

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE KISS OF QUILLA

Her women bore Quilla swooning from that ill-fated field, and sick and sad she remained until once more we saw the City of the Chancas. Yet all this while strength and sight were returning to her eyes, so that in the end she could see as well as ever she had done, for which I thanked Heaven.

Messengers had gone before us, so that when we drew near all the people of the Chancas came out to meet us, a mighty multitude, who spread flowers before us and sang songs of joy. On the same evening I was summoned by Huaracha and found him dying. There in the presence of his chief captains Quilla and I told him all our story, to which he listened, answering nothing. When it was finished he said:

"I thank you, Lord-from-the-Sea, who through great perils have saved my daughter and brought her home to bid farewell to me, untarnished as she went. I understand now that it was an evil policy which led me to promise her in marriage to the prince Urco. Through your valour it has come to naught and I am glad. Great dangers still lie ahead of you and of my people. Deal with them as you will and can, for henceforward, Lord-from-the-Sea, they are your people, yours and my daughter's together, since it is my desire and command that you two should wed so soon as I am laid with my fathers. Perchance it had been better if you

had slain the Inca when he was in your hand, but man goes where his spirit leads him. My blessing and the blessing of my gods be on you both and on your children. Leave me, for I can say no more."

That night King Huaracha died.

Three days later he was buried with great pomp beneath the floor of the Temple of the Moon, not being preserved and kept above ground after the fashion of the Incas.

On the last day of the mourning a council was summoned of all the great ones in the country to the number of several hundreds, to which I was bidden. This was done in the name of Quilla, who was now named by a title which meant, "High Lady," or "Queen." I went to it eagerly enough who had seen nothing of her since that night of her father's death, for, according to the custom of this people, she had spent the time of mourning alone with her women.

To my surprise I was led by an officer, not into the great hall where I knew the notables were assembling, but to that same little chamber where first I had talked with Huaracha, Quilla's father. Here the officer left me wondering. Presently I heard a sound and looking up, saw Quilla herself standing between the curtains, like to a picture in its frame. She was royally arrayed and wore upon her brow and breast the emblem of the moon, so that she seemed to glitter in that dusky place, though nothing about her shone with such a light as did her large and doe-like

eyes.

"Greeting, my Lord," she said in her soft voice, curtsying to me as she spoke. "Has my Lord aught to say to me? If so, it must be quick, since the Great Council waits."

Now I grew foolish and tongue-tied, but at length stammered out:

"Nothing, except what I have said before--that I love you."

She smiled a little in her slow fashion, then asked:

"Is there naught to add?"

"What can there be to add to love, Quilla?"

"I know not," she answered, still smiling. "Yet in what does the love of man and woman end?"

I shook my head and answered:

"In many things, all of them different. In hell sometimes, and more rarely in heaven."

"And on earth which lies between the two, should those who love escape death and separation?"

"Well, on earth--in marriage."

She looked at me again and this time a new light shone in her eyes which I could not misinterpret.

"Do you mean that you will marry me, Quilla?" I muttered.

"Such was my father's wish, Lord, but what is yours? Oh! have done," she went on in a changed voice. "For what have we suffered all these things and gone through such long partings and dangers so dreadful? Was it not that if Fate should spare us we might come together at last? And has not Fate spared us--for a while? What said the prophecy of me in the Temple of Rimac? Was it not that the Sun should be my refuge and--I forget the rest."

"I remember it," I said. "That in the beloved arms you should sleep at last."

"Yes," she went on, the blood mounting to her cheeks, "that in the beloved arms I should sleep at last. So, the first part of the prophecy has come true."

"As the rest shall come true," I broke in, awaking, and swept her to my breast.

"Are you sure," she murmured presently, "that you love me, a woman whom you think savage, well enough to wed me?"

"Aye, more than sure," I answered.

"Hearken, Lord. I knew it always, but being woman I desired to hear it from your own lips. Of this be certain: that though I am but what I am, a maiden, wild-hearted and untaught, no man shall ever have a truer and more loving wife. It is my hope, even that my love will be such that in it at last you may learn to forget that other lady far away who once was yours, if only for an hour."

Now I shrank as from a sword prick, since first loves, whatever the tale of them, as Quilla guessed or Nature taught her, are not easily forgot, and even when they are dead their ghosts will rise and haunt us.

"And my hope, most dear, is that you will be mine, not for an hour but for all our life's days," I answered.

"Aye," she said, sighing, "but who knows how many these will be? Therefore let us pluck the flowers before they wither. I hear steps. The lords come to summon us. Be pleased to enter the Council at my side and holding me by the hand. There I have somewhat to say to the people. The shadow of the Inca Kari, whom you spared, still lies cold upon us and them."

Before I could ask her meaning the lords entered, three of them, and glancing at us curiously, said that all were gathered. Then they turned and went before us to the great hall where every place was filled. Hand in hand we mounted the dais, and as we came all the audience rose and greeted us with a roar of welcome.

Quilla seated herself upon a throne and motioned to me to take my place upon another throne at her side, which I noted stood a little higher than that on which she sat, and this, as I learned afterwards, not by chance. It was planned so to tell the people, of the Chancas that henceforth I was their king while she was but my wife.

When the shouting had died away Quilla rose from her throne and began to speak, which like many of the higher class of this people she could do well enough.

"Lords and Captains of the Chanca nation," she said, "my father, the king Huaracha, being dead, leaving no lawful son, I have succeeded to his dignities, and summoned you here to take counsel with me.

"First, learn this, that I, your Queen and Lady, have been chosen as wife by him who sits at my side."

Here the company shouted again, thus announcing that this tidings pleased them. For though by now only the common people still believed me to be a god risen from the sea, all held that I was a great general and

a great man, one who knew much that they did not know, and who could both lead and fight better than the best of them. Indeed, since I had slain Urco with my hands and overcome Kari, who as Inca was believed to be clothed with the strength of the Sun and therefore unconquerable, I was held to be unmatched throughout Tavantinsuyu. Moreover, the army that had fought under my command loved me as though I were their father as well as their general. Therefore all greeted this tidings well enough without astonishment, for they knew it was their dead king's wish that I should wed his daughter and that to win her I had gone through much.

In answer to their shoutings I, too, rose from my seat, and drawing the sword Wave-Flame, which I wore girt about my dented armour, with it I saluted first Quilla and then the gathered nobles, saying:

"Lords of the Chancas, when on an island in the sea, my eyes fell upon this lady who to-day is your queen, I loved her and swore that I would wed her if I might. Between that day and this much has befallen. She was snatched away to be made the wife of Urco, heir to the Inca throne, and afterwards, to escape him whom she hated, she took refuge in the House of the Inca god. Then, people of the Chancas, came the great war which we shared together, and in the end I rescued her from that house of bondage, and slew Urco while he strove to steal or stab her. This done, I conquered Kari the Inca, who was as my brother, yet because I saved your lady from his god the Sun, became my enemy, and together she and I returned to this, her land. Now it is her will to wed me, as it has always been mine to wed her, and here in front of all of you I take her

to wife, as she takes me to husband, hoping that for many years it may be given to us to rule over you, and to our children after us. Yet I warn you that although in the great war that has been, if with much loss, we have held our own against all the hosts of Cuzco and won an honourable peace, by this marriage of ours, which robs the Inca god of one of a thousand brides, that peace is broken. Therefore in the future, as in the past, there will be war between the Quichua and the Chanca peoples."

"We know it," shouted the nobles. "War is decreed, let war come!"

"What would you have had me do?" I went on. "Leave your queen to languish in the House of the Sun, wed to nothingness, or suffer her to be dragged away to be one of Urco's women, or hand her back to Kari to be slain as a sacrifice to a god whom you do not accept?"

"Nay!" they cried. "We would have her wed you, White Lord-from-the-Sea, that she may become a mother of kings."

"So I thought, Chancas. Yet I warn you that there is trouble near. The storm gathers and soon it will burst, since Kari is not one who breaks his oaths."

"Why did you not kill him when he was in your hand, and take his throne?" asked one.



"Because I could not. Because it would not have been pleasing to Heaven that I should slay a man who for years had been as my brother. Because in this way or in that the deed would have fallen back upon my head, upon the head of the lady Quilla, and upon your heads also, O people of the Chancas, because----"

At this moment there was disturbance at the end of the hall, and a herald cried:

"An embassy! An embassy from Kari, the Inca."

"Let it be admitted," said Quilla.

Presently up the central passage marched the embassy with pomp, great lords and "earmen," every man of them, and bowed before us.

"Your words?" said Quilla quietly.

"They are these, Lady," answered the spokesman of the party. "For the last time the Inca demands that you should surrender yourself to be sacrificed as one who has betrayed the Sun. He asks it of you since he has learned that your father Huaracha is no more."

"And if I refuse to surrender myself, what then, O Ambassador?"

"Then in the name of the Empire and in his own name the Inca declares

war upon you, war to the end, until not one of Chanca blood is left living beneath the sun and not one stone marks where your city stood. It may be that a while will pass before this sword of war falls upon your head, since the Inca must gather his armies and give a breathing space to his peoples after all the troubles that have been. Yet if not this year, then next year, and if not next year, then the year after, that sword shall fall."

Quilla listened and turned pale, though more, I think, with wrath than fear. Then she said:

"You have heard, Chancas, and know how stands this case. If I surrender myself to be sacrificed, the Inca in his mercy will spare you; if I do not surrender myself, soon or late he will destroy you--if he can. Say, then, shall I surrender myself?"

Now every man in that great hall leapt up and from every throat there arose a shout of,

"Never!"

When it had died away an aged chief and councillor, an uncle of Huaracha, the dead King, came forward and stared at the envoys with his horny eyes.

"Go back to the Inca," he said, "and tell him that the threats of the

mouth are one thing and the deeds of the hand are another. In the late war that has been he has learned something of our quality, both as foes and friends, and perchance more remains for him to learn. Yonder is one"--and he pointed to myself--"who is about to become our King and the husband of our Queen. By the help of that one and of some of us the Inca won his throne. From the mercy of that one, also, but a little while ago the Inca won his life. Let him be careful lest through the might of that one, behind whom stands every Chanca that breathes, the Inca Kari Upanqui should yet lose both throne and life, and with them the ancient empire of the Sun. Thus say we all."

"Thus say we all!" repeated the great company with a roar that shook the walls.

In the silence that followed Quilla asked:

"Have you aught to add, O Ambassadors?"

"Ay, this," said the first of them.

"The Chanca tree is about to be cut down, but the Inca still offers a refuge to the Lion that hides among its branches because he has loved that Lion from of old. Let the White Lord-from-the-Sea over whom you have cast the net of your witcheries return with us and he shall be saved and given place and power, and with them a brother's love."

Now Quilla looked at me, and I rose to speak but could not, since all that came from my lips was laughter. At length I said:

"But the other day when I gave him his life, the Inca named me noble. What would he think of me if I said yes to this offer? Would he call me noble then and the Lion that dwells in the Chanca tree? Or, whatever his lips might speak, would not his heart name me the basest of slaves and no lion of the tree, but rather a snake that creeps at its roots? Get you gone, my lords, and say that here I bide happy with her whom I have won, and that the ancient sword Wave-Flame, on which Kari has looked of late, is still sharp and the arm that wields it is still strong, and that he will do well now that it has served his turn, to look on it no more," and again I drew the great blade and flashed it before their eyes there in that dusky hall.

Then, bowing courteously, for every man of them knew me and some of them loved me well, they turned and went. That was the last that ever I, Hubert of Hastings, saw of nobles of the Inca blood, though perchance, ere long, I shall meet them again in war.

"Let them be escorted safely from the city," commanded Quilla, and soldiers went to do her bidding.

When they had gone she issued another order, that the door should be closed and watchmen set about the hall, so that none could approach it unseen. Then after a pause she rose and spoke:

"My Lord," she said, "who soon, as I trust, will be my husband and my king, and you, the chosen of my people, hearken to me for I have a matter to lay before you. You have heard the Inca's message and you know that his words are not vain. He who is great in many ways, in one is small and narrow. He sets his god before his honour, and to satisfy his god, whom he thinks that I have outraged, is prepared to sacrifice his honour, and even to kill one to whom he owes all," and she touched me with her hand. "Moreover, these things he can do, not at once but in time to come, because for every man of ours he is able to gather ten. Therefore we stand thus; death and destruction stare us in the face."

She paused, and that old chief of whom I have spoken, asked in the midst of a silence, as I think was planned that he should ask:

"You have set our teeth in the bitter rind of truth. Is there no sweet fruit within? Can you not show us a way of escape, O Quilla, Daughter of the Moon, whose heart is fed with the wisdom of the Moon?"

"I believe that I can show you such a way," she answered. "You know the legend of our people--that in the old days, a thousand years ago--we came to this country out of the forests.

"You know, too, the legend tells that once far away, beyond the forest, there was a mighty empire of which the king sat in a City of Gold hidden within a ring of mountains. That king, it is said, had two sons, and

when he died these sons made war upon each other, and one of them, my forefather, was defeated and driven away into the forests by those who clung to him. By boats he descended the river that runs through the forest, and at length with those who remained to him came to this land and there once more grew to be a king. Is it not so?"

"It is so," answered the aged chief. "The tale has come down to me through ten generations, and with it the prophecy that in a day to come the Chancas would return to that City of Gold whence they came and be welcomed of its people."

"I have heard that prophecy," said Quilla. "Moreover, of it I have something to tell you. While I sat in despair and blindness in the Convent of the Sun at Cuzco it came into my mind and I brooded upon it much, who was always sure that the war between the Chancas and the armies of the Incas was but begun. In my darkness I prayed to my Mother, the Moon, for light and help. Long and often I prayed, and at length an answer came. One night the Spirit of the Moon appeared to my soul as a beautiful and shining goddess, and spoke to me.

"'Be brave, Daughter,' she said, 'for all that seems to be lost shall yet be found again, and the light of a certain flashing sword shall pierce the blackness and give back vision to your eyes.' This, indeed, happened, my people, since it was when the sword of my Lord saved me from death at the hands of Urco that the first gleam of light returned to my darkened eyes.

"Be not afraid, moreover, for the Children of the Chancas who bow to me,' went on the shining Spirit of the Moon, 'since in the day of their danger I will show them a path towards my place of resting in the west. Yea, I will lead them far from wars and tyrannies back to that ancient city whence they came, and there they shall sleep in peace till all things are accomplished. Moreover, you shall be their ruler during your appointed days, you and another whom I led to you out of the deeps of the sea and showed to you sleeping in my beams.'

"Thus that Spirit spoke to me, Councillors, though at the time I did not know whether the vision were more than a happy dream. But now I do know that it was no dream, but the truth.

"For did not my sight begin to return to me in the flashing of the sword that is named Flame-of-the-Wave? And if this were true, why should not the rest be true also? People of the Chancas, I am your Queen to-day and my counsel to you is that we flee from this land before the Inca's net closes round us and the Inca's spears pierce our heart, to seek our ancient home far in the depths of the western forest where, as I trust, his armies cannot come. Is that your will, O my People? If so, by the tongues of your Lords and Captains declare it here and now before it be too late."

Back thundered the answer:

"It is our will, O Daughter of the Moon!"

When its echoes had died away Quilla turned to me, lovely to look on as the evening star and with eyes that shone like stars, and asked:

"Is it your will also, O Lord-from-the-Sea?"

"Your will is my will, Quilla," I answered, "and your heart is my home. Lead on; where you go I follow, even to the edge of the world and beyond the world."

"So be it!" she cried in a triumphant voice. "Now the evil past is finished with its fears and battles and before our feet, lit by moonbeams, stretches the Future's shining road leading us to the mystery in which all roads begin and for an hour are lost again. Now, too, our separations end in a perfect unity that perchance we have known before and shall know again in ages to be born and lands revisited. Now, Lord-from-the-Sea, at whose coming my sleeping heart awoke to love and whose sword saved me from shame and death, giving me back to life and light, here, before this company of our people, I, the Daughter of the Moon, defying the Sun who held me captive, and all his servants, take you to husband with this kiss," and leaning forward Quilla pressed her lips upon my own. . . .

The remaining parchment sheets of the ancient Manuscript are



rotted with the damp of the tomb in which it lay for centuries  
and quite undecipherable.

Editor.