

The Gadfly was carefully putting on his beard and wig before the looking-glass.

"To-morrow morning, with the pilgrims. On the next day I fall ill and stop behind in a shepherd's hut, and then take a short cut across the hills. I shall be down there before you will. Good-night!"

Twelve o'clock was striking from the Cathedral bell-tower as the Gadfly looked in at the door of the great empty barn which had been thrown open as a lodging for the pilgrims. The floor was covered with clumsy figures, most of which were snoring lustily, and the air was insufferably close and foul. He drew back with a little shudder of repugnance; it would be useless to attempt to sleep in there; he would take a walk, and then find some shed or haystack which would, at least, be clean and quiet.

It was a glorious night, with a great full moon gleaming in a purple sky. He began to wander through the streets in an aimless way, brooding miserably over the scene of the morning, and wishing that he had never consented to Domenichino's plan of holding the meeting in Brisighella. If at the beginning he had declared the project too dangerous, some other place would have been chosen; and both he and Montanelli would have been spared this ghastly, ridiculous farce.

How changed the Padre was! And yet his voice was not changed at all; it was just the same as in the old days, when he used to say: "Carino."

The lantern of the night-watchman appeared at the other end of the street, and the Gadfly turned down a narrow, crooked alley. After walking a few yards he found himself in the Cathedral

Square, close to the left wing of the episcopal palace. The square was flooded with moonlight, and there was no one in sight; but he noticed that a side door of the Cathedral was ajar. The sacristan must have forgotten to shut it. Surely nothing could be going on there so late at night. He might as well go in and sleep on one of the benches instead of in the stifling barn; he could slip out in the morning before the sacristan came; and even if anyone did find him, the natural supposition would be that mad Diego had been saying his prayers in some corner, and had got shut in.

He listened a moment at the door, and then entered with the noiseless step that he had retained notwithstanding his lameness. The moonlight streamed through the windows, and lay in broad bands on the marble floor. In the chancel, especially, everything was as clearly visible as by daylight. At the foot of the altar steps Cardinal Montanelli knelt alone, bare-headed, with clasped hands.

The Gadfly drew back into the shadow. Should he slip away before Montanelli saw him? That, no doubt, would be the wisest thing to do—perhaps the most merciful. And yet, what harm could it do for him to go just a little nearer—to look at the Padre's face once more, now that the crowd was gone, and there was no need to keep up the hideous comedy of the morning? Perhaps it would be his last chance—and the Padre need not see him; he would steal up softly and look—just this once. Then he would go back to his work.

Keeping in the shadow of the pillars, he crept softly up to the chancel rails, and paused at the side entrance, close to the altar. The shadow of

the episcopal throne was broad enough to cover him, and he crouched down in the darkness, holding his breath.

"My poor boy! Oh, God; my poor boy!"

The broken whisper was full of such endless despair that the Gadfly shuddered in spite of himself. Then came deep, heavy, tearless sobs; and he saw Montanelli wring his hands together like a man in bodily pain.

He had not thought it would be so bad as this. How often had he said to himself with bitter assurance: "I need not trouble about it; that wound was healed long ago." Now, after all these years, it was laid bare before him, and he saw it bleeding still. And how easy it would be to heal it now at last! He need only lift his hand—only step forward and say: "Padre, it is I." There was Gemma, too, with that white streak across her hair. Oh, if he could but forgive! If he could but cut out from his memory the past that was burned into it so deep—the Lascar, and the sugar-plantation, and the variety show! Surely there was no other misery like this—to be willing to forgive, to long to forgive; and to know that it was hopeless—that he could not, dared not forgive.

Montanelli rose at last, made the sign of the cross, and turned away from the altar. The Gadfly shrank further back into the shadow, trembling with fear lest he should be seen, lest the very beating of his heart should betray him; then he drew a long breath of relief. Montanelli had passed him, so close that the violet robe had brushed against his cheek,—had passed and had not seen him.

Had not seen him— Oh, what had he done?

This had been his last chance—this one precious moment—and he had let it slip away. He started up and stepped into the light.

"Padre!"

The sound of his own voice, ringing up and dying away along the arches of the roof, filled him with fantastic terror. He shrank back again into the shadow. Montanelli stood beside the pillar, motionless, listening with wide-open eyes, full of the horror of death. How long the silence lasted the Gadfly could not tell; it might have been an instant, or an eternity. He came to his senses with a sudden shock. Montanelli was beginning to sway as though he would fall, and his lips moved, at first silently.

"Arthur!" the low whisper came at last; "yes, the water is deep——"

The Gadfly came forward.

"Forgive me, Your Eminence! I thought it was one of the priests."

"Ah, it is the pilgrim?" Montanelli had at once recovered his self-control, though the Gadfly could see, from the restless glitter of the sapphire on his hand, that he was still trembling. "Are you in need of anything, my friend? It is late, and the Cathedral is closed at night."

"I beg pardon, Your Eminence, if I have done wrong. I saw the door open, and came in to pray; and when I saw a priest, as I thought, in meditation, I waited to ask a blessing on this."

He held up the little tin cross that he had bought from Domenichino. Montanelli took it from his hand, and, re-entering the chancel, laid it for a moment on the altar.

"Take it, my son," he said, "and be at rest, for the Lord is tender and pitiful. Go to Rome,

and ask the blessing of His minister, the Holy Father. Peace be with you!"

The Gadfly bent his head to receive the benediction, and turned slowly away.

"Stop!" said Montanelli.

He was standing with one hand on the chancel rail.

"When you receive the Holy Eucharist in Rome," he said, "pray for one in deep affliction—for one on whose soul the hand of the Lord is heavy."

There were almost tears in his voice, and the Gadfly's resolution wavered. Another instant and he would have betrayed himself. Then the thought of the variety-show came up again, and he remembered, like Jonah, that he did well to be angry.

"Who am I, that He should hear my prayers? A leper and an outcast! If I could bring to His throne, as Your Eminence can, the offering of a holy life—of a soul without spot or secret shame——"

Montanelli turned abruptly away.

"I have only one offering to give," he said; "a broken heart."

A few days later the Gadfly returned to Florence in the diligence from Pistoja. He went straight to Gemma's lodgings, but she was out. Leaving a message that he would return in the morning he went home, sincerely hoping that he should not again find his study invaded by Zita. Her jealous reproaches would act on his nerves, if he were to hear much of them to-night, like the rasping of a dentist's file.

"Good-evening, Bianca," he said when the

maid-servant opened the door. "Has Mme. Reni been here to-day?"

She stared at him blankly

"Mme. Reni? Has she come back, then, sir?"

"What do you mean?" he asked with a frown, stopping short on the mat.

"She went away quite suddenly, just after you did, and left all her things behind her. She never so much as said she was going."

"Just after I did? What, a fortnight ago?"

"Yes, sir, the same day; and her things are lying about higgledy-piggledy. All the neighbours are talking about it."

He turned away from the door-step without speaking, and went hastily down the lane to the house where Zita had been lodging. In her rooms nothing had been touched; all the presents that he had given her were in their usual places; there was no letter or scrap of writing anywhere.

"If you please, sir," said Bianca, putting her head in at the door, "there's an old woman——"

He turned round fiercely.

"What do you want here—following me about?"

"An old woman wishes to see you."

"What does she want? Tell her I c-can't see her; I'm busy."

"She has been coming nearly every evening since you went away, sir, always asking when you would come back."

"Ask her w-what her business is. No; never mind; I suppose I must go myself."

The old woman was waiting at his hall door. She was very poorly dressed, with a face as brown and wrinkled as a medlar, and a bright-coloured

scarf twisted round her head. As he came in she rose and looked at him with keen black eyes.

"You are the lame gentleman," she said, inspecting him critically from head to foot. "I have brought you a message from Zita Reni."

He opened the study door, and held it for her to pass in; then followed her and shut the door, that Bianca might not hear.

"Sit down, please. N-now, tell me who you are."

"It's no business of yours who I am. I have come to tell you that Zita Reni has gone away with my son."

"With—your—son?"

"Yes, sir; if you don't know how to keep your mistress when you've got her, you can't complain if other men take her. My son has blood in his veins, not milk and water; he comes of the Romany folk."

"Ah, you are a gipsy! Zita has gone back to her own people, then?"

She looked at him in amazed contempt. Apparently, these Christians had not even manhood enough to be angry when they were insulted.

"What sort of stuff are you made of, that she should stay with you? Our women may lend themselves to you a bit for a girl's fancy, or if you pay them well; but the Romany blood comes back to the Romany folk."

The Gadfly's face remained as cold and steady as before.

"Has she gone away with a gipsy camp, or merely to live with your son?"

The woman burst out laughing.

"Do you think of following her and trying to

win her back? It's too late, sir; you should have thought of that before!"

"No; I only want to know the truth, if you will tell it to me."

She shrugged her shoulders; it was hardly worth while to abuse a person who took it so meekly.

"The truth, then, is that she met my son in the road the day you left her, and spoke to him in the Romany tongue; and when he saw she was one of our folk, in spite of her fine clothes, he fell in love with her bonny face, as *our* men fall in love, and took her to our camp. She told us all her trouble, and sat crying and sobbing, poor lassie, till our hearts were sore for her. We comforted her as best we could; and at last she took off her fine clothes and put on the things our lasses wear, and gave herself to my son, to be his woman and to have him for her man. He won't say to her: 'I don't love you,' and: 'I've other things to do.' When a woman is young, she wants a man; and what sort of man are you, that you can't even kiss a handsome girl when she puts her arms round your neck?"

"You said," he interrupted, "that you had brought me a message from her."

"Yes; I stopped behind when the camp went on, so as to give it. She told me to say that she has had enough of your folk and their hair-splitting and their sluggish blood; and that she wants to get back to her own people and be free. 'Tell him,' she said, 'that I am a woman, and that I loved him; and that is why I would not be his harlot any longer.' The lassie was right to come away. There's no harm in a girl getting a bit of money out of her good looks if she can—that's

what good looks are for; but a Romany lass has nothing to do with *loving* a man of your race."

The Gadfly stood up.

"Is that all the message?" he said. "Then tell her, please, that I think she has done right, and that I hope she will be happy. That is all I have to say. Good-night!"

He stood perfectly still until the garden gate closed behind her; then he sat down and covered his face with both hands.

Another blow on the cheek! Was no rag of pride to be left him—no shred of self-respect? Surely he had suffered everything that man can endure; his very heart had been dragged in the mud and trampled under the feet of the passers-by; there was no spot in his soul where someone's contempt was not branded in, where someone's mockery had not left its iron trace. And now this gipsy girl, whom he had picked up by the wayside—even she had the whip in her hand.

Shaitan whined at the door, and the Gadfly rose to let him in. The dog rushed up to his master with his usual frantic manifestations of delight, but soon, understanding that something was wrong, lay down on the rug beside him, and thrust a cold nose into the listless hand.

An hour later Gemma came up to the front door. No one appeared in answer to her knock; Bianca, finding that the Gadfly did not want any dinner, had slipped out to visit a neighbour's cook. She had left the door open, and a light burning in the hall. Gemma, after waiting for some time, decided to enter and try if she could find the Gadfly, as she wished to speak to him about an important message which had come from Bailey. She knocked at the study door, and the Gadfly's voice answered

from within: "You can go away, Bianca. I don't want anything."

She softly opened the door. The room was quite dark, but the passage lamp threw a long stream of light across it as she entered, and she saw the Gadfly sitting alone, his head sunk on his breast, and the dog asleep at his feet.

"It is I," she said.

He started up. "Gemma,— Gemma! Oh, I have wanted you so!"

Before she could speak he was kneeling on the floor at her feet and hiding his face in the folds of her dress. His whole body was shaken with a convulsive tremor that was worse to see than tears.

She stood still. There was nothing she could do to help him—nothing. This was the bitterest thing of all. She must stand by and look on passively—she who would have died to spare him pain. Could she but dare to stoop and clasp her arms about him, to hold him close against her heart and shield him, were it with her own body, from all further harm or wrong; surely then he would be Arthur to her again; surely then the day would break and the shadows flee away.

Ah, no, no! How could he ever forget? Was it not she who had cast him into hell—she, with her own right hand?

She had let the moment slip by. He rose hastily and sat down by the table, covering his eyes with one hand and biting his lip as if he would bite it through.

Presently he looked up and said quietly:

"I am afraid I startled you."

She held out both her hands to him. "Dear," she said, "are we not friends enough by now for you to trust me a little bit? What is it?"

"Only a private trouble of my own. I don't see why you should be worried over it."

"Listen a moment," she went on, taking his hand in both of hers to steady its convulsive trembling. "I have not tried to lay hands on a thing that is not mine to touch. But now that you have given me, of your own free will, so much of your confidence, will you not give me a little more—as you would do if I were your sister. Keep the mask on your face, if it is any consolation to you, but don't wear a mask on your soul, for your own sake."

He bent his head lower. "You must be patient with me," he said. "I am an unsatisfactory sort of brother to have, I'm afraid; but if you only knew—I have been nearly mad this last week. It has been like South America again. And somehow the devil gets into me and——" He broke off.

"May I not have my share in your trouble?" she whispered at last.

His head sank down on her arm. "The hand of the Lord is heavy."



PART III.