sword-play with some of the other prisoners, using sticks for swords. Further, he was allowed the use of his horse that he had ridden from Granada, on which he jousting in the yard of the castle with the governor and certain other gentlemen, proving himself better at that play than any of them. These things he did vigorously and with ardour, for Margaret had told him of the hint which the queen gave her, and he desired to get back his full strength, and to perfect himself in the handling of every arm which was used in Spain.

So the time went by, until one afternoon the governor informed them that Peter's trial was fixed for the morrow, and that they must accompany him to the court to be examined also upon all these matters. A little later came Bernaldez, who said that the king had returned and would sit with the queen, and that already this affair had made much stir in Seville, where there was much curiosity as to the story of Morella's marriage, of

which many different tales were told. That Margaret and her father would be discharged he had little doubt, in which case their ship was ready for them; but of Peter's chances he could say nothing, for they depended upon what view the king took of his offence, and, though unacknowledged, Morella was the king's nephew and had his ear.

Afterwards they went down into the garden, and there found Peter, who had just returned from his jousting, flushed with exercise, and looking very manly and handsome. Margaret took his hand and, walking aside, told him the news.

"I am glad," he answered, "for the sooner this business is begun the sooner it will be done. But, Sweet," and here his face grew very earnest, "Morella has much power in this land, and I have broken its law, so none know what the end will be. I may be condemned to death or imprisoned, or perhaps, if I am given the chance, with better luck I may fall fighting, in any of which cases we shall be separated for a while, or altogether. Should this be so, I pray that you will not stay here, either in the hope of rescuing me, or for other reasons; since, while you are in Spain, Morella will not cease from his attempts to get hold of you, whereas in England you will be safe from him."

When Margaret heard these words she sobbed aloud, for the thought that harm might come to Peter seemed to choke her.

"In all things I will do your bidding," she said, "yet how can I leave

you, dear, while you are alive, and if, perchance, you should die, which may God prevent, how can I live on without you? Rather shall I seek to follow you very swiftly."

"I do not desire that," said Peter. "I desire that you should endure your days till the end, and come to meet me where I am in due season, and not before. I will add this, that if in after-years you should meet any worthy man, and have a mind to marry him, you should do so, for I know well that you will never forget me, your first love, and that beyond this world lie others where there are no marryings or giving in marriage. Let not my dead hand lie heavy upon you, Margaret."

"Yet," she replied in gentle indignation, "heavy must it always lie, since it is about my heart. Be sure of this, Peter, that if such dreadful ill should fall upon us, as you left me so shall you find me, here or hereafter."

"So be it," he said with a sigh of relief, for he could not bear to think of Margaret as the wife of some other man, even after he was gone, although his honest, simple nature, and fear lest her life might be made empty of all joy, caused him to say what he had said.

Then behind the shelter of a flowering bush they embraced each other as do those who know not whether they will ever kiss again, and, the hour of sunset having come, parted as they must.

On the following morning once more Castell and Margaret were led to the Hall of Justice in the Alcazar; but this time Peter did not go with them. The great court was already full of counsellors, officers, gentlemen, and ladies who had come from curiosity, and other folk connected with or interested in the case. As yet, however, Margaret could not see Morella or Betty, nor had the king and queen taken their seats upon the throne. Peter was already there, standing before the bar with guards on either side of him, and greeted them with a smile and a nod as they were ushered to their chairs near by. Just as they reached them also trumpets were blown, and from the back of the hall, walking hand in hand, appeared their Majesties of Spain, Ferdinand and Isabella, whereat all the audience rose and bowed, remaining standing till they were seated on the thrones.

The king, whom they now saw for the first time, was a thickset, active man with pleasant eyes, a fair skin, and a broad forehead, but, as Margaret thought, somewhat sly-faced--the face of a man who never forgot his own interests in those of another. Like the queen, he was magnificently attired in garments brodered with gold and the arms of Aragon, while in his hand he held a golden sceptre surmounted by a jewel, and about his waist, to show that he was a warlike king, he wore his long, cross-handled sword. Smilingly he acknowledged the homage of his subjects by lifting his hand to his cap and bowing. Then his eye fell upon the beautiful Margaret, and, turning, he put a question to the queen in a light, sharp voice, asking if that were the lady whom Morella had married, and, if so, why in the name of heaven he wished to be

rid of her.

Isabella answered that she understood that this was the señora whom he had desired to marry when he married some one else, as he alleged by mistake, but who was in fact affianced to the prisoner before them; a reply at which all who heard it laughed.

At this moment the Marquis of Morella, accompanied by his gentlemen and some long-gowned lawyers, appeared walking up the court, dressed in the black velvet that he always wore, and glittering with orders. Upon his head was a cap, also of black velvet, from which hung a great pearl, and this cap he did not remove even when he bowed to the king and queen, for he was one of the few grandees of Spain who had the right to remain covered before their Majesties. They acknowledged his salutation, Ferdinand with a friendly nod and Isabella with a cold bow, and he, too, took the seat that had been prepared for him. Just then there was a disturbance at the far end of the court, where one of its officers could be heard calling:

"Way! Make way for the Marchioness of Morella!" At the sound of this name the marquis, whose eyes were fixed on Margaret, frowned fiercely, rising from his seat as though to protest, then, at some whispered word from a lawyer behind him, sat down again.

Now the crowd of spectators separated, and Margaret, turning to look down the long hall, saw a procession advancing up the lane between them,

some clad in armour and some in white Moorish robes blazoned with the scarlet eagle, the cognisance of Morella. In the midst of them, her train supported by two Moorish women, walked a tall and beautiful lady, a coronet upon her brow, her fair hair outspread, a purple cloak hanging from her shoulders, half hiding that same splendid robe sewn with pearls which had been Morella's gift to Margaret, and about her white bosom the chain of pearls which he had presented to Betty in compensation for her injuries.

Margaret stared and stared again, and her father at her side murmured:

"It is our Betty! Truly fine feathers make fine birds." Yes, Betty it was without a doubt, though, remembering her in her humble woollen dress at the old house in Holborn, it was hard to recognise the poor companion in this proud and magnificent lady, who looked as though all her life she had trodden the marble floors of courts, and consorted with nobles and with queens. Up the great hall she came, stately, imperturbable, looking neither to the right nor to the left, taking no note of the whisperings about her, no, nor even of Morella or of Margaret, till she reached the open space in front of the bar where Peter and his guards, gazing with all their eyes, hastened to make place for her. There she curtsied thrice, twice to the queen, and once to the king, her consort; then, turning, bowed to the marquis, who fixed his eyes upon the ground and took no note, bowed to Castell and Peter, and lastly, advancing to Margaret, gave her her cheek to kiss. This Margaret did with becoming humility, whispering in her ear:

"How fares your Grace?"

"Better than you would in my shoes," whispered Betty back with ever so slight a trembling of her left eyelid; while Margaret heard the king mutter to the queen:

"A fine peacock of a woman. Look at her figure and those big eyes. Morella must be hard to please."

"Perhaps he prefers swans to peacocks," answered the queen in the same voice with a glance at Margaret, whose quieter and more refined beauty seemed to gain by contrast with that of her nobly built and dazzling-skinned cousin. Then she motioned to Betty to take the seat prepared for her, which she did, with her suite standing behind her and an interpreter at her side.

"I am somewhat bewildered," said the king, glancing from Morella to Betty and from Margaret to Peter, for evidently the humour of the situation did not escape him. "What is the exact case that we have to try?"

Then one of the legal assessors, or *alcaldes*, rose and said that the matter before their Majesties was a charge against the Englishman at the bar of killing a certain soldier of the Holy Hermandad, but that there seemed to be other matters mixed up with it.

"So I gather," answered the king; "for instance, an accusation of the carrying off of subjects of a friendly Power out of the territory of that Power; a suit for nullity of a marriage, and a cross-suit for the declaration of the validity of the said marriage--and the holy saints know what besides. Well, one thing at a time. Let us try this tall Englishman."

So the case was opened against Peter by a public prosecutor, who restated it as it had been laid before the queen. The Captain Arrano gave his evidence as to the killing of the soldier, but, in cross-examination by Peter's advocate, admitted, for evidently he bore no malice against the prisoner, that the said soldier had roughly handled the Dona Margaret, and that the said Peter, being a stranger to the country, might very well have taken them for a troop of bandits or even Moors. Also, he added, that he could not say that the Englishman had intended to kill the soldier.

Then Castell and Margaret gave their evidence, the latter with much modest sweetness. Indeed, when she explained that Peter was her affianced husband, to whom she was to have been wed on the day after she had been stolen away from England, and that she had cried out to him for help when the dead soldier caught hold of her and rent away her veil, there was a murmur of sympathy, and the king and queen began to talk with each other without paying much heed to her further words.

Next they spoke to two of the judges who sat with them, after which the king held up his hand and announced that they had come to a decision on the case. It was, that, under the circumstances, the Englishman was justified in cutting down the soldier, especially as there was nothing to show that he meant to kill him, or that he knew that he belonged to the Holy Hermandad. He would, therefore, be discharged on the condition that he paid a sum of money, which, indeed, it appeared had already been paid to the man's widow, in compensation for the man's death, and a further small sum for Masses to be said for the welfare of his soul.

Peter began to give thanks for this judgment; but while he was still speaking the king asked if any of those present wished to proceed in further suits. Instantly Betty rose and said that she did. Then, through her interpreter, she stated that she had received the royal commands to attend before their Majesties, and was now prepared to answer any questions or charges that might be laid against her.

"What is your name, Señora?" asked the king.

"Elizabeth, Marchioness of Morella, born Elizabeth Dene, of the ancient and gentle family of Dene, a native of England," answered Betty in a clear and decided voice.

The king bowed, then asked:

"Does any one dispute this title and description?"

"I do," answered the Marquis of Morella, speaking for the first time.

"On what grounds, Marquis?"

"On every ground," he answered. "She is not the Marchioness of Morella, inasmuch as I went through the ceremony of marriage with her believing her to be another woman. She is not of ancient and gentle family, since she was a servant in the house of the merchant Castell yonder, in London."

"That proves nothing, Marquis," interrupted the king. "My family may, I think, be called ancient and gentle, which you will be the last to deny, yet I have played the part of a servant on an occasion which I think the queen here will remember"--an allusion at which the audience, who knew well enough to what it referred, laughed audibly, as did her Majesty[1].

"The marriage and rank are matters for proof," went on the king, "if they are questioned; but is it alleged that this lady has committed any crime which prevents her from pleading?"

"None," answered Betty quickly, "except that of being poor, and the crime, if it is one, as it may be, of having married that man, the Marquis of Morella," whereat the audience laughed again.

"Well, Madam, you do not seem to be poor now," remarked the king, looking at her gorgeous and bejewelled apparel; "and here we are more

apt to think marriage a folly than a crime," a light saying at which the queen frowned a little. "But," he added quickly, "set out your case, Madam, and forgive me if, until you have done so, I do not call you Marchioness."

[Footnote 1: When travelling from Saragossa to Valladolid to be married to Isabella, Ferdinand was obliged to pass himself off as a valet.

Prescott says: "The greatest circumspection, therefore, was necessary. The party journeyed chiefly in the night; Ferdinand assumed the disguise of a servant and, when they halted on the road, took care of the mules and served his companions at table."]

"Here is my case, Sire," said Betty, producing the certificate of marriage and handing it up for inspection.

The judges and their Majesties inspected it, the queen remarking that a duplicate of this document had already been submitted to her and passed on to the proper authorities.

"Is the priest who solemnised the marriage present?" asked the king; whereon Bernaldez, Castell's agent, rose and said that he was, though he neglected to add that his presence had been secured for no mean sum.

One of the judges ordered that he should be called, and presently the foxy-faced Father Henriques, at whom the marquis glared angrily, appeared bowing, and was sworn in the usual form, and, on being

questioned, stated that he had been priest at Motril, and chaplain to the Marquis of Morella, but was now a secretary of the Holy Office at Seville. In answer to further questions he said that, apparently by the bridegroom's own wish, and with his full consent, on a certain date at Granada, he had married the marquis to the lady who stood before them, and whom he knew to be named Betty Dene; also, that at her request, since she was anxious that proper record should be kept of her marriage, he had written the certificates which the court had seen, which certificates the marquis and others had signed immediately after the ceremony in his private chapel at Granada. Subsequently he had left Granada to take up his appointment as a secretary to the Inquisition at Seville, which had been conferred on him by the ecclesiastical authorities in reward of a treatise which he had written upon heresy. That was all he knew about the affair.

Now Morella's advocate rose to cross-examine, asking him who had made the arrangements for the marriage. He answered that the marquis had never spoken to him directly on the subject--at least he had never mentioned to him the name of the lady; the Señora Inez arranged everything.

Now the queen broke in, asking where was the Señora Inez, and who she was. The priest replied that the Señora Inez was a Spanish woman, one of the marquis's household at Granada, whom he made use of in all confidential affairs. She was young and beautiful, but he could say no more about her. As to where she was now he did not know, although they

had ridden together to Seville. Perhaps the marquis knew.

Now the priest was ordered to stand down, and Betty tendered herself as a witness, and through her interpreter told the court the story of her connection with Morella. She said that she had met him in London when she was a member of the household of the Señor Castell, and that at once he began to make love to her and won her heart. Subsequently he suggested that she should elope with him to Spain, promising to marry her at once, in proof of which she produced the letter he had written, which was translated and handed up for the inspection of the court--a very awkward letter, as they evidently thought, although it was not signed with the writer's real name. Next Betty explained the trick by which she and her cousin Margaret were brought on board his ship, and that when they arrived there the marquis refused to marry her, alleging that he was in love with her cousin and not with her--a statement which she took to be an excuse to avoid the fulfilment of his promise. She could not say why he had carried off her cousin Margaret also, but supposed that it was because, having once brought her upon the ship, he did not know how to be rid of her.

Then she described the voyage to Spain, saying that during that voyage she kept the marquis at a distance, since there was no priest to marry them; also, she was sick and much ashamed, who had involved her cousin and mistress in this trouble. She told how the Señors Castell and Brome had followed in another vessel, and boarded the caravel in a storm; also of the shipwreck and their journey to Granada as prisoners, and of their

subsequent life there. Finally she described how Inez came to her with proposals of marriage, and how she bargained that if she consented, her cousin, the Señor Castell, and the Señor Brome should go free. They went accordingly, and the marriage took place as arranged, the marquis first embracing her publicly in the presence of various people--namely, Inez and his two secretaries, who, except Inez, were present, and could bear witness to the truth of what she said.

After the marriage and the signing of the certificates she had accompanied him to his own apartments, which she had never entered before, and there, to her astonishment, in the morning, he announced that he must go a journey upon their Majesties' business. Before he went, however, he gave her a written authority, which she produced, to receive his rents and manage his matters in Granada during his absence, which authority she read to the gathered household before he left. She had obeyed him accordingly until she had received the royal command, receiving moneys, giving her receipt for the same, and generally occupying the unquestioned position of mistress of his house.

"We can well believe it," said the king drily. "And now, Marquis, what have you to answer to all this?"

"I will answer presently," replied Morella, who trembled with rage.

"First suffer that my advocate cross-examine this woman."

So the advocate cross-examined, though it cannot be said that he had the

better of Betty. First he questioned her as to her statement that she was of ancient and gentle family, whereon Betty overwhelmed the court with a list of her ancestors, the first of whom, a certain Sieur Dene de Dene, had come to England with the Norman Duke, William the Conqueror. After him, so she still swore, the said Denes de Dene had risen to great rank and power, having been the favourites of the kings of England, and fought for them generation after generation.

By slow degrees she came down to the Wars of the Roses, in which she said her grandfather had been attainted for his loyalty, and lost his land and titles, so that her father, whose only child she was--being now the representative of the noble family, Dene de Dene--fell into poverty and a humble place in life. However, he married a lady of even more distinguished race than his own, a direct descendant of a noble Saxon family, far more ancient in blood than the upstart Normans. At this point, while Peter and Margaret listened amazed, at a hint from the queen, the bewildered court interfered through the head alcalde, praying her to cease from the history of her descent, which they took for granted was as noble as any in England.

Next she was examined as to her relations with Morella in London, and told the tale of his wooing with so much detail and imaginative power that in the end that also was left unfinished. So it was with everything. Clever as Morella's advocate might be, sometimes in English and sometimes in the Spanish tongue, Betty overwhelmed him with words and apt answers, until, able to make nothing of her, the poor man sat

down wiping his brow and cursing her beneath his breath.

Then the secretaries were sworn, and after them various members of Morella's household, who, although somewhat unwillingly, confirmed all that Betty had said as to his embracing her with lifted veil and the rest. So at length Betty closed her case, reserving the right to address the court after she had heard that of the marquis.

Now the king, queen, and their assessors consulted for a little while, for evidently there was a division of opinion among them, some thinking that the case should be stopped at once and referred to another tribunal, and others that it should go on. At length the queen was heard to say that at least the Marquis of Morella should be allowed to make his statement, as he might be able to prove that all this story was a fabrication, and that he was not even at Granada at the time when the marriage was alleged to have taken place.

The king and the alcaldes assenting, the marquis was sworn and told his story, admitting that it was not one which he was proud to repeat in public. He narrated how he had first met Margaret, Betty, and Peter at a public ceremony in London, and had then and there fallen in love with Margaret, and accompanied her home to the house of her father, the merchant John Castell.

Subsequently he discovered that this Castell, who had fled from Spain with his father in childhood, was that lowest of mankind, an unconverted

Jew who posed as a Christian (at this statement there was a great sensation in court, and the queen's face hardened), although it is true that he had married a Christian lady, and that his daughter had been baptized and brought up as a Christian, of which faith she was a loyal member. Nor did she know--as he believed--that her father remained a Jew, since, otherwise, he would not have continued to seek her as his wife. Their Majesties would be aware, he went on, that, owing to reasons with which they were acquainted, he had means of getting at the truth of these matters concerning the Jews in England, as to which, indeed, he had already written to them, although, owing to his shipwreck and to the pressure of his private affairs, he had not yet made his report on his embassy in person.

Continuing, he said that he admitted that he had made love to the serving-woman, Betty, in order to gain access to Margaret, whose father mistrusted him, knowing something of his mission. She was a person of no character.

Here Betty rose and said in a clear voice:

"I declare the Marquis of Morella to be a knave and a liar. There is more good character in my little finger than in his whole body, and," she added, "than in that of his mother before him"--an allusion at which the marquis flushed, while, satisfied for the present with this home-thrust, Betty sat down.

He had proposed to Margaret, but she was not willing to marry him, as he found that she was affianced to a distant cousin of hers, the Señor Peter Brome, a swashbuckler who was in trouble for the killing of a man in London, as he had killed the soldier of the Holy Hermandad in Spain. Therefore, in his despair, being deeply enamoured of her, and knowing that he could offer her great place and fortune, he conceived the idea of carrying her off, and to do so was obliged, much against his will, to abduct Betty also.

So after many adventures they came to Granada, where he was able to show the Dona Margaret that the Señor Peter Brome was employing his imprisonment in making love to that member of his household, Inez, who had been spoken of, but now could not be found.

Here Peter, who could bear this no longer, also rose and called him a liar to his face, saying that if he had the opportunity he would prove it on his body, but was ordered by the king to sit down and be silent.

Having been convinced of her lover's unfaithfulness, the marquis went on, the Dona Margaret had at length consented to become his wife on condition that her father, the Señor Brome, and her servant, Betty Dene, were allowed to escape from Granada----

"Where," remarked the queen, "you had no right to detain them, Marquis. Except, perhaps, the father, John Castell," she added significantly.

Where, he admitted with sorrow, he had no right to detain them.

"Therefore," went on the queen acutely, "there was no legal or moral consideration for this alleged promise of marriage,"--a point at which the lawyers nodded approvingly.

The marquis submitted that there was a consideration; that at any rate the Dona Margaret wished it. On the day arranged for the wedding the prisoners were let go, disguised as Moors, but he now knew that through the trickery of the woman Inez, whom he believed had been bribed by Castell and his fellow-Jews, the Dona Margaret escaped in place of her servant, Betty, with whom he subsequently went through the form of marriage, believing her to be Margaret.

As regards the embrace before the ceremony, it took place in a shadowed room, and he thought that Betty's face and hair must have been painted and dyed to resemble those of Margaret. For the rest, he was certain that the ceremonial cup of wine that he drank before he led the woman to the altar was drugged, since he only remembered the marriage itself very dimly, and after that nothing at all until he woke upon the following morning with an aching brow to see Betty sitting by him. As for the power of administration which she produced, being perfectly mad at the time with rage and disappointment, and sure that if he stopped there any longer he should commit the crime of killing this woman who had deceived him so cruelly, he gave it that he might escape from her. Their Majesties would notice also that it was in favour of the Marchioness of

Morella. As this marriage was null and void, there was no Marchioness of Morella. Therefore, the document was null and void also. That was the truth, and all he had to say.