

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

THE next five weeks were spent by Gemma and the Gadfly in a whirl of excitement and overwork which left them little time or energy for thinking about their personal affairs. When the arms had been safely smuggled into Papal territory there remained a still more difficult and dangerous task: that of conveying them unobserved from the secret stores in the mountain caverns and ravines to the various local centres and thence to the separate villages. The whole district was swarming with spies; and Domenichino, to whom the Gadfly had intrusted the ammunition, sent into Florence a messenger with an urgent appeal for either help or extra time. The Gadfly had insisted that the work should be finished by the middle of June; and what with the difficulty of conveying heavy transports over bad roads, and the endless hindrances and delays caused by the necessity of continually evading observation, Domenichino was growing desperate. "I am between Scylla and Charybdis," he wrote. "I dare not work quickly, for fear of detection, and I must not work slowly if we are to be ready in time. Either send me efficient help at once, or let the Venetians know

that we shall not be ready till the first week in July."

The Gadfly carried the letter to Gemma and, while she read it, sat frowning at the floor and stroking the cat's fur the wrong way.

"This is bad," she said. "We can hardly keep the Venetians waiting for three weeks."

"Of course we can't; the thing is absurd. Domenichino m-might unders-s-stand that. We must follow the lead of the Venetians, not they ours."

"I don't see that Domenichino is to blame; he has evidently done his best, and he can't do impossibilities."

"It's not in Domenichino that the fault lies; it's in the fact of his being one person instead of two. We ought to have at least one responsible man to guard the store and another to see the transports off. He is quite right; he must have efficient help."

"But what help are we going to give him? We have no one in Florence to send."

"Then I m-must go myself."

She leaned back in her chair and looked at him with a little frown.

"No, that won't do; it's too risky."

"It will have to do if we can't f-f-find any other way out of the difficulty."

"Then we must find another way, that's all. It's out of the question for you to go again just now."

An obstinate line appeared at the corners of his under lip.

"I d-don't see that it's out of the question."

"You will see if you think about the thing calmly for a minute. It is only five weeks since

you got back; the police are on the scent about that pilgrim business, and scouring the country to find a clue. Yes, I know you are clever at disguises; but remember what a lot of people saw you, both as Diego and as the countryman; and you can't disguise your lameness or the scar on your face."

"There are p-plenty of lame people in the world."

"Yes, but there are not plenty of people in the Romagna with a lame foot and a sabre-cut across the cheek and a left arm injured like yours, and the combination of blue eyes with such dark colouring."

"The eyes don't matter; I can alter them with belladonna."

"You can't alter the other things. No, it won't do. For you to go there just now, with all your identification-marks, would be to walk into a trap with your eyes open. You would certainly be taken."

"But s-s-someone must help Domenichino."

"It will be no help to him to have you caught at a critical moment like this. Your arrest would mean the failure of the whole thing."

But the Gadfly was difficult to convince, and the discussion went on and on without coming nearer to any settlement. Gemma was beginning to realize how nearly inexhaustible was the fund of quiet obstinacy in his character; and, had the matter not been one about which she felt strongly, she would probably have yielded for the sake of peace. This, however, was a case in which she could not conscientiously give way; the practical advantage to be gained from the proposed journey seemed to her not sufficiently important to be

worth the risk, and she could not help suspecting that his desire to go was prompted less by a conviction of grave political necessity than by a morbid craving for the excitement of danger. He had got into the habit of risking his neck, and his tendency to run into unnecessary peril seemed to her a form of intemperance which should be quietly but steadily resisted. Finding all her arguments unavailing against his dogged resolve to go his own way, she fired her last shot.

"Let us be honest about it, anyway," she said; "and call things by their true names. It is not Domenichino's difficulty that makes you so determined to go. It is your own personal passion for——"

"It's not true!" he interrupted vehemently. "He is nothing to me; I don't care if I never see him again."

He broke off, seeing in her face that he had betrayed himself. Their eyes met for an instant, and dropped; and neither of them uttered the name that was in both their minds.

"It—it is not Domenichino I want to save," he stammered at last, with his face half buried in the cat's fur; "it is that I—I understand the danger of the work failing if he has no help."

She passed over the feeble little subterfuge, and went on as if there had been no interruption:

"It is your passion for running into danger which makes you want to go there. You have the same craving for danger when you are worried that you had for opium when you were ill."

"It was not I that asked for the opium," he said defiantly; "it was the others who insisted on giving it to me."

"I dare say. You plume yourself a little on

your stoicism, and to ask for physical relief would have hurt your pride; but it is rather flattered than otherwise when you risk your life to relieve the irritation of your nerves. And yet, after all, the distinction is a merely conventional one."

He drew the cat's head back and looked down into the round, green eyes. "Is it true, Pasht?" he said. "Are all these unkind things true that your mistress is s-saying about me? Is it a case of *mea culpa; mea m-maxima culpa*? You wise beast, you never ask for opium, do you? Your ancestors were gods in Egypt, and no man t-trod on their tails. I wonder, though, what would become of your calm superiority to earthly ills if I were to take this paw of yours and hold it in the c-candle. Would you ask me for opium then? Would you? Or perhaps—for death? No, pussy, we have no right to die for our personal convenience. We may spit and s-swear a bit, if it consoles us; but we mustn't pull the paw away."

"Hush!" She took the cat off his knee and put it down on a footstool. "You and I will have time for thinking about those things later on. What we have to think of now is how to get Domenichino out of his difficulty. What is it, Katie; a visitor? I am busy."

"Miss Wright has sent you this, ma'am, by hand."

The packet, which was carefully sealed, contained a letter, addressed to Miss Wright, but unopened and with a Papal stamp. Gemma's old school friends still lived in Florence, and her more important letters were often received, for safety, at their address.

"It is Michele's mark," she said, glancing quickly over the letter, which seemed to be about

the summer-terms at a boarding house in the Apennines, and pointing to two little blots on a corner of the page. "It is in chemical ink; the reagent is in the third drawer of the writing-table. Yes; that is it."

He laid the letter open on the desk and passed a little brush over its pages. When the real message stood out on the paper in a brilliant blue line, he leaned back in his chair and burst out laughing. "What is it?" she asked hurriedly. He handed her the paper.

"*Domenichino has been arrested. Come at once.*"

She sat down with the paper in her hand and stared hopelessly at the Gadfly.

"W-well?" he said at last, with his soft, ironical drawl; "are you satisfied now that I must go?"

"Yes, I suppose you must," she answered, sighing. "And I too."

He looked up with a little start. "You too? But——"

"Of course. It will be very awkward, I know, to be left without anyone here in Florence; but everything must go to the wall now except the providing of an extra pair of hands."

"There are plenty of hands to be got there."

"They don't belong to people whom you can trust thoroughly, though. You said yourself just now that there must be two responsible persons in charge; and if Domenichino couldn't manage alone it is evidently impossible for you to do so. A person as desperately compromised as you are is very much handicapped, remember, in work of that kind, and more dependent on help than anyone else would be. Instead of you and Domenichino, it must be you and I."

He considered for a moment, frowning.

"Yes, you are quite right," he said; "and the sooner we go the better. But we must not start together. If I go off to-night, you can take, say, the afternoon coach to-morrow."

"Where to?"

"That we must discuss. I think I had b-b-better go straight in to Faenza. If I start late to-night and ride to Borgo San Lorenzo I can get my disguise arranged there and go straight on."

"I don't see what else we can do," she said, with an anxious little frown; "but it is very risky, your going off in such a hurry and trusting to the smugglers finding you a disguise at Borgo. You ought to have at least three clear days to double on your trace before you cross the frontier."

"You needn't be afraid," he answered, smiling; "I may get taken further on, but not at the frontier. Once in the hills I am as safe as here; there's not a smuggler in the Apennines that would betray me. What I am not quite sure about is how you are to get across."

"Oh, that is very simple! I shall take Louisa Wright's passport and go for a holiday. No one knows me in the Romagna, but every spy knows you."

"F-fortunately, so does every smuggler."

She took out her watch.

"Half-past two. We have the afternoon and evening, then, if you are to start to-night."

"Then the best thing will be for me to go home and settle everything now, and arrange about a good horse. I shall ride in to San Lorenzo; it will be safer."

"But it won't be safe at all to hire a horse. The owner will——"

"I shan't hire one. I know a man that will lend

me a horse, and that can be trusted. He has done things for me before. One of the shepherds will bring it back in a fortnight. I shall be here again by five or half-past, then; and while I am gone, I w-want you to go and find Martini and explain everything to him."

"Martini!" She turned round and looked at him in astonishment.

"Yes; we must take him into confidence—unless you can think of anyone else."

"I don't quite understand what you mean."

"We must have someone here whom we can trust, in case of any special difficulty; and of all the set here Martini is the man in whom I have most confidence. Riccardo would do anything he could for us, of course; but I think Martini has a steadier head. Still, you know him better than I do; it is as you think."

"I have not the slightest doubt as to Martini's trustworthiness and efficiency in every respect; and I think he would probably consent to give us any help he could. But——"

He understood at once.

"Gemma, what would you feel if you found out that a comrade in bitter need had not asked you for help you might have given, for fear of hurting or distressing you? Would you say there was any true kindness in that?"

"Very well," she said, after a little pause; "I will send Katie round at once and ask him to come; and while she is gone I will go to Louisa for her passport; she promised to lend it whenever I want one. What about money? Shall I draw some out of the bank?"

"No; don't waste time on that; I can draw enough from my account to last us for a bit. We

will fall back on yours later on if my balance runs short. Till half-past five, then; I shall be sure to find you here, of course?"

"Oh, yes! I shall be back long before then."

Half an hour after the appointed time he returned, and found Gemma and Martini sitting on the terrace together. He saw at once that their conversation had been a distressing one; the traces of agitation were visible in both of them, and Martini was unusually silent and glum.

"Have you arranged everything?" she asked, looking up.

"Yes; and I have brought you some money for the journey. The horse will be ready for me at the Ponte Rosso barrier at one in the night."

"Is not that rather late? You ought to get into San Lorenzo before the people are up in the morning."

"So I shall; it's a very fast horse; and I don't want to leave here when there's a chance of anyone noticing me. I shan't go home any more; there's a spy watching at the door, and he thinks me in."

"How did you get out without his seeing you?"

"Out of the kitchen window into the back garden and over the neighbour's orchard wall; that's what makes me so late; I had to dodge him. I left the owner of the horse to sit in the study all the evening with the lamp lighted. When the spy sees the light in the window and a shadow on the blind he will be quite satisfied that I am writing at home this evening."

"Then you will stay here till it is time to go to the barrier?"

"Yes; I don't want to be seen in the street any