

"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.

Your Eminence will excuse us—if we had been expecting you, we should have been prepared.”

“There is no need for any preparation. Will you kindly leave us alone, sergeant; and wait at the foot of the stairs with your men?”

“Yes, Your Eminence. Here is the chair; shall I put it beside him?”

The Gadfly was lying with closed eyes; but he felt that Montanelli was looking at him.

“I think he is asleep, Your Eminence,” the sergeant was beginning, but the Gadfly opened his eyes.

“No,” he said.

As the soldiers were leaving the cell they were stopped by a sudden exclamation from Montanelli; and, turning back, saw that he was bending down to examine the straps.

“Who has been doing this?” he asked. The sergeant fumbled with his cap.

“It was by the Governor’s express orders, Your Eminence.”

“I had no idea of this, Signor Rivarez,” Montanelli said in a voice of great distress.

“I told Your Eminence,” the Gadfly answered, with his hard smile, “that I n-n-never expected to be patted on the head.”

“Sergeant, how long has this been going on?”

“Since he tried to escape, Your Eminence.”

“That is, nearly a week? Bring a knife and cut these off at once.”

“May it please Your Eminence, the doctor wanted to take them off, but Colonel Ferrari wouldn’t allow it.”

“Bring a knife at once.” Montanelli had not raised his voice, but the soldiers could see that he was white with anger. The sergeant took a clasp-

knife from his pocket, and bent down to cut the arm-strap. He was not a skilful-fingered man; and he jerked the strap tighter with an awkward movement, so that the Gadfly winced and bit his lip in spite of all his self-control. Montanelli came forward at once.

“You don’t know how to do it; give me the knife.”

“Ah-h-h!” The Gadfly stretched out his arms with a long, rapturous sigh as the strap fell off. The next instant Montanelli had cut the other one, which bound his ankles.

“Take off the irons, too, sergeant; and then come here. I want to speak to you.”

He stood by the window, looking on, till the sergeant threw down the fetters and approached him.

“Now,” he said, “tell me everything that has been happening.”

The sergeant, nothing loath, related all that he knew of the Gadfly’s illness, of the “disciplinary measures,” and of the doctor’s unsuccessful attempt to interfere.

“But I think, Your Eminence,” he added, “that the colonel wanted the straps kept on as a means of getting evidence.”

“Evidence?”

“Yes, Your Eminence; the day before yesterday I heard him offer to have them taken off if he”—with a glance at the Gadfly—“would answer a question he had asked.”

Montanelli clenched his hand on the window-sill, and the soldiers glanced at one another; they had never seen the gentle Cardinal angry before. As for the Gadfly, he had forgotten their existence; he had forgotten everything except the

physical sensation of freedom. He was cramped in every limb; and now stretched, and turned, and twisted about in a positive ecstasy of relief.

"You can go now, sergeant," the Cardinal said. "You need not feel anxious about having committed a breach of discipline; it was your duty to tell me when I asked you. See that no one disturbs us. I will come out when I am ready."

When the door had closed behind the soldiers, he leaned on the window-sill and looked for a while at the sinking sun, so as to leave the Gadfly a little more breathing time.

"I have heard," he said presently, leaving the window, and sitting down beside the pallet, "that you wish to speak to me alone. If you feel well enough to tell me what you wanted to say, I am at your service."

He spoke very coldly, with a stiff, imperious manner that was not natural to him. Until the straps were off, the Gadfly was to him simply a grievously wronged and tortured human being; but now he recalled their last interview, and the deadly insult with which it had closed. The Gadfly looked up, resting his head lazily on one arm. He possessed the gift of slipping into graceful attitudes; and when his face was in shadow no one would have guessed through what deep waters he had been passing. But, as he looked up, the clear evening light showed how haggard and colourless he was, and how plainly the trace of the last few days was stamped on him. Montanelli's anger died away.

"I am afraid you have been terribly ill," he said. "I am sincerely sorry that I did not know of all this. I would have put a stop to it before."

The Gadfly shrugged his shoulders. "All's fair

in war," he said coolly. "Your Eminence objects to straps theoretically, from the Christian standpoint; but it is hardly fair to expect the colonel to see that. He, no doubt, would prefer not to try them on his own skin—which is j-j-just my case. But that is a matter of p-p-personal convenience. At this moment I am undermost—w-w-what would you have? It is very kind of Your Eminence, though, to call here; but perhaps that was done from the C-c-christian standpoint, too. Visiting prisoners—ah, yes! I forgot. 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the l-least of these'—it's not very complimentary, but one of the least is duly grateful."

"Signor Rivarez," the Cardinal interrupted, "I have come here on your account—not on my own. If you had not been 'undermost,' as you call it, I should never have spoken to you again after what you said to me last week; but you have the double privilege of a prisoner and a sick man, and I could not refuse to come. Have you anything to say to me, now I am here; or have you sent for me merely to amuse yourself by insulting an old man?"

There was no answer. The Gadfly had turned away, and was lying with one hand across his eyes.

"I am—very sorry to trouble you," he said at last, huskily; "but could I have a little water?"

There was a jug of water standing by the window, and Montanelli rose and fetched it. As he slipped his arm round the Gadfly to lift him, he suddenly felt the damp, cold fingers close over his wrist like a vice.

"Give me your hand—quick—just a moment," the Gadfly whispered. "Oh, what difference does it make to you? Only one minute!"

He sank down, hiding his face on Montanelli's arm, and quivering from head to foot.

"Drink a little water," Montanelli said after a moment. The Gadfly obeyed silently; then lay back on the pallet with closed eyes. He himself could have given no explanation of what had happened to him when Montanelli's hand had touched his cheek; he only knew that in all his life there had been nothing more terrible.

Montanelli drew his chair closer to the pallet and sat down. The Gadfly was lying quite motionless, like a corpse, and his face was livid and drawn. After a long silence, he opened his eyes, and fixed their haunting, spectral gaze on the Cardinal.

"Thank you," he said. "I—am sorry. I think—you asked me something?"

"You are not fit to talk. If there is anything you want to say to me, I will try to come again to-morrow."

"Please don't go, Your Eminence—indeed; there is nothing the matter with me. I—I have been a little upset these few days; it was half of it malingering, though—the colonel will tell you so if you ask him."

"I prefer to form my own conclusions," Montanelli answered quietly.

"S-so does the colonel. And occasionally, do you know, they are rather witty. You w-wouldn't think it to look at him; but s-sometimes he gets hold of an or-r-iginal idea. On Friday night, for instance—I think it was Friday, but I got a l-little mixed as to time towards the end—anyhow, I asked for a d-dose of opium—I remember that quite distinctly; and he came in here and said I m-might h-h-have it if I would

tell him who un-l-l-locked the gate. I remember his saying: 'If it's real, you'll consent; if you don't, I shall look upon it as a p-proof that you are shamming.' It n-n-never oc-c-curred to me before how comic that is; it's one of the f-f-funniest things——"

He burst into a sudden fit of harsh, discordant laughter; then, turning sharply on the silent Cardinal, went on, more and more hurriedly, and stammering so that the words were hardly intelligible:

"You d-d-don't see that it's f-f-funny? Of c-course not; you r-religious people n-n-never have any s-sense of humour—you t-take everything t-t-tragically. F-for instance, that night in the Cath-thedral—how solemn you were! By the way—w-what a path-thetic figure I must have c-cut as the pilgrim! I d-don't believe you e-even see anything c-c-comic in the b-business you have c-come about this evening."

Montanelli rose.

"I came to hear what you have to say; but I think you are too much excited to say it to-night. The doctor had better give you a sedative, and we will talk to-morrow, when you have had a night's sleep."

"S-sleep? Oh, I shall s-sleep well enough, Your Eminence, when you g-give your c-consent to the colonel's plan—an ounce of l-lead is a s-splendid sedative."

"I don't understand you," Montanelli said, turning to him with a startled look.

The Gadfly burst out laughing again.

"Your Eminence, Your Eminence, t-t-truth is the c-chief of the Christian virtues! D-d-do you th-th-think I d-d-don't know how hard the

Governor has been trying to g-get your consent to a court-martial? You had b-better by half g-give it, Your Eminence; it's only w-what all your b-brother prelates would do in your place. 'Cosi fan tutti;' and then you would be doing s-such a lot of good, and so l-little harm! Really, it's n-not worth all the sleepless nights you have been spending over it!"

"Please stop laughing a minute," Montanelli interrupted, "and tell me how you heard all this. Who has been talking to you about it?"

"H-hasn't the colonel e-e-ever told you I am a d-d-devil—not a man? No? He has t-told me so often enough! Well, I am devil enough to f-find out a little bit what p-people are thinking about. Your E-eminence is thinking that I'm a conf-founded nuisance, and you wish s-somebody else had to settle what's to be done with me, without disturbing your s-sensitive conscience. That's a p-pretty fair guess, isn't it?"

"Listen to me," the Cardinal said, sitting down again beside him, with a very grave face. "However you found out all this, it is quite true. Colonel Ferrari fears another rescue attempt on the part of your friends, and wishes to forestall it in—the way you speak of. You see, I am quite frank with you."

"Your E-eminence was always f-f-famous for truthfulness," the Gadfly put in bitterly.

"You know, of course," Montanelli went on, "that legally I have no jurisdiction in temporal matters; I am a bishop, not a legate. But I have a good deal of influence in this district; and the colonel will not, I think, venture to take so extreme a course unless he can get, at least, my tacit consent to it. Up till now I have uncondition-

ally opposed the scheme; and he has been trying very hard to conquer my objection by assuring me that there is great danger of an armed attempt on Thursday when the crowd collects for the procession—an attempt which probably would end in bloodshed. Do you follow me?"

The Gadfly was staring absently out of the window. He looked round and answered in a weary voice:

"Yes, I am listening."

"Perhaps you are really not well enough to stand this conversation to-night. Shall I come back in the morning? It is a very serious matter, and I want your whole attention."

"I would rather get it over now," the Gadfly answered in the same tone. "I follow everything you say."

"Now, if it be true," Montanelli went on, "that there is any real danger of riots and bloodshed on account of you, I am taking upon myself a tremendous responsibility in opposing the colonel; and I believe there is at least some truth in what he says. On the other hand, I am inclined to think that his judgment is warped, to a certain extent, by his personal animosity against you, and that he probably exaggerates the danger. That seems to me the more likely since I have seen this shameful brutality." He glanced at the straps and chains lying on the floor, and went on:

"If I consent, I kill you; if I refuse, I run the risk of killing innocent persons. I have considered the matter earnestly, and have sought with all my heart for a way out of this dreadful alternative. And now at last I have made up my mind."

"To kill me and s-save the innocent persons, of course—the only decision a Christian man