

She had not moved since their conversation began. There was no doubt, no fear, even no grief in her face; there was nothing in it but the shadow of death. The smuggler's eyes filled with tears as he looked at her.

"Make haste, Michele!" he said, throwing open the verandah door and looking out. "Aren't you nearly done, you two? There are a hundred and fifty things to do!"

Michele, followed by Gino, came in from the verandah.

"I am ready now," he said. "I only want to ask the signora——"

He was moving towards her when Martini caught him by the arm.

"Don't disturb her; she's better alone."

"Let her be!" Marcone added. "We shan't do any good by meddling. God knows, it's hard enough on all of us; but it's worse for her, poor soul!"

CHAPTER V.

FOR a week the Gadfly lay in a fearful state. The attack was a violent one, and the Governor, rendered brutal by fear and perplexity, had not only chained him hand and foot, but had insisted on his being bound to his pallet with leather straps, drawn so tight that he could not move without their cutting into the flesh. He endured everything with his dogged, bitter stoicism till the end of the sixth day. Then his pride broke down, and he piteously entreated the prison doctor for a dose of opium. The doctor was quite willing to give it; but the Governor, hearing of the request, sharply forbade "any such foolery."

"How do you know what he wants it for?" he said. "It's just as likely as not that he's shamming all the time and wants to drug the sentinel, or some such devilry. Rivarez is cunning enough for anything."

"My giving him a dose would hardly help him to drug the sentinel," replied the doctor, unable to suppress a smile. "And as for shamming—there's not much fear of that. He is as likely as not to die."

"Anyway, I won't have it given. If a man wants to be tenderly treated, he should behave accordingly. He has thoroughly deserved a little sharp discipline. Perhaps it will be a lesson to him not to play tricks with the window-bars again."

"The law does not admit of torture, though," the doctor ventured to say; "and this is coming perilously near it."

"The law says nothing about opium, I think," said the Governor snappishly.

"It is for you to decide, of course, colonel; but I hope you will let the straps be taken off at any rate. They are a needless aggravation of his misery. There's no fear of his escaping now. He couldn't stand if you let him go free."

"My good sir, a doctor may make a mistake like other people, I suppose. I have got him safe strapped now, and he's going to stop so."

"At least, then, have the straps a little loosened. It is downright barbarity to keep them drawn so tight."

"They will stop exactly as they are; and I will thank you, sir, not to talk about barbarity to me. If I do a thing, I have a reason for it."

So the seventh night passed without any relief, and the soldier stationed on guard at the cell door crossed himself, shuddering, over and over again, as he listened all night long to heart-rending moans. The Gadfly's endurance was failing him at last.

At six in the morning the sentinel, just before going off duty, unlocked the door softly and entered the cell. He knew that he was committing a serious breach of discipline, but could not bear to go away without offering the consolation of a friendly word.

He found the Gadfly lying still, with closed eyes and parted lips. He stood silent for a moment; then stooped down and asked:

"Can I do anything for you, sir? I have only a minute."

The Gadfly opened his eyes. "Let me alone!" he moaned. "Let me alone——"

He was asleep almost before the soldier had slipped back to his post.

Ten days afterwards the Governor called again at the palace, but found that the Cardinal had gone to visit a sick man at Pieve d'Ottavo, and was not expected home till the afternoon. That evening, just as he was sitting down to dinner, his servant came in to announce:

"His Eminence would like to speak to you."

The Governor, with a hasty glance into the looking glass, to make sure that his uniform was in order, put on his most dignified air, and went into the reception room, where Montanelli was sitting, beating his hand gently on the arm of the chair and looking out of the window with an anxious line between his brows.

"I heard that you called to-day," he said, cut-

ting short the Governor's polite speeches with a slightly imperious manner which he never adopted in speaking to the country folk. "It was probably on the business about which I have been wishing to speak to you."

"It was about Rivarez, Your Eminence."

"So I supposed. I have been thinking the matter over these last few days. But before we go into that, I should like to hear whether you have anything new to tell me."

The Governor pulled his moustaches with an embarrassed air.

"The fact is, I came to know whether Your Eminence had anything to tell me. If you still have an objection to the course I proposed taking, I should be sincerely glad of your advice in the matter; for, honestly, I don't know what to do."

"Is there any new difficulty?"

"Only that next Thursday is the 3d of June,—Corpus Domini,—and somehow or other the matter must be settled before then."

"Thursday is Corpus Domini, certainly; but why must it be settled especially before then?"

"I am exceedingly sorry, Your Eminence, if I seem to oppose you, but I can't undertake to be responsible for the peace of the town if Rivarez is not got rid of before then. All the roughest set in the hills collects here for that day, as Your Eminence knows, and it is more than probable that they may attempt to break open the fortress gates and take him out. They won't succeed; I'll take care of that, if I have to sweep them from the gates with powder and shot. But we are very likely to have something of that kind before the day is over. Here in the Romagna there is bad

blood in the people, and when once they get out their knives——”

“I think with a little care we can prevent matters going as far as knives. I have always found the people of this district easy to get on with, if they are reasonably treated. Of course, if you once begin to threaten or coerce a Romagnol he becomes unmanageable. But have you any reason for supposing a new rescue scheme is intended?”

“I heard, both this morning and yesterday, from confidential agents of mine, that a great many rumours are circulating all over the district and that the people are evidently up to some mischief or other. But one can't find out the details; if one could it would be easier to take precautions. And for my part, after the fright we had the other day, I prefer to be on the safe side. With such a cunning fox as Rivarez one can't be too careful.”

“The last I heard about Rivarez was that he was too ill to move or speak. Is he recovering, then?”

“He seems much better now, Your Eminence. He certainly has been very ill—unless he was shamming all the time.”

“Have you any reason for supposing that likely?”

“Well, the doctor seems convinced that it was all genuine; but it's a very mysterious kind of illness. Any way, he is recovering, and more intractable than ever.”

“What has he done now?”

“There's not much he can do, fortunately,” the Governor answered, smiling as he remembered the straps. “But his behaviour is something in-

describable. Yesterday morning I went into the cell to ask him a few questions; he is not well enough yet to come to me for interrogation—and indeed, I thought it best not to run any risk of the people seeing him until he recovers. Such absurd stories always get about at once.”

“So you went there to interrogate him?”

“Yes, Your Eminence. I hoped he would be more amenable to reason now.”

Montanelli looked him over deliberately, almost as if he had been inspecting a new and disagreeable animal. Fortunately, however, the Governor was fingering his sword-belt, and did not see the look. He went on placidly:

“I have not subjected him to any particular severities, but I have been obliged to be rather strict with him—especially as it is a military prison—and I thought that perhaps a little indulgence might have a good effect. I offered to relax the discipline considerably if he would behave in a reasonable manner; and how does Your Eminence suppose he answered me? He lay looking at me a minute, like a wolf in a cage, and then said quite softly: ‘Colonel, I can't get up and strangle you; but my teeth are pretty good; you had better take your throat a little further off.’ He is as savage as a wild-cat.”

“I am not surprised to hear it,” Montanelli answered quietly. “But I came to ask you a question. Do you honestly believe that the presence of Rivarez in the prison here constitutes a serious danger to the peace of the district?”

“Most certainly I do, Your Eminence.”

“You think that, to prevent the risk of bloodshed, it is absolutely necessary that he should somehow be got rid of before Corpus Domini?”

"I can only repeat that if he is here on Thursday, I do not expect the festival to pass over without a fight, and I think it likely to be a serious one."

"And you think that if he were not here there would be no such danger?"

"In that case, there would either be no disturbance at all, or at most a little shouting and stone-throwing. If Your Eminence can find some way of getting rid of him, I will undertake that the peace shall be kept. Otherwise, I expect most serious trouble. I am convinced that a new rescue plot is on hand, and Thursday is the day when we may expect the attempt. Now, if on that very morning they suddenly find that he is not in the fortress at all, their plan fails of itself, and they have no occasion to begin fighting. But if we have to repulse them, and the daggers once get drawn among such throngs of people, we are likely to have the place burnt down before night-fall."

"Then why do you not send him in to Ravenna?"

"Heaven knows, Your Eminence, I should be thankful to do it! But how am I to prevent the people rescuing him on the way? I have not soldiers enough to resist an armed attack; and all these mountaineers have got knives or flint-locks or some such thing."

"You still persist, then, in wishing for a court-martial, and in asking my consent to it?"

"Pardon me, Your Eminence; I ask you only one thing—to help me prevent riots and bloodshed. I am quite willing to admit that the military commissions, such as that of Colonel Freddi, were sometimes unnecessarily severe, and irritated

instead of subduing the people; but I think that in this case a court-martial would be a wise measure and in the long run a merciful one. It would prevent a riot, which in itself would be a terrible disaster, and which very likely might cause a return of the military commissions His Holiness has abolished."

The Governor finished his little speech with much solemnity, and waited for the Cardinal's answer. It was a long time coming; and when it came was startlingly unexpected.

"Colonel Ferrari, do you believe in God?"

"Your Eminence!" the colonel gasped in a voice full of exclamation-stops.

"Do you believe in God?" Montanelli repeated, rising and looking down at him with steady, searching eyes. The colonel rose too.

"Your Eminence, I am a Christian man, and have never yet been refused absolution."

Montanelli lifted the cross from his breast.

"Then swear on the cross of the Redeemer Who died for you, that you have been speaking the truth to me."

The colonel stood still and gazed at it blankly. He could not quite make up his mind which was mad, he or the Cardinal.

"You have asked me," Montanelli went on, "to give my consent to a man's death. Kiss the cross, if you dare, and tell me that you believe there is no other way to prevent greater bloodshed. And remember that if you tell me a lie you are imperilling your immortal soul."

After a little pause, the Governor bent down and put the cross to his lips.

"I believe it," he said.

Montanelli turned slowly away.

"I will give you a definite answer to-morrow. But first I must see Rivarez and speak to him alone."

"Your Eminence—if I might suggest—I am sure you will regret it. For that matter, he sent me a message yesterday, by the guard, asking to see Your Eminence; but I took no notice of it, because——"

"Took no notice!" Montanelli repeated. "A man in such circumstances sent you a message, and you took no notice of it?"

"I am sorry if Your Eminence is displeased. I did not wish to trouble you over a mere impertinence like that; I know Rivarez well enough by now to feel sure that he only wanted to insult you. And, indeed, if you will allow me to say so, it would be most imprudent to go near him alone; he is really dangerous—so much so, in fact, that I have thought it necessary to use some physical restraint of a mild kind——"

"And you really think there is much danger to be apprehended from one sick and unarmed man, who is under physical restraint of a mild kind?" Montanelli spoke quite gently, but the colonel felt the sting of his quiet contempt, and flushed under it resentfully.

"Your Eminence will do as you think best," he said in his stiffest manner. "I only wished to spare you the pain of hearing this man's awful blasphemies."

"Which do you think the more grievous misfortune for a Christian man; to hear a blasphemous word uttered, or to abandon a fellow-creature in extremity?"

The Governor stood erect and stiff, with his official face, like a face of wood. He was deeply

offended at Montanelli's treatment of him, and showed it by unusual ceremoniousness.

"At what time does Your Eminence wish to visit the prisoner?" he asked.

"I will go to him at once."

"As Your Eminence pleases. If you will kindly wait a few moments, I will send someone to prepare him."

The Governor had come down from his official pedestal in a great hurry. He did not want Montanelli to see the straps.

"Thank you; I would rather see him as he is, without preparation. I will go straight up to the fortress. Good-evening, colonel; you may expect my answer to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER VI.

HEARING the cell-door unlocked, the Gadfly turned away his eyes with languid indifference. He supposed that it was only the Governor, coming to worry him with another interrogation. Several soldiers mounted the narrow stair, their carbines clanking against the wall; then a deferential voice said: "It is rather steep here, Your Eminence."

He started convulsively, and then shrank down, catching his breath under the stinging pressure of the straps.

Montanelli came in with the sergeant and three guards.

"If Your Eminence will kindly wait a moment," the sergeant began nervously, "one of my men will bring a chair. He has just gone to fetch it.