

CHAPTER VIII

THE OLD WATCH-TOWER

A wall! A window--a prison-like interior! As her eyes opened, the Governor's daughter strove confusedly to decipher her surroundings. The wall seemed real; the narrow window, too, high above, framing, against a darkening background, a slant of fine rain! Again she closed her eyes, only to be conscious of a gentle languor; a heaviness like that of half-sleep; of bodily heat, and also a little bodily pain. For an indefinite period, really a moment or two, she resigned herself to that dreamy torpor; then, with an effort, lifted her lashes once more.

As she gazed before her, something bright seemed leaping back and forth; a flame--that played on the wall; revealing the joints between the stones of massive masonry; casting shadows, but to wipe them out; paling near a small window, the only aperture apparent in the cell-like place. Turning from the flickerings, her glance quickly sought their source--a fire in a hearth, before which she lay--or half-sat, propped against a stone.

But why? The spot was strange; in her ears sounded a buzzing, like the murmur of a waterfall. She remembered now; she had lingered before one--in the woods; and Saladin had run away, madly, across the sands, until--my lady raised her hand to her brow; abruptly let it fall. In the shadow on the other side of the hearth some one moved; some one who

had been watching her and who now stepped out into the light.

"Are you better?" said a voice.

She stared. On the bold, swarthy features of a young man now standing and looking down at her, the light flared and gleamed; the open shirt revealed a muscular throat; the down-turned black eyes were steady, solicitous. His appearance was unexpected, yet not quite strange; she had seen him before, but, in the general surprise and perplexity of the moment, did not ask herself where. The interval between what she last remembered on the beach--the rush and swirl of water--and what she woke to, absorbed the hazy workings of her mind.

The young man stopped; stirred the fire, and after a pause, apparently to give her time to collect her thoughts, repeated his question: "Are you better, now?"

"Oh, yes," she said, with an effort, half sitting up. And then irrelevantly, with rather a wild glance about her: "Isn't--isn't it storming outside?"

"A little--not much--" A smile crossed the dark features.

"I remember," she added, as if forcing herself to speak, "it had just begun to, on the beach, when it--the 'grand' tide--" The words died away; mechanically she lifted her hand, brushed back the shining waves

of hair.

"Why think of it now?" he interposed gently.

"But," uncertainly she smoothed her skirt; it was damp and warm; "I suppose this is the island of Casque?"

"Yes."

"And this place?"

"The old watch-tower."

"But how--" Then she noticed that his hands, long, brown and well-formed, were cut and bruised; bore many jagged marks as from a fierce struggle. "How did you hurt your hands?"

He thrust them into his pockets.

"Was it from the rocks--and the waves? How did I get here?"

"Oh, I was standing on the cliff," he answered carelessly, "and--saw your horse running away!"

"You did? And then--came down?"

"What else was there to do?" he said simply.

Her gaze returned to the fire. "But the tide was rushing in--rushing!
it was right upon me!"

She looked again toward the pockets into which his hands were thrust;
observed his shirt, torn at the shoulder; then arose unsteadily. "I
know--it was not so easy!" she said. "It was brave of you--"

"Your Ladyship is no coward!" he interrupted, a sparkle in his eyes.
"When you turned the horse toward the tide, I was watching; hoping you
would dare, and you did!"

About to reply, she became once more aware she was still very dizzy
from the fall on the sand; the shapely figure swayed and she put out
her hand with a gesture of helplessness. At the same time, the man
reached forward quickly and caught her. A moment was she conscious of
a firm grasp; a dark, anxious gaze bent upon her; then, slid gently
back to the stone seat.

A brief interval, and gradually she began to see again more
distinctly--a man's face, not far from hers; a face that drew back as
her own look cleared. At a respectful distance he now stood, his
bearing at once erect and buoyant, and more curiously she regarded him.
A distinct type, here pride and intelligence stamped themselves
strongly on the dark, handsome features; courage and daring were

written on the bold, self-reliant brow. And with this realization of something distinctive, compelling, in his personality, came another.

"I have seen you--spoken with you before! On the beach--the night of the dance!"

The young man turned. "Your Ladyship so far honored me--as to dance with me!" he said, in his eyes a touch of that brightness that had caused her to regard him imperiously, as he had swung her to the measure of the music, on the occasion in question.

"Started to!" She corrected him, straightening suddenly at the recollection of that evening, when humility and modesty were virtues conspicuously wanting in his demeanor.

"Your Ladyship is right," he said quietly. "An alarm from the Mount interrupted."

She glanced at him quickly. His eyes met hers with a look of unconcern.

"Are you--a fisherman?" she asked abruptly.

"On occasions."

"And when you are not one--what are you then?"

"At times--a hunter."

"Ah!" Her eye lingered on something bright on the ledge beneath the window. "And that is the reason you have--pistols?"

"Exactly, my Lady!"

She continued to regard the weapons, of finest workmanship, inlaid with a metal that gleamed dully, like gold, in the light from the fire. His glance followed hers; she was about to speak, when quickly he interrupted.

"Has your Ladyship thought how she is going to get back to the Mount?"

My lady's questioning, along the line of personal inquiry, ceased; the Governor's daughter looked a little blank. "No--that is, haven't you a boat?"

"Not here."

"Then you walked over?"

He neither affirmed, nor denied.

"And the tide will not be out for hours!" Her look showed consternation; she glanced toward the opening in the wall. "Isn't it

becoming dark now?"

"Yes, my Lady."

"Of course, it was almost sundown when-- But I must return at once!
Don't you understand?"

He regarded her silently; the beautiful, impatient eyes; the slim, white fingers that tapped restlessly, one against another. "I will do what I can!" he said at last slowly.

"But what?" she demanded. "What can you do?"

He did not answer; my lady made a gesture.

"How ridiculous! A prisoner on an island!"

"There may be a way," he began.

"My horse?" she said quickly. "What became of him?"

"He was swept away by the tide!"

Into the proud eyes came a softer light--of regret, pain.

"Your Ladyship should remember it might have been worse," he added, in

tones intended to reassure her. "After all, it was only a horse--"

"Only a horse!" she exclaimed indignantly. "But, I suppose you can't understand--caring for a horse!"

"I can understand caring for a ship!" he answered quickly, a flash of amusement, hardly concealed, in his bold, dark eyes.

"A ship!" scornfully; "dead wood and iron."

"Live wood and iron! Beautiful as--" The simile failed him; he looked at my lady. "Something to be depended on, with a hand to the wheel, and an eye keen for mad dancings and curvetings."

"I might appreciate them better," she interrupted dryly, with delicate brows uplifted, "an they brought me nearer to the Mount. That, and not idle opinions," in accents that conveyed surprise at the temerity of one in his position to express them, "is of most moment!"

He accepted the reproof with a readiness that further surprised her. "Your Ladyship is right," he said. "I will see what may be done. The storm has passed. There is yet daylight, and"--an expression, almost preoccupied, came to his features--"a boat may be sighted."

"To be sure!" At the prospect, all other considerations passed from my lady's mind. "A boat may be sighted! Why did you not think of it

before? Come! Too much time has already been lost." And she rose.

"One moment!" His voice was quiet; respectful; although, she fancied, constrained. "I had better go alone. The way to the cliff is rough, and--"

"I shall not mind that!"

"Besides, your clothes--"

"Are dry!"

"No!" She flushed at the abrupt contradiction. "I mean, I don't see how they could be!" he went on hurriedly, "and," his tone assumed a certain obduracy, "I assure your Ladyship, it will be best."

"Best?" She looked at him more sharply. "Is that your only reason?"

"Why?" A trace of embarrassment, for an instant, crossed his dark features. "What other reason, my Lady?"

"That I know not!" quickly, assured her words had struck home. "Only I am certain there is one!"

"Then, if your Ladyship must know," he spoke slowly. "I did not wish to alarm you. But this is a rough coast, with--many rough people

about--smugglers, privateersmen--"

"Whom you, perhaps, are expecting?" she cried suddenly.

"I!" with a careless laugh. "A fisherman! Your Ladyship is imaginative--" he began, when a sudden, hasty footstep clinked on the stones without; a hand caught at the fastenings of the door; flung it open.

"I thought I should find you here, Seigneur!" exclaimed a voice.

"Since--"

The young man made a movement and the speaker stopped; caught sight of my lady, just beyond, in the fading light. And at the picture--her figure behind that other one--the fine, patrician features, framed by the disordered golden hair, the widely opened eyes, bright, expectant, the intruder started back.

"The Governor's daughter! You, Seigneur!" he stammered, and, raising his hand, involuntarily crossed himself.