

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Now it chanced that Del Ferice was not at home at the hour when the carriage containing the detectives drew up at his door. Indeed he was rarely to be found at that time, for when he was not engaged elsewhere, he dined with Donna Tullia and her old countess, accompanying them afterwards to any of the quiet Lenten receptions to which they desired to go. Temistocle was also out, for it was his hour for supper, a meal which he generally ate in a small *osteria* opposite his master's lodging. There he sat now, finishing his dish of beans and oil, and debating whether he should indulge himself in another *mezza foglietta* of his favourite white wine. He was installed upon the wooden bench against the wall, behind the narrow table on which was spread a dirty napkin with the remains of his unctuous meal. The light from the solitary oil-lamp that hung from the black ceiling was not brilliant, and he could see well enough through the panes of the glass door that the carriage which had just stopped on the opposite side of the street was not a cab. Suspecting that some one had called at that unusual hour in search of his master, he rose from his seat and went out.

He stood looking at the carriage. It did not please him. It had that peculiar look which used to mark the equipages of the Vatican, and which to this day distinguishes them from all others in the eyes of a born Roman. The vehicle was of rather antiquated shape, the horses were black, the coachman wore a plain black coat, with a somewhat old-fashioned hat; withal, the turnout was respectable enough, and well kept. But it did not please Temistocle. Drawing his hat over his eyes, he passed behind it, and having ascertained that the occupants, if there had been any, had already entered the house, he himself went in. The narrow staircase was dimly lighted by small oil-lamps. Temistocle

ascended the steps on tiptoe, for he could already hear the men ringing the bell, and talking together in a low voice. The Neapolitan crept nearer. Again and again the bell was rung, and the men began to grow impatient.

"He has escaped," said one angrily.

"Perhaps—or he has gone out to dinner—much more likely."

"We had better go away and come later," suggested the first.

"He is sure to come home. We had better wait. The orders are to take him in his lodgings."

"We might go into the *osteria* opposite and drink a *foglietta*."

"No," said the other, who seemed to be the one in authority. "We must wait here, if we wait till midnight. Those are the orders."

The second detective grumbled something not clearly audible, and silence ensued. But Temistocle had heard quite enough. He was a quick-witted fellow, as has been seen, much more anxious for his own interests than for his master's, though he had hitherto found it easy to consult both. Indeed, in a certain way he was faithful to Del Ferice, and admired him as a soldier admires his general. The resolution he now formed did honour to his loyalty to Ugo and to his thievish instincts. He determined to save his master if he could, and to rob him at his leisure afterwards. If Del Ferice failed to escape, he would probably reward Temistocle for having done his best to help him; if, on the other hand, he got away, Temistocle had the key of his lodgings, and would help himself. But there was one difficulty in the way. Del Ferice was in evening dress at the house of Donna Tullia. In such a costume he would have no chance of passing the gates, which in those days were closed and guarded all night. Del Ferice was a cautious man, and, like many another in those days, kept in his rooms a couple of disguises which might serve if he was hard pressed. His ready money he always carried with him, because he frequently went into the club before

coming home, and played a game of *écarté*, in which he was usually lucky. The question was how to enter the lodgings, to get possession of the necessary clothes, and to go out again, without exciting the suspicions of the detectives.

Temistocle's mind was soon made up. He crept softly down the stairs, so as not to appear to have been too near, and then, making as much noise as he could, ascended boldly, drawing the key of the lodgings from his pocket as he reached the landing where the two men stood under the little oil-lamp.

"Buona sera, signori," he said, politely, thrusting the key into the lock without hesitation. "Did you wish to see the Conte del Ferice?"

"Yes," answered the elder man, affecting an urbane manner. "Is the Count at home?"

"I do not think so," returned the Neapolitan. "But I will see. Come in, gentlemen. He will not be long—*sempre verso quest'ora*—he always comes home about this time."

"Thank you," said the detective. "If you will allow us to wait—"

"Altro—what? Should I leave the *padrone's* friends on the stairs? Come in, gentlemen—sit down. It is dark. I will light the lamp." And striking a match, Temistocle lit a couple of candles and placed them upon the table of the small sitting-room. The two men sat down, holding their hats upon their knees.

"If you will excuse me," said Temistocle, "I will go and make the signore's coffee. He dines at the restaurant, and always comes home for his coffee. Perhaps the signori will also take a cup? It is the same to make three as one."

But the men thanked Temistocle, and said they wanted none, which was just as well, since Temistocle had no idea of giving them any. He retired, however, to the small kitchen which belongs to every Roman lodging, and made a great clattering with the coffee-pot. Presently he slipped into Del Ferice's bedroom, and extracted from a dark corner

a shabby black bag, which he took back with him into the kitchen. From the kitchen window ran the usual iron wire to the well in the small court, bearing an iron traveller with a rope for drawing water. Temistocle, clattering loudly, hooked the bag to the traveller and let it run down noisily; then he tied the rope and went out. He had carefully closed the door of the sitting-room, but he had been careful to leave the door which opened upon the stairs unlatched. He crept noiselessly out, and leaving the door still open, rushed down-stairs, turned into the little court, unhooked his bag from the rope, and taking it in his hand, passed quietly out into the street. The coachman was dozing upon the box of the carriage which still waited before the door, and would not have noticed Temistocle had he been awake. In a moment more the Neapolitan was beyond pursuit. In the Piazza di Spagna he hailed a cab and drove rapidly to Donna Tullia's house, where he paid the man and sent him away. The servants knew him well enough, for scarcely a day passed without his bringing some note or message from his master to Madame Mayer. He sent in to say that he must speak to his master on business. Del Ferice came out hastily in considerable agitation, which was by no means diminished by the sight of the well-known shabby black bag.

Temistocle glanced round the hall to see that they were alone.

"The *forza*—the police," he whispered, "are in the house, Eccellenza. Here is the bag. Save yourself, for the love of heaven!"

Del Ferice turned ghastly pale, and his face twitched nervously.

"But—" he began, and then staggering back leaned against the wall.

"Quick—fly!" urged Temistocle, shaking him roughly by the arm. "It is the Holy Office—you have time. I told them you would be back, and they are waiting quietly—they will wait all night. Here is your overcoat," he added, almost forcing his master into the garment—"and

your hat—here! Come along, there is no time to lose. I will take you to a place where you can dress.”

Del Ferice submitted almost blindly. By especial good fortune the footman did not come out into the hall. Donna Tullia and her guests had finished dinner, and the servants had retired to theirs; indeed the footman had complained to Temistocle of being called away from his meal to open the door. The Neapolitan pushed his master out upon the stairs, urging him to use all speed. As the two men hurried along the dark street they conversed in low tones. Del Ferice was trembling in every joint.

“But Donna Tullia,” he almost whined. “I cannot leave her so—she must know——”

“Save your own skin from the Holy Office, master,” answered Temistocle, dragging him along as fast as he could. “I will go back and tell your lady, never fear. She will leave Rome to-morrow. Of course you will go to Naples. She will follow you. She will be there before you.”

Del Ferice mumbled an unintelligible answer. His teeth were chattering with cold and fear; but as he began to realise his extreme peril, terror lent wings to his heels, and he almost outstripped the nimble Temistocle in the race for safety. They reached at last the ruined part of the city near the Porta Maggiore, and in the shadow of the deep archway where the road branches to the right towards Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Temistocle halted.

“Here,” he said, shortly. Del Ferice said never a word, but began to undress himself in the dark. It was a gloomy and lowering night, the roads were muddy, and from time to time a few drops of cold rain fell silently, portending a coming storm. In a few moments the transformation was complete, and Del Ferice stood by his servant’s side in the shabby brown cowl and rope-girdle of a Capuchin monk.

“Now comes the hard part,” said Temistocle, producing a razor and a pair of scissors from the bottom of the

bag. Del Ferice had too often contemplated the possibility of flight to have omitted so important a detail.

“You cannot see—you will cut my throat,” he murmured plaintively.

But the fellow was equal to the emergency. Retiring deeper into the recess of the arch, he lit a cigar, and holding it between his teeth, puffed violently at it, producing a feeble light by which he could just see his master’s face. He was in the habit of shaving him, and had no difficulty in removing the fair moustache from his upper lip. Then, making him hold his head down, and puffing harder than ever, he cropped his thin hair, and managed to make a tolerably respectable tonsure. But the whole operation had consumed half an hour at the least, and Del Ferice was trembling still. Temistocle thrust the clothes into his bag.

“My watch!” objected the unfortunate man, “and my pearl studs—give them to me—what? You villain! you thief! you——”

“No *chiacchiere*, no talk, *padrone*,” interrupted Temistocle, snapping the lock of the bag. “If you chance to be searched, it would ill become a mendicant friar to be carrying gold watches and pearl studs. I will give them to Donna Tullia this very evening. You have money—you can say that you are taking that to your convent.”

“Swear to give the watch to Donna Tullia,” said Del Ferice. Whereupon Temistocle swore a terrible oath, which he did not fail to break, of course. But his master had to be satisfied, and when all was completed the two parted company.

“I will ask Donna Tullia to take me to Naples on her passport,” said the Neapolitan.

“Take care of my things, Temistocle. Burn all the papers if you can—though I suppose the *sbirri* have got them by this time. Bring my clothes—if you steal anything, remember there are knives in Rome, and I know where to write to have them used.” Whereat Temistocle broke into a torrent of protestations. How could his

master think that, after saving him at such risk, his faithful servant would plunder him ?

"Well," said Del Ferice, thoughtfully, "you are a great scoundrel, you know. But you have saved me, as you say. There is a scudo for you."

Temistocle never refused anything. He took the coin, kissed his master's hand as a final exhibition of servility, and turned back towards the city without another word. Del Ferice shuddered, and drew his heavy cowl over his head as he began to walk quickly towards the Porta Maggiore. Then he took the inside road, skirting the walls through the mud to the Porta San Lorenzo. He was perfectly safe in his disguise. He had dined abundantly, he had money in his pocket, and he had escaped the clutches of the Holy Office. A barefooted friar might walk for days unchallenged through the Roman Campagna and the neighbouring hills, and it was not far to the south-eastern frontier. He did not know the way beyond Tivoli, but he could inquire without exciting the least suspicion. There are few disguises more complete than the garb of a Capuchin monk, and Del Ferice had long contemplated playing the part, for it was one which eminently suited him. His face, much thinner now than formerly, was yet naturally round, and without his moustache would certainly pass for a harmless clerical visage. He had received an excellent education, and knew vastly more Latin than the majority of mendicant monks. As a good Roman he was well acquainted with every convent in the city, and knew the names of all the chief dignitaries of the Capuchin order. When a lad he had frequently served at Mass, and was acquainted with most of the ordinary details of monastic life. The worst that could happen to him might be to be called upon in the course of his travels to hear the dying confession of some poor wretch who had been stabbed after a game of *mora*. His case was altogether not so bad as might seem, considering the far greater evils he had escaped.

At the Porta San Lorenzo the gates were closed as

usual, but the dozing watchman let Del Ferice out of the small door without remark. Any one might leave the city, though it required a pass to gain admittance during the night. The heavily-ironed oak clanged behind the fugitive, and he breathed more freely as he stepped upon the road to Tivoli. In an hour he had crossed the Ponte Mammolo, shuddering as he looked down through the deep gloom at the white foam of the Tevere, swollen with the winter rains. But the fear of the Holy Office was behind him, and he hurried on his lonely way, walking painfully in the sandals he had been obliged to put on to complete his disguise, sinking occasionally ankle-deep in mud, and then trudging over a long stretch of broken stones where the road had been mended; but not noticing nor caring for pain and fatigue, while he felt that every minute took him nearer to the frontier hills where he would be safe from pursuit. And so he toiled on, till he smelled the fetid air of the sulphur springs full fourteen miles from Rome; and at last, as the road began to rise towards Hadrian's Villa, he sat down upon a stone by the wayside to rest a little. He had walked five hours through the darkness, seeing but a few yards of the broad road before him as he went. He was weary and footsore, and the night was growing wilder with gathering wind and rain as the storm swept down the mountains and through the deep gorge of Tivoli on its way to the desolate black Campagna. He felt that if he did not die of exposure he was safe, and to a man in his condition bad weather is the least of evils.

His reflections were not sweet. Five hours earlier he had been dressed as a fine gentleman should be, seated at a luxurious table in the company of a handsome and amusing woman who was to be his wife. He could still almost taste the delicate *chaud froid*, the tender woodcock, the dry champagne; he could still almost hear Donna Tullia's last noisy sally ringing in his ears—and behold, he was now sitting by the roadside in the rain, in the wretched garb of a begging monk, five hours' journey from

Rome. He had left his affianced bride without a word of warning, had abandoned all his possessions to Temistocle—that scoundrelly thief Temistocle!—and he was utterly alone.

But as he rested himself, drawing his monk's hood closely over his head and trying to warm his freezing feet with the skirts of his rough brown frock, he reflected that if he ever got safely across the frontier he would be treated as a patriot, as a man who had suffered for the cause, and certainly as a man who deserved to be rewarded. He reflected that Donna Tullia was a woman who had a theatrical taste for romance, and that his present position was in theory highly romantic, however uncomfortable it might be in the practice. When he was safe his story would be told in the newspapers, and he would himself take care that it was made interesting. Donna Tullia would read it, would be fascinated by the tale of his sufferings, and would follow him. His marriage with her would then add immense importance to his own position. He would play his cards well, and with her wealth at his disposal he might aspire to any distinction he coveted. He only wished the situation could have been prolonged for three weeks, till he was actually married. Meanwhile he must take courage and push on, beyond the reach of pursuit. If once he could gain Subiaco, he could be over the frontier in twelve hours. From Tivoli there were *vetture* up the valley, cheap conveyances for the country people, in which a barefooted friar could travel unnoticed. He knew that he must cross the boundary by Trevi and the Serra di Sant' Antonio. He would inquire the way from Subiaco.

While Del Ferice was thus making his way across the Campagna, Temistocle was taking measures for his own advantage and safety. He had the bag with his master's clothes, the valuable watch and chain, and the pearl studs. He had also the key to Del Ferice's lodgings, of which he promised himself to make some use, as soon as he should be sure that the detectives had left the house.

In the first place he made up his mind to leave Donna Tullia in ignorance of his master's sudden departure. There was nothing to be gained by telling her the news, for she would probably in her rash way go to Del Ferice's house herself, as she had done once before, and on finding he was actually gone she would take charge of his effects, whereby Temistocle would be the loser. As he walked briskly away from the ruinous district near the Porta Maggiore, and began to see the lights of the city gleaming before him, his courage rose in his breast. He remembered how easily he had eluded the detectives an hour and a half before, and he determined to cheat them again.

But he had reckoned unwisely. Before he had been gone ten minutes the two men suspected, from the prolonged silence, that something was wrong, and after searching the lodging perceived that the polite servant who had offered them coffee had left the house without taking leave. One of the two immediately drove to the house of his chief and asked for instructions. The order to arrest the servant if he appeared again came back at once. The consequence was that when Temistocle boldly opened the door with a ready framed excuse for his absence, he was suddenly pinioned by four strong arms, dragged into the sitting-room, and told to hold his tongue in the name of the law. And that is the last that was heard of Temistocle for some time. But when the day dawned the men knew that Del Ferice had escaped them.

The affair had not been well managed. The Cardinal was a good detective, but a bad policeman. In his haste he had made the mistake of ordering Del Ferice to be arrested instantly and in his lodgings. Had the statesman simply told the chief of police to secure Ugo as soon as possible without any scandal, he could not have escaped. But the officer interpreted the Cardinal's note to mean that Del Ferice was actually at his lodgings when the order was given. The Cardinal was supposed to be omniscient by his subordinates, and no one ever thought of giving any

interpretation not perfectly literal to his commands. Of course the Cardinal was at once informed, and telegrams and mounted detectives were dispatched in all directions. But Del Ferice's disguise was good, and when just after sunrise a gendarme galloped into Tivoli, he did not suspect that the travel-stained and pale-faced friar, who stood telling his beads before the shrine just outside the Roman gate, was the political delinquent whom he was sent to overtake.

Donna Tullia spent an anxious night. She sent down to Del Ferice's lodgings, as Temistocle had anticipated, and the servant brought back word that he had not seen the Neapolitan, and that the house was held in possession by strangers, who refused him admittance. Madame Mayer understood well enough what had happened, and began to tremble for herself. Indeed she began to think of packing together her own valuables, in case she should be ordered to leave Rome, for she did not doubt that the Holy Office was in pursuit of Del Ferice, in consequence of some discovery relating to her little club of malcontents. She trembled for Ugo with an anxiety more genuine than any feeling of hers had been for many a day, not knowing whether he had escaped or not. But on the following evening she was partially reassured by hearing from Valdarno that the police had offered a large reward for Del Ferice's apprehension. Valdarno declared his intention of leaving Rome at once. His life, he said, was not safe for a moment. That villain Gouache, who had turned Zouave, had betrayed them all, and they might be lodged in the Sant' Uffizio any day. As a matter of fact, after he discovered how egregiously he had been deceived by Del Ferice, the Cardinal grew more suspicious, and his emissaries were more busy than they had been before. But Valdarno had never manifested enough wisdom, nor enough folly, to make him a cause of anxiety to the Prime Minister. Nevertheless he actually left Rome and spent a long time in Paris before he was induced to believe that he might safely return to his home.

Roman society was shaken to its foundations by the

news of the attempted arrest, and Donna Tullia found some slight compensation in becoming for a time the centre of interest. She felt, indeed, great anxiety for the man she was engaged to marry; but for the first time in her life she felt also that she was living in an element of real romance, of which she had long dreamed, but of which she had never found the smallest realisation. Society saw, and speculated, and gossiped, after its fashion; but its gossip was more subdued than of yore, for men began to ask who was safe, since the harmless Del Ferice had been proscribed. Old Saracinesca said little. He would have gone to see the Cardinal and to offer him his congratulations, since it would not be decent to offer his thanks; but the Cardinal was not in a position to be congratulated. If he had caught Del Ferice he would have thanked the Prince instead of waiting for any expressions of gratitude; but he did not catch Del Ferice, for certain very good reasons which will appear in the last scene of this comedy.

Three days after Ugo's disappearance, the old Prince got into his carriage and drove out to Saracinesca. More than a month had elapsed since the marriage, and he felt that he must see his son, even at the risk of interrupting the honeymoon. On the whole, he felt that his revenge had been inadequate. Del Ferice had escaped the Holy Office, no one knew how; and Donna Tullia, instead of being profoundly humiliated, as she would have been had Del Ferice been tried as a common spy, was become a centre of attraction and interest, because her affianced husband had for some unknown cause incurred the displeasure of the great Cardinal, almost on the eve of her marriage—a state of things significant as regards the tone of Roman society. Indeed the whole circumstance, which was soon bruited about among all classes with the most lively adornment and exaggeration, tended greatly to increase the fear and hatred which high and low alike felt for Cardinal Antonelli—the man who was always accused and never heard in his own defence.