

Genital Jailers

by Steve Saffron

CHAPTER ONE

TOLEDO

It was the great Spanish city of Toledo, and the year was 1494, during the reign of the worthy King Ferdinand, and his beautiful and ambitious Queen Isabella. It was a little more than fourteen months until the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, whose three vessels, the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria were to be endowed by the Queen herself so that this intrepid explorer might find a new way to the Indies and bring back treasures of gold and jewels and precious spices to laden the coffers of Catholic Spain....

It was a hot July afternoon, an hour before the end of siesta. At the end of that hour the bell in the cathedral would toll the fatal knell, and a terrible auto-da-fe would begin. The condemned in their san benitos would file in abject procession carrying candles, barefooted, some with nooses about their neck indicating that they had recanted their heresy and would be spared the agony of the flames at the stake of execution.

Others, whose yellow ridiculous garments which showed the symbol of red flames sewn on the arms of these san benitos, were still obdurate and would know no mercy from the executioner and his assistants. There would be a

dozen destined for the stake this afternoon, among them two lovely women, one a Moorish girl named Tandelayo, accused of witchcraft and conspiracy against the realm.

The other was Inez de Cristobel, the orphaned daughter of a minor nobleman who had died on the charge of blasphemy and whose estates had been confiscated by the Crown ... a goodly portion of which would be turned over to the Holy Inquisition for its good work in ridding Spain of the dangerous heretics.

But at this moment, both condemned young women were being visited in their cells by familiars, who, though not the righteous Jesuits of the Order of Fra Torquemada, were nonetheless of inestimable value to the Inquisition in denouncing those whose treason and blasphemous conduct threatened the glorious reign of the beloved sovereigns of mighty Spain.

In the cell of Tandelayo, a masked, slim young man, in doublet and hose, a poignard at his side, confronted the beautiful Moorish girl. Tandelayo was only nineteen, her jet-black hair falling in a glossy swathe nearly to her hips, and the ripeness of her luscious figure was outlined lasciviously by the slim shift which was her only covering. It would soon be changed for the yellow *san benito*. Unless, to be sure, she recanted her sins and confessed to the familiar, whose name was Diego de Lorca, where she and her confederates had hidden a treasure chest of gold and silver bullion, a chest stolen from the galleon *Madre Grande*, by a group of renegade Spanish seamen and two crafty Moors who had been galley slaves on that galleon and had, in return for their freedom, revealed to these greedy rogues how to find the secret chest which had been hidden in the cabin of the second mate.

Tandelayo's father had been one of these Moors, but he had died under the torture before revealing how the deed had been done. A rigorous search for the stolen chest had been made, but thus far the soldiers of Fra Torquemada had failed to find it. And so Tandelayo had been arrested, taken before the grim tribunal, interrogated, and threatened with the question extraordinary ... torture that defied the mind to withstand. But, innocent, she had protested her utter ignorance of the plot.

Diego de Lorca, a profligate young nobleman who had squandered away his dead father's estate and sought employment with the Inquisition to further his own opportunities, had urged the Chief Inquisitora gaunt, baldheaded man in his fifties named Fra Durandonot to put the Moorish girl to the question but to sentence her to death by fire in the hope that her terror of this savage death and her fear of the loss of her immortal soul might open her reluctant lips.

But now it was but an hour until the knell of the execution bell, and Tandelayo stood before him, her black eyes flashing scorn and hatred, for she understood only too well his motives in this clandestine visit.

"I have spoken before the priests," she said contemptuously, "and I have told them all I know, which is nothing. Nada, do you understand? If I must die then, so be it, for it is the will of Allah."

"But you are so young and so beautiful! That lovely brown skin, those beautiful limbs shriveled by the flames, in a death which will not be slow but

horribly lingering and painful. It is unthinkable that you should wish to die thus, Tandelayo," he urged, moving closer to her. Through the slits of the mask, his eyes glittered with desire, for the heavy round closely set gourds of her titties tempted him, as did the magnificent ripeness of her young hips and buttocks, the full surging splendor of her plump thighs. "Listen, girl, I am your friend, I will save you from the stake. Tell me where that chest is and you shall go free from this prison, and you shall have some gold, too, and a little house."

"With you to visit me doubtless, Senor," Tandelayo mocked him, then spat in his face. "I know your kind, even if you call me heretic and infidel. No man has taken me and no man shall. I would rather die at the stake a thousand times over than let a filthy Spanish pig like you defile my body."

Diego de Lorca's suave, handsome face twisted with anger behind the mask. "Putá," he hissed, "I can have you put on the rack, I can have you whipped before you die! "

"I do not fear your threats, Senor. You will always remember that if I die, you can never be certain if I ever knew where your cursed chest of gold and silver and jewels is hidden. Think about it while you watch me die! "

Proudly she straightened her shoulders and stared at him in magnificent young defiance.

He uttered a curse under his breath, and then with his gloved hands he ripped her shift from her shoulders, and Tandelayo stood naked. The young

Moorish girl uttered a cry of shame, cowering back against the stone wall of her cell, a hand clapped over her plump mount of Venus over which grew a thick black cluster of soft silky curls. Her luscious titties rose and fell turbulently now, and her nipples were hardened, dark coral gems, set in narrow brownish-orange aureolae. The shallow wide, niche of her navel, set in that sweet lissome brown-skinned goblet of her virginal belly on which no man had ever lain, attracted his devouring gaze.

"Little bitch, little Moorish whore," he spat, "you'll not defy me! I shall have you, and then you shall burn at the stake before you will have time to enjoy the knowledge of my passion! "

He fumbled with his garments, liberating his elongated, stiff cock, seized her by the titties and wrenched her down on the cold stone floor. Tandelayo shrieked and tried to knee him in the groin but the nobleman pinched the inside of her tender naked thigh until she twisted to one side to escape the agonizing, searing pain. Now, letting go of one of her titties to seize her wrist in his left hand, he cuffed her viciously across the mouth and thrust himself between her struggling naked thighs, his prickhead rubbing the thick silky fronds of her virgin cunthole.

Frantic with shame and revulsion, Tandelayo tried to free her wrists, tried to twist her long satiny hips to avert the disaster.

But her ravisher was stronger and surely more expert, for Diego de Lorca was a notorious lecher and a taker of maidenheads, feared by every servant girl and tavern wench in all Toledo. With an exultant laugh he felt his prickhead press through the furry fronds and between the twitching soft

plump pink lips of her virgin vulva, then with an exultant cry forced himself against her hymeneal barrier and shattered it. He felt himself lodge within her to his balls, and Tandelayo twisted her face to one side and sobbed hoarsely in her shame and agony.

Inez de Cristobel was kneeling in prayer on the straw of her cell floor, her hands clasped, her slim, long, tapering fingers twisted in a very agony of soul. She could not believe that a merciful Creator could consign her thus at a scant nineteen years of age to the most hideous of all deaths, execution by fire. A week ago, she had stood, wavering and pale, between the two helmeted guards, soldiers attached to the secular office of the prison governor, to hear the cadaverous Fra Durando intone those terrible words: "My poor daughter, since you have not repented of your sins, and since all the terrors of the damned in hell have not been sufficient to alter your obdurate spirit, we of the Faith have no choice but to turn you over to the secular arm of justice and can only pray that mercy will be granted to you for your sins."

With this hypocritical and cruel formula, the Holy Inquisition absolved itself of all charges that it sought the death of its unfortunate victims. Not so, the Chief Inquisitor would argue; for was not every effort made to bring redemption to the soul of the poor wretch who had lacked guidance along an earlier path in life? And then, when all efforts had failed to persuade, to educate, and to teach, what other recourse did the Church have but to pray for leniency when the condemned was given over to the King's justice? To be sure, when the magistrate who sat for Ferdinand and Isabella understood what was to be done: death, or perhaps the galleys for life, or a flogging and a terribly heavy fine that would impoverish not only the unfortunate victim but his heirs for the rest of their lives. But in so acting, the Inquisition itself did not condemn the culprit to death.

They had made short shrift of her, Inez thought as the tears coursed down her ivory cheeks and a shudder shook her voluptuous young body. The magistrate had put on the black head cloth which spelled death, and had solemnly pronounced that one Inez de Cristobel, having been found guilty of the charge of abetting a traitor to the Crown and thus sharing in his blasphemous and unholy acts against most Catholic Spain, and further, having defied her peers by saying that if their faith led them to murder so good a man as her father, she would renounce it, she was to be put to death at the stake by fire.

But there had been one faint hope held out to her, even as the two soldiers had taken her by the elbows and turned her towards the door through which she must pass back to her cell. If she would but tell the magistrate or the Inquisitor himself where her father's gold had been hidden, leniency might be shown her. Peril haps it would be a long term in a convent prison, with the scourge and bread and water and constant prayers to purge her young but sinful soul of its evil-doing. But Inez knew nothing of such things. She had not even known until the fatal night of her father's arrest that he had not been still a favorite at Court. Only when her duenna, Dona Mercedes Solar, had brought word that her father had been condemned to death, could poor Inez credence what she had believed to be an ill dream, a terrible nightmare from which she would soon waken, to be reunited with her beloved father.

They had not, strangely enough, put her to the question, though she had been threatened with it, taken to the room and shown the rack and the strappado and the infamous bench on which the water question was applied. No, she had languished in this dark, noisy cell all these days and nights,

praying for courage and for some salvation.

She heard the jangling of keys and then the grinding of the lock as it turned to admit someone ... doubtless the jailer come to bring her the last meal she would have on this earth. But instead, holding a torch before him, stood a masked robust man, his hair sparse and streaked with gray, in a costly doublet, a sword at his side.

"Leave us," he said to the jailer. "You have been well paid. Give me an hour with this heretic, and perhaps I can persuade her to tell us where her father's gold is hidden. I would not see so lovely and young a wench scorched by the fire, even though she be the Devil's daughter herself!"

CHAPTER TWO

CAPTIVE RAPE

"W-who are you?" Inez de Cristobel quavered.

"I am a familiar of the Holy Inquisition, Inez. That is all you need to know. I can bring you life instead of the hideous death to which you have been condemned."

"But I'm innocent. I've never been a traitor and I've never been

blasphemous, I swear before God Himself," the young beauty sobbed.

"Can you not see, my poor deluded child, that what they want of you is simply the knowledge of where your father's wealth is hidden? It is well known that he had much gold, yet now it cannot be found. You, as his own child, must surely know what inheritance he left you."

"Sir, I have told them everything, and I can tell you nothing more, I know nothing. My father is innocent. He was never a traitor to Spain nor did he ever blaspheme against Mother Church."

"He is already dead, I sorrow to tell you," came the terrible answer.

Inez de Cristobel uttered a cry, wringing her hands as she knelt on the hard stone floor and now the tears which had welled up in her beautiful eyes for herself and for the hideous doom to which the Inquisition had delivered her, now poured forth freely for her unhappy father. Her mother had died a decade ago, and she and her father had been so close. And now he was gone, there was no one in the world, except perhaps those poor servants and her duenna who cared what would happen to her. When at last she had somewhat regained her composure, she stammered, "Oh my God, it would be a blessing if you would tell me when it was and how, sir!"

"Only yesterday morning. But not by fire."

"Thank God for that, at least," she murmured and then burst into tears

again.

"You must take care what you say to me, for as a familiar I am duty bound to report to the Holy Fathers what your attitude is and what your words are, Inez de Cristobel. Now tell me truly, are you certain that you know nothing about where your father's gold is hidden?"

"Have I not said so a dozen times before the tribunal itself?" the weeping girl wearily countered. "Do you think I wish to die at the stake? If I knew, since gold, nay, all the gold in Spain, could not buy back my father's life, do you not think I would tell you where it is?"

"Why as to that, my lovely child, it is possible that you might not because it was to be used in a revolt against the throne."

"There I will not believe you, whoever you may be! My father was the most loyal of subjects to the King and Queen of Spain!" She burst out passionately.

"What would you do to live, Inez de Cristobel?" he now asked her.

"Why do you ask that, Senor?"

"Because it is within my power to take you from this prison and to hide you until the storm has passed. I have told you I am a familiar, and that is

true. But what I have not told you is that I don't always share the vindictive hatred which the tribunal has for heretics. Take the Moors, for example; without them, Spain could not ever become rich and powerful. Yet now we drive them out and we burn them at the stake and we torture them to take away their gold which they honorably earned among us."

"Who are you, that you speak despairingly of the tribunal which employs you?" Inez de Cristobel uneasily demanded.

"I will not yet tell you my name, not until I have taken you safely from this prison. But I must have your word that you will not betray me. As you will see, I have my reasons."

"I have nothing to lose if I go with you, for, to tell the truth, sir, I have no wish at all to be burned by the fire until I am dead," Inez de Cristobel sighed, then burst again into sobs at the thought of her father's passing. "I give you my word, sir, that I will not betray you," she faltered when at last she had regained her composure.

CHAPTER THREE

INEZ

On the other side of the prison and on a higher floor, the handsome and buxom duenna of lovely young Inez de Cristobel was being interrogated by

none other than Fra Durando himself.

Dona Mercedes Solar had herself till this moment not been apprehended or interrogated by the Holy Inquisition, but had been allowed up to a few days ago to visit her beautiful young charge Inez. It had been suggested to the attractive widow that she, being on such affectionate terms with the girl, persuade the latter to put forth from her mind the fears and terrors of mortal sin and to confess freely all she knew about her father's treasonable activities and where he had sequestered his great fortune for the purpose of using it against Ferdinand and Isabella.

But when Dona Mercedes had visited Inez in her cell for the first time after the unfortunate girl had been given the sentence of death, the buxom widow could not bring herself to ask such infamous questions of this beautiful girl over whose care she had watched so lovingly for the past five years. Besides, Dona Mercedes herself did not believe the charges of the Holy Inquisition, having only praise and gratitude for Don Alfredo de Cristobel, who had taken her into his household as the duenna for his daughter, paid the paltry debts which her dead husband had left saddled upon her, and treated her with the most exquisite courtesies at all times.

And then early at the next dawn, while she still lay sleeping, there had come a terrible pounding at the door, and while the servants had gone to open, finding there the soldiers of the Inquisition who demanded forthwith that Dona Mercedes dress and come with them at once upon orders of Fra Durando himself.

She had been taken immediately to the prison and locked in this rather

wide and comfortably furnished cell ... comfortable by comparison with the ones in which Inez and Tandelayo languished.

There was a table and chair, a comfortable bed instead of a pallet of straw, and there was even a little window. But Dona Mercedes Solar had no way of judging the relative luxury of this cell in which she was incarcerated, for her mind was still numbed with terror at having been taken from the house at such an early hour and told that she was to be examined by the Chief Inquisitor himself. As she stared out of that little window, she looked into the prison courtyard, a wide square, and what she saw was hardly comforting: a whipping post centered on one platform to her left, and a pillory in the middle of another platform to her right, each ascended to by a flight of about five wooden steps, and guarded by soldiers wearing halberds and swords.

Dona Mercedes Solar was thirty-one, and she had been wed at the age of nineteen to a sturdy and prosperous tavern keeper, Manuel Solar, then thirty-five. He was a lusty man, bearded and jovial, and at first Dona Mercedes had been terrified at his bawdiness and his habit of clapping her upon the backside and bursting into a roar of Homeric laughter when he had delivered a most lewd joke which had made her still maidenly cheeks blush.

She had had convent schooling, to be sure, and her worldly husband's carnal behavior had at first made her swoon away with very shame. He had taken her maidenhead joyously, and to her horror, insisted that she strip naked even of her thick shift on their wedding night. But after a few weeks, her own earthy nature asserted itself, thanks to Manuel Solar's virile and repeated lovemaking, so that she had, at last, to join him in as passionate a desire to be fucked as he to fuck her. He had died in a drunken brawl in his

tavern when two roistering soldiers of the King had set on each other with knives over a fancied insult to the blowsy wench over whose charms both had fought and for whose favors the winner sought to emerge victorious. In attempting to separate them so that some officer might not enter his tavern and clap him into irons for permitting such a duel, Manuel Solar had received a dagger blow in the ribs and had died after two days of agony.

The tavern had been seized by the Crown on the grounds that its dead owner had instigated this fight, and so Mercedes Solar found herself penniless. It was then that the kindly Don Alfredo de Cristobel had given her shelter in his own house and made her the duenna of lovely young Inez. He had treated her with great courtesy and given her the stately and respectful address of Dona.

And now after these five years of comfort and luxury and of respect and of a virtual sinecure, the buxom young widow found herself in the hands of the Inquisition.

She had had little time to clothe herself properly. Only a dress over her shift and a cape, her stockings and shoes. And, twisting her fingers in anguish, she was pacing the floor of this cell when suddenly there was the sound of a key turning in the lock and then the door swung open and a tall gaunt cadaverous looking man in the cowled robe of a Jesuit friar entered her cell....

Fra Durando was forty-eight and at this moment possessed more power than the King himself within the confines of this grim and vast prison with its honeycomb of cells, so arranged that a familiar might secretly enter the

cell of a condemned prisoner and pretend to be a fellow captive for the purpose of obtaining vital information which the Inquisition sought.

He had begun his days as a young priest in Cordoba, and thence gone to Granada. His parents had been impoverished, his father a blacksmith, and he himself had been treated with contempt by the villagers because his father had taken to drink after the death of the boy's mother. This contempt had warped him and he had resolved with a fierce vow that one day he would come into power and show all and sundry that it did not matter what a man's background was so long as he had intelligence and wit and cunning to prove himself a thousand times better than they.

The Bishop of Granada, remarking the young friar's zeal, had put him to work obtaining confessions from heretics and Moors and prisoners suspected of conspiring against the rulers of mighty Spain. So adept had Friar Durando proved himself that he had been summoned to Madrid and there given his ordainment as Fra, appointed as an Inquisitor and sent to the province of Rios where for ten years his name had been mentioned with terror by those who had reason to fear the power of the Inquisition.

But he was also venal and corrupt, and had been known to pardon a confessed heretic for a petty bribe and not always in gold. In Coravilla, a little town about ten miles from where he had been stationed, he had come upon a beautiful widow and her three daughters whose husband had been sent to the galleys a few years earlier for sedition and who therefore remained suspect on the list of the Inquisition. He had coveted the woman and her daughters, and he had seen to it that she was accused of witchcraft. Brought before his court, she and her three girls, ages fourteen, seventeen, and nineteen, respectively, had helplessly wept as three

villagers had mounted the platform on which he sat at a table and denounced the woman as a witch, naming this or that misfortune which had befallen them as being entirely due to the curse of the witch. The mother was thirty-seven, still intensely beautiful, and her daughters were even more tempting to the lecherous Inquisitor.

So he had condemned them to be burned at the stake, and at night he had visited their cells each in turn, the mother first. Groveling at his feet, the distracted and hysterical woman had implored mercy for the girls, swearing that though the testimony of the villagers was false, she would rather die as a condemned witch than have her innocent girls suffer so abominable a martyrdom. And Fra Durando had told her that if she would make public penance in the marketplace, wearing only a shift, barefooted, holding a lighted candle, her three daughters equally in penance, and given over to him for charitable causes the gold which she had hidden in her house, he would commute her sentence of death and that of her daughters as well and send them instead to the Convent of Santa Felicia in the mountains.

Naturally the unfortunate woman had agreed. But that was not all Fra Durando sought of her. As a proof of compliance, he demanded that she disrobe and give herself to him. When she hesitated, horrified at this sacrilege committed by a Jesuit friar, he had shrugged and said, "As you wish, Senora Concepcion. In that case, you and your daughters will be stripped naked in the marketplace and you and the girls will be flogged with knotted cords until the blood runs down your heels and then you will all be sent to the prison of Hermosidad."

This last threat had made the unfortunate widow capitulate to Fra Durando's lust. For that prison, located on the outskirts of Barcelona, was

notorious throughout all Spain for the cruelty and rigorous treatment accorded all its prisoners. Weeping, she had disrobed, and Fra Durando had fallen upon her, and glutted his lust upon her sumptuous naked body.

Then, having guilefully promised that he would spare her and her daughters and incarcerate them in the Convent of Santa Felicia instead, he had enjoyed the virginities of the three girls on successive nights. The eldest girl, a spirited red-haired beauty, had fiercely struggled with him until he had had a soldier seize her, strip her naked to the waist, and bind her wrists above her head to a metal ring set into the wall of her cell. Then, taking a leather strap, he had whipped her breasts and belly until she had shriekingly assented to do his bidding.

A week later, the widow and her three daughters were sent to the prison of Hermosidad, and Fra Durando had by then obtained the poor woman's hidden gold which went into his own personal coffers....

With great shaggy brows, his hawk-like nose, his thin lips which were those of an ascetic and a zealot, his body wiry and hairy, naked under the cowed robe, it was no wonder that this man terrified the trembling Dona Mercedes Solar. She could see through the open door out to the corrido a group of halberdiers with torches awaiting the Chief Inquisitor's commands, and she shrank back, her eyes wide with terror.

"Leave us," he said curtly to the soldiers, as he closed the door behind him. Then he stood contemplating the frightened duenna of Inez de Cristobel.

Mercedes Solar was black-haired, with plump rounded face, lovely hazel eyes, a ripe mouth; and her figure, though perhaps overly plump, still retained its firmness and youth. Her skin was as milky pale as that of any noblewoman, and her two closely spaced large round titties rose and fell with violent turbulence as she watched this brooding man approach her.

"God day, Mercedes," he greeted her with a mocking familiarity. "I had you brought here to tell me more about the unrepentant girl who was in your charge all these years. She is under sentence of death, and within an hour, she will go to the stake like any heretic. You alone can save her, Mercedes Solar."

"I, Your Worship? But how, in God's name?"

"Do not use that holy name so lightly, woman!" the Chief Inquisitor thundered, fixing her with so venomous a look that she quailed. "Upon your hope of salvation in the next world, I conjure you to tell me all that you know about that girl!"

"But, Your Worship, I swear she is innocent, she is good and pure and virtuous. Her only sin-if it may be called that-is that she loved her father. Would you punish a loyal daughter for such love?"

"Do not play casuistic games with me, Mercedes!" Fra Durando snarled. "Her father was executed as a traitor and a rebel. His estates are

confiscated, but his gold remains hidden from us. I would be failing in my duty to my sovereigns if I did not employ every means at my command to locate that treasonably amassed fortune so that it may be put to the good work of advancing the extermination of all such heretics and blasphemers and traitors!"

"I swear to you, Your Worship, that I know nothing of Don Alfredo's fortune. Surely you could not believe that he would confide in me, a mere servant, over such a matter?"

"Not so, woman. It is well known from what lowly origin you sprang and how Don Alfredo took you into his household and treated you well." A vicious smile curved the thin lips of Fra Durando. "Verily, since his wife died ten years before, it is plain to me why he took you into his household. You are comely and not at all virtuous."

"Oh, Your Worship, but it's not true! I swear it's not true! Don Alfredo never looked upon me in that way!" Mercedes Solar gasped.

CHAPTER FOUR

DURANDO

Fra Durando greedily devoured the frightened duenna with his brooding eyes, purposely remaining silent to agonize her and to increase her suspense which his threats had already engendered. Under the coarse black robe of

his order, he could feel the powerful manhood of his naked body throbbing with an angry impatience, for Mercedes Solar was mouthwateringly succulent, like a roasted pigeon in wine sauce, and he meant to savor her to the full this afternoon.

"I have been very patient with you, Mercedes," he at last spoke in a sonorous voice. "I have granted you every indulgence because I did not believe at first that you could be guilty of any conspiracy against the Crown."

"Oh, Your Reverence, have mercy, in the name of Heaven, have mercy on me," the unfortunate woman cried, sinking to her knees and clasping her hands in prayer. "I swear upon my hope of salvation that I know absolutely nothing of the treasure of Don Alfredo de Cristobell! Never once in the years I was engaged in his household, did he ever speak of treasure or of gold, I swear it, Your Reverence!"

"I am almost inclined to believe you, Mercedes," Fra Durando favored her with a mournful little smile. "But, alas, my daughter, the Church cannot accept the word of an impious woman, a woman who has lived in sin. You must be put to the question, because only then can we extract the truth."

"Impious? I, Your Reverence? But I swear it's not so! The priest, Father Ernesto, at the little church of the Virgin of San Pilar, he will tell you that I have been a devout Catholic, that I have gone to mass every Sunday. With Don Alfredo and his daughter, who have their pews in that very church. He will tell you, oh, in the name of Heaven, ask him, and do not drive me mad

with terror with your threat of putting me to the question!"

"It will not do, Mercedes. We know of many heretics who seek to cast suspicion away from themselves by going publicly to the church so that all will say, 'Here are good children of the faith.' But the truth is, Mercedes, they blaspheme against their own perverse creed as much as they do against our wrathful Lord who knows them as liars and hypocrites. No, that statement will not save you, Mercedes. Don Alfredo has met his death as a condemned heretic, despite his having attended mass each Sunday.

"We of the Inquisition found him to be a traitor to the Crown, false to the Creator to whom he gave but lip service, like you, and like his obstinate daughter. If you will not think of yourself, think of her, the daughter of a nobleman, condemned to march in san benito in penitence, exposed to the cheers and the hooting of the crowd, bound to the stake by the executioner, the faggots piled high about her and the executioner waiting with his torch. Think of how her flesh will be scorched in that sultry air when the flames approach her. Think"

"Oh no, Your Reverence, have pity, have pity in the name of Heaven! We are both innocent, that poor girl and I!" Mercedes Solar heartrendingly sobbed.

"I will give you one last chance, Mercedes. And I will send an order to the jailer who guards your young charge Inez de Cristobel to hold her in her cell until the next auto-da-fe, provided you will follow me now into my private quarters where you shall make your confessional to me, unheard by any

soldier or informer or familiar. Are you willing, Mercedes?"

"Oh yes, Your Worship, yes, and save my young mistress, save her! She's innocent, she's too young to die so horribly!"

"Very well. It shall be so." He strode to the door of her cell, opened it and called out, "Captain Posa!"

A bearded, sturdy young man wearing the insignia of captain of the guard stepped from the ranks of halberdiers and smartly saluted the gaunt friar. "At your service, Holy Inquisitor!" he exclaimed.

"You will take two men, Captain Posa, and you will go to the cell of one Inez de Cristobel, who is being held awaiting execution at our hands on the floor below. Let her be taken to one of the subterranean dungeons, chained to the wall, to await further interrogation by the Holy Office."

"It shall be done at once, Your Reverence," the bearded young soldier exclaimed.

Fra Durando turned back to contemplate the kneeling, weeping duenna, a crafty smile curving his ascetic lips. His eyes burned with the zeal not of his religion but of lust, for he coveted her buxom body with an unholy lust which he now meant to slake, just as he meant to procure for his own coffers the gold of the late Don Alfredo de Cristobel.

"Say your prayers humbly, Mercedes Solar," he intoned. "For I have just pardoned your young mistress from the death that awaited her but an hour from now. She has not yet escaped the flames, so remember that well. Now you will come with me and you will make your confessional."

CHAPTER FIVE

THE TORTURE

Half fainting in her unknown despair and anguish, the buxom duenna followed the black robed figure of Fra Durando down the gloomy corridor, which even though it was midday with a blazing sun outside,, remained in an obscure darkness, broken only at long intervals by flickering torches thrust into metal brackets set into the stone walls. It was, indeed, an atmosphere that chilled the blood and made even the strongest of body and heart quail with dread of the unknown.

Purposely, Fra Durando marched ahead of the unfortunate woman, at a regular pace, without once turning back to regard her, certain that she was following like one compelled, like a puppet drawn by the strings of an invisible master puppeteer.

He descended one flight of steps and then another and still a third, and finally a last until they were in the subterranean region where the special dungeons were, equipped with persuasive apparatuses to loosen the tongues

of the most recalcitrant. To the very end of this gloomy and narrow passageway, which had fewer torches to illumine it than any of the floors above, he led her until he turned to the left and, turning the knob of a heavy wooden door, pushed it open and then gestured to her to enter.

It was inky blackness, and she moved forward hesitantly, glancing at him fearfully, tears running down her cheeks. But from the torch thrust into the bracket just outside the cell, she could see that it contained a low wide bench, a stool, and a wooden sawhorse with a sharp-ridged top.

Fra Durando seized the torch and entered, placed it in a bracket just inside the door, and then closed the door behind him and bolted it.

"On your knees, Mercedes Solar," he thundered, "And prepare to shrive your soul and to tell the truth! I shall be both your father confessor and your Grand Inquisitor. I have fulfilled my part of the bargain, I have saved your young mistress from the stake this day, so do you recall that well, Mercedes Solar!"

"Why-yes, Why-Your Worship," the bosom duenna quavered.

"Now then, my daughter, confess your sins to me, as you would to your own priest," he commanded.

Mercedes Solar again burst into tears. Then, composing herself, her voice breaking and trembling from time to time, she recited a whole list of petty

doings, none of which would have made a sparrow fall from Heaven. She was slothful, she was over fond of her food and of wine at times, she was vain, she had purchased a lace kerchief which was really beyond her means, and there were times when she mourned her robust husband Manuel when he was not beside her in the night. And finally she came to an end of these small trifles, bowed her head and stammered, "Absolve me, Father, for I have sinned."

"I cannot absolve you yet, I cannot say to you, te absolvo, my daughter. Because you have not been frank with me, and you have not told the entire truth of your sins. You have categorized and held back that which you believed would rouse my ire as it would that of your Maker," he said sanctimoniously.

Mercedes Solar uttered a cry of consternation: "But, Your Reverence, I swear I've told you everything, everything! There's nothing else, believe me!"

"My poor daughter, are you so afraid of your frail flesh that you try to withhold the truth when you may at this very moment be on the threshold of the doom of your immortal soul?" he countered, with the cunning and malicious skill which the Inquisitors had in confusing and confounding and terrorizing their victims. "I brought you here that none save you and I might commune to learn the truth, so that I might shrive you and give you penance for those sins which you have committed. But the act of truth, my daughter, would have more truly absolved you than aught else I myself could do as priest. Yet here you are before me on your knees and alone, granted this dispensation and this mark of favor which, I can assure you, your young mistress and her heretic father did not gain, and you refuse to be honest

with me. I shall put you to the discipline, my daughter. Tell yourself that you should be grateful to me that I do not at once have the soldiers take you to the room of interrogation and show you the instruments of the question!"

"Oh no, not that, in Heaven's name, Your Reverence! I am innocent, I swear to you, I am innocent as is my young mistress Inez!"

"You will do me the courtesy of rising and then disrobing yourself entirely, Mercedes Solar," he said in a pitiless voice, folding his arms across his chest and watching her as she shuddered there on her knees before him, still faintly twisting her fingers in a clasp of prayerful anguish.

"Dis-disrobe, but why-Your Reverence? Oh surely" she faltered.

"At once, my daughter, or I will have the soldiers take you to the interrogation chamber and themselves strip you naked for the executioner," was his sibilant retort.

Weeping bitterly, Dona Mercedes Solar rose and began to remove her gown. But in her modesty, affronted even at the thought of being naked before a priest, the unfortunate woman turned her back upon Fra Durando as her faltering fingers drew her gown over head and shoulders and let it fall to the floor.

"Vanity, vanity, that is the work of the Devil himself!" Fra Durando thundered. "Are you so ashamed then, my daughter, of your flesh, are you so

afraid that I might read upon it the secrets of your sins which you have not confessed to me, that you turn from me? Face me, your confessor and your inquisitor, as you hope for salvation, and you are at this moment far from it, you may believe me, my daughter!"

She loosened her petticoats, and stood at last before him in her shift and hose and shoes. She trembled violently, for her lusciously opulent body was outlined by the thin cotton shift. It was not hemmed with the fine lace which you would expect to find on the person of Inez de Cristobel, but it was thin enough to mould out the appetizing contours of her breasts and belly, her loins and haunches and thighs.

"Quickly," he added, his voice hoarse and rasping, "your shift! You must be naked for the discipline!"

CHAPTER SIX

"PRIESTLY" PASSION

When Mercedes Solar let her shift fall to the stone floor of the dungeon and was naked as the day she was born before the gaunt black-robed Inquisitor, she uttered a sobbing little cry of shame and clapped her hands over the plump mount of her Venus, completely concealed by the thick black curls which grew over the soft pouting pink lips. It was just as she had told him, she had been chaste all these years in the household of Don Alfredo de Cristobel. Not that she hadn't secretly longed to have the kindly and elderly nobleman take notice of her, for he had been a magnificent figure of a man

even in his fifties, with his distinguished gray hair, his noble head, so leonine, and so proudly did he carry himself.

But alas, he was faithful to the memory of his dead wife, and if she had replaced that aristocratic beauty five years after the latter's death, it had been only as the governess of the gentle and lovely Inez ... not at all as Don Alfredo's bed companion. Even so, at the age of thirty-one, which she now was, her loins still burned impatiently to be assuaged.

The hungry mouth of her cunt hungered again for the swollen cock it so well remembered. It could still taste the beautiful, glistening head of it as its owner, Manuel her husband, would urge it steadily in, in, and still further in, and her widespread cunt lips would widen even more, eagerly clinging to the round, hard sides of it, clasping it sheath-like, as Manuel would thunder it all the way into the hilt.

Yes, her cunt many times tingled in memory of that cock, recalling-as with its own separate memory-the long sliding motion of it as it would slide back and forth, sending the woman's entire body spiraling up and still farther upwards in a dizzying rise of sensation, as the cock hammered and thrust deep into her body, causing the spasms, and the mounting desires, and the long climb toward fulfillment.

It was a fulfillment that would come as she screamed out her passion, her lungs clawing for breath as she opened her body completely to spew out her own excitements, the lubing cream that glistened on the pulsing shaft, glistened until the male shaft of her husband spewed forth its come, sending that froth into her eager cunt, feeding it, placating the hungry sex lips until

the spurting gism dribbled out the sides of them onto her glistening thighs....

She felt that way now, feeling a tickling in her cunt, as it signaled her central nervous system, reminding it of the long missing cock-and reminding her even more poignantly that here beside her was another cock as replacement. One that could feed and stifle the raging hunger in her loins. But overpowering this feeling was a deep-seated horror of the man before her!

Five years had not taught her yet to forget her lusty Manuel, nor the bawdy, joyous way he had of taking her and tumbling her onto the bed, hoisting her petticoats, gripping her by the backs of her knees and shoving them against her bosom while in this scandalously indecent position he thrust his sturdy cock deep into her moist crevice. How she wished, with the fervor of one who now knew cringing terror at the brooding silence of the cadaverous Inquisitor standing before her, that Manuel were alive with his sword in hand to save her from the perils of this dungeon and of this man whom she dreaded more than any other in all Spain!

"Once again, my daughter, leave off your vanity and prepare yourself for the discipline," he sneered at her. "Your arms at your sides, for there is no part of your body which I do not know, and no part which is not without sin in the eyes of Our Maker. You are a weak vessel, Mercedes Solar, and you have flaws, many flaws. Place yourself astride that sawhorse. Submit yourself humbly to do your penance."

With a groan of shame, the handsome widow moved towards the sharp-

ridged sawhorse and gingerly straddled it, very carefully stretching herself forward and letting her arms dangle down along the front legs. She uttered a cry as the sharp wooden surface pressed into the most tender spot of all her being: "Ohh, Your Reverence, it hurts me, it hurts me!"

"It is meant to hurt you, Mercedes." He moved now towards her, crouched down and seized her left leg, tethered her ankle with a broad heavy leather strap and bucked it tightly. Then he did the same to the right leg, and Mercedes Solar felt herself straddled indecently, but so that the plump fig of her pussy bore down upon the infernally sharp and narrow wooden ridge along the top of this device which was one of the "persuasive" accouterments by which the Inquisition wrested the "truth" from its helpless victims.

"Submit yourself humbly, I tell you! It is the only way to renounce your wickedness, your sins, your impiety," he thundered as he made his way to the head of the horse now, again crouched down and strapped her wrists to the front legs as he had done her ankles to the lower ones. Then, rising, he took a strap which dangled from the middle of the sawhorse and was affixed to its underside, drew it around Mercedes's waist, and bucked it so cruelly tight over her bare white back that she uttered a shriek of pain as once again the ridge manifested itself in pressing viciously into the sensitive cleft of her cunthole: "Aiii! Ohh, Your Worship, have pity on me, it hurts me, it hurts me so!" she wailed.

"Only through pain and discipline, my daughter, can the wicked flesh and the errant soul be purged of sin," Fra Durando responded. He moved to the tall wooden stool near the sawhorse, over whose top there lay a thick strap, of brown leather, with a double thickness at one end to be used as handle

for the wielder, about a foot in length, a good quarter of an inch thick, three inches wide, and the last four inches had been slashed artfully to compose five narrow strips, like human fingers. It was a derivation of the Scotch tawse. Armed with this, the Chief Inquisitor of Toledo took his stance to the victim's left, his eyes feasting over the spacious hillocks of her milky-skinned buttocks, which contracted violently in the duenna's shame of being thus exposed stark naked before the ominous and morose ecclesiastic. Then, lifting his arm, he briskly descended the leather strap so that just the tips cracked viciously against the upper summit of Mercedes Solar's right buttocks.

The effect was instantaneous. The naked woman's entire body seemed to arch up against her straps, her buttocks jerked and swerved violently, then contracted with a long muscular spasm. And her head rose, her eyes glazed with suffering, as her mouth gaped in a hoarse shriek of agony: "EEEowwouuu!!! Ohh, have mercy, Your Worship! I cannot bear such suffering, have mercy on me, I'm only a helpless woman, I know nothing more than I've told you, nothing!"

Crackkk! The leather band leaped down again, this time biting the top of the left buttock, and the tips of those cruel "fingers" left angry, darkening blotches the size of a pea along the white soft flesh. Once again the naked woman struggled over the sawhorse, her bottom cheeks clenching, then yawning to display the salacious vista of the perineum, the amber-shadowy furrow between those nether globes, and the glimpse of the palpitating pink lips of her cunt framed by the luxuriant thatch of black pussyhair. Her cry was wordless, inchoate, her head flung back, her maddened eyes searching the stone ceiling for some sign of reprieve. But there was none, nor would there be. And no one could hear her cries, save Fra Durando.

"This is proof that the discipline is bearing fruit, my daughter," he said unctuously as he applied the lash again, but this time directly across both naked bottomglobes, the five tips at the end whisking cruelly against the edge of her right hip. The violent twisting of her posterior caused, understandingly, the most agonizing friction of her cunt against the sharp edge of the sawhorse to which she was so helplessly pinioned. And this time her shriek was deafening, clamorous.

"When you are ready to confess what you have held back from me, my daughter, I will relent, but not until then," he told her. Then, grinning like a fiend, his eyes narrow slits of glittering lust, the black robed Inquisitor began to flog the shrieking duenna. The thick leather band cracked against her sumptuous hindquarters, streaking the lusciously pouting, plumply succulent globes with vividly crimson weals, with darkening splotches and streaks, as methodically he flogged her from the tops of her hips to the base of her wriggling and twisting behind. Incoherent shrieks, babbling pleas, hysterical supplications which were interspersed by choking sobs and floods of tears, attested to the fiery agony of the lashing. When he had laid on some twenty such strokes, he paused, panting, his face furrowed and gleaming with sweat, and his prick was monstrous, prodding out against the robe. His hairy chest panted, moist with the dank sweat of lust and of exertion.

He was in his element now, alone with his victim in the bowels of his infamous prison where there was no hope of mercy save perhaps death which alone could stop the pitiless torments of those who toiled under the guise of righteousness and in the name of the Crown of Spain.

"Are you now, my daughter, of better disposition to make your confession to me?" he hoarsely demanded as he let the thongs dangle from his right hand and stepped back to contemplate his handiwork. Those once filial bottomcheeks were furiously striped, livid with a pattern of welts and splotches and stripes, contracting and yawning in the most immodest and uncontrollable manner.

"Anything ... I will confess ... only have mercy ... no more ... I'm dying. Your-Your-Your-W-Worship ... have pity on me ... a poor woman ... aiiiiioooohhhhhhhahhhhhhhhhave ... pity, have pity!" Mercedes Solar moaned.

"Then what have you done with the gold of Don Alfredo de Cristobel? Where is it hidden within that house of his? I warn you, Mercedes Solar, do not try my patience further! I will have you racked and then whipped again, but this time on the breasts and on the belly to loosen your tongue!"

And, to punctuate his order, he delivered a furious downward-slashing stroke which sent the "fingers" of the thong biting right into her tender rectal furrow.

It was too much. Frenziedly, her naked body lurched and jerked and twisted, trying to tear itself from the sawhorse. Her face turned back to him, contorted unrecognizably, the eyes mad with incredible torment, the mouth gaping to bare her chattering white teeth in the supreme paroxysm of suffering.

"Well, my daughter? I'm waiting!" came his inflexible, rasping voice.

"P ... pity ... oh G ... God ... in heaven ...'s ... spare me ... I don't know where ... the g ... gold is, Y ... Your Reverence, Is ... swear ... oh ... stop, only stop, and I'll do anything you wish, anything." Mercedes hysterically babbled, arching and squirming to ease the hellish rubbing of the chafing ridge against her tortured cunt.

"I will test you, my daughter. Woe betide you if you fail," he said.

Then, unstrapping her, and helping her to totter down from the apparatus, he ordered, "Go lie on that bench and prepare yourself to yield your sinful body to my will. Thus alone may you show repentance, my daughter."

Stumbling, whimpering, the naked duenna made her way to the bench and flung herself down upon it. Then, with a grim chuckle, the gaunt Inquisitor doffed his robe and was naked, lean and wiry, his chest thick with sweat-matted graying hair, his prick enormous.

He flung himself upon her, his hands clutching her panting tittie-gourds, and buried himself to the hilt inside her quaking quim with a single mighty thrust. Then, grunting like an animal in rut, Fra Durando fucked the half-swooning duenna, who abandoned herself, closing her eyes, averting her face, groaning when his animalistic passions hurt her in the frenzied piercing of his accelerated cock-lungings, till at last with a bellow, he flooded her with

his acrid drench.

And thus the gentle Inez de Cristobel was betrayed by one who loved her, one whose love could not withstand the insidious torments of the Inquisition.

CHAPTER SEVEN

POSTRAPE

When Fra Durando at last languidly raised himself from the prone naked, shuddering body of Mercedes Solar, he contemplated her for a moment as she lay sprawled, her face averted, still wet with the tears of shame and suffering, and then he said coldly: "You have shown yourself to be sufficient enough to me, but that is out of fear, Mercedes. Now you will go back with me to the house of your late master and you will help me find his gold. I shall also ask you questions concerning your young mistress"

But at this very moment, he was interrupted by the clanging of a mailed fist upon the door to the dungeon, and he swore an unprintable oath at his annoyance at this interruption. Swiftly he covered himself in the black hooded robe, bidding the naked duenna roll over onto her belly, so that he would appear that he had been interrupted in his task of scourging her and driving forth the daemons within her soul and flesh. So venomously did he warn her not to dare admit to anyone on pain of the most hideous death-what carnal liberty he had taken with her person, that Mercedes Solar quailed and shook her head, unable to utter a word in her terror.

Again came the clanging of the mailed fist and Fra Durando drew back the bolt of this special dungeon and opened the door. It was the captain of the guards, his face pale, who had news of great moment for the Chief Inquisitor. "Your Worship, the young girl has escaped!"

"What nonsense is this, Captain Posa? And if that be true, why did it take you so long to give me this news? It was a good half hour since I sent you to go to the cell of Inez de Cristobel to be taken to one of the lower dungeons!"

"A thousand pardons, Your Reverence," the bearded young captain stammered, very ill at ease. "But as my men and I were going to carry out your order, the governor of the prison, Don Escudero, gave orders that I come at once to his offices, for he had just received news of a plot involving some of the heretics who have been imprisoned here. And he gave me instructions on what I was to do to counteract against this plot, Your Reverence. It was only when I had been dismissed that I could continue on my errand. When I arrived at the cell of this Inez de Cristobel, I found it empty."

"Eternal damnation to the villainous rogue who spirited the girl away!" Fra Durando angrily exclaimed. "Have you at least instituted a search? She and the man and his confederates who helped her to escape may still be hiding somewhere in this prison."

"That, Your Worship, is still another reason why I was so long in coming to

you. Immediately upon finding the girl gone, I sent Corporal Posada here to the officer of the guard and Sergeant Gonzaga to the garrison outside the prison to bid them search for the missing prisoner and to intercept and arrest not only her but those who might be with her. But they reported that they had seen no one, Your Reverence."

"At least you used your intelligence, Captain Posa," the grim Inquisitor grudgingly averred.

"You will sound the alarm, Captain Posa. I will relieve you of your duties here at the prison, and you will go into the city with a dozen of the best soldiers at your command in search of the escaped girl and those who aided her in fleeing her just punishment for heresy and blasphemy against not only the Church but against the Crown as well. However, you need not search the house of her father, Don Alfredo, for I myself plan to go there at once and take this wretched prisoner, who was the young girl's duenna, with me to point out the effects of the articles of value in the house of that condemned and executed heretic which of course are forfeited to their glorious majesties, Ferdinand and Isabella."

"Very good, Your Reverence. I will select my men from the garrison, with your permission."

"That is your affair, Captain. You belong to the temporal branch, I to the spiritual. You are but a tool whereby Mother Church shall punish the wicked and the traitorous. Go quickly now. And have one of your men bring a cloak and shoes to this woman that she may accompany me. You will have my secretary, Lorenzo Estragar, see that my carriage is ready for the journey

back to the home of that nest of vipers!"

"At once, Your Reverence!"

A few moments later, one of the soldiers brought a thick blue woolen cloak for the still terrified and naked Mercedes Solar and a pair of heavy shoes. The Chief Inquisitor bade her clothe herself, forgetting the garments that she had already divested herself of in frantic eagerness to save herself further torment, and mockingly remarked, "Such fripperies, my daughter, are a part of the snare of the devil himself to lead you into perdition. You must forget all vanity and you must say to yourself humbly that you will follow me and serve in this holy work of exterminating the treasonable heretics who threaten all Spain!"

A few moments later, the gaunt Inquisitor, still naked under his black robe, took his place inside the carriage beside the trembling and cowed and terrified Mercedes Solar, duenna and companion to the beautiful young Inez.

As the carriage moved through the gate of the prison which had been opened to permit the Grand Inquisitor to pass, there began the tolling of the bells from the Cathedrals of Toledo announcing the terrible auto-da-fe and the execution of the condemned. And soon there would be smoke blackening the skies with hideous portent of death at the stake for many whose only crime was that they had defied the will of the Inquisition and believed that their wealth and their estates kept them immune from harm by this the most dreaded and cunning power in all the land, mightier by far than that of Ferdinand or Isabella!

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE SEARCH

Even as Fra Durando led Mercedes Solar out of her cell to a waiting carriage at the gate of the prison, a carriage which would take the two to the house of Don Alfredo de Cristobel (where the cruel Inquisitor intended to make Inez's duenna search for the gold of her head employer), the Moorish girl Tandelayo was being carried away by a masked young nobleman and his two aids. For Diego de Lorca, the familiar of the Inquisition, had decided not to let this beautiful young heretic perish by fire. It would be a waste of luscious femininity-he had already fucked her by brute force, and now he did not wish to lose the delicious possibility of enjoying her at his leisure again and again....

There was an unholy alliance between this profligate Spanish courtier and the gaunt Chief Inquisitor.

It was their unholy secret: each was motivated by physical lust and also by a corrupt desire for gold. For gold and power as well. That was why the profligate young courtier, who had heard rumors of those high in the royal court that Fra Durando could be reached if the price were right, had weeks ago visited the gaunt Inquisitor and alluringly tempted him with the betrayal of many wealthy families.

Fra Durando had drawn himself to his full height and sneered at the young nobleman: "Do you think to tempt me with material gain, Diego de Lorca?"

"Not entirely that, Your Worship," the slim, handsome wastrel had chuckled, for he knew his man, and he had already seen the gleam of desire in those dark brooding eyes. "But if I were to tell you that there were lovely young girls who can be put to the question in a private dungeon, where only you and a trusted henchman can preside, and where for their salvation's sake they will do anything to spare their tender flesh from the torture, need I say more, Your Reverence? I can tell you many things if you will but trust me and name me as familiar."

Fra Durando had stared at him for a long moment. Then, leaning forward from his chair, a forefinger pointed accusingly at the young nobleman, he had thundered, "You are shameless, Diego de Lorca! You think to involve me in your evil scheme, because you are penniless. Very well, an informer, even a Judas, receives his share for betrayal. What do you ask, if-and I have not yet said yes to your proposal-if I take you in league with me?"

"Why, as to that, Your Reverence," Diego de Lorca had fawningly declared as he inclined his head deferentially towards the grim Inquisitor, "I shall rely entirely on Your Reverence's generosity. Let it be whatever you wish, I shall be content."

"So be it. But this is in the name of the holy faith and the good work of the extermination of all blasphemers, heretics and traitors to their beloved Majesties Ferdinand and Isabella. Yet betray me once, Diego de Lorca, trick me and let me see that you alone have compounded this device for your own

selfish gains, and you yourself shall face the rack and the water question and the stake. I have that power, as you well know," the Inquisitor had warned him....

And so the bargain had been made, and thus far Fra Durando had been well content. For it was Diego de Lorca who had accused the blameless Don Alfredo de Cristobel and his innocent virginal daughter to the Holy Inquisition, as well as a number of other families now languishing in the cells and waiting their turn before the terrible Tribunal.

The method of interrogation was without appeal, and that was why it was so dreaded by all who heard the knock upon the door of the soldiers of the Inquisition. One would be brought before a group of monks, devout Jesuits over whom the tall cadaverous Fra Durando would preside, and then from a side entrance a masked informer or a familiar would enter the chamber of questioning. He would be the accuser against the unfortunate victim, who would not be allowed to know his identity nor confound him in turn with questions. And out of that chamber there would come a broken, helpless, pitiable man or woman or girl, for courage itself could not withstand the torments of the Holy Inquisition, not when they were wreaked with such fiendish imagination and skill by Fra Durando's orders!

But Diego de Lorca had the rashness of youth and, moreover, an overbearing pride in his noble heritage; the taunts of creditors and of his former companions who had seen him lavish much gold at the gaming tables and at the taverns among pretty wenches had made him swear to himself to recoup all his losses and to make this desperate gamble for a fortune ... a fortune which would include the lush body of young Tandelayo.

And now that he had taken her cherry in the cell, fucked her by force, he knew that he could not part from her, could not leave her to die at the stake.

So his two aids Pedro Salvamar and Jose Cardinal, roistering companions in a tavern where he had often gone to sate his thirst for wine and his lust for women, and whom he had proclaimed as worthy rogues and good companions, had agreed for a share of that gold to help him smuggle the Moorish girl out of the prison of the Inquisition. He was familiar with the many secret passages which were hollowed out behind the cells, passages which the monk Jesuits had created so that the informers and familiars could at will enter the cells of those imprisoned and awaiting trial or those condemned, and reason with them or truck them into avowals which would reveal the hidden secrets which the Inquisition sought to learn from their hitherto silent lips. And after he had fucked Tandelayo, he struck her a brutal blow on the jaw. As she sank back unconscious, he put two fingers to his lips and emitted a low whistle. At once Pedro and Jose entered the cell from the hidden passage and, at his sign, bound and gagged the Moorish girl, their eyes glittering at the sight of her splendid nakedness.

"You know what way to go, you rogues!" Diego de Lorca hissed, "My carriage is waiting, and my coachman has a permit signed by Fra Durando himself which will pass us through the guards at the gate."

What he did not think necessary to tell his lowly henchmen was that he himself had stolen a parchment from the office of the Chief Inquisitor and himself forged the signature of that gaunt and ruthless persecutor of

heretics.

"Hurry, you fools, the bell is tolling and soon the guards will come here to take this Moorish bitch to the stake," he urged them. Then, as he saw them carry the naked, unconscious figure of the girl out into the tunnel behind the cell, he followed them. It was a long and tortuous way, lighted only by a small torch which he had lit just before entering the tunnel. Crouching low, for the height of the tunnel forced him to stoop as it was no higher than a man's chest, Diego de Lorca grimaced with jealous anger as he saw how his two companions held Tandelayo, one clutching both her thighs and staring at the thick black curls over her deflowered cunt, the other with his hands dug into Tandelayo's silky-tufted armpits, feasting his eyes on the two round, closely spaced goblets of her breasts with their dark-coral tips circled by the brownish-orange love halos. Well, let them look. They would not lie with her, only he. Perhaps he should kill them once they had accomplished their purpose; but that could wait. He would need the cunning of rogues like these to find the stolen chest of gold. After that, a poniard in the back would be their reward, and he would have the gold and Tandelayo and they could go to her own country, if she so wished it. The Bey of Algiers would welcome him if he could pay with Spanish doubloons for his safety and his conversion to the Moorish faith. And to Diego de Lorca it did not matter much by what name the Creator was called or praised, so long as he himself could be rich again and own a great house and have fine food and wine on his table and in bed a bitch like Tandelayo to fuck.

In the hubbub of searching for the abducted Inez de Cristobel, the soldiers of the prison paid no attention to the masked and cloaked figure of the young nobleman, for on the cloak was pinned a silver cross, which designated him as a privileged familiar and a friend of Fra Durando himself. The naked body of the Moorish girl was covered with that cloak now as

Pedro and Jose swiftly carried her to the carriage while their master clambered in beside her. He took a kerchief from his doublet, stuffed it into her mouth, and then another which he tied around her mouth and knotted at the back of her neck. Thus she could make no outcry till they had reached their destination.

It would not be to his house, because Fra Durando might suspect and send soldiers there in search of him, Diego de Lorca reasoned. No, it would be the miserable little hovel of Jose Dardenal, who should have a few extra gold pieces for this hospitality. There was a little cellar in that hovel, and there he could have Tandelayo at his mercy, interrogating her with torture if need be to open her recalcitrant lips and learn the whereabouts of that fabulously priceless seaman's chest....

And meanwhile Inez de Cristobel, still sorrowing for the death of her father, followed the masked, robust man, so richly clad and with a sword with a jeweled hilt at his side, a man whom she had never seen before but whose hair was streaked with gray and who spoke in the elegant Castilian of the court itself.

He had bribed the jailer to have an hour with her, and he had told her that he was a familiar of the Inquisition.

Inez de Cristobel was terrified when the man had identified himself as a familiar; to her, this was synonymous with the cruel Grand Inquisitor himself. But her young mind and body revolted at the thought of being bound to a stake, helpless to evade the crackling flames that rose around her. And so she had willingly gone with him. To her amazement, after she had

consented to accompany him, her masked savior had knelt down at the back of the cell, dislodged a slab of stone with seeming ease, revealing a passageway. Then curtly he had ordered her to enter it, and had directed her to the right and down a long and winding path in stygian darkness.

She had no way of knowing that his man who wished to save her was a friend of her dead father, the Count Paco de Miromar. He was fifty, but still virile and capable of lust for a beauty such as Inez de Cristobel, and he had coveted her ever since he had seen her as a child of eleven, playing in the garden of her father's house.

Paco de Miromar was, it was true, a familiar of the Inquisition. But what not even the terrible Fra Torquenada or his subordinate and right hand Fra Durando did not know, was that Paco de Miromar detested the cruelty and implacable power of this fanatical arm of Mother Church which persecuted in the name of faith, tortured in the name of salvation, condemned in the name of greed for gold and authority.

The guards were entering the cells of those condemned to the terrible processional of the auto-da-fe, and there were monks with them going into the cells of those who had been sentenced to death, bringing the terrible san benitos whose insignia indicated by what manner of death they were to perish for their heresy. The others, who would be whipped, or sentenced to the galleys, or do penance in front of the Cathedral, were being assembled in the lower court of the prison. Once having reached the subterranean level through this winding passageway, Paco de Miromar whispered to Inez de Cristobel. "Have courage, girl. We go into the kitchen of the prison, where I have a good friend. He has two swift horses outside for us, and we shall go to the country where I have a little house. There you will be safe, my

daughter.

"But who are you, that I may thank you? You are a familiar of the Inquisition, do you not endanger yourself by trying to save me from execution?" Inez protested. He had put his cloak around her now and she was trembling, thinking of how close she was to hideous death. She was five feet seven inches in height, with glossy black hair that tumbled to her shoulders, an exquisite cameo of a face, with large dark brown eyes, exquisitely straight nose, sweet generous mouth, dimpled chin, and the ivory skin of her voluptuous young body with those pearshaped titties, those lithe hips, those full over cheeked buttocks, those long and quivering thighs, would have made even a lesser man than Paco de Miromar lust for her. And now that he knew her to be all alone, her duenna Mercedes Solar in the clutches of Fra Durando himself, Paco de Miramar believed that he could save Inez and have her for himself ... and also discover the gold of Don Alfredo.

Gold and lust ... these age-old lures were to deliver many victims into the hands of the Inquisition, who itself, as we shall see, often fell prey to the deadly sins of envy and greed and venal passion.

CHAPTER NINE

THE WITNESSES

The crowd in the marketplace was agog with impatience to watch the punishment of the condemned heretics. It was ever thus with mankind,

whose most lubricious senses were titillated by blood and torture and agony and inhuman death. How many centuries ago had pitiless spectators looked down from their loges in the great Colosseum of Rome to watch the Christian martyrs being torn to pieces by the slaving of ferocious lions, and then, scarcely a few centuries later, had watched Roman prisoners dying in the arena when the tables had been reversed. Nor were the crowds who followed the executions at Tyburn in England in this very year before Columbus discovered America any less bloodthirsty than those in the marketplace of Toledo. And after them, in the centuries ahead, there would be those who would knit and count to themselves as the blade of the guillotine thudded down to sever the neck of an aristocratic nobleman or noblewoman, and those who would pay the executioner a special fee to let them have a front seat at the flogging of a prostitute in the women's prison at Banberg or Berlin in the same year that Charles Dickens immortalized Sydney Carton in his "A Tale of Two Cities."

But, then, there was ample justification for the mood of the crowd. A dozen heretics were to die at the stake, true enough, but many hours before this delightful finale, a kind of gory dessert to the feast of sadistic enjoyment to be served up to them, they would see handsome women and trembling young girls stripped and whipped by the friars, or robust men given the lash and then the branding iron before being manacled and sent off to the galleys, so that they might pull an oar for Their Majesties Ferdinand and Isabella for the greater glory of Spain.

And meanwhile, Fra Durando had delegated his authority to preside over the executions to his own shrewd and devotedly loyal colleague, Fra Murcio. It was well for both of them that the grand inquisitor of all the Inquisition, Fra Torquemada himself, was this week in Barcelona, where he was saying mass for the redemption of souls and presiding over another auto-da-fe

which would see no fewer than seventeen men and women bound to the stake and dying horribly for the pleasure of the crowds that exulted at this punishment for the impious and the blasphemer and the renegade sons and daughters of Mother Church. For Torquemada would have thought it strange that his Chief Inquisitor in Toledo should, at the very opening of this "act of faith," as these mass punishments and executions were called, leave the prison in a carriage with a handsome and mature duenna bound for the house of a man who had but recently been put to death as an enemy of Spain.

Mercedes Solar was numb with terror. She had been flogged and raped, and she knew that her life was forfeit at a single word from this cold, pitiless man whose gaunt body and whose fanatic lies proclaimed him to be not only a religious zealot but a man possessed of the most satanic lusts and cruelties disguised by the hood and the cowl and the cross.

For even as in our own degenerate century the Nazi sadists and psychopaths hid their evil and diabolical perversions under the guise of the swastika, in the name of the Third Reich, to purge it of traitors, so there were many bullies and brutes who satiated their own inordinate and unpardonable passions by wearing the black of the order and in the name of the Inquisition waged not only a war upon the helpless and the innocent but on those whom their own sinful flesh coveted and lusted for....

The auto-da-fe began with the punishment of a mother and two daughters, sentenced to a public flogging, to doing penance before the Cathedral, barefooted and in their shifts, each holding a candle in both hands and praying for forgiveness, and then to be fined a hundred golden moidores and to be placed upon the lenient probation of the Inquisition for

the next two years. Their sin? Idolatry.

The mother, Phillippa Aranguez, had gaily observed to a neighbor that her two pretty daughters, Concepcion and Rita, were betrothed to worthy young men who had given them lovely bracelets in token of their pledge of constancy. And Phillippa Aranguez, who had lost her husband to the flux three years ago, even boasted that she was being courted by a ship owner, himself a widower, who was making her feel young again and who had given her a medallion. What was more, she had shown this medallion to her neighbor, a shrewish and childless woman in her late forties, who had detested Phillippa for the latter's comeliness.

And so the neighbor had hastened to the office of the Inquisition, had been led into a room draped in black, and then a panel had slid away in the wall and then a gloomy voice had intoned, "Woman, speak as you would without fear. Your identity will not be divulged to those whom you condemn, and the saints will rejoice in heaven that you have informed against a traducer, a blasphemer or a miserable heretic."

Granted such immunity, the envious neighbor had prattled long and venomously against Phillippa Aranguez and her two daughters Concepcion and Rita. These three had been seized in the night by soldiers of the Inquisition, brought into the prison, each in a separate cell, and then each in turn brought separately before the tribunal. Fearfully, each had confessed her fondness for the bracelet and the medallion. Idolatry. And that was to be the punishment.

The trio were led to a platform by soldiers, made to mount the short

steps ascending to it, and there seized by the executioner and his two assistants. In a trice, each victim was bound to the thick wooden whipping posts, her wrists fettered with cords bound to the iron rings set into the post, and then her *san benito* was ripped down to the hips, exposing her naked to the waist.

The executioner took a knotted scourge and stationed himself behind the ivory-skinned, handsome mother, who was forced to stand on tiptoe because the ring of the whipping post to which she was attached was placed higher for her and besides she was of shorter stature than her daughters. Each of the assistants placed himself at the left of one of the pleading and weeping young girls, and at a signal from Fra Murcio, the three scourges rose in the air, poised a terrible moment, and then hissed down to bite into the naked flesh of those lovely backs and shoulders.

Phillippa Aranguez received one hundred lashes, which left her bleeding and unconscious; her daughters were more fortunate, for each received only fifty. And throughout the flogging, the cries of the spectators, the encouragements from the lustful who urged the torturers to rip the *san benitos* entirely off the victims, proved how appealing this lurid and cruel spectacle was to the populace.

After the unconscious mother and her hysterical and half-fainting daughters had been taken down from the whipping posts, revived by bucketsful of salt brine doused against their bleeding wounds by the executioner and his two assistants, there were new victims. First, an elderly man was sentenced to a hundred strokes of the scourge for blasphemy, and was then branded with the letter "B" on his right shoulder. He, like the mother and her daughters, was revived and shackled and put back into the

processional that would march in front of the Cathedral to do penance. But this only whetted the avid desires of the impatient crowd; their joy was uppermost when it was a matter of the chastisement of a handsome wench or a matron such as Phillippa Aranguéz.

And so now again they had their sport as a young gypsy girl, eighteen and not unlike Tandelayo, was dragged forward, clawing and biting and kicking up the steps of the platform and bound by the wrists to the heavy ring set in the wooden post, while the executioner himself took a cat-of-nine-tails, nine polished, tapering leather bands fixed to a short, heavy wooden handle, and swished the menacing instrument through the air with relish as his two assistants proceeded to the great joy of the crowd, moreover-to strip the girl of her shift and to leave her stark naked. Now the spectators thronged forward, milling about the platform, fighting for vantage places from which to stare at the bold, high-perched and surprisingly ripe gourds of her olive-skinned titties with their dark carmine points, the deep narrow cleft of the navel, and the forest of black silky curls which formed the Venus triangle, the play of the muscles in the lovely supple long thighs as she twisted and jerked helplessly at her bound wrists in an attempt to escape the cruel flogging. Her sentence was seventy-five lashes on the naked body-a fine differentiation in the phraseology of the Inquisition for the sin of idolatry, which in this instance was an amulet which had been given to her by her grandmother to ward off evil spirits. And again a neighbor-but this time a man who lusted for her and for whom she had only contempt-had been the informer to the friar of the little church of which her mother had been a parishioner.

Her name was Lucita Ruiz, and the tribunal had dealt almost lovingly with her case. So beautiful and desirable a girl could fan the lusts even of the ecclesiastics. So they had warned her upon the peril of losing her immortal

soul not to lie or bandy words with them but to speak the truth without fear. When she had sworn that it was only an amulet and that she was a devout daughter of Mother Church, they had taken her into the interrogation chamber and shown her the instruments of torture. The terrible strappado, which was nothing more than a noose over a beam, fixed to the victim's wrists; the rope flung over the other end was then drawn till the victim was dragged high in the air and then suddenly the rope was let down, only to be pulled short again just before the victim's feet reached the ground. Invariably such an ordeal dislocated the shoulders and caused excruciating torment. And then they showed her the implements of the water question, the funnel and the cloth and the knotted cords which were bound around legs and arms while water was being poured down her throat. And then the rack and the brazier in which slender wands and tongs would be heated until they were red hot for infliction against her naked flesh.

But they had been careful not to scar her or to hurt her too much, only enough to watch her naked body wriggling, gleaming with sweat of agony and shame, while they had hoisted her on the strappado but then gently lowered her because they did not wish to maim her. When she still was recalcitrant and insisted that the amulet was not a devil's token, they put her on the rack, just enough to stretch her till the magnificent olive-skinned body was taut and shuddering with anguish and they could see the globules of sweat in her quivering armpits and along her inner thighs and on her forehead. Then the executioner had taken a curry brush with stiff prickly bristles, and rubbed it over her titties and her belly and finally along the tender insides of her thighs while she had jerked and squirmed frantically, wakening the lust of all who witnessed her torment and even the executioner himself.

And when she had been threatened with having the brush rubbed against her cunt, which would be first shorn, she sobbingly swore that she had used

the amulet only once to wish that this man who had informed against her might be stricken dead.

So there she was now at the whipping post before the eyes of all ... and the tall, bony, gloating neighbor who had brought her to this hideous shame and suffering stood up against the edge of the platform, staring avidly up at her cunt and titties, deriving his own fanciful compensation for her rejection of him.

And so on and on through the long day the soldiers sounded the long drum rolls announcing a new punishment, a new atonement. And finally it was time for the main event. But this time there were only ten who would die at the stakes, since Tandelayo and Inez de Cristobel had, as we know, been spirited away.

Several of these condemned victims had recanted and received the merciful boon of being strangled by the executioner before the flames reached them. But for those who remained obdurate to the end, theirs was indescribable agony. And here too the mob crowded around the stakes to watch the clothing fall from the panting, shriveling breasts of a handsome matron whose face was contorted with an unspeakable horror and terror ... or here again to see a Moorish woman of thirty-, the mother of three children, condemned to death as a blasphemer and heretic, arching against the chains which lashed round her waist at the stake, as the fire reached her thighs and her pubic hair crackled as it burned, and those who watched received the most savage transports of lustful joy, as they would in sexual intercourse. This, then was the unholy fever which the diabolical work of the Holy Inquisition had inspired....

CHAPTER TEN

ADVANCE VISIT

The carriage stopped in the courtyard of a magnificent house of Don Alfredo de Cristobel. It was forfeit to the Crown, but as yet the soldiers of Ferdinand and Isabella had not yet received the royal order to occupy it and to search it for what treasures might be found within. Knowing this, the wily Chief Inquisitor profiting in the absence in Barcelona of his superior and the eminent head of the Holy Inquisition itself, the saturnine and vengeful and also unswervingly dedicated Fra Torquemada, had decided to make a personal search of this elegant dwelling and perhaps uncover for himself treasures enough to warrant his casting aside the role of subordinate and fulfilling his own secret dream of power and the life of a sybarite.

What his brothers did not know, could not know, was that the young friar who had seemed so devoted and so almost blindly incorruptible in his persecution of heretics did so as a self-defense ... in these days in the fifteenth century such things as psychology and psychiatry were of course not known. But if such a man had been endowed with powers to read the mind of his fellow man, then it would have been known at once that Fra Durando had chosen the vows of chastity and poverty and piety in a kind of way that would help him cast out the infernal fleshly lusts which had always tormented him even as a boy, even in dreams.

Yes, even as friar in his late twenties, he had wrestled with the Devil, had

gone to his cell and bared his body and scourged himself to the blood to drive away the evil, pestilential thoughts which made him no better than the lowliest vagabond in Spain. For as a boy, when singing in the choir of the little village church where his parents had been married and where himself had been baptised, Carlos Durando had come upon a mature couple in a hayloft, naked and fornicating. He had crouched there for a sudden thunderstorm had come up, and he had heard and seen how the two-backed beast was made. In all the teachings of the Bible, lust was one of the seven deadly sins, and even the priest in the pulpit of the church which his parents attended thundered forth a constant warning of eternal damnation for those who succumbed to the temptations of the flesh.

But the boy was strong and wiry and tall, and he had the natural sap and vitality of youth, so it was but understandable that often at night he would see in his mind's eye that unforgettable vision of the naked man and the naked woman coupling like animals, rutting 'in the tumbled straw, kissing and fondling, man rising swiftly and falling even more swiftly upon the groaning female whom he serviced until their simultaneous cry of rapture at climax drowned out even the crashing thunder of the storm.

So he had told himself that the only way to redemption was by taking the vows of the Jesuits and by great good works and a show of faith and confidence to convince those who were holy and purposeful that he was worthy to be one of them.

Perhaps he might have succeeded with only a few peccations, with only a few deviations from that exemplary piety which he had sworn would be his way of life if it had not been that Ferdinand and Isabella, rulers of mighty Catholic Spain, had a horror of heretics, and themselves wished such

malefactors to be exterminated. To the Church they turned, therefore, promising that in their temporal power, they would dispense justice so that those who prayed would be errant souls and those who had recanted only to go back to heretical ways might not have blood upon their own conscience, for it was written that it was evil to kill. And so there was formed the terrible office of the Holy Inquisition, which dealt with the souls and the creeds of those whose beliefs were faltering or were not strong or were disloyal to the Spanish Cause itself.

And because of this singular legal dispensation which the rulers of Spain created, those who did the heinous work of the Inquisition could tell themselves that it was not they who had sentenced a young girl or an old woman to be burned alive at the stake, or to be racked till her limbs were broken and she could not even walk to the place of execution. No, the monks prayed and questioned and then when the victim was stubborn and would not confess his or her sins, these pious guardians of salvation cast them forth from the protection of Mother Church, whereupon the stern and pitiless justice of the King and Queen would take all responsibility for the torture and the death of so many whose sins were not so frightful as was truly believed. This madness which overtook a nation was not new in the world and it would not be the last time it occurred; in our own free land of America, there was once a persecution of witches in Salem, where on the testimony of frightened and selfish children, gentle old women were hanged as a public sport.

The young friar had proved himself to be zealous, and his superiors watched his progress eagerly. They did not learn of his several lapses.

In one of the little villages to which he had been sent to make converts,

Carlos Durando once heard the confession of a handsome widow in her early thirties, whose only sin perhaps was that the tragically early death of her virile husband had left her unfulfilled, childless and yearning for a mate. But because she had been an outsider and because her husband had brought her into the village, she had been hated by all, and now no man would have congress with her except by stealth, as if she were a whore.

To the young Friar, the two Alcalde had come one day, angrily demanding that Senora Delores Santruce be driven forth from the village and stoned as a fallen woman, whereupon the young Friar reminded the vindictive official that Our Lord had forgiven Mary Magdalen. The , Alcalde himself hated the handsome widow because he had come to her cottage one night and sought her body and she had laughed at him and sent him away.

But because he was new to the village and because it was his first important post, Fra Durando assured the Alcalde that he would pray with this woman and urge her to a sanctity of life, that she might no longer offend her neighbors.

Well, she had been summoned to his rectory, and he had been alone with her and taken her into the confessional box and there heard her sobbing and pathetic avowal that she was not evil or sinful but only loved her dead husband so much that she yearned to have another man sent in his image to be husband to her once again.

He could understand this, but she also knew that too much compassion would be a weakness in the eyes of these sturdy peasants, and that if they mocked his weakness, he would be unfaithful to his duty and perhaps thus

malign Mother Church by failing his tasks.

So Fra Durando had sternly told the handsome woman that she must suffer the discipline, and he had bidden her follow him to his bedroom. There he had made her strip herself naked and kneel down before him and bow her head and repent, while he took a thick leather thong and flogged her buttocks and back and thighs till his arm was weary. As he whipped her, he could see again in his mind's eye that vision which he had espied as a boy, and suddenly, to his own horror and shame, he felt himself in violent erection. And yet, because, perhaps again this widow was in need of a master, instead of fainting under the lashing, she seemed to writhe and grovel and implore for more of it that her soul might be saved. So salaciously did her naked body twist and squirm under the thong's kisses that Fra Durando could not endure the torment of his own vigorous male body. And so, casting himself down behind her and angrily warning her that she must submit on pain of stoning and banishment for life from the village, he possessed her ruthlessly and furiously.

That was the turning point in his life. He saw that under the guise of religious power which all feared, he, the administrator of it, might by stealth and terror compel the comely female to yield to his darkest lusts.

A week later, the unhappy woman, stricken with remorse over what both of them had done, hanged herself. And the villagers acclaimed him as one who had cast out a devil from their midst, and shudderingly he kept that secret, took their praise, which was reported back to his own bishop. Slowly, suddenly, his fame grew until now he was the right hand aide to mighty Torquemada himself. He was in fact the third most powerful man in Spain, second only to Torquemada and of course to King Ferdinand. But because of

the superstitious fear that gripped the nation, only Torquemada was stronger than he, and it was his lustful urge to become the first in all Spain.

Yet he knew he could not achieve that, and so he would need gold, much gold, and perhaps then he could escape to the New World and take with him a subjugated woman who would be his lust slave.

This was why he had compelled Mercedes Solar to yield to him in her cell and why now he had brought her alone to the house where she had been employed, a gloomy house where nothing lived now and where the loveliest treasure of all that Don Alfredo had ever had beautiful Inez de Cristobel had been removed.

As he opened the door of the carriage and helped the trembling Mercedes Solar down, he bade the driver go back to the prison and tell Captain Posa that he was occupied in an investigation for the greater glory of the Inquisition. When he saw the carriage clatter away in the distance, he smiled cruelly at his terrified and handsome prey. "Now then, you stubborn bitch," he snarled, "You will take me through this house with which you must be familiar. I do not believe the story that you did not bed down with the old Don. From what I know of you already, Mercedes, you are an easy wanton, and you could not have quelled that lustful itch between your legs for all those years without creeping to the bedroom of your master on many a night! "

"Oh no, Your Reverence, I swear you" the unhappy woman sobbed.

He struck her viciously across the face. "We are alone now Mercedes Solar." he told her in a cold authoritative voice. "I have but to lift a finger and send you to the stake. Look there in the distance. Do you not see the black pall of smoke which rises over the city of Toledo? Ask yourself what that smoke is, Mercedes Solar. It is the funeral pyre of the heretics. Their flesh burns, and their souls burn in hell. There will be a stake for you, you obstinate bitch, unless you do my bidding without question and without argument, do you comprehend me?"

"Yes, Yes, Your Reverence!" she babbled. "Only, in the name of heaven, don't torture me any more. I'll do whatever you want, I swear it, but don't torture me again, don't burn me!"

"That will depend on how grateful you show yourself to be. But come now, there's work to be done. I will have you take me to every room, every secret chamber in that house. You will help me search for the gold of your master."

But what he could not know and what of course the duenna herself did not know was that the courageous old nobleman, fearing that the Holy Inquisition would one day seize him because it feared his outspoken tongue and his influence with his neighbors and his friends and even his servants, had converted all his gold into three priceless rubies, each nearly as large as a child's palm. Only six months ago, Don Alfredo de Cristobel, while riding in his carriage one pleasant evening, had seen half a dozen villagers attack an old white-haired Jew, throwing stones at him, beating him with cudgels, cursing him as a killer and eater of children—all the hideous lies which were told of those of Hebraic faith in those dark days when superstition and terror ruled Spain. He had had two of his retainers drive away the ruffians, and had taken the old Jew, Eleazer Ben Gerton, into his house where the old

man had been attended by his personal physician, and then brought to table with him.

In his gratitude, Eleazer Ben Gerton had revealed that he was a moneylender and that he had traffic with merchants who journeyed to Persia and Turkey and other exotic lands.

The old man remained as a guest in Don Alfredo's house for more than a week, and then they became close friends. The old Jewish moneylender understood only too well what religious persecution could mean, and so Don Alfredo did not hesitate to confide in his new friend his own fears of the future. Eleazer Ben Gerton then told Inez's father, "If you will convert your gold into precious gems, these you can hide where they will not be found by either the soldiers of the Crown or those who wear the Black Cross of the Inquisition. And they will be kept safe for your daughter when the time has come for her to possess them."

So he had bought these three magnificent rubies, and the old Jew had hidden them away in a tiny pouch made of sheepskin which Don Alfredo had buried in the cistern which stood near the barn and beyond which the rolling fields of Don Alfredo's estate stretched out for many a goodly acre. And then Inez's father had devised a tiny map, in cryptic symbols so that in the event it should fall into the hands of a stranger, he would not understand its meaning. And this little map had been left in Inez de Cristobel's prayer book in the library of his house. But when the young girl had been seized by the soldiers of the Inquisition, she had been given no time to do more than put a robe over her shift, and they had not allowed her to take any of her possessions with her, so that her little prayer book still remained in the

drawer of the table beside her own bed.

Don Alfredo had tried desperately to see his daughter before he had been sentenced to death by the Inquisition, but the merciless Tribunal had refused him this last kindness, and so he had died without being able to tell her of the secret which was her inheritance, one that would make her one of the wealthiest women in all Spain.

The mature Count Paco de Miromar, who himself had no love for the Inquisition as we know, suspected that his old friend had perhaps converted his gold into some small but priceless objects, perhaps gems. He too, wished to search that house if he could, not for his own greed so much as for the salvation of beautiful Inez. For if he could restore to her her estates and wealth, he told himself that perhaps he could win her hand in marriage. He lusted for her, yes, but his lust was more noble than that of the terrifying, gaunt black robed Fra Durando.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE BOLD PLAN

The Count Paco de Miramar intended to take Inez back to her father's house, but intuition warned him that this would not be the time. First, he must safely secrete the beautiful virginal daughter of his old friend Don Alfredo in a place where the soldiers of the Inquisition would not think to look for her. And so boldest of all, would be to place her in his own home, for his rank as a familiar would at once remove him from the slightest

suspensions, and his house would become a sanctuary for the terrified and bereaved young beauty.

In the carriage with him. Inez gave way to a crisis of tears, understandable enough when one realizes what torment of the mind she must have endured alone in that dark cell in the prison of the Inquisition awaiting execution by fire and already knowing that her beloved father had been put to death as a traitor to his country. Of course she did not recognize the Count because of his mask, and the moment had not yet come for him to reveal his identity till they were safely in his house among his trusted servants.

He had his own personal sorrow. When he was only twentyfive, he had fallen deeply and sincerely in love with a spirited Moorish girl, not unlike Tandelayo in both temperament and bodily attractiveness. His parents had been up in arms against such a romance, and his father had cynically advised him, "Come now, Paco, you descend from one of the oldest and most honorable names in Spain. Would you sully this heritage by an alliance to an infidel? And think of your children, boy, if you have no heed for my advice, and that of your grieving mother. Your children will be outcasts, and the blue blood of nobility which will run in their veins will mean nothing to them because they are born out of the womb of a Moorish woman. Take her as your slut, please yourself with her, give her some gold and marry her off to one of the servants, but do not destroy your life by thinking of taking her as your wife."

But the young Count had remained steadfast in his love for Mirama, and had defied his father's wishes until finally the old man had employed the services of a ruffian whom he had met in a tavern by the wharf. In exchange

for gold, the seaman had enlisted the aid of two of his companions, and one evening they had broken into the house of Mirama, abducted her and smuggled her aboard the galleon in which they were to sail for Panama. But as luck would have it, a violent storm foundered the ship and nearly all hands aboard were lost, including the young Count's beloved Mirama.

When news finally reached the young nobleman of Mirama's death, he broke with his father, and it was then that his hatred for the detestable bigotry which was beginning all Spain was born. He had never married, though he had taken his pleasure with elegant ladies in clandestine trysts from time to time as the urge moved him. But now that he was in his ripe maturity, weary of the intrigue of the Court and the fanatical persecution of all who would not bow to the will of the Inquisition, Count Paco de Miramar hoped that fate would pay him back for his murdered sweetheart Mirama in the person of the lovely and gentle Inez de Cristobel.

The carriage at last came to a halt in the courtyard of his magnificent villa, seven miles northeast of Toledo. The young grooms hurried out to unharness the horses and take them back to the stables, while his trusted majordomo, Alejandro hastened to open the door of the carriage and to greet his master.

Inez was startled when she recognized the servants of the Count, and she turned to the masked man at her side, "Who are you, then?" she gasped.

It was the major domo who unwittingly revealed her savior's identity: "Why, Senorita, it is the Count Paco de Miromar who comes back to his house to be welcomed by his faithful servants. Our master has been absent

these past weeks."

"Get about your duties, you fool," the Count gruffly told him. "See to it that Rosa prepares the best room in the house for my lovely guest, Inez de Cristobel."

"At once, master, at once!" Alejandro bobbed his head in deference, and then obsequiously escorted the still dazed and trembling brunette beauty into the luxuriously furnished house where Rosa, a buxom gray-haired woman who was the Count's housekeeper, bustled about to put the girl at ease. At her orders, the cook prepared food and drink, and Inez at last began to feel that she was safe, though she could not and would not ever forget how her father had died in that same prison from which she had just been taken.

Tactfully, the servants did not speak of the black smoke which could be seen hanging in the heavens over Toledo, though they shared their master's contempt for the bigoted and sadistic tyranny of the Inquisition. They did not voice their opinions, needless to say, for even though they were under the protection of a familiar of the Inquisition himself, there was danger that one whose views were far less tolerant than their master might overhear and denounce them to the dreadful tribunal. Nor had the Count Paco de Miromar himself openly expressed his own hatred of the very authority which he represented, except that his servants who had been with him for years knew him well and understood his innate kindness, and thus by inference understood that they had nothing to fear from him.

After Inez de Cristobel had regained a little strength after partaking of the excellent repast which the warmhearted Rosa set before her, the Count

himself entered the dining room where she was seated at the table, this time his mask removed. He bowed low to her: "Be welcome in my house. Senorita de Cristobel," he said in a resonant voice. "You're safe now and I promise you that you will never go back to that prison."

"I am in your debt more than I can ever repay you, Count de Miromar," Inez said faintly, "but I think I shall never forget that my father was murdered. If only I could have gone to the King and the Queen to plead for him, to tell them how well he had served them all these years!"

"Alas, my poor child, it would have availed you nothing. Ferdinand and Isabelle hear what they wish to hear, and Fra Torquemada has convinced them that the persecution of the innocent under the name of the extermination of traitors and heretics is blessed in the eyes of heaven."

"How does it come, Count de Miromar, that you were in that prison and able to save me? "

"I will trust you with a secret, and I know that you will not reveal it. Senorita Inez, I am a familiar of the Inquisition. I accepted that post after great reflection, for I myself had reason to stand against all that it represents, its cruelty and tyrannies, its temporal greed for power and wealth. It is like a plague which is choking the land and killing it, and I do not know when we shall be free of it. But I said to myself that if I who am one of the grandees of Spain and stand in high esteem with their Majesties, could do what little I could in secret, to be sure, to protect the innocent, then I should think more of myself as a man. Do you think that I could have endured the thought of your death at the stake, my poor child, when I am

certain that you have never in your life harbored even a hateful thought, no, not even for those who murdered your father? For he was murdered, and the reason was that they feared him. He was too kindly and too tolerant, in an age when tolerance is feared more than cruelty. And they wished his hold and lands and estate. But this is your inheritance, and it should not fall to the crown. Try to think, Senorita Inez, where your father could have hidden his gold?"

"But I was asked that at the tribunal which condemned me, Count," Inez faltered, "In all truth, I know nothing. My father never told me of such things, nor did I ever seek to know them, for they were not my business."

"But now they are because your father is dead and there is no other heir to the de Cristobel estate. It is customary after the Inquisition has issued its decree against a heretic or an adjudged traitor, that all property be confiscated. But it generally takes from two weeks to a month before an actual search is made of the house and its contents looted-for there is no other word to describe pillaging and greed of the Inquisition. And I do not think it wise to try to get access to your father's house at this moment, Senorita Inez. I shall send Alejandro in a day or two on some pretext or other to go there and to see what is happening. If there are no soldiers stationed, then it might be safe at night for us both to visit the house where you were born."

"I will gladly do that, because my prayer book is still there. My mother gave it to me as a child, and I wish it in memory of her."

"We shall find that and whatever else is yours, I swear," Count Paco de

Miromar gave her a courtly bow. "And now, my house is yours, and you've only to command my servants for anything that you require. Rosa will attend you as your maid so long as you wish her. Do not hesitate to command her or any of my servants, Senorita Inez.

Inez de Cristobel's lovely eyes filled with tears and impulsively she put out a hand to touch the wrist of her savior. "I am deeply grateful, Count de Miromar. And as I have said, I do not know how I can repay you. But I'm still saddened over my father's death, and I fear I shall be no congenial companion in this lovely house of yours."

"Your very beauty makes you congenial, Senorita Inez," he gallantly retorted. "And I will one day tell you what is in my heart."

Fra Durando walked slowly through the magnificent salon of Don Alfredo de Cristobal with the frightened duenna at his side. He had permitted her to go to the room which had once been hers, there to dress herself, but had ordered that she put on only a shift and robe and sandals, so that she might be readily offered the discipline if he found that she had tricked him in not doing all she could to uncover the treasures of her master. Haggard and trembling Mercedes Solar watched his every movement, studied the moody changes on his cadaverous face, for she knew well that her life or death depended on the whim of this cruel, inflexible man. And a curious admixture of feelings had come over her alone with him now, because as a devout veneration for those who wore the black hood and cowl and robe of the religious order; yet this man had brutally flogged and tortured her, ravished her and used her even more roughly than her own adored and now, alas, dead Manuel. Yet he was a priest, a holy man, the Chief Inquisitor, she knew that he had so transgressed his vows horrified her with the sacrilege, and so now

she felt her own body sinful for having tempted him into carnal lust. And yet a tiny part of her, the part which she could not admit and could not credence, shudderingly yearned towards him ... for Mercedes was a ripe and mature female who longed for the domination that only a male could give her.

She led him down the narrow winding stone steps, after opening a little door in the corridor which led towards the kitchen and the pantry. It was dark and dusty, and one could hear at times the scurrying of the rats, who, finding no one to half them, not even the cat which had been the pet of the cook, now boldly ventured around this house as if it were theirs by right. Mercedes uttered a cry of terror as a rat brushed her feet and vanished into the shadows, she brushed herself against the gaunt Inquisitor, panting, "In the name of heaven, Your Excellency, let me get a torch to light our way. I am afraid of the rats."

"You have no reason to fear the four-legged creatures, my daughter," he said mockingly. "Those who go on two legs are the more dangerous by far. But you'll stay here for your penance while I get the torch. Do not move from this room, or I will give you the scourge again on your naked flesh to mortify your vanity and your lustfulness, woman."

So saying, he hurried up the stone steps, leaving the duenna in the middle of that gloomy cellar, half-fainting with her agony. Each human fears one thing above all others on this earth; with Mercedes Solar, was rats, and had she been bound to a chair in the cellar and threatened with being left all night long unless she gave up her immortal soul to the Devil himself, she would eagerly have done so, such was her fear of the vermin.

It seemed an eternity until he made his way down the steps, carrying a torch. The grotesque patterns of light which played upon the bare stone floor uncovered, to the terrified eyes of the duenna, the furry beasts which made her flesh crawl with revulsion. But seeing the light, they scurried back into their holes, and now all was silent.

Thrusting the torch into a metal bracket on the wall, Fra Durando observed with satisfaction the trembling anguish of his companion. She stood there with hands clasped in fervent prayer, her eyes huge and appealing, her lips trembling. His prick ached at the sight of her, and he longed again to taste the lush ripeness of her naked flesh. He himself was still naked under his robe, and he could not control the shivering anticipation which rippled through his flesh and which projected out the turgid spear of his cock against the black stuff of the robe ... so that her eyes were inevitably drawn towards that bold manifestation.

"Well, woman, think!" his dry voice recalled her to reality. "You have been in the cellar before, I take it? Where did your master hide those articles of great worth to his household? Surely it must be somewhere here. Recollect, revive your memory, or I shall give you the discipline again to revive it for you, Mercedes Solar!"

"Oh have mercy, Your Eminence," in her terror, the duenna thought to placate this grim and terrible man by heaping upon him the most ostentatious of titles, "I am but a poor woman, a peasant, whose only importance was to be the duenna of the lovely daughter of my master. He would never have entrusted to a simple woman like myself such knowledge. It would be surely to his daughter, Your Excellency! Oh do believe me, I swear

it on the holy book itself!"

"Take care, do not blaspheme!" His brows knitted with righteous anger. "And save all your gibbering and use the strength to better purpose. Search for me, there must be chests in this cellar. Go now and look for them."

"Oh yes, Your Eminence, I will obey you! But in the name of heaven, do not punish me if I cannot find anything because there is nothing, Your Eminence!" she sobbed.

And while he stood, the handsome duenna moved this way and that among the cloth covered articles of furniture and the barrels of wine and of household goods which were kept in this spacious cellar. There was only one old oaken chest in a corner, farthest away, which seemed a likely repository for treasures. It was padlocked, and with an imprecation, Fra Duando seized a heavy iron bar and smashed the lock. But when Mercedes opened the chest, he swore again aloud and unprintably for there was only a treasure of books. And when he himself examined one of the musty volumes, his face darkened with anger; it was by an author whose works had been condemned by Mother Church for heresy and blasphemy. He took down the torch from the wall and held it to the books until they kindled, and then he stepped back and snarled, "Once again the Inquisition has proved that it was just that Don Alfredo de Cristobel deserved to die a thousand times over, if only for those books. He harbored treason there as he might traitors who would lodge here and plot their infamous crimes against our country and our church. Come, Mercedes Solar, we must search through the rest of the house."

And so they spent that entire day and well into the night, the duenna, exhaust and sobbing with her growing fear at his anger over each new failure to find the treasure, searching the rooms of that elegant house where her young mistress had once been happy and carefree. They found nothing. In the room which had been Inez's, Mercedes Solar found only the little prayer book, but Fra Durando impatiently gestured for her to put it back. He could not know that hid in its pages was that little map which told where the three priceless rubies were hidden in the cistern. And this too was the irony of fate!

He had brought provisions in the carriage, wine and bread and meat, and now he bade Mercedes serve him. He seated himself at the elegant table in the dining room where once Don Alfredo de Cristobel and his daughter had entertained their guests. The trembling woman served him hastily, and then was ordered to eat quickly. For his impatience was like a fever upon him and he could not spare much more time. When his superior, Torquemada, returned from Barcelona, he must be there to greet and honor the man who was all-powerful in Spain even over him.

"Strip naked, Mercedes," he roughly ordered after the hasty meal, when he had gone into one of the rooms to quarter himself for the night. Weepingly, the duenna helplessly obeyed. And when she was naked before him, he doffed his robe and she saw that he was hairy and naked and in rut again. With the growl of a ravenous beast, Fra Durando dug his sinewy fingers into Mercedes' ripe bottom globes, and thrusting his prick against the furry clasp, fucked her violently. Then summoning her to lie beside him in bed, he made her suck his organ back to life so he could fuck her again. And thus, he savored this clandestine night of renunciation of his holy vows.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE HOVEL

While the grim Inquisitor was having his way with the helpless duenna, the beautiful Moorish girl Tandelayo found herself in the dirty, barely furnished little hovel of Jose Cardenal, the henchman of the slim young nobleman and profligate, Diego de Lorca. Pedro Salvamar, a bearded, fat scoundrel who was the crony of Jose both men, as we know, had encountered the young nobleman at the tavern of the Red Boar, where young de Lorca often went in search of likely wenches-stared down at the naked body of the Moorish captive. They had taken off her cloak and laid her down on a straw pallet in a tiny room near the kitchen. Jose Cardenal's wife Maria, a blowsy shrew who was only thirty-one years old but had already lost her looks and figure long ago, had visited her aunt in Calderon, about a hundred miles away, and would not be back for another fortnight. So Jose had offered his house as a hiding place for Tandelayo and the young nobleman had eagerly agreed. No one would think of searching here for the escaped heretic, and he and his two aides would have ample time to compel poor Tandelayo to confess the whereabouts of that stolen chest full of doubloons and moidores and even gems, as the story went.

"Bring a pitcher of water and douse the bitch," de Lorca exclaimed. "Here is a gold piece, Pedro. Do you go out and buy food and wine for us. And don't be cheated, just because they see you with this gold."

"Have no fear, good master," Pedro Salvamar laughed and winked. "They well know that I will put my dagger in their ribs if they try to trick me. I will

go to the inn of my old friend Maximilian Gonzalez, who would not dare to trick me."

Yet he hesitated, and his eyes greedily devoured the naked lithe body of the Moorish girl. He lusted for her, and he was reluctant to leave lest his friend Jose enjoy her without his having his turn.

Diego de Lorca chuckled in turn, understanding precisely what was passing in the mind of his uncouth vagabond. "Go to, man," he jeered, "she will not vanish by the time you return. See how well she is made and how young and supple are her limbs! She can take many a man between those long thighs of hers before the night is done. So what if Jose should steal a march on you, good comrade? It could be your turn when you come back. Now hurry, man!"

So, grumbling, Pedro Salvamar left the hovel, while the young Spaniard unbuckled his doublet and took off his sword, and then knelt down to study the magnificent nakedness of the Moorish captive.

Jose Cardenal came forward with a pitcher of water and flung it into the face of the sprawled, naked girl. "Aye, good master, here's a rare piece of cunt, even if it is that of a heretic," he chuckled thickly. His beady little eyes fixed on the silk tufted black fleece of her loins, then moved along the lovely sleek belly with its narrow navel nitch and thence to the round jutting goblets of her magnificent titties whose steady rise and fall alone showed that she was still alive. "She is slow to waken, master. Another pitcher of water."

"I have a better idea," Diego de Lorca said mockingly as he undid his breeches and bared his swollen prick. "She is tight and hot, and I will revive her thus. Then you may have your turn, and perhaps by then she will be ready to loosen her tongue as we shall loosen the tightness between her long olive-skinned legs."

With this, he sank down over the girl, his hands greedily clutching her titties, and buried his hot lips in the hollow of her throat, while the stiff blade of his cock thrust demandingly against the furry slit of the naked girl.

At this moment, Tandelayo awoke, her long lashes fluttering, and when she saw the twisted, lust-flushed face of the unmasked nobleman above her, she uttered a cry and struck at him with her hands.

Laughingly, he overpowered her, gripping her wrists and forcing them out on either side of her in cross, while at the same time he thrust himself just inside her cunthole. "Now then, you Moorish bitch," he growled, "you're going to give me satisfaction one way or another. Until we learn where this treasure is, you will be our prisoner. But then cheer up, because it's better than the fire, don't you think, my wild savage?"

"You filthy infidel, to take me thus when I can't help myself!" Tandelayo gasped. "Give me but a dagger, and I will slay all of you for what you have done-aahhh-you're hurting me, Senor!"

"I mean to, bitch," he growled as he thrust himself in to the balls, reveling in her twisting, writhing and ineffectual attempts to free herself

from his harpooning. The magnificent turbulence of her bare breasts, rising and falling with erratic rhythm as she struggled with him, added to his furious excitement. The warm clutch of her vaginal sheath was indescribable paradise for the young wastrel, in whose veins flowed some of the noblest blood of all Spain. "Do you feel me, bitch?" he panted. "Am I not familiar to you, from the cell where you waited for your death?"

"It was you, then" she gasped, and spat into his face.

"You'll pay for that, Tandelayo, and with much interest, believe me," he chuckled thickly as he felt the glorious confines of her cunt grip his imbedded prick.

I'm glad that you are awake and in full possession of all your faculties. This may not be the prison of the Inquisition, my Moorish beauty, but you will find that we three have the means of making you speak."

"You can torture me to death if it pleases you, you filthy Spanish dog," she said fiercely, wincing as he dug his fingernails into her slim wrists to pin them to the bare earthen floor.

"But I can tell you nothing I don't know. The chest was stolen from the ship, true enough, and my father had been told of it, but he is dead now, and the secret gone with him."

"Not so. He would have told you, his only daughter. And by the lash or the

rack or. by the three of us keeping you busier than a whore on feast day, Tandelayo, you're going to lead us to that chest," Diego de Lorca panted.

The Moorish girl closed her eyes and passively abandoned herself, realizing the futility of struggle against superior odds. Very pale, teeth chattering with revulsion, she endured the brutal and contemptuous fucking which the slim nobleman inflicted on her, but she gave him nothing in return except the husk of her beautiful, olive-sheened nakedness. Otherwise she might have been a stone statue upon which he performed an obscene oblation.

At last, with an oath, he raised himself from her and moved away, his face twisted with anger and frustration. "You little whore," he snarled, "I know your kind. Once we get the gold, once you think I'll make a fine lady of you, you'll come crawling to my bed, I warrant. Oh yes, you'll beg for it, Tandelayo. You'll be my fancy lady and proud to be seen with a nobleman of Spain, the son of a true grandee."

"The whelp of a pedigreed animal is not in itself pedigreed, Senor," the Moorish girl mocked him as she opened her eyes and stared up at him. "The blood that you have in your veins may be blue, but it is also disgraced and diseased with your arrogance. You think because I am not of your faith, that I must be a whore. Until you possessed me in that cell, I was a virgin. And I was betrothed to the son of a man far more noble than you will ever be, you and your people who have tyrannized us and brought us into slavery only to deliver us into persecution because we do not fall down and worship the cross."

"Jose," Diego de Lorca growled, his face reddening at her insults, "take your belt and whip this bitch a little before you fuck her. I want to see her well and thoroughly fucked, hombre, do you understand me? Show me that she's just a crawling little Moorish bitch, not a fine woman as she talks herself to be."

"That I will do, your lordship," Jose grinned as he undid his belt and dropped his breeches and then flung himself down on the naked, sprawled Moorish girl.

But even as his grizzled beard rasped against her cheeks and chin, Tandelayo looked up at Diego de Lorca and taunted: "Senor, I would much rather have this man possess me a thousand times over than you once, because at least he is a man and honest and does not seek to be what he will never be."

"Damn you, Jose, I told you to whip her first," Diego de Lorca snarled as he kicked the vagabond in the buttocks.

"Hey there gently, your lordship," the ruffian leered as he looked up at the slim young nobleman, "first things first. My prick tells me that it's time to fuck, and after that there's time enough to belt this wench! Besides, you're forgetting our good friend Pedro, who'll want a piece of her pussy or cut our throats if we deny him that. Now then, you little spitfire, claw me and scratch all you wish, you're going to know you've been fucked by Jose Cardenal! "

Slipping his hands under her velvety buttocks, the bearded ruffian began to thrust himself in and out of Tandelayo's sheath, but the young girl had turned her face to one side and again closed her eyes, with her arms lying passively at her sides, and she did not resist until he had at last shot his seed deep into her already profaned chasm. Then as he rose, he dragged the black leather belt from his breeches and, doubling it in his hand, bent down and lashed her twice across the belly, and then thrice more over both round panting titties, drawing a cry of pain from the naked girl.

At this moment, Pedro entered with a jug of good wine and a basket of roast chicken and bread and fruit. "What's this, my friends?" he cried. "You have the dessert before the feast, and ahead of me, eh?" Now that's not fair play, mates."

Diego de Lorca looked scornfully at the second rogue whom he had had to engage because of his complex plot against the Inquisition and the Crown itself, and thought to himself that it was a pity a nobleman had to associate with such scum. But he needed their swords and daggers, their brutality and cunning in the midst of danger, and most of all he needed their persuasive efforts with the stubborn Moorish beauty whom he had spirited away from the prison and the stake of execution. Without them, he could not succeed, because Tandelayo had flouted him only too cleverly back there in the cell and even here in this wretched hovel.

"We were waiting for you, Pedro," he said with the air of a man who accepts destiny for what it is. "We have prepared her for you, man. Before we dine, enjoy yourself with her. And then tie her up so that she won't run away, and we'll enjoy the feast you've brought and then we'll talk about that

chest of gold and jewels which was stolen from a galleon of Spain."

Pedro did not need a second invitation. Turning over the jug of wine and the basket of food to the nobleman and his crony Jose, the ruffian soon divested himself of his undergarments and flung himself down over Tanelayo, who again endured in silence the vicious and mercifully brief fucking which in his excitement did not last too long. After that, he and Jose rolled her over onto her belly, dragged her wrists behind her back and bound her tightly with a rawhide thong, and then did the same for her ankles. Then they rolled her back over again onto the pallet and both crouched down on either side of her, fondling her titties and pinching her belly and inner thighs and playing with the matted silky hairs of her pussy, obscenely promising her much toil when they had satisfied a different kind of hunger.

And even she could not know what irony fate was playing even now. For one of the seamen who had skillfully in the dead of night smuggled that heavy chest off the galleon and onto a waiting rowboat back into the harbor, had with his companion lugged the chest to the pawnshop of old Eleazear Ben Gerton, the very man who had given such good counsel to the late Don Alfredo de Cristobel and had converted his gold into those three great rubies now buried in the side of the cistern on the Cristobel estates.

Recognizing what a priceless treasure these two seamen had brought him, and realizing also the terrible danger which might result from the search of the royal guards or those of the Holy Inquisition, the old Jew had given the two aspiring thieves good advice. "Let me bury it in the floor of my shop, and give you just enough silver now to have your fill of drink and of wenches. I am honest, I have never cheated anyone though I myself have been cheated.

I am in greater danger than you if I hide this in my shop, for if it is found, I shall be burned at the stake as assuredly as will you be if you are caught with it. Then, when the hue and cry is over, and you have escaped the law, come back and claim your gold. I will give you these tokens as pledges." And he had handed them each the half of a gold doubloon which he had cut in twain with his jeweler's saw.

And then again fate played its hand. For the very two men who had stolen a fortune from the great ship found the end of the road awaiting them in the tavern where they went to spend the pittance Eleazear Ben Gerton had given them. They had never been known to have much wealth, and so when one of them asked for a flagon of Madeira and the other for the handsomest wench in the tavern, the tavern keeper grew suspicious. His eyes glittered with avarice when he saw one of them throw down two silver pieces to pay for their wine. And then, fawning upon them and promising them the finest room and his own daughter to sleep with, he plied them with drugged wine and had them carted out into the back of the tavern where they were swiftly knifed and their bodies disposed of. There were some thirty- pieces of silver left when their dead bodies were searched ... That was the price they had been given for their theft. As to the halfcoin which was found in the purse of each, the innkeeper swore an oath against the sacrilege of defacing good money, and tried his best to piece the two parts together so that he might keep it for his daughter's dowry.

The father of Tandelayo had learned how the seamen had managed to steal the heavily laden chest from the galleon, and he had also heard how they had died in the tavern of one Hernando Valverde, whom he knew to be a rogue and who mixed water with his wine and overcharged. But he knew no more, and now that he was dead Tandelayo could not possibly have gleaned what little he knew from his dead lips. She lay there in her bonds, suffering

the mocking and bawdy glances of the two ruffians while they ate their meal and of the menacing gazes of the young nobleman, while she racked her brain to think of some way of making her escape. She knew that as a Moor she would find no salvation or aid or comfort from any Spaniard who was infested by the hatred which the Holy Inquisition had sown against her people or the Jews. And then she thought to herself of the kindly old bearded man who had once helped her father up in the marketplace when he had stumbled and grown faint from the sun. An old man with a white beard and the look of a patriarch who was a moneylender and a Jew. He had a shop along the Calle del Orinoco, in the poorer quarter of Toledo.

If she could only escape and find his shop and ask for his aid, he would defend her. For he, a Jew, who knew what persecution was even as did her own people, would understand her plight and take pity upon her.

The jug of wine at last finished and the last of the chicken and the bread gone, Jose and Pedro belched and slapped their bellies as they rose from the rude table. The young nobleman, sniffing with disdain at having to share this repast with such scurvy knaves, rose also, adjusting his doublet and tapping the hilt of his sword to reassure himself that he was their superior in pedigree as well as strength. "And now let's see if Tandelayo is ready to talk," he said gloatingly. "You have a cellar in this little hovel of yours, don't you, my good friend, Jose?"

"That's true, your lordship. Shall we take the bitch down there and work her over a bit?"

"Of course we shall. The three of us. We'll loosen her tongue. Tandelayo,

in your own interest, I warn you, you had best speak now before we begin to hurt you. There are ways of making a naked girl like you talk."

"Yes, Senor, and I'm sure you know them all," the Moorish girl scornfully retorted as Pedro and Jose bent down and lifted her up in their arms, trundling her off like a sack of potatoes between them and down the rickety wooden steps to the small cellar where Jose's shrewish wife kept empty hogheads and useless trinkets and broken muskets which she and her husband had scavenged from the dump heaps.

There was a heavy chest in one corner of the dank dark cellar, and after Diego de Lorca had lighted a torch and stuck it into the side of the earthen wall to cast sufficient light, Tandelayo was tied down over it, a thong passed under the middle of the chest and around her back and knotted cruelly tight, her wrists bound to one of the handles of the trunk, while her legs were left to straddle the other end and to kick free as they would.

"Lend me your belt, good Pedro," the young nobleman demanded, and the grinning rogue at once complied.

"Now then, you Moorish trollop, I'm going to take the skin off that posterior of yours until you tell me what you know of that stolen chest. It would be a pity to stripe such pretty skin over a trifle!"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SEX CAPTIVE

The two rogues stood near Diego de Lorca, greedily enjoying the squirming of the naked Moorish girl.

"Well, you bitch, speak up, your last chance!" Diego de Lorca snarled.

"You call the stolen chest a trifle, Senor?" Tandelayo mocked him. "What good will it do any of you even if you find it, since it does not belong to you?"

"Silence, you Moorish slut," he cried, lifting the belt threateningly aloft.

"Beat me if you like, Senor," she taunted him. "Enjoy what little time you and your friends have left in this beautiful land of Spain. Yes, because you dare not stay in Spain once you steal the gold that belongs to your King," the naked girl defied him as she turned her lovely face back to where he stood at her left, the belt dangling from his hand. "You can kill me, but I won't tell you."

She had purposely used this last phrase to make certain that he would take the bait. For now she had decided on a daring scheme of escape. She would tell him that the gold was hidden in the shop of the moneylender, but she would not tell him the address of the old Jew's shop. And once they freed her and took her with them, she knew herself to be agile and quick enough to escape from them in the crowd and to find refuge in some hiding

place where she would be safe until she could find Eleazear Ben Gerton.

And the greedy young wastrel took the bait at once. "Do you hear that, compadres?" he eagerly demanded of Pedro and Jose. "She didn't mean to let that slip out, I warrant you. So she does know where the chest is, after all! All right, my pretty infidel, I'm going to give you the belt until you decide that it's much easier to confide in us than to have the skin taken off that pretty hide of yours! "

And with this, Diego de Lorca lifted up the belt and slashed it violently and diagonally over the huddling olive-sheened buttocks of the naked beauty. Tandelayo shivered and closed her eyes, grinding her teeth together to suppress any outcry. The wild, desperate plan took shape in her mind as she lay bound over the rough wooden chest, for she realized she must not yield too quickly lest they doubt her story. Also, she must supply just enough details to whet their greed for gold so they would force her to take them to where it was hidden.

The belt swept down again and again, whistling through the air and wacking with a sonorous impact over her squirming naked behind. The burning kisses of the leather turned the warm olive-sheened skin to a fiery red before, after about some twenty vigorous lashes, Tandelayo at last sobbingly cried out: "Enough! Oh in the name of Allah the Compassionate, have pity on a poor helpless girl! I will tell you, only do not beat me any more!"

"Now that's a better tune to sing than any I've heard from you before, my sweet bird," Diego de Lorca panted as he stepped back, his eyes fixing on the vividly striped flesh of Tandelayo's voluptuous posterior. "But you'd

best not play us false, girl, or there's more where that came from. Splinters under your toenails and fingernails, red-hot needles thrust into your titties and that tender backside of yours-yes, as a familiar of the Inquisition, I know how to make you pay for any lies you tell us. Remember that, Tandelayo. All right then, Pedro, untie the bitch."

"But what's the need, your lordship? Pedro guffawed. "She's nicely tied down now for a fucking, your lordship. And watching her pretty ass jerk and jump and twist about while you've been thrashing her has made me horny as the devil himself, I swear it has."

"And me as well," Jose Cardenal chimed in. Diego de Lorca shrugged. Inwardly, however, his lust for Tandelayo was such that an angry jealousy rose in him at the thought of having to share her with these two ruffians. But prudence dictated discretion, for he knew himself to be no match for their combined murderous skills, and a knife in the back was no respecter of nobility. If he did not wish to lie on his blanket without sleep and keeping all his senses alert for a stealthy sound in the night, he had best give in to their desires. "Why, as to that, I confess I myself feel an itch in my private parts, good comrades," he jovially told them. "Only I go first, because I am the one who found this bitch for us all, and do not forget it."

"As your lordship wishes," Pedro grimaced as he rubbed his crotch impatiently. "But have done with it, for I am smoking down below, I swear this on the bones of the first king of Spain himself!"

"Have pity, my lord," Tandelayo now turned her tearstained face back over her shoulder to appeal for mercy. "Senor, I will tell you, but if you and

your men use me thus so cruelly, I will never tell."

"Do you dare to bargain with us, you Moorish bitch?" the slim young nobleman angrily growled. "By my faith, I'll teach you not to try that game again. Hand me the belt, Pedro!"

"Willingly, your lordship," Pedro grinned. "Wait, in the name of mercy, Senor!" Tandelayo cried. "I will take you to where the chest is hidden, and you, Senor de Lorca, I will willingly give myself to you and be whatever you wish me to be to you, if you will save me from them."

"Hola, your lordship, are you going to bargain with this bitch now?" Pedro Salvamar angrily demanded as he prepared to loosen his breeches and bare his swollen prick. "We've an agreement between us all, a part of the gold and whatever spoils are taken. And the wench belongs not to one man but to the three of us, isn't that what you agreed to, your lordship?"

"Of course, man," Diego de Lorca impatiently retorted, "but use your brains if you've any left in that addled head of yours. She can turn stubborn again, as she's just said, and I for one would rather have the gold, because with it one can buy a dozen such wenches. One for each of you, or two, if you've a mind."

"There's something in what he says, Pedro," Jose Cardenal advised, his bearded face ugly with concentration. "With all that gold and the jewels in that chest as we've heard, I could ditch my old woman and pick myself a lady out of the court, so I could, and so could you, Pedro. Let the wench alone

until she' taken us to where the treasure is. Then there's time enough to decide what's to be done with her." He made a vicious gesture of drawing a forefinger across his throat, accompanying this with a lewd wink, and Pedro cackled with glee: "That's right, hombre! Well, your lordship, let the bitch take us there then. It's nightfall and we won't be so likely to run into the soldiers on patrol if we go now."

"Very well. Cut the bitch loose, give her a cloak and some of your wife's clothing, for there's no sense taking a naked wench through the streets of Toledo or you'll have every man jack in the city on your heels," Diego de Lorca laughingly agreed.

Then, bending and running his hand over Tandelayo's quivering, inflamed bare bottom, he added, "And as for you, Tandelayo, no tricks. If you're taking us on a wild goose chase, you'll have need to call on this Allah of yours before we've done with you and that's my promise to it!"

"And mine too, your lordship," Pedro Salvamar crouched down to cut the rawhide thongs binding the Moorish girl's waist and wrists. He leered at her and with his free hand stroked her naked back, then slyly moved his hand down along her side until he could press it against one of her panting round olive-sheened titties, flattened down against the chest in her helpless posture. "It would be a pity to kill such a lovely pullet. Now you be good, and maybe we'll give you a few gold pieces and find you a husband. Though you'll miss us, I warrant, after the way we've fucked you and shown you what it is to be under a man, a real man, my beauty!" In a few minutes, Jose Cardenal brought back a pair of calecons, drawers made of rough cloth, and a sleazy, dirtied dress which belonged to his wife, as well as her best cloak. Tandelayo hastily covered herself, and Diego de Lorca took up the jug of wine and

found about half a glass left in it, which he poured out for the Moorish girl:

"Drink it and give yourself strength, bitch," he ordered. "And now there is this chest you speak of?"

"In the shop of a pawnbroker, Senor. I know the way well."

"Very well. You'll go on my arm, as if you are a great lady," Diego de Lorca remarked. "You, Pedro and Jose, will follow behind us as if you were a guard of honor. And not too closely either, remember. In the event that we see soldiers, I as a familiar of the Inquisition will not be questioned. But you two rogues may well be, for one look at your faces would convince a magistrate that you both deserved hanging, and that as quickly as possible."

"That's not a pleasant joke, your lordship," Pedro Salvamar grumbled.

"It's what's likely to happen if you cross me, either of you," the young nobleman warned.

They left the hovel and made their way into the street. It was dark and silent. Tandelayo walked slowly, her arm entwined with that of the man who had saved her from the stake only to bring her to this hovel where the lash and lust had been her regimen. The cool night air revived her, for she was bruised and weak from the violent assaults which had been made upon her, and also there was a kind of enervating aftermath when she had been ready

for death by fire and had been saved from it at the last moment.

The shop of the Jewish moneylender was about two and a half miles to the northwest. It was nearly midnight, and there was of course danger of being stopped by the patrols. And there was further danger because, Diego de Lorca well knew, notices must already have been posted on the escape of one of the heretics sentenced to the stake. To avert this danger, he made Tandelayo wear the Venetian facemask which he himself had worn upon entering her cell this afternoon. "This way, you will appear to be my mistress, whose reputation I protect."

"You do me too much honor, Senor," Tandelayo mocked him with a curl of her lovely lips.

"Why, now, girl, I won't use you badly, once we've found the gold. I've a fancy for you.

Surely you must have felt it when I had you. If you'll be good, I'll take you with me."

"Let me think about it, Senor."

"Do so. But remember, if you stay in Spain, you're sure to be taken and then burned. I would spare you that. Are not my embraces preferable to those of the fire?"

"Let's go this way, Senor," Tandelayo evaded the question. "I think I hear someone coming, it might be soldiers."

They turned quickly and went down a dark alley. But Tandelayo's keen eyes, used to the darkness, perceived that it was a dead end save for a wooden gate which was as tall as a full-grown man. She did not know what lay on the other side, but it was worth the attempt. Turning back to look at the street whence they had come, she suddenly cried, "Look out--I see soldiers!"

Diego de Lorca whirled, as did Pedro and Jose. Tandelayo broke free and ran like one possessed down the narrow alleyway.

"After her, you fools, she's tricked us!" Diego de Lorca swore, clapping his hand on the hilt of his sword. The two ruffians drew their daggers and hurried after Tandelayo. But she had gotten too good a start, and swiftly leaping as she approached the gate, she grasped the top of it with both hands, and then agilely hauled herself up and over it just before they reached her. She had just time enough to see that there was a kind of abandoned garden on the other side. She let herself fall into a bed of what had once been flowers and was now weeds, and then, scrambling to her feet, hurried through the garden and past the old ruined house which stood there. It had once been the property of a wealthy shop owner whose neighbor had betrayed him to the Holy Inquisition and who had died at the stake for heresy. His property had been forfeit to the Crown, and the house had long since been looted and left to stand there as a warning to malefactors.

Tandelayo ran out into the street and then, drawing a deep breath, ran like a deer and disappeared around the side of another house, as she quickly lost her pursuers. Jose and Pedro, swearing horribly, had at last to report to the infuriated nobleman that she had made good her escape.

"You fools," he cried, "she's going to the shop of the moneylender to find the gold all for herself. See what you've done?"

"But, your lordship, you were taken in as much as we," Pedro Salvamar protested.

"Aye, that's true, your worship," Jose added confirmation. "You were the one walking with the girl, you ought to have had sense enough to hold her tight and know it was a trick."

"Do you dare, you dog, to question a de Lorca?" the slim young nobleman snarled.

"I've enough of your fancy airs, for one," Pedro Salvamar snarled. He drew his dagger and lunged at the young wastrel. But Diego de Lorca had anticipated this, and, agilely stepping back, drew his sword and thrust the point into Pedro Salvamar's heart, then wrenched the bloody steel free. With a gurgling cry, the ruffian sprawled on the cobblestones of the alley.

"You bastard, you've killed my best friend," Jose Cardenal shouted as he lunged with his dagger at the foppish young nobleman. But Diego de Lorca

had whirled and, lunging to one side, feinted Jose into driving there with his knife, whereupon, the expert swordsman that he was, Diego de Lorca quickly recovered and thrust home his blade into the pit of Jose's belly. The bearded man doubled up, coughing, his eyes rolling, as he panted, "She'll do you in too ... it was a trick ... now we've nothing ... a curse on your black heart, you blu-blooded bastard ... this is my reward ... oh, Jesu, receive my spirit...."

At last paroxysm stiffened him, and as Diego de Lorca drew back his bloody sword, Jose Cardenal sprawled forward on the cobblestones only a few feet away from his dead friend.

The familiar of the Holy Inquisition had killed twice for gold and he had already been false to his creed of war upon the heretics. But this meant nothing to him. Now his only thought was to find Tandelayo so that he could take the treasure for himself, have his fill of her, and then either kill her or have her taken back to Spain where the long arm of the Inquisition would seize her and give her the fiery death from which today she had been spared through his own intervention.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ESCAPE!

Tandelayo ran like a deer, thinking only of saving herself from the brutal men who had tortured and ravished her. Having crossed through the garden and out into the next street, she did not wait to look back but continued her

frantic course as far away from the trio as she could get.

Finally, exhausted, she sank down in a dark doorway of a little house, and tried to recollect her senses. Suddenly her blood ran cold as she heard a faint, dry chuckle and then a cracked, rather feeble voice spoke: "The night is cold, my daughter, to stay here unless you await some handsome young Senor to take you with him."

Turning quickly, she beheld a white-haired little man on a cane, who had hobbled out of the doorway and seen her crouching there at the entrance. "Oh please, Senor, I am not waiting for a man, I am trying to save myself! "

"You, so young, in need of salvation? Heehee! Surely, for all that the worthy powers of the Inquisition declaim, Toledo cannot be overrun with heretics and those who are in mortal danger of losing their souls, for that would mean nearly all the populace!" he chuckled. "Let me see your face, my daughter."

Tremblingly, Tandelayo turned to one side, and the old man gasped: "How beautiful you are! I, alas, can do no more than with my rheumy eyes admire and perceive. Were I some forty- summers younger, you would not be crouching here in my doorway, but inside my warm house sipping wine with me and then passing to other pleasant diversions. Heehee! How can I help you my poor child! You are of that race which we call the Moorish, are you not?"

"Yes, Senor. And I throw myself on your mercy. I do not wish to die at

the stake because my faith and the color of my skin differ so much from the people of the city."

"Do you fear me, child? I am seventy-two, and I perhaps have not more than a few more months, my physician tells me. But the sight of you warms my old heart and my bones. I will save you if I can. What do you need of me?"

"I am seeking the house of a moneylender, who was once kind to my dead father."

"And his name, my child?"

"Eleazear Ben Gerton."

"Why, that is passing strange! He is a dear friend of mine, Senorita. I will have my carriage take you to his dwelling. But first, come inside my humble house and partake of wine with me and perhaps a little food. You are weary, I can see that."

"May Allah bless you, Senor."

She straightened, glanced down the street and saw no one. Then she went with the old man into his house. An elderly manservant who seemed as senile as his master hurried to the bell, and brought food and wine for the

trembling young Moorish beauty.

Her host identified himself as Domenico Torres, a retired ship maker. And while the girl regained her strength and caught her breath after her frantic escape, he regaled her with tales of the past. "Yes, my daughter, if I were but younger I would not leave you thus, and I myself would be setting forth upon some great voyage of discovery! I hear that the Queen is about to give her aid to a penniless visionary, one Cristoforo Columbo. Well, I can only wish him a fortunate voyage and success at the end of it, for this Queen is a woman who will not hesitate to hurl a man down from the heights to which she has raised him. She is as fickle as the people. But no more of this. Ah, Nicolo, what news of the carriage?"

"It will be ready within the hour, my master," the old servant quavered.

"There, my child. Stretch out upon this couch and close your eyes. I will waken you when it is time to go. I am sending my young servant, Francisco, as the driver of the carriage, and he will see that you come to no harm. He is an excellent swordsman and, though a Spaniard, he has a gentleness in his soul which does not let him see heretics at every corner on every street. Go with God, my daughter."

There were tears in Tandelayo's eyes as she humbly kissed the withered hand which the old man held out to her. And then, supple as a cat, she stretched her body out along the velvet-draped couch and was soon asleep.

Meanwhile, her pursuers, cursing vile oaths, had lost the trail entirely.

And Pedro and Jose began to upbraid the young nobleman who had brought them to such a purposeless end of this quest in which they had agreed to help him. "How could you let the girl go, your lordship?" Pedro snarled. "Did you not yourself tell us that she was a tricky vixen? You should at least have had her bound so that she could not run away. Now how the devil are we to find her and that chest of gold and jewels?"

"Aye, how indeed?" Jose echoed. "And my wife will turn me out of the house after she finds that I've brought a slut there who gave us no profit. And you, Don Diego, how will you pay us what you promised?"

"You utter fools! We'll find her, we must. Because if the Inquisition finds her first, then you and I, my friends, will be in the same kettle of fish and there'll be a burning of the three of us as well as of that bitch," the young nobleman angrily retorted.

"Then how do you wish us to search, good master?" Pedro sarcastically demanded. "Are we to go through the streets and ask the watch to tell us whether he has seen a Moorish girl running away? She has gone to some kennel to hide and she will not come out again so easily. Damn it, master, you should have let me take her, I'd have throttled her before she could escape from me."

"I'll hear no more of your insults, Pedro Salvamar," Diego de Lorca angrily insisted. "We are all in this venture together, and there's no need for name calling."

"Oh, but there is, your worship," Jose Cardenal sarcastically countered. "You have cost us a pretty penny with your fine ways. And the way you thrashed her-why, those were love taps. Now had I wielded that belt on her bare ass, you'd have seen the blood flow, and, by all the saints, she'd have talked her head off with a bucket of brine to wash down the bleeding wounds before I'd have let her off."

"I dislike your tone, Jose," Diego de Lorca snapped, hand at his sword.

"Is that a purse attached to your belt, your worship?" Pedro innocently demanded.

Diego de Lorca glanced down at himself, and at that instant Jose Cardenal drew his dagger and stabbed the young wastrel between the shoulderblades. Diego de Lorca uttered a strangled cry, and then crumpled to the ground. Hastily Pedro knelt beside the inert body, cut away the purse, and opened it. "A few doubloons, and a little silver. Not much for all our work and trouble, Jose. But better by far than to have our necks stretched on the gallows or our bodies on the racks when the Inquisition gets done with us. You know, I think that bastard would have delivered us over to the holy fathers after he'd found his Moorish bitch and his chest of gold, without giving us so much as a moidore."

"I think you speak with wisdom, Pedro. So let's go to the Inn of the Blue Grotto and buy a flagon of good Madeira and drink to his soul's salvation and to our luck in escaping at the very least a prison cell."

And thus Diego de Lorca, familiar of the Inquisition, who sought gold and the virtue of Tandelayo, found ignoble death in a narrow, dirty little alleyway in the city of Toledo. He had lost both now, and he had sullied the good name of his family for all time to come.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE GREED

Tandelayo left the house of the old ship maker, her eyes were filled with tears of gratitude at the kindness which could be rendered to her without search of profit by a man ... what was more, an unbeliever, a Spaniard. The gentle white-haired old man had given her a costly cloak and a new dress, and into the pockets of that cloak had slipped a few gold pieces. "If my friend cannot get you out of Toledo, my girl," he had told her, "he will at least let you stay at his house until it is safe to make inquiries.

The Inquisition soldiers search throughout the city for heretics, and I can guess that you are on their proscribed list." At this, Tandelayo had confessed to him that she had been under sentence of death by fire, and, moreover, that she had been imprisoned and threatened with torture in the hope of getting her to tell the whereabouts of a certain stolen sea chest containing a fortune in gold and gems. The old man laughed and shook his head sadly: "So it is not entirely an act of faith, as they call their auto-da-fe, you see, my daughter.

It is greed for gold, the same greed which made Cain kill his brother, the

gold which destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, the same greed that will destroy us in our time and those who come after us. But I think that old Eleazear will know a way to pass you safely through the gates and into the countryside where there are more honest people and not those courtiers who seek to curry favor with their King and Queen and who would deliver a helpless girl into the hands of the torturers. I am of that faith, my daughter, but I cannot countenance, nor do I think the good Creator of us all would either, the persecution and the merciless torture and burning of those who do not agree with our doctrines or espouse our faith. For all I know, your god is as gentle and good as mine, except that you call him by the name Allah. In eternity, my daughter, when at last we shall meet, we shall all of us know the truth. Now Godspeed, and tell that gay blade of a coachman of yours, Francisco Herrera, that he is not to let you out of his sight until he is sure that you are safe with my good friend Eleazear."

And so Tandelayo, the Moorish girl, the nineteen-year-old beauty who was to have died by fire this very afternoon, found herself riding in a coach driven by a handsome, swarthy young coachman who, on handing her into the conveyance, stared boldly but not displeasingly at her. Indeed, she blushed to see the admiration in his dark eyes. His skin was almost as dark as hers, though he was a Spaniard.

He had only a short beard, but his eyes were good and clear and true, and his mouth firm and not twisted in lust. He was sturdy and young, and she found this pleasing.

They came at last to the dwelling and the shop of the Jewish moneylender who had advised Don Alfredo de Cristobel into the conversion of his wealth into three gems. Francisco Herrera got down off the coach, and opened the

door with a flourish of his plumed hat, such as he might accord the Queen herself. "Here we are, Senorita. I shall wait for you until I am sure that all is well."

"Thank you, Senor, you are very kind. And when you see your master again, tell him"

"My master?" The youth laughed heartily. "Has that old fox of a grandfather of mine been telling you such stories? I'm his grandson. And I simply take the name of Herrera because it was my mother's name, and because I am still an apprentice. When I have attained my mastership in the guild of ship makers, then I will take my grandfather's name and be worthy of it."

"I am sure you are worthy of it already, Senor Francisco."

He had held her hand a little longer than was necessary in helping her down from the carriage, but Tandelayo did not find this at all annoying. She felt a sweet languor stir in her thighs and in her breasts, because she was now wakened through the brutality of violation, but now wakened to the sensitivity of someone who was gentle and tender and respectful, unlike her three ravishers.

"It is very late, and I am afraid the old man will be asleep. Perhaps you had best wait, Senor Francisco, until I am sure he will let me in," she said softly. She took away her hand very gently so as not to offend him.

He bowed low. "I am at your orders, Senorita."

She advanced to the door of the house and struck the knocker three times. After a moment, there was the sign of light through the windows, as a servant lit a candle, and then the door was opened and not the servant but Eleazear Ben Gerton himself, in his nightshirt and his yarmulka, stood before her.

"The hour is late, if you wish to do business in my shop, Senorita," he said politely, mistaking Tandelayo for a wealthy young noblewoman in that magnificent cloak the old ship maker had given her.

"Oh no, no, it's not that. My name is Tandelayo. You were a friend to my father whom they called 'Morisco Viejo.' Do you not remember?"

"The old Moor ... but of a certainty, I do. He and I often talked of philosophies and of the day when his god and mine would let all mankind be at peace and put an end to bigotry," said the Jewish money lender. "Come in, my daughter. Oh, I know that he is dead and how he died. And you were taken too, were you not?"

"Yes, Senor. But I escaped from prison and your friend who was so kind to me, the old ship maker, said that you would' help me leave Toledo."

"I see that his grandson has brought you to my humble dwelling, my daughter. Come inside. It is too late to talk tonight, but on the morrow we shall make plans. Go tell that good-for-nothing of a grandson of his not to stay with that carriage beside my door all night, it will draw the attention of the soldiers of the Inquisition. For I, my daughter, a Jew, am in as great danger as you. I will help you all I can.

On the morning of the next day, Tandelayo woke in a soft bed, and uttered a cry of fright, until she realized where she was and remembered how she had come there. The gentle gray-haired wife of Eleazear Ben Gerton was beside her, inquiring of her health. Sarah Ben Gerton had talked with her husband before Tandelayo had wakened, and they too had agreed that it was best for all of them to flee the city of Toledo. But it was the thought of the money lender to find a ship that would take him to Africa, for he felt a kinship with the Moors, they too being outcasts in this land of greed and colonization and royal treacheries.

Francisco Herrera, dressed as an apprentice, came by that afternoon to call with a message for both Tandelayo and for his grandfather's dear friend Eleazear. And the two young people were left in the same room for a moment while the moneylender and his wife conferred with a friend who had just come to them with news from the prison of the Inquisition. A price had been set upon the head of Tandelayo and also on that of Inez de Cristobel.

"That decides it," the old money lender said, "because for that gold, even a worthy man who has known the pangs of hunger and of poverty would be tempted to turn that virtuous and unfortunate child over to those torturers to die so hideously. No, my beloved Sarah, we shall keep our faith in the new land, and our Moorish neighbors who have also known persecution, they will

abide with us in righteousness. Come, we must pack and be off. Francisco knows of a small ship outside the harbor of Corquenadeam which is but a day's journey from Toledo."

Then he went back into the room in which Tandelayo and the handsome swarthy Francisco sat, staring admiringly at each other, strangely fallen silent, for each felt a new and strange emotion in each other's presence.

"The news that I have, Francisco, is very bad. We shall take your offer of that little ship and start our journey at nightfall. Alas, it is not only Tandelayo whom the Inquisition seeks, but also the daughter of another dear friend of mine, Don Alfredo de Cristobel. It was I who advised him how to hide his gold from their greedy hands."

"Gold, gold," Tandelayo repeated with a sobbing little laugh. "For this men kill and perjure themselves, give up their honor, and torture helpless women. I was imprisoned and sentenced to death because I could not tell them where my father's treasure was. And they believed that treasure to be a sea chest stolen from one of the galleons of the Crown, of which of course I knew nothing nor my poor father either."

Eleazear Ben Gerton stared at her incredulously: "A chest? Stolen from the galleon? Ah, this is irony indeed, my daughter. Two seamen came to me some little time ago and they had this chest, and they told me how they had come by it. And so I buried it in the cellar of my house and I gave them each a broken half of a coin by which they could redeem it."

"As it chances," Francisco Herrera spoke up, "I have heard news that two seamen were murdered in a tavern and their bodies disposed of. The soldiers are questioning the villainous innkeeper who is supposed to have at least seen the murder if he himself did not commit it. He has had others killed for profit, that we have always suspected."

"Oh the justice of heaven," the old Jewish money lender looked up at the ceiling and sighed. "If this be true, then all the wealth in that chest must be spent for the people of Tandelayo and of my own race to bring them into freedom from the bondage of this new and dreadful Egypt where we are as dogs and rogues before the symbol of the cross."

And thus it came to pass that Eleazear Ben Gerton felt himself absolved of his pledge of redemption and himself unearthed the chest. Francisco Herrera opened it and stared aghast at its contents. Pieces of gold and rare glittering gems, piled to overflowing, a fortune and more.

"Perhaps," the money lender said gently, "it should be given back to the Crown from which it was stolen."

"No," Francisco Herrera boldly declared. "How do you think that money was gleaned, old man? From the colonies, by the lash and the sword, poor Indians working in mines, tortured to give up their treasure, money with blood upon it. Let it be done as you have said, to aid those who have suffered from Spanish tyranny. Then alone will the blood be wiped clean from that gold and those gems. And make haste, lest someone learn of this and have you and your wife torn asunder out of their own greed!"

And so that night Eleazear Ben Gerton and his wife and Tandelayo set out in a carriage, driven by Francisco Herrera. The young grandson of the ship maker took a route which he knew, to the western gate, where vigilance was not so great. Quick-thinking as he was, he had procured a pass from a captain for whom he had bought many a drink in a tavern. The chest of gold was hidden carefully under the bottom of the seat in the back of the carriage, and when the captain hesitated, scratching his forehead and staring at Francisco Herrera, the latter leaned down from the coachman's box and said softly, "Take this and drink my health, Captain Sanchez."

The captain shrugged and opened his hand to receive Francisco Herrera's handful ... and when he stared at what his hand now contained, he gulped and waved to the guards: "Open the gate at once, business of the King! "

A dozen gold pieces and a rare ruby ring worth more than his salary for the next twenty years were concealed in the hand he now thrust into the pocket of his uniform. "Godspeed!" he called after the coach.

And then he smiled as he went back to his post. There would be much wine and that flirtatious Luisa who had snubbed him for Major Duarte would snub him no longer ... A few pieces of gold or the promise of this priceless ring would make the little bitch open her legs for a prick whenever he wished....

The next afternoon they reached the little port where the ship lay waiting, and Francisco Herrera helped the old money lender and his wife aboard. The chest had to be lifted by two sturdy seamen, and Francisco

himself supervised it so it was taken to the little cabin which the old money lender and his wife would share on the journey. Then he stood on the deck with Tandelayo and he said to her, "My beautiful one, I am half tempted to go with you, except that you would not have me."

"Why would I not have you, Senor Francisco?" She looked at him with her soul in her eyes. "After what you and your grandfather have done for me, I would be your slave and willingly."

"Not my slave, but my wife. But then, I am a Spaniard and you are a Moor."

"But our hearts are as one, Francisco. Come with me to Algiers. There you can build your ships, there you can sail for new worlds, and be happy with me and I will be all things to you and your wife and give you children," Tandelayo murmured.

Francisco Herrera drew a deep breath. Then he decided. Turning to one of the idlers on the wharf, he beckoned, and when the man came forward, he whispered to him and handed him two pieces of gold. The man gaped at him, then touched his forelock and mounted onto the coachbox, picked up the reins and called to the horses.

"What have you done, my love?" Tandelayo murmured.

"I have sent that worthless old fool to the house of my grandfather to

tell him that he shall hear news from me from Algiers when next he learns of my whereabouts. And I have thanked him for his Christian kindness to a Moorish girl who has my heart," the swarthy young man replied. Then he turned to Tandelayo and cupped her cheeks as he pressed his mouth reverently to hers. Her sinuous arms wound 'round him, and he felt the thrust of her titties as she gave her kiss, surrendering all to him in that sweet embrace.

And that night, after the captain of the vessel had married them, Francisco Herrera and Tandelayo lay naked in the narrow bunk of the little cabin which was all the space that could be found aboard that ship bound for Algiers. And though but some scant forty-eight hours before she had been a pure virgin, Tandelayo was now a rapturous and happy bride, eager for fulfillment. Yet even as he mounted her and was about to thrust his prick against the soft furry thatch which crusted her love mouth, she whispered, "Before you take me, my sweet Francisco, I have a confession to make of you. I am not a virgin, and I would to Allah that I were for you."

"It matters not, my sweeting. I want you, I shall always want you, Tandelayo."

"No, but you must learn this. I would not have you think me guilty of deceit, my lover. In the cell, in prison, as I lay waiting for my death at the stake, a nobleman came who was a familiar of the Inquisition. He ravished me against my will, and then he took me out of the prison with two of his companions to a little hovel which belonged to one of them. There they beat me and again ravished me, trying to learn from me where the chest was hidden. So tonight when you take me for the first time, you must know that

I am not pure."

"You little fool, you darling, do you think I am pure? I have lain with a dozen wenches before I wed you this day, my Tandelayo," Francisco Herrera muttered, his voice thick with lust and love. "And now, for the love of Allah, as you yourself would say it, please to close your mouth except on mine, and let us give ourselves up to this night of nuptials!"

"Oh yes, my love, my lord, my life," Tandelayo whispered ecstatically as she spread her thighs and locked her arms around his sturdy shoulders, feeling his prick slip gently between the lips of her twitching pussy. Then she heard a groan as his mouth sealed hers and she felt him thrust to the end of his manhood within her quivering sheath.

But his hands were gentle and reverent even in their lust and joy. They cupped her titties, they stroked her sides, roamed under her bottom and gripped the velvety cheeks as he rode her, with the lusty vigor of a young man in love. His forefinger caressed the twitching moist rims of the vulva, found the nodule of the clitoris, and Tandelayo uttered a shriek of ecstasy as she felt herself borne up towards the stars.

And thus for these at least, the Inquisition had no more terrors.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

LUST

The next morning, when Fra Durando awoke to find himself in bed with the cowering, naked duenna, he remembered his purpose in coming to the house of Don Alfredo de Cristobel. He was sated with the ripe flesh of this harlot, and her only reason for remaining alive that she might aid him in finding the hidden treasure. But now his stomach was empty for food, and he prowled the house, donning his black robe and sandals, finding a little wine in the cutglass decanters in the salon of the man whom he himself had sent to death so unjustly. In the kitchen there was only some stale bread and a pot in which garbanzos and pieces of tender kid had been cooking when the soldiers of the Inquisition had come to take Mercedes Solar to the prison. He heated the unpalatable mess and made a meal of it with the bread and the wine, and then he went back to the bed in which the naked duenna lay, now awake and with the covers up to her neck and shrinking back at the sight of him as if he were the devil incarnate. And to her indeed he was.

"Woman, I did not bring you here to appease your insatiable lusts," he growled. "We must find the gold and then I must get back to my duties. I'm certain that my superior, the great Torquemada, will reach Toledo a few days hence, and if he finds me absent, there will be unpleasantness for both of us. If you value your life, and you do not wish to die horribly, dress yourself and aid me in the search."

"But, Your Worship, we have looked everywhere," Mercedes sobbed.

Infuriated with her helplessness, the gaunt Inquisitor flung back the covers and stared at her naked body. Then, in lieu of a weapon he began to

slap at her with his bony hands, stinging her naked titties and her belly and inner thighs, till she wailed and squirmed out of bed, but not without a number of good stinging slaps on her plump bottom. At last when she was clothed, cringing in terror of him, he fiercely ordered her to take him to each room of that house which was now forfeit to any living man or woman or child in Spain save the Crown. And all through that day they diligently searched, but they found nothing. Mercedes discovered her young mistress's prayer book, but she did not think to look into it, or she would have discovered the little cipher which depicted the map where the rubies were hidden. They had been placed behind the rocks in the second tier of stones which circled the cistern near the barn; and if Fra Durando had only realized how close he was to finding what he sought, he would have redoubled his efforts and flogged the helpless duenna to the blood for not guiding him more accurately to the goal of all his ambitions.

But by the time the setting sun cast its long darkening shadows over the rich estate of Don Alfredo de Cristobel, Fra Durando gnashed his yellowing teeth in frustration and slapped Mercedes Solar so cruelly across the face that she uttered a shriek and tumbled to her knees, crouching there in mortal terror of him, rubbing her swollen cheek and staring at him with tears blinding her eyes.

"I have been too patient with you, too lenient, too gentle, you lying whore!" he cried. "You think to escape the prison and the rack and the interrogation chamber, do you? But you shall go back with me, and there the executioners will teach you what it is to defy the Chief Inquisitor of Toledo! Come, I will bind your wrists behind you so you cannot escape, and we shall go down the dusty road until we come upon a patrol of soldiers who will escort us back to the prison."

"In heaven's name have mercy, Your Excellency, Your Eminence!"
Despairingly Mercedes Solar clasped her hands in prayer to this grim and inflexible man. "Have I not taken you to every room and even to the cellar of this house? We have searched everywhere and we have found nothing. Perhaps he spent all his gold on goodly works"

"You lying strumpet, a heretic would not spend his gold on Mother Church! You forget yourself, Mercedes Solar! But I will not forget how you have wasted these hours here. Put your hands behind your back at once-there! And now, set your feet upon the road which leads back to Toledo, where you'll have a reckoning with our gentle Hermano, the Chief Executioner."

He had found a rawhide thong, and now, brandishing it in his right hand, he lashed her across the buttocks, driving her out of the house, laughing sarcastically at her sobbing pleas, her stumbling gait, his brooding eyes savage with anger and vexation. There would be just time to put her to the question, to learn the truth, and then to go back to this accursed house of the heretic and find the treasure. And once having found it, he might even flee Spain and seek his fortune in Mexico or Panama or even the legendary Indies. He would have a great house and many young girls to serve him. And what he had learned in the torture chambers would stand him in good stead when it came to compelling obedience to his every wish. There would be no more of the long sermons and the fanatical diatribes of Torquemada, no more of the fasting, and the meals of gruel and a little bread and water, no more nights spent alone in a dark narrow cubicle with a hard plank as a mattress. No, there would be wine and the soft yielding flesh of a girl under him, and warm kisses on his mouth, and soft fingers to caress his quivering limbs and to draw his cock into the soft sweet well of delight. And only this stupid woman, this sow who had let a heretic fuck her all these many years,

stood in his way of achieving that earthly paradise!

Good fortune was with him. An hour after they had set upon that road in the darkness of night, he heard the jingling of spurs and the clop-clop-clop of horses' hooves. He cried out, and the leader of the horsemen drew on the reins of his mount and stared down with surprise at this gaunt man in the black robe of a monk. "It is late for you to be on this road, Father, can I be of service?"

"It is you, Captain Posa?" Fra Durando cried. "You and your men must take this woman and myself back to the prison. I have sought for the treasure of an heretic, that I may give it to my king and queen. But she holds back what she could tell me, and she must be questioned by the executioner."

"I will send two of my men back with you, Your Worship," the young soldier replied. "But I'm on business for the Crown at this moment."

"How so?"

"Fra Torquemada returns to Toledo tomorrow night," Captain Posa replied. "I have an order from their most gracious Majesties themselves, wishing an auto-da-fe to be held in honor of his return on the day following. To that end I have been dispatched in search of two condemned heretics who have escaped us and who were sentenced to die at the stake but a few days ago."

"What are you telling me?" Fra Durando interrupted. The news that his

superior was returning before he had been expected filled him with a sudden dread, made him all the more impatient to take Mercedes back to the prison that she might be tortured to reveal what she had been concealing all this time.

"I do but tell you, Your Eminence, what I have in turn been told. A Moorish girl and the daughter of a heretic who is already put to death, one Inez de Crostobel, have not yet been found. It was you, Your Worship, who told me of their disappearance on the afternoon of the execution. And I searched, and then I reported to your subordinate, Fra Murcio. He had me make further search, but now it is imperative that my men and I find them. They must die to do homage to the glorious founder of the Inquisition."

And once again Fra Durando gnashed his teeth in frustrated rage to hear the young soldier speak so reverently of the man in whose shadow he stood, the man whose power was greater even than his and who would unswervingly send him to the stake and to the torture chamber if ever he should learn that Fra Durando had left the prison, not taken part in the auto-da-fe, all for the sake of gold and the duenna's fleshly charms.

"Where do you seek Inez de Crostobel now," he demanded.

"We shall first search the house, Your Worship."

"Useless! This woman and I have just come from there. I myself have made a search for the gold which Don Alfredo was rumored to have hidden, for it is forfeit to their Majesties, of course. I found nothing. But the girl is

not there. Someone smuggled her away, someone doubtless who knows much of the Inquisition. It may well be one of the familiars. All the more reason why I must reach the prison to confer with my subordinate, Fra Murcio. He will tell me who has been absent from the prison and from the tribunal. Come, Captain Posa, I need but one soldier and one horse. The woman will ride in front of me and I will guard her safely, never fear. Let us be on to Toledo!"

"As you wish, Your Worship, Hola, Pedro Vendugo, hear me at once. You will accompany the Chief Inquisitor and his prisoner back to the city. And you, Manuel Salazar, give up your horse to this man who is the right arm of the Holy Inquisition!"

Fra Durando, his left hand gripping the scruff of Mercedes Solar's neck, shoved the sobbing woman towards the door of a gloomy subterranean dungeon. His eyes glittered with an unholy lust. "And now, you faithless bitch, you will see what your stubbornness has gained you. We'll have the truth, Mercedes, if we must flay the skin from that ripe body of yours. Oh you'll talk, never fear. And you'll confess that have had carnal relations with that heretic. I myself will conduct the interrogation. Expect no mercy, and pray only that you be given wisdom enough to tell the truth before it is too late! Here now, Hermano, a prize for you. Take her!"

"Oh no, oh for the sake of God in Heaven!" shrieked the buxom duenna as from the darkness at the back of the dungeon there emerged a tall man, wearing a black mask, and red tights and shoes, naked to the waist, sweat gleaming on his hairy chest, his thin lips twisted in a smile of vicious anticipation. It was Hermano Soledad, the chief executioner of the city of

Toledo.

Here in this terrible dungeon, there was a rack, a strappado, a bench for the water question, and other grisly objects ... even the Iron Virgin, that hideous metal replica of a woman which, when unlocked and opened, revealed terrible spikes fixed to the inner surface. The victim was put into it, the two sections pushed together and locked, and the spikes slowly pierced the victim's body and cause lingering and hideous death. Here was a whipping post and a pillory, and in another corner of the room a brazier was heating in which branding irons and pincers were growing white-hot.

Hermano Soledad seized the trembling Mercedes, whose head fell back, her eyes rolling in their sockets, as she uttered a wordless shriek of horror. His young assistant, squat, his head shaven, also masked, but wearing black tights and black shoes and hose, stepped forward at his master's gesture to rip the scanty garments from the body of the duenna and to reveal her nakedness.

"With what shall we begin, Your Eminence?" Hermano Soledad demanded.

"Show her the Spider, Hermano," Fra Durando chuckled.

"Yes, Your Eminence!" The masked executioner replied. He made a sign, and his young assistant, gripping Mercedes' elbows, forced her forward towards the opposite wall. Two torches, set into metal brackets, cast their flickering light on this hellish dungeon, and as she moved toward the wall,

her mouth gaped in speechless terror at what she saw.

Two iron bars projecting from the wall. At the ends of these bars were cruel iron spikes in the shapes of claws. It would be the duty of the executioner's assistant to lift her up by the armpits and to drag her over those horrid claws, which would rip her titties and belly and loins excruciatingly. This torment could be repeated at will until either she died or was rendered unconscious and spared for further suffering.

"Oh no! Not that, in the name of infinite mercy, not that! I'll do anything- Oh God, anything!" In her raving terror, the handsome naked duenna twisted her face round to look at the masked squat bald assistant who held her up towards the hideous iron claws. "You may take my body, make love to me, whip me, do what you want with me, but in the name of Heaven, don't torture me thus! Let it be a quick death if I must die, but not by that! "

"Do you hear that wanton?" Fra Durando chuckled. "She bargains with the executioner, that she would lie with him! Oh I have no doubt that would be sweet torture for you, Mercedes, you shameless trull. No, we shall not begin with the Spider. We shall find something simple at the outset, and then as our patience wanes, you shall learn how the Inquisition punishes the obstinate and the deceitful and the liar! "

"With what, then, Your Eminence, may I begin?" Hermano Soledad respectfully enquired.

"Put her on the racking bench, and stretch her with the wheels," was Fra

Durando's sadistic answer.

The masked young executioner's assistant sniggered in Mercedes' ear as he lowered the naked, half-fainting woman to the stone floor of the dungeon:

"You're lucky, you pretty bitch. What big titties you've got it would be a pity to tear them off right at once. But we'll find another way for you to caress them, my lovely one! Come along, now!"

So saying, he carried her to a low wide bench, and laid her down on her back, while the chief executioner at once untied her wrists, only to drag them out at right angles and to strap her wrists to heavy wooden pegs set at the edge of each side of the bench. Meanwhile the young assistant strapped down her legs, and corded her ankles to similar pegs, thereby gaping her thighs and exposing the plump mound of her cunt.

Now both masked men moved to either side of the bench and squatted down. Fra Durando approached to witness the torture. Two metal wheels, rising only about to knee-height, the other end of their diameter under the floor of the dungeon, were connected to each side of the bench, which was movable. One wheel was located to the left, the other to the right, and as the two men turned the wheels, the bench began to open and Mercedes' arms were tautened to extreme till the men could see the distension of her furry perspiring armpits. Her head rose, and a wild shriek of pain attested to her suffering. "Another turn," Fra Durando ordered.

Both men bent to their wheels, and now a clamorous scream tore through the dungeon as Mercedes Solar turned her face from side to side, sweat gleaming on her forehead, her mouth gaping in a rictus of agony: "Ahhrrr!! Oh dear God, let me die, Oh I can't bear it, you're ripping me apart! Oh heavens, have mercy, Fra Durando! I'll do anything you want, I'll let you make love to me-I'll"

"Gap that whore," Fra Durando snarled, white with fury. For the executioner and his assistant, though loyal indeed, would be even more loyal to his superior Torquemada; and if it be told to the dreaded founder of the Inquisition that Fra Durando had had sport with the duenna, Fra Durando could guess at the fury of his superior and of the danger to himself.

The young assistant rose from his wheel, went to a little tabouret, and picked up a choke pear gag of wood, which by dint of pinching shut Mercedes' nose and forcing into her mouth, he used to gag her. Then a cloth was bound over her mouth to retain the bulging object so that her eyes stared, glassy with tears and torment.

"This time I'm not going to waste time on your useless cries and pleas for mercy, you bitch," Fra Durando stooped over her. "We're going to give you a little treatment, and after you've had it, perhaps you'll be ready to speak. You're very proud of your titties, aren't you, Mercedes? Well, perhaps with reason. At your age they're not at all flaccid or sagging. They're nice and firm. And look at those nipples!"

While he spoke, his bony fingers wandered over her panting titties, tugging and tweaking them, and then suddenly he took hold of her nipples

with thumbs and forefingers and twisted viciously.

A muffled shriek was heard, and the naked woman's body arched from the bench rack.

"See how the slut offers up her cunt," the young assistant executioner guffawed, and thrust his forefinger into the pulpy crevice of Mercedes Solar's cunthole.

"Do not give her pleasure, good friend," Fra Durando insisted, "or you will make this torture a joy for the bitch. Now then, Hermano, heat the needles!"

The chief executioner moved to one side of the dungeon, wheeled over a metal table with casters, on whose top there stood an unlit brazier. This at once he lit, and then, opening the drawer of the metal table, took out two long steel needles and placed them in the hot fire of the kindled brazier.

The two masked torturers waited, while Mercedes lifted her tortured face, to stare with bulging eyes at the brazier. Violent spasms shook her shoulders and arms, and sweat glistened in the tufts of her black armpit hair.

She shook her head, crazed with horror, as the two masked torturers pulled on heavy leather gloves, each of them seizing the doubly thick steel base of the needle with its horrid tapering white-hot point. And now the

young assistant moved to her right breast, now Hermano Soledad approached the shuddering globe of her left breast. At Fra Durando's sign, the two white-hot needles were approached to within an inch of the nipples, and choking, gurgling cries were heard through the choke pear as Mercedes Solar felt the atrocious heat crisp the sensitive, tender buds.

The two torturers eyed the grim Chief Inquisitor. And he nodded. Mercedes Solar tried to shrink herself back against the divided rack bench, but she could not. With slow and vicious deliberation, each of the torturers approached the tip of the needles toward the palpitating tittie buds and then suddenly touched them for a tiny instant.

Fra Durando, devouring the scene, felt his prick harden at the sight of Mercedes Solar's inhuman suffering. Her Adam's apple jerked, her eyes rolled in their sockets, her nostrils dilated and shrank, and a gurgling horrid scream was stifled in her gagged mouth.

The two torturers drew the needles back, and again regarded the Chief Inquisitor and once again he nodded. Then again the slow white-hot needles were approached towards the tautened buds at the peaks of Mercedes' magnificent titties. Now they could see the flesh beginning to sear, and the atrocious smell of burned flesh was wafted to their nostrils. And Mercedes raised her head, her eyes rolled back to the whites, and then she slumped in her bonds, unconscious.

"There is no great harm, Your Eminence," Hermano Soledad put the needle back in the brazier and knelt down to study Mercedes' left tittie which he squeezed and kneaded with his bony fingers. "It isn't badly burned

at all. Oh, she'll be sensitive there for a bit."

"You'll continue the torture of her breasts, Hermano," the Chief Inquisitor coldly declared, "The leather whip, the black one. A dozen lashes to each breast, slowly administered. And then give her as many strokes on the belly, and finally let your assistant apply half a dozen to each inner thigh, finishing with three good hard cuts right between her whorish legs. First revive her!"

It was left to the young assistant to bring back Mercedes Solar from the merciful swoon which the torture of her nipples had caused. A bucket of brine was doused into her face, and then, grinning diabolically, the baldheaded torturer knelt down and put his teeth to the right nipple which he had seared with the needle, and bit it gently several times. Mercedes Solar's body stirred, and then shuddered and jerked, as her eyelids fluttered open, haggard and swollen eyes staring up at the masked demons who were inflicting such unspeakable agony upon her tender body. She tried to speak, but the choke pear prevented this. Her body was damp with sweat, and the muscles of her straddled thighs were jerking, under the fine smooth skin.

Hermano Soledad had taken down from the wall a short black whip made of hard tool-worked leather about a foot long, the last three inches of which tapered into a notched tip. Grasping it firmly by the thicker end, he delivered a furious slash over the lower curve of her left tittie, and after a deliberately long pause, one over the other globe at exactly the same place. At each cut the body of the duenna arched from the rock bench, and gurgling screams attested to her suffering.

But pitilessly, she received a dozen lashes on each breast, and twenty-four on her naked belly, till her face was contorted and drowned with tears, her body twisted and jerking fitfully, mad with suffering and her cries choked by sobs and saliva and tears.

Again brine was flung into her face, to restore her somewhat for the resumption of the flogging. Now the young assistant took over the manipulation of the lash, and with almost loving and lustful care applied six cuts against each of her inner thighs. Then, planting himself at the foot of the bench, he lifted his arm high and slashed the little whip down straight into her gaping cunthole with all his strength. Her body convulsively lunged and jerked; her head raised, then fell back with a thud, as a mewling sound emerged from the choke pear. A second cut fell with even more vicious force, and finally the last.

Blood oozed on the gaping, inflamed pink cuntlips of the naked duenna. Fra Durando made an impatient sigh; the chief torturer bent over the suffering naked woman, untied the cloth, and pulled out the choke pear.

"And now, you bitch," Fra Durando snarled, "Are you ready to tell us what you have kept from me all this time? Or do you wish to taste the kisses and caresses of the Spider? There are other things we have in store for you, Mercedes Solar, unless you talk now." Her head rolled back and forth on the rack bench. Her eyes were glazed with suffering, and she could hardly speak. Her body kept jerking and squirming, for the lashing of her thighs and cunt had and titties had left her in indescribable torment which not even this pause could alleviate. Finally she managed to speak, almost

inaudibly: "I-Oh for the love of-G-God-I know nothing ... nothing except what I have already told you ... you can kill me and I can tell you no more ... have pity on me, oh have pity! "

Fra Durando clasped his hands behind his back and paced the floor of the dungeon. In the prey of furious vexation, he was almost ready to believe her pitiable avowal that she knew nothing more.

After all, the two of them had searched that house from top to bottom and found nothing.

And yet that old heretic was wealthy, everyone knew it, with his carriage and his fine brocaded tapestries and the silver scabbard in which he kept the sword of a grandee and the garments of his beautiful daughter- assuredly all this cost gold and the old fool had hidden it only too well.

But there was the danger that Mercedes Solar could stand no more torture and that she might die if the executioners continued their heinous work.

Still, with Torquemada only a day and night away from him, Fra Durando had no more time to lose. He would stake all on one final throw.

"Let her be given the strappado," he announced.

"Oh no, not more torture, Fra Durando, in the name of pity, spare me! I submitted to you, I gave myself to you, won't you have a little pity on me now? I will swear before these good men on the Bible that I know nothing more than what I told you," Mercedes Solar began to babble as the two executioners released her from the rack bench.

Again the Chief Inquisitor's face twisted with fury at this reminder of his transgression against his holy vows. "Gag her again," he ordered, and it was done.

Now, her wrists tightly strapped with a heavy leather thong behind her back, a pulley rope was lowered from a ring in the ceiling, and made fast under her armpits into a kind of noose. Then the burly young executioner's assistant squatted down and dragged down the other end of the rope, hoisting the naked woman aloft almost to the ceiling, and then suddenly released the rope, only to catch it just before her naked feet thudded on the floor. This was the question ordinary: three times it was done to her, the rope cutting viciously under her tender armpits, drawing shrieks and tears and cries of inferable agony. But still she would not speak.

"The strappado extraordinary!" Fra Durando hissed, his face pale with rage.

And this time, the pulley rope was bound the tethered wrists of the half-conscious naked woman and she was hoisted till her arms were dragged up unnaturally behind her. Up she went slowly, her body dangling and twisting on the end of that rope, until the executioner's assistant suddenly released it,

only to pull it tight again just before she hit the floor.

There was a sickening crack as her shoulders and arms were dislocated, and her head fell forward on her bosom. Hermano Soledad moved quickly forward, put his cheek to the left tittie of the unconscious woman. Then a look of alarm twisted his ugly face as he stared at the Chief Inquisitor: "The slut is dead, Your Eminence."

"You fool, you bungler!" Fra Durando shrieked. "How could she die from the strappado?"

"Perhaps her heart was weak, Your Eminece."

"I swear that I exercised no more than the usual degree of the question, Your Eminence," the torturer's assistant uneasily declared.

But Fra Durando was not listening. He had left the dungeon gnashing his teeth. Now he had lost not only the secret of the gold, but also the lush body of the duenna to satisfy his perverse rut. And now he must take matters in his own hands and go back a last time to the house of Don Alfredo de Cristobel and find that treasure before Torquemada reached Toledo!

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

MURCIO

Fra Murcio, the monk whom Fra Durando had appointed in his stead to preside at the terrible auto-da-fe at which Tandelayo and Inez de Cristobel were to have been burned at the stake, had profited from his superior's absence from the prison. He had sent off by special courier a dispatch addressed to Torquemada, and he had given the horseman a piece of gold, impressing the latter with the urgency of the message. It must reach the founder of the Holy Inquisition before Torquemada's return to Toledo.

Fra Murcio was a dour, portly friar but a few years younger than Fra Durando, and in his own way as greedily ambitious. He was soft-spoken, meek in the presence of his superiors and members of the royal court of Spain, but this did not entirely conceal his avaricious lust for power that would demand its own kind of terrified recognition. Moreover, he was subject to the same carnal temptations as the man who had taken Mercedes Solar back to her employer's house in search of treasure and then had her tortured to death.

He had stood on the steps of the cathedral as the terrible processional of condemned heretics had passed by, watching as penances were exacted until finally only the ten unfortunate victims were left for the stake. And there he had been also, accompanying each victim and pronouncing the solemn curse of loss of soul salvation as penalty for the victim's obstinacy in not acknowledging guilt and seeking forgiveness. He had watched with glittering eyes as the bodies chained to the stakes had jerked and twisted, blackening under the fire, until they were no longer human and until the stench of death and the black pall of smoke overwhelmed even the avid

crowd witnessing the atrocious spectacle.

Then he had returned to the prison, in full charge of it and of any further investigations concerning those who were still on trial for their heresy. He had learned that the Moorish girl had thus far escaped her jailers and that the daughter of the dead nobleman was missing also. And on the very evening when Fra Durando had taken Mercedes to her master's house in search of the treasure, Fra Murcio ordered that two new victims be brought before him and three masked and hooded monks who formed the tribunal of the Inquisition.

Fra Murcio had learned from an examination of the prison dossiers that a handsome widow and her seventeen-year-old daughter had once been guests of the condemned and executed heretic Don Alfredo de Cristobel. It was his belief that the woman and her daughter, who had been imprisoned on a charge of irreverence against the Inquisition itself as well as treasonable remarks against the King and Queen of Spain, might be able to shed some light on the possessions of their host. And it was not without a secretly eager hope that his interrogation might disclose the whereabouts of that treasure so that he himself might profit there from, which motivated the unscrupulous subordinate who had taken Fra Durando's place and was thus himself pro tem the Chief Inquisitor of Toledo.

Fra Murcio had come from humble origin and, perhaps even better than Fra Durando, knew the meaning of self-denial and poverty. But now, given unprecedented powers over the entire prison in his superior's absence and wishing to ingratiate himself with the great Torquemada, he determined on a stroke which would at the same time satisfy his own carnal desires and undermine the prestige of Fra Durando in the eyes of the terrible Tomas

Torquemada, Grand Inquisitor of all Spain.

He therefore summoned Hermano Soledad and the latter's young, bald, burly assistant, gave them each a gold piece and swore them to secrecy concerning what he proposed to do with the mother and daughter held prisoner in a single cell on the second floor of the prison. "I think they may know more about the condemned heretic Don Alfredo de Cristobel than they have thus far admitted," he instructed the two masked torturers. "I have summoned this afternoon a secret meeting of the tribunal to hear them. Then they will be turned over to you, and I myself shall conduct the interrogation. What you will hear, the two of you, is to be known only to your ears and mine and it is to go no farther, on pain of your lives and excommunication of your immortal souls."

"I understand, Your Eminence," Hermano Soledad inclined his head in respect of authority. "It shall be done as you wish. And I will say more, Fra Murcio. I have no great love for this Fra Carlos Durando who struts about like a popinjay, full of authority and importance, when it is well known that he covets the bodies of the female prisoners put to the torture."

This sly little speech made Fra Murcio squirm uneasily, for he too intended to enjoy the unwilling favors of the mother and daughter who were to be delivered up to these two rogues. But he pretended to be gravely concerned: "How now, Hermano, do you charge Fra Durando with the sin of fleshly lust?"

"I do, Your Worship. Oh, though I am of the faith, I am not without understanding that a monk may have the desires of a man, since they are

both one in the same to my humble way of thinking, begging Your Worship's pardon. But I admire honesty in a man as I do in a monk, and I would have myself the same enjoyment if I had the authority which Fra Durando gives himself."

"Do you mean, Hermano, that you yourself lust for the bodies of the females whom you put to the question?" Fra Murcio cunningly queried.

The chief executioner nodded, then grinned: "And why not? If they are condemned, let the poor devils have a little pleasure before they perish, is my motto. Harms no one, and you have no idea what torture himself a man of my constitution and vigor endures when he must handle the naked bodies of these fancy bitches and yet not dare to entertain the most interesting ideas concerning them.

A thin and crafty smile passed over the gloomy face of Fra Murcio. He understood perfectly. "Well then, Hermano, you have my word also as a man, not a monk, that this night you and your friend here shall share the wenches with me. But you must keep this secret, for I will denounce you if you dare bring charges."

"Oh, Your Worship, never fear, I'll be as silent as the tomb," the executioner chuckled. "You and I can do business, Your Worship. And if I may say so, I should be the first to tell Fra Torquemada himself that you are the most diligent and zealous in your duties."

"Do so, then, good Hermano, and you shall have still more gold. Now I must

leave you, to summon my brothers for the tribunal, and then after suppertime, the three of us shall have some pleasant hours in your dungeon."

And with this the gloomy friar took his leave of the cruel executioner of the prison of the Holy Inquisition.

Two hours later, in a gloomy room which had light from only a small barred window and whose walls were draped with black cloth on which the white cross was shown, two women stood before a narrow table at which were seated two hooded monks and Fra Murcio. At the extreme left of this wide room was a kind of pulpit, shut off from view by black velvet drapes, in which the informer or familiar would be hidden to testify against the accused, but they in turn would not be permitted to identify him or see him ... a procedure long practiced by the Inquisition for the purpose of confounding and confusing and terrorizing those who fell into its clutches.

The woman was superbly beautiful, a matron of thirty-seven years, Dona Lucia de Peromonte. She was of medium height, her skin pale ivory and set off all the more vividly by the glossy black tresses which showed not a streak of gray. Her hair was coiffed in an imposing bun at the top of her head, leaving her nape bare, and from her earlobes dangled two sapphire pendants, which she had been permitted to retain. Often those who languished in the dungeons of the Inquisition were able to buy little comforts like wine and freshly baked bread as well as to bribe the executioner into greater leniency should the question be applied, and thus prisoners of rank-and Dona Lucia de Peromonte merited such treatment because she was the widow of a grandee of the Courtwere allowed to keep what monies and jewels they had with them at the time of their incarceration. Such a privilege, to be sure, was denied the common-folk and

of course the Moors and the Jews.

Her face was cameo-like, with thick, curving brows, a straight nose, a full sweet mouth, rounded cheeks and dark brown eyes. Her voice was a haughty contralto, and she was accustomed to ordering servants about, and there were even rumors that she was at times cruel to them, ordering them whipped or even sometimes applying the whip herself.

Her daughter, Juana, was but a week from her seventeenth birthday. An inch taller than her mother, she was also slim and extremely voluptuous of bodily form. Her face, too, showed the traits of willfulness and stubbornness and haughtiness like her mother's, with a dainty aquiline nose, a thin small selfish mouth, firm chin, slantingly set cheekbones, and hazel eyes set widely apart and quite large, so that she seemed to look with insolence upon her judges.

Both women wore silk gowns, and had been in the prison for a week on this charge of irreverence to the Inquisition and disrespect for the Crown. Now they were being called to accounting. There was no question of their being spared execution and the stake, but they would be punished in public at the next auto-da-fe. An example thus given to the populace which showed that the Inquisition was not impressed by rank or nobility would be of great advantage in winning new followers to the faith, and Tomas Torquemada was cunning enough to see the value of such a dramatic example of ecclesiastical justice.

The two monks had already conferred with Fra Murcio and all of them had agreed upon a verdict in advance, for Fra Durando's subordinate had

convinced them of the guilt of these two females and of his intention to steer the interrogation towards a discovery of more vital information concerning a heretic who had already perished and a condemned daughter who had escaped her own just expiation.

Accordingly, it was Fra Murcio who addressed the two trembling prisoners: "Dona Lucia de Peromonte and you, her daughter Juana, have both been charged with the treasonable utterances against your sovereigns and, what is worst of all, disrespect for the holy toil of the Inquisition. Do you admit your guilt?"

"If by that, Senor Priest," the handsome matron scornfully retorted, "you mean that my daughter and I have expressed impatience with the neglect which Ferdinand and Isabella have repaid our petition for the release of my dead husband's gold after such long years of loyal service which he gave the Crown, yes, we are both guilty, and if you condemn us for saying that your Inquisition is a mockery of true justice and exists through terror and the ignorance of its victims, then we are equally guilty also."

"You dare speak such blasphemy here, but a stone's throw from the torture chamber?" Fra Murcio thundered.

"I am the widow of a grandee of Spain, and my daughter has blue blood in her veins and should be a maid of honor at the Court," was Lucia de Peromonte's haughty reply. "You may fine me and rebuke me, and I will do penance in church, but I have a right to my own opinions. They are not treasonable nor are they blasphemous, they are but fact. Are you to say that we who live in Spain may not criticize the stupidities and the blunders

which human beings commit in one name or another?"

"Take care, woman," Fra Murcio growled, "it is true that I cannot condemn you to the stake, but you and your daughter shall do penance before the Cathedral at the next act of faith which will be held when our beloved Fra Torquemada returns from Barcelona. You and your daughter shall go naked under your shifts, candle in hand, to kneel before the Cathedral and acknowledge your scurrilous tongues. And you shall feel the lash on your proud flesh. But commoners will watch the spectacle of a de Peromonte stripped naked and given the whip! "

"How dare you speak to me in such an insulting way, priest!" Lucia de Peromonte gasped, her cheeks crimsoning at the insult and the salacious image which it offered. "And before my daughter, who is a maiden, to speak so unseemly of nakedness! For shame!"

"Take care, woman, I am not on trial here, but you," Fra Murcio angrily retorted. "Do you apologize humbly now for your false remarks and your accusations?"

"I will apologize only if I am shown that what I have said is not true."

"You see, my problem?" Fra Murcio turned to his two colleagues. "She is stubborn and defiant. I believe that we can accomplish no more than to let them face the question. But it will be the simple question at the outset." Then, turning back to the astounded woman, he sardonically added: "We shall respect your rank, Lucia de Peromonte, and your daughter's innocence. But I

think that in a little while, after you have tasted the humiliation of chastisement, you will see the error of your ways."

With this, he lifted a silver bell and shook it in the air, the door swung open and two halberdiers entered.

"Conduct these women to the chamber of Master Hermano," he ordered.

The guards seized the two condemned beauties, despite Lucia de Peromonte's indignant cries and protests, while Fra Murcio led the way down to the subterranean dungeon where, as we have already seen, poor Mercedes Solar met her untimely end and thus thwarted Fra Durando's ungovernable greed for the mysterious and hidden treasure of Don Alfredo de Cristobel.

When the door had clanged behind the mother and daughter and the gloomy friar, the two masked torturers stepped forward out of the shadows, and Lucia de Peromonte clapped her hand to her mouth as her eyes widened with incredulous terror. Until this moment, she could not believe that such an indignity would be done to her, and now she turned to Fra Murcio: "I will complain to the King and Queen themselves! You have no right to subject the family of a nobleman to such monstrous indignities!"

"My daughter, be temperate in your words which you have not been before," he guilefully counseled. "Look rather upon this as chastening of your obdurate and pretentious spirit, which is in need of modification if you are again to be looked upon with favor by your sovereigns. Would you have it go forth from this tribunal to their Majesties that you have been

condemned out of your own mouth for treasonable utterances? I think at least they would banish you both from Spain forever and declare your estates forfeit. So take care and accept this penance as the lesser evil, swearing to yourself the meanwhile a vow of more judicious speech and attitude in future." With these specious words, Fra Murcio proffered the veiled threat which he knew would at least momentarily silence Lucia de Peromonte's rebellion against the decree of the Inquisition tribunal. And so indeed it did; the prospect of being cast out of her own land and her husband's rich lands and holdings taken from her and her daughter made the proud matron lower her eyes and shudder with dismay and fear.

"With whom shall we begin, Your Reverence?" Hermano Soledad respectfully demanded. His glittering eyes surveyed the handsome matron and found her quite toothsome to his taste, while the burly, bald younger assistant coveted Juana, whose tawny skin and whose lithe and voluptuous body excited him ferociously. The thought that he might be permitted to appease his carnal lust on the flesh of this tempting young beauty of blue-blooded estate made his prick already swell with anticipation.

"Let it be with the daughter," Fra Murcio decided. "And fix the daughter in the pillory so that she may watch and wait her own turn."

"As you command, Your Reverence," the younger assistant eagerly exclaimed. "Come, my little dove, my sweet gosling, I will give you a front row place in which to watch your revered mother's disciplining!"

With this, he seized the wrist of young Juana, who uttered a piercing cry and struggled with him, planting her feet on the stone floor and trying to

strike at him with her other fist, calling upon her mother to aid her. But Hermano Soledad had already clapped one hand over the mother's mouth and grasped both her wrists in his other hand, as he roughly forced her towards a wooden post set into the stone and at one end of the grim chamber of interrogation. Arrived at the post, he hoisted up her wrists to a metal ring fixed into the top of the wood, from which a dangling leather thong had already been prepared as fetter; swiftly and expertly he wound the thong round the woman's wrists, and knotted it so cunningly that she could not jerk her limbs free from its hold. This compelled her to stand on tiptoe, a pose which set into relief the sumptuous globes of her behind as well as the thrusting cantaloupes of her panting titties.

Meanwhile, the younger torturer had dragged the shrieking and pleading Juana over to a pillory which stood about five feet distant from the whipping post, and, swiftly unlocking the top section and opening it, he thrust the girl's head down into the central yoke hole, then forced her wrists into the smaller ones, and swiftly pulled down the top section to lock it into place. Now the young beauty was confined, and her face was turned to the whipping post while she herself would be ready if the order came for the attention of the torturer!

Hermano Soledad turned to the panoply of whipping implements which hung from hooks on the stone wall, lovingly appraising them and waiting for Fra Murcio to indicate his pleasure.

"Start with half a dozen strokes across her back and shoulders, Master Hermano," the gloomy friar ordered.

This guileful order was purposely given to lull the fears of Lucia de Peromonte; indeed, the handsome matron believed that her penance would thus be mild and not so shameful as she had dreaded, and she stoically resolved to make no outcry and to take the flogging-which for that matter might have been imposed upon her in a convent to which she could have been sent in penance even by the Queen herself-and consider herself mercifully spared. She had already observed in a twinkling of an eye the terrible apparatuses furnished in this chamber, and she was quite content to experience a mild whipping.

But she had not reckoned at all with the cruel and sardonic intentions of Fra Murcio. He winked at the chief executioner as the latter took down a braided leather thong and planted himself to the victim's left. Slowly Hermano Soledad's right arm rose and fell. Each stroke whistled across the dimpled, rounded shoulders of the buxom and beautiful matron, who ground her teeth and closed her eyes tightly and compressed her mouth to hold back her cries, for she was of tender nature and unused to such harsh treatment. So that when at last the six lashes had been administered, and her shoulders were smarting and burning, she was proud of herself for having shown such courage.

How little the poor woman knew that she had only just begun to taste the wrath of the Inquisition and, still more, those villainous lusts of its empowered judges!

"That, Lucia de Peromonte," Fra Murcio now declared, "was a first atonement for your shrewish tongue in my presence. And now we shall begin to remit payment for your previous sins, my daughter. You must be absolved before you can leave this prison. And when you have declared your humility

and your desire for forgiveness, in the honor of the great Torquemada, founder of our order, you and your daughter shall appear in public to tell all devout believers of the true justice of the Holy Inquisition!"

After a lengthy pause during which poor Lucia de Peromonte squirmed uneasily at the whipping post, he now made a gesture. With a bawdy laugh, Hermano Soledad now set his hands upon the fine gown of the lady, and ripped it from her shoulders, followed by her chemise.

"Oh God what are you doing? Oh no, Father, don't let him do this to me-merciful heaven-not naked-oh, my poor Juana, you mustn't look, they've stripped me naked, oh the shame of it!" For the chief executioner had ripped off the chemise and then the silken drawers, leaving the buxom matron in only her hose and garters and shoes, as she tried to move away, jerking at her bound wrists high above her head.

The marks of the whip across her white shoulders intensified the voluptuous tinting of her soft skin. Meanwhile, across from her, her face contorted with horrified incredulity, the young girl observed her mother's nakedness for the first time.

"And now, a good dozen across the bare back with the leather strap," Fra Murcio counseled.

These lashes having been duly inflicted, each of which drew a muffled cry of torment from the panting naked matron, the executioner regarded the appetizingly opulent naked woman with even more avaricious gaze. Poor Lucia

de Peromonte had begun to squirm and press herself against the heavy wooden post as the burning pain of the lashing attenuated her resistance and exacerbated her nerves. But again she had only begun to taste a partial measure of what was in store for her.

"And now, let us mortify the shameful parts," Fra Murcio intoned. "Hermano, two dozen strokes over that voluminous behind. Let us chasten this haughty creature's proud spirit by thrashing her as one might a naughty child!"

"Oh what shame! Have pity, Your Reverence! Mercy!" Lucia de Peromonte panted, turning her scarlet face towards the gloomy friar, tears running down her cheeks as she strove to gain reprieve.

But the chief executioner had taken down from the wall a broad black leather strap, about half an inch thick, and with this in his right hand, he directed a ferocious, angrily smacking blow which bit across the plumpest curves of both huddling milky bottomcheeks. The naked victim uttered a shriek of pain, grinding herself frantically against the whipping post, as she turned back again to the friar to implore pardon: "Eeeyahhrrrr!! It hurts! Oh it hurts me, have pity, Father! I repent what I have said, I retract it!"

"That's a good resolve, my daughter," Fra Murcio mocked her. "But we know only too well that when a sinner is confronted with the first threat of punishment, she at once discards her sins as she would outmoded garments. Wait a bit, my daughter, till you have had more of your thrashing, and then we shall see if you are truly sincere in your repentance! Lay on, Master

Hermano, with a will!"

The executioner needed no second invitation to decorate those magnificently sumptuous white hillocks with blazing red, broad welts. The thickness of the leather band employed cracked viciously against poor Lucia de Peromonte's tender flesh, drawing wild screams of pain from her, and making her execute a lubricious dance, jumping from foot to foot, her shoes soon being scuffed off by this maneuver so that she presented to the two executioners and Fra Murcio the titillating spectacle of a woman naked save for her hose and garters, bounding about and grinding herself frantically against the whipping post as she sought to diminish her all too vulnerable contours from the burning strap.

By the time the two dozen lashes had been applied, her bottomcheeks were swollen and shuddering, emblazoned with purplish, darkening broad weals, and her cries were wordless, while the tears streamed down her cheeks.

Her daughter Juana kept crying out in horror at what she saw, imploring Fra Murcio to spare her mother. Now there was a respite, while the unfortunate naked matron slumped in her bonds, dangling by her thonged wrists from the ring at the top of the whipping post. But again a bucket of brine doused over her back and shoulders and bottom seemed to revive her, and Fra Murcio pronounced: "Let the mother occupy herself with wholesome thoughts and future pledges of docile and humble conduct, while we interrogate the daughter a little. But for her, the younger pullet, a slim birch, Master Hermano. And let your assistant wield it, for he must gain cunning and skill so that he, like yourself, may wage the good fight against

the abominable heretics who undermine our nation."

The burly, bald younger assistant chuckled thickly at this mark of favor, and approached the frightened young girl. Juana, foreseeing the danger, at once began to kick out wildly, but he laughingly moved to one side and, grasping her gown, ripped it from her slender body, and with it her chemise.

"Oh Mother! He's making me naked-don't let him, Mother! Help me, oh save me, Mother!" Juana shrieked as she wriggled this way and that, trying to escape the removal of her flouncy drawers. But with a brusque tug, this final veil, too, was torn off, and she like her mother was naked in hose and garters and shoes.

The executioner's assistant uttered a gasp of lustful admiration at the vision before him. Forced to bend over with her neck and wrists held in the yoke holes of the pillory, Juana de Peromonte presented to him the ravishingly enticing nudity of a young beauty on the very threshold of womanhood. Her tawny-sheened skin was warm and exciting, and agitated now by constant flurries and tremors which rippled up and down her spine and buttocks and thighs. Her body was svelte, but her hips were now seen to be surprisingly ripe, and the cheeks of her behind were broad ovals, separated by a gradually broadening ambery-shadowy crease which she tried instinctively to clench so as to hide her most intimate vistas from these offending male eyes. Her thighs were long and supple, nervously muscled, beautifully chiseled, and her high set calves, sinuous calves bespoke a suppleness and agility of movement that promised much in the bed of lust.

A tiny oval-shaped brown birthmark could be seen just below the base of

her left buttock, and the young executioner's assistant touched it with his calloused finger, rubbing it salaciously as he licked his lips.

Juana shrieked again, "Oh Mother, he's touching me-oh I'm naked, oh I want to die in shame!"

"Gently, my little fledgling," the burly bald executioner's assistant muttered, "I'll make you wish to be alive, and how you'll caper when that sweet backside of yours tastes the kisses of my birch! "

With this, he went over to the nearest wall and stooped to procure from a brine-filled bucket a slender birch rod, tied with cloth at the handle to form a wielder's convenient grip. About four long slender withes, still with twigs and buds upon them, comprised this rod, which was ideally devised for the fustigation of the young girl, whereas the chief executioner would have prescribed a much bulkier birch had it been a question of flogging the buxom matron.

Taking his stance at the girl's left, the assistant now tortured the weeping and pleading girl by rubbing the twigs and buds of the supple birch over the cheeks of her shuddering naked bottom, as a kind of foretaste of what was to come. Then at last, his face flushed and his eyes glittering from the excitement, and his swollen prick prominently visible as it strained against the tights which garbed his loins, he drew back his arm and swished the rod across the base of Juana's naked posterior. A piercing scream announced the agony of this slashing, fiery cut, and the naked girl jerked frantically to escape the viselike grip of the pillory, but in vain. She tried also as her mother had done to dance, the dance of the whip, shifting from

foot to foot, as a second and then a third cut of the birch slashed horizontally over the tops of her bare young hips.

But naked as she was and stooped over by the pillory's command, young Juana de Peromonte offered to Fra Murio as well as to the chief executioner the intoxicating sight of her surprisingly thick-furred mount of Venus, the long triangle of black silky tufts which covered the dainty pink lips of Juana de Peromonte's virgin cunthole.

"Oh in the name of mercy and humanity," her mother cried from the whipping post, her voice hoarse and trembling with agony both physical and spiritual, "spare my poor young girl! She's done nothing, she's innocent! What do you want of us, Father?"

"The truth, my daughter," Fra Murio insisted as he approached the whipping post. Naked under his black robe and hood, his prick was in a frightful state of agitation-just as Fra Durando had been with the duenna. His left hand wandered over the swollen, twitching buttocks of the groaning and sobbing matron, and he felt his prick throb and jerk with an angry and savage lust. "You were a guest often, I believe, at the home of Don Alfredo de Cristobel?"

At this moment, the executioner's assistant lifted up the thin supple birch and delivered a swishing cut straight across the plumpest curves of Juana's bare behind. The young girl shrieked and kicked out with one lovely long leg, her shoe flying off and narrowly missing her torturer, who guffawed salaciously to see her plight. In that maneuver, the lovely virgin revealed the feathery black fronds which shielded her maiden cunthole, and

this sight put his prick into a violent state of tumescence, thrusting against his tights as if to burst through and enter that sacrosanct maiden temple.

"Yes, yes, I knew Don Alfredo, but what in God's name has that to do with this torture, Father?" the matron sobbed. Her face twisted back over her shoulder, she saw her daughter's agonized visage contorted, the eyes wide and staring and glassy with tears, the nostrils flaring and shrinking, the lovely imperious little mouth twisted in a rictus of unspeakable suffering and shame. "Oh spare her, Father, spare her and heaven will bless you for it, what can the poor girl know of Don Alfredo?"

"But I would know more, Lucia de Peromonte," the gloomy friar pursued. Again his left hand wandered over Lucia's shuddering rump, and the twitchings and heat of her naked skin continued to inflame his ignoble rut. "Did he ever speak to you of his wealth, and of his plans to leave Spain?"

"No, Father, not of such things ever that I can recall. Oh please" for here another shriek from her daughter and the sight of Juana's head jerking against the yoke of the pillory announced another slashing blow of the thin birch rod across the young girl's lower buttocks. "Spare her, spare her and I will do anything, only spare her!"

"Hold your hand a while," Fra Murcio curtly ordered. Stepping very close to the sobbing naked matron, his left hand now rose from her bottom along her smooth dimpled back, savoring the contact against that milky warm twitching skin, till he had reached one of her titties, which he boldly fondled, thumb and forefinger compressing the pulpy bud of her nipple, till Lucia de Peromonte moaned and closed her eyes, stricken with shame, to be

thus used by these men in the sight of her own daughter. "Speak now, Lucia, and do not be so proud, for you are readied for the question until I end this session. And what you have felt already is only the beginning of the tortures that can be inflicted upon you to loosen your wagging tongue. Speak now the truth. I command you in the name of the Holy Inquisition! The truth, woman, or else your daughter shall feel the birch between those long dancing legs of hers! Here, I mean!"

And with this, the lustful monk lowered his hand abruptly down the side of her belly until he had reached the luxuriant thatch of black curls over her plump cunt mound.

"Oh no, oh no, have mercy, spare her, not that, she's only a young girl, have mercy, Father!" Lucia de Peromonte wailed.

"Give her two cuts well up between her legs," Fra Murcio exclaimed.

There was a sinister and then Huiishcrack!

And then another, almost instantly following. Juana de Peromonte yanked savagely at her yoked wrists and neck, 'hopping from one foot to the other, the other shoe flying off, as she screamed her agony:

"Eeeeyeeowwwarrrrhhhowwwwww!!!! "

"Oh, my poor Juana, my little girl, my baby, it's dreadful-oh, Father, don't make her suffer like that, I'll tell you all I know, though it isn't much-I swear I know so little about Don Alfredo!" the naked matron wailed.

"Then quickly, before the torturer gives your daughter the birch again between her naked legs," Fra Murcio insisted, his voice thick with monstrous rut.

"Two months ago, Juana and I were his guests, F-Father," the sobbing matron confided as she squirmed restlessly against the whipping post, for all this time his hand remained pressed against her pussy, and now to her horror she felt his forefinger stealthily probe between the plump lips of her sex. Her face was scarlet, and she closed her eyes, but she did not cry out, not wishing to let the two torturers and her daughter know what the monk was doing to her. "He said that he had lost his love for his native land because of the cruelty and persecution that were everywhere, and that one day he might find a new world where he and his daughter could live in happiness, in a land where there would be a brotherhood of man. That is all I ever heard him say of that, Father, I swear it is!"

"And how did he propose to transfer his estate and his wealth to this new world, my daughter?" Fra Murcio insisted. Now his forefinger had entered between the lips of Lucia de Peromonte's cunt, and was making its way against the dainty nodule of her clitoris, making her twitch and jerk and clench her thighs spasmodically, as her titties began to rise and fall with increased agitation.

"II don't know, I swear I don't, F-Father!" she pouted.

"Two more in the same place," he cried out. And even as Lucia de Peromonte tearfully supplicated for him to spare her daughter, the executioner's assistant lowered the thin rod to the floor and then swept it up between the naked young girl's squirming legs, attacking not only her pussy but the tender cleft of her voluptuous, resilient bare bottom. A strident scream, prolonged and clamorous, rent the air, as the naked young sufferer danced from foot to foot, wrenching her neck and wrists against the yoke holes of the pillory to free herself. And even as she twisted and writhed and danced, the grinning rogue lowered the birch to the floor and once again swept it up between those lithe tawny-sheened legs, this time the tips of the rod biting fully home against her virgin cunthole.

"Aiiiiieeowwwwoooouuuaahhrrr!!! Not there, not there, oh please, Mother, Mother, I can't stand it there, please have him stop, Mother!" Juana shrieked.

"It is up to you, Lucia de Peromonte, whether your daughter receives further discipline. Rack your mind and tell me what you know of Don Alfredo's plans," the gloomy monk commanded. Now the tip of his forefinger was rubbing against her love-button, and the naked matron squirmed and gasped, as she felt waves of sensual languor pervade her loins. The heat left by the strap against her back and shoulders and bottom cumulatively merged with this sweet torment till to her shame she felt herself nearly fainting with sensual desire, sinful though she knew this to be and especially before her daughter and the two torturers. But she was so undermined by her emotional grief and the pain of her flogging that she was now, just as the wily monk understood, completely distraught and a fitting subject for his

carnal conquest. "Speak, quickly, my daughter, or your girl will know the birch again in her tenderest spot! " he harangued her.

"Oh Father, don't have her beaten anymore-pity, pity! All I can recall, I swear it is all, Father, is that he alluded to some kind of transformation ... yes, that was his very word for it Father. He said that it would require a change of much into little to be able to smuggle it out of Spain. But that is all I know, I swear on the Holy Book it is all I know, Father!"

There was such a fervent tone of sincerity in the matron's voice that Fra Murcio believed her to be speaking the truth. His cunning mind swiftly arranged what facts he had discovered thus far. Transformation ... that would mean conversion of great wealth into small, portable items that might be carried about on one's person without danger of detection. Gold? No, that was out of the question. If Don Alfredo had sold his estate, had been paid in gold for it, he could not possibly have carried bags of gold out of the country on any ship. Besides, since the rogue had already been caught, condemned and executed, he had not obviously had a chance to effect that smuggling. Therefore the treasure, in whatever converted form it must be, must assuredly be hidden somewhere on the estate or near it. All this was logic. But where to begin, where to start, where to search?

"Tell me, Lucia de Peromonte," he pursued, while the assistant executioner, panting, dripping with sweat, his prick swollen violently against his tights, held the birch ready to deal poor Juana another stroke. The torturer's eyes feasted on the darkening and livid thin welts imprinted on her tawny-satiny bottom, and observed how she still shifted from foot to foot, wriggling and twisting as the ferocious heat of her whipped pussy and bumhole agonized her tender young nerves. And now Fra Murcio pursued the

thought uppermost in his mind: "Lucia, I adjure you on your hope of salvation in the next life, think carefully now of that conversation which you have just described to me. That in which he spoke of transformation. Did he give you any other clue as to how he proposed to transform his holdings into treasurable objects which he could take with him out of Spain?"

All this while, his forefinger had continued to rub against her clitoris, which was swollen and throbbing now with tumescence, and the half-fainting naked woman suffered and lolled by her wrist bonds, head bowed, as wave upon wave of sexual fury began to seethe within her thighs, within her loins, within her moistening cunthole. "Ohhh-I cannot think-oh Father, please-please-don't-don't touch-oh please-I cannot think, I am going mad" she babbled.

He withdrew his finger from her cunt and hissed into her ear, "You are not yet finished with me, Lucia de Peromonte! I will have you stretched on the bench and racked, I will pierce your nipples with hot needles, I will have the torturers take red-hot wands and whip the insides of your thighs and your naked belly, burn the thick moss that grows between your wanton naked legs if you do not try with all your might to reveal to me what it was that Don Alfredo said! And your daughter shall be given to the torturers, for, just as in ancient Rome, it is the law that no virgin may be put to death. Therefore they will despoil her, Lucia de Peromonte, so that she may be executed if we find that she has sinned against the Crown!"

Stricken with terror at these hideous threats, Lucia de Peromonte babbled hysterically, "He said only, yes I remember now, he said only that it must be precious stones of great price, for these alone could he take with him! But that is all, Father, I swear before you, on my daughter's honor, I

swear it, that is all he ever said. I think he was afraid he had said too much even then, although we were good friends and he trusted us. Oh have pity now, let poor Juana go!"

And now Fra Murcio knew with a dazzling clarity how the heretic Don Alfredo de Cristobel had turned his fortune into what could be taken from Spain with no man's knowing: gems, perhaps pearls of unheard-of size and beauty, or sapphires or emeralds or rubies mined in Panama or Mexico. Yes, but then where were these gems? Somewhere in the house of that traitor and heretic, there must be some sign to lead him to that fortune. Either that, or the daughter, the escaped whelp of the heretic, Inez de Cristobel, knew that secret and had it with her, a secret which would make him one of the richest men in Spain. And thus greed for gold tainted the warped and zealously fanatical mind of Fra Murcio even as it had tinged his superior, Fra Durando ... and it would undermined them both to their doom!

But now there remained the matter of pleasure after business. Now that he had taken all he could learn from Lucia de Peromonte's fear-ridden mind, there was still her body and the body of her lovely young daughter. He and the two torturers were bound together in an unholy secret, in which they must share with him the pleasure as well as the profit.

He turned now to regard them both, as they stood with their masks and in their black and red tights, eyes sparkling with lust. "I shall have the house searched again. I do not think that Fra Durando knows what I know now," he said slowly to the two of them. We shall let him have his day and night with that duenna-you, men of flesh and lust, can well imagine to what service he has put her. Well now, my turn will come, and I shall be distracted by no temptation of the flesh to find the pleasure of that cursed heretic. And

when I do, the two of you shall share it with me in return for your silence. It is agreed?"

"Yes, Your Reverence," Hermano Soledad hoarsely agreed. And the bald rogue beside him, still gripping the thin birch, nodded, licked his lips and stared hungrily at the shuddering and twisting young body in the pillory before him.

"Well then it is agreed," Fra Mucio chuckled. "Now, my worthy friend, persuade the tender virgin to seek solace from your rod by accepting your rod of flesh!"

Comprehending the monk's lewd play on words, the bald assistant executioner sniggered with delight. Then, stepping back, adroitly lowering the supple switches to the floor, he darted them up once again between Juana de Peromonte's bare thighs, attacking the tender fig of her virgin cunthole with a wicked, stinging slash.

"Owwwooooeeowwwwarhhhh!!! Not there, oh Mother, oh I can't bear it, I can't bear it anymore! Oh make him stop, Mother, why is he whipping me so horribly, what have I done?" The poor girl screamed.

Her hips now executed a salacious twisting this way and that, as she tried by shifting her feet to alter her stance in the pillory, but of course all she was able to do was jut out her tempting naked posterior and the glimpse of her furry virgin cleft in a way that inflamed her torturer's overwhelming rut the more. And once again the switches leaped up between her shaking naked

thighs, biting against the tenderest spot of her young anatomy, and drawing a wailing shriek of "Eowwwarhhaiiii!!! Oh please, I'll do whatever you want, but please no more, oh not there, not there, oh Mother, Mother oh God, make him stop!"

Fra Murcio's body was shaking with his lust, and now both his hands kneaded Lucia de Peromonte's titties, and his thin mouth pressed a burning kiss on her naked shoulder, as he muttered, "Tell your daughter to yield or she will be flayed alive, I promise you! And you, sluttish bitch, surrender yourself to me, or I will have you racked and then hot needles thrust into your breasts, right where my fingers pinch them now! "

Once again, as he spoke, the assistant executioner directed a perfidious cut of the withes right up into the tender gape and Lucia, her face twisted round, saw her daughter's agonized visage crisp with intolerable suffering, saw the lovely eyes dilate and roll in their sockets, saw the mouth gape in a prolonged, frenzied scream.

"Oh, my poor Juana, do whatever he wishes of you, oh God, I cannot bear to watch you suffer thus!" she cried. "Juana, beg him for mercy, and perhaps he will be kind! "

And then, realizing what she had said and done, she bowed her head and burst into fitful sobs.

"Well, my pretty dove," the bald torturer snarled, "you heard your mother, do her bidding! Tell me quickly that you will be my sweeting, and I'll

spare you the switches! Otherwise" and once again the infernal rod swept up between Juana de Peromonte's jerking thighs to cut into her already inflamed and throbbing young virgin cunthole.

"Arrrrhhowwwweeee!!! Yes, yes, do anything you want with me, but not there anymore, oh please, oh I can't stand it, have mercy on me, mercy!" the naked victim cried.

Flinging down the birch, the bald torturer advanced to the pillory and unlocked it, then dragged the weeping and half-swooning naked adolescent over to the low bench of the rack, and flung her down upon it. Dragging down his tights, he bared his swollen, dark-veined shaft, with its broadly oblong plum-shaped meatus, and for a moment stood over the whimpering, hysterical captive, delectating in her suffering and shame. Then with a hoarse cry, he flung himself down atop her, kneeing apart her struggling thighs, and his prickhead buried against the soft mossy tufts of her pussyhair, forced the swollen lips of her cleft apart and thrust himself with fury against the virgin barrier.

"Aiiiiiioh, Mother, Mother!!!" the girl shrieked as she tried to fend him off with her clenched little fists. But he had torn through her hymen and was now in her to the balls, and his hands readily mastered her wrists and flung them on either side of her, stretching her out and weighing over her as he ruthlessly began to fuck the almost maddened young victim.

Fra Murcio made a sign to Hermano Soledad, who took his knife and slashed the wrist bonds which held Lucia de Peromonte to the whipping post. She slumped to the floor, and stared slowly up at him, her eyes mad with

agony, blurred with tears, her magnificent cantaloupe-like titties rising and falling violently.

"My turn," the executioner panted. Fra Murcio frowned, then decided that the alliance he had formed with these two rogues was worth more than the question of who would be first with the mother. "Take the bitch," he snarled.

And when both men were done, Fra Murcio removed his robe and was naked under it, his prick savagely erect and throbbing for release. And he replaced Hermano Soledad atop Lucia de Peromonte. And when he had finished with her, he turned to the sprawled naked girl nearby, on whose black love tufts the blood of her sacrificed hymen showed. Still hard with longing, he paid no heed to this pitiable sight, but knelt down, his hands greedily caressing her panting titties, and then he crushed her mouth to silence under his as his prick thrust into that narrower channel and knew surcease.

And thus this deed was done in the name of the treasure of Don Alfredo de Cristobel.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE COUNT

Count Paco de Miromar could not keep his eyes off the lovely, anguished

face of Inez de Cristobel. They had dined, and his housekeeper Rosa had attended the young girl with loving care, as if she had been her own daughter. The sweetness and gentleness of the orphaned daughter of Don Alfredo had won the heart of everyone in this luxurious house, but most of all that of the Count who felt himself young again when he gazed at that exquisite cameo-like face and the lithe body.

"Do you think you have strength enough, Inez?" he asked.

"Yes, Count, I want to go back to the house. I know that my father is dead and that all his possessions are forfeit to the Crown. But I want my prayer book, and some of the other little mementos which my father gave me, so I may remember him always as a good and dear man who never did anyone any harm and who most of all loved his country better than it knew."

"Then we shall go there tonight. I have had word that Tomas Torquemada reached Toledo tonight, and once he is back in power here, it will not be safe for anyone to be seen in your father's house. He will send the soldiers to occupy the house and to arrest all those who come near it. Come quickly, and Rosa will give you a warm cloak, for the night is chilly."

Half an hour later, the carriage of the Count de Miromar drew up at the gateway of the palacial estate which had once belonged to Don Alfredo de Cristobel. The gray-haired but handsome nobleman had brought with him two faithful retainers, Sandoval and Pepe, young men in their mid-twenties, who drove the coach and its four sturdy horses, with the blood of proud Arabian steeds in their veins. They had great endurance and they could outdistance any other horses on the road if need be. But they were gentle and had never

been given the whip. Yet tonight Sandoval and Pepe carried whips in the event that speed was of the utmost necessity-as well it might be if by some evil chance the soldiers of the Inquisition had been assigned already to guard the estate.

But they saw no soldiers on the road, and now as the Count opened the door and handed Inez down, he called up to his two faithful servants, "Keep careful watch. And you, Sandoval, hoot like an owl three times if you see soldiers or anyone else approaching. Now hide the carriage towards the back and behind that clump of trees where it will not be seen by those who take this road. And then watch from the hedges and keep your hands on your daggers, you both, for this is a desperate hour."

He led Inez up the steps of her father's house, and she opened the door, for her 'father had never bolted it in those happy years when he had lived at peace with his neighbors. It was deathly still and dark. The Count de Miromar carried a candle with him and a flint, and now he struck a light and lit the wick, and the two of them moved through the salon like ghosts in a dead house. There were tears in Inez's eyes, tears of bitter memory and nostalgia and also sorrow for her dead father.

Up the winding steps they went, and there was not a sign of life in the house, and the flickering candlelight guided them both to the room where her chaste virginity had been sheltered all those happy years before the black terror of the Holy Inquisition had darkened the land that was once free Spain.

She reached the chest of drawers, opened the top and uttered a cry of

joy: "My prayer book, Count, it's still here, oh, heaven be praised!"

And as she took it, opening it at random, her eyes blurred with tears, a tiny folded piece of parchment fluttered from it to the floor. His keen eyes noticed, and he stopped to retrieve it. "What's this?"

"I-I don't know, perhaps a marker-what is it, Count?" She stared at him, for his brow was furrowed in concentration as he held the candle closer to the unfolded scrap.

"It's a map, Inez! Your father left you this final legacy. Now I know where his treasure is. Do you see the signs of water, the drawing as of a wave?"

"Yes."

"And beside it, is a kind of round tunnel, and here are the Latin words for a well and a rock. Your father has hidden his treasure in the cistern, behind the rocks which form its outer wall. And here is the Roman numeral sign of two, which means that it is in the second circle of rocks, just below the top. What cleverness, and yet it would not be so easy for a dullard or a greedy man to make sense of this. Come, hurry, Inez! Out to the cistern! And I shall need a pickaxe. There must be one in the shed in the garden. Go to the cistern and I will join you there."

Inez hastened out of the house and towards the barn. There at the

familiar cistern, where so often as a child she had come to dip a long ladle cup for the pure cold sweet water that quenched her childish thirst, she waited for her father's friend.

A few minutes later, the Count hurried towards her, a pickaxe in hand. "Hold the candle, and do not let it fall," he counseled. The one thing which this cipher map does not tell us is exactly at what place in that second row of rocks the treasure is hidden. But we will pray that your father's courageous and noble spirit will guide our weak hands!"

At random, his keen eyes judging the demarcation between the first two rows of rocks which circled the narrow cistern, he posed the point of the pickaxe and then began to strike. Carefully he struck away, and fragments of rock dropped into the water below. Now he had hollowed out a section large enough for a man's hand to thrust inside, and he did so, but found nothing except more stone. Again he tried, and after a few more minutes, found nothing. Pausing, his heart pounding wildly, he directed the trembling girl to bring the candle even closer over the top of the cistern and towards the layers of rock. And then he uttered a cry of stupefaction and joy: for there was a tiny blue cross marked as with crayon on one of the stones directly beyond him. "To the other side now, and bring the candle slowly round so I may follow," he cried.

Now back in place, he leaned over while Inez, beside him, holding her breath, approached with trembling hand the candlelight towards the marking of the cross.

Posing the point of the pickaxe against the very center of the cross, the

Count de Miromar struck with all his might. At once it seemed to penetrate the stone, as if it were putty, and he uttered another cry of surprise as, carefully tugging the axe away, he disclosed a narrow opening. Transferring the instrument to his left hand, he leaned forward and passed his right hand into the orifice and then uttered another cry: "Santa Maria! I have found it, I have found the treasure!"

And then before the dazzled eyes of Inez de Cristobel, Count Paco de Miromar drew out one by one the huge rubies which Eleazear Ben Gerton had obtained in transference of Don Alfredo's gold.

Suddenly the Count stiffened. He had heard the hooting of an owl three times. "Quickly," he hissed to Inez, "go hide in the barn. Someone is coming!" And then thrusting the three huge rubies into the pocket of his doublet, he drew his sword from its scabbard and, pickaxe in his left hand, sword in right, advanced round the side of the house to meet the unknown intruder.

But already he heard angry voices. And he stopped, stricken with wonder at what he heard.

"So this is how you keep your vows of obedience, Fra Murcio!" It was the angry, hoarse voice of Fra Durando.

"I, Fra Durando? Are you not mistaken? It seems to me that you, my superior, have committed a greater sin than I. I but came here to seek the treasure of a heretic which, Mother Church shall first redeem and then offer to their glorious Majesties. I but discovered this on the night when

you and that trollop of a duenna were closeted here in this fine house, no doubt searching for what Satan himself put before you," the mocking, reedy voice of Fra Murcio retorted.

"And how, then, you pillar of faith and piety, did you learn that there was treasure here, when I myself and the duenna sought it through each room of this accursed house, aye, and in the chests and the trunks and in the cellar?" the angry Fra Durando cried, beside himself with baffled rage.

"You are too impetuous, good Fra Durando," Fra Murcio willingly and mockingly responded. "What could that poor woman know of her master's fortune, I asked myself? Naught, unless she was his bed companion. And I did not think that this was so. You, on the contrary, Fra Durando, lusted for her-do not deny it! The Creator Himself looks down from heaven now to judge you, so examine your heart. Did you not bring her here for your own base and venal lust. Else you would have found that which you sought, save what you sought was of the flesh. Oh damnation, that a brother of our order should so debase himself!"

"Do not take that tone with me, you ingratiating dog," Fra Durando snarled. "Torquemada himself will decide who is empowered to conduct the extermination of the accursed heretics. You sought this profit for yourself, you wretched monk whose ambition will lead him to the stake and to the cell and to the scourge!"

"Do not lecture me as from the mouth of our beloved Founder," Fra Murcio laughed dryly. "Let me first tell you how I learned what you should

have discovered yourself, you who claim to be the right hand of the Founder.

There were in this prison a mother and a daughter who had known Don Alfredo. Well, I had them put to the question, and I learned that some months ago that damnable heretic had spoken with the mother of a transformation. Yes, my good brother in the faith. A transformation whereby gold became perhaps precious jewels, small enough to conceal within one's body, even, and thus smuggle out of Spain.

But since he was apprehended and lodged in prison and there condemned to his death, he had no time to pass on this treasure to his daughter, who herself was in our custody until some traitorous wretch helped her escape our justice. Now I have come here to seek and without distraction, for I bring no wench with me."

"No, you scurvy knave, because doubtless you lay with the mother and the daughter in the prison," Fra Durando mocked him.

"Hold your tongue, you blasphemous scoundrel! The Founder himself, who rests now from his long journey from Barcelona, will learn of your secret corruption on the morrow."

"That he will not, I promise you, Fra Murcio."

"No, and why not, then?" the gloomy monk's voice rose in triumph.

"Because, you mutinous dog, I will silence you forever," Fra Durando hissed. And then there was the sound of a muffled thud, and a gurgling cry.

Count Paco de Miromar crept forward, and then he saw an incredible scene. Fra Durando, in his black robe and cowl, stood over the body of another man clad also in the black robe of a friar of the Inquisition, and in his hand was a bloody dagger.

"It is you!" Paco de Miromar cried out involuntarily horrified into revealing himself at this moment by the sight of that infamous crime.

"Count de Miromar, you, a familiar of the Inquisition! What do you here, what unholy business are you bent upon?" Fra Durando cried as he straightened, the dagger still in his hand. "Wait-now I begin to see, you traitorous villain! It was you, then, who must have spirited Inez de Cristobel out of prison."

"It was I, Fra Durando. I would not have been true to my manhood and to the honor of a Spanish nobleman if I had left that poor girl to die in flames at a stake of ignominy and injustice!"

"Take care, you blaspheme, Count de Miromar! You took the oath of loyalty to the Holy Inquisition, you know its secrets, and you"

"And I detest and despise the horror which you and your kind have brought to a gentle land," the gray-haired handsome nobleman finished for him. "Yes, at the outset, I believed fervently that the heretic and the traitor must be cast out. But when I saw kindly old men and women, children and young girls, butchered and tortured, raped and whipped and put to the rack in the dark cells of the prison at Toledo, in the name of piety and sanctimonious mumbo-jumbo which had as its only end the seizure of their possessions that the holy order might grow powerful and wealthier than the Crown itself, I began to doubt my wisdom."

"You have already said enough to send you to the stake a thousand times over, Count de Miromar!" Fra Durando shrieked, as he strode forward, brandishing the dagger.

"What have you done with Mercedes Solar?" Count Paco de Miromar coldly demanded.

"She has died under the question, because she was obstinate and stupid. She would not tell me where the treasure was."

"I have that treasure now in the pocket of my doublet, Fra Durando." Count Paco de Miromar dropped the pickaxe, and thrust his left hand into the pocket, drew forth one of the giant rubies. The eyes of the Chief Inquisitor fixed on it, huge and glazed with avarice, his lips drooling and trembling with cupidity.

"In the name of glory!" he thickly ejaculated.

"It is worth thousands of gold doubloons, verily!"

"Yes, it is all of that. And there are two others exactly like it. Don Alfredo de Cristobel was a virtuous and good man, and a prosperous one. And he would have spent this fortune on the glory of Spain if it had not been for the blight and the pestilence of bigotry which you and your kind have brought to our fair land, Fra Durando."

"Wait, wait, Count, let us not be hasty," Fra Durando licked his lips, lowered his dagger as he approached. "There is enough for both of us. I myself confess to a weariness of this life of celibacy and eternal vows of poverty. Why should not you and I leave Spain by a ship we can purchase from some lusty rogue in a tavern, and seek a new land where we can be rich and have all the things we have dreamed of. Power and women and good wine and food"

"And eternal damnation, if Torquemada should hear you speak thus, good Fra Durando," the Count mocked his interlocutor.

"Don't be a fool, Count! Do you mean to keep those rubies for yourself?"

"No. For their rightful heiress, Inez de Cristobel. She is in that barn, Fra Durando. Yes, I took her from the prison, I hid her in my house, and I found in her prayer book in her own bedroom the key to where these gems were

stored, awaiting her rightful possession of them."

"A thousand devils! Oh, would that Mercedes Solar were still in the dungeon with me!" Fra Durando gnashed his teeth in rage. "She spoke to me of the prayer book, but she did not examine it. Oh the damnably stupid bitch, the hellcat!"

"So you have killed her, in the manner of the proverb which warns against killing the goose which laid the golden eggs, eh, my good friar?" Count Paco de Miromar chuckled.

And now, seeing that all was lost, all his dreams shattered, the Chief Inquisitor flung himself forward with a shriek of rage, lifting the bloody dagger high. Stepping back nimbly, Count Paco de Miromar neatly ran him through with the shining sword, and the black-robed monk stiffened, stared down at the steel which transfixed his chest, and then the life went out of his eyes and as the Count dragged out the bloody blade, Fra Durando fell lifeless to the earth.

It was done. The horror and the greed and the scheming had come to nothing ... or perhaps, to everything.

EPILOGUE

Count Paco de Miromar was naked on the bed in the captain's cabin of the good ship Bonaventura, bound for the Azores. And beside him, young and

ivory-naked, her eyes glowing with joy, lay Inez de Cristobel, now the Countess de Miromar.

After he had sent the evil Chief Inquisitor to the flames of eternal damnation which awaited the corrupt monk, Count Paco de Miromar had summoned his carriage and driven back with Inez to his house. There he had taken his leave of them, and distributed much gold to the weeping Rosa and to his retainers Pepe and Sandoval. And these two gallant young servants had driven him far from the city of Toledo to the little port of Estanchia, where in a tavern he had found a bearded sea captain who, in exchange for a weighty purse of gold, had agreed to consign his vessel to the service of the Count.

They had been out upon the blue ocean three days, and this was the third and heavenly night of their marriage.

Inez blushed and lowered her eyes as her husband turned to her, his hands caressing her breasts and buttocks, his lips nuzzling at her throat. "Oh my darling husband, my beloved Paco, why do I feel so shameless? You are old enough to be my father, and yet I love you as deeply as I could any handsome youthnay, more, for you have saved my father's good name and you have avenged his death on those cruel and evil men who had him murdered in the name of the Inquisition only because they wished his possessions."

"Now you are a shameless jade and need a good thrashing, my sweet Inez," he chuckled as he gave her lovely ivory bottom a playful slap which made her squeal. "To tell your husband of three days that you love him more

dearly than any handsome young togue-that is hardly a fair compliment, my naughty bride. You shall pay dearly for it, till we touch harbor in our new world. And you will begin now to pay, you hot-blooded wench. Indeed, if I did not know myself that you were the little girl I once dangled on my knee, I would not believe you to be the daughter of my good old friend Don Alfredo, so lustful and insatiable you have become. But now, my darling one, you are but nineteen summers, and you have all your life to learn of the way between men and maid."

"But I am impatient, Paco, because you are so old," she teased him, as she engaged her forefinger in the matted gray hair of his sturdy chest. "After all, a poor maid must eke out all she can from her old dotard of a husband before he can no longer service her."

"Why, you impudent baggage! For that, I shall punish you as I would have done when I held you on my knee, Inez de Miromar!"

Laughingly, he seized her by the shoulders and forced her across his lap. Then, his left hand on the small of her back, he raised his right and delivered a dozen stinging slaps over that voluptuous, resilient ivory bottom of hers, while Inez pretended to cry and plead for mercy, kicking up her beautiful legs and showing him at thrilling moments a glimpse of the dark ringlets of her soft enticing cunt.

"Now then, have you learned your lesson, you jade?" he demanded.

"Oh yes, my lord and husband," she whispered meekly, but there was a

roguish devil in her dancing eyes. "I have learned a good lesson. It is that whenever I anger or excite you, I am sure that you will be faithful to me and that no other woman can hold you between her legs. So hurry, my darling Paco, before you see some wench aboard this ship whom you fancy more than poor little me! "

He roared with laughter, reached over to the night table and lifted a goblet of wine and sipped it, then made her share it with him. Then, setting it back on the table, he turned to her and pulled her down atop him, his hands squeezing her bottom while she wriggled lasciviously over him until she had fitted his stiffened prick into the soft socket of her eager cunt.

It was imbedded deeply into her cunt, as deep as the very center of her pulsing body. She could feel his thick, fat cock pulsing deep in what seemed the middle of her. And now he was beginning to slide it back and forth, up and down her clinging sheath, and she arched her body, thrusting her lips sharply up at his raging cock, as it thundered in and out of her chute, and she could feel the throbbing of it, as though it were a tingling nerve of muscle that was alive, eel-like, deep in her crater.

"Oooohhhhhh ... she screamed out, her breath coming in raking gasps as he eased his prick in and out, and she reached down and around and seized his balls, tickling and fondling them, coaxing out the frothy come that she was mad to feel surging into her body.

Her womanhood, femininity, girlhood ... all of it was at his disposal as he had his way with her, feeling the hardening breasts, and caressing the working buttocks of the gorgeous woman beneath him until his cock began to

pulse and hum, and her own answering cunt gave off a preliminary spasm, and then ejaculated its female froth all around the raging prick.

"Oooooooooo... Ahhhhhhhhhhhh!" she screamed, her fingers cutting into his back, and she was coming, coming, coming like never before and the prick continued raging into her, forcing come after come from her body.

And then the cabin was filled with moans and sighs and ecstatic cooing noises, all the symphony of love. And all the horrors of the Holy Inquisition were forgotten as old husband who was young in power, ' and in skill at mating; and young wife, who was already old in the ways of satisfaction, pledged their vows again; and exquisitely and passionately AGAIN!

THE END