

CHAPTER IX

KARI COMES TO HIS OWN

When I awoke on the following morning in the splendid chamber of which I have spoken, it was to find that my armour and arms had been restored to me, and very glad was I to see Wave-Flame again. After I had eaten and, escorted by servants, walked in the gardens, for never could I be left alone, marvelling at the wondrous golden fruits and flowers, a messenger came to me, saying that the Villaorna desired speech with me. I wondered who this Villaorna might be, but when he entered I saw that he was Larico, that same stern-faced, cunning-eyed lord who had been the spokesman of the Inca when he visited the city of the Chancas. Also I learned that Villaorna was his title and meant "Chief priest."

We bowed to each other and all were sent from the chamber, leaving us quite alone.

"Lord-from-the-Sea," he said, "the Inca sends me, his Councillor and blood relative, who am head priest of the Sun, to desire that you will go on an embassy for him to the camp of the Chancas. First, however, it is needful that you should swear by the Sun that you will return thence to Cuzco. Will you do this?"

Now as there was nothing I desired more than to return to Cuzco where Quilla was, I answered that I would swear by my own god, by the Sun, and

by my sword, unless the Chancas detained me by force. Further, I prayed him to set out his business.

He did so in these words:

"Lord, we have come to know, it matters not how, that the man who appeared with you in this land is no other than Kari, the elder son of the Inca, whom we thought dead. Now it is in the Inca's mind, and in the minds of us, his councillors, to proclaim the Prince Kari as heir to the throne which soon he would be called upon to fill. But the matter is very dangerous, seeing that Urco still commands the army and many of the great lords who are of his mother's House cling to him, hoping to receive advancement from him when he becomes Inca."

"But, Priest Larico, Urco, they say, is like to die, and if so all this trouble will melt like a cloud."

"Your sword bit deep, Lord, but I have it from his physicians that as the brain is uncut he will not die, although he will be sick for a long while. Therefore we must act while he is sick, since it is not lawful to bring about his end, even if he could be come at. Time presses, Lord, for as you have seen, the Inca is old and feeble and his mind is weak. Indeed at times he has no mind, though at others his strength returns to him."

"Which means that I deal with you who are the chief priest, and those

behind you," I said, looking him in the eyes.

"That is what it means, Lord. Now hearken while I tell you the truth. After the Inca I am the most powerful man in Tavantinsuyu, indeed for the most part the Inca speaks with my voice although I seem to speak with his. Yet I am in a snare. Heretofore I have supported Urco because there was no other who could become Inca, although he is a brutal and an evil man. Of late, however, since my return from the City of the Chancas, I have quarrelled with Urco because he has lost that witch, the lady Quilla, whom he desires madly and lays the blame on me, and it has come to my knowledge that when he succeeds to the throne it is his purpose to kill me, which doubtless he will do if he can, or at the least to cast me from my place and power, which is as bad as death. Therefore, I desire to make my peace with Kari, if he will swear to continue me in my office, and this I can only do through you. Bring this peace about, Lord, and I will promise you anything you may wish, even perchance to the Incaship itself, should aught happen to Kari or should he refuse my offers. I think that the Quichuas might welcome a white god from the Sea who has shown himself so great a general and so brave in battle, and who has knowledge and wisdom more than theirs, to rule over them," he added reflectively. "Only then, Lord, it would be needful to be rid of Kari as well as of Urco."

"To which I would never consent," I replied, "seeing that he is my friend with whom I have shared many dangers. Moreover, I do not wish to be Inca."

"Is there then anything else that you wish very much, Lord? A thought came to me, yonder at the City of the Chancas. By the way, how lovely is that lady Quilla and how royal a woman. It is most strange that she should have turned her mind towards an aged man like Upanqui."

We looked at each other.

"Very strange," I said. "It seems to me sad also that this beautiful Quilla should be immured in a nunnery for life. To tell you the truth, High-priest, since it is not good for man to live alone, rather than that such a thing should have happened I would have married her myself, to which perchance she might have consented."

Again we looked at each other and I went on:

"I hinted as much to Kari after we heard she was numbered amongst the Virgins, and asked him whether, should he become Inca, he would take her thence and give her to me."

"What did he answer, Lord?"

"He said that though he loved me like a brother, first he would kill me with his own hand, since such a deed would be sacrilege against the Sun. Last night also the Inca himself said much the same."

"Is it so, Lord? Well, we priests bring up our Incas to think thus. If we did not, where would our power be, seeing that we are the Voice of the Sun upon earth and issue his decrees?"

"But do you always think thus yourselves, O High-priest?"

"Not quite always. There are loopholes in every law of gods and men. For example, I believe I see one in the instance of this lady Quilla. But before we waste more time in talking--tell me, White Lord, do you desire her, and if so, are you ready to pay me my price? It is that you shall assure to me the friendship of the prince Kari, should he become Inca, and the continuance of my power and office."

"My answer is that I do desire this lady, O High-priest, and that if I can I will obtain from Kari the promise of what you seek. And now where is the loophole?"

"I seem to remember, Lord, that there is an ancient law which says--that none who are maimed may be the wives of the Sun. It is true that this law applies to them before they contract the holy marriage. Still, if the point came up before me as high-priest, I might perhaps find that it applied also to those who were maimed after marriage. The case is rare, for which precedents cannot be found if the search be thorough. Now through the wickedness of Urco, as it happens, this lady Quilla has been blinded, and therefore is no longer perfect in her body. Do you understand?"

"Quite. But what would Upanqui or Kari say? The Incas you declare are always bigots and might interpret this law otherwise."

"I cannot tell, Lord, but let us cease from beating bushes. I will help you if I can, if you will help me if you can, though I daresay that in the end you, who are not a bigot, must take the law into your own hands, as perhaps the lady Quilla, who is a moon-worshipper, would be willing to do also."

The finish of it was that this cunning priest and statesman and I made a bargain. If I could win Kari over to his interests, then he swore by the Sun that he would gain me access to the lady Quilla and help me to fly with her, if so we both wished, while I on my part swore to plead his cause with Kari. Moreover, as he showed me, there was little fear that either of us would break these oaths since henceforth each lay in the power of the other.

After this we passed on to public matters. I was charged to offer an honourable truce to Huaracha and the Chancas with permission to them to camp their armies in certain valleys near to Cuzco where they would be fed until peace was declared, which peace would give them all they needed, namely, their freedom and safeguards from attack. For the rest I was to bring Kari and those who had deserted to him on the yesterday into Cuzco where none would molest them.

Then he went, leaving me happier than I had been since I bade farewell to Quilla. For now at last I saw light, a faint uncertain light, it was true, only to be reached, if reached at all, through many difficulties and dangers, but still light. At last I had found someone in this land of black superstition who was not a bigot, and who, being the High-priest of the Sun, knew too much of his god to fear him or to believe that he should come down to earth and burn it up should one of the hundreds of his brides seek another husband. Of course this Larico might betray me and Quilla, but I did not think he would, since he had nothing to gain thereby, and might have much to lose, for the reason that I was able, or he thought that I was able, to set Kari against him. At least I could only go forward and trust to fortune, though in fact hitherto she had never shown me favour where woman was concerned.

Awhile later I was being borne in one of the Inca's own litters back to the camp of the Chancas, accompanied by an embassy of great lords.

We passed over that dreadful, bloodstained plain where, under a flag of truce, both sides were engaged in burying the thousands of their dead, and came to the ridge whence we had charged on the yester morn. Here sentries stopped us and I descended from my litter. When the Chancas saw me in my armour come back to them alive, they set up a great shouting and presently I and the lords with me were led to the pavilion of King Huaracha.

We found him lying sick upon a couch, for though he showed no wound he had been badly bruised upon the body by a blow from Urco's club and, as I feared, was hurt in the bowels. He greeted me with delight, since he thought that I might have been killed after I was captured, and asked how I came to appear in his camp in the company of our enemies. I told him at once what had chanced and that I was sworn to return to Cuzco when I had done my business. Then the Inca's ambassadors set out their proposals for a truce, and retired, while Huaracha discussed them with his generals and Kari, who also was overjoyed to see me safe.

The end of it was that they were accepted on the terms offered, namely, that Huaracha and his army should withdraw to the valleys of which I have spoken, and there camp, receiving all the food they needed until a peace could be offered such as he would be willing to accept. Indeed, the Chancas were glad to agree to this plan for their losses in the battle had been very great and they were in no state to renew the attack upon Cuzco, which was still defended by such mighty hordes of brave warriors fighting for their homes, families, and freedom.

So all was agreed on the promise that peace should be made within thirty days or sooner, and that if it were not the war should re-commence.

Then privately, I told Huaracha all that I had learned about Quilla and that I had still hopes of saving her though what these were I did not tell him. When he had thought, he said that now the fate of Quilla must

be left in the hands of the gods and mine, since not even for her could he neglect the opportunity of an honourable peace, seeing that another battle might mean destruction. Also he pointed out that he was hurt and I who had been general under him was a prisoner and bound by my oath to return to prison, so that the Chancas had lost their leaders.

After this we parted, I promising to work for his cause and to come to see him again, if I might.

These matters finished I went aside with Kari to a place where none could hear us, and there laid before him the offers of Larico, the high-priest, showing him how the case stood. Of Quilla, however, I said nothing to him, though it pained me to keep back part of the truth even from Kari. Yet, what was I to do, who knew that if I told him all and he became Inca, or the Inca's acknowledged heir, he would work against me because of his superstitious madness, and perhaps cause Quilla to be killed by the priests, as one whose feet were set in the path of sacrilege? So on this matter I held my peace, nor did he ask me anything concerning Quilla who, I think, wished to hear nothing of that lady and what had befallen her.

When he had learned all, he said:

"This may be a trap, Lord. I do not trust yonder Larico, who has always been my enemy and Urco's friend."

"I think he is his own friend first," I answered, "who knows that if Urco recovers he will kill him, because he has taken the part of your father, Upanqui, in their quarrels, and suspects him."

"I am not sure," said Kari. "Yet something must be risked. Did I not tell you when we were sailing down the English river that we must put faith in our gods, yes, afterwards also, and more than once? And did not the gods save us? Well, now again I trust to my god," and drawing out the image of Pachacamac, which he wore round his neck, he kissed it, then turning, bowed and prayed to the Sun.

"I will come with you," he said, when he had finished his devotions, "to live to be Inca, or to die, as the Sun decrees."

So he came and with him some of his friends, captains of those who had deserted to him in the battle. But the five thousand soldiers, or those who were left of them, did not come as yet because they feared lest they should be set upon and butchered by the regiments of Urco.

That night, when we were back safe in Cuzco, Kari and the high-priest, Larico talked together in secret. Of what passed between them he only told me that they had come to an agreement which satisfied them both. Larico said the same to me when next I saw him, adding:

"You have kept your word and served my turn, Lord-from-the-Sea, therefore I will keep mine and serve yours when the time comes. Yet be warned by me and say nothing of a certain lady to the prince Kari, since when I spoke a word to him on the matter, hinting that her surrender to her father Huaracha would make peace with him more easy and lasting, he answered that first would he fight Huaracha, and the Yuncas as well, to the last man in Cuzco.

"To the Sun she has gone," he said, "and with the Sun she must stay, lest the curse of the Sun and of Pachacamac, the Spirit above the sun, should fall on me and all of us."

Larico told me also that, fearing something, the great lords, who were of Urco's party, had borne him away in a litter to a strong city in the mountains about five leagues from Cuzco, escorted by thousands of picked men who would stay in and about that city.

On the next morning I was summoned to wait upon the Inca Upanqui, and went, wearing my armour. I found him in the same great chamber as before, only now he was more royally arrayed, and with him were sundry of his high lords of the Inca blood, also certain priests, among them the Villaorna Larico.

The old king, who on that day seemed clear in his mind and well, greeted me in his kindly fashion and bade me set out all that had passed between me and Huaracha in the Chanca camp. This I did, only I hid from him how

great had been the Chanca losses in the battle and how glad they were to declare a truce and rest.

Upanqui said that the matter should be attended to, speaking in a royal fashion as though it were one of little moment, which showed me how great an emperor he must be. Great he was, indeed, seeing that all the broad land of England would have made but one province of his vast dominions, which in every part were filled with people who, unless they chanced to be in rebellion like the Yuncas, lived but to do his will.

After this, when I thought the audience was ended, a chamberlain advanced to the foot of the throne, and kneeling, said that a suppliant prayed speech with the Inca. Upanqui waved his sceptre, that long staff which I have described, in token that he should be admitted. Then presently up the chamber came Kari arrayed in the tunic and cloak of an Inca prince, wearing in his ear a disc carved with the image of the Sun, and a chain of emeralds and gold about his neck. Nor did he come alone, for he was attended by a brilliant band of those lords and captains who had deserted to him on the day of the great battle. He advanced and knelt before the throne.

"Who is this that carries the emblems of the Holy Blood and is clothed like a Prince of the Sun?" asked Upanqui, affecting ignorance and unconcern, though I saw the colour mount to his cheeks and the sceptre shake in his withered hand.

"One who is indeed of the holy Inca blood; one sprung from the purest lineage of the Sun," answered the stately Kari in his quiet voice.

"How then is he named?" asked the Inca again.

"He is named Kari, first-born son of Upanqui, O Inca."

"Such a son I had once, but he is long dead, or so they told me," said Upanqui in a trembling voice.

"He is not dead, O Inca. He lives and he kneels before you. Urco poisoned him, but the Sun his Father recovered him, and the Spirit that is above all gods supported him. The sea bore him to a far land, where he found a white god who befriended and cared for him," here he turned his head towards me. "With this god he returned to his own country and here he kneels before you, O Inca."

"It cannot be," said the Inca. "What sign do you bring who name yourself Kari? Show me the image of the Spirit above the gods that from his childhood for generations has been hung about the neck of the Inca's eldest son, born from the Queen."

Kari opened his robe and drew out that golden effigy of Pachacamac which he always wore.

Upanqui examined it, holding it close to his rheumy eyes.

"It seems to be the same," he said, "as I should know upon whose breast it lay until my first son was born. And yet who can be sure since such things may be copied?"

Then he handed back the image to Kari and after reflecting awhile, said:

"Bring hither the Mother of the Royal Nurses."

Apparently this lady was in waiting, for in a minute she appeared before the throne, an old and withered woman with beady eyes.

"Mother," said the Inca, "you were with the Coya (that is the Queen) who has been gathered to the Sun, when her boy was born, and afterwards nursed him for years. If you saw it, would you know his body again after he has come to middle age?"

"Aye, O Inca."

"How, Mother?"

"By three moles, O Inca, which we women used to call Yuti, Quilla, and Chasca" (that is, the Sun, the Moon, and the planet Venus), "which were the marks of good fortune stamped by the gods upon the Prince's back between the shoulders, set one above the other."

"Man who call yourself Kari, are you willing that this old crone should see your flesh?" asked Upanqui.

By way of answer Kari with a little smile stripped himself of his broidered tunic and other garments and stood before us naked to the middle. Then he turned his back to the Mother of the Nurses. She hobbled up and searched it with her bright eyes.

"Many scars," she muttered, "scars in front and scars behind. This warrior has known battles and blows. But what have we here? Look, O Inca, Yuti, Quilla, and Chasca, set one above the other, though Chasca is almost hidden by a hurt. Oh! my fosterling, O my Prince whom I nursed at these withered breasts, are you come back from the dead to take your own again? O Kari of the Holy Blood; Kari the lost who is Kari the found!"

Then sobbing and muttering she threw her arms about him and kissed him. Nor did he shame to kiss her in return, there before them all.

"Restore his garments to the royal Prince," said Upanqui, "and bring hither the Fringe that is worn by the Inca's heir."

It was produced without delay by the high-priest Larico, which told me at once that all this scene had been prepared. Upanqui took it from Larico, and beckoning Kari to him, with the priest's help bound it about his brow, thereby acknowledging him and restoring him as heir-apparent

to the Empire. Then he kissed him on the brow and Kari knelt down and did his father homage.

After this they went away together accompanied only by Larico and two or three of the councillors of Inca blood and as I learned from Larico afterwards, told each other their tales and made plans to outwit, and if need were to destroy, Urco and his faction.

On the following day Kari was established in a house of his own that was more of a fortress than a palace, for it was built of great stones with narrow gates, and surrounded by an open space. Upon this space, as a guard, were encamped all those who had deserted to him in the battle of the Field of Blood, who had returned to Cuzco from the camp of Huaracha now that Kari was accepted as the royal heir. Also other troops who were loyal to the Inca were stationed near by, while those who clung to Urco departed secretly to that town where he lay sick. Moreover, proclamation was made that on the day of the new moon, which the magicians declared to be auspicious, Kari would be publicly presented to the people in the Temple of the Sun as the Inca's lawful heir, in place of Urco disinherited for crimes that he had committed against the Sun, the Empire, and the Inca his father.

"Brother," said Kari to me, for so he called me now that he was an acknowledged Prince, when I went to meet him in his grandeur, "Brother, did I not tell you always that we must trust to our gods? See, I have not trusted in vain though it is true that dangers still lie ahead of

me, and perhaps civil war."

"Yes," I answered, "your gods are in the way of giving you all you want, but it is not so with mine and me."

"What then do you desire, Brother, who can have even to the half of the kingdom?"

"Kari," I replied, "I cry not for the Earth, but for the Moon."

He understood, and his face grew stern.

"Brother, the Moon alone is beyond you, for she inhabits the sky while you still dwell upon the earth," he answered with a frown, and then began to talk of the peace with Huaracha.