

more to-night. Have a cigar, Martini? I know Signora Bolla doesn't mind smoke."

"I shan't be here to mind; I must go downstairs and help Katie with the dinner."

When she had gone Martini got up and began to pace to and fro with his hands behind his back. The Gadfly sat smoking and looking silently out at the drizzling rain.

"Rivarez!" Martini began, stopping in front of him, but keeping his eyes on the ground; "what sort of thing are you going to drag her into?"

The Gadfly took the cigar from his mouth and blew away a long trail of smoke.

"She has chosen for herself," he said, "without compulsion on anyone's part."

"Yes, yes—I know. But tell me——"

He stopped.

"I will tell you anything I can."

"Well, then—I don't know much about the details of these affairs in the hills,—are you going to take her into any very serious danger?"

"Do you want the truth?"

"Yes."

"Then—yes."

Martini turned away and went on pacing up and down. Presently he stopped again.

"I want to ask you another question. If you don't choose to answer it, you needn't, of course; but if you do answer, then answer honestly. Are you in love with her?"

The Gadfly deliberately knocked the ash from his cigar and went on smoking in silence.

"That means—that you don't choose to answer?"

"No; only that I think I have a right to know why you ask me that."

"Why? Good God, man, can't you see why?"

"Ah!" He laid down his cigar and looked steadily at Martini. "Yes," he said at last, slowly and softly. "I am in love with her. But you needn't think I am going to make love to her, or worry about it. I am only going to——"

His voice died away in a strange, faint whisper. Martini came a step nearer.

"Only going—to——"

"To die."

He was staring straight before him with a cold, fixed look, as if he were dead already. When he spoke again his voice was curiously lifeless and even.

"You needn't worry her about it beforehand," he said; "but there's not the ghost of a chance for me. It's dangerous for everyone; that she knows as well as I do; but the smugglers will do their best to prevent her getting taken. They are good fellows, though they are a bit rough. As for me, the rope is round my neck, and when I cross the frontier I pull the noose."

"Rivarez, what do you mean? Of course it's dangerous, and particularly so for you; I understand that; but you have often crossed the frontier before and always been successful."

"Yes, and this time I shall fail."

"But why? How can you know?"

The Gadfly smiled drearily.

"Do you remember the German legend of the man that died when he met his own Double? No? It appeared to him at night in a lonely place, wringing its hands in despair. Well, I met mine the last time I was in the hills; and when I cross the frontier again I shan't come back."

Martini came up to him and put a hand on the back of his chair.

"Listen, Rivarez; I don't understand a word of all this metaphysical stuff, but I do understand one thing: If you feel about it that way, you are not in a fit state to go. The surest way to get taken is to go with a conviction that you will be taken. You must be ill, or out of sorts somehow, to get maggots of that kind into your head. Suppose I go instead of you? I can do any practical work there is to be done, and you can send a message to your men, explaining——"

"And let you get killed instead? That would be very clever."

"Oh, I'm not likely to get killed! They don't know me as they do you. And, besides, even if I did——"

He stopped, and the Gadfly looked up with a slow, inquiring gaze. Martini's hand dropped by his side.

"She very likely wouldn't miss me as much as she would you," he said in his most matter-of-fact voice. "And then, besides, Rivarez, this is public business, and we have to look at it from the point of view of utility—the greatest good of the greatest number. Your 'final value'—isn't that what the economists call it?—is higher than mine; I have brains enough to see that, though I haven't any cause to be particularly fond of you. You are a bigger man than I am; I'm not sure that you are a better one, but there's more of you, and your death would be a greater loss than mine."

From the way he spoke he might have been discussing the value of shares on the Exchange. The Gadfly looked up, shivering as if with cold.

"Would you have me wait till my grave opens of itself to swallow me up?"

"If I must die,
I will encounter darkness as a bride——"

Look here, Martini, you and I are talking nonsense."

"You are, certainly," said Martini gruffly.

"Yes, and so are you. For Heaven's sake, don't let's go in for romantic self-sacrifice, like Don Carlos and Marquis Posa. This is the nineteenth century; and if it's my business to die, I have got to do it."

"And if it's my business to live, I have got to do that, I suppose. You're the lucky one, Rivarez."

"Yes," the Gadfly assented laconically; "I was always lucky."

They smoked in silence for a few minutes, and then began to talk of business details. When Gemma came up to call them to dinner, neither of them betrayed in face or manner that their conversation had been in any way unusual. After dinner they sat discussing plans and making necessary arrangements till eleven o'clock, when Martini rose and took his hat.

"I will go home and fetch that riding-cloak of mine, Rivarez. I think you will be less recognizable in it than in your light suit. I want to reconnoitre a bit, too, and make sure there are no spies about before we start."

"Are you coming with me to the barrier?"

"Yes; it's safer to have four eyes than two in case of anyone following you. I'll be back by twelve. Be sure you don't start without me. I

had better take the key, Gemma, so as not to wake anyone by ringing."

She raised her eyes to his face as he took the keys. She understood that he had invented a pretext in order to leave her alone with the Gadfly.

"You and I will talk to-morrow," she said. "We shall have time in the morning, when my packing is finished."

"Oh, yes! Plenty of time. There are two or three little things I want to ask you about, Rivarez; but we can talk them over on our way to the barrier. You had better send Katie to bed, Gemma; and be as quiet as you can, both of you. Good-bye till twelve, then."

He went away with a little nod and smile, banging the door after him to let the neighbours hear that Signora Bolla's visitor was gone.

Gemma went out into the kitchen to say good-night to Katie, and came back with black coffee on a tray.

"Would you like to lie down a bit?" she said. "You won't have any sleep the rest of the night."

"Oh, dear no! I shall sleep at San Lorenzo while the men are getting my disguise ready."

"Then have some coffee. Wait a minute; I will get you out the biscuits."

As she knelt down at the side-board he suddenly stooped over her shoulder.

"Whatever have you got there? Chocolate creams and English toffee! Why, this is luxury for a king!"

She looked up, smiling faintly at his enthusiastic tone.

"Are you fond of sweets? I always keep them for Cesare; he is a perfect baby over any kind of lollipops."

"R-r-really? Well, you must get him s-some more to-morrow and give me these to take with me. No, let me p-p-put the toffee in my pocket; it will console me for all the lost joys of life. I d-do hope they'll give me a bit of toffee to suck the day I'm hanged."

"Oh, do let me find a cardboard box for it, at least, before you put it in your pocket! You will be so sticky! Shall I put the chocolates in, too?"

"No, I want to eat them now, with you."

"But I don't like chocolate, and I want you to come and sit down like a reasonable human being. We very likely shan't have another chance to talk quietly before one or other of us is killed, and——"

"She d-d-doesn't like chocolate!" he murmured under his breath. "Then I must be greedy all by myself. This is a case of the hangman's supper, isn't it? You are going to humour all my whims to-night. First of all, I want you to sit on this easy-chair, and, as you said I might lie down, I shall lie here and be comfortable."

He threw himself down on the rug at her feet, leaning his elbow on the chair and looking up into her face.

"How pale you are!" he said. "That's because you take life sadly, and don't like chocolate——"

"Do be serious for just five minutes! After all, it is a matter of life and death."

"Not even for two minutes, dear; neither life nor death is worth it."

He had taken hold of both her hands and was stroking them with the tips of his fingers.

"Don't look so grave, Minerva! You'll make me cry in a minute, and then you'll be sorry. I do wish you'd smile again; you have such a d-delight-

fully unexpected smile. There now, don't scold me, dear! Let us eat our biscuits together, like two good children, without quarrelling over them—for to-morrow we die."

He took a sweet biscuit from the plate and carefully halved it, breaking the sugar ornament down the middle with scrupulous exactness.

"This is a kind of sacrament, like what the goody-goody people have in church. 'Take, eat; this is my body.' And we must d-drink the wine out of the s-s-same glass, you know—yes, that is right. 'Do this in remembrance——'"

She put down the glass.

"Don't!" she said, with almost a sob. He looked up, and took her hands again.

"Hush, then! Let us be quiet for a little bit. When one of us dies, the other will remember this. We will forget this loud, insistent world that howls about our ears; we will go away together, hand in hand; we will go away into the secret halls of death, and lie among the poppy-flowers. Hush! We will be quite still."

He laid his head down against her knee and covered his face. In the silence she bent over him, her hand on the black head. So the time slipped on and on; and they neither moved nor spoke.

"Dear, it is almost twelve," she said at last. He raised his head.

"We have only a few minutes more; Martini will be back presently. Perhaps we shall never see each other again. Have you nothing to say to me?"

He slowly rose and walked away to the other side of the room. There was a moment's silence.

"I have one thing to say," he began in a hardly audible voice; "one thing—to tell you——"

He stopped and sat down by the window, hiding his face in both hands.

"You have been a long time deciding to be merciful," she said softly.

"I have not seen much mercy in my life; and I thought—at first—you wouldn't care——"

"You don't think that now."

She waited a moment for him to speak and then crossed the room and stood beside him.

"Tell me the truth at last," she whispered.

"Think, if you are killed and I not—I should have to go through all my life and never know—never be quite sure——"

He took her hands and clasped them tightly.

"If I am killed—— You see, when I went to South America—— Ah, Martini!"

He broke away with a violent start and threw open the door of the room. Martini was rubbing his boots on the mat.

"Punctual to the m-m-minute, as usual! You're an an-n-nimated chronometer, Martini. Is that the r-r-riding-cloak?"

"Yes; and two or three other things. I have kept them as dry as I could, but it's pouring with rain. You will have a most uncomfortable ride, I'm afraid."

"Oh, that's no matter. Is the street clear?"

"Yes; all the spies seem to have gone to bed. I don't much wonder either, on such a villainous night. Is that coffee, Gemma? He ought to have something hot before he goes out into the wet, or he will catch cold."

"It is black coffee, and very strong. I will boil some milk."

She went into the kitchen, passionately clenching her teeth and hands to keep from breaking

down. When she returned with the milk the Gadfly had put on the riding-cloak and was fastening the leather gaiters which Martini had brought. He drank a cup of coffee, standing, and took up the broad-brimmed riding hat.

"I think it's time to start, Martini; we must make a round before we go to the barrier, in case of anything. Good-bye, for the present, signora; I shall meet you at Forlì on Friday, then, unless anything special turns up. Wait a minute; th-this is the address."

He tore a leaf out of his pocket-book and wrote a few words in pencil.

"I have it already," she said in a dull, quiet voice.

"H-have you? Well, there it is, anyway. Come, Martini. Sh-sh-sh! Don't let the door creak!"

They crept softly downstairs. When the street door clicked behind them she went back into the room and mechanically unfolded the paper he had put into her hand. Underneath the address was written:

"I will tell you everything there."

CHAPTER II.

It was market-day in Brisighella, and the country folk had come in from the villages and hamlets of the district with their pigs and poultry, their dairy produce and droves of half-wild mountain cattle. The market-place was thronged with a perpetually shifting crowd, laughing, joking, bargaining for dried figs, cheap cakes, and sunflower seeds. The brown, bare-footed children sprawled,

face downward, on the pavement in the hot sun, while their mothers sat under the trees with their baskets of butter and eggs.

Monsignor Montanelli, coming out to wish the people "Good-morning," was at once surrounded by a clamorous throng of children, holding up for his acceptance great bunches of irises and scarlet poppies and sweet white narcissus from the mountain slopes. His passion for wild flowers was affectionately tolerated by the people, as one of the little follies which sit gracefully on very wise men. If anyone less universally beloved had filled his house with weeds and grasses they would have laughed at him; but the "blessed Cardinal" could afford a few harmless eccentricities.

"Well, Mariuccia," he said, stopping to pat one of the children on the head; "you have grown since I saw you last. And how is the grandmother's rheumatism?"

"She's been better lately, Your Eminence, but mother's bad now."

"I'm sorry to hear that; tell the mother to come down here some day and see whether Dr. Giordani can do anything for her. I will find somewhere to put her up; perhaps the change will do her good. You are looking better, Luigi; how are your eyes?"

He passed on, chatting with the mountaineers. He always remembered the names and ages of the children, their troubles and those of their parents; and would stop to inquire, with sympathetic interest, for the health of the cow that fell sick at Christmas, or of the rag-doll that was crushed under a cart-wheel last market-day.

When he returned to the palace the marketing began. A lame man in a blue shirt, with a shock