

## CHAPTER V

### KARI GOES

As it chanced during the remaining days of that journey, Quilla and I were not again alone together (that is to say, except once for a few minutes), for we were never out of eyeshot of someone in our company. Thus Kari clung to me very closely, indeed, and when I asked him why, told me bluntly that it was for my safety's sake. A god to remain a god, he said, should live alone in a temple. When he began to mix with others of the earth and to do those things they did, to eat and to drink, to laugh and to frown; even to slip in the mud or to stumble over the stones in the common path, those others would come to think that there was small difference between god and man. Especially would they think so if he were observed to love the company of women or to melt beneath their soft glances.

Now I grew sore at the sting of these arrows which of late he had loved to shoot at me, and without pretending to misunderstand him, said outright:

"The truth is, Kari, that you are jealous of the lady Quilla as once you were jealous of another."

He considered the matter in his grave fashion, and answered:

"Yes, Master, that is the truth, or part of it. You saved my life, and sheltered me when I was alone in a strange land, and for this and for yourself I came to love you very greatly, and love, if it be true, is always jealous and always hates a rival."

"There are different sorts of loves," I said; "that of a man for man is one, that of man for woman is another."

"Yes, Master, and that of woman for man is a third; moreover, there is this about it--it is the acid which turns all other loves sour. Where are a man's friends when a woman has him by the heart?--although perchance they love him better than ever will the woman who at bottom loves herself best of all. Still, let that be, for so Nature works, and who can fight against Nature? What Quilla takes, Kari loses, and Kari must be content to lose."

"Have you done?" I asked angrily, who wearied of his homilies.

"No, Master. The matter of jealousy is small and private; so is the matter of love. But, Master, you have not told me outright whether you love the lady Quilla, and, what is more important, whether she loves you."

"Then I will tell you now. I do and she does."

"You love the lady Quilla and she says that she loves you, which may or

may not be true, or if true to-day may be false to-morrow. For your sake I hope that it is not true."

"Why?" I said in a rage.

"Because, Master, in this land there are many sorts of poison, as I have learned to my cost. Also there are knives, if not of steel, and many who might wish to discover whether a god who courts women like a man can be harmed by poisons or pierced by knives. Oh!" he added, in another tone, ceasing from his bitter jests, "believe me that I would shield, not mock you. This Lady Quilla is a queen in a great game of pieces such as you taught me to play far away in England, and without her perchance that game cannot be won, or so those who play it think. Now you would steal that queen and thereby, as they also think, bring death and destruction on a country. It is not safe, Master. There are plenty of fair women in this land; take your pick of them, but leave that one queen alone."

"Kari," I answered, "if there be such a game, are you not perchance one of the players on this side or on that?"

"It may be so, Master, and if you have not guessed it, perhaps one day I will tell you upon which side I play. It may even be that for my own sake I should be glad to see you lift this queen from off the board, and that what I tell you is for love of you and not of myself, also of the lady Quilla, who, if you fall, falls with you down through the black night into the arms of the Moon, her mother. But I have said enough, and

indeed it is foolish to waste breath in such talk, since Fate will have its way with both of you, and the end of the game in which we play is already written in Pachacamac's book for every one of us. Did not Rimac speak of it the other night? So play on, play on, and let Destiny fulfil itself. If I dared to give counsel it was only because he who watches the battle with a general's eye sees more of it than he who fights."

Then he bowed in his stately fashion and left me, and it was long ere he spoke to me again of this matter of Quilla and our love for one another.

When he was gone my anger against him passed, since I saw that he was warning me of more than he dared to say, not for himself, but because he loved me. Moreover, I was afraid, for I felt that I was moving in the web of a great plot that I did not understand, of which Quilla and those cold-eyed lordlings of her company and the chief whose guest I had been, and Kari himself, and many others as yet unknown to me, spun the invisible threads. One day these might choke me. Well, if they did, what then? Only I feared for Quilla--greatly I feared for Quilla.

On the day following my talk with Kari at length we reached the great city of the Chancas, which, after them, was called Chanca--at least I always knew it by that name. From the dawn we had been passing through rich valleys where dwelt thousands of these Chancas who, I could see, were a mighty people that bore themselves proudly and like soldiers. In multitudes they gathered themselves together upon either side of the road, chiefly to catch a sight of me, the white god who had risen from

the ocean, but also to greet their princess, the lady Quilla.

Indeed, now I learned for the first time how high a princess she was, since when her litter passed, these folk prostrated themselves, kissing the air and the dust. Moreover, as soon as she came among them Quilla's bearing changed, for her carriage grew more haughty and her words fewer. Now she seldom spoke save to issue a command, not even to myself, although I noted that she studied me with her eyes when she thought that I was not observing her.

During our midday halt I looked up and saw that an army was approaching us, five thousand men or more, and asked Kari its meaning.

"These," he answered, "are some of the troops of Huaracha, King of the Chancas, whom he sends out to greet his daughter and only child, also his guest, the White God."

"Some of the troops! Has he more, then?"

"Aye, Master, ten times as many, as I think. This is a great people; almost as great as that of the Incas who live at Cuzco. Come now into the tent and put on your armour, that you may be ready to meet them."

I did so, and, stepping forth clad in the shining steel, took my stand where Kari showed me, upon a rise of ground. On my right at a little distance stood Quilla, more splendidly arrayed than I had ever seen

her, and behind her her maidens and the captains and counsellors of her following.

The army drew nearer, marshalled in regiments and halted on the plain some two hundred yards away. Presently from it advanced generals and old men, clad in white, whom I took to be priests and elders. They approached to the number of twenty or more and bowed deeply, first to Quilla, who bent her head in acknowledgment and then to myself. After this they went to speak with Quilla and her following, but what they said I did not know. All the while, however, their eyes were fixed on me. Then Quilla brought them to me and one by one they bowed before me, saying something in a language which I did not understand well, for it was somewhat different from that which Kari had taught me.

After this we entered the litters, and, escorted by that great army, were borne forward down valleys and over ridges till about sunset we came to a large cup-like plain in the centre of which stood the city called Chanca. Of this city I did not see much except that it was very great as the darkness was falling when we entered, and afterwards I could not go out because of the crowds that pressed about me. I was borne down a wide street to a house that stood in a large garden which was walled about. Here in this fine house I found food prepared for me, and drink, all of it served in dishes and cups of gold and silver; also there were women who waited upon me, as did Kari who now was called Zapana and seemed to be my slave.

When I had eaten I went out alone into the garden, for on this plain the air was very warm and pleasant. It was a beautiful garden, and I wandered about among its avenues and flowering bushes, glad to be solitary and to have time to think. Amongst other things I wondered where Quilla might be, for of her I had seen nothing from the time that we entered the town. I hated to be parted from her, because in this vast strange land into which I had wandered she was the only one for whom I had come to care and without whom I felt I should die of loneliness.

There was Kari, it is true, who I knew loved me in his fashion, but between him and me there was a great gulf fixed, not only of race and faith, but of something now which I did not wholly understand. In London he had been my servant and his ends were my ends; on our wandering he had been my companion in great adventures. But now I knew that other interests and desires had taken a hold of him, and that he trod a road of which I could not see the goal; and no longer thought much of me save when what I did or desired to do came between him and that goal.

Therefore Quilla alone was left to me, and Quilla was about to be taken away. Oh! I wearied of this strange land with its snowclad mountains and rich valleys, its hordes of dark-skinned people with large eyes, smiling faces, and secret hearts; its great cities, temples, and palaces filled with useless gold and silver; its brilliant sunshine and rushing rivers, its gods, kings, and policies. They were alien to me, every one of them, and if Quilla were taken away and I were left quite alone, then I thought that it would be well to die.

Something moved behind a palm trunk of the avenue in which I walked, and not knowing whether it were beast or man, I laid my hand upon my sword which I still wore, although I had taken off the armour. Before I could draw it my wrist was grasped and a soft voice whispered in my ear:

"Fear nothing; it is I--Quilla."

Quilla it was, wrapped in a long hooded cloak such as the peasant women wear in the cold country, for she threw back the hood and a beam of starlight fell upon her face.

"Hearken!" she said. "It is dangerous to both of us, but I have come to bid you farewell."

"Farewell! I feared it would be thus, but why so soon, Quilla?"

"For this reason, Love and Lord. I have seen my father the King, and made my report to him of the matter with which I was sent to deal among the Yuncas. It pleased him, and since his mood was gracious, I opened my heart to him and told him that no longer did I wish to be given in marriage to Urco, who will soon put on the Inca fringe, for, as you know, it is to him that I am promised!"

"What did he answer, Quilla?"



"He answered: 'This means, Daughter, that you have met some other man to whom you do wish to be given in marriage. I will not ask his name, since if I knew it it would be my duty to kill him, however high and noble he might be.'"

"Then he guesses, Quilla?"

"I think he guesses; I think that already some have whispered in his ear, but he does not wish to listen who desires to remain deaf and blind."

"Did he say no more, Quilla?"

"He said much more; he said this--now I tell you secrets, Lord, and place my honour in your keeping, for having given you all the rest, why should I not give you that also? He said: 'Daughter, you who have been my ambassador, you, my only child, who know all my counsel, know also that there is about to be the greatest war that the land of Tavantinsuyu has ever known, war between the two mighty nations of the Quichuas of Cuzco whereof the old Upanqui is king and god, and the Chancas whereof I am king and you, if you live, in a day to come will be the queen. No longer can these two lions dwell in the same forest; one of them must devour the other; nor shall I fight alone, since on our side are all the Yuncas of the coast who, as you report to me, are ripe for rebellion. But, as you also report, and as I have learned from others, they are not yet ready. Moons must go by before their armies are joined to mine and I

throw off the mask. Is it not so?'

"I answered that it was so, and my father went on:

"Then during that time, Daughter, a dust must be raised that will hide the shining of my spears, and, Daughter, you are that dust. To-morrow the old Inca Upanqui visits me here with a small army. I read your thought. It is--Why do you not kill him and his army? Daughter, for this reason. He is very aged and about to lay down his sceptre, who grows feeble of mind and body. If I killed him what would it serve me, seeing that he has left his son, Urco, who will be Inca, ruling at Cuzco, and that of his soldiers not one in fifty will be with him here? Moreover, he is my guest, and the gods frown on those who slay their guests, nor will men ever trust them more.'

"Now I answered: 'You spoke of me as a cloud of dust, Father; how, then, can this poor dust serve your ends and those of the Chanca people?'

"Thus Daughter,' he answered. 'With your own consent you are promised in marriage to Urco. Upanqui the Inca has heard rumours that the Chancas prepare for war. Therefore, he who travels on his last journey through certain of his dominions comes to lead you away, to be Urco's bride, saying to himself, "If those rumours are true, King Huaracha will withhold his only child and heiress, since never will he make war upon Cuzco if she rules there as its queen." Therefore, if I refuse you to him, he will withdraw and begin the war, rolling down his thousands

upon us before we are ready, and bringing the Chancas to destruction and enslavement. Therefore also not only my fate, but the fate of all your country lies in your hand.'

"Father,' I said, 'tell me, who was ever dear to you that lack sons, is there no escape? Must I eat this bitter bread? Before you answer, learn that you have guessed aright, and that I who, when I made that promise, cared for no man, have come to feel the burning of love's fire!'

"Now he looked at me awhile, then said: 'Child of the Moon, there is but one escape, and it must be sought--in the moon. The dead cannot be given in marriage. If your strait is so sore, though it would cut me to the heart, perchance it is better that you should die and go whither doubtless he whom you love will soon follow you. Depart now and counsel with Heaven in your sleep. To-morrow, before Upanqui comes, we will talk again.'

"So I knelt and kissed the hand of the King, my father, and left him, wondering at his nobleness who could show such a road to his only child, though its treading would mean woe to him and mayhap the ruin of his hopes. Still that road is an old one among the women of my people, and why should I not walk it, as thousands have done before me?"

"How came you here?" I asked hoarsely.

"Lord, I guessed that you would be walking in this garden which joins on

to that of the palace, and--none were about, and--the door in the wall was open. Indeed, it was almost as though I were left alone and unwatched of set purpose. So I came and sought--and found, having a question to put to you."

"What question, Quilla?"

"This: Shall I live or shall I die? Speak the word and I obey. Yet ere you speak, remember that if I live we meet for the last time, since very soon I go hence to become the wife of Urco and play the part that is prepared for me?"

Now when I, Hubert, heard these words, I felt as though my heart would burst within my breast and knew not what to say. So to gain time I asked her:

"Which do you desire--to live or to die?"

She laughed a little as she answered:

"That is a strange question, Lord. Have I not told you that if I live I must do so befouled as one of Urco's women, whereas, if I die, I die clean and take my love with me to where Urco cannot come, but where, mayhap, another may follow at the appointed time."

"Which time would be very soon, I think, Quilla, seeing that he who had

spoiled all this pretty plot would scarcely be left long upon the earth, even if he wished to stay there. Yet I say: Do not die--live on."

"To become Urco's woman! That is strange counsel from a lover's lips, Lord; such as would scarcely have been given by any of our nobles."

"Aye, Quilla, and it is given because I am not of your people and do not think as they think, who reject their customs. You are not yet Urco's wife, and may be rid of him by other paths than that of death, but from the grave there is no escape."

"And in the grave there is no more fear, Lord. Thither Urco cannot come; there are neither wars nor plottings; there honour does not beckon and love hold back. I say that I will die and make an end, as for like causes many of my blood have done, though not here and now. When I am about to be delivered to Urco then I will die, and perchance not alone. Perchance he will accompany me," she added slowly.

"And if this happens, what shall I do?"

"Live on, Lord, and find other women to love you, as a god should. There are many in this land fairer and wiser than I, and, save myself, you may take whom you will."

"Listen, Quilla. I have a story to tell you."

Then, as briefly as I could, I set out the tale of Blanche and of her end, while she hung upon my every word.

"Oh! I grieve for you," she said, when I had finished.

"You grieve for me, and yet, what she did for my sake you would do also, so that, as it were, both my hands must be dyed with blood. This first terror I have borne, but if a second falls upon me then I know that I shall go mad and perish in this way or in that, and you, Quilla, will be my murderess."

"No, no, not that!" she murmured.

"Then swear to me by your god and by your spirit, that you will do yourself no harm, whatever chances, and that if die you must, it shall be with me for company."

"Is your love so great that you would dare this for my sake, Lord?"

"I think so, though not till all else had failed. I think that if you were taken from me, Quilla, I could not live on here in loneliness and exile--however great the sin. But do you swear?"

"Aye, Love and Lord, I swear, for your sake. Moreover, I add to the oath. If perhaps we should escape these perils and come together, I will be such a wife to you as never man has had. I will wrap you round with

love and lift you up to be a king, that you may live in glory forgetting your home across the sea, and all the sorrows that befell you there. Children you shall have also of whom you need not be ashamed, though my dark blood runs in them, and armies at command and palaces filled with gold, and all royal joys. And if perchance the gods declare against us, and we pass from the world together, then I think, oh! then I think that I shall give you finer gifts than these, though what they are I know not yet, since to the power of love there is no end--here on earth or yonder in the skies."

I stared at her face in the starlight, and oh! it had grown splendid. No longer was it that of a woman, since through it, like light through pearl, shone a soul divine. It might have been a goddess who stood beside me, for those eyes were holy and her embrace that wrapped me close was not that of the flesh alone.

"I must be gone," she whispered, "but now I go without fear. Perchance we may not speak again for long, but trust me always. Play your part and I will play mine. Follow me wherever I am taken and keep near to me, if you may, as ever my spirit shall be near to you. Then what matters anything, even if we are slain? Farewell, beloved, kiss me and farewell."

Another moment and she had glided away and was lost in the shadows.

She was gone, and I stood amazed and overcome. Oh! what a love it was that this alien woman had given to me and how could I be worthy of it? Now I forgot my griefs; now I no longer mourned because I was an outcast who nevermore might look upon the land where I was born, nor see the face of one my own race or blood. All my loss was paid back to me again and yet again, in the coin of the glory of this woman whom I had won. Dangers rose about us, but I feared them no more, because I knew that her love's conquering feet would stamp them flat and lead me safe to a joyful treasure-house of splendour of spirit and of body where we should dwell side by side, triumphant and unafraid.

Whilst I thought thus, lost in a rapture such as I had not felt since Blanche kissed me at the mouth of the Hastings cave after I had killed the three Frenchmen with as many arrows from my black bow, I heard a sound and looked up to see a man standing before me.

"Who is it?" I asked, grasping my sword, for his face was hidden in the shadows.

"I," answered a voice which I knew to be that of Kari.

"Then how did you come here? I saw no one pass the open ground."

"Master, you are not the only one who loves to walk in gardens in the quiet of the night. I was here before yourself, behind yonder tree," and



he pointed to a palm not three paces distant.

"Then, Kari, you must have seen----"

"Yes, Master, I saw and heard, not everything, because there came a point at which I shut my eyes and stopped my ears, but still much."

"I am minded to kill you, Kari," I said between my teeth, "who play the spy upon me."

"I guessed it would be so, Master," he replied in his gentlest voice, "and for that reason, as you will notice, I am standing out of reach of your sword. You wonder why I am here. I will tell you. It is not from any desire to watch your love-makings which weary me, who have seen such before, but rather that I might find secrets, of which love is always the loser, and those secrets I have learned. How could I have come by them otherwise, Master?"

"Surely you deserve to die," I exclaimed furiously.

"I think not, Master. But listen and judge for yourself. I have told you something of my story, now you shall hear more, after which we will talk of what I do or do not deserve. I am the eldest son of the Inca Upanqui, and Urco, of whom you have been talking is my younger brother. But Upanqui, our father, loved Urco's mother while mine he did not love, and swore to her before she died that against right and law, Urco, her

son, should be Inca after him. Therefore he hated me because I stood in Urco's path; therefore too many troubles befell me, and I was given over into Urco's hand, so that he took my wife and tried to poison me, and the rest you know. Now it was needful to me to learn how things went, and for this reason I listened to the talk between you and a certain lady. It told me that Upanqui, my father, comes here to-morrow, which indeed I knew already, and much else that I had not heard. This being so I must vanish away, since doubtless Upanqui or his councillors would know me again, and as they are all of them friends of Urco, perhaps I should taste more poison and of a stronger sort."

"Whither will you vanish, Kari?"

"I know not, Master, or if I know, I will not say, who have but just been taught afresh how secrets can pass from ear to ear. I must lie hid, that is enough. Yet do not think that therefore I shall desert you--I, while I live, will watch over you, a stranger in my country, as you watched over me when I was a stranger in your England."

"I thank you," I answered, "and certainly you watch well--too well, sometimes, as I have found to-night."

"You think it pleases me to spy upon you and a certain lady," went on Kari with an unruffled voice, "but it is not so. What I do is for good reasons, amongst others that I may protect you both, and if I can, bring about what you desire. That lady has a great heart, as I learned but

now, and after all you did well to love her, as she does well to love you. Therefore, although the dangers are so many, if I am able, I will help you in your love and bring you together, yes, and save her from the arms of Urco. Nay, ask me not how, for I do not know, and the case seems desperate."

"But if you go, what shall I do alone?" I asked, alarmed.

"Bide here, I think, Lord, giving it out that your servant Zapana has deserted you. Indeed it seems that this you must do, since the king of this country will scarcely suffer you to be the companion of his daughter upon her marriage journey to Cuzco, even if Upanqui so desires. Nor would it be wise, for if he did, misfortune might befall you on the road. There are some women, Lord, who cannot keep their love out of their eyes, and henceforward there will be plenty to watch the eyes and hearken to the most secret sighings of one of the greatest of them. Now farewell until I come to you again or send others on my behalf. Trust me, I pray you, since to whomever else I may seem false, to you I am true; yes, to you and to another because she has become a part of you."

Then before I could answer, Kari took my hand and touched it with his lips. Another moment and I had lost sight of him in the shadows.