

CHAPTER XXXIII

*In which Mesty should be called throughout Mephistopheles, for it abounds in black cloaks, disguises, daggers, and dark deeds.*

ON the fourth evening after the removal of our two midshipmen to the palazzo of Don Rebiera, as they were sitting in company with Agnes and Don Philip in their own room, a friar made his appearance at the door. They all started, for by his height they imagined him to be the Friar Thomaso, but no one addressed him. The friar shut the door without saying a word, and then lifting up his cowl, which had been drawn over it, discovered the black face of Mesty. Agnes screamed, and all sprang from their seats at this unusual and unexpected apparition. Mesty grinned, and there was that in his countenance which said that he had much to communicate.

"Where is the friar, Mesty?" inquired Easy.

"Stop a little, massa—suppose we lock door first, and den I tell all."

Taking this precaution, Mesty threw off the friar's gown, and appeared in his own dress, with the bag of dollars slung round his body.

"Now, Massa Easy, I hab a long tory to tell—so I tink I better begin at the beginning."

"It is the most approved method," replied Jack, "but stop when I hold up my finger, that we may translate what you say to the lady and Don Philip."

"Dat all right, sar. Friar and I get on two mule as soon as it quite dark. He make me carry all tousand dollars—and we ride out of town. We go up mountain and mountain, but the moon get up shine and we go on cheek by jowl—he nebber say one word, and I nebber say one word, 'cause I no speak his lingo, and he no understand my English. About two o'clock in de morning, we stop at a house and stay dere till eight o'clock, and den we go on again all next day, up all mountain, only stop once, eat a bit bread and drink lilly wine. Second night come on, and den we stop again, and people bow very low to him, and woman bring in rabbit for make supper. I go in the kitchen, woman make stew smell very



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nice, so I nod my head, and I say very good, and she make a face, and throw on table black loaf of bread and garlic, and make sign dat for my supper; good enough for black fellow, and dat rabbit stew for friar. Den I say to myself, stop a little; suppose friar hab all de rabbit, I tink I give him a lilly powder."

"The powder, Mesty?" exclaimed Jack.

"What does he say?" inquired Don Philip.

Gascoigne translated all that Mesty had communicated. The interest of the narrative now became exciting. Mesty continued:—

"Well, Massa Easy, den woman she go for dish to put stew in, and I take de powder and drop it in de pot, and den I sit down again and eat black bread, she say good enough for black man. She tir up de stew once more, and den she pour it out into dish, and take it to friar. He lick um chops, by all de powers, and he like um so well he pick all de bones, and wipe up gravy with him bread. You tink it very nice, Massa Friar, tink I; but stop a little. After he drink a whole bottle of wine, he tell em bring mules to de door, and he put him hands on de woman head, and dat de way he pay for him supper.

"The moon shone bright, and we go up all mountain, always go up, and 'bout two hour, he get off him mule and he put him hand so, and set down on de rock. He twist, and he turn, and he groan, for half-an-hour, and den he look at me, as much as to say, you black villain, you do this? for he not able to speak, and den I pull out de paper of de powder, and I show him, and make him sign he swallow it; he look again, and I laugh at him—and he die."

"Oh, Mesty, Mesty," exclaimed our hero; "you should not have done that,—there will mischief come from it."

"Now he dead, Massa Easy, so much less mischief."

Gascoigne then interpreted to Don Philip and Agnes, the former of whom looked very grave, and the latter terrified.

"Let him go on," said Don Philip; "I am most anxious to hear what he did with the body."

Mesty, at the request of our hero, proceeded: "Den I thought what I should do, and I said I would hide him, and I tink I take his coat for myself—so I pull off him coat and I pull off all his oder clothes—he not wear many—and I take

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the body in my arm, and carry him where I find a great split in de rock above all road. I throw him in, and den I throw plenty large pieces rock on him till I no see him any more; den I take de two mules and get on mine wid de dollars, and lead the other three four mile, till I come to a large wood—take off him saddle and bridle, turn him adrift. Den I tear up all clothes all in lilly bits, hide one piece here, nodder piece dere, and de saddle and bridle in de bush. All right now, I say; so I put on friar cloak, hide my face, get on my mule, and den I look where I shall go—so I say, I not be in dis road anyhow. I passed through wood till I find 'nother. I go 'bout two mile—moon go down, all dark, and five six men catch hold my bridle, and they all got arms, so I do nothing—they speak to me, but I no answer, and neber show my face. They find all dollars (d—n um) fast enough, and they lead me away through the wood. Last we come to large fire in de wood, plenty of men lie 'bout, some eat and some drink. They pull me off, and I hold down my head and fold my arms, just like friar do. They bring me along to one man, and pour out all my dollar before him. He give some order, and they take me away, and I peep through the cloak, and I say to myself, he that d—n galley-slave rascal Don Silvio."

"Don Silvio!" cried Jack.

"What does he say of Don Silvio?" demanded Don Philip.

Mesty's narrative was again translated, and he continued:

"Dey led me away 'bout fifty yards, tie me to tree, and den they leave me, and dey all drink and make merry, neber offer me anything, so I hab noting den to eat; I eat de ropes and gnaw them through, and den I stay there two hour until all go asleep, and all quiet; for I say to myself, stop a little. Den when dey all fast asleep, I take out my knife and I crawl 'long de ground, as we do in our country sometime—and den I stop and look 'bout me; no man watch but two, and dey look out for squarl, not look in board where I was. I crawl 'gain till I lay down 'longside that d—n galley-slave, Don Silvio. He lie fast asleep with my bag thousand dollars under him head. So I tink, 'you not hab dem long, you rascal.' I look round—all right, and I drive my knife good aim into him heart and press toder hand on him mouth, but he make no noise; he struggle little and look up, and den I throw off de head of



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de gown and show him my black face, and he look and he try to speak; but I stop dat, for down go my knife again, and de d—n galley-slave dead as herring."

"Stop, Mesty, we must tell this to Don Philip," said Gascoigne.

"Dead! Don Silvio dead! well, Mesty, we are eternally obliged to you, for there was no safety for my father while he was living. Let him go on."

"So when I put de knife through his body, I lie down by him as if noting had happened, for ten minutes, and den I take de bag of dollars from under him head, and den I feel him all over, and I find him pistols and him purse, which I hab here, all gold. So I take them and I look—all asleep, and I crawl back to de tree. Den I stay to tink a little; de man on watch come up and look at me, but he tink all right and he go away again. Lucky ting, by de power, dat I go back to tree. I wait again, and den I crawl and crawl till I clear of all, and den I take to my heel and run for um life, till daylight come, and den I so tired I lie down in bush; I stay in bush all day, and den I set off again back here, for I find road and know my way. I not eat den for one day and one night, and come to house where I put my head in and find woman there. I not able to speak, so I help myself, and not show my face. She not like dat and make a bobbery, but I lift up my cloak and show my black face and white teeth, and den she tink me de debil. She run out of de house and I help myself very quick, and den set off and come close here yesterday morning. I hide myself all day and come in at night, and now, Massa Easy, you ab all de whole truth—and you ab your tousand dollars—and you ab got rid of de rascal friar and de d—n galley-slave, Don Silvio."

"Tell them all this, Ned," said Jack, who, whilst Gascoigne was so employed, talked with Mesty.

"I was very much frightened for you, Mesty," said Jack; "but still I thought you quite as cunning as the friar, and so it has turned out; but the thousand dollars ought to be yours."

"No, sar," replied Mesty, "the dollars not mine; but I hab plenty of gold in Don Silvio's purse—plenty, plenty of gold. I keep my property, Massa Easy, and you keep yours."

"I'm afraid that this affair may be found out, Mesty; the

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woman will spread the report of having been attacked by a black friar, and that will lead to suspicion, as the other friars of the convent knew that you left with Friar Thomaso."

"So I tink dat, but when a man starve, he quite forget his thought."

"I don't blame you; but now I must talk to Don Philip."

"Suppose you no objection, while you talk I eat something from the table then, Massa Easy, for I hungry enough to eat de friar, mule and all."

"Eat, my good fellow, and drink as much as you please."

The consultation between our two midshipmen and Don Philip was not long; they perceived the immediate necessity for the departure of Mesty, and the suspicion which would attach to themselves. Don Philip and Agnes left them, to go to Don Rebiera, and make him acquainted with what had passed, and to ask his advice.

When they went into the room, Don Rebiera immediately accosted his son.

"Have you heard, Philip, that Friar Thomaso has returned at last?—so the servants tell me."

"The report may be fortunate," replied Don Philip; "but I have another story to tell you."

He then sat down and imparted to Don Rebiera all the adventures of Mesty. Don Rebiera was for some time in deep thought; at last he replied—

"That Don Silvio is no more is fortunate, and the negro would be entitled to reward for his destruction—but for the friar, that is a bad business. The negro might remain and tell the whole story, and the facts might be proved by the evidence of Signor Easy, and the letters; but what then? we should raise the whole host of the clergy against our house, and we have suffered too much from them already; the best plan would be the immediate departure, not only of the negro, but of our two young friends. The supposition of Friar Thomaso being here, and their departure with the negro servant to rejoin their ship, will remove much suspicion and destroy all inquiry. They must be off immediately. Go to them, Philip, and point out to them the absolute necessity of this measure, and tell our young friend that I rigidly adhere to my promise, and as soon as he has his father's sanction I will bestow upon him my daughter. In the mean-



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time I will send down and see if a vessel can be chartered for Malta."

Our hero and Gascoigne fully admitted the wisdom of this measure, and prepared for their departure; indeed, now that Don Rebiera's resolution had been made known to our hero, he cared more for obtaining his father's consent than he did for remaining to enjoy himself at Palermo; and before noon of the next day all was ready, the vessel had been procured, Jack took his leave of Agnes and her mother, and accompanied by Don Rebiera and Don Philip (for Don Martin was on duty a few miles from Palermo), went down to the beach, and having bid them farewell, embarked with Gascoigne and Mesty on board of the two-masted latteen which had been engaged, and before sunset not a steeple of Palermo was to be seen.

"What are you thinking of, Jack?" said Gascoigne, after our hero had been silent half-an-hour.

"I have been thinking, Ned, that we are well out of it."

"So do I," replied Gascoigne; and here the conversation dropped for a time.

"What are you thinking of now, Jack?" said Gascoigne, after a long pause.

"I've been thinking that I've a good story for the old governor."

"Very true," replied Gascoigne; and both were again silent for some time.

"What are you thinking of now, Jack?" said Gascoigne, after another long interval.

"I've been thinking that I shall leave the service," replied Jack.

"I wish you would take me with you," replied Gascoigne, with a sigh; and again they were both in deep contemplation.

"What are you thinking of now, Jack?" said Gascoigne again.

"Of Agnes," replied our hero.

"Well, if that's the case, I'll call you when supper's ready. In the meantime I'll go and talk with Mesty."

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CHAPTER XXXIV

*Jack leaves the service, in which he had no business, and goes home to mind his own business.*

ON the fourth day they arrived at Malta, and our two midshipmen, as soon as they had settled with the padrone of the vessel, went up to the government house. They found the governor in the verandah, who held out both his hands, one to each.

"Glad to see you, my lads. Well, Jack, how's the leg—all right? don't limp? And your arm, Gascoigne?"

"All right, sir, and as sound as ever it was," replied they both.

"Then you're in luck, and have made more haste than you deserve after your mad pranks; but now sit down, and I suppose, my friend Jack, you have a story to tell me."

"Oh yes, Sir Thomas, and a very long one."

"Then I won't have it now, for I expect people on business; we'll have it after dinner. Get your things up and take possession of your rooms. The *Aurora* sailed four days ago. You've had a wonderful recovery."

"Wonderful, sir!" replied our hero; "all Palermo rings with it."

"Well, you may go now—I shall see you at dinner. Wilson will be delighted when he hears that you have got round again, for he was low-spirited about it, I can tell you, which is more than you deserve."

"He's right there," said our hero to Gascoigne, as they walked away.

When dinner was over, Jack narrated to the governor the adventures of Mesty, with which he was much interested; but when they were quite alone in the evening, the governor called our two midshipmen into the verandah and said—

"Now, my lads, I'm not going to preach, as the saying is, but I've been long enough in the world to know that a compound fracture of the leg is not cured in fourteen or sixteen days. I ask you to tell me the truth. Did not you deceive Captain Wilson on this point?"