

CHAPTER XIII

THE SEETHING OF THE SEA

"I have concluded to deal leniently with you,' said the Governor; 'set you free!' I could not believe."

Alone in the little chamber, the door of which now was closed, shutting them from sight of the company in the general eating and drinking room adjoining, Sanchez and the Black Seigneur sat together. Before them the viands that had been placed on the table were untouched; the filled glasses, untasted. As he spoke, the man bent forward, his words disjointed; his eyes gleaming.

"But,' the Governor added, 'the criminal must be taught not to forget'; then turned to his soldiers. 'Beat me this fellow from the Mount!' he commanded."

"What!" The blood sprang to the dark face of the listener; he half started from his chair. "And they did! A merry chase, down the streets, across the sands! I, an old soldier!" His voice choked.

"Beaten like a dog!"

For some moments the young man looked at him; then again sank back; stared straight ahead. Without, the laughter and harsh voices of the islanders had become louder; within the little chamber, the only sound

now was the hard, persistent ticking of the clock on the shelf.

"But how," at length Desaurac made a movement, "did he--"

"Learn!" violently. "The way I told you he would!"

"You mean--"

"That I was betrayed and you were--by the Lady Elise--"

"Impossible!" the Black Seigneur exclaimed with sudden violence.

"Because she has a pretty face!" sneered the other.

"Silence! Or--"

"That is it!" The servant's voice rose stridently. "Beaten at one end, threatened at the other!"

The arm the young man had reached out fell to his side. "Hush! You're mad; you don't know what you're saying!"

"And you did not know what you were doing! Oh, I dare say it--I tell you now I little liked the task of taking her back; expecting some sort of treachery, and, when it came, was not surprised! Any more than, when they had brought me before the Governor, I saw her at the

cloister--watching, hiding--"

"Hiding!"

"Behind the coping to listen when he, her father, was questioning me!
And, when I looked up and caught her, she walked out--to show me I
might as well confess!"

"She did that?"

"Then tried to cozen me into believing it was not through her," went on
the man bitterly, as if speaking to himself. "But I know the lying
blood--none better--and when she saw it was no use," he paused and
looked up, the marks of the stripes on his face seeming suddenly to
burn and grow livid, "she acknowledged it to my face! 'I won't deny.'
Those were her words! And when she left the place, she turned around
to look back at me--and laugh--"

"You are not mistaken?"

"Perhaps," said the man, a venomous light in his obstinate eyes, "it
was all a fancy; or--I am lying!"

Outside, the wind, blowing sharper, whistled about the eaves, beat at
the window and shook the blinds angrily; far below, a steady monotone
to those other sounds, could be heard the rush and breaking of the surf.

"Why did I cross myself that day on the island, when I saw her--behind you?" Sanchez's taciturnity--the reticence of years--suddenly burst its bonds. "Because she made me think of the former lady of the Mount--the Governor's wife--who betrayed the Seigneur, your father! I promised him to keep the secret--he would have it, for the sake of the lady; but now--to you! Your father was stabbed at the foot of the Mount by the Governor!--"

"Stabbed! By him!"

"It was given out," sourly, "by rogues--again to shield her!"

"But--"

"That same day he had a letter--from her. As evening fell he walked near the Mount--was followed by the Governor, who sprang, struck in the back and left him for dead! I found him and took him home. But before he recovered, it was reported my lady had died--"

"How?"

"I know not; a punishment, perhaps! She was always delicate--or liked to be considered such--a white-faced, pretty, smiling thing whose beauty and treachery this other one, the daughter, inherits. It was the ghost of herself looking over your shoulder that day on the island,

with the same bright, perfidious eyes--"

"Enough!" Angrily the Black Seigneur brought down his hand. "I will hear no more!"

"Because she has caught your fancy! Because you--"

"No more, I say! Think you I would not avenge your wrongs at once, were it possible? That I would not strike for you, on the instant? But now? My hands are tied. Another matter--of life, or death--presses first!"

Sanchez looked at him quickly; said no more; between them, the silence grew. The servant was the first to move; turning to the table, he began to eat; at first mechanically; afterward faster, with the ravenous zest of one who has not tasted food for many hours. The other, for his part, showed no immediate desire to disturb that occupation; for some time waited; and it was not until the servant stopped; reached out his arm for a glass, to drink, that the young man again spoke.

"The palace? The plan of the Mount? Did you notice? Tell me something of it--how it is laid out--"

Sanchez swallowed; set down the glass hard. "Yes, yes! I saw much--a great deal!" he answered with eager zest. "Oh, I kept my eyes open,

although I seemed not to, and was mindful of learning all I could!"

"Here!" From his pocket the young man took a note-book; pencil. "Set it down; everything! I know something, already, from the old monks--the rough diagrams in their books. You entered where? Take the pencil and--"

The minutes passed and still Sanchez traced; seemed almost to forget his injuries in his interest in the labor. Plan after plan was made; torn up; one finally remained in the hand of the Black Seigneur.

"You think--" Anxiously the servant watched his master's face; but the latter, straight, erect, with keen eyes fixed, did not answer.

"You think--" again began the man when the ancient time-piece, beating harshly the hour, interrupted.

"Eleven o'clock! High tide!" The Black Seigneur pushed back his chair and rose.

"Good!" Sanchez's alacrity indicated a quick comprehension of what the movement portended.

"You--had better remain here!" shortly.

"Me?" said the servant with a hoarse laugh. "Me?"

"Have you not had enough of my family--my service?" the young Seigneur demanded bitterly.

"Bah!" muttered the other. "The dog that's beaten springs at the chance to bite! You go to rescue your comrades. I--will go with you!"

"In which case, death--not vengeance--will most likely be your reward!"

"I care not!" stubbornly.

A moment the Black Seigneur regarded him; then made a gesture.

"Well, have your way!" He listened. "The wind is in the west."

"A little south of west," answered the man.

"A rough night for your boat to have crossed!"

"Oh, I was bound to come! And if you hadn't been here, I'd have gone on, on,--till I found you--"

The hand of the young man touched the other's shoulder. "Come!" he said, and threw open the door.

"You are going in the storm?" The girl, Nanette, intercepted them.

The Black Seigneur nodded shortly.

"It must be an important mission to take you to sea on such a night. Why don't you stay where it's warm and comfortable? Or," with a laugh, "at least until Monsieur Gabarie," indicating the corpulent figure intrenched behind a barricade of dishes and bottles on a small table near the fire, "has finished the little puppet play he is writing."

"It is finished!" As he spoke, the poet rose. "I had but written 'curtain' when you spoke. Your wine, fair Nanette, hath a rarely inspiring quality!"

"Oh, I care not for your compliments!" she returned. "Your capitaine," again studying the Black Seigneur with dark sedulous eyes, "has not found it so much to his liking! He has neither asked for more, nor drunk what he ordered; and now would venture out--"

Unmindful of her words the young man called to old Pierre.

"Well," she went on, throwing back her head, "if you lose your ship, come to me, and--I'll see you have another!"

Above in his chamber at the inn, not long thereafter, the priest, looking out of the window, saw a line of men file down the narrow stairs; embark in the small boats from the sheltered nook where they

lay, and later, in the light of the moon, breaking from between
scudding clouds and angry vapors, a ship that got under way--glided
like a phantom craft from the haven and set seaward through the foam.