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self on account of his haste, put the spurs to his horse and regained his own party, who now proceeded at a rapid pace.

"O signor!" said the guide, "we shall kill the horses."

"I'll pay for them," said Jack.

"Yes, but we shall kill them before we get there, Jack," replied Gascoigne, "and have to walk the rest of the way."

"Very true, Ned; let's pull up, and give them their wind."

"By de holy poker, Massa Easy, but my shirt stick to my ribs," cried Mesty, whose black face was hung with dewdrops from their rapid course.

"Never mind, Mesty."

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon when they arrived at the seat of Don Rebiera. Jack threw himself off his jaded steed, and hastened into the house, followed by Gascoigne. They found the whole family collected in the large sitting-room, quite ignorant of any danger threatening them, and equally astonished and pleased at the arrival of their old friends. Jack flew to Agnes, who screamed when she saw him, and felt so giddy afterwards that he was obliged to support her. Having seated her again, he was kindly greeted by the old people and the two young officers. After a few minutes dedicated to mutual inquiries, our hero stated the cause of their expeditious arrival.

"Don Silvio with one hundred and fifty gallerians let loose on the coast yesterday afternoon!" exclaimed Don Rebiera. "You are right; I only wonder they were not here last night. But I expect Pedro from the town; he has gone down with a load of wine; he will bring us intelligence."

"At all events, we must be prepared," said Don Philip; "the troops, you say, will be here to-morrow morning."

"Holy Virgin!" exclaimed the ladies, in a breath.

"How many can we muster?" said Gascoigne.

"We have five men here, or we shall have by the evening," replied Don Philip—"all, I think, good men—my father, my brother, and myself."

"We are three—four with the guide, whom I know nothing about."

"Twelve in all—not one too many; but I think that now we are prepared, if they attack, we can hold out till the morning."

"Had we not better send the ladies away?" said Jack.

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"Who is to escort them?" replied Don Philip; "we shall only weaken our force; besides, they may fall into the miscreants' hands."

"Shall we all leave the house together? they can but plunder it," observed Don Rebiera.

"Still we may be intercepted by them, and our whole force will be nothing against so many," observed Don Philip, "if we are without defence, whereas in the house we shall have an advantage."

"E' vero," replied Don Rebiera thoughtfully; "then let us prepare, for depend upon it, Don Silvio will not lose such an opportunity to wreak his vengeance. He will be here to-night; I only wonder he has not been here with his companions before. However, Pedro will arrive in two hours."

"We must now see what means we have of defence," said Philip. "Come, brother—will you come, sir?"

CHAPTER XXXI

*Regular set-to, in which the parties beaten are not knocked down, but rise higher and higher at each discomfiture—Nothing but the troops could have prevented them from going up to heaven.*

DON REBIERA and his two sons quitted the room, Gascoigne entered into conversation with the signora, while Easy took this opportunity of addressing Agnes. He had been too much occupied with the consultation to pay her much attention before. He had spoken with his eyes fixed upon her, and had been surprised at the improvement which had taken place in less than a year. He now went to her, and asked her, in a low voice, whether she had received his letter.

"Oh yes!" replied she, colouring.

"And were you angry with what I said, Agnes?" in a low tone.

"No," replied she, casting her eyes down on the floor.

"I repeat now what I said, Agnes—I have never forgotten you."

"But——"



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"But what?"

"Father Thomaso."

"What of him?"

"He never will——"

"Will what?"

"You are a heretic, he says."

"Tell him to mind his own business."

"He has great influence with my father and mother."

"Your brothers are on our side."

"I know that, but there will be great difficulty. Our religion is not the same. He must talk to you—he will convert you."

"We'll argue that point, Agnes. I will convert him if he has common-sense; if not, it's no use arguing with him. Where is he?"

"He will soon be at home."

"Tell me, Agnes, if you had your own will, would you marry me?"

"I don't know; I have never seen any one I liked so well."

"Is that all?"

"Is it not enough for a maiden to say?" replied Agnes, raising her eyes, and looking reproachfully. "Signor, let me go, here comes my father."

Notwithstanding, Jack cast his eyes to the window where Gascoigne and the signora were in converse, and perceiving that the old lady's back was turned, he pressed Agnes to his bosom before he released her. The gentlemen then returned with all the firearms and destructive weapons they could collect.

"We have enough," observed Don Philip, "to arm all the people we have with us."

"And we are well armed," replied Jack, who had left Agnes standing alone. "What now are your plans?"

"Those we must now consult about. It appears"—but at this moment the conversation was interrupted by the sudden entrance of Pedro, who had been despatched to the town with the load of wine. He rushed in, flurried and heated, with his red cap in his hand.

"How now, Pedro, back so early!"

"O signor!" exclaimed the man, "they have taken the cart and the wine, and have drawn it away up to the mountains."

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"Who?" inquired Don Rebiera.

"The galley-slaves who have been let loose—and by the body of our blessed saint, they have done pretty mischief. They have broken into the houses, robbed everything—murdered many—clothed themselves with the best—collected all the arms, provisions, and wine they could lay their hands on, and have marched away into the mountains. This took place last night. As I was coming down within a mile of the town, they met me with my loaded cart, and they turned the bullocks round and drove them away along with the rest. By the blessed Virgin! but they are stained with blood, but not altogether of men, for they have cut up some of the oxen. I heard this from one of the herdsmen, but he too fled, and could not tell me more. But, signor, I heard them mention your name."

"I have no doubt of it," replied Don Rebiera. "As for the wine, I only hope they will drink too much of it to-night. But, Pedro, they will be here, and we must defend ourselves—so call the men together; I must speak to them."

"We shall never see the bullocks again," observed Pedro mournfully.

"No; but we shall never see one another again, if we do not take care. I have information they come here to-night."

"Holy Saint Francis! and they say there are a thousand of them."

"Not quite so many, to my knowledge," observed Jack.

"They told me that a great many were killed in their attack upon the town, before they mastered it."

"So much the better. Go now, Pedro, drink a cup of wine, and then call the other men."

The house was barricadoed as well as circumstances would permit; the first story was also made a fortress by loading the landing-place with armoires and chests of drawers. The upper story, or attic, if it might be so called, was defended in the same way, that they might retreat from one to the other if the doors were forced.

It was eight o'clock in the evening before all was ready, and they were still occupied with the last defence, under the superintendence of Mesty, who showed himself an able engineer, when they heard the sound of an approaching multitude. They



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looked out of one of the windows, and perceived the house surrounded by the galley-slaves, in number apparently about a hundred. They were all dressed in a most fantastic manner with whatever they could pick up: some had firearms, but the most of them were supplied with only swords or knives. With them came also their *cortège* of plunder: carts of various descriptions, loaded with provisions of all sorts, and wine; women lashed down with ropes, sails from the vessels and boats to supply them with covering in the mountains, hay and straw, and mattresses. Their plunder appeared to be well chosen for their exigencies. To their carts were tied a variety of cattle, intended to accompany them to their retreat. They all appeared to be under a leader, who was issuing directions—that leader was soon recognised by those in the house to be Don Silvio.

"Massa Easy, you show me dat man," said Mesty, when he heard the conversation between Easy and the Rebieras; "only let me know him."

"Do you see him there, Mesty, walking down in front of those men? He has a musket in his hand, a jacket with silver buttons, and white trousers."

"Yes, Massa Easy, me see him well—let me look little more—dat enough."

The galley-slaves appeared to be very anxious to surround the house that no one should escape, and Don Silvio was arranging the men.

"Ned," said Jack, "let us show him that we are here. He said that he would acquaint Don Rebiera with our arrival—let us prove to him that he is too late."

"It would not be a bad plan," replied Gascoigne; "if it were possible that these fellows had any gratitude among them, some of them might relent at the idea of attacking those who saved them."

"Not a bit; but it will prove to them that there are more in the house than they think for; and we can frighten some of them by telling them that the soldiers are near at hand."

Jack immediately threw up the casement, and called out in a loud voice, "Don Silvio! galley-slave! Don Silvio!"

The party hailed turned round, and beheld Jack, Gascoigne, and Mesty, standing at the window of the upper floor.

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"We have saved you the trouble of announcing us," called out Gascoigne. "We are here to receive you."

"And in three hours the troops will be here, so you must be quick, Don Silvio," continued Jack.

"A reveder la," continued Gascoigne, letting fly his pistol at Don Silvio.

The window was then immediately closed. The appearance of our heroes, and their communication of the speedy arrival of the troops, was not without effect. The criminals trembled at the idea; Don Silvio was mad with rage—he pointed out to the men the necessity of immediate attack—the improbability of the troops arriving so soon, and the wealth which he expected was locked up by Don Rebiera in his mansion. This rallied them, and they advanced to the doors, which they attempted to force without success, losing several men by the occasional fire from those within the house. Finding their efforts, after half-an-hour's repeated attempts, to be useless, they retreated, and then bringing up a long piece of timber, which required sixty men to carry it, they ran with it against the door, and the weight and impetus of the timber drove it off its hinges, and an entrance was obtained; by this time it was dark, the lower story had been abandoned, but the barricade at the head of the stairs opposed their progress. Convenient loopholes had been prepared by the defenders, who now opened a smart fire upon the assailants, the latter having no means of returning it effectually, had they had ammunition for their muskets, which fortunately they had not been able to procure. The combat now became fierce, and the galley-slaves were several times repulsed with great loss during a contest of two hours; but encouraged by Don Silvio, and refreshed by repeated draughts of wine, they continued by degrees removing the barriers opposed to them.

"We shall have to retreat," exclaimed Don Rebiera; "very soon they will have torn down all. What do you think, Signor Easy?"

"Hold this as long as we can. How are we off for ammunition?"

"Plenty as yet—plenty to last for six hours, I think."

"What do you say, Mesty?"

"By holy St. Patrig, I say hold out here—they got no firearms—and we ab um at arm-length."



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This decision was the occasion of the first defence being held for two hours more, an occasional relief being afforded by the retreat of the convicts to the covered carts.

At last it was evident that the barricade was no longer tenable, for the heavy pieces of furniture they had heaped up to oppose entrance, were completely hammered to fragments by poles brought up by the assailants, and used as battering-rams. The retreat was sounded; they all hastened to the other story, where the ladies were already placed, and the galley-slaves were soon in possession of the first floor—exasperated by the defence, mad with wine and victory, but finding nothing.

Again was the attack made upon the second landing, but as the stairs were now narrower, and their defences stronger in proportion, they for a long while gained no advantage. On the contrary, many of their men were wounded, and taken down below.

The darkness of the night prevented both parties from seeing distinctly, which was rather in favour of the assailants. Many climbed over the fortress of piled-up furniture, and were killed as soon as they appeared on the other side, and at last the only ammunition used was against those who made this rash attempt. For four long hours did this assault and defence continue, until daylight came, and then the plan of assault was altered: they again brought up the poles, hammered the pieces of furniture into fragments, and gained ground. The defenders were worn-out with fatigue, but flinched not; they knew that their lives, and the lives of those dearest to them, were at stake, and they never relaxed their exertions; still the criminals, with Silvio at their head, progressed, the distance between the parties gradually decreased, and there was but one massive chest of drawers now defending the landing-place, and over which there was a constant succession of blows from long poles and cutlasses, returned with the bullets from their pistols.

"We must now fight for our lives," exclaimed Gascoigne to Easy, "for what else can we do?"

"Do?—get on the roof and fight there, then," replied Jack.

"By-the-bye, that's well thought of, Jack," said Gascoigne.

"Mesty, up and see if there is any place we can retreat to in case of need."

Mesty hastened to obey, and soon returned with a report

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that there was a trap-door leading into the loft under the roof, and that they could draw the ladder up after them.

"Then we may laugh at them," cried Jack. "Mesty, stay here while I and Gascoigne assist the ladies up," explaining to the Rebieras and to their domestics why they went.

Easy and Gascoigne hastened to the signora and Agnes, conducted them up the ladder into the loft, and requested them to have no fear; they then returned to the defences on the stairs, and joined their companions. They found them hard pressed, and that there was little chance of holding out much longer; but the stairs were narrow, and the assailants could not bring their force against them. But now, as the defences were nearly destroyed, although the convicts could not reach them with their knives, they brought up a large supply of heavy stones, which they threw with great force and execution. Two of Don Rebiera's men and Don Martin were struck down, and this new weapon proved most fatal.

"We must retreat, Jack," said Gascoigne; "the stones can do no harm where we are going to. What think you, Don Philip?"

"I agree with you; let those who are wounded be first carried up, and then we will follow."

This was effected, and as soon as the wounded men were carried up the ladder, and the arms taken up to prevent their falling into the hands of the assailants, for they were now of little use to them, the ammunition being exhausted, the whole body went into the large room which contained the trap-door of the loft, and as soon as they were up, they drew the ladder after them. They had hardly effected this, when they were followed with the yells and shoutings of the galley-slaves, who had passed the last barriers, and thought themselves sure of their prey; but they were disappointed—they found them more secure than ever.

Nothing could exceed the rage of Don Silvio at the protracted resistance of the party, and the security of their retreat. To get at them was impossible, so he determined to set fire to the room, and suffocate them, if he could do no otherwise. He gave his directions to his men, who rushed down for straw, but in so doing, he carelessly passed under the trap-door, and Mesty, who had carried up with him two or three of the stones, dashed one down on the head of Don Silvio, who fell imme-



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diately. He was carried away, but his orders were put in execution; the room was filled with straw and fodder, and lighted. The effects were soon felt: the trap-door had been shut, but the heat and smoke burst through; after a time, the planks and rafters took fire, and their situation was terrible. A small trap-window in the roof, on the side of the house, was knocked open, and gave them a temporary relief; but now the rafters burned and crackled, and the smoke burst on them in thick columns. They could not see, and with difficulty could breathe. Fortunately the room below that which had been fired was but one out of four on the attics, and as the loft they were in spread over the whole of the roof, they were able to remove far from it. The house was slated with massive slates of some hundredweight each, and it was not found possible to remove them so as to give air, although frequent attempts were made. Donna Rebera sank exhausted in the arms of her husband, and Agnes fell into those of our hero, who, enveloped in the smoke, kissed her again and again; and she, poor girl, thinking that they must all inevitably perish, made no scruple, in what she supposed her last moments, of returning these proofs of her ardent attachment.

"Massa Easy, help me here,—Massa Gascoigne, come here. Now heab wid all your might: when we get one off we get plenty."

Summoned by Mesty, Jack and Gascoigne put their shoulders to one of the lower slates; it yielded, was disengaged, and slid down with a loud rattling below. The ladies were brought to it, and their heads put outside; they soon recovered; and now that they had removed one, they found no difficulty in removing others. In a few minutes they were all with their heads in the open air, but still the house was on fire below, and they had no chance of escape. It was while they were debating upon this point, and consulting as to their chance of safety, that a breeze of wind wafted the smoke that issued from the roof away from them, and they beheld the detachment of troops making up to the house; a loud cheer was given, and attracted the notice of the soldiers. They perceived Easy and his companions; the house was surrounded and entered in an instant.

The galley-slaves who were in the house, searching for the treasure reported by Don Silvio to be concealed, were captured or killed, and in five minutes the troops had possession. But

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how to assist those above was the difficulty. The room below was in flames, and burning fiercely. There were no ladders that could reach so high, and there were no means of getting to them. The commandant made signs from below, as if to ask what he was to do.

"I see no chance," observed Don Philip mournfully. "Easy, my dear fellow, and you, Gascoigne, I am sorry that the feuds of our family should have brought you to such a dreadful death; but what can be done?"

"I don't know," replied Jack, "unless we could get ropes."

"You quite sure, Massa Easy, that all galley rascals below gone?" asked Mesty.

"Yes," replied Easy, "you may see that; look at some of them bound there, under charge of the soldiers."

"Den, sar, I tink it high time we go too."

"So do I, Mesty; but how?"

"How? stop a little. Come, help me, Massa Easy; dis board (for the loft was floored) is loose; come, help, all of you."

They all went, and with united strength pulled up the board.

"Now strike like hell!—and drive down de plaster," said Mesty, commencing the operation.

In a few minutes they had beaten an opening into one of the rooms below not on fire, pulled up another board, and Mesty having fetched the ladder, they all descended in safety, and to the astonishment of the commandant of the troops, walked out of the door of the house, those who had been stunned with the stones having so far recovered as to require little assistance.

The soldiers shouted as they saw them appear, supporting the females. The commanding officer, who was an intimate friend of Don Philip, flew to his arms. The prisoners were carefully examined by Mesty, and Don Silvio was not among them. He might, however, be among the dead who were left in the house, which now began to burn furiously. The galley-slaves who were captured amounted in number to forty-seven. Their dead they could not count. The major part of the plunder, and the carts, were still where they had been drawn up.

As soon as the culprits had been secured, the attention of



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the troops was directed to putting out the flames, but their attempts were ineffectual; the mansion was burned to the bare walls, and but little of the furniture saved; indeed, the major part of it had been destroyed in the attack made by Don Silvio and his adherents.

Leaving directions with Pedro and his people that the property collected by the miscreants should be restored to the owners, Don Reberia ordered the horses, and with the whole party put himself under the protection of the troops, who, as soon as they had been refreshed, and taken some repose, bent their way back to Palermo, with the galley-slaves bound and linked together in a long double row.

They halted when they had gone half-way, and remained for the night. The next day at noon, Don Reberia and his family were once more in their palazzo, and our two midshipmen and Mesty took their leave, and repaired on board to make themselves a little less like chimney-sweepers.

Captain Wilson was not out of the ship. Jack made his report, and then went down below, very much pleased at what had passed, especially as he would have another long yarn for the governor on his return to Malta.

## CHAPTER XXXII

*In which our hero and Gascoigne ought to be ashamed of themselves, and did feel what might be called midshipmite compunction.*

THE *Aurora* continued three weeks at Palermo, during which the most active search had been made for the remainder of the galley-slaves, and some few had been captured; but still Don Silvio and a considerable number were at large, and it was said that they had retired to the fastnesses in the mountains. Our hero was constantly on shore at Don Reberia's house, and, after what had passed, he was now looked upon as soon to become a member of the family. The difference of religion was overlooked by Don Reberia and his relations—by all but the confessor, Father Thomaso, who now began to agitate and fulminate into the ears of the Donna Reberia all the pains and

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penalties attending heretical connection, such as excommunication and utter damnation. The effects of his remonstrances were soon visible, and Jack found that there was constraint on the part of the old lady, tears on the part of Agnes, and all father confessors heartily wished at the devil ten times a day, on the part of Don Philip and his brother. At last he wormed the truth out of Agnes, who told her tale, and wept bitterly.

"Ned, I don't much like the appearance of things," observed Jack; "I must get rid of that Father Thomaso."

"You'll find that rather difficult," observed Gascoigne; "besides, if you were rid of him you would have his place filled up with another."

"He has frightened that poor old woman into the dismals, and she has the pains of purgatory on her already. I shall go and talk to Mesty."

"How can Mesty help you?"

"I don't know, but you can't; so, for want of better advice, I'll try the Ashantee."

Our hero went to Mesty, and laid the difficult affair open to him.

"I see," said Mesty, showing his filed teeth, "you want him skull."

"No, I don't, Mesty; but I want him out of the way."

"How that possible, Massa Easy?—ship sail day after to-morrow. Now 'pose I ab time, I soon manage all dat. Stop a little."

"Confound it! but there's no stopping," replied Jack.

"Suppose, Massa Easy, you get leave go on shore—not come off again."

"That will be deserting, Mesty."

"By holy poker, I ab it—you go on shore and break your leg."

"Break my leg!—break my leave, you mean?"

"No, Massa Easy—you break your leg—den captain leave you shore, and leave me to take care of you."

"But why should I break my leg, and how am I to break my leg?"

"Only pretend break leg, Massa Easy. Go talk Massa Don Philip, he manage all dat. Suppose man break his leg in seven pieces, it is not possible to take him board."

"Seven pieces, Mesty! that's rather too many. However I'll think of this."