

not come away with you. I have my work in Italy, and my comrades——”

“And someone else that you love better than me!” she cried out fiercely. “Oh, I could kill you! It is not your comrades you care about; it’s—— I know who it is!”

“Hush!” he said quietly. “You are excited and imagining things that are not true.”

“You suppose I am thinking of Signora Bolla? I’m not so easily duped! You only talk politics with her; you care no more for her than you do for me. It’s that Cardinal!”

The Gadfly started as if he had been shot.

“Cardinal?” he repeated mechanically.

“Cardinal Montanelli, that came here preaching in the autumn. Do you think I didn’t see your face when his carriage passed? You were as white as my pocket-handkerchief! Why, you’re shaking like a leaf now because I mentioned his name!”

He stood up.

“You don’t know what you are talking about,” he said very slowly and softly. “I—hate the Cardinal. He is the worst enemy I have.”

“Enemy or no, you love him better than you love anyone else in the world. Look me in the face and say that is not true, if you can!”

He turned away, and looked out into the garden. She watched him furtively, half-scared at what she had done; there was something terrifying in his silence. At last she stole up to him, like a frightened child, and timidly pulled his sleeve. He turned round.

“It is true,” he said.

## CHAPTER XI.

“BUT c-c-can’t I meet him somewhere in the hills? Brisighella is a risky place for me.”

“Every inch of ground in the Romagna is risky for you; but just at this moment Brisighella is safer for you than any other place.”

“Why?”

“I’ll tell you in a minute. Don’t let that man with the blue jacket see your face; he’s dangerous. Yes; it was a terrible storm; I don’t remember to have seen the vines so bad for a long time.”

The Gadfly spread his arms on the table, and laid his face upon them, like a man overcome with fatigue or wine; and the dangerous new-comer in the blue jacket, glancing swiftly round, saw only two farmers discussing their crops over a flask of wine and a sleepy mountaineer with his head on the table. It was the usual sort of thing to see in little places like Marradi; and the owner of the blue jacket apparently made up his mind that nothing could be gained by listening; for he drank his wine at a gulp and sauntered into the outer room. There he stood leaning on the counter and gossiping lazily with the landlord, glancing every now and then out of the corner of one eye through the open door, beyond which sat the three figures at the table. The two farmers went on sipping their wine and discussing the weather in the local dialect, and the Gadfly snored like a man whose conscience is sound.

At last the spy seemed to make up his mind that there was nothing in the wine-shop worth further waste of his time. He paid his reckoning, and,

louncing out of the house, sauntered away down the narrow street. The Gadfly, yawning and stretching, lifted himself up and sleepily rubbed the sleeve of his linen blouse across his eyes.

"Pretty sharp practice that," he said, pulling a clasp-knife out of his pocket and cutting off a chunk from the rye-loaf on the table. "Have they been worrying you much lately, Michele?"

"They've been worse than mosquitos in August. There's no getting a minute's peace; wherever one goes, there's always a spy hanging about. Even right up in the hills, where they used to be so shy about venturing, they have taken to coming in bands of three or four—haven't they, Gino? That's why we arranged for you to meet Domenichino in the town."

"Yes; but why Brisighella? A frontier town is always full of spies."

"Brisighella just now is a capital place. It's swarming with pilgrims from all parts of the country."

"But it's not on the way to anywhere."

"It's not far out of the way to Rome, and many of the Easter Pilgrims are going round to hear Mass there."

"I d-d-didn't know there was anything special in Brisighella."

"There's the Cardinal. Don't you remember his going to Florence to preach last December? It's that same Cardinal Montanelli. They say he made a great sensation."

"I dare say; I don't go to hear sermons."

"Well, he has the reputation of being a saint, you see."

"How does he manage that?"

"I don't know. I suppose it's because he gives

away all his income, and lives like a parish priest with four or five hundred scudi a year."

"Ah!" interposed the man called Gino; "but it's more than that. He doesn't only give away money; he spends his whole life in looking after the poor, and seeing the sick are properly treated, and hearing complaints and grievances from morning till night. I'm no fonder of priests than you are, Michele, but Monsignor Montanelli is not like other Cardinals."

"Oh, I dare say he's more fool than knave!" said Michele. "Anyhow, the people are mad after him, and the last new freak is for the pilgrims to go round that way to ask his blessing. Domenichino thought of going as a pedlar, with a basket of cheap crosses and rosaries. The people like to buy those things and ask the Cardinal to touch them; then they put them round their babies' necks to keep off the evil eye."

"Wait a minute. How am I to go—as a pilgrim? This make-up suits me p-pretty well, I think; but it w-won't do for me to show myself in Brisighella in the same character that I had here; it would be ev-v-vidence against you if I get taken."

"You won't get taken; we have a splendid disguise for you, with a passport and all complete."

"What is it?"

"An old Spanish pilgrim—a repentant brigand from the Sierras. He fell ill in Ancona last year, and one of our friends took him on board a trading-vessel out of charity, and set him down in Venice, where he had friends, and he left his papers with us to show his gratitude. They will just do for you."

"A repentant b-b-brigand? But w-what about the police?"

"Oh, that's all right! He finished his term of the galleys some years ago, and has been going about to Jerusalem and all sorts of places saving his soul ever since. He killed his son by mistake for somebody else, and gave himself up to the police in a fit of remorse."

"Was he quite old?"

"Yes; but a white beard and wig will set that right, and the description suits you to perfection in every other respect. He was an old soldier, with a lame foot and a sabre-cut across the face like yours; and then his being a Spaniard, too—you see, if you meet any Spanish pilgrims, you can talk to them all right."

"Where am I to meet Domenichino?"

"You join the pilgrims at the cross-road that we will show you on the map, saying you had lost your way in the hills. Then, when you reach the town, you go with the rest of them into the market-place, in front of the Cardinal's palace."

"Oh, he manages to live in a p-palace, then, in s-spite of being a saint?"

"He lives in one wing of it, and has turned the rest into a hospital. Well, you all wait there for him to come out and give his benediction, and Domenichino will come up with his basket and say: 'Are you one of the pilgrims, father?' and you answer: 'I am a miserable sinner.' Then he puts down his basket and wipes his face with his sleeve, and you offer him six soldi for a rosary."

"Then, of course, he arranges where we can talk?"

"Yes; he will have plenty of time to give you the address of the meeting-place while the people

are gaping at Montanelli. That was our plan; but if you don't like it, we can let Domenichino know and arrange something else."

"No; it will do; only see that the beard and wig look natural."

"Are you one of the pilgrims, father?"

The Gadfly, sitting on the steps of the episcopal palace, looked up from under his ragged white locks, and gave the password in a husky, trembling voice, with a strong foreign accent. Domenichino slipped the leather strap from his shoulder, and set down his basket of pious gewgaws on the step. The crowd of peasants and pilgrims sitting on the steps and lounging about the market-place was taking no notice of them, but for precaution's sake they kept up a desultory conversation, Domenichino speaking in the local dialect and the Gadfly in broken Italian, intermixed with Spanish words.

"His Eminence! His Eminence is coming out!" shouted the people by the door. "Stand aside! His Eminence is coming!"

They both stood up.

"Here, father," said Domenichino, putting into the Gadfly's hand a little image wrapped in paper; "take this, too, and pray for me when you get to Rome."

The Gadfly thrust it into his breast, and turned to look at the figure in the violet Lenten robe and scarlet cap that was standing on the upper step and blessing the people with outstretched arms.

Montanelli came slowly down the steps, the people crowding about him to kiss his hands. Many knelt down and put the hem of his cassock to their lips as he passed.

"Peace be with you, my children!"

At the sound of the clear, silvery voice, the Gadfly bent his head, so that the white hair fell across his face; and Domenichino, seeing the quivering of the pilgrim's staff in his hand, said to himself with admiration: "What an actor!"

A woman standing near to them stooped down and lifted her child from the step. "Come, Cecco," she said. "His Eminence will bless you as the dear Lord blessed the children."

The Gadfly moved a step forward and stopped. Oh, it was hard! All these outsiders—these pilgrims and mountaineers—could go up and speak to him, and he would lay his hand on their children's hair. Perhaps he would say "Carino" to that peasant boy, as he used to say—

The Gadfly sank down again on the step, turning away that he might not see. If only he could shrink into some corner and stop his ears to shut out the sound! Indeed, it was more than any man should have to bear—to be so close, so close that he could have put out his arm and touched the dear hand.

"Will you not come under shelter, my friend?" the soft voice said. "I am afraid you are chilled."

The Gadfly's heart stood still. For a moment he was conscious of nothing but the sickening pressure of the blood that seemed as if it would tear his breast asunder; then it rushed back, tingling and burning through all his body, and he looked up. The grave, deep eyes above him grew suddenly tender with divine compassion at the sight of his face.

"Stand back a little, friends," Montanelli said, turning to the crowd; "I want to speak to him."

The people fell slowly back, whispering to each other, and the Gadfly, sitting motionless, with teeth clenched and eyes on the ground, felt the gentle touch of Montanelli's hand upon his shoulder.

"You have had some great trouble. Can I do anything to help you?"

The Gadfly shook his head in silence.

"Are you a pilgrim?"

"I am a miserable sinner."

The accidental similarity of Montanelli's question to the password came like a chance straw, that the Gadfly, in his desperation, caught at, answering automatically. He had begun to tremble under the soft pressure of the hand that seemed to burn upon his shoulder.

The Cardinal bent down closer to him.

"Perhaps you would care to speak to me alone? If I can be any help to you—"

For the first time the Gadfly looked straight and steadily into Montanelli's eyes; he was already recovering his self-command.

"It would be no use," he said; "the thing is hopeless."

A police official stepped forward out of the crowd.

"Forgive my intruding, Your Eminence. I think the old man is not quite sound in his mind. He is perfectly harmless, and his papers are in order, so we don't interfere with him. He has been in penal servitude for a great crime, and is now doing penance."

"A great crime," the Gadfly repeated, shaking his head slowly.

"Thank you, captain; stand aside a little, please. My friend, nothing is hopeless if a man

has sincerely repented. Will you not come to me this evening?"

"Would Your Eminence receive a man who is guilty of the death of his own son?"

The question had almost the tone of a challenge, and Montanelli shrank and shivered under it as under a cold wind.

"God forbid that I should condemn you, whatever you have done!" he said solemnly. "In His sight we are all guilty alike, and our righteousness is as filthy rags. If you will come to me I will receive you as I pray that He may one day receive me."

The Gadfly stretched out his hands with a sudden gesture of passion.

"Listen!" he said; "and listen all of you, Christians! If a man has killed his only son—his son who loved and trusted him, who was flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone; if he has led his son into a death-trap with lies and deceit—is there hope for that man in earth or heaven? I have confessed my sin before God and man, and I have suffered the punishment that men have laid on me, and they have let me go; but when will God say, 'It is enough'? What benediction will take away His curse from my soul? What absolution will undo this thing that I have done?"

In the dead silence that followed the people looked at Montanelli, and saw the heaving of the cross upon his breast.

He raised his eyes at last, and gave the benediction with a hand that was not quite steady.

"God is merciful," he said. "Lay your burden before His throne; for it is written: 'A broken and contrite heart shalt thou not despise.'"

He turned away and walked through the market-place, stopping everywhere to speak to the people, and to take their children in his arms.

In the evening the Gadfly, following the directions written on the wrapping of the image, made his way to the appointed meeting-place. It was the house of a local doctor, who was an active member of the "sect." Most of the conspirators were already assembled, and their delight at the Gadfly's arrival gave him a new proof, if he had needed one, of his popularity as a leader.

"We're glad enough to see you again," said the doctor; "but we shall be gladder still to see you go. It's a fearfully risky business, and I, for one, was against the plan. Are you quite sure none of those police rats noticed you in the market-place this morning?"

"Oh, they n-noticed me enough, but they d-didn't recognize me. Domenichino m-managed the thing capitally. But where is he? I don't see him."

"He has not come yet. So you got on all smoothly? Did the Cardinal give you his blessing?"

"His blessing? Oh, that's nothing," said Domenichino, coming in at the door. "Rivarez, you're as full of surprises as a Christmas cake. How many more talents are you going to astonish us with?"

"What is it now?" asked the Gadfly languidly. He was leaning back on a sofa, smoking a cigar. He still wore his pilgrim's dress, but the white beard and wig lay beside him.

"I had no idea you were such an actor. I never saw a thing done so magnificently in my life. You nearly moved His Eminence to tears."

"How was that? Let us hear, Rivarez."

The Gadfly shrugged his shoulders. He was in a taciturn and laconic mood, and the others, seeing that nothing was to be got out of him, appealed to Domenichino to explain. When the scene in the market-place had been related, one young workman, who had not joined in the laughter of the rest, remarked abruptly:

"It was very clever, of course; but I don't see what good all this play-acting business has done to anybody."

"Just this much," the Gadfly put in; "that I can go where I like and do what I like anywhere in this district, and not a single man, woman, or child will ever think of suspecting me. The story will be all over the place by to-morrow, and when I meet a spy he will only think: 'It's mad Diego, that confessed his sins in the market-place.' That is an advantage gained, surely."

"Yes, I see. Still, I wish the thing could have been done without fooling the Cardinal. He's too good to have that sort of trick played on him."

"I thought myself he seemed fairly decent," the Gadfly lazily assented.

"Nonsense, Sandro! We don't want Cardinals here!" said Domenichino. "And if Monsignor Montanelli had taken that post in Rome when he had the chance of getting it, Rivarez couldn't have fooled him."

"He wouldn't take it because he didn't want to leave his work here."

"More likely because he didn't want to get poisoned off by Lambruschini's agents. They've got something against him, you may depend upon it. When a Cardinal, especially such a popular

one, 'prefers to stay' in a God-forsaken little hole like this, we all know what that means—don't we, Rivarez?"

The Gadfly was making smoke-rings. "Perhaps it is a c-c-case of a 'b-b-broken and contrite heart,'" he remarked, leaning his head back to watch them float away. "And now, men, let us get to business."

They began to discuss in detail the various plans which had been formed for the smuggling and concealment of weapons. The Gadfly listened with keen attention, interrupting every now and then to correct sharply some inaccurate statement or imprudent proposal. When everyone had finished speaking, he made a few practical suggestions, most of which were adopted without discussion. The meeting then broke up. It had been resolved that, at least until he was safely back in Tuscany, very late meetings, which might attract the notice of the police, should be avoided. By a little after ten o'clock all had dispersed except the doctor, the Gadfly, and Domenichino, who remained as a sub-committee for the discussion of special points. After a long and hot dispute, Domenichino looked up at the clock.

"Half-past eleven; we mustn't stop any longer or the night-watchman may see us."

"When does he pass?" asked the Gadfly.

"About twelve o'clock; and I want to be home before he comes. Good-night, Giordani. Rivarez, shall we walk together?"

"No; I think we are safer apart. Then I shall see you again?"

"Yes; at Castel Bolognese. I don't know yet what disguise I shall be in, but you have the password. You leave here to-morrow, I think?"