

CHAPTER XXXIII

TRAPPED

It will be remembered that some hours before Otter found himself in the light of day, after his conquest of the reptile god, Leonard found himself in a very different place, namely, in a secret passage bearing the senseless form of Juanna in his arms, and being guided by Soa, whither he knew not.

On they went through various tunnels, of the turnings of which Leonard tried to keep count in his mind, till at length Soa ushered him into a rock-hewn cell that evidently had been prepared for their reception, for on one side of it stood a bed covered with skin blankets, and on the other a table provided with the best food that the country could offer. At a sign from Soa he laid Juanna down upon the bed, whereon the woman instantly threw a blanket over her, so as to hide her face from the eyes of the curious. Then, of a sudden Leonard felt himself seized from behind, and while his arms were held by two of the priests, a third, under Soa's direction, removed his revolver and hunting knife, which weapons were carried away.

"You treacherous hag!" said Leonard to Soa, "be careful lest I kill you."

"To kill me, Deliverer, would be to kill yourself and another. These

things are taken from you because it is not safe that you should have them; such toys are not for angry children. Stay," she said to a fourth priest, "search his pockets."

The man did as he was ordered, placing everything that Leonard had about him, such as his watch, Francisco's notebook and rosary, and the great ruby stone, in a little pile upon the table. Presently he came to the fragment of poison which was wrapped in a square of kid-skin. Soa took it, and after examination said:

"Why, Deliverer, you have been borrowing medicine that will bring you bad luck if you keep it," and going to a small aperture in the wall of the cell, she threw the tiny packet out of it, and after it a second packet which Leonard recognised as having been taken from Juanna's hair.

"There, now you cannot hurt yourself," she added in Portuguese. "Let me tell you something: so long as you remain quiet all will be well, but if you attempt violence or escape, then you shall be bound and placed by yourself, also you will bring about the death of the Shepherdess yonder. Be warned then by me, White Man, and turn gentle, for remember that my day has come at last and you are in my power."

"That is very clear, my estimable friend," answered Leonard, controlling his wrath as best he might. "But for your sake I hope that the hour will never come when you shall be in mine, for then I may remember more than you wish. I do not in the least understand what you are aiming at, nor

do I much care so long as a certain person is protected."

"Do not fear, Deliverer, she shall be protected. As you know well, I hate you, and yet I keep you alive because without you she might die; therefore, for her sake be careful. Attempt no violence towards me or my father if we visit you alone, for we shall do so in order that she may not be discovered, and the moment that you lift a hand against us will be the beginning of her doom. And now I must leave you for a while, for something passes in the temple which I desire to see. If she awakes before I return, be careful not to frighten her. Farewell!"

Then Soa went taking the priests with her, and the massive timber door was closed upon them.

After he had restored his various belongings to his pockets, the revolver and the knife which had been removed excepted, Leonard turned down the rug and looked at Juanna, who appeared to be plunged in a deep and happy sleep, for there was a smile upon her face. Next he examined the place where they were confined. It had two doors, that by which they had entered and a second of equal solidity. The only other opening was the slit out of which Soa had dropped the poison. It was shaped like an inverted loophole, the narrow end facing inward. This aperture attracted Leonard's attention, both on account of its unusual form and because of the sounds that reached him through it. Of these, the first and most pervading was a noise of rushing water. Then after a while he distinguished a roar as of a multitude shouting, that was repeated again

and again at intervals. Now he knew where they must be. They were hidden away in the rock of the temple, somewhere in the immediate neighbourhood of the raging pool that lay in front of the colossus, and these sounds which he heard were the clamour of the people who watched the fate of Otter and Francisco.

This conviction was terrible enough, but had he known that, as it entered his mind, the body of his friend the priest was travelling on its last journey within four feet of his eyes, Leonard might have been even more prostrated than he was.

For an hour or more the shouting continued, then followed a silence broken only by the everlasting murmur of the waters without.

When Soa departed she had left a fragment of dip made of goat-fat burning upon the floor, but very soon this expired, leaving them in darkness. Now, however, light began to flow into the dungeon through the slit in the rock, and it seemed to Leonard that the character of this light was clearer than that to which they had been accustomed in this gloomy land.

After a while Leonard sat down upon a stool, which he placed close to Juanna's bed, just where the beam of light pierced the shadows, and groaned aloud in the bitterness of his heart. It was over; the pure-hearted martyr, Francisco, was dead, and with him Otter, his faithful friend and servant. Except Soa, who had become an active

enemy, at least so far as he was concerned, of all who travelled to this hellish country Juanna and he alone were left alive, and sooner or later fate must overtake them also. The greatest and last failure of his life was about to be consummated, and he would go down into a nameless grave, there to be lost, having for many years suffered and toiled to no purpose, pursuing a chimera.

Juanna still slept heavily under the influence of the drug, and he was glad of it, for when she woke it must be to a worse misery than any that had gone before. Partly for something to do, and partly because the cravings of nature made themselves felt even through his sorrows, Leonard turned to the table and ate and drank of the viands there, though not without fear that they might be doctored. As the food took effect upon him some share of hope and courage entered into his heart, for it is a true saying that a full stomach makes a brave man. After all they two still breathed and were unharmed in body, nor was it absolutely certain that they would be called upon to give up the ghost at present. This was much.

Moreover, he had lived long enough to win the love of the fearless and beautiful girl who slept beside him, and though perhaps under such circumstances love, however true and passionate, ceases to occupy a commanding place in a man's heart, even then he felt that this was more, and that happier days might dawn when it would be, if not everything, at least most of all.

As he thought thus, he saw colour creep into Juanna's pale face; then she sighed, opened her eyes, and sat up.

"Where am I?" she said, glancing round wildly. "This is not the bed on which I lay down. Oh!" she started, "is it over?"

"Hush, dear, hush! I am with you," said Leonard, taking her hand.

"So I see. But where are the others, and what is this dreadful place? Are we buried alive, Leonard? It looks like a tomb."

"No, we are only prisoners. Come, eat and drink something, and then I will tell you the story."

She rose to obey him, and for the first time her eyes fell upon the robe she wore.

"Why, this is Francisco's! Where is Francisco?"

"Eat and drink," he repeated.

She did his bidding mechanically, watching his face the while with wondering and frightened eyes.

"Now," she said, "tell me. I can bear this no longer. Where are Francisco and Otter?"

"Alas! Juanna, they are dead," he answered solemnly.

"Dead," she wailed, wringing her hand. "Francisco dead! Why then are we still live?"

"Have courage and listen, Juanna. After you went to sleep in the palace, Soa came to us with a plan which we accepted."

"What was the plan?" she asked hoarsely.

Twice he strove to tell her and twice he failed--the words would not come.

"Go on. Why do you torment me?"

"It was this, Juanna: that Francisco should be dressed in the robe of Aca, and offered up with Otter in your place, while you were hidden away."

"Has it been done?" she whispered.

"I believe so," Leonard replied, bowing his head to his breast. "We are prisoners in a secret cell beneath the feet of the statue. There has been great noise and confusion without, and now for some time silence."

Then Juanna sprang up and stood over him with flashing eyes.

"How dared you do this?" she said. "Who gave you leave to do it? I thought that you were a man, now I see that you are a coward."

"Juanna," said Leonard, "it is useless for you to talk like this. Whatever was done was done for your sake, not for that of anybody else."

"Oh, yes, you say so, but I believe that you made a plot with Soa to murder Francisco in order that you might save your own life. I have done with you. I will never speak to you again."

"You can please yourself about that," answered Leonard, who by now was thoroughly enraged, "but I am going to speak to you. Look here, you have said words to me for which, were you a man, I would do my best to be avenged upon you. But as you are a woman I can only answer them, and then wash my hands of you. As you must know, or will know when you come to your right mind, I would gladly have taken Francisco's place. But it was impossible, for had I attempted to dress myself up in the robe of Aca, I should instantly have been discovered, and you would have paid the price of my folly. We all knew this, and after we had consulted, things were arranged as I have told you. I only consented to your being brought here on the condition that I was allowed to accompany you for your protection. Now I wish that I had left it alone and gone with Francisco, then perhaps I should have found peace instead of bitter words and reproaches. However, do not be afraid, for I think it probable

that I shall soon follow him. I know that you were very fond of this man--this hero--and also, either by accident or design, that you had succeeded in making him a great deal too fond of you for his peace of mind; therefore I make excuses for your conduct, which, with all such deductions, still remains perfectly intolerable."

He paused and looked at her as she sat on the edge of the couch, biting her lip and glancing towards him now and again with a curious expression on her beautiful face, in which grief, pride, and anger all had their share. Yet at that moment Juanna was thinking not of Francisco and his sacrifice, but of the man before her whom she had never loved so well as now, when he spoke to her thus bitterly, paying her back in her own coin.

"I cannot pretend to match you in scolding and violence," she said, "therefore I will give up argument. Perhaps, however, when you come to your right mind, you will remember that my life is my own, and that I gave nobody permission to save it at the cost of another person's."

"What is done, is done," answered Leonard moodily, for his anger had burnt out. "Another time I will not interfere without your express wish. By the way, my poor friend asked me to give you these," and he handed her the rosary and the notebook; "he has written something for you to read on the last sheet of the journal, and he bade me say that, should you live to escape, he hoped that you will wear these in memory of him," and he touched the beads, "and also that you would not forget him in

your prayers."

Juanna took the journal, and holding it to the light, opened it at hazard. The first thing that she saw was her own name, for in truth it contained, among many other matters, a record of the priest's unhappy infatuation from the first moment of their meeting, and also of his pious efforts to overcome it. Turning the pages rapidly she came to the last on which there was any writing. It ran as follows:

"Senora, of the circumstances under which I write these words you will learn in due course. The pages of this journal, should you deign to study them, will reveal to you my shameful weakness. But if I am a priest I am also a man--who soon shall be neither, but, as I hope, an immortal spirit--and the man in me, following those desires of the spirit that find expression through the flesh, has sinned and loved you. Forgive me this crime, as I trust it will be forgiven elsewhere, though myself I cannot pardon it. Be happy with that noble gentleman who has won your heart and who himself worships you as you deserve. May you be protected from all the dangers that now surround you, as I think you will, and may the blessing of Heaven be with you and about you for many peaceful years, till at length you come to the peace that passeth understanding! And when from time to time you think of me, may you in your heart couple my name with certain holy words: 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' Senora, pardon me and farewell."

Juanna read this touching and noble-hearted adieu with an ever-growing wonder, and when she had finished it, put down the book crying aloud,

"Oh! what have I done to deserve such devotion as this?" Then with a strange and bewildering inconsequence she flung herself into Leonard's arms, and burying her head upon his breast she began to weep.

When she was somewhat calmer he also read the letter and closed the book, saying:

"The world is poorer by a perfect gentleman. He was too good for any of us, Juanna."

"I think so," she answered.

Just then they heard a sound without the door; it opened, and Nam entered accompanied by Soa.

"Deliverer," said the aged priest, whose countenance and troubled eyes bore traces of many conflicting emotions, "and you, Shepherdess, I come to speak with you. As you see, I am alone, except for this woman, but should you attempt any violence towards her or me, that will be the signal for your deaths. With much toil and at no little risk to myself I have spared the life of the Shepherdess, causing the white man, your

companion, to be offered up in her place."

"Has that offering been accomplished?" broke in Leonard, who could not restrain his anxiety to learn what had happened.

"I will be frank with you, Deliverer," answered the high-priest, when Juanna had translated his question, "since the truth cannot hurt me, for now we know too much of one another's secrets to waste time in bandying lies. I know, for instance, that the Shepherdess and the dwarf are no gods, but mortal like ourselves; and you know that I have dared to affront the true gods by changing the victim whom they had chosen. The sacrifice has been accomplished, but with so many signs and wonders that I am bewildered; the People of the Mist are bewildered also, so that none know what to think. The white man, your companion, was hurled fainting into the waters when the dawn had broken upon the mountain and was seen to be grey; but the dwarf, your servant, did not wait to have that office done for him, for he sprang thither himself, ay, and took one with him."

"Bravo, Otter!" cried Leonard; "I knew that you would die hard."

"Hard did he die indeed, Deliverer," said Nam with a sigh, "so hard that even now many swear that he was a god and not a man. Scarcely had they all vanished into the pool when a wonder chanced such as has not been told of in our records: Deliverer, the white dawn turned to red, perchance, as I cried to calm the people, because the false gods had met

their doom."

"Then the true ones must be singularly blind," said Juanna, "seeing that I, whom you dare to call a false god, am still alive."

This argument silenced Nam for a moment, but presently he answered.

"Yes, Shepherdess, you are still alive," he said, laying a curious emphasis on the "still." "And, indeed," he added hastily, "if you are not foolish you may long remain so, both of you, for I have no desire to shed your blood who only seek to end my last days in peace. But listen to the end of the tale: While the people wondered at the omen of the changed dawn, it was seen that the dwarf, your servant, was not dead there in the pool. Yes! this was seen, Deliverer: to and fro in the troubled waters rushed the great Water Dweller, and after him, keeping pace with him, went that dwarf who was named Otter. Ay, round and round and down to the lowest depths, though how it could be that a man might swim with the Snake none can say."

"Oh, bravo, Otter!" said Leonard again, bethinking him of an explanation of the mystery which he did not reveal to Nam. "Well, what was the end of it?"

"That none know for certain, Deliverer," answered the priest perplexedly. "At last the Water Dweller, from whose mouth poured blood, was seen to sink with the dwarf; then he rose again and entered the

cave, his home. But whether the dwarf entered with him, or no, I cannot say, for some swear one thing and some another, and in the foam and shadow it was hard to see; moreover, none will venture there to learn the truth."

"Well, dead or alive, he made a good fight for it," said Leonard. "And now, Nam, what is your business with us?"

This question appeared to puzzle the priest a little, for, to speak truth, he did not care to disclose the exact nature of his business, which was to separate Leonard from Juanna, without force if possible.

"I came here, Deliverer," he answered, "to tell you what had happened."

"Exactly," said Leonard, "to tell me that you have murdered my best friend, and one who was but lately your god. I thank you for your news, Nam, and now, if I might make bold to ask it, what are your plans with reference to ourselves--I mean until it suits you to send us after our companions?"

"Believe me, Deliverer, my plan is to save your lives. If the others have been sacrificed it was no fault of mine, for there are forces behind me that I cannot control even when I guide them. The land is in confusion and full of strange rumours. I know not what may happen during the next few days, but till they are over you must lie hid. This is a poor place in which to dwell, but there is none other safe and secret.

Still, here is another chamber which you can use; perchance you have already seen it," and placing his hand upon what appeared to be a latch, he opened the second door which Leonard had noticed previously, revealing a cell of very similar construction to that in which they were, and of somewhat larger size.

"See, Deliverer," he went on, "here is the place," and he stepped forward to enter the cell, then drew back as though in courtesy to allow Leonard to pass in before him.

For once Leonard's caution forsook him, for at the moment he was thinking of other things. Almost mechanically he passed the threshold. Scarcely were his feet over it when he remembered the character of his host and the lodging, and turned quickly to come back.

It was too late, for even as he turned the heavy timber door closed in his face with a crash, and he was caged.