

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

of black hair hanging into his eyes and a deep scar across the left cheek, lounged up to one of the booths and, in very bad Italian, asked for a drink of lemonade.

"You're not from these parts," said the woman who poured it out, glancing up at him.

"No. I come from Corsica."

"Looking for work?"

"Yes; it will be hay-cutting time soon, and a gentleman that has a farm near Ravenna came across to Bastia the other day and told me there's plenty of work to be got there."

"I hope you'll find it so, I'm sure, but times are bad hereabouts."

"They're worse in Corsica, mother. I don't know what we poor folk are coming to."

"Have you come over alone?"

"No, my mate is with me; there he is, in the red shirt. *Holà, Paolo!*"

Michele hearing himself called, came lounging up with his hands in his pockets. He made a fairly good Corsican, in spite of the red wig which he had put on to render himself unrecognizable. As for the Gadfly, he looked his part to perfection.

They sauntered through the market-place together, Michele whistling between his teeth, and the Gadfly trudging along with a bundle over his shoulder, shuffling his feet on the ground to render his lameness less observable. They were waiting for an emissary, to whom important directions had to be given.

"There's Marcone, on horseback, at that corner," Michele whispered suddenly. The Gadfly, still carrying his bundle, shuffled towards the horseman.

"Do you happen to be wanting a hay-maker,

sir?" he said, touching his ragged cap and running one finger along the bridle. It was the signal agreed upon, and the rider, who from his appearance might have been a country squire's bailiff, dismounted and threw the reins on the horse's neck.

"What sort of work can you do, my man?"

The Gadfly fumbled with his cap.

"I can cut grass, sir, and trim hedges"—he began; and without any break in his voice, went straight on: "At one in the morning at the mouth of the round cave. You must have two good horses and a cart. I shall be waiting inside the cave— And then I can dig, sir, and—"

"That will do, I only want a grass-cutter. Have you ever been out before?"

"Once, sir. Mind, you must come well-armed; we may meet a flying squadron. Don't go by the wood-path; you're safer on the other side. If you meet a spy, don't stop to argue with him; fire at once— I should be very glad of work, sir."

"Yes, I dare say, but I want an experienced grass-cutter. No, I haven't got any coppers to-day."

A very ragged beggar had slouched up to them, with a doleful, monotonous whine.

"Have pity on a poor blind man, in the name of the Blessed Virgin— Get out of this place at once; there's a flying squadron coming along— Most Holy Queen of Heaven, Maiden undefiled— It's you they're after, Rivarez; they'll be here in two minutes— And so may the saints reward you— You'll have to make a dash for it; there are spies at all the corners. It's no use trying to slip away without being seen."

Marcone slipped the reins into the Gadfly's hand.

"Make haste! Ride out to the bridge and let the horse go; you can hide in the ravine. We're all armed; we can keep them back for ten minutes."

"No. I won't have you fellows taken. Stand together, all of you, and fire after me in order. Move up towards our horses; there they are, tethered by the palace steps; and have your knives ready. We retreat fighting, and when I throw my cap down, cut the halters and jump every man on the nearest horse. We may all reach the wood that way."

They had spoken in so quiet an undertone that even the nearest bystanders had not supposed their conversation to refer to anything more dangerous than grass-cutting. Marcone, leading his own mare by the bridle, walked towards the tethered horses, the Gadfly slouching along beside him, and the beggar following them with an outstretched hand and a persistent whine. Michele came up whistling; the beggar had warned him in passing, and he quietly handed on the news to three countrymen who were eating raw onions under a tree. They immediately rose and followed him; and before anyone's notice had been attracted to them, the whole seven were standing together by the steps of the palace, each man with one hand on the hidden pistol, and the tethered horses within easy reach.

"Don't betray yourselves till I move," the Gadfly said softly and clearly. "They may not recognize us. When I fire, then begin in order. Don't fire at the men; lame their horses—then they can't follow us. Three of you fire, while the other

three reload. If anyone comes between you and our horses, kill him. I take the roan. When I throw down my cap, each man for himself; don't stop for anything."

"Here they come," said Michele; and the Gadfly turned round, with an air of naïve and stupid wonder, as the people suddenly broke off in their bargaining.

Fifteen armed men rode slowly into the market-place. They had great difficulty to get past the throng of people at all, and, but for the spies at the corners of the square, all the seven conspirators could have slipped quietly away while the attention of the crowd was fixed upon the soldiers. Michele moved a little closer to the Gadfly.

"Couldn't we get away now?"

"No; we're surrounded with spies, and one of them has recognized me. He has just sent a man to tell the captain where I am. Our only chance is to lame their horses."

"Which is the spy?"

"The first man I fire at. Are you all ready? They have made a lane to us; they are going to come with a rush."

"Out of the way there!" shouted the captain. "In the name of His Holiness!"

The crowd had drawn back, startled and wondering; and the soldiers made a quick dash towards the little group standing by the palace steps. The Gadfly drew a pistol from his blouse and fired, not at the advancing troops, but at the spy, who was approaching the horses, and who fell back with a broken collar-bone. Immediately after the report, six more shots were fired in quick succession, as the conspirators moved steadily closer to the tethered horses.

One of the cavalry horses stumbled and plunged; another fell to the ground with a fearful cry. Then, through the shrieking of the panic-stricken people, came the loud, imperious voice of the officer in command, who had risen in the stirrups and was holding a sword above his head.

"This way, men!"

He swayed in the saddle and sank back; the Gadfly had fired again with his deadly aim. A little stream of blood was trickling down the captain's uniform; but he steadied himself with a violent effort, and, clutching at his horse's mane, cried out fiercely:

"Kill that lame devil if you can't take him alive! It's Rivarez!"

"Another pistol, quick!" the Gadfly called to his men; "and go!"

He flung down his cap. It was only just in time, for the swords of the now infuriated soldiers were flashing close in front of him.

"Put down your weapons, all of you!"

Cardinal Montanelli had stepped suddenly between the combatants; and one of the soldiers cried out in a voice sharp with terror:

"Your Eminence! My God, you'll be murdered!"

Montanelli only moved a step nearer, and faced the Gadfly's pistol.

Five of the conspirators were already on horseback and dashing up the hilly street. Marcone sprang on to the back of his mare. In the moment of riding away, he glanced back to see whether his leader was in need of help. The roan was close at hand, and in another instant all would have been safe; but as the figure in the scarlet cassock stepped forward, the Gadfly suddenly

wavered and the hand with the pistol sank down. The instant decided everything. Immediately he was surrounded and flung violently to the ground, and the weapon was dashed out of his hand by a blow from the flat of a soldier's sword. Marcone struck his mare's flank with the stirrup; the hoofs of the cavalry horses were thundering up the hill behind him; and it would have been worse than useless to stay and be taken too. Turning in the saddle as he galloped away, to fire a last shot in the teeth of the nearest pursuer, he saw the Gadfly, with blood on his face, trampled under the feet of horses and soldiers and spies; and heard the savage curses of the captors, the yells of triumph and rage.

Montanelli did not notice what had happened; he had moved away from the steps, and was trying to calm the terrified people. Presently, as he stooped over the wounded spy, a startled movement of the crowd made him look up. The soldiers were crossing the square, dragging their prisoner after them by the rope with which his hands were tied. His face was livid with pain and exhaustion, and he panted fearfully for breath; but he looked round at the Cardinal, smiling with white lips, and whispered:

"I c-cong-gratulate your Eminence."

Five days later Martini reached Forli. He had received from Gemma by post a bundle of printed circulars, the signal agreed upon in case of his being needed in any special emergency; and, remembering the conversation on the terrace, he guessed the truth at once. All through the journey he kept repeating to himself that there was no reason for supposing anything to have hap-

pened to the Gadfly, and that it was absurd to attach any importance to the childish superstitions of so nervous and fanciful a person; but the more he reasoned with himself against the idea, the more firmly did it take possession of his mind.

"I have guessed what it is: Rivarez is taken, of course?" he said, as he came into Gemma's room.

"He was arrested last Thursday, at Brisighella. He defended himself desperately and wounded the captain of the squadron and a spy."

"Armed resistance; that's bad!"

"It makes no difference; he was too deeply compromised already for a pistol-shot more or less to affect his position much."

"What do you think they are going to do with him?"

She grew a shade paler even than before.

"I think," she said; "that we must not wait to find out what they mean to do."

"You think we shall be able to effect a rescue?"

"We *must*."

He turned away and began to whistle, with his hands behind his back. Gemma let him think undisturbed. She was sitting still, leaning her head against the back of the chair, and looking out into vague distance with a fixed and tragic absorption. When her face wore that expression, it had a look of Dürer's "Melancholia."

"Have you seen him?" Martini asked, stopping for a moment in his tramp.

"No; he was to have met me here the next morning."

"Yes, I remember. Where is he?"

"In the fortress; very strictly guarded, and, they say, in chains."

He made a gesture of indifference.

"Oh, that's no matter; a good file will get rid of any number of chains. If only he isn't wounded——"

"He seems to have been slightly hurt, but exactly how much we don't know. I think you had better hear the account of it from Michele himself; he was present at the arrest."

"How does he come not to have been taken too? Did he run away and leave Rivarez in the lurch?"

"It's not his fault; he fought as long as anybody did, and followed the directions given him to the letter. For that matter, so did they all. The only person who seems to have forgotten, or somehow made a mistake at the last minute, is Rivarez himself. There's something inexplicable about it altogether. Wait a moment; I will call Michele."

She went out of the room, and presently came back with Michele and a broad-shouldered mountaineer.

"This is Marco," she said. "You have heard of him; he is one of the smugglers. He has just got here, and perhaps will be able to tell us more. Michele, this is Cesare Martini, that I spoke to you about. Will you tell him what happened, as far as you saw it?"

Michele gave a short account of the skirmish with the squadron.

"I can't understand how it happened," he concluded. "Not one of us would have left him if we had thought he would be taken; but his directions were quite precise, and it never occurred to us, when he threw down his cap, that he would wait to let them surround him. He was close beside the roan—I saw him cut the tether—and I

handed him a loaded pistol myself before I mounted. The only thing I can suppose is that he missed his footing,—being lame,—in trying to mount. But even then, he could have fired.”

“No, it wasn’t that,” Marcone interposed. “He didn’t attempt to mount. I was the last one to go, because my mare shied at the firing; and I looked round to see whether he was safe. He would have got off clear if it hadn’t been for the Cardinal.”

“Ah!” Gemma exclaimed softly; and Martini repeated in amazement: “The Cardinal?”

“Yes; he threw himself in front of the pistol—confound him! I suppose Rivarez must have been startled, for he dropped his pistol-hand and put the other one up like this”—laying the back of his left wrist across his eyes—“and of course they all rushed on him.”

“I can’t make that out,” said Michele. “It’s not like Rivarez to lose his head at a crisis.”

“Probably he lowered his pistol for fear of killing an unarmed man,” Martini put in. Michele shrugged his shoulders.

“Unarmed men shouldn’t poke their noses into the middle of a fight. War is war. If Rivarez had put a bullet into His Eminence, instead of letting himself be caught like a tame rabbit, there’d be one honest man the more and one priest the less.”

He turned away, biting his moustache. His anger was very near to breaking down in tears.

“Anyway,” said Martini, “the thing’s done, and there’s no use wasting time in discussing how it happened. The question now is how we’re to arrange an escape for him. I suppose you’re all willing to risk it?”

Michele did not even condescend to answer the superfluous question, and the smuggler only remarked with a little laugh: “I’d shoot my own brother, if he weren’t willing.”

“Very well, then— First thing; have you got a plan of the fortress?”

Gemma unlocked a drawer and took out several sheets of paper.

“I have made out all the plans. Here is the ground floor of the fortress; here are the upper and lower stories of the towers, and here the plan of the ramparts. These are the roads leading to the valley, and here are the paths and hiding-places in the mountains, and the underground passages.”

“Do you know which of the towers he is in?”

“The east one, in the round room with the grated window. I have marked it on the plan.”

“How did you get your information?”

“From a man nicknamed ‘The Cricket,’ a soldier of the guard. He is cousin to one of our men—Gino.”

“You have been quick about it.”

“There’s no time to lose. Gino went into Brisighella at once; and some of the plans we already had. That list of hiding-places was made by Rivarez himself; you can see by the handwriting.”

“What sort of men are the soldiers of the guard?”

“That we have not been able to find out yet; the Cricket has only just come to the place, and knows nothing about the other men.”

“We must find out from Gino what the Cricket himself is like. Is anything known of the govern-

ment's intentions? Is Rivarez likely to be tried in Brisighella or taken in to Ravenna?"

"That we don't know. Ravenna, of course, is the chief town of the Legation and by law cases of importance can be tried only there, in the Tribunal of First Instance. But law doesn't count for much in the Four Legations; it depends on the personal fancy of anybody who happens to be in power."

"They won't take him in to Ravenna," Michele interposed.

"What makes you think so?"

"I am sure of it. Colonel Ferrari, the military Governor at Brisighella, is uncle to the officer that Rivarez wounded; he's a vindictive sort of brute and won't give up a chance to spite an enemy."

"You think he will try to keep Rivarez here?"

"I think he will try to get him hanged."

Martini glanced quickly at Gemma. She was very pale, but her face had not changed at the words. Evidently the idea was no new one to her.

"He can hardly do that without some formality," she said quietly; "but he might possibly get up a court-martial on some pretext or other, and justify himself afterwards by saying that the peace of the town required it."

"But what about the Cardinal? Would he consent to things of that kind?"

"He has no jurisdiction in military affairs."

"No, but he has great influence. Surely the Governor would not venture on such a step without his consent?"

"He'll never get that," Marcone interrupted. "Montanelli was always against the military commissions, and everything of the kind. So long as they keep him in Brisighella nothing

serious can happen; the Cardinal will always take the part of any prisoner. What I am afraid of is their taking him to Ravenna. Once there, he's lost."

"We shouldn't let him get there," said Michele. "We could manage a rescue on the road; but to get him out of the fortress here is another matter."

"I think," said Gemma; "that it would be quite useless to wait for the chance of his being transferred to Ravenna. We must make the attempt at Brisighella, and we have no time to lose. Cesare, you and I had better go over the plan of the fortress together, and see whether we can think out anything. I have an idea in my head, but I can't get over one point."

"Come, Marcone," said Michele, rising; "we will leave them to think out their scheme. I have to go across to Fognano this afternoon, and I want you to come with me. Vincenzo hasn't sent those cartridges, and they ought to have been here yesterday."

When the two men had gone, Martini went up to Gemma and silently held out his hand. She let her fingers lie in his for a moment.

"You were always a good friend, Cesare," she said at last; "and a very present help in trouble. And now let us discuss plans."

CHAPTER III.

"AND I once more most earnestly assure Your Eminence that your refusal is endangering the peace of the town."

The Governor tried to preserve the respectful