

CHAPTER XXIII

FATHER HENRIQUES AND THE BAKER'S OVEN

A week had gone by. Margaret was in the palace, where Peter had been to see her twice, and found her broken-hearted. Even the fact that they were to be wed upon the following Saturday, the day fixed also for the combat between Peter and Morella, brought her no joy or consolation. For on the next day, the Sunday, there was to be an "Act of Faith," an auto-da-fé in Seville, when wicked heretics, such as Jews, Moors, and persons who had spoken blasphemy, were to suffer for their crimes--some by fire on the Quemadero, or place of burning, outside the city; some by making public confession of their grievous sin before they were carried off to perpetual and solitary imprisonment; some by being garotted before their bodies were given to the flames, and so forth. In this ceremony it was known that John Castell had been doomed to play a leading part.

On her knees, with tears and beseechings, Margaret had prayed the queen for mercy. But in this matter those tears produced no more effect upon the heart of Isabella than does water dripping on a diamond. Gentle enough in other ways, where questions of the Faith were concerned she had the craft of a fox and the cruelty of a tiger. She was even indignant with Margaret. Had not enough been done for her? she asked. Had she not even passed her royal word that no steps should be taken to deprive the accused of such property as he might own in Spain if he were

found guilty, and that none of those penalties which, according to law and custom fell upon the children of such infamous persons, should attach to her, Margaret? Was she not to be publicly married to her lover, and, should he survive the combat, allowed to depart with him in honour without even being asked to see her father expiate his iniquity? Surely, as a good Christian she should rejoice that he was given this opportunity of reconciling his soul with God and be made an example to others of his accursed faith. Was she then a heretic also?

So she stormed on, till Margaret crept from her presence wondering whether this creed could be right that would force the child to inform against and bring the parent to torment. Where were such things written in the sayings of the Saviour and His Apostles? And if they were not written, who had invented them?

"Save him!--save him!" Margaret had gasped to Peter in despair. "Save him, or I swear to you, however much I may love you, however much we may seem to be married, never shall you be a husband to me."

"That seems hard," replied Peter, shaking his head mournfully, "since it was not I who gave him over to these devils, and probably the end of it would be that I should share his fate. Still, I will do what a man can."

"No, no," she cried in despair; "do nothing that will bring you into danger." But he had gone without waiting for her answer.

It was night, and Peter sat in a secret room in a certain baker's shop in Seville. There were present there besides himself the Fray Henriques--now a secretary to the Holy Inquisition, but disguised as a layman--the woman Inez, the agent Bernaldez, and the old Jew, Israel of Granada.

"I have brought him here, never mind how," Inez was saying, pointing to Henriques. "A risky and disagreeable business enough. And now what is the use of it?"

"No use at all," answered the Fray coolly, "except to me who pocket my ten gold pieces."

"A thousand doubloons if our friend escapes safe and sound," put in the old Jew Israel. "God in Heaven! think of it, a thousand doubloons."

The secretary's eyes gleamed hungrily.

"I could do with them well enough," he answered, "and hell could spare one filthy Jew for ten years or so, but I see no way. What I do see, is that probably all of you will join him. It is a great crime to try to tamper with a servant of the Holy Office."

Bernaldez turned white, and the old Jew bit his nails; but Inez tapped the priest upon the shoulder.

"Are you thinking of betraying us?" she asked in her gentle voice.

"Look here, friend, I have some knowledge of poisons, and I swear to you that if you attempt it, you shall die within a week, tied in a double knot, and never know whence the dose came. Or I can bewitch you, I, who have not lived a dozen years among the Moors for nothing, so that your head swells and your body wastes, and you utter blasphemies, not knowing what you say, until for very shame's sake they toast you among the faggots also."

"Bewitch me!" answered Henriques with a shiver. "You have done that already, or I should not be here."

"Then, if you do not wish to be in another place before your time," went on Inez, still tapping his shoulder gently, "think, think! and find a way, worthy servant of the Holy Office."

"A thousand doubloons!--a thousand gold doubloons!" croaked old Israel, "or if you fail, sooner or later, this month or next, this year or next, death--death as slow and cruel as we can make it. There are two Inquisitions in Spain, holy Father; but one of them does its business in the dark, and your name is on its ledger."

Now Henriques was very frightened, as well he might be with all those eyes glaring at him.

"You need fear nothing," he said, "I know the devilish power of your

league too well, and that, if I kill you all, a hundred others I have never seen or heard of would dog me to my death, who have taken your accursed money."

"I am glad that you understand at last, dear friend," said the soft, mocking voice of Inez, who stood behind the monk like an evil genius, and again tapped him affectionately on the shoulder, this time with the bare blade of a poniard. "Now be quick with that plan of yours. It grows late, and all holy people should be abed."

"I have none. I defy you," he answered furiously.

"Very well, friend--very well; then I will say good night, or rather farewell, since I am not likely to meet you again in this world."

"Where are you going?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh! to the palace to meet the Marquis of Morella and a friend of his, a relation indeed. Look you here. I have had an offer of pardon for my part in that marriage if I can prove that a certain base priest knew that he was perpetrating a fraud. Well, I can prove it--you may remember that you wrote me a note--and, if I do, what happens to such a priest who chances to have incurred the hatred of a grandee of Spain and of his noble relation?"

"I am an officer of the Holy Inquisition; no one dare touch me," he gasped.

"Oh! I think that there are some who would take the risk. For instance--the king."

Fray Henriques sank back in his chair. Now he understood whom Inez meant by the noble relative of Morella, understood also that he had been trapped. "On Sunday morning," he began in a hollow whisper, "the procession will be formed, and wind through the streets of the city to the theatre, where the sermon will be preached before those who are relaxed proceed to the Quemadero. About eight o'clock it turns on to the quay for a little way only, and here will be but few spectators, since the view of the pageant is bad, nor is the road guarded there. Now, if a dozen determined men were waiting disguised as peasants with a boat at hand, perhaps they might----" and he paused.

Then Peter, who had been watching and listening to all this play, spoke for the first time, asking:

"In such an event, reverend Sir, how would those determined men know which was the victim that they sought?"

"The heretic John Castell," he answered, "will be seated on an ass, clad in a zamarra of sheepskin painted with fiends and a likeness of his own head burning--very well done, for I, who can draw, had a hand in it. Also, he alone will have a rope round his neck, by which he may be known."

"Why will he be seated on an ass?" asked Peter savagely. "Because you have tortured him so that he cannot walk?"

"Not so--not so," said the Dominican, shrinking from those fierce eyes.

"He has never been questioned at all, not a single turn of the mancuenda, I swear to you, Sir Knight. What was the use, since he openly avows himself an accursed Jew?"

"Be more gentle in your talk, friend," broke in Inez, with her familiar tap upon the shoulder. "There are those here who do not think so ill of Jews as you do in your Holy House, but who understand how to apply the mancuenda, and can make a very serviceable rack out of a plank and a pulley or two such as lie in the next room. Cultivate courtesy, most learned priest, lest before you leave this place you should add a cubit to your stature."

"Go on," growled Peter.

"Moreover," added Fray Henriques shakily, "orders came that it was not to be done. The Inquisitors thought otherwise, as they believed--doubtless in error--that he might have accomplices whose names he would give up; but the orders said that as he had lived so long in England, and only recently travelled to Spain, he could have none. Therefore he is sound--sound as a bell; never before, I am told, has an impenitent Jew gone to the stake in such good case, however worthy and

worshipful he might be."

"So much the better for you, if you do not lie," answered Peter.

"Continue!"

"There is nothing more to say, except that I shall be walking near to him with the two guards, and, of course, if he were snatched away from us, and there were no boats handy in which to pursue, we could not help it, could we? Indeed, we priests, who are men of peace, might even fly at the sight of cruel violence."

"I should advise you to fly fast and far," said Peter. "But, Inez, what hold have you on this friend of yours? He will trick everybody."

"A thousand doubloons--a thousand doubloons!" muttered old Israel like a sleepy parrot.

"He may think to screw more than that out of the carcasses of some of us, old man. Come, Inez, you are quick at this game. How can we best hold him to his word?"

"Dead, I think," broke in Bernaldez, who knew his danger as the partner and relative of Castell, and the nominal owner of the ship Margaret in which it was purposed that he should escape. "We know all that he can tell, and if we let him go he will betray us soon or late. Kill him out of the way, I say, and burn his body in the oven."

Now Henriques fell upon his knees, and with groans and tears began to implore mercy.

"Why do you complain so?" asked Inez, watching him with reflective eyes. "The end would be much gentler than that which you righteous folk mete out to many more honest men, yes, and women too. For my part, I think that the Señor Bernaldez gives good counsel. Better that you should die, who are but one, than all of us and others, for you will understand that we cannot trust you. Has any one got a rope?"

Now Henriques grovelled on the ground before her, kissing the hem of her robe, and praying her in the name of all the saints to show pity on one who had been betrayed into this danger by love of her.

"Of money you mean, Toad," she answered, kicking him with her slippered foot. "I had to listen to your talk of love while we journeyed together, and before, but here I need not, and if you speak of it again you shall go living into that baker's oven. Oh! you have forgotten it, but I have a long score to settle with you. You were a familiar of the Holy Office here at Seville--were you not?--before Morella promoted you to Motril for your zeal, and made you one of his chaplains? Well, I had a sister," And she knelt down and whispered a name into his ear.

He uttered a sound--it was more of a scream than a gasp.

"I had nothing to do with her death," he protested. "She was brought within the walls of the Holy House by some one who had a grudge against her and bore false witness."

"Yes, I know. It was you who had the grudge, you snake-souled rogue, and it was you who gave the false witness. It was you, also, who but the other day volunteered the corroborative evidence that was necessary against Castell, saying that he had passed the Rood at your house in Motril without doing it reverence, and other things. It was you, too, who urged your superiors to put him to the question, because you said he was rich and had rich friends, and much money could be wrung out of him and them, whereof you were to get your share. Oh! yes, my information is good, is it not? Even what passes in the dungeons of the Holy House comes to the ears of the woman Inez. Well, do you still think that baker's oven too hot for you?"

By this time Henriques was speechless with terror. There he knelt upon the floor, glaring at this soft-voiced, remorseless woman who had made a fool and a fool of him; who had beguiled him there that night, and who hated him so bitterly and with so just a cause. Peter was speaking now.

"It would be better not to stain our hands with the creature's blood," he said. "Caged rats give little sport, and he might be tracked. For my part, I would leave his judgment to God. Have you no other way, Inez?"

She thought a while, then prodded the Fray Henriques with her foot,

saying:

"Get up, sainted secretary to the Holy Office, and do a little writing, which will be easy to you. See, here are pens and paper. Now I'll dictate:

"Most Adorable Inez,

"Your dear message has reached me safely here in this accursed Holy House, where we lighten heretics of their sins to the benefit of their souls, and of their goods to the benefit of our own bodies----"

"I cannot write it," groaned Henriques; "it is rank heresy."

"No, only the truth," answered Inez.

"Heresy and the truth--well, they are often the same thing. They would burn me for it."

"That is just what many heretics have urged. They have died gloriously for what they hold to be the truth, why should not you? Listen," she went on more sternly. "Will you take your chance of burning on the Quemadero, which you will not do unless you betray us, or will you certainly burn more privately, but better, in a baker's oven, and within half an hour? Ah! I thought you would not hesitate. Continue your letter, most learned scribe. Are those words down? Yes. Now add these:

"I note all you tell me about the trial at the Alcazar before their Majesties. I believe that the Englishwoman will win her case. That was a very pretty trick that I played on the most noble marquis at Granada. Nothing neater was ever done, even in this place. Well, I owed him a long score, and I have paid him off in full. I should like to have seen his exalted countenance when he surveyed the features of his bride, the waiting-woman, and knew that the mistress was safe away with another man. The nephew of the king, who would like himself to be king some day, married to an English waiting-woman! Good, very good, dear Inez.

"Now, as regards the Jew, John Castell. I think that the matter may possibly be managed, provided that the money is all right, for, as you know, I do not work for nothing. Thus----" And Inez dictated with admirable lucidity those suggestions as to the rescue of Castell, with which the reader is already acquainted, ending the letter as follows:

"These Inquisitors here are cruel beasts, though fonder of money than of blood; for all their talk about zeal for the Faith is so much wind behind the mountains. They care as much for the Faith as the mountain cares for the wind, or, let us say, as I do. They wanted to torture the poor devil, thinking that he would rain maravedis; but I gave a hint in the right quarter, and their fun was stopped. Carissima, I must stop also; it is my hour for duty, but I hope to meet you as arranged, and we will have a merry evening. Love to the newly married marquis, if you meet him, and to yourself you know how much.

"Your

"HENRIQUES.

"POSTSCRIPTUM.--This position will scarcely be as remunerative as I hoped, so I am glad to be able to earn a little outside, enough to buy you a present that will make your pretty eyes shine.'

"There!" said Inez mildly, "I think that covers everything, and would burn you three or four times over. Let me read it to see that it is plainly written and properly signed, for in such matters a good deal turns on handwriting. Yes, that will do. Now you understand, don't you, if anything goes wrong about the matter we have been talking of--that is, if the worthy John Castell is not rescued, or a smell of our little plot should get into the wind--this letter goes at once to the right quarter, and a certain secretary will wish that he had never been born. Man!" she added in a hissing whisper, "you shall die by inches as my sister did."

"A thousand doubloons if the thing succeeds, and you live to claim them," croaked old Israel. "I do not go back upon my word. Death and shame and torture or a thousand doubloons. Now he knows our terms, blindfold him again, Señor Bernaldez, and away with him, for he poisons the air. But first you, Inez, be gone and lodge that letter where you know."

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That same night two cloaked figures, Peter and Bernaldez, were rowed in a little boat out to where the Margaret lay in the river, and, making her fast, slipped up the ship's side into the cabin. Here the stout English captain, Smith, was waiting for them, and so glad was the honest fellow to see Peter that he cast his arms about him and hugged him, for they had not met since that desperate adventure of the boarding of the San Antonio.

"Is your ship fit for sea, Captain?" asked Peter.

"She will never be fitter," he answered. "When shall I get sailing orders?"

"When the owner comes aboard," answered Peter.

"Then we shall stop here until we rot; they have trapped him in their Inquisition. What is in your mind, Peter Brome?--what is in your mind? Is there a chance?"

"Aye, Captain, I think so, if you have a dozen fellows of the right English stuff between decks."

"We have got that number, and one or two more. But what's the plan?"

Peter told him.

"Not so bad," said Smith, slapping his heavy hand upon his knee; "but risky--very risky. That Inez must be a good girl. I should like to marry her, notwithstanding her by-gones."

Peter laughed, thinking what an odd couple they would make. "Hear the rest, then talk," he said. "See now! On Saturday next Mistress Margaret and I are to be married in the cathedral; then, towards sunset, the Marquis of Morella and I run our course in the great bull-ring yonder, and you and half a dozen of your men will be present. Now, I may conquer or I may fail----"

"Never!--never!" said the captain. "I wouldn't give a pair of old boots for that fine Spaniard's chance when you get at him. Why, you will crimp him like a cod-fish!"

"God knows!" answered Peter. "If I win, my wife and I make our adieux to their Majesties, and ride away to the quay, where the boat will be waiting, and you will row us on board the Margaret. If I fail, you will take up my body, and, accompanied by my widow, bring it in the same fashion on board the Margaret, for I shall give it out that in this case I wish to be embalmed in wine and taken back to England for burial. In either event, you will drop your ship a little way down the river round the bend, so that folk may think that you have sailed. In the

darkness you must work her back with the tide and lay her behind those old hulks, and if any ask you why, say that three of your men have not yet come aboard, and that you have dropped back for them, and whatever else you like. Then, in case I should not be alive to guide you, you and ten or twelve of the best sailors will land at the spot that this gentleman will show you to-morrow, wearing Spanish cloaks so as not to attract attention, but being well armed underneath them, like idlers from some ship who had come ashore to see the show. I have told you how you may know Master Castell. When you see him make a rush for him, cut down any that try to stop you, tumble him into the boat, and row for your lives to the ship, which will slip her moorings and get up her canvas as soon as she sees you coming, and begin to drop down the river with the tide and wind, if there is one. That is the plot, but God alone knows the end of it! which depends upon Him and the sailors. Will you play this game for the love of a good man and the rest of us? If you succeed, you shall be rich for life, all of you."

"Aye," answered the captain, "and there's my hand on it. So sure as my name is Smith, we will hook him out of that hell if men can do it, and not for the money either. Why, Peter, we have sat here idle so long, waiting for you and our lady, that we shall be glad of the fun. At any rate, there will be some dead Spaniards before they have done with us, and, if we are worsted, I'll leave the mate and enough hands upon the ship to bring her safe to Tilbury. But we won't be--we won't be. By this day week we will all be rolling homewards across the Bay with never a Spaniard within three hundred miles, you and your lady and Master

Castell, too. I know it! I tell you, lad, I know it!"

"How do you know it?" asked Peter curiously.

"Because I dreamed it last night. I saw you and Mistress Margaret sitting sweet as sugar, with your arms around each other's middles, while I talked to the master, and the sun went down with the wind blowing stiff from sou-sou-west, and a gale threatening. I tell you that I dreamed it--I who am not given to dreams."