

## CHAPTER IX

### A DISCOVERY

"Why did you do that?" It was Lady Elise who now spoke, lifting her head haughtily to regard the new-comer, as she stepped toward him.

"Cross yourself, I mean?"

"This good fellow, my Lady, is surprised to see you here, and small wonder he forgets his manners!" said the young man coolly, speaking for the other. "But he is honest enough--and--intends no disrespect!"

"None whatever!" muttered the intruder, a thin, wizened, yet still active-looking person.

My lady did not reply; her gaze, in which suspicion had become conviction, again met the young man's, whose black eyes now gleamed with a sudden, challenging light.

"With your permission, my Lady, I will speak with this fellow," he said, and abruptly strode from the tower; walked a short distance away, followed by the man, when he stopped.

"Certes, your tongue betrayed you that time, Sanchez!" he said confronting the other.

The man made a rough gesture. "C'est vrai!" regretfully. "But when I saw you two together I thought I had seen a--" He stopped. "She is so like--"

"Nay; I don't blame you; the sight was certainly unexpected! I had thought to come down and prepare you, but--'tis done!"

"And I knew what it meant." The old servant looked over his shoulder toward the tower.

"Call it magic!" with a short laugh.

"Diablerie!" muttered the other.

"Well, have your way! Why," abruptly, "did you not meet me here last night at high tide, as we had planned?"

"The priest came not in time; fearing he was watched, waited until night to leave his hiding-place at Verranch."

"And after missing me last night, you thought to find me here to-day?"

"I knew you were most anxious to see him; that upon him depended your chance to undo some of his Excellency, the Governor's, knavery! And, then, to find you here with the daughter of the man who has wrought you so much wrong; robbed you of your lands--your right to your name!" A

cloud shadowed the listener's bold brow. "I know not how it came about, Seigneur, but be assured, no good can come of it!"

From where she stood, at the distance to the tower, the Governor's daughter saw now the two men descend; she perceived, also, at a turn in the path, coming up slowly, as one whose years had begun to tell upon him, another figure, clad in black; a priest. This last person and the Black Seigneur accosted each other; stopped, while the other man, who had crossed himself at sight of her, drew aside. At length, somewhat abruptly, they separated, the priest and Sanchez going down the hill and the young man starting to walk up. Then quickly leaving the ancient, circular structure for observation, she stepped toward the cliff, not far to the right; and in an attitude of as great unconcern as she could summon, waited.

Below the ocean beat around the rock, and her eyes seemed to have rested an interminable period on the dark surface of the water, when at length she heard him; near at hand; directly behind. Still she did not stir; he, too, by the silence, stood motionless. How long? The little foot moved restlessly; why did he not speak? She knew he was looking at her--the Governor's daughter who had inadvertently looked into a forbidden chamber; was possessed of dangerous knowledge.

Again she made a movement. When was he going to speak? It was intolerable that he should stand there, studying, deducing! That she, accustomed to command; to be served; to have her way at court and

Mount, should now be judged, passed upon, disposed of, by--whom?

Quickly she looked around; the flashing brown eyes met the steady black ones.

"Well?"

"The man will take you back." His manner was quiet; composed; implied a full cognizance of what she knew, and an absence of any further desire to attempt to disguise the truth.

"Back! Where?" She could not conceal her surprise.

"To the Mount."

For the moment she did not speak; she had not known what to expect--certainly not that.

"Why not?" A smile, slightly forced, crossed his face. "Does your Ladyship think I make war on women? Only, before your Ladyship departs, it will be necessary for you to agree to a little condition."

"Condition?" She drew her breath quickly.

"That you will say nothing to incriminate him. He is an old servant of mine; has broken none of the laws of the land," with a somewhat contemptuous accent, "works his bit of ground; pays metayage, and a

tax on all the fish he brings in. Only in a certain matter to-day has he served me."

"You mean I must say nothing about meeting him? You?"

"For his sake!"

"And your own!"

"Mine?" He made a careless gesture. "I should not presume! For myself I should exact, or expect, from your Ladyship no promise. To-night I shall be far away. But this good fellow remains behind; should be allowed to continue his peaceful, lowly occupation. I would not have anything happen to him on my account."

"And if I refuse to promise?" she asked haughtily. "To enter into any covenant with--you!"

"But you will not!" he said steadily. "Your Ladyship, for her own sake, should not force the alternative."

"Alternative?"

"Why speak of it?"

"What is the alternative?" she demanded.

"If your Ladyship refuses to promise, it will be necessary for the man to return alone."

"You mean," in spite of herself, she gave a start, "you would make me--a prisoner?"

"It should not be necessary."

"But you would not dare!" indignantly.

"Not dare! Your Ladyship forgets--"

"True!" with a scornful glance. After a pause: "But suppose I did promise? Are you not reposing a good deal of confidence in me?"

"Not too much!"

"I presume," disdainfully, "I should feel flattered in being trusted by--" She did not finish the sentence.

But the young man apparently had not heard. "I'll take the chance on your own words," he added unexpectedly.

"My words?"

"That you are no telltale."

The girl started. "Telltale?" she repeated.

"You once told me you were not!"

"I--told you!" She stared at him.

"Told me you were no telltale," he repeated. "And--when Beppo lied, you told the truth--about a ragged vagabond of a boy."

"Beppo!" The look in her eyes deepened; cleared. "I remember now," she said slowly. "You were the boy with the fish, who said he lived in the woods. I met you while riding, and again that night, as a child, leaving for Paris; but I did not know, then, you would become--"

The young man's face changed. "An outlaw!" he said coolly.

"Yes; an outlaw," she repeated firmly. Angered by his unflinching gaze, she went on: "Who dares not fly the flag of his king! Who dares not come openly into any honest port!"

She ended, her brown eyes flashing. His own darkened; but he only remarked coldly; "My Lady, at any rate, dares much!"

"Oh, I've no doubt you don't care to hear--"

"From you!" He looked at her oddly, from the golden hair to the small, dainty foot. "From your Ladyship!" he repeated, as if amused. An instant he regarded her silently, intently; but his voice when at length he again spoke was cool and slightly mocking: "My Lady speaks, of course, from the standpoint of her own world--a very pretty world! A park of plaisance, wherein, I can vouch for it, my Lady dances very prettily."

She started; a flush of resentment glowed and faded on her cheek; a question his words suggested trembled on her lips.

"Why did you come to the beach that night of the dance? How dared you, knowing that if--"

"Why?" His eyes lost their ironical light. "Why?" he repeated; then laughed with sudden recklessness. "I wished to see your Ladyship."

"Me?" She shrank back.

"You!" he repeated, his gaze fastened on the startled, proud face. "Though I looked not forward to a dance--with your Ladyship!" The black eyes glowed. "Pardi! It was worth the risk." A moment he waited; then his manner changed. "I will leave your Ladyship now," he said quietly. "You will have opportunity to consider"--she did not answer--"whether you will give me your promise, or not," he added, and,



wheeling abruptly, walked away.

Some time later, in the fast-gathering darkness, from the cove a small boat put out, with Sanchez, gloomy and sullen, in the stern; at the bow, the Governor's daughter. As the isle receded and the point of land loomed bigger before them, the girl gazed straight ahead; but the man looked back: to the sands of the little cove, a pale simitar in the dragon-like mouth of the rock; toward the tower, near which he fancied he could see a figure, turned from them--seaward--where, far out, a ship might just be discerned, a dim outline on the horizon.