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IN DIREST PERIL

BY DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY

AUTHOR OF "TIME'S REVENGES" "A WASTED CRIME"
ETC.

1894

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PREFACE

It is not often that an honorable man commits a theft and yet leaves no stain upon his honor. It can happen still less often that a man of honor robs the lady he loves and honors above all womankind, and wins her hand in marriage by the act. Yet before we were married I robbed my wife of forty thousand pounds, breaking into her house to steal it; and here-now that we are both old-she is still so proud of me for having done that, that she must needs make me tell the story. A better writer would have done it better, but my wife has polished my rough phrases; and, at any rate, the plain truth about the strangest things which have happened in my knowledge is here set plainly down.

(Signed)

John Fyffe,

(Late acting) General of Division
under General Garibaldi.

IN DIREST PERIL

CHAPTER I

I have told my wife quite plainly that in my opinion I am as little fitted by nature for the task she has laid upon my shoulders as any man alive. I have spent a great part of my life in action; and though the later part of it has been quieter and more peaceful than the earlier, and though I have enjoyed opportunities of study which I never had before, I am still anything but a bookish man, and I am not at all confident about such essential matters as grammar and spelling. The history I am called upon to tell is one which, if it were put into the hands of a professed man of letters, might be made unusually interesting. I am sure of that, for in a life of strange adventure I have encountered nothing so strange. But, for my own part, the utmost I can do is to tell the thing as it happened as nearly as I can, and if I cannot command those graces of style which would come naturally to a practised pen, I can only ask that the reader will dispense with them.

The natural beginning of the story is that I fell in love with the lady who has now for eight-and-thirty blessed and happy years been my wife. It may be that I may not again find opportunity to say one thing that should be said. That lady is a pearl among women; and I am prouder of having fallen in love with her at first sight, as I did, than I should be if I had taken a city or won a pitched battle. I have sought opportunities of doing these things far and near, but they have been denied to me. I trust that I have always been on the right side. I know that, except in one case, I have always been on the weaker side; but until my marriage I was what is generally called a soldier of fortune. I am known to this day as Captain Fyffe, though I never held her most sacred Majesty's commission. That I should be delighted to fight in my country's cause goes, I hope, without saying; but I never had the opportunity, and my sword, until the date of my marriage, was always at the service of oppressed nationalities. This, however, is not my story, and I must do my best to hold to that. Should I take to blotting and erasing, there is no knowing when my task would be over. I will be as little garrulous as I can.

It was in the height of the London season of 1847, and I had just got back from the Argentine Republic. I had been fighting for General Rosas, but the man's greed and his reckless ambition had gradually drawn me away from him, and at last, after an open quarrel, I broke my sword across my knee before him, threw the fragments at his feet, and left the camp. I did it at the risk of my life; and if Rosas had cared to lift a hand, his men would have shot me or hanged me from the nearest tree with all the pleasure in the world. An event which has nothing whatever to do with this story had got into the newspapers, and for a time I was made a

lion of. I found it agreeable enough to begin with, but I was beginning to get tired of it, when the event of which I have already spoken happened. My poor friend, the Honorable George Brunow, had taken me, at the Duchess's invitation, to Belcaster House, and it was there I met my fate. There was a great crush on the stairs, and the rooms were crowded. I never once succeeded in getting as much as a glimpse of our hostess during the whole time of my stay at the house, but before half an hour had gone by I was content to miss that honor. Brunow and I, tight wedged in the crowd, were laughing and talking on the staircase, when I caught sight of a lady a step or two above me. She was signalling with her fan to a friend behind me, and I thought then, and I think still, that her smiling face was the most beautiful thing I had ever beheld. Her hair, which is pure silver now, and no less lovely, was as dark as night, but her face was full of pure color, the brow pale, the cheeks rosy, and the red of the lips unusually bright and full for an Englishwoman, as I at first thought her to be. Her beautiful figure was set off to great advantage by a simple gown of white Indian muslin—the white was of a crearaish tone, I remember, and a string of large pearls was her only ornament. My heart gave a sudden odd leap when I saw her, and I had the feeling I have known more than once when I have been ordered on a dangerous service. But the sensation did not pass away, as it does under danger when the feeling comes that action is necessary. I continued to flutter like a school-girl; and when by accident her eyes met mine, a moment later, I felt that I blushed like fire. I could read a sort of recognition in her glance, and for a moment it seemed as if she would float down the stairs, in spite of the intervening crush, and speak to me. But instead of that she sighted Brunow at my side and beckoned him.

** Note by Violet Fyffe.—My husband had saved the life of his general a day earlier, in circumstances of extraordinary heroism. I do not expect to find any record of that sort of act in any pages written by his hand.*

“Can you contrive to come to me, Mr. Brunow?” she asked, in a voice as lovely as her own eyes. They were the first words I heard her speak, and I seem to hear them again as I write them down, just as I can see her exquisite face and noble figure instinct with youth, though when I raise my eyes I can see my old wife—God bless her!—walking a little feebly in the garden, with a walking-stick of mine to help her steps.

Brunow made his way to her, and they talked for a minute. I couldn't help listening to her voice, and I heard my own name.

“You know the gentleman who stood beside you?” she asked. And Brunow answering that he and I were old friends, she said, “It is Captain Fyffe, I think.”

“No other, Miss Rossano,” said Brunow.

“Bring him here and introduce me to him,” she said. “I have a great desire to know Captain Fyffe.”

At this I hardly knew whether I stood on my head or my heels; but Brunow calling me by name, and the crush thinning just then for a moment, I made my way easily to the step below the one she stood on, and Brunow introduced us to each other. Now I had lived very much away from women all my life. I lost my mother early, and of sisters and cousins and such-like feminine furniture I had none, so that I had never had practice among them; and I speak quite honestly in saying that I would sooner have stormed a breach than have faced this young lady. Not that even my intolerable shyness and the sense of my own clumsiness before her could make it altogether disagreeable to be there, but because there was such a riot in my head—and in my heart, too—and I was mortally afraid of blurting out something which should tell her how I felt. And if you will look at it rightly, a gentleman—and when I say a gentleman I mean nothing more or less than a man of good birth and right feeling—has no right to think, even in his own heart, too admiringly of a young lady at their first meeting. At the very moment when I saw my wife I thought her, I knew her, indeed, to be the most faultlessly beautiful woman I had ever seen, and I was as certain as I am now that her soul was as flawless as her face. My heart was right, but I was too precipitate in my feelings, and if I had dared I would have knelt before her. All this, I dare say, is romantic and old-fashioned to the verge of absurdity; but it is so true that all the other truths I have known, excepting those I have no right to speak of here, seem to fall into insignificance beside it. I fell in love with my wife there and then; and without even knowing it I was vowed to her service as truly as I have been in the forty-two years that have gone by since then. I thank Heaven for it humbly, for there is nothing which can so help a man in his struggles against what is base and unworthy in himself as his love for a good woman. If that has grown to be an old-fashioned doctrine in these days I am sorry for the world. It is true, it has been true, and will be true again.

“I have heard of you often, Captain Fyffe,” said the charming voice, “and I am delighted to meet you. Your old comrade, Jack Rollinson, is a cousin of mine.”

I blushed again at this; but I could have heard nothing that would have pleased me more, for, early as it was, I would have given anything to stand well in this lady's eyes, and Rollinson and I were fast friends. I had the good-fortune to save his life in a row at Santa Fé, and from that hour poor Jack sang my praises in and out of season. I knew that if Miss Rossano had gained any opinion of me from Jack Rollinson it would not be a bad one. Indeed, my only fear was that Jack had probably praised me so far beyond my merits that nobody who had seen the portrait would have the slightest chance of recognizing the original. But when I had once heard my old comrade's name I was able to identify this charming young lady. Rollinson had more than once spoken of his beautiful cousin, Violet Rossano, and I knew a little of her history. I learned more of it that night, and myself became concerned in it in a very surprising manner.

Miss Rossano and I talked of Jack and of our common adventures, and to my delight, and the great easing of my embarrassment, she treated me almost like an old friend. She was swept off by the crowd at last; but in going she bade me call upon her at her aunt's house—Lady Rollinson's—where I might have news of my friend; and it need scarce be said that I promised eagerly to accept her invitation.

When I saw that I had seen the last of her for that evening I had no desire to stay in the crush which filled the rooms; and finding Brunow in the same mind as myself, I went away with him. Brunow lived off Regent Street, in a garret handsomely furnished and tenantable, but stuffy and confined to my notions, used as I had been to the open-air life of a soldier on active service. We threw the windows wide open, and sat down beside them with a tumbler of cool liquor apiece, Brunow with his cigar, and I with my pipe—which I was glad to get

back to after a regimen of those beastly South American cigarettes—and we made ourselves comfortable. My mind was so full of my beautiful new acquaintance that I must needs approach her in my talk, and I used Jack Rollinson as a sort of stalking-horse. Brunow, as I found out later on, was in love with her—after his fashion—which, as I shall have to show you, was not very profound or manly; but, at any rate, he was glad of a chance to talk about her, and I was glad to listen.

“That beautiful girl you met to-night,” he told me, “has a strange history. She is one-and-twenty years of age, and her father is still living, but she and he never saw each other in their lives.”

I said something to the effect that this was strange, and I asked the reason of it.

“I dare say,” Brunow answered, “that I am the only man in England who knows the truth about the matter. The world has given the Conte di Rossano up for dead years and years ago. His daughter has no idea that he is alive. Yet I saw him no more than six weeks ago.”

“And you have not told her?” I asked.

“Why should I pain her for nothing?” he demanded in his turn. “She never saw him. She never even knew enough of him to grieve for him. He is not so much as a memory in her mind. And since they can never come together, it is better for her to go on believing that he died while she was in her babyhood.”

“What is to prevent their coming together?” I asked.

“He is a prisoner,” said Brunow, gravely. “Mind you, Fyffe, I tell you this in the strictest confidence, and I know you well enough to trust you.”

I knew Brunow well enough to know that if there were any truth in the story, it would be told in the strictest confidence until it was property as common as the news of the town crier. I knew him well enough to know also that if it were not true, but merely one of his countless romances, it would be forgotten in the morning in the growth of some new invention as romantic and as baseless as itself. In any case, I gave him the assurance he asked for, and he went on with his story.

“More than two-and-twenty years ago Miss Ros-sano's grandfather, General Sir Arthur Rawlings, and his wife made a trip through Italy. They took with them their daughter Violet, and in Rome they met the Conte di Rossano, who by all accounts was then a young, rich, handsome fellow, and the hope of the National party. The National party in Italy has always had a hope of some sort, and their hope is always just about as hopeful as a sane man's despair.”

“I am not so sure of that,” I cried. “I shall live to see the Italians a free people yet!”

“You are one of the enthusiasts,” said Brunow, laughing. “And I suppose that if you got an opportunity you'd lend the cause a hand.” I said “Assuredly,” and Brunow laughed again. “Well, to keep to the story,” he went on, “the count saw Miss Rawlings, and fell head over ears in love with her at first sight. He was young, he was handsome; he had spent years in England, and spoke the language like a native. He made love like Romeo, but the young lady at first would not listen to him. He followed the party to England, stuck to his cause like a man, and finally won it. The only objection anybody had to urge against him was that he was hand in glove with the conspirators against Austrian rule. The Austrian's were just as much a fixture in Italy as they are at this day; the Italians were just as hotly bent as they are now on getting rid of them, and Sir Arthur, who was an old diplomat, was afraid of the prospective son-in-law's political ideas. He tried at first to make marriage a question of surrender of the cause, but the count was ultra-romantic, ultra-patriotic, ultra-Italian all over in point of fact. Not even for love's sake would he throw over his country, and, oddly enough, it was this bit of romanticism which clinched the lady's affection.”

“And why oddly?” I asked him.

“My dear fellow,” said Brunow, “why should I characterize or analyze a woman's whims. The story is the main point. Miss Rawlings married the count. Within three months of their marriage the count went back to Italy to assist in the stirring up of some confounded Italian hot-pot or other, and was never heard of again. Seven or eight months after, the girl you met to-night was born. Her mother died a few months later. The count's estates were confiscated by the Austrian government, and the little orphan was bred by her grandparents. They are dead now, and Miss Rossano is chaperoned by her aunt, Lady Rollinson, and lives with her. When she is two-and-twenty she will come in for her dead mother's money, some forty or maybe fifty thousand pounds. In the meantime she inherits some two thousand a year from her grandfather. There are better things in the marriage market, but—”

There he stopped and sipped at his tumbler, and I sat thinking for a while. Barring that one little point in the story at which Brunow introduced himself, I was disposed to give the history entire credence. But that Brunow should have seen the mournful hero of the tale within the last six weeks was altogether too like Brunow to be believed without some confirmation. One rarely tells even the most practised romancer outright and in so many words that he is not telling the truth, but I fenced for a time.

“And the count's alive, you say?”

“Alive? I saw him barely six weeks ago. I'll tell you all about it.” He leaned forward in his chair, and I would have sworn that he was inventing as he went on. “I was at a little place called Itzia, in the Tyrol, when by pure chance I stumbled on a fellow I had known in Paris and Vienna—a fellow named Reschia, Lieutenant Reschia. He was on General Radetsky's staff when I knew him first—an empty-headed fellow rather; but a man's glad to meet anybody in a place like Itzia; and when he asked me to dine with him at the fortress, I was jolly glad to go. ‘We've got an old file here,’ he told me, ‘the Italians would give anything to get hold of if they only knew where he was. I believe they'd tear the place down with their nails to get at him.’ It was after dinner, and he was ridiculously confidential. He pledged me to secrecy of course, and of course I told him that I should respect any confidence he reposed in me. Of course I did, out there; and equally, of course, I'm not bound here. It came out they'd got the Conte di Rossano there, and when I heard the name I jumped. Reschia didn't take notice of my surprise, and after a time I said I should like to see the fellow. He pointed him out to me next day, taking exercise in the court-yard.”

“The count,” I said, still less than doubtful of the truth of Brunow's story—“the count must have been a man of unusual importance to the political party to be remembered with such a passionate devotion after so many

years."

"God bless your soul," cried Brunow, "it was devotion! Those Austrian fellows are as cunning as the devil. The Italians have been made to believe these twenty years that the count was playing fast and loose with both parties. His jailers made out that he had been a paid spy in their service, and pretended that he had been killed by one of the Nationalist party, whom they hanged."

"Of course you made no effort to release him?"

"How the deuce could I? Release him! If you knew the fortress at Itzia you'd think twice before trying that. Besides—hang it all, man!—I was Reschia's guest; and he told me the story under the seal of confession."

I spoke unguardedly, but I was not allowed to go far.

"If your story is true, Brunow—"

"What do you mean by that?" he asked, with sudden anger. Everybody knew how utterly irresponsible he was, but nothing made him so angry as to be doubted. "The story's true; and if proof were wanted, here is proof enough."

He rose with unusual vivacity, and, throwing open an escritoire, took from it a disorderly little pile of papers. He searched this through, muttering in a wounded tone meanwhile. "True? If the story's true? I'll show you whether it's true or not! No! By George, it isn't here! Now where on earth can I have put that paper?"

Just as I was laughing inwardly to think how well he thought it worth while to pretend, he slapped his forehead with a sudden air of recollection, turned again to the escritoire, drew from it a crumpled dirty scrap of paper, and striding over to me thrust it into my hand. "Read that," he said.

"These lines," I read, "are written by the Conte di Rossano, for more than twenty years a prisoner in the fortress of Itzia. They are carried at grave danger to himself by an attendant whose pity has been moved by the contemplation of a life of great misery. Should they reach the hands of the English stranger for whom they are intended, he is besought, for the love of God, to convey them to the Contessa di Rossano, daughter of Sir Arthur Rawlings, of Barston Manor, Warwickshire, who must long have mourned the writer as dead."

"That was slipped into my hand as I was leaving the village," said Brunow. "If the countess had been living—unless she had been married again—I should have thought it my duty to let her know the truth. But Miss Rossano knows nothing—guesses nothing. Why should I wound her with a piece of news like this?"

We did not talk much more that night, but I had plenty to think about as I walked home to my hotel.

CHAPTER II

If I had never seen that pencilled scrap of paper, I should have had no belief in Brunow's story. But though he was a romancer to his finger tips, and as irresponsible as a baby, I had never known him to take the least trouble to bolster up any of his inventions, or to show the least shame when he was discovered in a lie. I am told that people who suffer from kleptomania cannot be taught to be ashamed of stealing, though even a dog has grace enough to be abashed if you catch him in an act of dishonesty. I have met in my lifetime two or three men like Brunow, who lie without temptation, and who do not feel disgraced when detected.

For once I could not help believing him, and his story stuck in my mind in a very disagreeable way, for Miss Rossano fairly haunted me, and anything which was associated with her had an importance in my eyes. It was a hard thing to think that such a living tragedy should be so close to a creature so young and bright and happy. I praised Brunow in my own mind for his sensible resolution to keep the secret of her father's existence from her, but I was constantly thinking whether there might not be some possibility of setting the prisoner free. If I had been a rich man I could see quite enough chance of adventure to tempt me to the enterprise. I hated the Austrian rule with all my heart and soul, as at that time the Austrian rule deserved that every freeborn Englishman should hate it. The thought of Italian independence set my blood on fire, and I would as soon have fought for that cause as for any in the world.

I don't care to talk much about my own character, but I have often laughed to hear myself spoken of as a man whose life has been guided by romantic considerations. If I know anything about myself at all it is that I am severely practical. I could not even think of so far-away an enterprise as the attempted rescue of the count, a thing which, at the time, I was altogether unlikely and unable to attempt, without taking account of all the pros and cons, so, far as I could see them. In my own mind I laid special stress on the friendly attendant mentioned in the count's brief and pathetic letter. I felt sure that if I only had money enough to make that fellow feel safe about his future, I could have got the prisoner away. For in my own practical, hard-headed way I had got at the maps of the country and had studied the roads and had read up every line I could find.

If I try to explain what kept me a whole four weeks from accepting Miss Rossano's invitation to call upon her at the house of her aunt, Lady Rollinson, I am not at all sure that I shall succeed; I can say quite truly that there was not a waking hour in all that time in which she did not occupy my mind. Every morning I resolved that I would make the promised call, and every day dwindled into midnight without my having done it. I need not say that I was by this time aware of the condition of my heart. I ridiculed myself without avail, and tried to despise myself as a feather-headed fellow who had become a woman's captive at a glance. It was certainly not her wealth and my poverty which kept me away from her, for I never gave that matter a single thought—nor should I at any time in my life have regarded money as an inducement to marriage, or the want of it as a bar. It was no exalted idea of her birth as compared with mine, for I am one of the Fyffes of Dumbartonshire, and there is as good blood in my veins as flows from the heart of any Italian that ever wore a head. The plain fact, so far as I can make myself plain, is that I had already determined to win Miss Rossano for myself if I

could, and that I felt that she deserved to be approached with delicacy and reserve. I knew all the while that I might be wasting chances, and I endured a good deal of trouble on that account. But four whole weeks went by before I ventured to obey her invitation to call, and by that time I was sore afraid that she had forgotten all about me.

It was Lady Rollinson herself who received me; a fat and comfortable lady of something more than fifty, as I should judge, though it is a perilous thing for a man to be meddling with guesses at a lady's age. She looked as if she could enjoy a good dinner, and as if she liked to have things soft and cosey about her; but in spite of that, she wore a countenance of pronounced kindness, and received me, so to speak, with open arms. Her son, Jack, had inspired her with all manner of absurd beliefs about me, and she praised me to my face about my courage until I felt inclined to prove it by running away from an old woman. I assured her of what was actually the fact, that Jack's rescue was a very ordinary business, and accompanied by very little danger to myself; but this set her praising my modesty (which has never been my strong point), and I thought it best to turn the conversation. I ventured to hope that Miss Rossano was well.

"I am very sorry to tell you," said Lady Rollinson, "that Miss Rossano is very unwell indeed. She has been greatly upset this morning. We have had the strangest news, and I don't know whether we ought to believe it or not. I don't think I have ever been so flustered in my life; and as for Violet, poor dear, it's no wonder that she's disturbed by it, for she's one of the tenderest-hearted girls in the world, and the idea that she has been happy all the time is quite enough to kill anybody, I am sure."

Lady Rollinson rambled in this wise, and if I had had nothing to go on beforehand I should not have been able to make head or tail of her discourse; but Brunow's story flashed into my mind in a second, and I was sure that in some fashion it had reached Miss Rossano's ears. She gave me no time to offer a question, even if I had been disposed to do it, but started off again at once, and put all chance of doubt to rest.

"Poor Violet doesn't remember her father, for he has been supposed to be dead this twenty years; but he was the Conte di Rossano, a very handsome and charming young Italian gentleman, and I remember his courting Violet's mother as if it were only yesterday. The poor dear girl has the right to call herself the Contessa di Rossano; but that would be little use to her, for the Austrian government confiscated all her father's estates, and she never saw a penny from them, and I don't suppose she ever will. But her father went to Italy before she was born, and now it turns out that in place of being killed there, as every one thought at the time, he was taken prisoner by the Austrians. He's alive still, it seems, and a hopeless prisoner. Poor Violet only learned the truth last night, and she has done nothing but cry ever since."

I said I had heard the story from Brunow, but that I understood he had bound himself to strict secrecy about it.

"He might as well have held his tongue," cried her ladyship, "for all the good talking can do. But I've known George Brunow all his life, Captain Fyffe, and of course the idea of his keeping a secret is absurd. Mr. Brunow would talk a dog's hind-leg off, and you can't believe a quarter of the things he says. Only in this case he got a letter from the count, and some busybody persuaded him to surrender it, and brought it to poor Violet, and she has compared the handwriting with some letters of her father's which came to her from her poor dear mother, and she's quite convinced that it's the same, though twenty years is a long time, and a man's writing changes very often in less than that."

I heard a rustle in the room, and, turning, I saw Miss Rossano standing within a yard or two of us. How much of our conversation she had heard I could not tell, but I was certain from her look that she knew its purport.

"Good-morning, Captain Fyffe," she said, holding out her hand. I rose and took it in my own, and found that it burned like fire. Her eyelids were red and heavy, but her cheeks were almost colorless. She told me long afterwards that the pity she saw in my looks almost broke her down, and, indeed, I remember well how I felt when I saw her beautiful mouth trembling with the pain and sorrow which lay at her heart. She kept her self-possession, however, but by a sort of feminine instinct, I suppose, she sat down with her face away from the light, and when she spoke again no one who had not known the condition of affairs would have guessed, from the firm and even tones of her voice, that she suffered as she did. I think very highly of courage, whether in a man or in a woman, and I have no words to say how I admired her self-control.

"My aunt has been telling you of my dreadful news," she began, and I answered with a mere nod. Her next words almost took my breath away. "I am glad that you have called, and if you had not done so, I should have taken the liberty to send for you. You are a man of courage and experience, Captain Fyffe, and I wish to ask your advice and help."

I answered that I should be glad to render any service in my power, but I was afraid to show how eager I was to be of use to her, and I thought that my answer sounded grudging and reluctant.

"Thank you," she said, simply. I could see her great eyes shining from the dusk in which she sat, and they seemed never to leave my face for a moment. "I heard you say just now that Mr. Brunow had told you the story. Did he show you this?"

She drew a scrap of paper from the bosom of her dress, and I took it from her hand. I told her I had seen it before, and returned it to her.

"Without this," she went on, "I should have had no faith in Mr. Brunow's statement; but I have compared it with old letters of my father's, and I have no doubt that it was written by his hand. Now, Captain Fyffe"—she did her hardest to be business-like and commonplace in manner through all this interview, and my honor and esteem rose higher every moment—"now, Captain Fyffe, I want to ask you if in your judgment there is anything which can be done. I come to you—I tell you frankly—because you have already done my family one incalculable service. It is a poor way of offering thanks to burden you with a new trouble."

"If I have done anything to save you from grief or trouble, Miss Rossano," I replied, "I can ask for no better reward than to be allowed to repeat my service."

If she had been anybody but the woman she was she might have accepted my words, which I knew were spoken with coldness and restraint, as a mere surface compliment of no value. But I never knew her yet

mistaken' in respect of that one virtue of sincerity. It is especially her own, and it is the touchstone by which a true heart tests all others.

"Thank you," she answered, simply.

I told her it was four weeks that day since I had first heard of the matter, and that I had since given it a good deal of practical consideration. I drew for her a rough map of the country, showing the roads, marking the places where guards were posted, and so on, and I gave her what information I had been able to acquire about the rates of possible travel. From Itzia I calculated we could, if well mounted, cross the frontier in about nine hours. There were no telegraph wires in that region in those days, and I pointed out that with a start of a single hour escape was probable. I laid stress on the value of the sympathetic attendant, and she hung with clasped hands and suspended breath on every word I spoke.

"You have thought of all this already?" she asked, when I had said all I then had to say.

"I have thought of little else," I answered. "But now I must tell you that all this will cost money."

"We can see to that," said Lady Rollinson, who was almost as interested as her niece. She showed it another way; for while Miss Rossano had listened without a word, the old lady had been full of starts and ejaculations.

"I must be able to tell the man on whose aid I shall have to rely that the relatives of the count are wealthy, and that they will reward him handsomely. I may even have to promise him an independence for life."

"You may promise him anything it is in my power to give him," cried Miss Rossano. "If I could secure my father's liberty I would surrender every penny I have in the world."

"The man is a common soldier," I responded. "He has his rations and his clothes, and a few copper coins a day to find him a little beer and tobacco. To such a man a pension of a pound a week would look like Paradise. Much depends on his condition. If he is a single man, I may secure him. If he is married and has a family, I shall find greater difficulties in the way. The great thing is not to hope too much. I will try, if you will allow me, and I will leave no stone unturned."

"Captain Fyffe, how shall I thank you?" cried Miss Rossano.

"I shall be repaid, madame," I answered, "if I succeed." She did not understand me then, but I told her afterwards what my meaning had been. I told her that I should have earned the right, if I brought her father back with me, to tell her I had earned the right to say that I knew no such pride as to live or die in her service. And that was simply true, though I had as yet met her but twice. I think that love at first sight must be a commoner thing than many people imagine. If it was so real with a sober-sided, hard-headed fellow like myself, who had spent all the years of his manhood in rough-and-tumble warfare, what must it be with romantic and high-strung people who are more naturally prone to it.

"You will run great risks, Captain Fyffe," said her ladyship.

"It has been the habit of my life," I answered, "to run as few risks as possible."

"I hardly know if we have the right to ask you to undertake such a hair-brained enterprise," she said again.

"I have not waited to be asked, Lady Rollinson. I am a volunteer."

"Give us at least a hint of what you propose to do," urged her ladyship. "Let us be sure that you do not intend to run into danger."

"It would be futile to plan until I am on the spot," I answered; "and as for danger—I shall meet nothing I can avoid."

"I shall trust Captain Fyffe entirely," said Miss Rossano. "As for money, Captain Fyffe," she added, turning to me, "you must not be cramped in that respect. Will you call and see my bankers to-morrow?"

"I should prefer," I answered, "to start to-night. I have ample funds for my immediate purposes, and I shall make my way, in the first place, to Vienna. Tell me your banker's name, and I will find out his agents there. And now good-bye, Miss Rossano. I cannot promise success, but I will do what I can."

She answered that she was sure of that; and when she had given me the name of her bankers and I had made a note of it, we shook hands and parted. For my own part I was glad that Lady Rollinson's presence made our parting commonplace.

I hailed the first hackney carriage I met and drove to my rooms. There I found my passport, and went with it to the Foreign Office, where, through the good offices of an old schoolfellow, I had it *vised* without loss of time, and then home again to pack. Travelling was slower then than it is to-day, but we thought it mighty rapid, and scarcely to be improved upon, it differed so from the post-chaise and stage-coach crawl of a few years before. There was no direct correspondence between Hamburgh and Vienna, but the journey was shorter by a day than it had been when I had last made it. I reached the Austrian capital after an entirely adventureless journey, and felt that my enterprise was begun.

I called at the Embassy, and had my papers finally put in order. I called on the Viennese agents of Miss Rossano's bankers, and found that no less a sum than one thousand pounds had been placed to my credit. Not only was this liberal provision made for contingencies, but I received a letter from Miss Rossano telling me that anything within her means was fully at my disposal. I thought it not unlikely that with so persuasive a sum behind me I might be able to win over the kindly jailer to our side. My thoughts were very often with this man, and I spent a good deal of useless time in speculating about him. Was he married or single? That was a point on which much depended, and I was half inclined to pray that he might prove to be a bachelor. Marital responsibilities were all against my hopes. Marital confidences might well upset the best-laid plans I could devise.

I was thinking thus as I paced the Ring Strasse on the third day after my arrival in Vienna. I lingered in the capital against the grain, for I was eager to be at work, but it was part of a policy which I had already settled. Itzia was not the sort of place for which one would make a straight road, unless one had special business there, and it was the merest seeming of having any special business there which I was profoundly anxious to avoid. So I lingered in Vienna, and on this third day, pacing the chief street, I felt a sudden hand clapped upon my shoulder, and, turning, faced Brunow.

"Here you are," he cried, still keeping his hand upon my shoulder as I turned. "I have been to the bank and to your hotel. I have been hunting you, in point of fact, all day, and here at last I come upon you by chance."

"What brings you in Vienna?" I asked him. I did my best to be cordial, but I was sorry for his intrusion, and would willingly have known him to be a thousand miles away.

He glanced swiftly and warily about him, and, seeing nobody within ear-shot, answered in an easy tone:

"I have come to assist in your enterprise, Fyffe, and I mean to see you through it."

"I think," I told him, "that I prefer to go through my enterprise alone."

"My dear fellow," said Brunow, "I couldn't dream of allowing you to run any risk alone in such a cause. And besides that, I have a little selfish reason of my own. In addition, you don't speak the language, and will be in a thousand corners. I was bred here, and speak the language like a native. I have already the *entree* to the place you desire to get into, and I can introduce you. My sympathetic friend—" He broke off suddenly because a foot-passenger drew near. "It is, as you say, a beastly journey, but, as you say again, it's done with, and when you know Vienna as well as I do, you will say it pays for the trouble ten times over. Vienna, my dear fellow, is the jolliest and the handsomest city in the world." The passenger went by, and he resumed at the dropped word. "My sympathetic friend will recognize me, and at my return will be immediately on the *qui vive*. Negotiations will be as good as opened the very minute of my arrival. You'll want an interpreter, and here am I sworn to the cause, and secret as the tomb. In effect, I'm going, and I don't see how the deuce you expected to get on without me."

"I suppose," I asked him, "you know what to expect if we fail and are caught?"

He took me by the arm and walked with me along the road, sinking his voice to a confidential murmur.

"You're a son of Mars, Fyffe, and you ought to be able to understand my feelings. You've met Miss Rossano, and I dare say you can understand the possibility of a man actually losing his head over a creature so charming and so well provided for." I could have struck him for the cynicism of his final words, but I restrained myself. "Now I don't mind telling you, Fyffe, that I've a little bit of a tendresse in that direction, and, between ourselves, I'm not at all sure that it isn't returned. Miss Rossano is convinced that this is a service of especial and particular danger. So it might be for a headstrong old warrior like yourself if you were in it alone; but as I shall manage it there won't be a hint of danger, and we shall get the credit without the risk. And so, my dear Fyffe, I'm with you. My motives I believe are as purely selfish as I should always wish them to be. Yours of course are as purely unselfish as you would always desire."

Of course I knew already the man's complete want of responsibility. Here almost in his first breath he couldn't dream of allowing me to run the risk alone, and here in almost his last breath there was to be no risk at all. I dreaded his companionship; and when I had taken time to think the matter over I told him so quite plainly.

"My dear Fyffe," he answered, "you don't know me. You haven't seen me under circumstances demanding discretion. You tell me I'm a feather-head, and I've not the slightest doubt in the world that if you asked any of our common acquaintances you'd find the epithet endorsed. It's my way, my boy, but it's only a little outside trick of mine, and it has nothing to do with the real man inside. And besides that, Fyffe, you know you can't prevent my going, and so—why argue about it?"

"There is risk in this business," I said, "and grave risk. Let us have no further folly on that theme. I could prevent you from going, and I would if it were not for the fact that I think it more dangerous to leave you behind than to take you with me. You would be hinting this to this man, and that to the other, and I should have a noose about my neck through that slack tongue of yours before I had been away a fortnight. You shall go, but I warn you of the risk beforehand."

"There's no risk at all," he said, pettishly. "I've told you so already."

"Pardon me," I answered. "I am going to show you the risk. If this enterprise should fail by any folly of yours, if I am sacrificed by any indiscretion or stupidity on your part, I will shoot you. I am going out with my life in my hand, and I mean to take care of it. You can be useful to me, and I will use you. But please understand the conditions, for so truly as you and I stand here, I mean to keep them."

I knew enough of Brunow to be sure that he would treat this plain statement as if it were a jest, and I knew that he read me well enough to be sure that it was nothing of the sort. The threat made him safe. In an hour he was talking as if he had forgotten all about it, but I knew better.

CHAPTER III

We travelled at apparent random for nearly three weeks, and when at last we reached Itzia, no man could possibly have guessed that we had set out with that little place as our serious destination. It was Brunow who suggested this lingering method of approach, and it was he also who gave a semblance of nature to our proceedings by pausing here and there to set up his camp-stool and easel in some picturesque defile, or in the streets of some quaint village. Twice this innocent blind brought us into collision with the military police, who were in a condition of perpetual disquiet, and suspected everybody. Our papers, however, were in perfect order, and Brunow in particular was so well provided with credentials that we were easily set going again, and so by a circuitous road we approached Itzia, and finally pounced down upon it from the hills.

I found it a village of not more than four or five hundred inhabitants, set in the midst of a green plateau surrounded by gaunt hills, and watered by a fair, broad stream. The fortress in which the Conte di Rossano was confined stood on the lowest slope of the nearest hill, and frowned down upon the village with a threatening aspect, dwarfed as it was almost into nothing by the surrounding majesties of nature. It was a building of modern date—not more than fifty years of age I should be inclined to say—and it boasted nothing

in the way of architectural beauty. It was built of an ugly dark stone, was strongly fortified, and was flanked by outlying batteries which surrounded the mouth of the defile which led from Zetta on the frontier. The artillery of to-day would reduce the fortress of Itzia to a rubbish heap in less than an hour; but it was a strong place for the date of its erection, and even now the difficulty of bringing siege guns along the broken and difficult mountain pathways makes it worth calculating as a point of resistance against invasion.

I saw it first at the close of a dull day when a storm was brewing. The sky was overcast, and the clouds were mustering fast from the south in black battalions. Every now and then a hoarse echoing rumble of sound went wandering about in the hollows of the hills with a deep cavernous tone, which sounded astonishingly threatening and foreboding. I suppose that everybody knows more or less the feeling which associates itself with the first view of any memorable place, and fixes itself as it were upon his recollection of it. After all these years I can hardly think of the fortress at Itzia without some return of the depression and half-dismay which fell upon me when I first looked at it, with the black clouds gathering thickly over it, the mountain on which it stood looking as if it would topple over and bury fortress and valley, and one spear-like gleam of bleak sunshine lighting up a few of its windows and a few square yards of its western wall. Of course I had never been guilty of such a madness as to think of approaching the place by anything but wile and stratagem; and its bulk and blackness and the thickness of its walls had nothing in the world to do with the success or failure of my enterprise, and yet I could not resist a feeling of discouragement which almost amounted to a sense of superstition.

We had engaged a guide from some little village, the name of which I forget, at which we had rested on the previous night; and the castle was the first object to which he had called our attention.

"There!" he cried, pausing at a sudden bend in the road, and turning half round upon us with his right hand pointing forward. "There is the fortress of Itzia. The end of your journey, gentlemen."

I spoke the language very feebly, but I happened to understand every word he said, and his speech gave me a nervous chill. It was not altogether unlikely that the end of our journey lay in that forbidding heap of dark stone, and the thought was not an agreeable one. Brunow caught the fancy too, and turning on me with a smile which I thought not quite natural, said:

"A bad omen!"

We trudged along pretty wearily, for we had made on foot a good five-and-twenty miles that day, and the country had been extremely difficult. The mountain road had scarcely been worthy to be called a road at all, and in the course of it we had had a score or so of break-back climbs. Brunow had held out with an unexpected stoutness, but I think another mile of such a road would have left him helpless; and though I was more innured to personal fatigue than he, I gave half a grunt and half a groan of comfort at the thought of stretching my legs in an arm-chair at the village inn. We were both as hungry as we had a right to be, and finding our feet set upon turf instead of insecure stones with points all over them, we mustered our forces for a brief run downhill. The guide, who had done the journey with a stolid indifference, set up a whoop and raced after us speedily, getting the better of us, and so we entered the village racing like a trio of school-boys, Brunow and I shouting to each other and laughing. Some of the villagers came to their doors and looked with an ox-like kind of wonder after us, but just then the first open growl of the tempest sounded, the premature blackness of the evening was split wide open by a sudden flash, and the rain began to fall as it can only fall in mountain countries and in the tropics, I suppose the inhabitants simply thought we were flying from the storm, and, anyway, at the first sign of it they slammed and fastened their doors, and we raced on, drenched almost to the skin in the first minute.

Brunow knew the inn, of course, and was recognized immediately on his arrival. The fat hostess, stolid as she looked, seemed glad to see him; and her pretty daughter, who looked in the characteristic costume of the country as if she had just stepped off the stage or was just ready to step on to it, received him with demure smiles and blushes. He was quite a lion among the ladies, was Brunow, and I had no doubt he had been doing some little execution here. In a minute or two, at the landlady's bidding, we had stripped off our soaked coats and were sitting by a wood-fire, each in a brief Tyrolean jacket, with lace and silver buttons all about it—the property, as we found out afterwards, of our host and his son, who were out just then shooting on the hills, and likely, as we learned, to be away all night.

We had an excellent meal: fish from the river, fowl from the poultry-yard—we heard the clucking of the doomed hen, and the indignant remonstrances of her companions—a capital omelette, and country cheese and butter. With these comfortable things we had a bottle of honest wine of unknown vintage, but palatable and generous; and when the meal was over we sat and smoked in a kind of animal ease begotten of the past labor and present comfort. The storm lashed the panes, and though the time of year was but late August, and the hour not beyond six of the afternoon, it was so dark we could scarce see across the road. Yet every flash of lightning that hung with its blue, quivering light in the skies for two or three seconds at a time showed the fortress to either of us who chose to look out of window; and tired and bodily contented as I was, I never saw its gloomy form thus gloomily illuminated; but my first feeling on beholding it came back to me, and with it the guide's phrase: "The end of your journey, gentlemen!" The Austrian government would have seen to that if any merest guess of our purpose had occurred to the stupidest of its officials. I speak of Austria as she was, not as she is. She has learned something in the universal struggle for freedom which has shaken Europe since I first opened my eyes upon the world. But in those days—I speak it calmly, and with something, at least I hope, of the judgment which should belong to old age—Austria was a power to be loathed and warred against by all good men, a stronghold of tyranny and cruelty, a dark land within whose darkness dark deeds were done, a country where the oppressed found no helper. I am heaping up words in vain, which is a thing outside my habits. Every student of history knows what Austria was at that time, and there are thousands still living who are old enough to remember.

We went to bed early that night in spite of thunder and lightning, rain and wind, and slept as we deserved to do after the heavy marching of the day. When I got up in the morning the mountains were smiling in a sun-bath, the river wound shining through fields of delightful green, and the fortress, ugly as it was in itself, took from its surroundings, and helped to give them back again a picturesque and pleasing look. The feeling I had first had in respect to it never came back again in its first force; and when I looked at it with the refreshment

of rest in my own heart, and the brightness of the clean-washed earth and heaven about it and above it, I could afford to smile at the womanish foreboding and chill of the night before.

Brunow was still sleeping, and I was loath to disturb him; so dressing myself carelessly but without noise, I went down-stairs, and there munched a fragment of black bread and drank a draught of milk. Then having tried in vain to say that I wanted a towel, I contrived to express myself to the landlord's pretty daughter by signs. I pointed out-of-doors, made a pantomime of undressing, diving, and swimming, and then a further pantomime of rubbing myself down. At this she understood, supplied me with what I wanted, and led me to the door, whence she pointed to the left, and then seemed by a sweeping motion of the hand to indicate a turning to the right. I took the way thus signalled, and in a very little time found myself in a sequestered spot by the water-side, which looked as if it might have been made for my purpose. A great boulder as big as a moderate-sized house protected the place from view on the village side, and the place was bowered in trees. A short, soft grass made a delightful footing, and on the opposite side of the river a fallen tree had been trimmed into convenient shape for diving from. A narrow track worn through the grass showed that this place was frequently approached. I was seated and in the act of unlacing my heavy mountain boots, when I heard a cheery and melodious voice singing; and, looking up, I saw at a little distance through the trees a young Austrian officer in undress, strolling at an easy pace towards me. He, too, had evidently come out for a morning dip, for he was swinging a towel in his right hand, and was lounging straight towards the river.

As he came nearer I saw that he was handsome in an effeminate sort of way, with a slight lady-like sort of figure, a blond mustache, so light in color as to be almost invisible at a distance, and fine girlish eyes of a light blue. As he saw me in turn he gave me a good-morning in a cheery tone, and I returned his salutation. He noticed my accent at once and said,

"Ah! An Englishman?" I answered, "Yes;" and having disembarrassed myself of the heavy boots, stood up to throw off my jacket. "And a soldier?" he said. Then speaking in English this time, but with a very laughable and halting accent—an accent, I should be inclined to say, almost as laughable and halting as mine sounded to him. "I mak yeeoo velkom at my place."

At this I asked him if the place were private and I an intruder, but this little bit of English, took him altogether out of his depth.

"I speak English abominably," he said in fluent and accurate French; "properly speaking, I do not know it at all. May I ask if you speak French?"

French and Spanish are the only two foreign languages of which I know anything, but I speak them both with ease, though I dare say with little elegance. I repeated my question, and he, with great good-humor, responded that he had no claim upon the place, and was delighted to find a companion of similar tastes; I went on undressing without more ado, and in a minute more was ploughing about in the water, the first nip of which had an icy and almost maddening delight in it. I found out later on that the stream came almost straight from the mountain-tops of ice and snow.

"You would not have bathed here five or six hours ago," said my companion, as he swam beside me. "The storm lasted but two hours, yet the river was raging here until long after midnight. It falls, however, as soon as it rises, and now, except for the wet banks, you would hardly guess that it had been in flood."

I had reason to remember what he said not very much later on, at a moment perhaps as anxious as any I have ever had to face in my life. But that will come in its place, and I only notice it here because it was one of those odd things in life that we all notice at one time or another, that at our first accidental meeting the man whose business it was to guard the prisoner I had come to rescue should give me a bit of comforting knowledge in this way. For my companion turned out to be none other than that Lieutenant Breschia of whom Brunow had spoken. When my swim was finished he gathered up his clothes in a neat bundle, and holding them in the air in one hand, paddled himself easily across with the other, and dressed beside me.

"It is ambition of mine," he said, in a laughing, boyish way, which made his manner very charming and natural, "to learn your English tongue. But I am stupid with it, and whenever I meet an Englishman I waste my chances and converse with him in one of the tongues I know already. You are great masters of language, you Englishmen."

I told him that we bore a very indifferent reputation in that respect, and that next to the French, who in that one regard are the most intractable people in the world, we were probably less acquainted with foreign languages than any people in Europe. He looked surprised.

"I think, sir, you rate yourselves too low. May I offer you a cigar? I can assure you of its quality, for I import my own. It is true that I have not met many Englishmen in my time, but I have met none who have not been admirable linguists. A friend of mine, an Englishman, who was in this neighborhood but a few weeks ago, is one of the finest I have known. He may perhaps be known to you. Have you ever met, may I ask, the honorable Brunow?"

This gave me a little inward start, and I had begun to guess already at the identity of my companion. I bit the end from the cigar I had accepted from him a moment before, and asked,

"The Honorable George Brunow?"

"That is he," cried the young fellow, delightedly. "You know him?"

"He is my companion," I replied. "I left him asleep at the auberge less than an hour ago."

"You are the friend of my friend Brunow!" he exclaimed. "Sir, I am delighted to meet you. And Brunow is here again? What news! And do you stay long? Oh, once again life will be bearable. In this dull hole, sir, I pledge you my most sacred word of honor, a man has but one contemplation; his thoughts are all towards suicide. Figure for yourself the life we lead here: the commandant a bachelor of sixty, and"—he lowered his voice and bent laughingly to my ear—"a bore the most intense, the most rigid, the most unbending, conceivable by the mind of man. But pardon me—that is my name. You have not travelled in this direction with Brunow without hearing it?"

"No, indeed," I answered. "Brunow has spoken of you hundreds of times. I have no card, but my name is Fyffe. Brunow shall give us a formal introduction by-and-by."

I did my best to carry off the situation, but I doubt if I achieved any very great measure of success. I can say honestly that if there is one thing in this world I abhor with all my heart and soul it is treachery. And there was no escape from the fact that I was here for the express purpose of playing the traitor with this amiable and friendly young fellow, and there is no escape from the fact that I was bound to go on playing the traitor with him, to receive his friendly advances, to accept his welcome, and all the while to plot and plan to work away from him the prisoner it was his duty to guard, and for whose safe-keeping his reputation at least, and perhaps his life, was responsible. This reflection kept me awkward and constrained, but luckily for me he took no notice of my clumsiness, but rattled on as if he took an actual delight in the sound of his own voice.

"Brunow," he declared, "is the most delightful man I have ever known. The common complaint I hear against your delightful countrymen, Monsieur Fiff, is that they are devoid of *esprit of verve*—that they are too alive to their responsibilities, that they live in a cave of depression of spirits. As I say, I have not known many; but I have not found them so, and Brunow least of all. Brunow in his gayety, in his wit, is French of the French. An astonishing man. Though, even here—in that infernal fortress yonder where I suffer incredibly from *le spleen*—I laugh when I am by myself, and when the face and voice of Brunow present themselves to my memory. What conversation, eh? What inventions! What a noble *farceur*! Let us go and see him."

He set off at an impetuous pace, which he moderated almost immediately; and gayly chattering all the way, led me—feeling like a villain at every step, yet not in the least relaxing from my purpose—to the hostel, where we found Brunow chaffing the landlady, who was already busy in the preparation of our breakfast. The impetuous Lieutenant Breschia fell upon his neck and kissed him on both cheeks, and Brunow returned the salute with heartiness. I may as well let the fact out at once and have the declaration over: I was beginning to have a serious dislike for Brunow, though I strove to subdue it, trying to reflect how much our rivalry, of which he knew nothing, might possibly warp my judgment of him. At that minute I felt a downright twinge of hatred and contempt for him; and his kisses made him seem like a sort of Judas in my eyes. I did not pause to reflect that the kiss meant no more to him than a shake of the hand means to a man who has been bred in England, and it is a form of salute which—though I have been familiar with the sight of it for years together—I cordially hate. Those beastly South American Spaniards, among whom I fought, were always at it, with their beards scented with garlic and tobacco! It was a form of salute I had hard work to avoid at times; but I should always have been ready to astonish the man who had succeeded in getting at me in that fashion. I loathed Brunow for his acceptance and return of that caress; and yet the man was doing no more than his breeding demanded of him; and if he had recoiled from his friend he would have insulted him. I loathed myself because this duplicity was necessary to our plan, but I never proposed to myself for a moment to go back from the plan itself. I stood pledged to Miss Rossano to rescue her father from that horrible long-drawn imprisonment if the courage, or the wit, of man could compass it; and I meant, with all my heart and soul, to keep my word. In spite of that I had no stomach for the means it was necessary to employ; and at last it came to this: in place of hating and despising myself for using the means, I took to hating and despising the Austrians for making the means necessary.

In less than a minute Brunow was justifying his friend's opinion of him by an extravagantly farcical story of our adventures by the way, and the young Austrian was laughing at him as if he would burst his stays. I knew, of course, that he wore those feminine additions to the toilet, because within the last hour I had seen him take them off and put them on again; and the effeminacy of that trick, which was of course merely national and professional, and not in the least to be charged against him personally, added to the disgust I felt at him and at Brunow, and at the whole Austrian nation, and at myself, and at our joint treachery—Brunow's and mine.

So I carried my own moodiness out into the village street, and suddenly remembering that I was smoking a cigar the harmless, merry-hearted youngster had given me, I hurled it away and walked hotly along the road in a state of mind altogether unenviable. I brought myself to reason in a quarter of an hour, and got back to the inn in time for breakfast; but I know that I made poor company, and sat there glum and silent while my two companions shouted with boisterous laughter, and drank more wine than was good for them at so early an hour in the morning.

At last Brunow shook hands with the lieutenant, and embraced him into the bargain, and kissed him, and was kissed on both cheeks again, the young officer having to go back to his duty. I escaped the kisses and was let off with a hand-shake, with which also I would gladly have dispensed if I could.

Then Brunow and I were left alone; but he was so full of his conspirator's caution—developed in a minute when there was no need for it, and likely as soon to be forgotten when it was wanted—that though not a soul in the house could understand a word of English, he would not speak to me until he had led me into a deep pine wood at the back of the house, and on the first slope of the mountain, and even there he went peering about and beating the bushes and undergrowth with a stick, as if he had been a stage-spy, until I lost temper with him, and shouted to him to begin. He came and sat mysteriously at my side.

"You see," he said, "how I stand with Breschia. I can have the run of the fortress at any time, and so, if you play your cards properly, can you."

"Was there any need," I asked, ill-humoredly, "to bring me here to say that?" I admit that I was in a quite unreasonable temper, and that an angel would have been tempted to quarrel with me. I called Brunow "a melodramatic ass" I remember very well, and I told him that if we fell into a habit of getting in the corners to conspire we should only draw suspicion upon ourselves. I spoke with a roughness altogether unnecessary, but then it must be remembered that Brunow, whom I was fast learning to dislike and despise, bade so far to be of more service than myself, and it is always bitter to be beaten by an inferior. I stung him, and he replied angrily, and the result of it was that we separated for the day. I went uphill, and by-and-by lost myself and came quite unexpectedly upon a highway, from which I could look down upon the fortress. Being assured by this that I could not easily lose myself again, I walked for a considerable distance, until from the top of a hill I could look down the straight road into a broad and fertile plain, with a city far and far away shining on the limit of it.

"This," I said, "is the road we shall have to travel if ever we get the Conte di Rossano out of prison."

And following the mental road pointed out by this finger-post of thought, I sat down and allowed my fancy to carry me into all manner of worthless and impracticable plans of rescue in which I could dispense with Brunow's aid. I was engaged in this unprofitable exercise, when I suddenly discerned a carriage near the hill-top. It came on with difficulty, and the two horses that drew it were dead blown when they reached the level, and stood trembling with their late exertion. A strikingly handsome woman put her head round the front of the carriage as if to look at the road before her. Catching sight of me she smiled and addressed me in the language of the country. I responded in French, and in that tongue she asked me how far it still was to Itzia. I told her as nearly as I could guess; she thanked me, and then leaned back in her carriage, waiting until the horses should have rested. In due time she drove on, with a little inclination of the head so regal and condescending that she might have been a princess at the least. When she was two or three hundred yards away I arose and followed. The carriage went out of sight in a little while, and I thought no more about it or its occupant until I saw the vehicle itself standing empty at the door of the inn.

The lady was seated in her rich dress in the common room, and she and Brunow were talking like old friends. Brunow's anger was no more lasting than a child's, and by this time he had quite recovered his good-humor.

"Oh, here you are, old fellow," he cried, genially. "Baroness, permit me to introduce to you Captain Fyffe. Fyffe, this is the Baroness Bonnar."

CHAPTER IV

When I saw the lady face to face I perceived that she was older than I had fancied her to be, and I saw that she adopted certain devices to hide the ravages of time which had, as they always have, the effect of emphasizing them. I wonder if women will ever learn the perfect folly and uselessness of that sort of trickery.

The Baroness Bonnar was very gracious in her manners, but she seemed to me much less like a real great lady than like an actress who played at being a great lady. I am not very penetrating in that respect, and, as I have said already, I knew next to nothing of women and their ways, and so I was not disposed to trust my own judgment, but put it on one side with a certain contempt and impatience of myself. As a matter of fact, as I found out not so long afterwards, the Baroness Bonnar was no more a baroness than I was a baron, but simply and merely an adventuress who had spent some time on the Vienna stage, where she had secured no great success. She was now one of that almost innumerable band of spies who lived at that time in the service of the Austrian government. She was not a very clever woman, I am inclined to think, but she had been clever enough to induce a high official to fall in love with her, and by keeping this high official hanging off and on she had contrived to obtain promotion in her abominable calling far beyond her intellectual deserts. Brunow, it seemed, had known her for a year or two, but I learned afterwards that he had made no guess as to her real business in life.

The foolish fellow was so delighted at the unexpected opportunity for a flirtation that the whole purpose of our journey seemed to be forgotten by him. The baroness, with her maid and her coachman—who were both on the same pay with herself (without her having the least guess of it), and reported all her doings to her superiors—stayed only one night in Itzia, and then went on to a village some dozen miles away, where she put up with some friends of hers who had a country-house there. Then nothing would please Brunow but that he must hire a horse and ride off to this country-house, and spend hours in the society of the sham baroness, while our scheme for the release of Miss Rossano's father hung in the wind, without making even a sign of progress.

The young lieutenant was almost my only companion, and once or twice he dined with me at the inn, and twice I had breakfast with him in the fortress; but these interviews with him brought me no nearer to my purpose. A third invitation brought something in its train, however, and, to tell the truth, I asked nothing much better than to have Brunow out of my scheme. The matter came about in this wise: Breschia and I were seated in his private room, when a non-commissioned officer entered with his report for the day, and stood, forage-cap in hand, at attention while his superior read it over. Some conversation ensued between them, which my ignorance of the language prevented me from following; but I understood the phrase with which Breschia brought it to a close.

"Send him here," he said. "Send him at once."

The non-commissioned officer saluted and retired, and Breschia turned laughingly on me.

"We have here an original who is always getting into trouble. A good fellow, and an honest servant, but so incorrigibly kind-hearted that he is always breaking our rules. I shall have to be serious with him in spite of myself."

He poured out a cup of black coffee as he spoke, and set it with a bottle of maraschino and an open box of cigars at my elbow. I had scarcely selected and lit ray cigar, when there came a tap at the door; and at the lieutenant's call to enter a man in uniform came in, and, having closed the door behind him, stood rigidly at attention. Breschia addressed him in a tone of anger, which sounded real enough, and the man stood like a statue to receive his reproof. There was nothing in the least degree remarkable about the fellow, who was just a mere simple, common soldier. He was attired in a sort of fatigue costume, and looked and smelled as if he had just been sent away from stable duty. His short cropped hair was of a fiery auburn, and his rough features, with a prodigious mustache and the most ponderous over-beetling eyebrows I had ever seen, gave him a look rather of ferocity than of good-nature. But when in answer to the lieutenant's rating he began to excuse himself, it was evident even to an ear so untrained and ignorant as mine that he spoke in a language which was not his own. He spoke haltingly and stammeringly; and at last, despairing of making himself understood, he made a little motion of his hands without moving them from his sides, and so stood as if to

receive sentence. Again Breschia spoke to him, and again the man responded. The lieutenant broke into a fit of laughter, and the man stood there immovable, with his little fingers at the seams of his canvas trousers, and his rugged visage frowning straight before him.

"Go!" said the lieutenant, speaking, to my surprise, in his own halting English. "You are too much a silly fellow. Go; and do it not again.... Eh? Will you?"

"Well, sir," the man answered, speaking, to my astonishment, in good native-sounding English, "I'm sorry to displease, and I try to do my duty—"

"Hold your tongue," cried Breschia, and the man obeyed at once. "Behold a man," cried the lieutenant, turning upon me and speaking in his customary French, "who has been in the English army, and who is as incapable of an idea of discipline as if he were a popular prima donna."

"Oh," said I, turning round on the man and addressing him in English, "you have been in the army at home, I hear?"

"Yes, sir," he answered, saluting me as he had done the lieutenant on his entrance. "Two-and-twenty years, sir."

"You don't mind my talking to the fellow?" I asked the lieutenant, reverting to French again.

"Pas du tout," said the lieutenant. "Vous le trouverez bien bête, je vous promiss."

"How long have you been in the Austrian service?"

"Not in the service at all, sir. General's groom, sir."

"You're in fatigue dress?"

"Yes, sir. Old custom, sir. Like the feel of it, sir."

"Been here long?"

"Ten years, sir."

"Why, how's this? You don't look a day over forty."

"Forty-two, sir. Joined the band at home as a boy. Sixteenth Lancers, sir."

"What's your name?"

"Hinge, sir. Robert Hinge, sir. Son of Bob Hinge, sir. Tattenham Fancy. Champion of the light-weights years back, sir."

"Oh! What have you been getting into trouble about?"

"Beg your pardon, sir. Mustn't talk about that, sir. Discipline, sir. Can see as you're an officer. That ought to be enough, sir."

"Quite enough. Drink my health, *if* there's anything fit to drink it in. You don't object, Breschia?"

"Not at all," the lieutenant answered. "You have done with him? Very good. Go. And let me hear of you no more, or I shall report you. To your general. Do you hear?"

The man saluted and went out.

"He is so good, and so stupid—that individual there," said Breschia, gladly plunging back into a more familiar language than English, though I could see he was proud of having acquitted himself so well in that tongue. "He is so stupid and so good, but I do nothing but laugh at him. But Rodetzsky is a martinet, and if he were here just now the man would be in trouble."

"What has he been doing?" I asked.

"He has been smuggling tobacco to the prisoners," Breschia answered, and all of a sudden I found my heart beating like a hammer. Was this the man, I wondered, who had shown compassion to Miss Ros-sano's hapless father? And was he therefore the man of all others whom I needed to lay hands on? If that were so it seemed nothing less than a providence that the man should be English, for my ignorance of all the patois dialects of the country, and even of its main language, made the speech of the Austrian soldiers a sealed book to me.

Did it ever happen to you that you have met a person whom you have never heard of and never thought of before—a person who was destined to affect your fate in some way—and that from the first moment of your encounter you seemed fated to renew acquaintance with him? It has happened more than once to me, and it happened so in this case. That very afternoon, when I returned from a lonely tramp upon the hills, I found the man Hinge in the kitchen of the inn. He bore a note from Breschia to Brunow, and was awaiting the return of that gentleman, who was once again away in pursuit of the *soi-disant* baroness, but had promised to be back in time for dinner. When I entered the kitchen to demand a draught of milk, the man rose up and saluted me, and explained his errand. In the course of my ramble I had had hardly anything but this man in mind, and I had been planning to make use of him. When I met him all my plans seemed to go to pieces. I shall have to confess before I have done with it that I am the poorest plotter in the world. Give me something downright to do, and I will try to do it; but in dodges and evasions and pretences I have little skill indeed. I took the note from the man's hand and promised that Brunow should receive it. Then I drank the milk which the landlady's daughter had already set before me, and stood there tongue-tied and bewildered, not knowing how to begin. The man himself relieved me.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, taking his glass in his left hand, and saluting again with the right. "Your health, sir."

"That's poor tack," I said, nodding towards the glass. He had made a grimace over the wine.

"Well, so it is, sir," he replied; "but it's better than nothing, and it's about all we poor folks can afford, sir."

"Did you ever taste Scotch whiskey?" I asked him. He smiled a slow smile as if he remembered something pleasing.

"Why, yes, sir, I have, sir, and I won't deceive you."

"Come to my room," I said, "and I'll give you as good a glass as you ever tasted in your life."

He set down his glass of sour wine on the table with an emphatic quickness, and his soldierly tread sounded behind me in the uncarpeted passage and up the bare deal steps. When he came to my room I bade him sit

down, but he remained standing, and I had to give the invitation as an order before he would obey it. Then he sat like a figure carved in wood, with his shoulders back, his head well up, a hand on either knee, and a face as expressionless as the back of his head. I got my flask out of my knapsack, and with it a little collapsible cup of silver, found the water-bottle, and set everything before him.

"Help yourself!" He took a thimbleful. "Help yourself, man!" He took another thimbleful. I seized the flask from his hand and poured him enough for a good tumbler. "Now, there's the water; help yourself to that."

He obeyed, and tasted the mixture with a solemn satisfaction.

"My friend, Lieutenant Breschia, tells me," I said then, for by this time I had made up my mind how to begin with him, "that you are constantly breaking the rules of the fortress. He tells me that you have been giving the prisoners tobacco."

"That's a fact, sir," he admitted.

"Give them some more," I said, "first chance you get." I laid a gold coin on the table before him, and sat down in front of him. "I'd give some of the poor beggars something better than tobacco if I had my way."

"And so would I, sir," he answered. "And the Lord knows it. It needn't all go in tobacco, I suppose, sir?" He had taken up the coin and was holding it in his thumb and finger by this time. "Any kind o' little comfort 'l do as well, sir?"

"Any kind of little comfort, as you say," I answered.

"Thank you, sir," he said, pocketing the coin. "You're an Englishman and you're a gentleman, sir, and I'm very much obliged to you."

I made no answer, for I wanted to see if my man would talk. I thought he looked as if he would like to ease his mind.

"You haven't been over the fortress, have you, sir?" I shook my head. "Miserable kind of an 'ole it is, sir, for a man to live in. I think I should go stark, starin', ravin' mad if I was to live there long, sir."

"So bad as that?" I asked.

"You may well say that, sir," he rejoined. "I've got a nice, easy, comfortable place along with the general, and I don't want to lose it. So long as we're in Vienna or anywhere else but here, I'm satisfied. But here! Why, good Lord, sir, it's simply sickening."

I supposed it was pretty dull.

"Oh, it's dull enough, sir, but it ain't that. It's what you may call such a miserable hole, sir. There's nothing like it in old England, thank God, sir!"

"Have they many prisoners here?" I asked.

"Prisoners, sir? There's a regular rookery of 'em. The place swarms with 'em. I should think there's a matter o' five hundred, as near as I can guess."

I ejaculated "Nonsense!"

"Don't you believe it's nonsense, sir," he answered. "They're as thick on the ground as rats in an old rick, sir. P'litical prisoners most of 'em is, sir; Eyetalians, mainly. Of course one doesn't value that kind o' rubbish much. They're foreigners, sir, every man Jack of 'em. But then, sir, these damned Austrians ain't no better, and they treat their prisoners like they was so much dirt beneath 'em."

"You look like an honest fellow," I said, "but you're not very discreet. Suppose I repeated what you have told me to the general?"

"Why, sir," he answered, with a twinkle in his eye, "I don't suppose you'll do that, sir; but if you did, sir, the general's got a good groom, sir, and he knows it. He's a judge of a horse, sir, and he knows when a horse is in condition. And, besides that, he knows my opinion about these here Austrians, sir."

No, I thought to myself. Robert Hinge sounds very plausible, looks very honest, and is undeniably an Englishman. But supposing Robert Hinge to have been put purposely in my way this morning as a very good-natured and very stupid fellow, and supposing Robert Hinge to have been sent over to me on purpose to draw me out? Quite possible, quite likely, indeed—quite in the Austrian manner, as all the world knew well.

"Don't get yourself into more mischief, anyway," I said, rising from my seat. He took the hint, finished his glass standing, and left me with a military salute. I sat for a full hour smoking and thinking, occupied mainly in wondering whether I had thrown a chance away. There was nothing to be got by wasting time, and I worried myself into a state of feverish nervousness by thinking that this man Hinge was probably a true and genuine fellow, and that I had missed my chance with him. It was the clattering of a horse's hoof in the back yard of the inn that awoke me from my reverie, and looking out I saw Brunow in the act of dismounting. He waved his hand to me, and surrendering his horse to a hostler, entered the house. I heard Hinge address him in English, and then he came tearing upstairs. The note Breschia had sent to him lay upon the table, and when he had read it he shouted from the stair-head, "Certainly. My compliments to the lieutenant, and we will come with pleasure."

"Here's Breschia suddenly left almost alone," he explained when he re-entered the room. "He writes apologizing for troubling us with his poor hospitality so often, but will I go over and take you with me? He declares it will be a charity, and in the great hereafter will be remembered in our favor."

I was willing enough to go; and the hour being already near, we made some slight change in our attire and strolled across to the fortress. Breschia met us gayly and entertained us well, but nothing of note happened at the dinner. We sat late over our wine, and it was pitch dark when at last we rose to go. Breschia at first insisted on accompanying us, but, to tell the plain truth about the matter, he had taken more than was altogether good for him, and was not to be trusted to return alone. We compromised for a man with a lantern, and on that shook hands and took our leave. A man in uniform met us at the gate of the grim place, and was about to set out with us when Hinge appeared, and, without a word, took the lantern from his hand. As we made our way along the dark and stony road, with the little circle of light dancing and waving in front of us, Hinge stumbled against me twice or thrice. At first it crossed me that he had been making free with the gift of that afternoon, and that he had spent a portion of it for his own benefit, rather than that of the prisoners,

in whom he professed to take so great an interest; but at the third or fourth lurch he gave it dawned upon me that with his left hand he was groping for my right. Brunow was just a step in front of us, and I held my hand out openly. The man slipped into it a twisted scrap of paper, which I transferred carefully to my waistcoat pocket.

"Here's the bridge, gentlemen," said Hinge, "and that's the inn right before you, where the lights are."

"All right," I answered. "We can find the way now quite easily. Good-night!"

"Good-night, gentlemen," he answered, and so turned away, while Brunow and I footed it home in silence.

We occupied the same room, and I did not care to read whatever message I might have received in his presence. He had proved so lukewarm in the enterprise on which we had both embarked, and had now so apparently forgotten all about it in dancing attendance on the Baroness Bonnar, that I should have made no scruple of leaving him out of my councils altogether. When he had half undressed I made some pretence of wanting something from below, and read my missive in the kitchen. It was late, and the room was empty.

I was not surprised to find I knew the handwriting, and that it was the same that Brunow had shown me in his rooms on the night on which I had first seen Miss Rossano.

This is what I read:

"The wretched prisoner, the Conte di Rossano, who has languished for years in this fortress, asks, for the love of Heaven, that the Englishman for whose hands this is meant will send a line to the Contessa di Rossano, daughter of General Sir Arthur Rollinson, to assure her that her husband still lives. If she should still live, and have remarried, for pity find some means to let the writer know it."

I went to bed saying nothing of this, but held sleepless by it all the night. With the idea which had come to me that afternoon of the possibility of Hinge being set upon me to act as a spy and to discover my intent so strong upon me that I could not shake it off, I tossed and tumbled in a very sea of doubt and trouble. I was more than half persuaded all along that this fancy was a mere chimera, and yet it took such force in my mind. It was past two o'clock when the moon rose. I got up noiselessly, filled and lit my pipe, and sat staring at the great solemn bulk of the fortress, as it stood for the time being almost white in the moonlight against the monstrous shadow of the bills. My mind was in a miserable whirl, and I knew not what to make of anything. This wretched state lasted until broad dawn, and I was still troubled by it when I walked into the keen morning air, towel in hand, for my customary swim. I undressed slowly by the river-side and stood thinking, until I was so nipped by the keen breath of the wind which blew clear down from the mountain-tops that I plunged into the stream for refuge from it. I remember as distinctly as if it had happened a minute ago, that at the very second when I dived an impulse came into my mind. I thought as I struck the water, "I'll trust that fellow!" I dived far, and swam under water until I was forced to rise for air. "I'll trust that fellow!" I thought again; and as I passed my hand across my forehead to squeeze the water from my hair, I saw "that fellow" on the very top of a little rise of land which lay between me and the fortress, and hid it entirely from my sight.

I swam back to the place from which I had originally dived, towelled myself hastily, dressed, and set out at a round pace towards the bridge. I reached it when he was within a hundred yards, and with a signal to him to follow, sauntered on towards the pine wood.

A backward glance assured me that he had seen my signal and was coming.

CHAPTER V

"You gave me that last night," I said, holding the scrap of paper before me. "You knew what was in it?"

"I didn't know, sir; I guessed. Poor gentleman's wife, sir? I thought so, sir."

"Robert Hinge, you're an Englishman, and you've served your queen."

"And king as well, sir. King William was on the throne when I joined, sir."

"How long have you known this unhappy gentleman, this Count Rossano, who is imprisoned here?"

"Eight years and over."

The man stood bolt upright before me until I gave him the word to stand at ease. I questioned him closely, and with a growing belief in him. This was the substance of what I heard from him: He had been in General Rodetzsky's service for a year or thereabouts when he first came to visit the fortress. The stables in which the general's horses were bestowed were in themselves beautifully tidy, but outside, immediately beside the door, was a great heap of manure and rotten straw, the accumulation of years, which was an eyesore to the new groom, who took immediate measures for removing it. He was at work at it a whole day and then left it. Returning a week later to his task, he thrust the prongs of his pitchfork through a pane of glass which lay hidden by the rubbish heap, and heard not only the crash and fall of the glass itself, but a startled cry. A peasant was in charge of the cart which was carrying away the refuse heap, and Robert Hinge took no apparent notice of this cry. He knew that the fortress was a prison. He had heard queer stories about the treatment the Austrians gave their prisoners. His interest was awakened, and his fancy began to be excited. When he had filled the cart, and the peasant had gone away, Hinge cleared from the wall the remainder of the heap, and found that he had laid bare a grated window almost on a level with the ground. The glass was so thickly incrustated with filth as to be as opaque as the wall by which it was surrounded, but at the broken pane a face appeared. The man in telling me the story was honestly moved. He could not describe the condition of the man he saw without imprecations on his jailer and the whole country that held them. He told me that the prisoner's hair grew to his waist, and was of a dreadful unwholesome gray; that his beard and mustache were matted, his eyes were sunken, and his face was unwashed and of the color of stale unbaked bread. The man spoke with difficulty, but had a fair knowledge of English, though he seemed unused to it. He had inhabited that hole in the earth for years. How many years he did not know until Hinge, in answer to his

questions, told him the date of the year and the day of the month. The conversation was interrupted by the coming of an officer, and Hinge covered up the window before anything was seen. Afterwards he broke a few more panes and heaped clean straw against the wall to hide the window, but in such a fashion as to admit air and light. Many hundreds of times he had sat outside his stable door within arm's-length of the prisoner, and had listened to him while he talked. They had a preconcerted signal at which the prisoner instantly ceased to speak. Food and water were thrust in upon the unhappy man at regular intervals, but he was never visited, and lived a horrible, lonely death in life there, which made the flesh creep to hear of. The stench of the chamber Hinge described as something horrible and sickening, and he thought it a marvel that the man had lived so long.

The wretched man had never been allowed a minute's exercise outside his cell, and Brunow's pretence of having seen him was, of course, an invention. That did not surprise me, but I hated Brunow for it. The man's shallow and worthless spirit could go hovering about a tragedy like this with his butterfly irresponsible lies. The thought made me angry.

"Hinge," I said, when the groom had told me all he had to say, "I am going to trust you with a secret. I think you are the man to keep it. I am going to ask you to help me in a difficult and dangerous bit of work. I think you are the man for the job. If we succeed, I am going to pension you handsomely for life."

"Thank you, sir," said Hinge.

"Walk quietly with me and listen. I am going to have a try to set that man free. You hear?"

"Yes, sir."

"And I am going to ask you to help me."

"Yes, sir."

"Will you do it?"

"If I can, sir."

"Very good. Now when can we talk this matter over and get it ship-shape, and see what is to be done?"

"My time's my own, sir," Hinge answered; "and being mine, sir, it's yours."

I turned into the deeper recesses of the wood, and Hinge followed me. I had resolved to trust him, and I have never been a believer in half-confidences. I told him the errand which had brought me there. I told him of the countess's early death, and I told him of my meeting with her daughter and of the promise I had made to her. I set before him the fact that, if the venture succeeded and he gave me his aid in it, he would find wealthy friends and protectors. I told him that I was not myself a *rich* man, but I showed him Miss Rossano's letter and the draft I had for a thousand pounds.

"Better send that money out of the country, sir," he said, quietly. "They're queer beggars, these Austrians, and they wouldn't be above collaring the lot if we got clear of the country with our man afore you'd got the coin out o' the bank."

"And now, how to set about the work, Hinge?"

"You give your orders, sir, and leave 'em to me."

"Tell me what you can. Now, how about the guards? Is the prisoner's cell watched on all sides?"

"There's a man on stable sentry at night-time. In the day-time nobody's on watch on my side."

I had provided myself with a flexible-jointed saw and a small bottle of oil, and they were packed in my knapsack now. I asked Hinge if he would pass these to the prisoner, and he declared that he could do it easily and without the slightest danger of discovery.

He caught eagerly at the idea, and assured me that two or three of the iron bars which guarded the window were quite rotten at the bottom, and could be sawn through in an hour. The day-time would be safest, and he would undertake to be near, to cover any sound which might be made, and give warning of any danger.

"Gettin' out o' the cell is as easy as pie, sir," said Hinge. "That's all right. But gettin him out o' fortress—that's another pair o' shoes altogether!"

I thought hard for perhaps ten minutes, and then I fancied I saw my way. Half a dozen questions cleared it. The general was away in Vienna. The time of his return was uncertain. There were half a dozen horses under Hinge's charge. It would surprise nobody if a message came from the general ordering Hinge to meet him at any hour with two led horses. If he knew when that hour would come he could have the prisoner ready in uniform, and they could ride out together. But to do this we should need a written order from the general, which would have to pass the officer on duty. That order once being passed and sent on to him, Hinge would be answerable for the rest.

This threw a dreadful difficulty in the way, but the groom was ready with a partial help. He had received a similar order which had been countermanded, and therefore never surrendered, as it would have been if he had passed the gates with it. He thought he knew its whereabouts, and he would look for it.

In effect, he found it, and found means to send it on to me. It was scrawled in pencil from a posting place on the road to Vienna, distant from Itzia four-and-twenty miles English, or thereabouts. I pored over this document in my own room, and made many heart-breaking attempts to imitate it. They were absolute failures, one and all. I had no faculty in that direction, and my own hand stared at me from the written page the more plainly and uncompromisingly for every effort I made to disguise it. Apart from the utter vileness of the imitation, I did not even clearly understand the words employed, and for aught I knew might be giving an order which, if put into execution, would be useless for my purpose.

I was compelled, unwillingly, to appeal to Brunow. He made light of the business, and in less than an hour he brought me an imitation which looked completely deceptive. He had been able, he told me, to trace the greater part of the order on the window-pane from the original I had given him to imitate; for the rest, to my surprise and gratitude, Brunow volunteered. He took advantage of our next meeting with Breschia to tell him that he was off on a three or four days' sketching expedition, leaving me behind. He commended me to the lieutenant's friendly hospitality with all his usual gayety of manner, and on the following morning he rode away. The arrangement made between us was that he should return at about ten o'clock on the following

night with news of the general's approach. The general's horses should appear to have come to grief somehow, anyway (he guaranteed to find a plausible story), and Brunow was to pretend to have ridden on with a message ordering remounts. Then Hinge was to meet us at a given point, we being on foot, and we should all make for the frontier with speed.

So long as I live I shall never forget that day or the day that followed it. Hinge was advised of everything, and no doubt was doing all that needed to be done, but the suspense was scarcely bearable. To saunter about and look at those impenetrable walls, and to wonder what was going on behind them—to invent a thousand accidents, any one of which might wreck our plans for good and all, and to suffer in the contemplation of each of these inventions of my own as much as I could have suffered if it had been true, to read knowledge or suspicion in every innocent glance that fell upon me, to fear and suspect everybody and everything, and to keep a constant guard upon myself lest I should seem for an instant to be anxious and preoccupied with all this weight upon me—all this was an agony. I am not afraid to confess all this, for I have shown more than once that I am not deficient in courage of my own kind. But here I was a very coward, hateful and contemptible to myself.

The long day passed, and the long night, and then the real day of waiting came. The thing that weighed upon me most of all was that while I knew that every minute of rest and tranquillity I could snatch might be of moment to me, rest and tranquillity were absolutely impossible. For two whole nights I had not closed my eyes in sleep, and my brain seemed on fire. My nerves were going, too, under this intolerable strain, and I feared that if a crisis should arise I should lack coolness, and plunge into some avoidable disaster.

But the day wore itself out at last, and at ten o'clock at night I was wandering along the road by which Brunow must come, and listening with my soul in my ears for the first distant noise of hoof-beats. The sun had gone down in a bank of threatening cloud, and before the moon rose the last look I had taken at the hills which hemmed us in on every side had shown them seemingly hidden by driving mists, which travelled at an astonishing pace, betokening a wild wind up there, while the valley lay in a hot stillness. The light of the moon was in the sky long before she rose above the mountains, and I could see that the wild work up there was growing wilder every minute. The wind was descending, too, from its lofty altitude, and I could hear it now roaring and now muttering in the gullies like a discontented giant.

In the course of that waiting I was often mistaken in the sound of distant hoofs. I was tricked at least a thousand times. Now it was the wind in the trees, now it was a gurgle in the river, now it was a murmur of life in the village, now it was the movement of a goat, a cow, or a horse upon the hill-side. But at last I caught the real sound, and knew it at once from all the noises which had till then deceived my fancy. The rider came along at a good round pace, and in a while I heard Brunow singing—a signal to me, no doubt. I called aloud "Hello! that you, Brunow?" and he answered with a whoop, expressive of high spirits. There was light enough to see me as he passed without drawing rein.

"I've a message from the governor to the officer in charge," he shouted. "Meet you at the inn by-and-by." There was no reason why we should have met at all, but the sense of precaution which touched me in his words allayed my anxiety a little. If by any very improbable chance anybody within hearing had understood him, the pretence justified itself. It could do no harm, and it was worth while to look natural. I betook myself at once to the point we had agreed upon for a meeting-place, and waited there in a renewed suspense, to which all the wretchedness of waiting I had hitherto known seemed as nothing. Suddenly the wind took me with a great gust, which almost carried me off my feet; a clap of thunder directly overhead seemed actually simultaneous with a piercing glare of lightning, and the rain came down in torrents. After the flash of lightning everything looked so impenetrably black and formless that I might as well have stared about me with my eyes shut, but a second flash showed me the gate of the fortress quivering in the light, and so distinct and near that I might have believed it no more than a stone's throw off, though I knew it to be a full mile away. In the sudden howling of the wind and the pelting of the rain I could hear nothing, but I kept my aching eyes fixed in the direction of the fortress, and over and over again I saw it leap out of darkness distinct and seeming near, but quivering as if it were built of air and shaken by a wind. The river, which flowed quite near me, began to take a roaring and ominous tone, and I grew anxious lest the ford we meant to attempt three or four miles below should have become impassable by the time we reached it. To have passed through the village would have betrayed the fact that we were going in an opposite direction to the one proposed, and might have excited suspicion and immediate inquiry and pursuit. While the river growled in a more and more menacing tone beside me, I began to wish that our arrangements could be recast. We might easily have dared the village, trusting to a half-hour's start and the chapter of accidents, while now the swollen ford might delay us for whole hours. The plans could not be changed, however, and there was nothing to be done but wait.

I was wet to the skin, and dazed by the noises of the storm, and weary with want of sleep, but every sense of fatigue vanished when I saw, by the glare of the lightning between me and the fortress, the recognizable figures of Brunow and Hinge on horseback. There was a third horseman with them, and a led horse, and for a fraction of a second I could see them all wildly prancing and leaping together, as if the beasts were maddened by the storm, as no doubt they were. It seemed an hour—I have known a day seem to go by more quickly many a time—when another flash showed them nearer, like a dark group of statuary, the horses quivering at the glare, and the heads of the riders bent against the wind and rain. I ran forward, not daring to call, and found them again in the lightning and lost them again in the dark half a dozen times. When at last we met I hailed them in a guarded tone, though it was a marvel to me that nobody was abroad at such an hour. Brunow replied boisterously, and I mounted in the dark, being half doubled as I did so by a kick from one of the plunging horses. I was fortunately too near for the full effect of the blow, but the hoof took me at the hipbone, and for the moment paralyzed me. I had much difficulty in getting astride my own beast, but I judged it best to say nothing of what had happened. All sense of power had gone from my right leg, and I could get no grip upon the saddle; but as the first sensation of numbness passed away I became persuaded that no great hurt was done, though I was in much pain and found a difficulty in keeping my seat.

The fear of the horses made this no easy task, for at every flash they reared and broke away, and the ground over which we rode was difficult, and would have been uncanny even in the daylight, so that we made slow progress. I had travelled the way repeatedly, for this was the route by which I had decided to travel if

ever we were so lucky as to be allowed the experiment, and I never had more reason to be thankful for my own care and foresight.

These mountain storms are very often things of an hour, and so to-night it proved. By the time we had reached the ford the thunder and lightning were far away, the wind had sunk to an occasional sob and moan, the rain had cleared, and the moon rode high in a mass of skurrying cloud, which at times obscured her light and at times left her almost clear. But the river was terribly swollen, and it was evident that we should not be able to cross it for a considerable time.

So far not a word had been exchanged among us; but now that we were compelled to pause, I turned to our companion and looked at him, in such dim and changing light as there was, with a profound interest. He sat with a tired stoop in his saddle, and his head was bent upon his breast. He wore a peaked forage-cap and a large, rough, military cloak, which effectually disguised his figure.

"This is the Conte di Rossano?" I asked, leaning towards him.

"The same, sir," he answered, in a voice which I shall never forget. "I know from my faithful friend here, to whom I am indebted, but I cannot distinguish my friends as yet."

"This is the Honorable George Brunow, sir," I said, "and I am Captain Fyffe, at your service."

"Mr. Brunow," he responded, raising his forage-cap and bowing, "Captain Fyffe, my dear friend Corporal Hinge, I am without words to thank you. God knows I thank you in my heart!"

His voice failed him altogether then, and we all sat silent for a time.

"What are we waiting for?" asked Brunow. "Every minute is precious. Let us push along."

"You see the ford," I answered. "It may be passable in an hour, now that the storm has ceased; but at present—"

"Great God!" cried Brunow, with a savage impatience in his tone. "Why didn't we cross by the bridge? We could have made four times the distance by the road!"

"It was a mistake as things have turned out," I answered; "but we both thought it best when we talked things over the night before last."

"I never thought it best!" cried Brunow, fuming. "Hark! What the devil's that?"

There was no need to call our attention to the sound, for everybody heard it. There was no need to ask what it was, for it was impossible to mistake it. It was the sound of a cannon from the fortress. We stared at each other in the uncertain light.

"That's my fault, gentlemen," said Hinge, calmly. "They've found the stable sentry, and he's told 'em what has happened. He came up, sir," addressing himself to me, "just as the count was climbing out o' window. I knocked him on the 'ead of course, but they go the rounds at midnight, and they've come across him. Not a doubt about it."

Just as he finished speaking another gun sounded. We were between three and four miles away, but in the stillness of the night it seemed much nearer.

"And with a good road under us we might by this time have been within half a dozen miles of the frontier and safe."

"Safe?" said Hinge. "Quite so, sir. Safe to run into the ground at the toll-gate, sir. We're a lot better off where we are. I know Captain Fyffe's plan, sir, and it's the best whatever happens."

"Gentlemen," said the count, "let us dismount and rest our horses. We may have need of all that they can do for us."

A third gun banged from the distant battery. The river was raging before us. The clouds parted, and the full moon shone down with a light almost as clear as that of day.

CHAPTER VI

Pursuit was afoot, and what should be done to avoid it no man among us could guess. The foaming river ran in such volume that only madness would have attempted to ford it. Flight was cut off, and of course resistance was hopeless. The first place our pursuers would make for would be the bridge and the ford, since they were the only roads by which we could hope to reach the frontier. To take to the mountains would have been a purposeless folly. We could look for nothing but starvation and ultimate surrender there.

Happily for myself I was in my element again. We were forced into inaction once more, but it was a form of inaction which differed from that weary waiting which had so torn my nerves for the past eight-and-forty hours.

"I suppose, gentlemen," I said, "that, in any case, surrender is out of the question."

"I decline," cried Brunow, "to be the victim of your folly. If you had taken the road we should have been out of danger long ago. You choose to be caught like a rat in a trap, and I wash my hands of the whole business. I shall walk back to the inn."

He was already in the act of dismounting, when Hinge spoke.

"I wonder," he said, very dryly, "what them Austrians will think of the gentleman as brought the letter from the general?"

Brunow settled back in his saddle with a muffled exclamation, and spoke no more.

"Gentlemen," said the count, "if there is any possible way of escape without me I beseech you to take it."

Nobody answered. We sat for a long time in silence, and the river roared by. We strained our ears to listen, but not a sound reached us from the direction of the fortress. The night, late so stormy, was quite light and

quiet. An intense silence reigned on the hills, and not a sound was heard but the noise of the tumbling, hurrying water near at hand.

When I had gone to look at the ford I had taken keen note of everything, for to have mistaken the spot might have been fatal to us, even if no pursuit had been started. I had noticed a rock which stood in mid-stream about a score of yards above the ford, rising some four feet above the level of the stream. When we had reached the water-side this rock had been invisible, and I could only guess how deeply it was covered. I noticed on a sudden that its forehead was bare once more, and I stared at it with my heart in my eyes until I was persuaded that it was growing above water every instant. The river ran in this spot in a perfect torrent, with an incline, I should say, of nearly three feet in a hundred. The stream bore off the rainfall of a whole network of hills, but at the pace at which it ran it could not take long before it would become passable at some risk. I said nothing as yet, but the conversation I had held with Lieutenant Breschia on the morning of our first meeting filled my mind with hope. The torrent seemed no less noisy, but measuring it by the projecting arms of the rock I could see that it was falling with a greater rapidity than I had dared to hope for. Within ten minutes it had dropped six inches, but for the next ten minutes it hung stationary; and sometimes to my fancy seemed to gain. The thousand mountain rills and watercourses which helped to fill its bed, and which had themselves been latest to receive the rainfall, were charging down with new forces; and thinking of this I almost surrendered myself to despair. But I had not even yet given way, when the volume of water fell with an astonishing suddenness, and in little more than five minutes by my watch I could see a foot of the rock clear.

At ordinary times the ford was about a foot deep, and even then the rapid incline of the ground sent the shallow water swirling along at such a pace that it made a horse's foothold on the sliding pebbles precarious. Now it was four feet deep at least, and to cross at present was as impossible as it had been half an hour before. But as I watched it became more and more evident that the stream had received its last impetus, and the very element of speed which made the passage dangerous would diminish danger every moment.

The river seemed to grow noisier as it fell, chafing against obstacles which it had hitherto overflowed, and listen as one might we could make out nothing but its sullen roar. I told Hinge what I had noticed about the stream, and with a few words to my companions I rode until the noise of rushing water was no longer oppressive to the ear, and listened with all my might. I heard a thousand distant-seeming noises, which had in them no reality—shoutings and stealthy whispers, the thud and jingle of cantering troops of horse, lonely far-away footfalls, all manner of phantom sounds. Suddenly, in the midst of these illusions, my heart stood still for a mere half-beat at a noise which I knew in an instant to be real. A troop of cavalry at a gallop crossed the wooden bridge which spanned the river a couple of miles away. It sounded like a peal of thunder, but I knew what it meant well enough. The pursuers would be ahead of us, and every pass and pathway would be threaded, and guards would be everywhere.

Half an hour passed away without bringing anything further, and I rode back to the ford. All three of my companions were watching it with an absorbed and gloomy interest, and the rock by which I marked the fall of the stream stood a clear three feet above its surface.

"Let us try it now," I counselled, and was heading my horse at the water, when Hinge interposed.

"What's the depth, sir?" he called out to me.

"About two feet," I answered.

"Then I shall wade," said Hinge. "It 'll give the hoss more confidence, and I'll back leather against iron for a foothold."

I saw the force of his advice, and, dismounting, I stepped cautiously down into the stream. At first the rush of water carried me off my legs, and if it had not been that I had firm hold of the reins, and that my horse still stood on dry land, my share in the enterprise would in all probability have been then and there over. As it was I succeeded in regaining a foothold; but though the stream reached only to mid-thigh, it swept along with such violence that I had all my work cut out to stand against it. My horse, encouraged by hand and voice, came tremblingly after me, and the others followed. The stiffest bit of all the crossing lay at the point where the rush of water diverted by the rock caught us, and here we were at the deepest. This spot once passed we were under partial shelter, and from the centre of the stream the bank rose so rapidly that in half a dozen yards we were scarcely knee deep. We gained the farther bank and remounted, and then I called a council of war.

"I have already gone over the ground we shall have to travel," I began, "and we ought to be within three hours of safety. But the alarm has been given, and we shall find every pass guarded. What is to be done?"

"Sir," said the count, "I have no claim upon you or your companions. I thank you from my heart for your brave attempt in my behalf. But the fates are against us. For my own part, I counsel that we resign the struggle, and that you do your best to cross the frontier singly. I shall not be taken alive."

"There is no going back," I answered. "It is no safer now to abandon the enterprise than to go on with it. We are not likely to be intercepted until we reach the pass. My advice is that we ride as far as we dare, and then take to the hills on foot, avoiding the passes. We shall have a scramble for it, but life and liberty are worth that."

"Neither life nor liberty should have been in danger," said Brunow, sullenly. "It is your fault if they are, and if I lose either through your folly, on your head be it."

I reminded him that we had laid our plans together, and that they had had his full approval; but he was not in a mood to listen to reason, and I got no answer from him but a grunt of anger and disdain. The council of war had not served any very great purpose so far, and I turned away with a touch of desperation in my mind. I rode on, and the others followed. We skirted a wood which stretched from the river towards the nearest range of hills, and our horses' footfall on the turf, sodden as it was by the recent rain, made hardly a sound. We kept well in shadow, and had advanced perhaps a couple of miles, when I made out the highway at a little distance looking like a broad ribbon in the moonlight. Suddenly a bugle-call shrilled on the air, and while we shrank closer into the shadow of the trees a tumult of hoof-beats filled the quiet night, and a whole squadron of cavalry came in sight, riding full tilt in the direction of the fortress. We could feel the reverberation caused

by the galloping mass beneath us, and in a minute they were out of sight and almost out of hearing.

"That's a curious thing, sir," said Hinge, speaking almost at my ear.

"What is a curious thing?" I asked.

"That is," he replied, stretching out a hand in the direction of the vanished body of horsemen. "They've left nobody to guard the roads."

"How do you know that?" I asked, eagerly.

"I counted 'em as they went by," he answered. "There's every mounted man they've got in the place. They're all there down to the farriers. I'm a born fool, I am," he added, in an accent of the greatest delight. "They've never been after us at all, sir. It's a bit of midnight drill. That's what it is. I'll bet the road's as clear in front of us as ever it was."

After the fright we had had the news seemed too good to be true, but a brief consultation decided us to act on Hinge's hope, and to push boldly forward. We made for the highway, and following it at a road trot found ourselves breasting the first upward slope of the pass within a quarter of an hour. By-and-by the hills began to enfold us round, but the moon rode high and the road was clear and firm. For the first mile or so we kept an anxious outlook, but as the minutes went on our fears of interruption grew fainter, and our hopes rose to fever heat. We were all well mounted, our horses were fresh and full of vigor, and to all but one of us the ride itself was the merest bagatelle. But I noticed, riding side by side with the count, that he was reeling in the saddle like a drunken man, and at one moment he gave such a lurch towards me that if I had not been at hand to support him he would have fallen to the ground.

"I am weak," he said, as I checked his horse and mine. "It is no wonder. I am surprised that I have come as far."

He spoke with a gasping voice as if in pain, and with one hand clasped to his side.

"No hurry," I answered. "Let us go at an easier pace."

He soon recovered, and professed himself ready to push on again; but half a mile at the old pace brought him once more to a standstill. I gave him a little brandy from a flask with which I had been careful to supply myself, and once more he managed to ride on. From this time forward, however, he had to be watched with the utmost carefulness, and his feebleness so delayed us that we were a good three hours later in Teaching the end of the pass than we had expected. I had ascertained that the downs, which showed the frontier line, might be skirted by taking a lonely and difficult road to the right within a mile or so of our exit from Austrian territory. I had ascertained also that a sentry was on duty on this pathway night and day, his main duty being to prevent the passage of contraband goods. That we should have to deal with this fellow was an absolute certainty, and had been from the first, but it was easier to reckon with one man than with the dozen posted at the barrier.

We had come at so easy a pace that our horses showed no signs of distress or travel, and by this time the daylight was shining broadly. The dawn was two hours old, and there was on the face of things suspicion in our being on the road at such a time. Already the land of promise lay in sight, when the last obstacle to be encountered on our journey presented itself. The sentry sat as if dozing, with his rifle between his knees, but at the noise of our approach he sprang to his feet and hailed us sharply. We had passed a quick bend in the road, and had come upon him rather suddenly. We had already decided to ride up to him without reply, but he cocked his piece and called on us to halt. I waved my hand to him and we all rode on quickly. He seemed puzzled and irresolute for a moment, but he ended by clapping the butt of his rifle to his shoulder, and sang out "Halt!" once more.

"Good! good! my friend," I answered. "We are Englishmen, and travellers. There is no need to fire."

My foreign accent was proof enough that we were strangers, and he hesitated again. I was almost abreast of him by this time, and wishing him a good-day I was in some hope of being able to push by without further parley, but he set himself in the way with his rifle across his breast.

"What brings you travelling this way?" I made him out to ask. "You have no right to pass by here. Take the lower road," he added, with a gesture which helped me to his meaning.

"We have passports," I told him, producing my own paper and holding it towards him. "This is my friend, and this is my servant. The guide they gave us at Itzia has fallen ill."

"You cannot pass this way," he answered, gruffly, disregarding the passport. "You must go round by the lower road."

"My good fellow," Brunow broke in, airily, "you mustn't talk nonsense. We are going by, and there is an end of it. This gentlemen and I are personal friends of General Rodetzsky's. We have been on a visit to my friend Lieutenant Breschia at the fortress at Itzia, and we are now on our way to Pollia. That is the town below there I believe."

I more than half made him out at the time, and he confirmed my guesses later on. Suave and easy as he was, he made no impression on the sentry, who stood there immovable, bent on duty.

"We don't want to be troublesome," said Brunow, "and it's too absurd to talk of one man stopping four. Look at our papers if you like, and there's a little something for yourself." He threw the man a gold coin. The fellow stooped to pick it up, and we rode on like men whose business was accomplished. He ran after us, shouting and gesticulating for a minute or two, but we paid no heed to him, and in a while he left us to ourselves.

In five minutes we were breathing free air in a free land.

Half an hour later we rode into the main street of the town and hammered at the gate of a hotel. When we had awakened everybody else in the neighborhood our summons was answered by a sleepy hostler, who admitted us to the yard and took in our horses. A sleepy waiter appeared and led us to a room, the shutters of which were still closed against the daylight. We asked for coffee; and the man having thrown open the window to admit the light and air, and having gone away, I turned to our rescued prisoner, who had fallen all in a heap on a couch in one corner of the room.

Until now I had but little opportunity of observing him, for he had ridden all the way wrapped up in his great common soldier's cloak with its big collar turned up until it obscured every feature but his eyes and the mere point of a beak-like nose. Now, as he lay in an attitude of exhaustion, I went to assist him to a position of more comfort. I took the hook-and-eye which fastened the collar of the cloak and drew them apart; and such a countenance revealed itself as I never saw before, and pray Heaven I may never see again. A huge sweeping beard descended to the waist, and its whiteness was obscured by filth incredible. The long locks that mingled with it and overlay it on either side were roped together and tangled beyond hope of severance. The face was horribly pinched and meagre, and was of the color or want of color which you see in plants which have grown wholly in the dark. I will not describe further what I saw—what loathsome evidences of foul neglect. I have no heart for it, and I feel as if it insulted the memory of a gentleman to recall the evidences of the long and miserable martyrdom he had endured. They had kept him stabled like a wild beast—those accursed Austrians—for twenty years, and during all that time the martyred wretch had never known the use of the simplest appliance of cleanliness. In all the years I have lived I have never met a man who was more completely a gentleman by nature—more fastidious in his nicety of dress and person. I had to learn that afterwards; but for the moment, whether rage or pity or repulsion most filled my heart at this first clear sight of him, I could not have told. I think he saw nothing but the horror in my face, for he blushed crimson, and started to his feet with his coarse cloak clutched about his neck, and stared at me half appealing and all ashamed.

If I had had one of his jailers to account with at that moment it would have gone ill with him, I fancy. I have lived to see the death of that horrible tyranny, and I know now, that outside the borders of the one blackguard power which still darkens in the East, no such a life as this man had led is possible for any political prisoner in Europe; but even now, when I am an old man, and ought to be able to take things quietly, my blood surges in my veins when I think of that one minute of my life. I was no milksop, and I had led a soldier's life, and had seen plenty of things that were not pretty to look at. But I was horrified, and I can't even write about it now without the old wrath and disgust and shame.

I got the poor gentleman a room to himself, and when, in the course of a few hours, the town was alive, I wandered out into the streets and bought a pair of scissors. Any old campaigner may be a tolerable barber, and I was a pretty good one. I trimmed the late prisoner into decency, and with my own hands carried up a pail of water, a piece of soap, and towels. I had taken good stock of him, and carried his bodily measurements in my mind when I went out again to an outfitter's, taking Hinge with me to translate. I bought underclothing, and a suit of clothes; and I took back a shoemaker with me, and when the-count had dressed sent the man to him to try on a number of pairs of boots he had brought with him in a basket.

When the Conte di Rossano, clothed like himself for the first time in twenty years, came into the room in which breakfast was set for us, I hardly recognized him, though I myself had taken part in bringing about the transformation which had been worked in him. He came in alert and erect, and for a mere second looked every inch a gentleman. But the broad light to which he had been so long a stranger made him blink, and sent his hand to his eyes. He came across to the table with a faltering and uncertain tread, and with a curious crouch in his walk. It struck me for the first time then, but I saw it so often afterwards that I almost ceased to notice it at all. For an instant pride and liberty had buoyed him so that he could present a passing semblance of what he had been, but the change fell upon him as quick as lightning, and no flash of lightning could have blighted him more dreadfully. He approached the table shuffling, with bent head, and purblind eyes peering this way and that. I placed a chair for him, but he seemed uncertain what to do with it until I helped him to seat himself. The filthy floor of that unspeakable dungeon had been his only seat and couch for a score of years.

He sat crouching at the table as if hugging himself together for warmth, though the day was balmy, and the sun was bright and hot outside. When he drank he took his cup in both hands as an ape would have done, and as he tasted the fragrant coffee he made an animal noise of satisfaction. He caught himself at this, and a swift tide of crimson passed over his face; but a minute later the old felon habit was upon him again, and I saw him tearing his bread with his teeth in quite the jail-bird way. Looking at his thin hands, I saw that he had clipped his nails; but the skin had overgrown them, and had split into ragged fragments. I caught him peering at them in a distasteful way, and when he detected me in the act of watching him he hid them beneath the table.

We were still at table, when there came a sudden bang at the door, and without waiting for any reply in walked a gentleman with every sign of the public functionary about him, cocked hat, official stick, and all. He bowed, closed the door, stepped forward, and bowed again.

"The gentlemen speak French?" he asked.

I answered in the affirmative, and our visitor announced himself as the *huissier* of the magistrates court. It was his duty to demand our presence before the bench. On what ground, I asked. The functionary responded fluently and with an evident sense of his own importance that we had passed the frontier without showing our papers, and by an unrecognized route; that one of us was an escaped political prisoner; that the others were charged with assisting in his flight; that a lieutenant of lancers had been sent to demand our return, and that we were at once to appear at court. To all of which I answered flatly that we would not go; whereupon the functionary retired, leaving, as we discovered afterwards, a guard outside the house. A little later came a gentleman in official robes, who turned out to be the chief-magistrate. He explained his errand with some pomp.

"Sir," I said, when he had come to a peremptory end, "I am an Englishman and a soldier. Here are my credentials. This gentleman, the Honorable George Brunow, is a son of Lord Balmeyle, and is also an Englishman. This gentleman is the Conte di Rossano."

And here, to my surprise, the Conte di Rossano arose from his seat at the table, and, turning towards the official, with one hand on the back of his chair, said, in a clear, loud voice:

"Also an English subject! I was naturalized before my marriage," he added in a changed tone, and so sank into his seat again.

"You hear, sir," I said, respectfully. "I am about to order a carriage, and in half an hour shall leave the town

with these gentlemen and my servant on my way to England. Any official person molesting us will be held officially responsible for his conduct."

The mayor wavered.

"I have the honor, sir, to wish you a good-day."

I opened the door, and in walked Lieutenant Breschia.

"These are my birds," he said, laughingly. "I haven't the pleasure of being acquainted with this gentleman," signaling the count, "but I dare say we shall learn to know each other."

"My dear Breschia," cried Brunow, "we are sorry to have defrauded you; but you know us, and you know it will not pay to meddle with us. We are on neutral soil. We are all three British subjects. You have no authority here, and you know it."

"Eh, bien!" said the lieutenant, laughing still. "Civis Romanus sum. His excellency, the mayor, will bear out my statement that I came and saw and strove to conquer. You do not find it in your competence, sir, to arrest these gentlemen, who are all subjects of the British crown?"

"It is not my affair," said the mayor.

"And I am not authorized to employ force," said the lieutenant. "We are nonplussed, Monsieur le Maire."

"It would so appear," said the puzzled functionary; and being bowed from the room by the lieutenant, he retired.

"Civis Romanus sum," repeated Breschia, when we were left alone. "It is a great saying. And so you positively won't come back?"

"Positively we will not," said Brunow.

"Then, positively," returned the lieutenant, "I will go back and report my failure."

"Permit that I condole," said Brunow.

"Permit that I felicitate," answered Breschia; and so with a burlesque friendly bow on either side they parted.

CHAPTER VII

It was a strange and memorable journey home with the escaped prisoner, and men have been rarely more embarrassed than Brunow and myself. We had to deal with the strangest creature, a thing alternately beast and gentleman, sensitive in every fibre of his nature, and so animalized by that awful life of imprisonment that he was a constant dread and terror to himself. To see him slinking in his corner of the railway carriage or any room at our one or two halting-places, dull, bleary-eyed, with his fingers tapping at his teeth, was pitiable and dreadful, but not so pitiable and dreadful as to see him grow suddenly conscious of his state and aspect and awake to some shamefaced effort to arouse himself and reassert the manhood that had once been in him.

The most astonishing thing in him was the way in which, through all these silent and horrible years, he had possessed his faculty of speech. He had been an exceptional linguist in his youth, and he was an exceptional linguist still. He was most companionable and least embarrassed with us when he was in the dark, and it was in the dark on the deck of the steam-packet which carried us to Dover that he gave me the secret of his retention of this faculty.

He sat with one arm thrown over the vessel's rail and with his face half averted.

"Do you know, sir," I said, after trying in a dozen ways to draw him out, and after having failed in all of them—"do you know, sir, that I am quite sure of one thing about you?"

"What is that?" he asked.

"During all those years of cruel solitude you never abandoned the hope of freedom."

"How should you know that?" he demanded, with a strange and vivid manner. I had never known him so roused and interested, even when I had told him of the existence of his daughter.

"You have carefully preserved your power over language," I answered. "You would never have cared to do that if you had not had some hope of future freedom."

"I had no hope of freedom," he returned. "But everything else had gone that held me from the beasts, and that I determined should not go. I am no poet, but I have occupied myself in making verses. I have done into verse every incident of my life, and the character and aspect of every person I have known. I have translated every line into every language of which I am master. I have hundreds of thousands of lines in my head—how can I tell how many? They are poor enough, I dare say, but I could talk every working day for weeks and not exhaust them. They are in French, Italian, German, English, Spanish, in Greek and Latin, in the patois of a half-dozen districts of my native country. How many hundreds of thousands of hours have had no other occupation. But for that I had gone mad, my friend."

He rose and began to pace the deck, and I watched him. The night was calm, and the sea was like a mill-pond. Sometimes he forgot himself, and prowled with bent shoulders and clasped hands in a limited space, walking to and fro, with a sharp check at the end of such brief promenade, as if an invisible world had put a limit to the space he moved in; that was the jail-bird's gait, and the prison limits were about him again to his unconscious memory. Then, at other times he would assert himself with an effort only too visible. He would lift his head, throw out his chest, and march the full length of the deck with an assurance of freedom and manhood. But the slouching gait was always back in a minute, and his unconscious fancy began to confine his footsteps once more. On a sudden he paused in his walk and stretched out his right hand.

"That light?" he said.

"Dover," I answered. "We shall land in half an hour."

We were fortunately alone, for I would not have had it happen in the presence of a stranger for a thousand pounds. I had scarcely spoken when he dropped his face into both his hands and broke into an hysteric fit of crying. His limbs failed him; and in the passion of his emotion he would certainly have fallen to the deck if I had not put an arm about him. His poor body was all crate and basket, ribs and spine; and the wretched man's skeleton figure shook in my arms as if each sob were an explosion. He laid his head on my shoulder at last, and I put my other arm round him and held him to my breast. I love my country, and I thank God for her daily that she is free, and has taught the world the lessons of freedom, for that is the great and just pride of all Englishmen; but I never blessed her in my heart as I did then.

"God bless the dear old land," I said. "There is freedom there at least."

I did not know that I had spoken until he answered me.

"There is freedom there," he said, in his foreign voice, broken with sobs. "Thank God for freedom."

The town lights were almost blotted out for me; but I hugged him and patted him with less shame than I should have felt if he had been an Englishman. He disengaged himself at last and shook me by the hand, and began his promenade again. Before we had exchanged another word we were slowing alongside the pier, and men were bustling along the deck and racing beside us on the land. Brunow came on deck, and Hinge got together our simple baggage.

We had but just landed when I saw two ladies, whom I recognized at once. Miss Rossano and Lady Rollinson were waiting to meet us. Miss Rossano came to me and took my hand in both hers.

"Thank you, Captain Fyffe," she said. "My father is here?"

"You are my daughter?" said the count.

She bent and kissed him on the forehead gravely, and with perfect self-possession. An onlooker, who had known nothing of the story, would have guessed little from their meeting. They had a carriage in waiting, and Miss Rossano led the count towards it.

"You will join us at the Lord Warden?" she said. And at that minute Brunow approached her. She took his hand in both of her own, precisely as she had taken mine; but entered the carriage without a word to him. Now, I have said nothing lately of my feeling for Miss Rossano; but anybody who reads this record may be sure that what had happened since I had last seen her had not tended to put her out of my mind. I knew that I was going to be very happy, or very unhappy, about her. I knew that the power lay in her hands to make my life mainly cloud or mainly sunshine. That was quite settled in my own mind by this time, and my wife and I have laughed a thousand times and more about it. Yes; I knew scarcely anything about her, and yet I was prepared to fight in the assurance that she possessed every virtue and every grace of character which I have since proved in her. This is the folly of love; but it is at the same time that which makes it so beautiful. Most young men, and most young women, live to be disillusioned. But I fell in love with better fortune, if with no more discretion, than the average man displays, and after many years of trial and happiness I know my wife to be a better woman than I had power to guess all those years ago. And I know, as every husband of a good wife knows, that I was a much better man than I could ever have been without her influence.

All this leads me away from what I meant to say, which was simply that Miss Rossano's wordless reception of Brunow made me furiously jealous of him, and altogether dashed my happiness. She had spoken to me—*ergo*, she could speak. She had not spoken to him—*ergo*, the emotion of encountering him was too great for her. We had been six years married when I told her of this.

I saw her with both hands reached out to help her father into the carriage. I saw her beautiful face, so soft and serious and lofty in its look that I have no words to say how it touched me. The carriage drove away. Hinge shouldered our bit of luggage easily, and Brunow and I walked up to the hotel side by side. We were met in the hall by a waiter who asked us if we would go to Lady Rollinson's sitting-room in half an hour, and then Brunow and I went to a private room of our own, and drank each a pint of English ale, as every Englishman did on reaching the Lord Warden in those days. It was a libation to liberty, the health of welcome home which the loneliest traveller poured when he felt himself upon his native land again after an absence however temporary.

When we had got through this ceremony we sat glum and silent enough, and I have since thought it likely that Brunow was as much hurt at the difference in our greetings as I had been. For Miss Rossano had thanked me in words and had not spoken to him, and he was probably reading the thing the other way about. But he was much more at home within himself than I was, and at any time I don't think he was capable of any very deep feeling. Perhaps I do him less than justice, and we are all apt to think our sensations more striking and real than those of other people.

At the appointed time we went out into the corridor and walked to the room which bore the number the waiter had already given us. I tapped at the door, and Lady Rollinson admitted us. The count sat in a plush-covered arm-chair and his daughter leaned above him with a hand on either shoulder. The scene looked purely domestic, and if a stranger had seen it he would have discovered nothing unusual in it. At the moment at which I entered the count's hand strayed to his shoulder, and for a mere instant touched the hand which rested there. His daughter's hand closed upon it and held it, and she looked up with her beautiful face bright with feeling.

"Be seated, gentlemen," said the count, and we obeyed him. "I have tried to thank you often, but I have never succeeded. I shall succeed less than ever now, but I thank you."

Lady Rollinson sat in one corner of the room with some trifle of woman's work in her hand, pretending to be busy over it. She looked up at Miss Rossano once or twice, and it was plain to see that she had been crying. As for the girl herself, her eyes shone, her beautiful lips were apart, her color came and went, and it would have been evident to the dullest sight that she was deeply moved; but she showed no sign of having shed tears, and looked altogether brave and exultant. It was a beautiful thing to notice the caressing and protecting air with which she leaned above the count; and it was strange to read the likeness which existed between her bright young face and his worn lineaments.

We had paused more than once upon our journey, and he was in all respects trimmed and dressed as became a gentleman. As he sat there with his face alight and his whole manner animated, there was no trace of the jail-bird period about him. I remembered the man I had first seen at Pollia—the man with the colorless face, the sunken eyes, the matted hair and beard—and was puzzled to identify him with the polished gentleman who sat before me. And yet, in spite of the disguise, the jail-bird was back again in as little time as it would take to snap your thumb and finger. The cloud lowered upon him in a second, and he sat biting his nails with an air altogether lost and furtive. I think his daughter first read the change in him from my own look, for after one swift glance at me she bent over him and gazed into his face. He seemed unconscious of her presence or of ours.

"You were saying, dear—" she said, and there halted.

He looked up with an undecided half-return to his former brightness.

"I was saying—" he began, and then stopped, as if searching in his own mind for the clew to what had passed a moment earlier.

"You were thanking Captain Fyffe and Mr. Brunow."

"Gentlemen," said the count, with a complete momentary repossession of himself, "I know not how to thank you. You have seen enough already to know that the life I have led this many year's has left its mark upon me. I fail in words—sometimes, to tell you the whole truth, I fail in feelings. There are moments when I have not even the heart to be glad that I am free again. But you will understand, and you will forgive because you understand. If words of gratitude do not come easily to my tongue, it is not because you have not deserved them."

"The man who really deserves the thanks of all of us," I answered, "is Corporal Hinge. Without him we should have been nonplussed; with him everything fell out in the simplest way. We have encountered no difficulty, and run no dangers."

"But," said Brunow, in his lightest and airiest fashion, as if he disclaimed credit in the very act of claiming it, "I need hardly tell Miss Rossano that in fulfilling the commission we accepted at her hands we should have been delighted to encounter either. As it was we had the most extraordinary good-fortune in the world. The whole thing has been a chapter of happy accidents."

"It pleases you to say so," said the count; "but my daughter and I enjoy no less the privilege of gratitude."

The position was embarrassing; for the more I thought about it the more I saw how little we had done, and how plain and simple a piece of duty it had been to do that little.

"Your father is tired, Miss Rossano," I said, taking the shortest way out of the difficulty. "You and he, besides, will have a thousand things to say to each other with which nobody else will have a right to interfere." I rose and held out my hand, and she came from behind her father's chair to meet me with an exquisite frankness.

"You shall have my thanks, Captain Fyffe," she said, "all my life long, whether you disclaim them or not. And you too, Mr. Brunow. I suppose we all go to town together?"

The count had risen from his seat while she spoke, and stood before us with one hand stretched out to Brunow and the other to myself. "I am poor in words," he said, with a shaking voice; "I am poor in everything. But believe me, gentlemen, I thank you, and shall thank you always. For whatever of life is left to me I am yours."

Two or three tears rolled over from his bright, sunken eyes, ran down the deep-channelled line in his cheeks, which misery and solitude had bitten there, and rested in his white mustache. He gripped our hands hard, and, turning away from us, sat down again.

We said good-night in hushed voices, as if we were speaking in a church or a sick-chamber, and came away.

Even at this, distance of time I am ashamed of my own sensations; but when I got away to my own room my whole feeling was one of disappointment and dissatisfaction. I had meant to do everything by myself—to have had no rival, to have brought back Miss Rossano's father unaided, and to have taken whatever gratitude was due for that service entirely to myself. As it turned out, I had done nothing. The original discovery of the count's whereabouts was entirely due to Brunow. Without him the expedition would have been fruitless, and but for the pure accident of Hinge's presence we should both have been helpless.

My bedroom window overlooked the sea, and I sat at it for three or four hours, smoking and staring across the motionless waste of water before the truth about myself occurred to me. When it came it brought as little comfort as the truth is apt to bring. I saw that my whole purpose had been to do something that should make me look noble and exceptional in Miss Rossano's eyes, and that the recovery of a living man from that infernal dungeon meant almost nothing in contrast with my own selfish wishes.

It took a long time to swallow that pill, and it took a longer time yet to digest it; but it had a wholesome effect upon me, and I was all the better for it in the end.

When I got down into the public breakfast-room I found Brunow there in the act of making inquiry of a waiter as to the hour of the arrival of the London papers. I attached no particular importance to the fact at the moment, but a few minutes later I passed him in the corridor and found him repeating the same inquiry to another waiter; and a little later, when we were seated at table together, he propounded the same question to a third.

"You're in a hurry for news," I said.

"I want to see what they've made of it," he answered, smilingly. "The local man down here seems to be a smartish sort of fellow, and I was careful to see that he had the facts all right before he went away."

"What local man? What facts?" I asked.

"My dear fellow," said Brunow, smiling and waving his table-napkin in the air, "we are people of distinction, and under the circumstances our comings and goings are naturally chronicled. We shall have a reception in town, I promise you."

I understood by then what he had been doing, and I was almost as much ashamed as if I had done it myself.

He had taken the trouble to blaze the whole affair in the newspapers; and when, an hour later, the train which brought the London journals down to Dover arrived at the station, I was there with him to meet it. He was so obviously satisfied with his own action that it would have been useless to say a word to him. And yet I fairly boiled over when I saw the travesty of the whole adventure with which he had duped the *Times*. One would have supposed from the story with which he had primed the representative of that journal that we had run every conceivable kind of risk, and had, by our own courage and cunning, surmounted every obstacle the wit of man could compass. All this was absurd enough and annoying enough, but the introduction of Miss Rossano's name into the narrative looked altogether wanton and unwarranted, and, I dare say, now that I can recall the whole thing in cool blood, that I was more disturbed and angry than I need have been. Brunow took what I had to say with imperturbable good-humor, and was altogether satisfied with himself.

"We shall have a crowd to meet us," he prophesied. "There are thousands of Italian refugees in London at this minute, and they will all be there to cheer the illustrious Fyffe, and the no less illustrious Brunow. All the exiled noblemen who live in Hatton Garden, and make London stand and deliver at the barrel-organ's mouth, all the dukes and counts who shave and teach dancing, and sell penny ices, and keep cheap restaurants, will be there to welcome their delivered compatriot. The railway terminus will be odorous with garlic and the humanity of Italy. Fyffe, my dear fellow, we shall have a glorious day."

When I told him, as I did, that he was a thick-skinned idiot and braggart, he looked amazed. But I left him to his surprise, and took what precautions I could against the newspaper falling into the hands of Miss Rossano. We all travelled to London together at her request, and I had some difficulty in persuading Brunow that I was in earnest in insisting that she should see nothing of the nonsense he had caused to be written and printed about our expedition.

"My dear fellow," he declared, "the man was eager to get the news, and would have printed three times as much if I had felt inclined to give it him. You can't expect," he went on, "to do a thing of this kind at this time of day and not have it talked about. And of course it's best to let these press fellows come to the fountain-head and get the plain, simple, unadulterated truth."

This, in face of the story he had told, was so monstrous, and, when I came to think about it, so astonishingly like him, that I forbore to say another word, except to warn him that the newspapers should not reach Miss Rossano with my good-will.

He gave in at last, though he grumbled a great deal, and was evidently as far from understanding me as I was from comprehending him.

We made a dull party on the whole, for nobody could help feeling that the count and his daughter were absolute strangers to each other, or that our presence was a little awkward at the time. It was ridiculous to try to talk commonplace. It felt brutal and unsympathetic to sit in silence, and almost equally brutal and unsympathetic to say a word of what was nearest to all our hearts. But if we had been embarrassed on the journey, all our memory of it vanished for the moment in the deeper embarrassment of the reception which Brunow's babble had prepared for us. His prophecy of what would happen was fulfilled, and more than fulfilled. The platform of the terminus swarmed with people of every nationality known to London, and everybody there present seemed crazy with excitement. How, or by whom, our little party was singled out was beyond my power to guess. But we were recognized in a moment, and in another moment were swept asunder from each other amid such a polyglot babel of voices as I had never heard before. People were laughing and crying and cheering and fighting all at once, and I had a glimpse of the count in the arms of a score of mustachioed, sallow-featured men who were weeping and shouting, and hugging and kissing him and each other like a pack of lunatics inspired with the instinct of welcome. I was faring little better at the hands of the populace, though I cooled the enthusiasm of more than one patriot, I am afraid, as I fought my way out of the railway station. I escaped to a hackney carriage and found my way to my own lodgings, accompanied by Hinge, who was as delighted at the scene as I was angry at it. Before I had driven away from the terminus I had seen from no great distance that the count, Miss Rossano, and Lady Rollinson had safely reached her ladyship's carriage, which had been telegraphed for before our leaving Dover. I had interfered to prevent the taking out of the horses, and had seen the carriage start for home amid a roar of "vivas" and "bravas" and "hurrahs." The last I had seen of Brunow was in the middle of a crowd, with whom he was exchanging polyglot congratulations in the height of good spirits and enjoyment.

Hinge had not been three minutes in my room before he had made himself master of the place. He installed himself without engagement or invitation as my body-servant, and I found him in my bedroom hunting the wardrobe and chest of drawers for a change of clothes.

"You'll find me 'andier when I gets to know my way about, sir," he said. "I was the colonel's batman for three years, and I can valley a gentleman as well here as there, sir. You'll feel more like London when you've got into these, sir."

He pointed to the garments laid out symmetrically on the bed, and, motioning to me to be seated, knelt down before me and began to unlace my boots.

I was still in the act of dressing when a knock sounded at the outer door; Hinge marched off to answer it, returning with a large visiting-card edged with a line of mourning. He presented this to me, and I read the words "Count Ruffiano," printed very badly in blunt script type.

I told Hinge to ask the visitor his business, and I learned that he came direct from Miss Rossano with a message. I excused myself for a minute, and hastily finished dressing.

The Count Ruffiano, a head and shoulders taller than myself, stood in the middle of the room and bowed with surprising courtliness when I entered. He was six feet seven or eight in stature, had an eagle beak, a huge gray mustache, and a head of stiff, upstanding hair, close cropped and mottled in jet black and snow white. His cheeks and chin had been strange to the razor for a week; his linen was limp and discolored; and his clothes, which were of foreign cut, had once been shapely and fashionable, but were now seedy beyond belief. The hat he held in one hand was a monument of shabbiness; but his habitual stoop had the air of having been acquired by a constant courtly condescension. He was as lean as his own walking-cane, and his air of condescending gentility put a strange emphasis on his shabby clothes, and made them ten times as

noticeable as they would have been without it. And yet at the very first sight of him I was persuaded that he was a gentleman.

"You are Captain Fyffe?" he said, with a marked Italian accent.

"That is my name," I responded.

"You are possessed of mine," he answered. "Permit me that I shake hands. I read in your English *Times* this morning of the arrival of the Conte di Rossano. I have seen my friend, and, so far as I know, I am the only survivor of the enterprise in which he lost his liberty. I lose no moment in coming here to pay my homage to the disinterested valor which gave my compatriot his freedom, I am, sir," he bowed and extended his hands with a smiling humility—"I am, sir, this many years a pensioner on the bounty of Miss Rossano. She knows me as a comrade of the father whom she has always until now thought of as lost to her. She has pencilled for me a line or two on the back of my card."

I held the card still, and, turning it over, I read: "This brave and loyal gentleman is my father's one surviving friend. He wishes to know you. V. R."

I looked up after reading this brief but expressive message, and the face of the gaunt spectre who stood before me was flushed, and his head was in the air, as if he had read it with me, and was proud of the testimony it conveyed on his behalf.

I asked him to be seated, and gave him to understand that anybody carrying such a recommendation was welcome. He held out a long, lean hand, and when I gave him my own stooped over it and kissed it.

"Sir," he said, "you have done more than restore an individual to liberty. You have reanimated a cause: you have inspired a people. There are a thousand of us at this hour in London to whom the name of the Conte di Rossano is a legend and an inspiration. Twenty years ago he was our leader—a spirit of the subtlest and most indomitable. A soul without fear, and of resource astonishingly varied. 'You have restored him to us, and before a month is over his name will ring through Italy. We are preparing for such a rising as we have never made. For years our names have been written on the sands of failure. We shall write them to-morrow on the lasting granite of success.'"

He talked with any amount of fire and vigor, and in a voice pitched so high that he might have been haranguing a multitude. He gesticulated with the shabby old hat and the slim walking-stick as if he had been wielding sword and buckler in an opera, and his narrow chest swelled under the tight buttons of his ragged old frock-coat. Every English word he spoke was supplemented by an Italian vowel, so that his language, though it was perfectly fluent and correct, sounded quite foreign. His extraordinary height and leanness made him grotesque to look at, but neither the comicality of his figure nor his theatrical voice and gesture could kill the fact that he was in earnest, and I felt an immediate liking for him.

"I am not here," he said, "on a visit of impertinence. I have an actual object. I am charged by the Conte di Rossano to tell you that a meeting has been already arranged to welcome him to London. It will be held to-night, and he beseeches you through me to be present at it."

I demurred at first, for I had no mind to be publicly embraced by the tatterdemalion patriots I had seen in the crowd that morning. But when my visitor incidentally mentioned the fact that Miss Rossano would accompany her father, I gave him my promise at once.

The ragged nobleman promised to call and conduct me to the place of meeting, and so went his way with a torrent of thanks and a rage of gesticulation.

CHAPTER VIII

I found Miss Rossano and her father in the vestry of a Wesleyan Methodist chapel. The room was crammed almost to suffocation, and there was such a crowd outside that it took us ten minutes' hard fighting to reach the neighboring school-room in which the public meeting was to be held. The way was cleared at last, and a score or so of us filed on to the platform, which was erected at one end of the crowded hall. My visitor of that afternoon immediately preceded Miss Rossano and the count, and I followed on their heels.

As we reached the platform the gaunt phantom swung round upon us, and in a voice like the call of a trumpet announced "The Exile."

I had already had a taste of the patriotic enthusiasm of the crowd that morning, but I had never seen anything which did more than approach the delirious excitement which set in at this announcement.

There was not a seat in the body of the room, and the men who occupied the floor were packed like herrings in a barrel. One could see nothing but a great wave of swarthy, eager faces, and could hear nothing but a tumult like the roaring of the sea. There was hardly a man in the whole assemblage who was not weeping with excitement; and though I have rather a knack of keeping a cool head under such circumstances, I have to own that I was deeply moved.

It seemed impossible to stop the cheering. Ruffiano, who had constituted himself chairman, gesticulated like a windmill, and roared till he was hoarse in the vain effort to secure silence. It took a full quarter of an hour to wear out this prodigious welcome, and even then it broke out anew in scattered bursts and spurts, as if the people could never have enough of it.

All this while Miss Rossano stood at her father's side, holding one of his hands in both her own. The tears were streaming down her face without cessation, but I had never seen her look so radiant—not even on the night when I first saw her, and the happy brightness of her beauty made me her life-long servant.

The count, poor man, was shaken altogether out of self-control. He hid his eyes with his frail hand, and his tears ran like rain through his wasted fingers. I have tried many and many a time to realize in my own mind what he must have felt, but I have always known the futility of the effort.

Twenty years of solitary imprisonment, a martyrdom of physical degradation quite unspeakable, and sickening even to think of for a moment, darkness, torture, utter despair, and then freedom and human tears, and this astounding roar of triumph, sympathy, and welcome! It was no wonder the scene unmanned him. The wonder was that he had not sunk into an unquestioning animalism—a mere brute state of idiocy—years ago.

There was speech-making enough and to spare when the cheering at last was over. The count himself spoke a few broken words of thanks, which elicited another roar of sympathy and welcome scarcely inferior in volume to the first and only less prolonged. To tell the truth, I felt the whole business rather trying, and I got heartily sick of the name of the courageous, illustrious, magnanimous, and altogether noble and magnificent Signor Fyfa. I knew perfectly well, though I could not understand a tenth part of what was said, that Brunow's shameless exaggerations were accepted here as solid truth, and that I was being lauded for a number of splendid qualities which, to say the least, I had had no chance of displaying. The illustrious, courageous, magnanimous, and altogether noble Brunow came in for his share of the praise, and bowed solemnly, with his hand upon his heart, whenever the crowd cheered him. He made a speech in Italian, and achieved an overwhelming success.

Finally, the whole business was over. We had got back to the vestry, and all but a few of the chieftains had gone away, when I first became aware of the presence of the Baroness Bonnar. A light hand touched my sleeve, and a foreign voice spoke to me in English.

"This is a noble occasion. I have never been so moved in my life. I have cried until I am not fit to be seen."

Turning and looking at the speaker, I failed for a mere instant to recognize her. I had seen her but twice before, and then only for a moment at a time, and under circumstances of no especial interest. She saw the doubt in my face, and reintroduced herself. She looked extremely pretty, and even fascinating, in a coquettish little bonnet of the fashion of that time.

When her face was in repose one could judge of her age, but when she smiled all her wrinkles—and there were a good many of them—melted into the smile, and her face looked almost girlishly young and innocent. She owned that look of youth and freshness in spite of the fact that she was rouged and powdered and painted as if she had been ready for the stage. It was pretty easy to see that she had not been quite as much affected by the "noble occasion" as she pretended to have been, for the slightest shower of tears would have ruined that admirable and artistic make-up.

"I pass for Austrian," said the baroness; "but I am Hungarian all over, and I hate, I hate, I hate the Austrians! If I had my way I would kill them every one."

She spoke with a pretty enough pretence of vindictiveness, but her manner was not very convincing.

Supposing I had been aware of this little person's purpose, what should I have done, I wonder? What should I have been justified in doing? I had rather not answer that question, even to myself. But if I had known for a certainty what was in her heart, and what lay in the future, there are not many things at which I should have hesitated to spoil her plans.

She did not find me very sympathetic or very ardent. I was tired, for one thing, and for another I can never take very kindly to humbug, even when a pretty woman offers it. The baroness turned from me to Brunow, beseeching him to introduce her to the acquaintance of that dear and charming Miss Rossano, who had so much her sympathy, and the spectacle of whose natural emotion had so much affected her. I am not very observant in such matters, but though Brunow disguised it pretty well, I am sure that I noticed some reluctance in his manner. He made the presentation, however, and the baroness flowed out in sympathy and congratulation.

"I am myself Hungarian," I heard her say, "but I have lived in Austria half my life. There is no need to tell *you* anything about that terrible government, but—mon Dieu! the things I have seen and known! I am a stranger, Mees Rossano, and the hour is sacred; but you will forgive this intrusion, will you not? because I could not help it."

She spoke with so much vivacity and feeling that I felt a little sorry for my contemptuous thoughts of her. She had said her say, and she behaved with more reticence and more apparent delicacy than I should have been disposed to give her credit for. She said something to the count in a low and rapid voice, and he answered by the offer of his hand, and a mere broken murmur of response. I made out that she had asked to be honored by taking the hand of one ennobled by so much suffering, and the quiet and unobtrusive fashion in which she slipped from the room after offering this tribute raised her anew in my opinion. It would have been a just thing, had one known all, to have crushed that dangerous and wicked little viper exactly as if she had really been a snake, instead of a woman with a snake's nature.

She went her way, however, having begun her work of mischief under my eyes.

Another night or two of such emotion would have been fatal to our rescued prisoner; and, indeed, he gave us all a fright before we got him home that evening. All the enthusiasts had cleared away, and I was leading the poor gentleman towards a cab which had been already summoned and was now waiting in the street, when, without warning, he swooned away. I felt his arm slipping rapidly from mine, and caught him just in time to save him from a heavy fall. I carried him back to the vestry, and there we loosened his collar and laid him on the couch, and dashed water in his face, while Brunow ran for brandy. He recovered in a while, but was even then too weak to walk, so that I carried him in my arms to the street, and set him down in the cab. My wife has often told me, in talking over those old times, that she looked on me at that moment as a man possessed of Herculean strength; but, in truth, the poor fellow was so attenuated that his weight was scarcely greater than a child's.

I could hardly do less than call at Lady Rollinson's house next day to inquire after the sufferer's condition; and yet I went with great reluctance. I was so eager to be there, I was so willing to spend every hour in Miss Rossano's company, that I was afraid of being intrusive, and my very anxiety to be near her kept me away from her in this foolish fashion many a time.

The Baroness Bonnar was before me when I called, and I found her there in the daintiest and most becoming of visiting costumes, chatting away with excellent tact and unflinching vivacity.

She gave Miss Rossano time to welcome me, and then assailed me at once with laudation's of my devotion and courage, which I received, I know, with an extremely evil grace. I resemble my neighbors in liking to have credit for what I have done, but I know nothing more hateful than unmerited praise. I silenced her at last, and she turned upon Miss Rossano with a stage-whisper intended for my hearing: "I adore these brave men who are too modest to endure praise."

"You are too oily for my personal taste, madame," I said to myself, and my earlier dislike for her came back again.

The count, I learned, was better. Immediately on his arrival at Lady Rollinson's the family doctor had been sent for. Like a wise man, he had prescribed rest and complete freedom from all excitement. There were to be no more public meetings, and the sufferer was seriously warned against all stress of emotion.

"We have had great difficulty," said Miss Rossano, "in bringing him to reason. The enthusiasm of last night's meeting has convinced him that a great uprising is near at hand, and that in a year or two at the outside Italy will have her freedom back again. He would die for that," she said, with a flash of her beautiful eyes, and her face suddenly pale with feeling. "The house was overrun with Italians yesterday," she added. "My father saw some of them, and they are all full of the news that Charles Albert is ready to march into Piedmont, and that the Pope is favorable to devolution. One never knows how much truth there is in these stories, but I have lived in an atmosphere of them all my life." Then she laughed on a sudden, and, clapping her hands together, turned on me with a swift gesture like that of a pleased child. "You saw the Count Ruffiano yesterday?" she asked; and I, answering in the affirmative, she laughed again. "The poor dear old gentleman," she said, "is my father's one surviving comrade, and ever since I have been able to understand he has talked to me about Italy and The Cause. He is in fiery earnest, and such a dreamer that he has been looking forward to every month of his life as the date of Italy's liberty. I have had a great deal of influence with the count"—she was serious again by this time—"and through him over the Italian revolutionists in London, and I have always counselled them not to strike until they were sure of their aim. An unsuccessful revolution is a crime. You think it strange that a girl should be thinking of these things."

"Indeed, no," I answered. "I should think it strange in your case if you had no such thoughts. And let me tell you, Miss Rossano, that I think your friend Count Rumano's dream is coming near at last. He may wake any fine morning to find it very near indeed."

"You think so?" she cried, with a restrained vehemence. "You have heard news while you were abroad?"

"No news," I answered; "but I can see the general trend of things. There is an awakening spirit of liberty on the Continent, and unless I am much mistaken, a map of Europe of this date will be a surprising thing to look at in half a dozen years."

I should be a fool to pretend that I foresaw all the political changes which have taken place since then, but I should have been blind if I had not foreseen some of them. Liberty was in the air; there was an underlying strife and turmoil in the world's affairs which was not evident to everybody, though a soldier of fortune like myself, who made the cause of liberty his trade, was bound to be aware of it. The great politicians knew it all, no doubt; but they kept their knowledge to themselves, and waited, as we know now, with a bitter anxiety and fear for what events might bring. For the great politicians were, for the most part, then, as now, afraid of liberty, and looked on it as being very much of a curse rather than a blessing.

"You would fight for Italy," she said, "if there were a real chance?"

"If there were anything approaching a chance," I responded, "I would fight for Italy."

If I had dared I would have told her what was really at the bottom of my thought: I would have fought gladly for Italy; but the fact that it was her cause, that she espoused it and hoped for it, that her father had been buried alive for it, made it dearer to me than any other in the world. I had almost forgotten that we were not alone when the Baroness Bonnar proclaimed her presence.

"Italy!" she cried; and as I turned at the sound of her voice I saw her bring the palms of her gloved hands together and turn her fine eyes to the ceiling as if the word inspired her—"Italy! oh, if I were a man I would fight for Italy! Ah, those hateful Austrians! And what a man is Cavour! and what a man Garibaldi! Oh, they will fight! They will win!"

"There is plenty of time yet. Liberty, my dear Miss Rossano, will restore your father to health, and he will not lose his share of the glory." We English always excuse a foreigner who shows a tendency to bombast in conversation; and allowing for her partial knowledge of the language, and for the oratorical turn her people have, I saw nothing overstrained in the little woman's raptures. I had even a modified belief in their reality; and even to this day I cannot blame myself for having been deceived by her. She had an astonishing capacity in her own line, and though she had achieved no great success on the stage, she was the most perfect actress off it I have ever known.

She showed no disposition to prolong her visit, but withdrew after a stay of a quarter of an hour or so, with many expressions of good-will and ardent hope for the count's early recovery. If she might have the honor, she would call again upon Miss Rossano.

"Pardon me," she said; "beside you I am an old woman, and I can take a liberty. I like you for your interest in poor Italy and for your father's sake, who has been a martyr in such a cause. You will let me see you sometimes. People who know me better than you do will tell you that I am a butterfly, and without a heart. But that is not true. I do not show my heart often, and never unless I mean it."

She was gone without waiting for a response, and Miss Rossano, turning to me with a blush and a smile, asked me if I did not consider her visitor quite a charming little person. It would have been ungracious on no evidence at all to have stated my real mind, and I compromised by saying nothing. My silence on that topic went unobserved; and until I took my leave we talked about the count and the prospects of The Cause. It makes me smile now to remember how savagely in earnest I grew to be about that matter of Italian independence when once I had discovered that Miss Rossano was seriously interested in it. That, if I had only thought about it, was the way to her heart; but anxious as I was to secure her good opinion, I was guilty of no pretences. The mere fact that she desired it would have been enough to make me desire it also, even if I had

had no wishes that way to begin with.

"Captain Fyffe," said Miss Rossano, suddenly, in the midst of our enthusiastic talk upon this theme, "I am going to ask you a favor. I know very little of my father as yet. I have not spent twelve hours in his society, but it is easy to find out two things about it: he will be mad to join in any effort that The Cause may make, and —"

She paused there, with a look of semi-embarrassment.

"And?" I interrogated.

"I think," she continued, "that he is likely to be very much influenced by your opinion."

"We have scarcely exchanged a word together on that topic," I responded.

"Ah," she returned, quickly, "you have influenced his judgment without that. He has formed opinions about you, and he has expressed them more than once. He thinks you are a man of unusually solid character, and I am sure you will be able to influence him greatly. You must remember, too, what a debt of gratitude he owes you. The more warmly you are disposed to The Cause yourself, the more necessary it seems to beg you not to allow him to rush into any new danger. Give us, at least, a little time in which to know each other before he leaves me again."

I promised earnestly that I would never say a word to induce him to leave her side. I promised that if any undertaking should seem to lead him into useless danger, I would do my best to warn him from the enterprise. I promised further (but this was to myself, and I said no word about it) that in the event of any effort being made the count should be my comrade, and that I would do my loyal best for him.

That brought our conversation to an end, and I took leave of her, but not before she had assured me that I should always be a welcome visitor. I went away mighty proud and happy, and when I got home to my chambers who should I find awaiting me but the Count Ruffiano, buttoned to the throat to disguise the absence of the linen which had been so shabbily conspicuous yesterday. He was in a state of intense excitement, and when I entered was pacing up and down the room like one scarcely able to control himself.

"Pardon this second intrusion, my dear sir," he began; "I will explain its purport in a moment."

I induced him to be seated; but before he had got out half his statement he was on his feet again, striding about my little room in such a heat of excitement that, lean as he was, the perspiration fell in big drops from his thatched eyebrows and the tip of his Quixote nose.

"To begin with, sir," he said, when I had persuaded him to be seated, "you are one of us? That you are a friend to humanity, I know, but a friend to Italy—yes?"

I was still hot from my talk with Miss Rossano, and I assured the count that I was very much a friend to Italy indeed.

"Then, sir," he cried, "we have need of you! We have need of every counsel—of every hand."

He was on his feet again, and had intrenched himself behind the arm-chair. He declaimed from that position as if it had been a rostrum, employing a wealth and variety of gesture which no English mimic could succeed in copying in a year.

News, it appeared, had arrived that morning from Paris which led to the belief that an uprising against Louis Philippe might shortly be looked for. The messenger who brought that news had within twenty-four hours encountered a messenger from Turin, who prophesied insurrection there; this messenger in turn had news from Vienna from another comrade, who was assured that Metternich was trembling in his shoes at the thought of Charles Albert's threatened advance on Piedmont.

"The wine," cried my Italian Quixote, "is in ferment! We drink of it, and our hearts are turned to madness! We need more of your English sang-froid"—he called it "sanga-froida," and puzzled me for a passing instant. "The hour is here," he declared, "and the men are here! But, until now, we have ruined everything by too much precipitation, and against that we must now be on our guard!"

Of the volubility and energy with which he delivered himself of all this, and much more, I cannot convey even the slightest idea. I can give no notion of his fertility in unnecessary vowels, and I should be afraid to say how many syllables he made of the word precipitation, or how he would have spelled it in English if he had tried.

"It is for you, sir," he thundered, stopping in his headlong walk to shake a long forefinger in my face—"it is for you to teach us to be calm!"

I asked him to take his first lesson there and then, and to begin it by being seated.

"Ah," said he, "that is to be practical—that is to be English. To be practical and to be English is to be successful. You shall advise us—you shall lead us to victory!"

In his discovery of the excellence of my practical method he had forgotten all about it, and was pounding up and down the room at as great a rate as ever, when I took him by the shoulders and forced him into a chair.

"Let us talk business," I said, severely; "if this means anything at all, it means action."

"Action," he responded, "decisive and immediate!"

"Action," I retorted, "well matured and sane!"

"Ah! yes, yes," cried Ruffiano; "again, dear sir, you correct me. That is why I am here. But do not think because I have no patience—do not think because I am an old—an old—" He searched in his mind for a simile, and burst out with "gas-balloon" with a laugh of childish amusement at his own impetuosity. "Do not you think because I am an old gas-balloon that there are not among us no wiser and cooler heads than mine! We are at a white-heat now, but there are men among us who can keep their wits even in a furnace like this. I, dear sir"—he would have been on his feet again but that I checked him—"I am of the inner council. We meet to-night, and, hot as I am, I fear my own heat and that of others. If you wish well to Italy, be one of us. And be sure, sir, that the rescuer of our one most dearest and most prized shall be received with honor."

I promised; and he undertook to call upon me at nine o'clock that evening. And thus, within a day of my return to London, I found myself pledged to Italy; and a few hours later made one of a caucus of conspirators,

poor and needy and inconsiderable enough to look at, but holding in their hands, after all, one or two of the strings which, being pulled at the ripe hour of time, changed the scene for more than one land in Europe.

CHAPTER IX

And now it seems to me as if I might go on writing to the end of what remains of my lifetime, and never come to a finish. But I have to take hold of myself, as it were, with resolution, and to refrain from speaking of a hundred thousand things which interest me in memory.

The story I am bidden to tell is of how and why I came to rob Miss Rossano of forty thousand pounds, and yet not to suffer one whit in her esteem or in my own. It is an easy thing to say to a man, "You took part in such and such an adventure; you know all about it; take your pen in your hand and write a history of it." The trouble is in the selection; and I have found myself so gravely puzzled as to what I shall leave out that I see nothing for it but to set down formally before myself, for my own guidance, the names of the people who are most closely and intimately concerned in what I have to tell; and having done that, I must resolve to restrict my narrative to the history of their sayings and doings. Such a countless crowd of people surge up into memory that this is more difficult than any one would fancy. All my old comrades in deliberation, my friends in council, my companions in the war of later on are with me at times as I sit and think over the incidents of this story. The odd part of it is that a thousand things I had forgotten come back as clearly as if they had happened yesterday, and I should feel a greater pleasure in dwelling upon them than upon the main incidents to which I am bound to confine myself. Roaring nights by the camp-fire, when a chance-found skin of wine made the time glorious; jolly little touches of mirth and *camaraderie* here and there; heats of battle, splendors of victory, miseries of retreat—all come back upon me, and the faces of many dead comrades people the air.

But to come to my resolution. There is Brunow, who was the fatal cause of it all; and the Baroness Bonnar, who made her cat's-paw of him; and Ruffiano, whom the two betrayed between them; and then there are left the count, and Miss Rossano, and the faithful Hinge. Then there is the ghost of poor Constance Pleyel, who came like a wraith out of the past and vanished again into the darkness; then there is myself for the centre of the story, whether I like it or not. Here are now my *dramatis persono* before me. The stage of my mind is crowded with auxiliaries, but I dare scarcely glance at them.

And who was Constance Pleyel? In a sense she was the motive and main-spring of my life, for it was she who embarked me on that career of adventure which has made me what I am.

When I was a very young man indeed I fell in love with Constance Pleyel. I am not the first man whose life has been set awry by his love for an unworthy woman, nor shall I be the last. I would very willingly keep silent about that episode in my life, but the story has to be told. It shall be told with due reticence; for if I cannot respect poor Constance any more, I can at least respect the feelings which made her sacred in my eyes for a year and more in the days of my boyhood.

Months had gone by, and the spring of the year was near at hand. The count had come back to a condition of health and of mental strength which was no less than astonishing. I have never ceased to think it wonderful that a man who had been so long buried from the world, from all its interests, and from all knowledge of its affairs, should have been able so readily to take up the lost threads of life. The most remarkable thing about him, even if on the whole it were the least surprising, was the survival of the patriotic impulse in his mind. It seemed as if nothing could quench that, and as if all his suffering had served only to lend new fuel to that sacred flame. By this time he was deep in all our councils, the most active, and at once the wariest and most ardent of our leaders. I was pledged to the cause of Italy heart and soul, and was, I think, as thoroughly and % passionately devoted to her service as if the call of blood had sounded in me. I identified myself with the hopes of Miss Rossano and her father, and I was in all things their loyal servant and coadjutor.

I suppose I have made it clear by this time that I had never any very great esteem or affection for Brunow. He was in the thick of affairs, and knew as much of our intentions and of our actual movements as any man among us. It is no credit to me that I was willing to suspect him, and that I distrusted him from the beginning. I never thought him likely to be guilty of deliberate treason, but I always feared 'his rash and boastful tongue, and I confess that I did something here and there to inspire my comrades with the sense of my own mistrust. I have not the slightest doubt that he knew of this. I certainly never took any pains to disguise it from him, and I dare say that in what followed he partly justified his own action in his own mind by my dislike of him and his own dislike of me.

Brunow was a queerish sort of study, and I honestly believe that half the harm he did sprang out of the only little bit of good I was ever able to discover in him. He would do almost anything to secure anybody's favorable opinion, and neither his judgment nor his conscience—if he had either one or the other—stood in the way of this amiable weakness. He was more amenable to flattery than a child, and was moved by it as easily to good as to evil. The misfortune was that those who would have cared to influence him in the right direction disdained to tickle his foible, while those who fooled him to his own ruin flattered him to the top of his bent.

I can't help thinking that for a long time the poor feather-head attached a considerable value to my opinion, and that he was anxious in his own way to conciliate my friendship. He knew what I thought about him, and yet he sought my acquaintance, and did what he could to propitiate me and to secure my good-will; but at last an open breach declared itself between us. It came about in this wise:

I was sitting in my chambers one afternoon when the count called upon me. We had had a rather stormy discussion at our last meeting, and I had had to take sides against him. He was on fire for immediate action,

and I had felt it my duty to plead for delay. We had parted rather hotly, and he made it his first business to apologize to me for something into which his enthusiasm had hurried him. This being over, we sat in silence for some time, and I saw at last that something was weighing on his mind.

"I was ungenerous and wrong last night," he said at last, "and I feel it all the more because I am here to ask you now for a special favor."

"My dear count," I said, "we have the same hopes, and we disagree sometimes about the proper means of reaching them. I think there is no possibility of a quarrel between us. However much we disagree, we feel no rancor."

"Rancor!" cried the count. "Good God! my dear Fyffe, how should there be rancor in my mind to you."

He held out his hand, and I shook it heartily. The truest and easiest way of getting to like a man is to do him a service; that makes you wish him well forever afterwards. I should have honored and esteemed the Count Rossano if he had not been his daughter's father. As it was, I had an affection for him which it would not be easy for me to overstate.

"I have so few friends," said the count, when our reconciliation was complete, "and I am so much in need of advice, that I venture to trouble you, my dear Fyffe, in a matter of great delicacy."

I told him, I forget precisely in what terms, that I was entirely at his service; and after another hesitating pause he blurted out the truth.

"I have received an offer for my daughter's hand. The proposal comes to me from the Honorable Mr. Brunow. I owe him the same debt I owe to you, and I own that I should be reluctant to hurt his feelings by a refusal. His offer came to me last night, and took me by surprise. I should have been less troubled in dealing with it if he had not assured me that, with my consent, he is fairly certain of my daughter's. I should be wrong," he added—"I should be altogether wrong if I claimed any authority over her. I have not the right to such a voice in her affairs as I should have if she had been bred under my own care. But Brunow, in spite of the debt I owe him, is not the man I should have chosen for her. You have known him for many years. I am gravely troubled, my dear Fyffe. Tell me what I should do."

I am not exaggerating when I say that if the count had stabbed-me he would hardly have hurt or amazed me more. I had heard Brunow's butterfly protestations about his affection for Miss Rossano, and my eyes had certainly not been less open to his defects of character because he was a rival to my own hopes; but I had never regarded him as being altogether serious. I knew that he was irretrievably in debt, and I had never really feared until that moment that his opposition would take real form. A lover is always jealous, and I had envied my rival his faculty of small talk, his cheery, easy temper, and those touches of gallant attention of which practice and nature had made him master. I had been very angry sometimes at his success in pleasing. But a certain contempt had always mingled with my anger, and I had never really been afraid of him. Yet in the count's declaration of Brunow's belief that Miss Rossano was not indifferent to him I could see more than a touch of reason. She was always gay in his presence, always ready to laugh at his genial and charming nonsense—would come out of her gravest humor at any moment to meet his badinage half way.

I was thinking of all these things, and suffering sorely, when the count's voice recalled me to myself.

"I admit, I know, I feel the delicacy of the situation."

"I am the last man in the world," I said, "to be consulted on this question."

"Surely not that!" cried the count.

"The last man in the world," I repeated. "I can have no voice in the matter one way or the other."

I felt, even as I spoke, that my words and tones alike were too brusque and imperative, but I was wounded to the heart, and alarmed alike for Miss Rossano and myself. Brunow was certainly not the man to make her happy, whatever fancy he might have inspired in her mind, and yet it was no business of mine to say so. I was his rival, and my opinion of him was naturally biassed. For the moment I hated him, but I had self-control enough left to feel that that fact bound me all the more to silence.

"You cannot advise me?" said the count.

"I have no right to advise you," I responded.

He rose with a strange look at me, and began to walk up and down the room with his fingers at his lips. I have wounded myself in reading what I have already written about his prison look. I had learned to know him as so high-minded, so brave and so honorable a gentleman that it pains me even to think of the jail-bird aspect which came upon him at times. His walk up and down my room became something very like a prow, and he fell to casting furtive glances at me, biting his finger ends, and murmuring inarticulately below his breath.

"You have some reason for this," he said, suddenly. "You do not refuse to help me in such a matter for nothing."

"I have the best of all reasons," I answered. "I cannot advise, because I have no right to advise."

"I give you the right by asking for advice," he said, turning round upon me. "Is it kind to refuse me in this? I am a stranger to the world—a child, and less than a child. I owe to this man and to you everything I am and all I have. But—may I tell you?—I mistrust him. I do not care to leave my daughter's happiness in his charge."

I made a successful struggle to control myself, and I answered him quietly:

"You must know, sir, that in England young people arrange these matters very much for themselves. I have no doubt that Miss Rossano will attach full weight to your judgment and counsel. I am very sorry, but I have no right to advise you even at your own request."

"I had hoped for another answer," he responded. "I had even ventured to think—Ah, well, my dear Fyffe, I cannot help myself, and if you will not help me—"

"I would, sir, if I could," I answered.

And at this he sat down, gnawing at his finger-nails, and more broken and furtive in manner than I had seen him since the first week of his escape from prison.

"I owe Brunow a great deal," he said at length, as if he addressed himself rather than me; "but what I owe to one I owe to the other, and I had hoped things would have gone differently. It was natural, perhaps—I suppose it was natural—that she should think of one of you."

It was impossible to escape his meaning, and I saw clearly that if I had spoken first I should have found an ally in him. I do not remember ever to have felt so miserable and so hopeless; but I sat down and filled my pipe and smoked in silence, thinking that perhaps I had thrown a chance away, and that perhaps I had never had one.

While I sat thus, looking out of the window and watching with a curiously awakened interest the traffic in the street below, I felt the count's hand on my shoulder.

"Tell me, my dear Fyffe," he said, shaking me gently, "am I utterly mistaken? I had thought—I had hoped—"

"What had you thought, sir?" I asked, without turning my face towards him.

"I had thought," he began with hesitation, and then paused—"I had thought that you would have put that question to me, rather than Brunow. Was I wrong?"

"Brunow has put the question, sir," I answered, "and he has a right to be answered. You can guess now, I fancy, why I can give you no advice."

"That is enough," said the count. "Pray understand me, my dear Fyffe. This is a matter of delicacy in which I am perhaps acting very strangely, but I have thought that you cared for my child. I had hoped that it was so, and I had hoped that she might care for you. I had not thought of Mr. Brunow in this way; and if I intrust my daughter's happiness to his charge, I am afraid."

"I did not know," I told him, "that I had betrayed myself. If you have found out the truth about me, I can't be blamed for having told you. I should have spoken to you weeks ago, but you see how I live." He cast his eyes about the room and nodded. "I am as poor as a church-mouse, and I see no way to better my position."

"I had some hopes," said the count, "that you might tell me this. It was that which led me to come here and ask you to advise me."

A wild and improbable hope sprang into my mind, but it died as soon as it was born. Perhaps I was absurd enough to fancy the count had seen something in his daughter's manner which led him to believe that she cared for me, and perhaps he had taken advantage of Brunow's proposal to awake me to a sense of my own wasted opportunities. I put that fancy by, for intimate as I had grown to be with Miss Rossano. I had never discerned the faintest hint in her manner of anything but friendship. If my fancy had not been already dead, the count's next words would have killed it outright.

"I have nothing," he said, "to guide me to my daughter's feelings, but I am certain of my own. Mr. Brunow's declaration took me by surprise, but I had been expecting yours, and should have received it with pleasure."

"I did my best to form an honest judgment and to act like an honorable man. Mr. Brunow," I said, "has known Miss Rossano much longer than I have. I must not disguise the fact that he has more than once spoken to me of his attachment to her. He mentioned that months ago, but in such a way that I hardly supposed him to be in earnest. He has spoken first, and he has a right to an answer. If when he has received his answer I still have a right to speak, I may do so."

"That," said the count, "is not the conclusion at which I hoped you would arrive. I think I can offer an alternative. If I ask you to look at this matter like a man of the world, you will have a right to laugh at my presumption. I was a man of the world once, but that was long ago. I have lost so much that what is left to me is hidden in a cloud of self-distrust; yet I think I am right in this, and you yourself shall be the judge."

He paused there for some time, and I could tell by his inward look, and by the occasional motion of his lips, that he was choosing words in which to make his meaning clear to me. He looked up at last, with his gray face illuminated by the mere ghost of a smile, and reaching both hands across the table towards me, leaned upon them firmly.

"My penetration, blunted as it is, has not been altogether at fault," he said; "I have hit the truth in your case. That is so?" I nodded, gloomily enough, I dare say, to signify assent. "What I propose, my dear Fyffe, is this: I cannot read my daughter's mind at all, and so far as I can tell she may have no such preference as leads to marriage for either of you. She is half English by birth, and wholly English by education. If she would marry at all she will follow her own inclination, after the fashion of young ladies in this country. Even if I had had the authority which a life-long watch over her would have given me, I should never have dreamed of using it. But this is the plain English of the matter. I would gladly trust my child with you, and I should be sorry to trust her with Mr. Brunow. That sounds ungrateful to him, for I owe him an enormous service; but there are duties which transcend gratitude, and this is one of them. I have surprised your sentiments, and have extorted a confession from you. I ask you now to authorize me to lay before my daughter your case and Mr. Brunow's side by side. I will tell her, if you prefer it, precisely what passed between us. If she should accept neither of you, my own hope and yours will have had at least a chance of fulfilment. You have no objection to making that proposal?"

I answered truly that I was profoundly grateful for it, and that I had never had so much honor done me.

The count departed well pleased, and I was left to await his news in such anxiety as any man who has not awaited a similar verdict might picture for himself. I did not stir from my rooms for several days, and at almost every minute of that time I was either at the very height of hope or the very bottom of despair.

The news came in a startling and unexpected way at last. About four o'clock on the afternoon of the third day a rapid step came up the stair, and somebody knocked with an angry and passionate insistence at the outer door of my chambers. Hinge, startled by the unusual exigence of the summons, ran to answer it. I learned from him who my visitor was, for as he opened the door he sang out:

"Good Lord, Mr. Brunow, what on earth's the matter?"

"Stand on one side!" cried Brunow, in a loud and angry voice; and scarcely a second later he entered the room I sat in, and, banging the door noisily behind him, faced me, still grasping in his right hand the walking-cane with which he had offered such a startling announcement of his presence.

"You damned traitor!" said Brunow; "you infernal traitor!"

He had hardly spoken, indeed he had hardly turned his white and wrathful face towards me, when I understood precisely what had happened. Of course an absolute certainty was out of the question, but I felt the next thing to it; and what with the exulting thought that it was possible and the fear that it might not be true, I was so taken aback that I had no answer for this unusual greeting.

"You blackguard!" Brunow stammered, his stick quivering in his hand.

"Come, come," I answered, rising, and keeping a careful eye on him, for he looked as if he were fit for any sort of mischief, "this is curious language. Will you be good enough to tell me how you justify it?"

"You know well enough how I justify it!" cried Brunow. "Your dirty under-plot has succeeded. You have that for your comfort, but you may take this to flavor it. I took you for an honest man until a quarter of an hour ago, and now I know that you are as dirty and as despicable a hypocrite and backbiter as any in the world!"

"That is a lie, my dear Brunow, whoever says it!" I responded. "You will be good enough to tell me at once on what grounds you bring such a charge against me."

"Oh," cried Brunow, "I'm not going to debase myself with quarrelling with a man like you! You have my opinion of you, and you know how you have earned it. That's enough for me. Good-afternoon."

He turned, but I was at the door before him.

"That may be enough for you, my dear Brunow, but it isn't enough for me. You don't leave this room with my good-will until you have given me some justification for your conduct."

"I'll give you none!" he cried. "You're a liar and a hypocrite, and I've done with you forever! That ought to be enough for you! Stand by and let me go, or—" he raised his stick with a threatening gesture, but at that I could afford to smile. I knew Brunow a great deal too well to think him likely to assault me after having put me on my guard by a threat.

"I wonder," he said, with his lips quivering and his teeth tight clinched behind them—"I wonder that I don't thrash you within an inch of your life."

"I wouldn't waste much wonder on that question if I were you, Brunow," I answered. "You will be able to find an easy explanation. Tell me on what grounds you come to me with these angry accusations."

"You pretend you don't know?" he sneered. "You can't guess, you soul of honor!"

"I pretend nothing," I told him; "but no man uses such language to me without justifying it. A gentleman having under any fancied sense of wrong used such language will hasten to find reasons for it."

"You may keep me here," said Brunow, throwing himself savagely into an arm-chair. "I won't bluster with you, but I decline to explain or justify a word I've said, and you can take what course you please."

"Very well," I answered, turning the key in the lock and then putting it in my pocket, "we shall both have an opportunity of exercising the great gift of patience."

"Look here," he cried, suddenly leaping from his chair and shaking his forefinger in my face, "do you pretend to deny that months and months ago I told you what my feelings were with respect to Miss Rossano?"

"You told me," I answered, "that you admired her, and that she had a very pretty little income of her own. You coupled those two facts together in such a way as to make me think you were ready to contract a mercenary marriage."

"That's how you choose to put it," he retorted. "I could have supposed, without your help, that you'd find some such means of justifying yourself. Your affection has nothing mercenary in it, of course. In that respect you're above suspicion. A mountebank soldier with a wooden sword to sell that nobody chooses to buy. A strolling pauper without a penny to his name."

I don't quite like to think of what might have happened if this strain of invective had not been interrupted at that moment. I know now, and I almost knew then, what ground Brunow had for his anger and resentment. But the words he used were almost too much for my endurance, and I was glad that a ring sounded at the hall bell, and that Hinge, who, I have no doubt at all, was listening outside, answered immediately. I heard a muffled voice outside, and then Hinge knocked at the inner door; and having in vain tried the handle, said:

"The Conte di Rossano, if you please."

CHAPTER X

I drew the key from my pocket, unlocked the door, and admitted the count, who stood for an instant on the threshold, looking from me to Brunow and from Brunow to me with an aspect of some considerable amazement. Hinge was gaping in the passage, and it was evident that he was more interested in the proceedings than he knew himself to have the right to be; for, encountering my eye, he withdrew his own instantly, and plunged with great precipitation out of sight.

"Come in, sir," I said to the count; and he entered, closing the door behind him, and still looking from Brunow to myself and back again with an aspect of complete surprise strongly mingled with displeasure.

"I had not expected to find Mr. Brunow here." This told me, or seemed to tell me at once, that Brunow had but recently left the count, and my conjecture turned out in a moment to be true.

"I have repeated to Captain Fyffe, sir," said Brunow, "what I told you less than half an hour ago."

"Then," said the count, "you have repeated to Captain Fyffe what I emphatically denied to you. That, sir, is a refusal of my plighted word."

His meagre figure was drawn to its full height, he threw his head back, and his deep-sunken eyes flashed with indignation.

"I have told this fellow," cried Brunow, "that he has betrayed my confidence—the most sacred confidence one man can repose in another—a confidence I extended to him, believing him to be a man of honor and my friend."

"And I, sir, have instructed you," returned the count, "that your accusation is altogether baseless. There, if you cede so much to the authority of my years, the matter may be allowed to rest. If you have further business with Captain Fyffe, I will find another opportunity of calling upon him."

"I have no further business with Captain Fyffe," said Bruno, "now nor at any time."

So saying, he looked about him for his hat, caught it up, bowed angrily to the count, and without a word or a glance for me walked out of the room, slamming the outer door so noisily that the whole house shook with the concussion.

"Mr. Brunow," said the count, when we were thus left alone, "is an ill-conditioned person. I owe it to you to explain precisely what has happened. But first, my dear Fyffe, give me your hand, and let me offer you my felicitations."

I took the hand he offered and held it a moment, hardly realizing where I stood.

"Your suit is accepted; and if you will do us the honor to dine with us this evening, I am charged by Lady Rollinson to say that she will be charmed to meet you at her table. There, my dear fellow," he concluded, hastily withdrawing his hand, "you are stronger than you fancy yourself to be."

He stood, half laughing, as he straightened the fingers of his right hand with his left, and then shook them in memory of my grip.

I had not a word to say for myself, and I felt as foolish and awkward as a school-boy.

"And now," said the count, laying a hand on each of my shoulders and pressing me gently towards an arm-chair, "I will tell you what has happened between Mr. Brunow and myself."

"Never mind about Brunow just at present, sir," I cried, recovering my wits a little; "I have other things to think of which are of greater moment."

"Well, yes," he answered, with a very sweet yet mournful smile, "I can believe so. Brunow will keep."

"I am to understand, sir," I asked, "that Miss Rossano accepts the offer of my hand?"

"Precisely," said the count, nodding with his affectionate and melancholy smile.

"She knows my circumstances?"

"I will not say she knows them absolutely," he replied, "but I think she has a fairly accurate knowledge of them."

"I have an income of three hundred pounds a year."

"So much as that?" he asked, with a dry, quaint look. It was so wise, so friendly, so childlike, so gay, so unlike the dull and dreadful aspect his face had worn when I had first known it that it affected me strongly, "My dear Fyffe," he said, reaching his friendly hand out towards me once more, "why should we talk about money? If you can put Brunow out of your mind I can put money out of mine. My daughter loves me, and the man who saved me loves my daughter; and Violet—well, she shall speak for herself."

I was so entirely happy that I could afford to take pity on my unsuccessful rival. When I thought how I should have felt if our cases had been reversed—if he had won and I had been rejected—I was willing to forgive him anything. I hoped that in course of time he would come to see how baseless his suspicions were, but in my joy I could nurse no anger against him. But I was eager to meet my promised wife, and he did not fill my thoughts for more than a passing moment.

The count volunteered to accompany me to Lady Rollinson's house.

"You are bidden to dinner," he said, "but I dare say they will excuse an afternoon visit as well. The circumstances are unusual."

His face was full of a quiet and happy humor, which even in the midst of my own whirling emotions struck me as being remarkable. What a native courage must have existed within this man that all the miseries he had undergone had left so much of his manhood to him! What a tranquil and heroic soul he must have borne to have survived that hideous time at all. I know of myself that I should have beaten my brains out against the wall of that loathsome jail many years ago had his lot fallen to me, or I should have sunk to the stupor of an idiot.

We walked together arm in arm, as our manner was, and we talked of scores of things as we went along, though there was always one thought uppermost in the minds of both of us. The count seemed almost as happy as I was, and the knowledge that he welcomed me so warmly was like honey to my heart. For all this I was in an absurd flutter all the way; and when we reached the house I had come to such a condition of mind that whether I were in a delirium of joy or a delirium of misery I was in no wise sure. The delirium was certain; but I found that afternoon how true a thing it is that extremes meet. Great joy and great sorrow are not very wide apart in the havoc they work on the nerves.

I have been trying to recall everything that happened that day; but I find that I have no memory of anything at all between our talking very brightly and affectionately in the street, and my finding myself alone in Lady Rollinson's drawing-room. There was a bright fire burning there, for the spring days were chilly. There was a clock ticking delicately on the mantel-piece, and my mind fastened on to the sound as if there were possibility of checking and steadying my whirling thoughts by thinking of it—pretty much as a man would clutch a straw in a whirlpool. The rustle of a dress sounded in the corridor outside, and a step paused at the door. My heart beat furiously, and then as the door opened it seemed as if it stopped for a second. Miss Rossano entered (it is the last time I shall call her by that name), and for a moment we stood face to face in silence, like a pair of foolish statues. She was more self-possessed than I, for she advanced and offered me her hand, and I took it clumsily, as if I had no idea what to do with it.

I had loved her from the very first moment I had seen her sweet and noble face, and every hour had seemed to make me love her more. And yet I had never breathed a word to her, and here we were plighted to each other in this strange and sudden fashion, with no preliminaries of courtship, with no question asked by me or

answered by her, and hardly at the moment an understanding of how a thing so curious had come to pass.

I have not forgotten anything that was said or done that happy hour, but it is still all too sacred to be written down for any eye but hers or mine to read. It is enough to say that I learned she loved me. Her love has ceased to be to me the puzzle it once was, for one grows used to everything, and I have been both her husband and her lover now for so many years that it would be strange indeed if any sense of strangeness were left in it. But when I first found out that she had fallen in love with me just as quickly as I with her, I could not get over the wonder of it, or the feeling of added unworthiness with which the knowledge burdened me. But, in truth, the very things which make a man feel so clumsy and coarse in the presence of the woman he loves are the things that take a woman's fancy, just as her sweetness and delicacy are the things that take his. I never was a bit of a handsome fellow, but I was a big man, flowing over with health and vigor, with a big voice and a broad chest and shoulders, and, until I fell in love, I never set a great deal of value on good looks in a man. But there was I, a great hulking fellow who had passed all the best part of his life in the giving and receiving of hard knocks, a fellow who could not for the life of him help feeling that he carried the flavor of the camp about with him. What was there, in the name of Heaven, I used to ask myself in those first days of courtship, for a delicate and high-minded girl of refined breeding to fall in love with? But that, my lads and lasses all, is the provision of great nature which makes delicacy love strength and strength love gentleness, which makes fear look pretty to a soldier's eyes, and makes courage look noble and admirable to a charming creature who is afraid of a mouse. So now that I am older and more experienced, I have no wonder that my wife did not choose to fall in love with some namby-pamby fellow of the drawing-rooms rather than with me, though I have now, as I have had always, the sense to know that she is worth ten thousand of me.

I came back to something like sanity in the first ten minutes, and we sat there with no lack of things to talk about, a trouble from which I believe lovers do occasionally suffer. I am not going to pretend that the count and Italy occupied all our minds, but they had their full share of our thoughts, and we both knew that there was no question of marriage just at present. With the history of her broken-hearted mother before me I was in no mood to ask her to be my widow, and there was a growing certainty that there was fighting in front of us, and that it was likely to begin pretty soon.

If Lady Rollinson, Violet, the count, and myself had been dining alone that evening, I should probably have been allowed, under the circumstances, to dispense with evening-dress, and so there would have been no necessity for my going home again before dinner. The count, however, had already advised me of expected guests, and however fascinating the society in which I found myself, I had to break away from it for an hour.

The spring dusk was already thick as I passed along Bond Street, and there was a slight fog abroad; but at the time of which I am writing the West End shops kept open hours later than they do now, and there was no sign of cessation of business. There were a good many foot-passengers abroad, and in front of a brilliantly lighted jeweller's-shop I found myself brought to a stand-still by a little block in the traffic. A carriage stood immediately in front of the shop, and I was about to step round it into the horse road when I saw that a lady was bowing to me from it, and discovered that the lady was no other than the Baroness Bonnar. I raised my hat in answer to her salutation, and as I did so Brunow emerged from the crowd and handed a small packet to her. She took it from him with a smile, and gave the word to the coachman. I had seen that she had a companion with her, a lady whose back was turned to me; but I had taken no notice of the fact, and, indeed, had not given it a thought. But as the coachman wheeled round his horses the lady's face came for a moment into the full light of the brilliantly illuminated window, and I, standing wedged there in the momentary block of pedestrians, met her glance point-blank. She gave not the faintest sign of recognition, though she must have seen that I stared and stared as though I had beheld a ghost; but leaning back in the luxurious cushions of the carriage, drew down her veil and arranged a fur rug about her knees. I stood stock-still, and was rather roughly hustled before I so much as remembered where I was. When I looked round Brunow had disappeared. He had probably seen me, and having found time to cool, had wisely decided against a renewal in the public street of our quarrel of that afternoon. I walked on like a man in a dream, for Constance Pleyel was the last woman in the world I had thought to see, and the very last woman to be found in the society of Brunow and the Baroness Bonnar. So far as I knew, Brunow had certainly little enough to do with her, and their meeting might have been one of the purest chance; but that she was associated in some way with the baroness was evident enough from her presence in that lady's carriage. It is a bitter thing to have to go back on the past in this way, but I cannot tell my story without it. If there are worthless women in the world, there are some who are very nearly angels, and I feel as if I were almost dishonoring the sex in telling the truth about poor Constance, for I had been very honestly in love with her when I was a lad, and it seems even now, after the lapse of all these years, as if I were defiling the place which had once been a sanctuary. But when I had recovered from the shock of my surprise and began to understand what I had seen, it crossed me in a very vivid fashion that the mistrusting dislike with which I had always regarded the baroness had received strong confirmation in an unexpected way; for Constance Pleyel was not and had not been for years one with whom any self-respecting woman would wish to be intimate. The thought of the Baroness Bonnar, fresh from contact with her, coming into Violet's presence was anything but agreeable. I am not much of a prude, and was never disposed to hound a woman down for an error in love; but the plain English of the matter was that no woman who would care to know Constance Pleyel had a right to exchange a word with Violet. My mind was a good deal exercised about this matter as I walked swiftly homeward. I thought about it while I was dressing, and as I drove back to Lady Rollinson's that strange *rencontre* filled my thoughts to the exclusion of everything else. You may judge of my surprise when the baroness appeared as the very last of the invited guests. Considering the elaborate toilet she had made she had shown wonderful despatch, and though I have no pretensions to be versed in these mysteries, I should have been inclined to think that such a display as she made could only have been achieved with an hour or two's labor. In spite of haste, if she had been really pressed for time, her make-up was as perfect as ever, and what with her flashing white shoulders and flashing white teeth, her sparkling diamonds and sparkling eyes, and the artistic flush of artificial color on her cheeks, she looked quite dazzling.

Dinner was announced at the very instant of her arrival, and the count himself took her in to dinner. That, in the light of my latest knowledge of the lady, was the cruellest thing to remember, but the little traitress was all smiles and pompousness, and smiled and chatted as if no thought of mischief had ever entered her

heart. Lady Rollinson had confided Violet to my care, and I sat at table between her and the baroness. She talked across me to my companion until my nerves grew rigid with the strain of the repression I was compelled to lay upon myself, and the dinner, which ought to have been a little foretaste of heaven to a newly-accepted lover, was a long-drawn discomfort. There were two gentlemen at the table besides the count and myself, but they were both Italians, and had no notion of the English custom of sitting over their wine after dinner. The count was a total abstainer, for his long-enforced abstinence had taught him a curious delicacy of palate, so that all wines were actually distasteful to him. When the ladies had retired we smoked a cigarette, drank a cup of black coffee, and made our way to the drawing-room, where Lady Rollinson had promised us something unusual in the way of music. It was my right to have monopolized Violet's society, or if not actually to have monopolized it, to have taken a full share of it. I found opportunity to whisper to her that I had an especial reason for speaking to the baroness, and while the music was going on I planted myself at that lady's side. She received me with more than her usual foreign affability, and chattered so rapidly that one or two of the guests, who I suppose really cared for the performance then going on, cast glances of open disapproval in her direction. The little woman was quite at home, however, and continued to talk with great animation. I made two or three attempts to interject what I had to say, but she stopped me each time, and started off on a new theme before I could get more than a word in edgewise. I know that she must have seen from my looks that I was not in the least degree disposed to the flippant mood to which she herself pretended, and at last she either was, or feigned to be, tired of my failure to respond to her.

"You are *bête* to-night, *mon beau capitaine*," she said at last, and with a humorously disdainful gesture of her fan she made a motion to rise.

"Not yet, baroness," I said, taking the fan in my hand. "I have something serious to say to you."

"I am not in the mind for anything serious tonight," she answered, "and this is not the place for anything serious."

"I am in the mood," I said, "and the place will do well enough."

She flashed her eyes at me with a sudden anger.

"Is that an impertinence or a *gaucherie*?" she asked. A second later her charming girlish smile lit up her face again, and rising from her seat she dropped a little mock rustic courtesy. "If M. le Capitaine Fyffe will honor me at my own humble residence, I am never abroad till one." With that she shot me a curiously veiled glance and turned away, holding up her hand as if to ask me to listen to the last strains of the music which her own vehement chatter had already spoiled for everybody who cared to listen to it. She had evidently a purpose in holding me off, and I of course could form a reasonable guess as to what the nature of that purpose was. I devoted myself to Violet for the rest of the evening, and contrived so well to forget the baroness that by the time at which I was compelled to take my leave I was restored to the state of mind natural to an ardent lover who had only that day been lifted from something very like despair to the fulfilment of his hope.

When the baroness took leave I helped her to adjust her costly fur mantle. Violet was standing by, and the baroness was talking to her with a pretence of animation which I know was intended to prevent me from giving her a reminder of what had already passed between us. As she turned to go she gave me a moment's chance. I had been waiting for it, and I seized it instantly.

"To-morrow, then, at twelve," I said.

She turned, with her eyes wide open and angered, as if I had presumed in speaking to her and had offered her an insult. But she changed her mind in the merest fraction of time, and answered, smilingly:

"To-morrow, then, at twelve."

Then she looked at me with the odd veiled glance I had seen before—a glance which expressed both dislike and fear, and held at the same time a keener and more piercing observation than anybody at first sight would have been likely to charge the butterfly-like woman with.

I have spoken quite openly, and as if what I have had to say had been the most commonplace matter in the world. Violet had heard me, but when we went back to the drawing-room together she asked no questions. She has told me since that she wondered a little what appointment I could have with the Baroness Bonnar, but she gave me here the first of a hundred thousand proofs of that noble freedom from the pinch of small curiosity which helps to make her different from and superior to her sex.

I kept my appointment next day, and found the baroness at home. She had a dainty little house of her own, and I suppose that at this time she kept better style, was furnished with completer credentials, was admitted to know better people, and was more liberally supplied with funds than at any other period of her curiously vagabond existence. She was to me at this time the Baroness Bonnar pure and simple, a foreign lady of wealth and position who moved in good society, had agreeable and influential friends, and obvious command of money. She was to me, in short, what she was to the rest of the world, and I had no earthly reason to doubt any of her pretences. But I had come with a definite object, and I approached it at once. She was not at all disposed to banter to-day, but met me with perfect candor.

"My time is a little limited, Captain Fyffe," she began. "Will you do me the honor to let me know at once to what I owe your visit?"

"I passed you last night in Bond Street," I returned. She nodded briefly, with her lips tight set and her eyes glittering a little dangerously, I thought. "Would you oblige me by telling me the name of your companion?"

"Would you oblige me," she retorted, "by telling me the reasons for which you ask it?"

She was so very quick and resolute that I saw at once she had been prepared for the occasion.

"I had rather not give my reason just at present, baroness," I said. "I have, as a matter of fact, no reason for asking the lady's name for my own satisfaction, because I know it with much more certainty than you do."

"Oh!" she said, very quietly. "Then why do you ask?"

"Let me change my question," I responded. "Let me ask you if you have known Miss Constance Pleyel long?"

"Do you know, my good Captain Fyffe," said the little woman, toying idly with the *vinaigrette* and sniffing at its contents now and then, "you have a manner which is abominably resolute. You are speaking to me as if you were a rustic *juge d'instruction*, and I a prisoner in the dock."

"I beg your pardon, baroness; I was conscious of no such manner. Will you oblige me by telling me if you have known this lady long?"

"I do not recognize your right to question me," said the baroness; "but since you are audacious enough to come here and to question me about that lady after what I heard last night—" she paused there of set purpose, and repeating the words "after what I heard last night" with emphasis, paused again.

"After what you heard last night," I repeated, unable to attach any meaning whatever to her words.

"You decline to understand me?" she said, with a threatening nod of her pretty little head. "Very well. But if," still with marked emphasis, "after what I heard last night you are sufficiently audacious to come here and ask me questions about Constance Pleyel, I can tell you that I have known that lady long enough to know the history of her life and how far you are responsible for the sorrows she has known."

"I responsible?" I cried.

"Do you deny it?" she retorted.

I had risen to my feet unconsciously, and she arose to face me.

"I deny it absolutely!" I answered. "The suggestion is an outrage!"

For sole answer she touched a little silver gong which stood upon the table. A servant appeared in answer to the sound, and the baroness, without turning her head towards him, said, "Send my compliments to Miss Pleyel, and let her know Captain Fyffe has called."

I stood rooted in astonishment.

CHAPTER XI

The baroness walked to the window as the servant retired, throwing upon me as she went by a look of mingled triumph and disdain. I had no word to say for myself, and I awaited the progress of events with wonder. The baroness looked out upon the street, with her tiny foot tapping at the carpet, until the servant returned.

"Well?" said she, imperatively turning on him.

The man looked confused and stammered.

"Well?" she repeated, with an angry impatience.

"I beg your pardon, Madame la Baronne, but I am to say—"

"You are to say?" she echoed, scornfully, seeing that he paused and stammered anew. "Say what you are to say."

"Perhaps it would be better," the man said, "if I spoke to madame alone."

"Say what you have to say," his mistress commanded. "I presume you have an answer from Miss Pleyel?"

The man who was a young and by no means ill-looking fellow, was evidently in considerable distress. "It is not my fault, Madame la Baronne," he said, with an appealing glance at me, "but Miss Pleyel's message is that she declines to meet Captain Fyffe under any circumstances."

"That will do," said his mistress. "You can go."

The man retired once more. I could see that the baroness was disappointed, but she made the best of the circumstances.

"I am not surprised," she said, with as fine an expression of scorn as she could command.

"Nor am I," I responded. "It is natural that Miss Pleyel should not wish to meet one who knew her fifteen years ago."

"It is like a man and a soldier," she said, "to presume upon the natural delicacy of a lady under such circumstances. She shrinks from you and fears you. She dare not encounter you even in the presence of so dear a friend as I am. But I do not shrink from you, Captain Fyffe, and I am not afraid of you. I tell you once more that I think your coming here is, all things considered, as pretty a piece of audacity as I can remember."

"Madame," I answered, "I came here with a purpose. When I have fulfilled that purpose I will relieve you of my presence."

"Go on," she interjected, contemptuously.

"The position is both difficult and delicate, but my duty is plain, and I see no way of escape from it."

"Your duty to yourself," said the baroness, "is plain enough. Such a man as I see you now to be will make it his duty, at any cost, to defend himself."

"To defend himself from what, madame?" I asked, surprised at her boldness.

"From the plain truth," she answered, with an expression of anger and disdain which, if not real, was an excellent bit of acting in its way. "The brave Captain Fyffe is ambitious, and has made up his mind to marry money; but Miss Rossano, whom I have the honor to know, might shrink from Captain Fyffe if she knew him to be not merely a penniless adventurer, but a perjured and heartless villain."

"Madame," I replied, "I will not be so poor a diplomatist as to lose my temper over these charges. There are hundreds of people still alive in my native place to whom Miss Pleyel's miserable history is known, and such a charge as you are making could only excite derision if it were openly brought against me."

"You came here with a purpose," she said, coldly. "I shall be obliged if you will fulfil your purpose, and—"

"When I have fulfilled my purpose I will go. I will be as brief as I can. When I was a lad of twenty I was desperately in love with Miss Constance Pleyel, or thought I was, which at that time of life is pretty much the same thing."

"It will serve at any time of life," said the baroness. She listened with an air of aversion and impatience, which made a painful task more painful to perform.

"My father was a half-pay officer," I went on, "very poor and very proud. Miss Pleyel's father was a tradesman, an Austrian Jew, rich, vulgar, and ostentatious."

"Rich, certainly," the baroness responded. "I can congratulate you on one point, Captain Fyffe; you have not yet, so far as I can learn, suffered sentiment to blind you to the charms of wealth."

I passed the sneer. When a man is resolutely bent upon a journey he does not stop to fight the flies that tease him.

"We moved in different circles. I spoke to Miss Pleyel perhaps a dozen times, but in the hot enthusiasm of youthful love I wrote to her often."

"I have seen your letters," said the baroness, with a short, contemptuous laugh. "They might have deceived any woman."

I allowed myself to be diverted for a moment.

"She keeps them? It is a sign of grace in her that she cares, after so many years, to remember an honest, boyish passion."

"A sign of grace?" cried the baroness, passionately. "Oh, I lose patience with this cool infamy!"

Now all this time has gone by I can recall this scene as if it were a bit of stage play; and now that I can read every motive and understand every movement, I am inclined to think the baroness's part in it the finest piece of stage work I have ever seen.

"If you will permit me, madame, I will try to put the case in such a way that there shall be no mistake as to what I mean to say. I saw Miss Pleyel rarely, and never once in private. I wrote to her often; I wrote reams of boyish nonsense, which was all meant in fiery earnest then. Then news came. Miss Pleyel ran away from her father's house with Colonel Hill-yard, a man of wealth, a married man with a large family, and, in spite of that fact, a notorious *roue*. They lived abroad for six months, and Miss Pleyel ran away from Colonel Hillyard with a Russian officer, with whom she went to St. Petersburg, where she caught a grand duke, who was so far fascinated as to contract a morganatic marriage with her. Since that time Miss Pleyel's adventures have been before the world. Her name has been lost under a score of aliases, but there is no pretence between you and me, and no dispute as to her identity."

"Captain Fyffe," said the baroness, "I do not yet think so poorly of you as to believe that you have invented this abominable story, but I can tell you that it is, from beginning to end, a tissue of falsehoods."

"Pardon me, madame," I responded, "there is no man living who knows that wretched history half so well as I do."

"Oh, you men, you men!" cried the baroness, sweeping her little white hands towards the ceiling, and wringing them above her head with a tragic gesture. She turned upon me suddenly, with an admirable burst of passion and feeling. "Captain Fyffe, I am a woman of the world; I am *expérimentée*—unhappily for me, too, too bitterly experienced. Believe me, I already have the very poorest opinion of your sex. I beseech you not to lower it further."

"The most casual inquiry," I answered, "if you should care to make it, will confirm every word I have so far spoken. And now I need detain you little longer. It is a terrible thing to say to a lady, but it must be said. It is all the more terrible to say, because I had at one time a sentimental worship for that poor creature who has proved herself so often to be unworthy of any honest man's regard. No lady who knows the reputation of Miss Constance Pleyel, or who, being warned of her reputation, declines to test the truth of the warning and remains her friend, can be permitted to associate, to my knowledge, with anybody for whom I entertain the slightest regard or esteem."

"Do I understand you to threaten me, Captain Fyffe?" asked the baroness. "You must permit me for a moment to instruct you. My position in society is secure enough to enable me to defend any *protégée* of mine against any insinuation which Captain Fyffe may make."

"I make no insinuation," I returned. "I lay plain facts before you. I will send you by messenger, within an hour, the names and addresses of a score of people who know the facts of the case. You shall, if you choose, employ an agent, whose charges I will defray, and whose report I will never ask to see."

"Thank you, sir," she answered. "I do not spy upon the people to whom I profess to give my friendship."

That was perhaps as heroic a lie as even a lady of the baroness's profession ever uttered; but at that time I was not master of the facts of the case, and the little woman spoke with so much dignity and nature that she imposed upon me. I was really half ashamed of having suggested to her a course which only a minute before seemed quite natural.

"Madame," I said, "the position is a peculiar one, and it cannot be encountered by ordinary means. I accept without reserve the declaration you offer of your belief in Miss Pleyel's innocence. But then, you see, unhappily, I know the whole story, and I am forced, however unwillingly, to offer you an ultimatum."

"Pray let me hear it," she answered, in a tone of sarcasm.

"It is briefly this," I said. "It is impossible that the Baroness Bonnar should retain her association with Miss Pleyel and with Lady Rollinson at the same time."

"You guarantee that?" asked the baroness. "May I ask what means you propose to adopt?"

"If I am compelled," I answered, "but only in case I am compelled, I shall take the one possible, straightforward course, and shall tell to Lady Rollinson the story I have told to you."

The baroness tried another tack.

"I have often heard it said," she began, bitterly, "that it is only women who have no mercy upon women. Do

you tell me, Captain Fyffe, that you can have the heart to hound this poor creature down, even if all you charge against her were true, if all her life until now had been one huge mistake? Is she to have no chance of amendment? Do not suppose," she cried, "that your story convinces me for a moment! I am looking at your side alone, that is all."

"Pardon me," I felt constrained to answer, "I see no sign of any wish for amendment. The only defence yet offered lies in a gross and groundless accusation against myself. When I came here I had no idea that Miss Pleyel meant to be dangerous to me. I learn from you the course on which she has decided."

"She!" cried the baroness. "She has decided upon nothing. Perhaps I have been led too readily to leap at a conclusion. She has made no accusation against you, poor thing; but I confess that I thought she was striving to defend you. She was terribly agitated by the chance sight she caught of you in the street last night. She has been weeping ever since. She gave me your letters with some broken words, which perhaps I may have misconstrued. If I have done you wrong, I beg your pardon. If I have done you wrong, I beg your forgiveness with all my heart. But surely, Captain Fyffe, you do not in cold blood propose to one woman that she shall throw another on the world, that she should cast her, however frail she may have been, into new temptations. You must let me tell you," she hurried on, raising her hand against me to arrest any interruption I might have been disposed to make—"you must let me tell you that I exercise some little forbearance in taking this tone at all. No slander has ever touched my reputation, and I do not intend that it shall smirch it now. I have but to say I have been deceived to establish myself in the sight of all who know me. Tell me, sir, if you have ever heard a whisper against my honor. Did ever man or woman breathe a word in your hearing with respect to me which might not have been spoken of a sister of your own?"

The plain truth was that I knew nobody but Bru-now who had any acquaintance with the little lady's antecedents. He had certainly spoken of her often in terms which I should have been very sorry to have heard applied to a sister of mine if I had been so fortunate as to own one. But, then, Brunow was a man about town, and a braggart at the same time, and I had attached no more importance to his talk than to the irresponsible babble of a baby. It was not my business to repeat Brunow's stupid follies, and I kept silent. She, however, was not disposed to let me off that way, but pressed me for an answer.

"Madame," I was forced to say, "I am not so impertinent as to call your reputation into question for an instant. I will not be so insolent as to sit in judgment upon so delicate a question for a moment. I have said all I had to say, and can see no reason for recalling any part of it." I bowed, and made a movement to retire, but she flashed between me and the door, and faced me with supplicating hands.

"Think again, Captain Fyffe," she besought me; "think again. Poor Constance is not the heartless wretch you fancy her. She is alone in the world; she is friendless, penniless. There is nobody to lend her a helping hand, nobody to believe in her wish to lead a better life but only poor little me. And of what avail is my belief in her, of what avail is my wish to lift her from the mire if you should go from me and trumpet her past abroad. I knew her, Captain Fyffe, when she was richer and happier than she is now, when she was received by society in St. Petersburg, when she was courted, admired, adored. I am sorry for her in my soul. It would wring my heart to let her go. And notice, Captain Fyffe, I am not trying to thrust her on the world, I am not trying to introduce her to any friend of mine. When you saw us in the street yesterday she drove out for the first time in my company in London. Ah, Captain Fyffe, we cannot do much good in this miserable world if we try ever so hard. I have never tried very hard. I have been a frivolous, butterfly, useless creature; but at my time of life, you see, one begins to have serious fancies. And it was mine to find this poor creature an asylum, where she might hide her head from shame, and be free of all temptation. You are a stern man, Captain Fyffe, you have shown me that, but do not be all justice and no mercy." She actually cried and clung to me as she spoke, and even now it seems difficult to believe that there was no genuine feeling at the bottom of it all, though I know perfectly well that there was no ground for the merest scrap of it.

The situation was horribly embarrassing, and yet if I had been the most yielding fool alive there was no escape. It was simply impossible that I, with my eyes open, should permit any woman who openly associated with Constance Pleyel to associate with Violet.

"I have no wish," I answered, "to speak one word to Miss Pleyel's disadvantage, and I have no right, to dictate terms to you; but if you should insist on continuing your acquaintance with Miss Pleyel and with Lady Rollinson, it will be my bounden duty to tell her ladyship what I know, and leave her to act for herself."

"Ah, well," she cried, in a voice of despair, "I do not even know that I can blame you; but am I to be sure that I can buy your silence?"

"That you can buy my silence?" I repeated.

"Yes," she answered, despondently, looking up at me with tear-stained eyes. "I mean—will you say nothing if I promise to visit Lady Rollinson no more and to meet Miss Rossano no more? I am asking nothing for myself, Captain Fyffe, remember, and I would not stoop to make terms at all if it were not for this unhappy woman's sake. Will you promise me this?"

I thought the matter over for a minute, and I promised. As it turned out, I never did an unwise thing; but I had no means of knowing how unwise it was, and I was affected by her tears and protestations. If Baroness Bonnar had not had the skill to bedevil cleverer men than myself, and men twenty times as experienced, she would never have risen to the position of eminence she occupied.

We parted on the understanding that she was to pay no more visits to Lady Rollinson's house, but was to do her loyal best to avoid Violet and her chaperon. I went away half inclined to think myself a brute for having exacted that undertaking from her. Of course, if I had been the man of the world I thought myself, I should never have gone to see her, never have shown my hand, but should have awaited the development of events after having told Lady Rollinson what I knew, and having left her to safeguard her own interests and mine.

The whole business had been cruelly unpleasant, and I left the baroness's house thinking that on the whole I was very well out of it. I was sorry for the little lady herself, and did really and seriously give her credit for good intentions, which proves either that she was an exceptionally fine actress, or that I was an exceptional greenhorn.

I had scarcely left the house when I heard my name called in a loud whisper, and, turning, saw the gaunt

figure of Ruffiano within half a dozen yards of me. He was astonishingly shabby still, but he rejoiced in clean linen, and had been recently shaven, so that he looked far more presentable than usual.

His eyes were blazing, and the whole of his long bony frame was hitching and jolting with suppressed excitement.

"I have news!" he said; "such news! Which way go you? The man is here."

I turned in the direction indicated, and saw a foreign-looking fellow in a huge beard, a slouched hat, and a melodramatic cloak, looking for all the world like a conspirator in an Adelphi or Olympic drama at that date. It was raining slightly, but the man stood with folded arms in the middle of the pavement at the street corner, like a statue of patience, with the keen February wind buffeting his long cloak picturesquely about him, and blowing his wild hair and beard in all directions. At a signal from Ruffiano he crossed over to us, and the droll old Quixote, with superabundant gesture, began to question him in Italian, the man answering, of course, in the same tongue. When they had talked together for four or five minutes Ruffiano turned upon me with his hands spread wide, and his face beaming with triumph.

"You see," he said.

"You forget, my dear count," I told him, "that I don't understand a word of what you have been saying."

The count reviled himself, and plunged into apologies so fluent as to be only half intelligible.

"This gentleman," he said, indicating the shaggy melodramatist, "has but now arrived by the morning train from Paris. The hour is here at last. Louis Philippe has run away, and by this hour we suspect he is in England. You know what that means for us?"

I knew what it meant very well, but I was not disposed to believe the story without examination. I found that the messenger spoke no word of any language but his own, and resolved on carrying him at once to Count Rossano. To that end I called a hackney-coach, not greatly caring, I confess it, to be seen in broad daylight in London streets with such an astonishing pair of guys as poor old Ruffiano and his friend.

The count was at home, and, receiving us at once, heard the story with an excitement equal to that of the narrator. When it was ended he turned on me with the very phrase Ruffiano had used: "The hour is here!"

"You can trust this man?" I asked.

"Absolutely," he responded.

I confessed that I should prefer to await a confirmation of his story by the newspapers, but the count interrupted me with a wave of the hand.

"You will see," he said, "that the newspapers will confirm the story to-morrow, and in the meantime we shall have saved a day. France is awake, and the awaking of France is the dawn of liberty for Italy. We must hold a meeting to-night. You will wait?" he asked me. "I have a hundred things to talk of, but I must first despatch Count Ruffiano to our friends."

"Yes," cried Ruffiano, with a more than common emphasis on the superfluous vowels he used, "we must meet to-night. The hour is here. In a week from now we shall have the usurper by the throat. Wait but a day, and you shall hear such news from Milano! They are ready there, and there will be no holding them back this time."

The count silenced him, and gave him rapid instructions in Italian. I could follow most of what he said in this case, for I was familiar with every name he mentioned. He was calling out the astutest and most influential of the Italian refugees then in London. The revolutionary Italian party, like all the revolutionary parties known to history, was split up into sections. There were moderates and immoderates among them, men to whom the name of Carlo Alberto was an oriflamme, and others to whom it was the very signal of scorn and loathing. The count was calling the extremists of both schools together, and Ruffiano expostulated.

"This is a time," said the count, addressing me, "at which we must sink all divisions. We shall find ample time to quarrel when the work is done. In the meantime the work lies before us, and no good Italian can hang back from it."

"We shall do nothing but quarrel," Ruffiano protested. "We shall be at daggers drawn among ourselves."

"Leave that to me," said the count, "and do you do my bidding."

After this there was no more question, and Quixote set off, taking his brigand of a companion with him. The count paced the room in a sort of silent fury for a while, but he was easily tired, and after two or three minutes of this violent exercise he dropped, pale and panting, into an arm-chair, and wiped the thick beads of perspiration from his forehead.

"There is no doubt about the news," he said then; "and even if it were not true to-day, it would be true to-morrow or the day after."

I pointed out to him that its very likelihood should make us resolve that our evidence was perfect before we acted on it.

"Yes, yes," he cried, with an angry impatience; "but we must be ready for action, and I propose no more. There is just one thing in respect to which I have not yet taken you into confidence. I have had an opportunity offered me of the purchase of a stock of arms. They were made in Birmingham, at the order of one of the South American republics which fell into bankruptcy just as the order was fulfilled. They are to be had at a very low price, and I am inclined to buy them. I ask your judgment on this matter on two grounds, Captain Fyffe. To begin with, it is twenty years since I knew the world, and the fashion of arms has so changed during that time that I am a judge no longer. I shall want you to decide on the quality of the weapons." I nodded assent to this, and he went on. "The second reason is much more personal to yourself. The cause is poor, but my daughter, in the course of a few days, will have in her own hands a large sum of money inherited from her mother, and increased by interest through her long minority. In round figures she will receive something like forty thousand pounds. She proposes to offer that sum to her father's country. You ought to know of that."

I did not see what concern this was of mine, and I said so. Violet's fortune, so far as I was concerned, was entirely at her own disposal. I felt this so strongly that I did not dare to express myself quite unreservedly, lest I might seem guilty of a pretence of too great disinterestedness. But I added that if the money were my

own, I could think of no better way of spending it, and the count was satisfied.

He was in the very act of describing to me the weapons he proposed to buy when a servant entered with a card.

"This is my man," said the count, and bade the servant show the visitor in.

CHAPTER XII

"Mr. Alpheas P. Quorn" was the name printed on the card of the visitor just announced, and I had scarcely cast my eye upon it when the man came in. He was a prodigiously fat man, with a pigeon breast, and a neck so short that his tufted chin was set low down between his high shoulders. He was dressed in actual burlesque of the fashion then prevailing; but, spruce as he was, he nursed undisguisedly a huge quid of tobacco in one clean-shaven cheek, and his hands, which were covered with rings of no great apparent value, were very dirty, and the nails uncared for. He bowed with a great flourish of politeness, spat copiously in the fire, and bade the count good-day in a thin and shrill-pitched voice, so out of keeping with his monstrous size that I had to cough and turn away to disguise a laugh.

"My respects, count," said Mr. Quorn, "my respects and compliments. I presoom, sir, you have heard the noos from the European Continent."

"I am in pretty constant receipt of news," the count responded, with a swift glance in my direction; "but I do not know that it is yet common property."

"Wal," said Mr. Quorn, "I'm inclined to think it is. But my folks are pretty considerably damn smart, and so, I guess, are yours." He paused, looked hard at me, and turned his quid reflectively. "This gentleman—?" he said, interrogatively.

"This gentleman," the count responded, "is in full possession of my confidence. This is Mr. Quorn, Captain Fyffe. I was telling Captain Fyffe at the moment of your arrival," he continued, "the nature of our business. I shall rely upon his judgment of the goods you have for sale."

"That's all right," said Mr. Quorn. "I've got the real thing to sell, and I want a man as knows the real thing to see it before it's bought. Then you're satisfied and I'm satisfied. If I ain't mistaken now, Captain Fyffe's the man that hooked you out of that blasted Austrian dungeon."

"It is to Captain Fyffe," the count answered, "that I owe my liberty."

"Then you owe him a lot," retorted Mr. Quorn. "There's nothing sweeter on the face of the earth, and I presoom, sir, that you know it. I am a foe to slavery, gentlemen, everywhere and always. In the sacred cause of freedom I have been tarred and feathered and rode upon a rail. In comparison with twenty years in Austrian hands that ain't a lot, but it was more than I bargained for, and as much as I wanted. In the sacred cause of freedom, gentlemen, I'm willing to sacrifice even a pecuniary consideration. I could do a trade with Austria that would increase my profits by fifty per cent. But I'm all for freedom, and you get first offer."

"What is your news from the Continent, Mr. Quorn?" inquired the count.

Mr. Quorn looked about him for a convenient spot, selected the fireplace, spat again, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and winked with a slow deliberation.

"What's yourn?" he asked. The count smiled and shook his head. "Wal," said Mr. Quorn, "I'll tell you what I'll do with you. I'll letter it with you. L."

"O," said the count, still smiling.

"U," said Mr. Quorn.

"I," said the count.

"It appears to me," said Mr. Quorn, "we're on the same trail. The exalted individual we've got in mind, count, has done something. What's he done now?" He rolled his big head between his fat shoulders as he put the question, and chewed away at the great plug of tobacco in his cheek as if he were paid to do it, and as if he were paid by piecework.

"Yes," said the count, "he has done something, but that is a little vague."

"Wal, yes," Mr. Quorn allowed, seating himself and setting both elbows on the table, "I allow it's vague, but it won't be vague to-morrow morning."

"You allude," said the count, "to the rumor that Louis Philippe has—"

"Yes, sir," retorted Mr. Quorn, with a very bright twinkle of both eyes, "that is the rumor I allood to. That ain't vague, captain, is it? We both know all about it," he went on, "and I reckon it ought to grease this contract just a little and make it run smooth. Your time's here, if ever it will be, and I propose we strike a bargain."

"When can you supply the goods?" asked the count.

"Where?" asked Mr. Quorn, as if he were chopping something with a hatchet.

"Ah," said the count, "that has to be considered."

"Yes," the visitor assented, "that has to be considered. I'm for having everything above-board. It ain't easy to handle the contrabands of war at a time like this, when every heraldic bird and beast in Europe is on his hind-legs and looking nine ways for Sundays. If Captain Fyffe likes to come down with me to Blackwall I can show him something. On my side I'm all ready, and when I know where the goods are to be landed I'll undertake to fulfil my part of the contract. I'll leave you to yours. Money down on delivery is the only terms. I want to know the money's there, and you want to know the goods are there. The name of the Count Ro-Say-No would be a sufficient guarantee for anybody in the world but a cuss like me. I'm business. In matters of

business, gentlemen, delicacy and consideration for high-flown feelings don't enter into my composition, not for a cent's worth. If I was trading with Queen Victoria I should want to know where the money was coming from. Forty thousand sterling is a lot of money, and I expect you, as a man of the world, to excuse my curiosity."

The count rose from his seat and rang the bell by the fireplace. A servant answered it, and he said, simply:

"Ask Miss Rossano to be kind enough to see me here."

The servant retired, and Mr. Quorn filled in the time of waiting by walking about the room with his hands under his coat-tails, making a cursory inspection of the furniture and the engravings on the walls, and walking from time to time to the fireplace to expectorate. When Violet entered, the count placed a seat for her, but she remained standing, with an interrogative look from Mr. Quorn to me which seemed to ask an explanation of that gentleman's presence.

"My dear," said the count, "we have often spoken together of the necessity for the purchase of arms for The Cause."

"Yes," she said.

"This gentleman," the count indicated our visitor, "has arms to sell. We have had news this morning which makes it necessary that we should move at once."

Her face turned pale for a moment and her lips trembled, but she spoke an affirmatory word only, and waited.

"Mr. Quorn," said the count, "has fifty thousand stand of arms to dispose of."

"I suppose this is all right," interrupted Mr. Quorn, "but I may be allowed to say that I have been in a business of this sort more than once in my time, and I never knew any good come out of the introduction of a petticoat."

Violet looked at him, and I saw her lips twitch with an impulse towards laughter; but Mr. Quorn obviously misunderstood the emotions he had inspired.

"Do not suppose from that, madame," he said, with great solemnity, "that I have not the reverence for your sex which rules every well-regulated masculine boozom, but this, if it means anything at all, means secrecy, and that is not your sex's strong point."

"That is a matter, Mr. Quorn," returned the count, "with which, as I think, you need not concern yourself."

"That's all right," returned Mr. Quorn. "I merely mentioned it. It's no affair of mine."

"Mr. Quorn," said the count, "has fifty thousand stand of arms to sell. With them he has three million percussion-caps and three million cartridges. His price for the whole is—" he paused there and waited, looking towards the visitor.

"Forty thousand pounds sterling," said Mr. Quorn.

I interrupted the conversation at this point, asking when the cartridges in question had been made. That was more than Mr. Quorn could say; but I insisted upon an examination of their quality before any bargain with respect to their purchase could be begun. No sportsman shoots with last year's cartridges, and a man whose life depends upon his ammunition should be at least as careful as a sportsman.

"Now," said Mr. Quorn, "I like this—this is business. This comes of talking to an expert."

But all the same I could see that he was not over-pleased by my interference at this point.

"We will leave that to your judgment, my dear Fyffe," said the count. "But in the meantime Mr. Quorn desires to be satisfied of our ability to purchase. You have consulted your lawyer, dear, and you know at what time you will have control of your money—"

"On the twelfth of next month," said Violet. "I have a letter to that effect. If this gentleman desires to see it I shall have great pleasure in showing it to him."

"Thank you, miss," said Mr. Quorn. "I should feel satisfied if I could see the document."

Violet left the room with a furtive smile on her lips, and in a minute or so returned with the letter, which she handed to Mr. Quorn. He drew from his coat-pocket a spectacle-case, and took from it a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles. He breathed on these, and polished them with his handkerchief, and then read the letter.

"Richardson & Bowdler," he said, tapping the paper with one bejewelled, dirty finger, "Acre Building, Cheapside. No objection, I presoom, to my calling on these gentlemen and ascertaining if this document is genuine?"

"Sir," said the count, stiffly, "the whole matter is open to your investigation. You will take any course which seems to you to be justified by your own interests."

"That's above-board," said Mr. Quorn, calmly pocketing the letter and returning his glasses to their case. "I'll take a run down to these folks at once, and things being satisfactory there, I'll be at Captain Fyffe's service any minute. If you've nothing better to do this afternoon, captain, I'll run you down to Blackwall and show you what is to be seen."

It was arranged that he should call for me between three and four o'clock, and on that understanding he took his leave, retiring with many flourishes and an assurance, specially addressed to Violet, that he was flush on the cause of freedom anywhere and everywhere, the hull globe over, and dead against them blasted Austrians anyhow.

"You must remember, my child," said the count, when we three were left alone, "that you are spending a great sum of money in this enterprise, that it may all be wasted, and that even if by your help The Cause should win you can never hope to see one pound of your money back again."

Violet had seated herself beside him at Mr. Quorn's departure, and now, when he began to speak, she slid one arm about his neck and nestled closely to him, with her ripe young cheek touching his grizzled and lined old face.

"I have thought of all that, father," she answered. "I shouldn't care much in any case what became of the

money, for I shall have plenty left. But if it were the last penny, you and Italy would be welcome to it."

"I know that, my dearest," the count answered; "but all the same I could wish it were my own. You have not yet heard to-day's news?"

"No," she said, drawing a little away from him, in order that she might look into his face. "What is it?"

"France is up!" he responded. "Louis Philippe has flown away, and is either on the road here or here already."

"And that means?" she said.

"Instant action," returned the count. "Action without one hour's unnecessary delay."

"Tell me," she said, "exactly what it means."

"We have called a meeting for to-night," said the count, "and until that is held I can tell you nothing final. But you have a right to know my own design. We can really do nothing practical until we are armed. But I shall propose to quit England to-morrow. I shall leave Captain Fyffe to the negotiations with Quorn, and shall arrange for communications across the frontier, which will enable me to judge of the best place and the wisest hour for an attack. I shall go alone, because I wish to excite as little notice as possible."

"You must not go alone," she said, and made a movement towards him with her hands half extended. It was just such a movement as you will see a mother make towards a child that has not quite learned to walk and is in danger of falling. I could see the maternal instinct beaming in her face. The beautiful girl beside this grizzled and prematurely aged man was motherly all over, and it was a lovely and a touching thing to see. The count saw her meaning in a second, and drew back from her with a melancholy and affectionate smile, holding out both hands against her.

"I must go alone," he said.

"No, no!" cried Violet, taking both his outstretched hands in hers, and bending over him with a look of infinite protection. "My poor dear, have you not suffered enough, and run dangers enough already? I could not bear to be away from you." He was about to speak, but she closed his lips gently with the palm of her hand. "I have not been your daughter long," she said, with a little catch in her voice which took me at the throat and made my heart ache with tenderness and pity for her. "I can give you up, dear, when the time comes, but not an hour before."

"Should I not be happy, Fyffe?" asked the count, turning to me with tears in his eyes. "No, no, dearest, you will wait in England. I shall leave you in safety, for I will take nothing with me—no, not a thought, if I can help it, which would make me a coward for Italy."

"I can give you up when the time comes," she repeated, simply, "but not now. I will not ask you to take me into any danger. I don't think," she went on, striving to make something of a jest of it, and to hide the deeper feeling which controlled her so strongly—"I don't think that I am fond of danger or that I should like it at all; but there is no real reason why I should not be with you just at first."

"Aye, yes," cried the count, "there is every reason. I do not know where I may have to go. I do not know how I am to live—to travel—with what associates I must combine. My dear child, you must know the truth; my love must venture to speak it. You would be a drag upon every step, and with you I should not dare to face a single peril. I must go alone; I know the hardship, but that is the task of women. They wait at home and suffer, while the man goes out to enjoy adventure and excitement. It was your mother's fortune, my child, and you inherit it. She was all English, and yet she endured it for my sake. You are at least half of Italy, and Italy has need of both of us. If Italy needs my life, she is welcome to it. If she had need of yours, I would say not a word to hold you back. But your place is at home. Is it not so, Fyffe?"

I was a selfish advocate enough, but he had reason on his side, and I should have been blind indeed not to have seen it.

"It will be wiser—wiser far," I urged, "to stay at home. To speak plainly, you could not fail, in any sudden emergency, to hamper your father's steps. He would be nervous about you, and anxious for your safety."

"But there is no need for that," she cried, with a tender impatience. "I am not afraid. If I were a man you should not talk to me so."

"No," said the count, rising and folding his arms about her. "If you were a man, my dearest, you should have your way."

"Oh," she said, with a downward gesture of her clinched hands, "I hate these thoughts about women. Why should we not have courage? Why shouldn't we share danger with those we care about? I am not afraid of danger. But I could keep you away from it when there was no reason for it."

"Violet," said her father, gently, "I am not inclined to be rash; not now. I have had twenty years of warning, remember."

"Remember, poor dear!" she cried, with both arms round his neck and her face hidden on his shoulder, "I have never forgotten for a moment since I knew that you were alive. But don't let me be so useless. Let me do something. Let me be near you. Don't leave me behind."

"You do much already," said the count, soothing her as he spoke with one loving hand upon her flushed and tear-stained cheek. "You surrender your father and your plighted husband, and a great slice of your fortune. Ah, dearest, you do enough!"

"I do nothing," she declared. "Oh, I wish I were a man!"

"So do not I," said the count. "I should quarrel with any wish the fulfilment of which robbed me of my daughter."

She moved away from him gently, and dried her eyes. Her father watched her solicitously, and by-and-by she walked to the window of the room and said, in a tone of commonplace: "You cannot prevent me from following you."

"I can forbid it," he said, in a tone of pain.

"And I can follow all the same," she answered. He looked at her with a glance in which I read both surprise

and grief, and for a minute he found no answer. When she moved to look at him he had turned away, and did not see how timid and beseeching her eyes were, for all the rebellion in her words.

"My child," he said, "I am at a grave disadvantage. It pleased God to part us, and to deny us even the knowledge of each other's existence. I am still a stranger."

"No, no, no!" she cried. She turned and ran to him, and it was plain that an appeal couched in such terms was more than she could bear. "You are my father," she sobbed, "my dear, dear father! All the dearer," she went on, in words made half inarticulate by her tears, and all the more expressive and affecting—"all the dearer because we never knew each other through all those dreadful years! I love you, dear, and I am not undutiful, and I will do whatever you ask me; but I want to be with you, I want to be with you. I have had you for such a little time. I want you—I want you always!"

"You must spare me to Italy," said her father, kissing her hands and stroking them within his own.

"Italy! What would Italy be to me if you were not a part of it?" The Southern blood broke out there plain to see, and in her flashing eyes and vivid face and the free gesture with which she spoke she was Italian all over. "Do you think a girl can love a country or a name as she loves her father? Do you think she cares about your houses and intrigues, your Piedmonts and Savoyes, your Cavours and Metterniches? I would give everything I have to Italy, but I would give it all to Austria just as soon if you were on her side!"

The count stood as if stricken dumb. I do not believe that this human natural aspect of the case had ever occurred to him as being within the broadest limits of possibility. Italy had come to mean everything in the world to him. The word meant love, revenge, ambition, the very daily bread and water of his heart and soul. The fate of Italy overrode, in his mind, every personal consideration—not only for himself, but, unconsciously, for every living creature. It was natural that it should be so. It would have been strange, perhaps, had it been otherwise. I could see that his daughter's outburst sounded in his ears almost like a blasphemy. He stood wonder-struck and silent.

"If you," he said at last, with a face as white as a ghost's, and raising a shaking hand towards her—"if you, my daughter, the living remembrance of my wife—if she herself were back here from her repose in heaven—if all that ever were or could be dear to me stood on the one side, and my country's freedom on the other, I would lose you all—I would sacrifice you with my own hand for that great cause as willingly as I would sacrifice myself."

"Of course you would," she answered, with an amazement almost equal to his own. "What was the use of proclaiming a truth so self-evident as that? You are a man and a patriot, and you love your country"—her voice rang and her bosom heaved—"and you have given all the best years of your life in suffering for her; and that is why I love and honor you. But that is what a man could never understand. You love your cause, and we women love you for loving it; and love it because you love it, and we would die for it just as soon as you would. Oh, you heroic, noble, beautiful—goose!" She rushed at him, and kissed him with a passionate impetuosity. "And you think it's all Italy. It isn't Italy; it's you! You're my father, and you're a hero, and a—a—martyr, and the noblest man that ever lived; and I love you, and I'm proud of you, and—Italy! You're my Italy, dear!"

I know that I have not even recorded the words she spoke, well as I fancied I remembered them. But there is no recording the manner, all fire and passion and melting tenderness; and such a sudden sense of fun and affection in the very middle of it all that I was within an ace of crying at it. The count did cry, without disguise, and so did she, and I did what I could to look as if I were not in the least moved. But when her outburst was over, and we had all settled down again, there was no further hint of disobedience. Violet sat down submissively on a little footstool at the count's side, holding his hand and resting her head against his knee while he detailed his plans, so far as they were ripe, or speculated beyond them, looking into the possibilities of the future.

In a while, according to arrangement, Mr. Quorn returned, and this broke up our conclave. I knew already the hour and place appointed for that night, and the count and I agreed to meet there. 12

CHAPTER XIII

We met in a room in Soho, over an Italian restaurateur's. The place was dimly lit with lamps and a brace of tall candles, and down the centre of the room ran a long, unclothed table, with chairs ranged at either side of it. The men who formed our council were of every social grade, and in the crowd which hung about the room at the moment of my entrance there were two or three who would have passed social muster anywhere, and two or three who were shaggy, unkempt, and ragged enough to have been taken for beggars. One or two wore the short round jacket which is the trade-mark of the Italian waiter, and one, a diamond merchant from Hatton Garden, carried so much of his own stock in trade in open evidence about him that he would have been a fortune to a dozen of the poorer brethren. But whether they were prince or peasant, lean tutor, fat padrone, coarse stockbroker, or polished noble, they were all at one in patriotism, and there was not a man there who had not proved himself up to the hilt, and who was not given, body and soul, to The Cause.

In the darkest corner of the room stood an old grand pianoforte, the top propped open, and the keyboard exposed as if it had been but recently employed. A chair with a ragged cushion on top of it was pushed a little back, and a sheet of music drooped from the stand towards the keys. My entrance had excited no regard, and I took my place in this dim corner to look about me. The count had not yet arrived, and, indeed, I was some five minutes before the appointed hour; but as I stood watching, Brunow came in and shook hands with at least a score of the men assembled. The light was anything but clear, and I could not be quite certain of his aspect; but to me he wore a troubled and harassed look, and I thought I had never seen him so pale and wan. He talked loudly and excitedly; and little as I understood the language with which he was so familiar, I made

out enough to tell me that he was exulting in the news that day had brought us, and was prophesying success for the Italian cause. For people who did not know him, he had an extraordinary power of exciting enthusiasm, and before he had been three minutes in the place everybody was listening to him; and once or twice as he spoke there was a murmur of applause, now and then a laugh, and once a burst of cheering. Just as this broke out he caught sight of me standing in the dimness of the corner by the old piano, and peered at me as if uncertain of my identity. When he recognized me he turned away and spoke no more, and I thought it was anger at me which flushed his face at first and then made it paler than ever. I was sorry for Brunow, and, little as I valued him, I was grieved that he should nurse his groundless grudge against me; but there was nothing to be done at present.

Almost as the cheers which had greeted Brunow's last sentence died away the count came in. He walked straight to the head of the table, and took his seat there. There was more cheering, and then the men assembled took their places anyhow, with no distinction of persons. The count's official statement of the news was received with a murmur in which a note of stern interest was audible. I had been assured, from my first knowledge of them, that the men of this particular conclave meant business. It had been the main affair of my life to judge of the intentions of societies similar to this, and I have no reason to believe that my experiences had been altogether wasted. Their purpose was evident enough now, and in the flush of anticipated victory which brightened every mind with the thought that the one ally of the oppressor was down, I read the reflection of my own certainty. "You are my Italy," said Violet to her father, and in my own mind I repeated her words as if they had been the end of an old song, and added, "*You are mine.*"

It was not long before I found myself summoned to an active part in the deliberations of the night. I heard my own name from the count's lips, and, looking up, saw his hand beckoning to me.

"My dear and valued friend," said the count, as I stood by him, "knows nothing of Italian. All of us speak or understand his language more or less, for our exile in England has taught us at least the tongue of freedom. To-day Captain Fyffe has accepted a mission in our behalf. We have had an offer of fifty thousand rifles. A wealthy Italian lady, who commands me to conceal her name at this moment, has provided the money for their purchase." There was a tremendous cheer at this, and every man there sprang to his feet. "Captain Fyffe," the count resumed, when quiet was restored, "has charged himself with the negotiations. He is an experienced soldier, and has undertaken to see that we are not buying anything that is not likely to be of solid worth to us. I will ask you now to listen to Captain Fyffe's report."

I never pretended to be anything of an orator, but I could make a plain statement of that sort, though I was a little embarrassed by the feeling that a good many of my listeners could not understand me. I reported that I had overhauled a number of cases of the arms it was proposed to purchase, and that I was reasonably satisfied of their efficiency. The rifle was of the latest make, and though we have made great strides in gunnery since then, we have made no such stride as was made at that time. I was able to say that the weapons were more effective than anything with which our enemies were armed, and to announce that we were in a position to effect an astonishing bargain.

"More than that," I said, in conclusion, "I am not disposed to say even here. The arms are contraband of war, and if it were known that they were in England it would be the duty of the authorities to seize them. That fact makes silence safest."

Those who understood, or who thought they understood, translated this brief statement of mine to those who did not, and this made a deep hum all about the table. In the midst of it a man entered at the door, and, advancing to the count, began to talk to him animatedly in some local dialect, of which I could not understand so much as a syllable. The count nodded twice or thrice to signify attention, and though at first he looked doubtful, he ended by smiling, and dismissed the messenger with an applauding pat upon the shoulder. He rose to his feet before the man had reached the door, and made a brief statement, which was received with a mingling of dissent and applause. Ruffiano leaped to his feet, crying out in English:

"Brothers, I claim a word!" and there was instant silence, every face turning attentively to his. He began to speak rapidly, with all his usual vehemence, and with even more than his usual plenitude of gesture. Almost at the beginning of his argument he bent his lean figure forward and beat rapidly upon the table with the palm of his hand, and then, suddenly recovering his full height, sent both arms backward. Brunow sat immediately on his right, and the back of the orator's hand caught him resoundingly upon the cheek; and at this unexpected incident the audience broke into a sudden shout of laughter, in which Brunow tried to join—with a curiously ill success, I thought. I could not understand the subject of discussion, for Ruffiano had immediately gone back to his native language, and there was something about Brunow's look which could hardly be accounted for by so trifling a misadventure as that which had just occurred. The instinct of the eye told him that I was looking at him, and he glanced at me and then suddenly averted his face. He made an effort to appear at ease, but his color came and went strangely, and both his hands trembled, though I saw that he was pressing them heavily upon the table with the intent to steady them. I thought he might possibly have been raging inwardly at me, and that in his unreasoning anger at me he might find my mere presence hateful to him; but I could not help thinking that his looks expressed fear or suspense rather than anger. When the laughter excited by the accident had died away, Ruffiano turned to him with a voice and gesture of apology; and having once laid his hand on Brunow's shoulder, continued to address him as if the argument he was offering, whatever it might be, concerned Brunow more intimately than any one else there present. He seemed, so far as I could judge, to carry the suffrages of the meeting with him, but I had quite resigned any feeble attempt I had made to follow the thread of his discourse, when I caught distinctly the words, "Beware of the women! I say it again and again and again: beware of the women! It is my last word, beware of the women!" Every word of this I understood quite clearly; and while I was wondering why the advice was given, Ruffiano dropped back with a grotesque suddenness into his seat, and shouted the words of warning a fourth time, striking both hands, palms downward, on the table.

Brunow followed him, and beginning somewhat shakily at first, recovered confidence as he went on, and, warming to his work, delivered a speech which sounded eloquent and persuasive. It pleased his audience, beyond a doubt, for almost every sentence was punctuated with murmurs of approval; and when he sat down there was warm applause, in which almost everybody but Ruffiano joined, but he remained unconvinced and

dissatisfied; it was evident from the way in which he rolled his gaunt figure in his chair, and his frequent cries of "No, no! wrong, wrong! absolutely wrong!" The count persuaded him to silence, and then spoke again to the man who had charge of the door. He bowed and disappeared, and there was a moment or two of waiting, during which everybody looked eagerly towards the entrance. I seized the opportunity to whisper an inquiry to the count.

"A deputation of Italian and Hungarian legates," he responded. "They desire to congratulate us on the news of to-day, and to express their sympathy for The Cause."

"That can do but little harm," I answered. "But I agree with Ruffiano all the same: the less they know of our actual intentions the better."

The count nodded smilingly. "You are quite right; ours is not work for women."

As he spoke the door-keeper reappeared, bowing, and the whole assembly rose to its feet. Half a dozen ladies entered, and some eight or ten of our own number, among whom the count and Brunow were most conspicuous, moved to welcome them. After a little bustle of compliments and arrangement, chairs were found for the visitors at the far end of the room, and the meeting fell back into its former aspect. One of our unlooked-for visitors sat on the chair near the old grand piano, and I could see her white hand, ungloved and with a jewelled bracelet sparkling at the wrist, resting on the key-board. That corner of the long and narrow chamber was so dim, and the intervening lamps and candles sent up such a glare between, that I was not quite certain of her identity; but I felt a shock of surprise in the mere fancy that this was the Baroness Bonnar. I made a movement to one side, and, shading my eyes from the light, made her out with certainty. It was the Baroness Bonnar, and no other. She had often spoken in my hearing of her Hungarian birth, and of her hatred of the Austrians; but I had never been inclined to regard this as being more than a bit of private theatricals, and I was astonished to find her withdrawing herself from the butterfly, fashionable career she seemed to follow, and taking so much interest in sterner matters as her presence there seemed to indicate.

There was a little ceremonial, in the course of which the count proffered a formal welcome to the deputation; and one of the ladies, who was richly attired and wore an air of much distinction, spoke for three or four minutes in a balanced, musical voice. The count whispered me her title—I have forgotten it ages ago, though she was a great personage in her time—and told me that she had lost her husband and her three sons in the struggle for independence. This made her interesting and venerable, and I watched her closely as I listened to the balanced accents of her mournful and musical voice. While this lady spoke her figure hid that of the baroness, but I could still see the white hand resting on the key-board, and the jewelled bracelet glittering in some stray ray of light. By-and-by the hand began to hover over the keys as if it were playing a phantom air, and a moment later I saw its fellow hovering in company with it. Just as the speaker sat down I heard the sound of a chord, but this went unnoticed in the burst of cheering which arose.

I could see the baroness now. She was sitting with both hands on the keys, and as the cheering died away they rose and fell again with a loud and brilliant crash. Everybody turned and stared in a dead silence, and she began to sing. I had heard that song from Violet's lips, and a day or two later she made me a translation of it, of which I have long since forgotten everything but the first verse. It was a song of revolution, almost as popular in Italy and quite as sternly prohibited as was the Marseillaise in France. Here is the one verse that I remember:

*"Oh, is it sleep or death
In which Italia lies?
Betwixt her pallid lips is any breath?
Is any light of life within her eyes?
Oh, is it sleep or death?"*

It went on to picture Italy prostrate under the armed heel of Austria, and in its concluding verse the trance was broken, the trampled figure had risen to its feet, had wrested the sword from the oppressor's hand, had hurled him to the earth, and stood triumphant over his lifeless body. I have heard finer voices by the dozen, but I have not often heard a finer style or one more magnetic and entralling. The little woman sang as if the song possessed her, and it is not often that a singer finds such an audience. When the first amazement was over I looked about me and saw that everybody had risen and turned towards the singer as if by a common impulse. The song was recognized at the first bar, and it was listened to with an enthusiasm which had something very like worship in it. Before the first verse was over I saw tears glittering in many eyes, and when leaving the mournful strain with which she opened, the singer passed on to the swing and passion of the second and third verses, many of the listeners were so carried away that they wept outright; somebody struck in on the final line with a ringing tenor, and then the whole crowd joined in. The third verse was sung over and over again, in a scene of enthusiasm almost as wild as that of the count's welcome at the railway station, or the later and still more memorial meeting of that same evening. The hot Italian blood was fairly fired, and it took a long time to cool again. Brunow, who only a few minutes before had seemed so unlike his usual self, surrendered himself to the excitement of the moment with a zest, and seemed as madly enthusiastic as any one of them. He sang with both hands in the air, beating time extravagantly; and when at last the hubbub was over, he pressed his way to the baroness, who stood smiling at the pianoforte and drawing on her-gloves. He took both her hands in his, and said something to her at which she laughed as if well pleased. He made a way for her through the crowd gathered about the piano, and escorted her to the door. As they passed me I heard her say to him: "I told you how it would be," and I had reason to remember the words afterwards.

This unlooked-for episode being over, and the deputation of ladies having been dismissed with roaring "vivas," we went back to business. I noticed that Brunow's earlier awkwardness of manner had given way to a mood and aspect of great elation. But of course I was without the key to the understanding of the situation, and his change of temper had no significance for me. I can understand it now, however, and I know that he had frightened himself unnecessarily over the baroness's little experiment. It was he who had taken upon himself the onus of introducing the ladies' deputation, and the baroness's object is, of course, clear enough. All she wanted was to make herself favorably known to the general leaders of the party as a well-wisher to

The Cause. Whether Brunow knew, then, anything of her full purpose I am unable to say with certainty, but I am inclined to think he did, and I have two or three proofs which have grown more cogent with time that he already knew the theme of Austrian money, and had embarked on that wicked and degrading career which led him to so swift and just a punishment.

Of course little real business was done in those big gatherings of party of which this night's assembly was one. All the men were true and tried, as I have already said, but their numbers alone would have made them unwieldy as an active body, and the real work was performed by a sort of informal committee, of which I had now for some time been a member. Almost from the first hour of his arrival in England the count had taken his place among his party as the natural and recognized leader. I never knew a man who made less pretence of being dominant, but I never knew a man either who had in so marked degree that unconscious inner force of character which gives a man control over his fellows. At any moment of importance it was his habit to single out among us the men of whose counsel he had need, and only those thus singled out ever ventured to stay behind when the public business was finished and the more intimate discussions of the inner conclave were about to be held. This night, a little to my surprise, he beckoned Brunow, who, as I fancied, had been waiting in hope and expectation of the summons. His face, which had grown once more a little haggard and anxious, brightened when he received it, and the count held him in private conversation for a moment, with one hand on his shoulder. He spoke in a subdued tone, the murmur of which alone reached me; but when he had finished what he had to say, Brunow answered with a loud alacrity: "Willingly, my dear count, most willingly." At this the count beckoned me, and as I approached Brunow held out his hand.

"I hope you'll take that, Fyffe," he said. "I beg your pardon, with all my heart. I wasn't myself when I spoke, but I know that what I said was the merest nonsense."

I took his proffered hand at once, without a shadow of suspicion or reserve. There had never been very much in common between us, but we were life-long acquaintances, and, after a fashion, we had been friends. I was glad to patch up the quarrel, and willing to say and think no more about it.

The council we held was a brief one, for the count had already made up his mind to his own satisfaction; and when he had advised us of that, the business was practically over.

"I arranged with Mr. Quorn," he said, "more than a week ago, that if it were finally decided to purchase the arms he had for sale I would travel with him to Italy on board of his own ship, and would myself undertake the responsibility of effecting a landing. I have arranged also that trustworthy information shall be conveyed to us from the shore, I am not anxious to fall into Austrian hands again, and I shall take all precaution to avoid surprise."

"On what part of the coast do you intend to effect a landing, sir?" Brunow inquired.

"That will depend," the count answered, "on circumstances of which I am at present ignorant. I must wait and see. I shall probably start to-morrow. Mr. Quorn quite naturally and properly declines to part with the goods until he is paid for them. The money cannot be drawn until the 12th of August, but it will then be despatched to me by a safe hand, and I shall have ample time to signify the place to which it must be carried. Quorn," he added, "is assured of our *bona fides*, and will be ready to start at any hour I may indicate."

One or two of our number, I remember, endeavored to dissuade him from his plan, on the ground that we had need of his leadership in England, and that there were many things to be done there which could not be intrusted to hands of less authority. Ruffiano combated this opinion.

"We shall all be wanted in Italy," he argued, "and Count Rossano will be more needed there than any of us. The mere knowledge that he is again on Italian soil, and that he is amply provided with arms, will bring the people about him anywhere."

The discussion did not last long, and it was so plainly to be seen from the beginning that the count was bent upon carrying out his own plan, and Brunow, Ruffiano, and I were so strongly of opinion that he had chosen the most useful course, that opposition vanished very early. The count delegated his authority as president of the council to Ruffiano, who, in spite of his outside singularities, was a man of much force of character, and, next to the count himself, commanded most completely the respect of the party.

Ruffiano, the count, and I walked to Lady Rollinson's house together, and Brunow came half-way. As we walked together behind the two elders, who were deep in conversation, we found little to say to each other; but at last Brunow put his arm through mine in quite the old friendly fashion, and brought me almost to a standstill.

"I mustn't go any farther, old fellow," he said. "I shall get used to things by-and-by, I dare say, but it was a little bit of a facer at first, and I haven't quite got over it yet. Look here, Fyffe, we've always been friends, don't let what's happened make any difference between us."

I don't think I ever felt so well disposed to him as I did at that minute. I was victor, for one thing, and it was easy to make allowance for the man who had lost; and, apart from that, his withdrawal had been so generous and candid that I should have been a brute not to have accepted it instantly. I shook hands with him with a warmer cordiality than I had ever experienced towards him, and with a higher opinion of his manhood. It was the last time I ever took him by the hand, poor Brunow! and though it is a hundred chances to one in my mind now that he was at that very moment plotting to betray me, I can't somehow find it in my heart to feel so bitter against him as I should have felt against a stronger man. He never seemed to me to be altogether responsible, like other people, and the payment of his treachery was so swift and dreadful that the memory of it breeds a sort of half-forgiveness in my mind.

There were scores of hard business details to be thought of and talked about, and we three conspirators sat together until the night was late. When at last Ruffiano left us, the count detained me.

"The world is full of changes," he said, "and no man knows what may happen. We may never meet again, Fyffe, and I have a solemn charge to leave you. If I am caught again they will make short work of me. I do not mean to be caught if I can help it, but I know the risk I run. If anything should happen to me, I counsel you, for Violet's sake, to retire from The Cause. She cannot spare us both, and Italy has no claim on you."

I suppose the surprise I felt at receiving such advice from such a quarter showed itself in my face, for he

went on with a smile:

"I see you wonder at me, but I have had time to think since Violet spoke out her mind this afternoon. A man may have a cause and may set it above everything in the world, but a woman sees an individual—her father—her lover—her brother—her husband—a baby—any solitary human trifle—and to her the one individual is more valuable than any ideal. You will do as I wish, Fyffe?"

"No!" I answered. "I am pledged, and I will carry out my promise. I should despise myself and Violet would despise me if I went back from it."

"Well, well," he answered, and I could not tell from his manner whether he was pleased or displeased at my reply, "we are all in God's hands. Good-night, and good-bye. We shall not meet again for a little while, in any case."

CHAPTER XIV

The count had been gone a week, and of course no news was as yet to be looked for. He had sailed with Quorn for some undecided part of the Italian coast, and we had resigned ourselves to hear no more of him for at least another fortnight. We were all busy enough at this time, and news favorable to our enterprise came on us thick and fast every day.

This is no place for a history of the last Italian revolution. That story has never yet been fitly told, but it will furnish a splendid epic one of these days for a great historian. It came like a beneficent earthquake, with toil and trouble and turmoil enough, and it stirred up all Europe, and shook down many unjust forms of government. To my mind it is the happiest and most beautiful event in the modern history of Europe, for the revolution, though it was effected with the sternest purpose and the most unflinching heroism, was marked by none of the excesses of revenge and hatred which have disfigured so many popular risings against tyranny.

I had been hard at work until three o'clock in the morning, had gone to bed dead tired, and had slept like a log until ten, when Hinge came in with a cup of steaming coffee, and began with his usual silent dexterity to lay out my clothes. I paid no especial heed to him at first, but by-and-by I caught sight of his face reflected in the mirror which decorated my skimpy wardrobe, and I could see at once that he was beaming with self-congratulation. He was one of the most faithful and constant fellows in the world, but as a general thing he was a little saturnine in temper. Any outward display of cheerfulness was rare with him, and such an outward sign of inward exultation as I read this morning was a downright astonishment.

"Why, Hinge," I asked him, "what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing the matter with me, sir," responded Hinge.

"You look particularly pleased," I said. "What has happened? Has anybody left you a fortune?"

"No, sir," Hinge answered, turning his hard-bitten, queer old mug towards me with a shining smile. "Nobody's left me a fortune, sir, but I'm just as glad as as if they had. You're a-lying a bit late this morning, sir, and you haven't seen the newspapers."

"The newspapers!" I cried, springing out of bed at once. "Let me have them. What's the news?"

"The news is, sir," Hinge answered, standing in attitude of attention, and smiling like a happy Gargoyle—"the news is, sir, as the Italians is playing Old Harry at Milan with them Austrians, and old Louis Philippe turned up at Newhaven, England, yesterday."

I made my toilet with unusual haste, and in the meantime Hinge brought the papers and read out the news.

"I spent some years among them Austrians, sir," said Hinge, and then paused suddenly, scratching his head with a look of irritation.

"Yes," I answered; "what of that?" Something was evidently on the good fellow's mind, and in the midst of his delight he was troubled with it.

"You're a-going out to Italy, ain't you, sir?" he asked. I was shaving at the moment, and contented myself with a mere affirmative grunt. "Well, it's like this, sir," said Hinge; "I was in a civil capacity when I was in Austria, wasn't I, sir?"

"Well, yes," I told him, "I suppose so."

"They couldn't have sworn me in without my knowing it, could they, sir?" Hinge demanded. "Of course I picked up a bit of the language in the course of a year or two, but when I went there I didn't speak a word. When I was first engaged, sir, there was a lot of things said to me as I didn't understand no more than the babe unborn. Now, if I was swore in," Hinge proceeded, with an air of argument, "and if I was swore in in anything but a civil capacity, that can't be counted as being binding on my heart and conscience. Now, can it, sir?"

"You silly fellow," I answered, "you couldn't have been sworn in without being aware of it. A man cannot vow and promise that he will do anything without his own knowledge and desire."

"Well, then, sir," said Hinge, apparently relieved a little, "if I was swore in—and I might have been, you know, sir—I don't know but what they might have thought they'd done it—but even if it was so, you wouldn't think it binding?"

"Of course it couldn't be binding, but of course nothing of the sort was done. You were engaged, as I understand, as a groom." Hinge assented. "You happened to be engaged by a gentleman who was an officer in a foreign army. You don't suppose that an officer makes it his business to swear in all his civilian servants, do you?"

"Why, no, sir," Hinge admitted. "But it was a foreign country, and a lot of things was said to me as I didn't

understand no more than the babe unborn."

"You may make your mind quite easy on that score, Hinge. You are not in any way bound to the Austrian service. But what difference can that possibly make to you now?"

"Why, sir," said Hinge, scratching his head again, "I've lived among them Austrians, and I don't like 'em. I'm for Italy, I am. I used to think, sir, as the Italians was a organ-grinding class of people as a body, and I never had much respect for 'em. But I've seen a lot in six months, sir, and I've learned a bit, if I may make so bold as to say so. There's the count, now, sir; anybody can see as he's a gentleman. Why, if you'll believe me, sir, I've never seen a gentleman as was more a gentleman than the count. But, bless your heart, sir, you'd never have thought so if you'd a known him all the years as I did, off and on, a-living worse than a wild beast behind a muck-heap, and in a cellar underneath the stables. Now you know, sir," proceeded Hinge, growing warm and even angry with the theme, "that ain't civilized; it ain't Christian; it ain't treating a man as if you was a man yourself. Because a gentleman goes and fights for his country—that's a natural thing to do, ain't it?—they keep him dirtier and darker and 'orrible than any wild beast I ever see, for twenty years, and would have kept him all his miserable life, sir. I used to get that 'ot about it when I found it out I used to feel as if I was ready to do murder. I did, indeed, sir. And yet I can appeal to you, sir, and ask you fair and square, between an officer and his servant, if I am not a civil spoken person, as a rule. I believe I am, sir, and yet I used to feel as if it 'd do me good, every now and then, to go out and shoot a Austrian."

"I suppose," I said, "that the upshot of all this is that when I go to Italy you want to go with me."

"That's it, sir," Hinge returned, delightedly. "If I'm only free, sir, if I was engaged in nothing but a civil capacity—"

"You are quite free to go," I told him; "and I had thoroughly made up my mind to take you with me, supposing always that you were willing to be taken."

"I'm more than willing, sir," Hinge responded. "I should like to hear 'Boot and saddle' again, sir; so would you, I am sure."

I had never heard Hinge break out like this before, and the good fellow's enthusiasm and right-thinking pleased me, and as I went on dressing I kept, him talking.

"I should think, sir," he said, and he was about me all the while in his usual handy and unobtrusive fashion—"I should think, sir, as anybody as knowed the count 'd be glad to fight on his side. It makes you want to fight for a gentleman like that as has gone through so much. And if you'll excuse me telling you, sir, what makes me so pertickler glad to go—"

"Yes," I said, for he paused and looked a trifle confused. "Go on, what is it?"

"Well, sir," he answered, "I know it isn't right in my place to be talking, but there's Miss Rossano, sir—" I turned rather sharply round on him at the mention of that name, and Hinge, standing at attention, saluted. "No harm meant, sir," he said, "and I 'ope, sir, there's no offence. But I took a letter from you to Miss Rossano, sir, last Wednesday week. It was the second time as I was in the house, sir, and when Miss Rossano came out to give me the answer, she saw as it was me, and she asks me in; and there was the count, sir, a-sitting in the parlor. And says Miss Rossano, 'Father,' she says, 'here's the faithful man,' she says, 'as treated you so kind when you was in prison along with them blooming Austrians,' she says; and the count he gets up in his grand way, and he shakes me by the hand, with his other hand on my shoulder. They'd have made me sit down between them, sir, if I'd a done it, and the count, sir, with his own hands, he powered me out a glass of sherry wine. It was the right sort, that was," said Hinge, passing his hand across his lips with a gleam of remembrance, and instantly resuming his rigid attitude, as if he had suddenly found himself at fault, as, of course, in his own mind he did. "They was that kind between 'era and that nice way with it I didn't know whether I was a-standing on my head or my heels. And then the count he says something to Miss Rossano in his own lingo—language, I should ha' said, sir, begging your pardon—and Miss Rossano she answers him back again, and they get a-talking till there was tears in both their eyes, sir. And then Miss Rossano she fetches out her purse, sir, and she takes a ten-pound note, and here it is." Hinge took it from his waistcoat pocket, and opened it out before me. "Of course, sir, I didn't want to take it, for whatever little bit I done I done it for my own amusement, as a man may say. I've had a-many larks in my time, but I never was paid for none of them like that—two pound a week pension for a lifetime and a easy job into the bargain. I didn't want to take this, sir," Hinge continued, folding up the note and restoring it to his pocket; "but Miss Rossano she comes at me and shut it into my hand with both her own, whether I would or no, and all of a sudden, sir—" He stopped with a gulp, and swallowed laboriously twice or thrice. I was tickled, but I was touched at the same time, and touched pretty deeply; but I could not afford to show that to Hinge, and I dare say I looked pretty hard and stern at him.

"What did she do?" I asked, rather gruffly.

"She—she kissed my 'and, sir; that un." He held out his right hand and looked at it as if it were, in some sort, a wonder. "I never seen anything done like it," said Hinge. "And I was that took aback, and that delighted, and that flabbergasted!"

Hinge positively began to blubber, and what with, the mirth of it, and my own vivid sense of Violet's feeling at the time, and this revelation of the simple fellow's goodness, I was very near doing the same myself. I verily believe that I should have joined Hinge, and a very pretty pair we should have made (for I have found at the theatre and elsewhere that there is no way of disposing a man to tears like the way of making him laugh through affection and sympathy beforehand); but luckily for myself, I made shift to ask him, in a blustering way, what he meant by it, and to order him out of the room. He was so very shamefaced while he waited upon me at breakfast after this that I would have given a good deal to shake hands with him, and to tell him that he was a very fine fellow; but though I have known that impulse many times in my life, and have sometimes felt it very strongly, I have never been able to obey it, and I know that with many people I have passed through life as a hard man—perhaps to my own advantage.

This was the beginning of a strange day—the day on which I had my first suspicion of Brunow, and the day of poor old Ruffiano's betrayal, in which I myself had an unconscious hand. It came about in this way: I had seen at a gun-maker's shop in the Strand some weeks before a brace of revolvers which had greatly taken my

fancy. They were not the old-fashioned, clumsy pepper-caster which I can very well remember as having been used in actual warfare, and, indeed, esteemed as a deadly weapon, but were new from America, with all the latest patents. I had already examined them thoroughly, and had made up my mind to buy them when the time came; but I was afraid of accumulating expenses, and it was only now when the pinch of war was so near that I could find the heart to part with the money. Hinge went with me, keeping his usual place at a pace or half a pace behind my right shoulder, so that I could talk to him whenever I had a mind, while he still kept the position which he thought consistent with his master's dignity. Just as I came upon Charing Cross I sighted Ruffiano; and he, seeing me at the same moment, hurried across the street in his impetuous fashion, and barely escaped being run over. The escape was so very close, that when he reached me I congratulated him heartily, though if I had known what was going to happen I might much more properly have commiserated him. But the future is in no man's knowledge, and I have often been forced to think that that is a blessed thing, and one to be heartily thankful for. I have been happy at many moments, and so have those nearest and dearest to me, when, if we could have known what an hour would bring forth, we should have been profoundly mournful in anticipation of an event not yet guessed of.

Poor old Ruffiano was full of enthusiasm and full of news. He was better dressed than I had ever seen him before, and in consequence less remarkable to look at.

"You shall congratulate me on more than that," said the good old man, smilingly. "Within a few hours I shall have news straight from home, and but for you—see now how one thing depends upon another—it might never have reached me at all. Had I never known you I might never have known your excellent and estimable young friend, the Honorable Mr. Brunow, and," he continued, smiling and bending over me, to lay the tip of a bony finger on either of my shoulders before he straightened himself to his gaunt height, "it is evident that if I had never met the Honorable Mr. Brunow it would not have been possible for the Honorable Mr. Brunow to bring me news."

"You get your news from Brunow?" I responded, little guessing what it meant, and feeling in my blind ignorance quite friendly towards Brunow for having done anything to give the sad exile so much pleasure. "And I needn't ask you if the news is good news."

"I am told it is," he responded; "but I have it yet to hear." He explained to me that he had two sisters resident in Italy, who lived at tolerable ease upon what the family confiscations had left them of their property. "They would have maintained me well," said the old man, with his cordial, innocent smile, "but I have always pretended to them to want nothing. They have children, and young men will be expensive, and I get on very well without infringing on their little store. They live together at Posilippo, and a neighbor of theirs, one Signor Alfieri, the bearer of a great name, you observe—it is like an Englishman having Mr. Shakespeare coming to see him—this Signor Alfieri is a neighbor and a friend of theirs. He would have called upon me, but he failed to find me, and he sails for Italy to-night. I meet him at—I forget the name, but it is on your river, and the Honorable Mr. Brunow is so good as to be my guide. Come with me," he said, suddenly. "You will learn the very latest news of Italy, and you will meet a good patriot who will tell you what was actually doing three weeks ago."

Now it happened, as fate would have it, that I was free that evening and that Violet was engaged. If I had had any chance of meeting her I should have declined Ruffiano's invitation; but the night seemed likely to be vacant of employment, the old man seemed solicitous, and I saw no reason for refusing him. Quite apart from that it would, as he suggested, be agreeable and perhaps useful to know at first-hand what an Italian thought of the chances of the rising which must have been imminent when he left his country. So I made arrangements to meet Ruffiano and to dine with him at the same Italian restaurant in the upper room of which we held our meeting, and after this I shook hands and went about my own business.

It was dark when we met again, for this was only the fifth day of March, and it was about half-past six in the evening. Ruffiano told me that he had left word at Brunow's lodgings that he might be found here, and we ate our simple dinner, drank our half-flask of Chianti together, and had already reached our coffee and cigars when Brunow came to keep his appointment. He was astonished to find me there, and, I thought, disagreeably astonished. Remembering the terms on which we had parted when we had last seen each other, I was a little surprised at this. I have said already that at our parting on that occasion we shook hands for the last time. It was not because I did not offer him my hand on this occasion, but he seemed not to see it, and I took it back again, resolved in my own mind not to be angry with him, and thinking it probable that he had some attack of his old infirmity of temper.

"Ah, you are here!" cried Ruffiano, rising and half embracing him. "It is a pity you were not here earlier. We have had a jolly little dinner and a jolly little talk."

I seem to hear the old fellow's voice now, with its quaint accent, the "jollia leetle dinnera" and the "jol-lia leetle talka," with his half-childish-sounding vowel at the end of almost every word. Poor old Ruffiano! He has seen the end of his trouble this many and many a year. I never knew a more loyal gentleman, or one less capable of digging such a wicked trap as he fell into. Brunow's manner was altogether a puzzle to me, and even next day, enlightened as I was by events, I was unable to understand it, because it seemed altogether so silly a thing for him to run his neck into the noose as he did. I have sometimes thought it possible that he counted on his own apparent simplicity for safety, but in that case he could not have counted how far his embarrassment at the beginning had invited suspicion and misunderstanding.

First of all, he made some little effort to back out of the undertaking, and then, Ruffiano describing himself as being altogether disappointed, he became resigned, and undertook to pilot us to the place of rendezvous. He had a cab outside, one of the old-fashioned four-wheeled hackney-coaches, and as he led us to it some stranger, entering the restaurant, jostled him at the door. He turned with his face towards me at this instant by accident, and I saw that he was as pale as death, and had a queer flush of color at the eyes. His manner was alternately strangely alert and curiously preoccupied, and altogether I knew not what to make of him. The man who drove the cab had evidently had his orders beforehand, and knew exactly where he was expected to go, for he started off without a word. We seemed, to my mind, to travel interminably, for in the course of the journey I fell rather more than half asleep, and at wakeful and observant intervals found myself in portions of the town which, though I have always boasted to know London pretty well, were altogether

strange to me. First I made out, with a kind of half-wakeful start, that we were at Whitechapel, and waking, as it seemed to me, a wink or two later, I found that we were in a region of docks and public-houses, with here and there a sulky gleam of dock-water or of river showing under the dark sky—rare passengers and rarer tenements. But, of course, I had not the faintest reason for suspecting anybody, and we went rumbling on, I pretty sleepy, and pretty full of a satisfactory dinner after a hungry day, and Brunow and Ruffiano silent, as it seemed to me, nearly the whole length of the road. After, perhaps, an hour and a half's driving, Brunow woke me by calling impatiently to the cabman, and I came to the full possession of myself in time to see the vehicle swerve suddenly to the right. My prolonged drowse half refreshed me, and the cold, wet air which blew up from the river through the window Brunow had opened fell freshly on my cheek. I could see the river gleaming ahead, with spaces of liquid blackness in it, and a red or green light burning here and there. It was still raining, and the clouds were heavy in the south and west. We stopped almost at the river-side, before a tumble-down-looking little public-house, and here Brunow alighted hastily. A hulking fellow leaned against the door-jamb smoking a short pipe; and Brunow addressing an inquiry to him, he jerked his thumb towards the river, and answered: "Just got steam up. Start in an hour at the outside."

"Is there no boat?" Brunow asked.

"Boat?" said the man, spitting lazily into the road; "boats enough, if you care to pay for 'em."

"You hear," said Brunow, turning, and Ruffiano, dragging his gaunt length out of the cab and stumbling with some difficulty to the rough, dark pavement, called out for a boat by all means.

"I will see him but for a minute," he said; "but it will be better than nothing. I should be loath to make such a journey without result."

"Find us a boat," said Brunow. He spoke in such a voice as a man might have used if he had ordered his own execution, and I remarked that at the time. I can see now that a hundred thousand things were happening to advise me of the truth, but I was as ignorant and as unsuspecting of it as if I had been a baby. The man at the door lounged out into the road, and with a turn of the head invited us to follow him. We obeyed this voiceless bidding, and in a very little while found ourselves on a rough quay at the river-side. We descended a set of break-neck steps, and in another minute found ourselves afloat. The man pulled with leisurely, strong strokes to where a boat lay in midstream, with its green light towards us; and nearing the vessel, raised a hoarse cry, "Ship ahoy there!" The cry was answered from aboard the boat, and a ladder was lowered to us by which we climbed on deck. Brunow went first, Ruffiano followed, and I went third. It struck me as a surprising thing that at the very minute on which my foot struck the ladder the boat shot from under me. I sang out aloud to the man to ask where he was going, but he returned no answer save in a sneering and insolent-sounding growl, which might have meant anything or nothing. My conclusion was that he was coming back in time to take us away again, and I gave the matter no further heed, but followed Ruffiano on deck, still unsuspecting. My first surprise came when a man in a dreadnaught jacket and a sou'wester asked in German, "Is that the man?" and, without waiting for an answer, sang below, "Full steam ahead!" Even then I had no idea of a plan to carry off anybody, but I was astonished to find a man talking German and giving orders in German on a craft which I had imagined to be Italian.

"But why full steam ahead?" I asked Brunow; and he turned upon me in the darkness with a faltering in his voice.

"I don't know," he said. "There's something infernally strange about all this. Have we been trapped? This fellow's a German."

"Trapped!" I answered. "How should we be trapped?"

"This," cried Brunow, in a loud and quavering tone, "is not the ship I meant to board. There's some mistake here! Hi, you there!"

"Halloa!" said the man in the dreadnaught, approaching and speaking in broken English. "You can houl't your chaw. There is nothing for you to cry out about. Gom dis vays."

Still in growing wonderment, and feeling on the whole that I should have been much better satisfied if I had had with me the brace of revolvers I had bought that morning, I followed the man down the companion-ladder.

CHAPTER XV

The paddles had already begun to churn in the water, and the vessel to move slowly, but with a swift vibration in every plank of her which promised speed when once she had gathered way. I was suspicious enough already, though in so vague a fashion that I hardly guessed what I suspected, and I recall the fact that I was not in the least surprised when I heard a cry from Ruffiano's lips, and saw the old man struggling in the arms of a big sailor who had clipped him by both elbows from behind and held him in a position of the most serious disadvantage. Without reflection, I sprang to his release. I felt a heavy blow between the shoulders, which would in all probability have taken effect upon my head but for my sudden movement, and in an instant I was in the middle of as severe a rough-and-tumble fight as I could remember anywhere. There were eight or ten people engaged in it, and the whole thing was so rapid that I had not the faintest idea as to where my opponents came from. I only know that within five seconds of the time at which I had left the deck I was somehow back upon it, fighting, as it seemed to me at the moment, for bare life, though I cannot think at this time of day that any very serious personal violence was intended towards myself.

I was fighting like mad with half a dozen when we suddenly swerved altogether against some part of the bulwark which had not been properly secured, and was probably made to open to afford a gangway for passengers, or for the unloading of baggage. The rail swung back, and I, clutching desperately at one of the fellows with whom I was struggling, fell overboard, and soused into the black water, with the bitter chill of a

rainy spring in it. I think I may say quite honestly that on land I was a tolerably accomplished sportsman, but I was mainly inland bred as a boy, and though I could swim, after a fashion, and could also, after a fashion, handle a pair of sculls, I was a moderately poor creature in the water. The man I had clutched went down with me, and we both came up spouting the loathsome Thames water from our mouths and nostrils, and still holding to each other. As good luck would have it for me at that moment I came up on top, and a single blow disengaged me from my late adversary. The vessel from which we had fallen was already at a distance which seemed astonishing, and as I trod the water and looked about me, all the twinkling lights of the river craft and the shore looked alarmingly distant. I made for the nearest of them all, and swam, dreadfully embarrassed by my boots and soaked clothing. The light towards which I directed myself shone green over the black spaces of the water, and concentrating all my observation upon it, I thought I approached it at quite a royal pace. In a very little while, however, I discovered that the light was bearing down on me at a much greater rate than that at which I was approaching it, and finally I had some ado to get out of the way of the boat which carried it, and was considerably tossed and tumbled about in the long furrowing wake it made. I sang out at my loudest, but I can only suppose that I was not heard, for the craft, whatever it might have been, swept swiftly down the stream, and in a few seconds was lost to me. I began to feel horribly cold and hopeless. I have been in danger a good many times in my life, but almost always when I could warm the sense of peril by action; but here I felt for a moment as if my time had come, and as if nothing I could do could avert it. The fancy fairly sickened me; and what with the chill of immersion, the sickening taste of the nauseous water, and my own sense of feebleness as a swimmer, I was on the edge of giving up; but all of a sudden, as I have felt more than once in my time, a perfectly calm and bright sensation succeeded to the panic, and I rolled over on to my back, determined to make the best of things and to husband my strength as far as possible. I had read scores of times, as everybody has, that a man floating in the water has only to throw his head back, to keep his hands down, and to rest quite still to be safe. I tried this promising experiment, and whether from the weight of my wet clothes or the irregularity of my breathing, I found that it would not answer, and that I was compelled to keep in motion. I could feel that the current was carrying me, and as I paddled along, most carefully husbanding my strength, I saw that I was bearing gradually nearer to a light on shore, whose position in reference to the various other lights determined me that it was a fixed and not a moving object. I swam towards it, carefully regulating my respiration and determined to avoid all flurry, but I saw that in spite of my utmost efforts I was being hurried past it. Then I drifted into a space where there was something of a little broken, choppy sea, and got another fill of that beastly water, which tasted of tar and sewage and all abominations, and sickened me again to the very heart. Then, before I had fairly recovered from this, and while I was only automatically keeping myself afloat, I saw the wet, rotting piles of a wooden pier quite close to me, and swimming like a madman, touched the surface, and tried to get a grip of it. I failed, and was swept along, gripping and slipping in a most desperate endeavor, until at last the finger-nails of my right hand stuck somewhere in a crack of the water-soaked and slimy wood, and I held on, feeling that I was safe. I had not the faintest sensation of pain at the time, but I clung to the slimy pillar of that pier so urgently with both hands that my nails were half torn away, and for a fortnight later it was only with great difficulty that I could handle a pen, or button or unbutton a collar, or use a knife and fork. I tried to bottom the stream, but found I was quite out of my depth, and so worked cautiously along with the current from post to post until I came to the end of the structure, and then feeling my way round it in grim darkness, found myself at last with my feet embedded in soft mud. I held on there for a minute or two to take breath, and then fought on again. In a little while I found myself on dry land, but so used up by the pull and by the unwonted exertion that I fell all in a heap at the water's edge, and lay there so prostrated that I could move neither hand nor foot. At first the air was tenfold colder than the water had been, but the natural heat reasserted itself gradually, and my forces so far gathered themselves together that I could stand upon my feet and walk. I went on blindly just at first, with such lights as were visible dancing wildly all about me, and it must only have been by sheer good fortune that I did not wander back into the river from which I had so narrowly escaped. Sometimes I saw hundreds of lights, green and red and dazzling white, which had no existence at all, but in the midst of these I made out one which was stationary and real, and I went towards it. When I reached it I found that it hung above the door of that identical public-house at which we had found our boatman, and there at the doorway, glass in hand, was the hackney driver who had brought us down. The man looked amazed to see me, and was more surprised still when I hailed him. He undertook immediately to drive me back to town; helped me into the cab, wrapped me up from head to foot in a rough oilcloth, got me a stiff glass of hot brandy-and-water, and drove away.

The journey down had been long, but the return seemed actually interminable, and it seems so now in my recollection of it. I plead guilty to a confusion of mind which for a while left me powerless to think about anything. Notwithstanding the wraps with which the driver had supplied me, the cold of the March night pierced me to the bone, and the brandy I had taken seemed rather to stupify than to revive me; but when at last I did get home, and Hinge had helped me to a scorching rub-down with rough towels, and had assisted me to dress in dry raiment, I felt more myself again, and sent downstairs for the cabman, who was still waiting there for his fare. The man could tell me absolutely nothing of any value, and I soon found out that the fellow was as much surprised at the turn events had taken as I was myself. A servant girl, it seemed, had come upon the street and had told him that he was wanted a few doors off. He gave me correctly and with no unwillingness Brunow's address, and told me that the gentleman who chartered him had bidden him to drive first to the Italian restaurant, and then to our ultimate destination. I took the man's number and dismissed him with a handsome gratuity. Hinge at first wanted to insist on my immediate retirement to bed, but with every moment that went by I felt better, and when I had drunk a cup of his excellent coffee I was quite myself again, except in so far as all the events of the night seemed to have a curiously unreal and dreamlike feeling about them. The more I turned the thing over in my mind the more I felt inclined to doubt Brunow's *bonafides*, and yet our long acquaintance and the downright horrible character of the betrayal which had really been committed made the doubt seem so criminal that I tried to drive it away. The more I refused to harbor it the more emphatically it came back again. I recalled Brunow at every instant at which I had consciously or unconsciously observed him, and I *knew* that there had somehow been a burden on his mind. I could recall his cry when he had said that we were aboard the wrong ship; and let me do what I might, I could

not rid myself of the belief that his voice and look at that moment were artificial and theatrical. Once, in the middle of that rough-and-tumble which ended in my involuntary plunge into the water, I had caught sight of him in the gleam of a sickly oil-lamp which swung above the deck. He was held, yet not restrained, by a burly seaman, and the picture was burned into my mind as if by fire. The man was peering over his shoulder, ten thousand times more interested in watching the progress of the struggle than in guarding Brunow, and Brunow was watching the struggle too, but not in the least with any look of amazement, but only with one which I could not for the life of me help construing into fear and shame and self-reproach. It was like a scene beheld by lightning, divided and apart from everything else, and I found it ineffaceable.

It seemed to me obvious that the first thing to be done was to communicate with Ruffiano's friends, for whether he had been spirited away by design or not, it was undeniable that he was in a strange predicament. I set out at once for our ordinary meeting-place, taking Hinge with me, and a brisk walk of a quarter of an hour brought me to the spot. The room in which we held our meetings was approached by an entrance which ran beside the lower room of the restaurant. I left Hinge in this narrow passage, and mounted the stairs rapidly. Before I reached the room I heard the hum of excited voices, and when I tried the door I found that it was locked; I gave the signal known to every member of our fraternity, and the door was opened. The man who opened it, a swarthy Neapolitan whom I barely knew by name, started with amazement as he saw me, and gave vent to an ejaculation. There were perhaps a score of men in the room, and as I stepped forward they all started to their feet and began to press about me with questionings, of which I could barely understand a phrase. One man only hung aloof, and that man was Brunow. I was so amazed to see him there, and so bewildered by the din of welcome and inquiry, that I had no opportunity for a real observation of anything; but I am a mistaken man indeed if Brunow were not to the full as much amazed at seeing me as I at seeing him.

"My good friends," I called out at last, "let me have silence for a minute. Where is Count Ruffiano?"

Every one pointed at once to Brunow. He advanced, and I read treason in his face.

"My dear Fyffe," he cried, holding out his hand to me, "I had never hoped to see you alive again."

This time it was I who refused to see Brunow's hand, as he, only a few hours ago, had declined to see mine. If I had laid bare his villainy there and then, I have no shadow of doubt that there would have been murder done. If I had even hinted at suspicion, his life would have been barely worth a minute's purchase. If my associates had a fault with which both foes and friends alike would have credited them, it was that they were dangerously prone to act first and to argue afterwards. There had been treason in the camp already; when was ever a revolution conducted without it? But I could not make it my business to denounce a fellow-countryman, and a man who had once called himself my friend, unless I could proceed on actual certainty. It took an hour of excited talk to do it, and I had to describe my own share in the adventure twice or thrice; but I got Brunow away at last, and as we went down the stairs together I slipped my arm through his and held him with a grip which I dare say he found significant.

"You will come to my rooms," I said. He made no answer, and I walked along with him, Hinge following at a distance of a yard or two, and so far, of course, suspecting nothing. Not a word was spoken by the way, and Brunow walked like a man who was going to the scaffold. When we came to my own rooms I locked the door and faced him.

"What have you done with Ruffiano?" I asked him, sternly.

"God only knows what has become of him," cried Brunow, casting his hands abroad with a gesture which was meant to convey at once irritation and wonder. "I made my way straight back to tell the story of the extraordinary incident of to-night, and I have told it. The men we have just left can confirm me in the statement that I did not lose a minute." He was defending himself already, though no accusation had been brought against him.

"You escaped from the ship?" I asked him, curtly.

"Yes," he answered, with a gasp; "I escaped from the ship."

"How?" I asked.

"I followed your example," he returned, "and leaped overboard."

"To arrive here," I said, "in dry clothes, having made no change?"

He gave a sudden start at this, and cast a hurried glance at his own figure. Then he looked at me with an expression I shall not readily forget. It was that of a hunted creature trapped, and recognizing the fact that he was caught.

"I swam ashore," he said, "and I have changed my clothes at home."

I moved without a word to the door, and, opening it, called out to Hinge, who stood waiting for me in the darkening passage, bidding him to mount. He came and stood at attention.

"Mr. Brunow," I said, "will give you the key of his rooms, and you will go from here to there, and by his orders will bring back to me a soaked suit of clothes which you will find there. Oblige me by handing my man your key," I added, turning again on Brunow.

He shot a whisper at me.

"Do you wish to have me murdered?"

"I wish to know," I answered, "and I mean to know, the truth. What have you done with Ruffiano?"

"I tell you," he cried, desperately, "I have done nothing! I know nothing! You were there yourself, and you can tell as well as I that the whole thing was a surprise. How was I to know we were being carried aboard an Austrian craft? How could I suspect the man who came to me of treachery?"

"You swam ashore?" I asked. "I am not to be charged with hunting you to death because I ask for a sight of the clothes you swam in. Give Hinge your key!"

"He's quite welcome to it," he answered, turning his white, defiant face on me, and fumbling in his pocket with a hand so unnerved that he could grasp nothing with it for a minute. "There you are," he said at last, drawing out his latch-key and handing it to Hinge. "Do as you are told."

Hinge accepted the key, and, saluting, left the room without a word, though with a curious look both at Brunow and myself. When he had gone Brunow threw himself into a chair and drew out a cigar-case. He opened it, and selected and lit a cigar, though he shook so that he only succeeded with an expenditure of some half a dozen matches. When he had got a light at last he threw himself back and puffed away with as complete an expression of *insouciance* as he could command. I, of course, had nothing to say until Hinge returned, though I knew perfectly well beforehand what the result of his errand would be. He came back at last, and when his step was heard upon the stair Brunow looked more ghastly than ever as he turned his face towards me. When Hinge came in empty-handed the poor detected wretch rose with a pretence of bluster which was miserable to see.

"Why the devil," he cried, "haven't you done what you were told to do? This is a pretty servant of yours. Why hasn't he brought the things back as he was told to do?"

Hinge said nothing, but looked from me to my visitor in some bewilderment.

"You hear!" cried Brunow, rising and throwing the stump of his cigar into the grate with a sickly pretence of anger.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said Hinge; "there's Mr. Brunow's key, sir. Seems to me I've been sent on a fool's errand. Mr. Brunow's man wants to know what I mean by coming with a message like that. He says Mr. Brunow hasn't been at home since half-past six this evening. Mr. Brunow's man, sir," Hinge pursued, "seemed to think I was trying to make a fool of him."

"That will do," I answered. "You have obeyed your orders, and that is all you have to think about. Go and wait outside."

He went, but I could see that he nursed a little sense of injury. I turned to Brunow and asked him: "Is the game played out yet, or have you any other shift to show me?"

He made no answer at the minute, but fumbled in his pocket again for his cigar-case, with the same shaky and uncertain motion as before. He avoided my eyes, though every now and then he looked towards me as if in spite of himself. For my own part, I could not look away from him, and I do not know now whether I felt more rage or more contempt or more pity for him. I had not thought him so cowardly as he showed himself to be.

"It is for you," I told him at last, "to explain your actions of to-night. You know what the situation means. I charge you here with having betrayed a comrade whom you had sworn, in common with the rest of us, to stand by to the last. If I had brought the charge I am making now against you a little more than half an hour ago it would have gone hard with you. You are as well aware of that fact as I am, and you know that nothing could have saved you from my just renunciation but the memory of an old friendship, of which you have proved yourself utterly unworthy."

"I know you're talking nonsense," he responded, trying to brave it out still. "What should I want to betray old Ruffiano for?"

A sudden gust of wrath swept through me, and blew away before it the last sense of compunction in my mind.

"Understand," I said, "that I am in earnest in this matter, and that I mean to carry out my threat at once. Unless I receive from you a full confession of this night's infamy, I shall detain you here, and shall send Hinge to summon a meeting here; and at that meeting I shall denounce you as a traitor to the cause you have sworn to forward. I shall bring my proofs, and I shall leave you to justify yourself as best you may. What the consequence of that step may be it is for you and not for me to calculate. I will give you five minutes in which to make up your mind."

"You can do what the devil you please," he said; and I rang the bell. Hinge came in, and I bade him go out and call a cab. He obeyed, and taking a seat at the table I began to write out a series of addresses. I read them aloud to Brunow when I had finished, and he recognized the names of half a dozen of the most resolute of our leaders.

"You are playing with your own life!" I cried. "You have only to tell the truth to have a chance for it. You have only to go on lying in this futile way to throw your last chance into the gutter. I will palter with you no longer, and unless by the time at which Hinge returns you have made a clean breast of it, I shall send for the men whose names are here, I shall bring my charge, and you will have to stand the consequences."

"You can commit any folly you please," he answered. "I've nothing to say to you; and if you choose to excite the suspicions of a lot of foreign scum like that, you can do it, and take the responsibility."

"Very well," I said, and the room was dead still for a space of, I should say, four or five minutes; then the rumble of a cab was heard in the street and a step upon the stairs. It was a dreadful minute alike for Brunow and myself, and, looking at him, I felt a resurrection of pity in me.

"Is this bravado worth while any longer, Brunow?" I asked him. "I have no resource but to keep my word. If my man enters the room before you have spoken, he shall go on his errand, and then may Heaven have mercy on the soul of a traitor!"

Hinge's footstep came nearer, and his key touched the lock with a smart click. Brunow rose to his feet as if without any volition of his own, and made a sign with his hand against the door.

"You wish him to remain outside?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, and, falling back into the chair from which he had arisen, covered his white face with both hands. He had allowed his burning cigar to fall upon the carpet, and, a faint odor of acrid smoke reaching my nostrils, I looked for it, found it, and threw it into the empty grate. This trivial action seemed as important at the moment as anything else.

Hinge knocked at the door, but I told him to go down-stairs, and to detain the cab until I should call him. I heard the closing of the outer door, and heard every step of Hinge's feet until he reached the bottom of the stairs. Then the silence was so intense that I could hear Brunow's watch quite distinctly as it ticked in his pocket, and my own kept time to it.

"You have decided wisely," I said at last; "and when you have told me the truth you shall have your chance." He was silent for so long a time that I had to urge him. "I shall not wait forever."

"Well," he said, desperately, looking up at me for a mere instant, and then, burying his face in his hands again, "tell me what you want to know."

"I want," I told him, "to know the truth about the whole of this miserable business. Who employed you here?"

"Employed me!" he responded.

"Who paid you for this act of treachery?"

"You know all you want to know, it seems, already," he answered, sullenly, and at that I lost patience with him wholly.

"If I am not answered at once and without reserve," I said, "I will keep my part of the bargain, and leave you to your chance. Who paid you?"

"You can do what you like," he answered, rising. "I'm not going to betray a lady, anyhow."

"Thank you," I answered, with a more bitter disdain than I can easily express in words. "If you choose to make your confession in that form, it is as useful to me as it would be in any other. You were paid for this by a lady. Who was she? You will find it agreeable to have a little force exerted for the satisfaction of your own conscience, if that is the name you give it. Who was the lady?"

"I don't know that I'm bound to risk my life for her," he answered. "It's in her way of business, and she's paid for it."

"And who is she?" I demanded once again.

"The Baroness Bonnar," said Brunow.

CHAPTER XVI

To say that I was not astonished would be absurd; but the words had scarcely been spoken a moment when I began to be aware that I was wondering at my own amazement. On the whole, there was nobody whom I knew and nobody at whose existence I could have guessed who was quite so likely to be engaged in an affair of that nature as the Baroness Bonnar.

He fell back into his arm-chair with a certain air of defiance and lit another cigar, as if by this time he were thoroughly determined to brazen the whole thing out, and to justify himself to himself, even if it were impossible to find a justification for any other. His cigar slipped from his nerveless fingers; as he reseated himself he stooped to pick it up, and, looking at it with a critical eye, began to smoke again. I verily believe that if any stranger had been present, I might have been supposed to be the more disturbed and self-conscious of the two. Perhaps I was, for throughout the whole of this singular interview I was haunted by a wondering inquiry as to what I should do with the man when I had completely exposed his infamy. I dare say I was a fool from the first to feel so, though I could not help it; but to surrender him to the vengeance he had invited seemed altogether an impossibility. In that respect at least he had me at a disadvantage, and I cannot help thinking that he knew it.

"The Baroness Bonnar!" I echoed. He made no answer, but leaned back in my arm-chair, smoking with an outside tranquillity, as if the whole affair were no business of his. "The Baroness Bonnar!" I repeated, and he gave a brief nod in affirmation. "And what," I asked, "does she propose to pay you for this unspeakable rascality?"

A decanter and a water-jug stood upon the table, and he helped himself, holding up his tumbler against the light to judge of the amount of spirit he had taken before adding the water he needed. When his shaking hand jerked the jug and he had taken more water than he thought necessary, he sipped critically at the contents of the tumbler and added a little more spirit. Then he sipped again, and settled himself back into his chair, as if resigned to boredom. I knew I had only to speak a word to put all these airs to flight, but I hesitated to speak it.

"What does she pay you?" I asked again, and he turned upon me with a wretched attempt at a smile and a wave of the hand in which he held his cigar.

"It isn't usual to discuss these things," he answered.

"You wish me to understand," I said, "that for the sake of an amour with a woman of her age you have broken the most sacred oath a man could take, and have betrayed to life-long misery an old man who trusted you, and who never did you any harm. You have confessed yourself contemptible already, but surely you have a better excuse for your own villainy than this?" He was still silent, and smoked on with the same effort after an outward seeming of tranquillity, though his white face and shaking hand belied him. "What did you get in money?"

"Look here, Fyffe," he answered, inspecting the ash of his cigar with the aspect of a connoisseur, and evading my glance, "your position gives you an advantage, but you are trying to make too much use of it. I had the most perfect assurances that the old man would be treated kindly, and I know that nobody has any intention to do anything but keep him out of mischief."

I am very much ashamed of it now, and I think I was even a little conscious of shame about it then, but I felt inclined to comprehend the man, to fathom his depths of self-excuse, and I bore with his evasions and his explanations in a spirit of savage banter.

"Come," I said, "we shall get to understand each other before we part. What were you paid?"

"In money?" he asked, flicking the ash from his cigar and settling himself with ostentatious pretence of

ease. "In money—nothing."

At that very minute a knock sounded at the door, and mechanically consulting my watch, I saw that it was already nearly midnight. I had no reason to expect a visitor at that hour, and I stood listening in silence, while Hinge answered the summons at the door. There was a murmur of voices outside, and when I looked at Brunow I saw him start suddenly forward as if in the act to rise. For a second or two he set in an attitude of enforced attention, leaning forward with a hand on either arm of the chair, as if prepared to spring to his feet; but observing that my eye was upon him, he sank back again and began to smoke once more. This time nothing but the rapidity with which he puffed at his cigar was left to indicate his discomposure.

Hinge rapped at the door, and when I bade him enter, came in followed by a stranger, whose aspect was simply and purely business-like. This man bowed to me and then to Brunow, and receiving no response from either of us, stood for a moment as if embarrassed.

"Captain Fyffe, I believe?" he said, rather awkwardly.

"That is my name," I answered. "What is your business?"

"I beg pardon for coming here, sir," he responded, "but I have been waiting all night to find the Honorable Mr. Brunow, and I have only just heard that he was here. Can I have a word with you, sir?" He turned to Brunow as he spoke. "Sorry to trouble you, sir, but you remember what you promised me. I took your word of honor, sir, and I've made myself personally responsible."

"Damn it all!" cried Brunow, rising, with a whiter face than ever; "do you suppose that a gentleman is to be badgered about a thing of this kind at this hour of the night in another gentleman's rooms? Wait outside. Go down-stairs and wait for me, and I will arrange with you when we go home together."

"Very well, sir," the man replied. He was perfectly respectful, though there was an underlying threat in his manner. "I'll do as you wish. But I hope you understand—"

"I understand everything!" cried Brunow, with an imperious wave of the arm. "Do as you are told!"

"Hinge," I said, seeing a sudden light upon the complication of affairs which lay before me, "Mr. Brunow and I have business with each other which may detain us for some little time. This person can wait in your room until Mr. Brunow is at liberty."

"I beg your pardon, sir," the man responded, "I've spent a good deal of time about this business already, and it's getting late. I shall be glad to know when I may expect to be able to talk to Mr. Brunow."

"You will wait outside," I answered; "and I think I may guarantee that you will not be kept waiting long."

The man retired, and I turned on Brunow, as certain of the position of affairs at that moment as I was half an hour later.

"This man," I said, "has a business claim upon you, and you have promised to satisfy him to-night. Now, I know something of your affairs, and I can guess pretty well that without to-night's action you might not have been in a position to meet him. You had better make a clean breast of it, and it will pay you to remember once for all that I hold your life in my hands, and that I am not altogether indisposed to use my power. What were you paid, or what are you to be paid?"

"I have told you everything I had to tell," said Brunow, falling back into his former sullen attitude. "You can do just as you please, Fyffe, but I shall say no more."

I took between my thumb and finger the sheet which lay upon the table, inscribed, as he knew perfectly well, with the names and addresses of the people mainly concerned in our enterprise, and held it up before him.

"Very well," he said, after looking at it and me, and reading no sign of wavering in my face, "I was to get five hundred pounds."

"Provided always," I suggested, "that your plot came to a successful issue."

"Of course," he answered, biting his cigar and speaking in a tone of furtive flippancy, which I suppose was the only thing left to the poor wretch to hide the nakedness of his discomfiture.

"And you reckon," I asked him, "on being paid to-morrow?" Except for a sullen motion of his chair he gave no sign of answer. "Now listen to me," I said. "I have made up my mind as to what I will do. You shall not touch one penny of this blood-money. You shall have a run for your worthless life, and I promise not to denounce you to the men whom you have betrayed for twelve hours. To-morrow at midday I shall tell all I know, and you are the best judge of what it will be safest to do in the meanwhile."

"All right," he answered, desperately, rising to his feet and buttoning his coat about him; "you've found your chance and you've used it. It's a useful thing for you to get me out of the way, no doubt, but I may find a chance of being even with you yet, and if I do, I'll take it."

"You seem resolute," I told him, "to force me to do my worst. At this very instant, when I hold your life in my hands, when it is in my power to hand you over to justice by a word, and when I propose—partly for old friendship's sake and partly because I am ashamed that a fellow-countryman of mine should have been such a blackguard—to let you go, you are fool enough to tell me that my mercy has no effect upon you, and that you will do your best to be revenged upon me. Think that over, Brunow."

He turned his face away, and sat in silence for a minute; but all of a sudden I saw his shoulders begin to heave, his hands worked together, and he broke into convulsive tears. He sobbed so noisily that though the door was already closed, I darted towards it with an instinctive wish to shut out the sound from the ears of the people in the next room.

"For God's sake, Fyffe," he broke out, "let me go! I'll promise anything, do anything. I've—I've always been an honorable man till now, and I—I can't stand it any longer. If you've got any pity in you, let me go!"

I was as much ashamed as he was, though, I hope, in another way, and I was eager to cut short the conference. For all that, I had a duty to discharge.

"You shall go," I said, "and I shall be glad to be rid of you. But first of all you shall make a clean breast of it."

He told the story in a furtive, broken way, as well he might; and how much more and how much less than the actual truth he told me I never knew with certainty, but it came to this. He had had heavy gambling losses, and had got into financial difficulties. The Baroness Bonnar had found this out, and had told him of a way by which he might recuperate himself. She had only hinted at first, and he had indignantly refused her proposal, but he had played about the bait, as I could readily fancy him doing, and had finally gorged it. He was to have received five hundred pounds next day on consideration of the arrival of intelligence from the people to whom he had betrayed Ruffiano, and he confessed that he had been promised other work of the same kind.

"I swear to you, Fyffe," he declared, "that I'd never have done it at all if I hadn't had the most solemn assurances that nothing would happen to the old man."

"Do you think," I asked him, "that the solemn assurances of a spy are worth much in any case?"

"They won't hurt him," said Brunow; "I made sure of that beforehand. I give you my word of honor. I was careful about it, because I have rather a liking for him."

It was on the tip of my tongue to ask him if, having rather a liking for him, he had betrayed him to the Austrians, what he would have done if he had rather a dislike for him. But it could serve no purpose to argue at all in such a case, and it was hopeless to imagine that any exposure of himself would have made the man realize the perfidy of his own nature.

"The world is before you," I said, "and, so far as I am concerned, you may go where you will. I do not pretend to offer you any security from the vengeance of the men whose oath you have betrayed. I should be powerless to do that, however much I wished it. You must shift for yourself."

"Very well," he answered, sullenly; and, rising to his feet, he began to button his coat and to gather together his hat and gloves and walking-cane. Then he made a movement to go, but half-way to the door stopped irresolutely. I thought he was about to speak again, but after a pause of a second or two he went on, opened the door with an unsteady hand, and went out without closing it behind him. The man I had told to wait outside must have been upon the watch, for I heard his voice at the very instant at which Brunow set foot in the narrow passage.

"Well, sir?" he said.

"Well?" said Brunow.

"I am sorry to press this claim, sir," said the man, "but I have my instructions, and I can't help it. If you'll give me your word that you will settle in the morning, I will wait till then. But it's no use making any bogus promise."

"I suppose you don't mean to lose sight of me?" Brunow asked.

"That's the state of the case, sir," the man answered.

"H'm!" said Brunow, in a casual tone; "got anybody with you now?"

"Sheriff's officer in a hackney-coach down-stairs," the man responded. He had caught Brunow's tone to a hair, and spoke as if the whole thing were the merest casual trifle.

"He's prepared to do his duty now?" asked Brunow. I heard no response, but I presume that the man gave some sign of affirmation, for Brunow went on: "Very well; I'm ready. It could hardly have happened at a better time."

"I thought you were going to square up to-morrow, sir," the man said.

"So did I," responded Brunow; "but I've as much chance of that now as you have of being Emperor of China. Go on; I'm quite ready."

There was a trifling difficulty with the catch of the outer door, with which both Hinge and myself had long been familiar, and which we now surmounted with perfect ease. It bothered Brunow and the stranger, however, for I heard them both fumbling at the lock, and at last Hinge, hearing also, left his little bedroom on the landing and came to their assistance.

Then the door was opened, and with a cry of "Goodbye, Fyffe!" to which I returned no answer, Brunow went away in charge of his business friend.

At the first opening of the outer door the cold wind of the spring night came into the room with a burst, and scattered a handful of papers about the floor. I busied myself in picking these up again, but finding that the hall-door was still open, I called out to Hinge to close it. He delayed until I had repeated my order in an angry tone, and then, having closed the door, he came into my room with a hurried and excited look.

"Beg pardon for keeping the door open, sir," said Hinge, "but I've just seen something rather curious."

"Never mind that now," I answered. "Go to bed. I shall not want you any more to-night."

"No, sir," said Hinge. "If you'll excuse me, sir, this is something very important."

He was not wont to be troublesome, but after all the events of that strange night I was fairly unsettled and pretty well out of temper. I snapped at Hinge, telling him to go and not to bother me with any nonsense just then.

"Got to tell you this, sir," said Hinge, standing at attention, and looking straight before him. Even then it was with no sense of importance in the matter he had to communicate that I listened to him.

"Go on," I said, "and get it over. What is it?"

"Well, sir," said Hinge, "when I was in the general's service in Vienna I used to see a lot of the Austrian police. I got to know some of them by sight—a good many, I might say. Secret chaps, they was, sir—spies."

"That's all very interesting," I returned, "but you can see I'm bothered just at present, and I want to be alone. You can tell me all that at another time."

"There's one of them a-living in this house, sir," said Hinge, as little moved by my interruption as if I had not spoken.

This was news, and my impatience and ill-temper vanished.

"How do you know?" I asked. "Tell me all about it."

"I never set eyes on him but just this minute, sir," said Hinge, "since I left Vienna. But he walked upstairs just now with a latch-key in his hand, and he went into the rooms overhead of yours, sir. That's him a-walking about now, I'll lay a fiver." As a matter of fact, I could bear a heavy footstep pacing the room above. "The odd part of it is, sir," Hinge pursued, "this cove knows Mr. Brunow, and Mr. Brunow knows him, sir."

"Oh," I asked, fully interested by this time, "how do you know that?"

"They spoke together on the stairs, sir. This fellow Sacovitch, that's his name, he says to Mr. Brunow, 'Alloa,' he says, 'you 'ere?' And Mr. Brunow says, 'Don't speak to me; I'll write to you.' Now I don't like the look o' that, sir, and I thought you ought to know about it."

"You are quite right, Hinge," I said. "It was your business to tell me; and if I had known it yesterday, or if I had only known of it eight hours ago, it might have been of use to me."

"This Sacovitch chap didn't see me, sir," said Hinge, with a certain modest exultation; "I took care of that. But I nips half-way upstairs after him, and sees him open the door with his latch-key, and then I nips down again."

"Do you think he would know you if he saw you?" I asked.

"There's no saying about that, sir," Hinge responded; "he might and he mightn't. You see, sir, he's a swell in his own way, this chap is. He used to dine with the general, and they used to salute him like as if he was an officer. There was every reason, don't you see, sir, why I should notice him, and there was no mortal reason in the world why he should notice me. But there's no mistaking him, sir, and I should have spotted his ugly mug among a million."

"Thank you very much, Hinge. That will do." Hinge went away, and I sat down to think this new matter over. Of course I had never been foolish enough to suppose that Brunow had given me any information of value against his party, outside the one admission that he had been hired by the Baroness Bonnar; but here was sudden proof of the incompleteness of his confession. Shall I confess that my first impulse was to do an extremely silly and inconsiderate thing? I felt inclined, foolish as it will sound, to walk upstairs and to introduce myself sardonically to Herr Sacovitch, since that was the gentleman's name, with the proclamation of my newly-acquired knowledge of his business, and request that he would waste no further time in prosecuting it so far as I was concerned. But this foolish desire had scarcely occurred to me before I threw it out of the window. If the man believed himself to be unknown, I had the whip-hand of him in knowing him, and to have exposed my knowledge would only have been to release him for the prosecution of useful business on his own side, while some other person, whom I might never have the luck to recognize at all, would take his place. I was rather flattered, on the whole, to think that a great European power like Austria found it worth while to put a watch upon my actions; but there was only a passing satisfaction in that fancy. I could not get poor old Ruffiano out of ray head that night. I undressed and went to bed, but I courted sleep in vain. All night long I heard the quarters strike, and then the hours, and all night long the picture of the good, genial, patient, suffering old man fairly haunted me. There were times when I blamed myself severely for having allowed his betrayer to go free at all, and there were moments when, if Brunow had been once again before me, I should have had no control over myself. But, after all, mercy is just as much a duty as justice, and on looking back I am not disposed to censure myself very heavily for the course I took. I can think of nothing more hateful than Brunow's crime, and of nothing more just than the punishment which finally befell him; but I am glad that the act of vengeance was not mine.

It was bright morning when at last I fell asleep, and before that happened I had formed one clear resolution. This was to seek out Violet in the course of the day, to let-her know what had happened, and consult her judgment as to what my own course should be. In the meantime Brunow, in a debtor's prison, could do no further mischief, and was, at the same time, safe from immediate vengeance. There was time for a pause before further action was needed, and it was this reflection more than anything else which calmed me down at last into a state of mind in which sleep was possible.

I breakfasted at the usual time, for Hinge in household matters was a perfect martinet, and all my home affairs were as punctual as a clock. Then, at as early an hour as I dared to venture on, I walked to Lady Rollinson's house. The servant who answered my summons at the door had been in the habit of skipping on one side at once, and throwing the door open in something of an excess of hospitality. I had sometimes even felt a touch of humorous anger at the man; for his fashion of receiving me had seemed to indicate that he was in possession of the secret of the position, and it was as if his flourish of welcome showed an approval of my suit. But to-day he held the door half open, and, before I could get out a word of inquiry, said, "Not at hom?"

"Neither Lady Rollinson nor Miss Rossano?" I asked him.

"Not at home, sir," the man repeated. He looked conscious beneath my eye, and his manner was distinctly embarrassed.

"Are you quite sure of that?" I asked him. "Kindly go and see." The man looked more discomposed than ever, but he said for the third time: "Not at home, sir." And in the face of this repeated declaration it seemed useless to inquire again. I walked away, a little puzzled by the man's manner. I had heard of no intended visit, and so far as I could guess I knew of every plan which Violet and Lady Rollinson had formed. It is not usual for an accepted suitor to be met at the door of his *fiancee's* house with that curt formula, and I went away dissatisfied and wondering, turning my steps homeward. I had made up my mind to dismiss the whole circumstance and to write to Violet, and I was walking up the stairs which led to my chambers, in haste to put that little project into execution, when I ran full against a stranger on the landing. He raised his hat with an apology, and I was in the act of doing the same when his foreign accent induced me to look more closely at him. He was a tall, dark man, very gentlemanly to look at and irreproachably dressed. In a dark, saturnine way he was handsome, and recalling Hinge's statement that he would have known the ugly mug of our fellow-lodger among a million, I settled within my own mind that this could not be the man; but I still observed him with a little interest in the certainty that if not the man himself, he was at least a visitor. Hinge was at the door when I reached it.

"Did you spot him, sir?" he asked, eagerly. "That's him as you ran into on the stairs—Sacovitch."

I answered that I should know the man again, and with that should have forgotten to think about him, but that for days afterwards Hinge was full of excited intelligence about him, relating how he had received such a visitor at such a time, and had gone out in a cab at such an hour, returning after such and such a length of absence. In a very little time the mention of him became a bore, and I forbade Hinge to speak of him unless he had something of importance to tell me.

In the meantime I wrote my note and sent it to the post. I waited all day, and received no answer. When the next morning's post came in I turned my letters over hastily, and was a little surprised, as well as disappointed, to find that I had no line from Violet. Again that morning I made my way to Lady Rollinson's house, and again the accustomed servant met me, and this time fairly staggered me with a repetition of his "Not at home."

"Am I to understand," I asked, "that Lady Rollinson and Miss Rossano have left town?"

"Can't say, sir," said the man, staring straight above my head with unmoving eyes, but fidgeting nervously with his hands and feet. "My orders is: 'Not at home to Captain Fyffe.'"

"That will do," I returned, and walked away, more puzzled than I had ever been in my life before. I went back to my rooms, and there I wrote this note:

"Dear Lady Rollinson,—When I called at your house yesterday I was told that you and Violet were not at home. When I called again this morning, I was told that you were 'not at home to Captain Fyffe.' This troubles and worries me so much that I hope you will not think me impertinent if I ask the reason for it."

I despatched that letter by Hinge, with instructions to await an answer. In half an hour the answer came, and for the time being left me more puzzled and troubled than ever:

"Lady Rollinson acknowledges the receipt of Captain Fyffe's letter, and begs to say that on the two occasions referred to by Captain Fyffe her instructions were accurately obeyed by her servant."

That was all. There was not one word in explanation of this astonishing announcement. Violet and I were engaged to be married, with her father's warmest approval, and Lady Rollinson had, until that moment, shown nothing but the most enthusiastic favor for the match. And here, on a sudden, I was forbidden the house, without rhyme or reason.

For an hour I was like a man on whom a thunderbolt had fallen.

CHAPTER XVII

Of course I had a right to an explanation, and equally, of course, I was determined to have it. But the question was how to get it, and I confess that for a long time I did not see my way. If one had been dealing with a man it would have been very different. But when a lady with whom you have been on terms of intimacy and friendship turns round upon you without any cause you can assign, and tells you she desires to have no more to do with you, it is not easy to see by what means you can force her to a recognition of your side of the business. What made the thing the more astonishing and bewildering was that Lady Rollinson had always been so warm in her friendship for me. Over and over again she had alluded to my services to her son, and she had introduced me to scores of people as the savior of his life, magnifying a very simple incident to such heroic proportions that she often put me to the blush about it, and almost tempted me to wish that I had let poor Jack take his chance without any interference of mine. To have seen a lady the day before yesterday, to have been hailed by her for the hundredth time as her son's preserver, to get a solemn "Not at home" thrown at you when next you called—it was an experience entirely new, and anything but agreeable.

If I may say so without bragging, I have been judged a fairly good officer in my time. I can give an order, I can obey an order, I can see that an order is obeyed; but outside the realms of discipline, and in the common complications of life, I have never felt myself to be very much at ease! The whole of this present business was so bewildering that if only Lady Rollinson herself had been concerned I should have retired from the consideration of the problem instantly. But then she stopped my access to Violet, and that, for a young fellow who was ardently in love, put altogether another complexion on the affair. When I had got over my first amazement, I sat down and wrote a note, which, in the fervor of my feeling, bade fair to develop into a document which would have filled, say, a column of the *Times*. But when I had written, perhaps, a hundredth part of what I felt it in me to say, I tore up the paper and threw its fragments into the fire. Then I started afresh, determined to be extremely brief and business-like. Once more my feelings got the upper hand of me, and again I covered half a dozen closely-written pages before I discovered my mistake anew. Finally I sat down to a pipe and thought the matter over, until I decided on a definite line of action. The upshot of it all was that I wrote this note, and with my own hands bore it to her ladyship's house:

"Dear Lady Rollinson,—I am utterly at a loss to understand the occurrences of yesterday and to-day. A moment's reflection will show you that an explanation is absolutely due to me. It is my right to demand it, and it is at once your duty and your right to give it."

Armed with this document I set out. The same perturbed domestic greeted me with the formula to which I was by this time growing accustomed, and when I instructed him to carry the note within doors and deliver it to his mistress, he closed the door in my face and left me to await an answer on the steps. The position was anything but comfortable. It was a bright day, and a good many people were abroad, considering how quiet the street generally was. I felt as if everybody who passed was completely aware of my discomfiture. Not a nurse-maid went by with her charge who did not, to my distempered fancy, know my business, and look meaningfully at me in appreciation of my position. By-and-by the door opened, and the servant asked me to step inside. I had been cooling my heels on the steps for full five minutes, and was by this time as little self-possessed as I have ever been in my life. I followed the man blindly into the familiar morning-room, and was there left alone for another ten minutes. Anger was taking the place of bewilderment, and I was striding

rapidly up and down the room when Lady Rollinson entered. The weather was still cold, but she carried a fan in her hand, and moved it rapidly as she walked into the room and sank into a chair. I bowed with a stiff inclination of the head, but she made no return to my salute.

"I hope, Captain Fyffe," she said, "that you will make this interview as brief as possible. It is likely to be painful to both of us, but you have insisted on it. I do not see what purpose it can serve, but it is just as well that you should understand that I am finally determined."

It was plainly to be seen that she was painfully agitated; and though she had done her best to abolish the traces of the fact, I could see that she had been crying.

"You are finally determined!" I echoed, and I dare say my manner was foolish enough. "But what are you finally determined about?"

"I am finally determined," she responded, "that everything is over between us; and until the count returns and learns the dreadful truth, everything, so far as my influence can go, is over between you and Violet."

"What is the dreadful truth?" I asked. "I give you my word that I am utterly in the dark."

Now Lady Rollinson was a dear old woman, and I had had a warm affection for her. On her side she had treated me from the beginning of our acquaintance almost as if I had been her son; and hitherto there had been nothing but the most friendly and affectionate sentiment between us. But I began to get angry, and I dare say I spoke in a tone to which she had been little accustomed. She cast an indignant glance at me, and fanned herself at a great rate for a full minute before she answered.

"Come," I repeated more than once; "what is this dreadful truth? Surely I have a right to know it."

"You *shall* know it, Captain Fyffe," she answered, in a voice of weeping menace such as women use when they are both wounded and angry; "you shall have it in a word." She dropped her fan upon her knees, and asked me, with a lugubrious air of triumph and reproach, "Did you ever hear of Constance Pleyel?"

I was standing before her, and as she leaned forward suddenly to offer this surprising question I stepped back a little. A chair caught me at the back of the knees, and I dropped into it as if I had been shot. I have laughed in memory many a time over that ludicrous accident, but it was no laughing matter at the moment, for it sent a conviction to the old lady's mind which I do not think was altogether banished from it to her dying day. Of course the question in such a connection came upon me as a surprise. In all my searchings for the cause of her ladyship's distemper I had not lighted on the thought of Constance Pleyel. I was not so much amazed at it that the name alone could have bowled me over in that way; but Lady Rollinson's idea was that it had gone home instantly to a guilty conscience.

"That is enough," she said, "and more than enough." With these words she arose and walked towards the door, but I intercepted her.

"I beg your pardon, it is not enough, or nearly enough."

"You know the name," she answered. "You have shown me enough to tell me that."

"I know the name, certainly," I replied. "I have known the name and the person that owns the name for many years. But that fact affords a very partial explanation of your conduct. I must trouble you to sit down, Lady Rollinson, and listen to what I have to say."

The stupid, good old woman had taken her side already, and if anything had been needed to confirm her own mistaken judgment of the case that ludicrous accident would have supplied it. She fanned herself in an emotion made up of wrath and grief and dignity, glancing at me from time to time, and looking away again with an expression of disdain, which was hard for an innocent man to bear.

"I suppose," I said, as coolly as I could, "that whatever information you have upon this matter comes from the Baroness Bonnar?" I waited for an answer, but she gave no sign. "I must trouble you to tell me if that is so."

"You know that well enough," she answered. "The Baroness Bonnar is the only friend the poor creature has in London."

"Do you know much of the Baroness Bonnar?" I asked. "Would it ever have occurred to you to guess that the Baroness Bonnar is neither more nor less than a paid Austrian spy, and that Miss Constance Pleyel is, in all probability, her confederate?"

She looked at me with an incredulity so open that I felt it to be an insult, and she preserved the same disdainful silence.

"I came here yesterday," I continued, "to consult Violet—"

She interrupted me almost with a shriek.

"Don't mention that poor girl's name!" she cried. "I won't have it mentioned! I won't listen to it in this connection!"

"Pardon me," I said, "it has to be mentioned, and unless you are in the humor to permit yourself to be made the dupe and tool of as wicked a little adventuress as ever lived, you must listen to what I have to tell you. I came here yesterday to consult Violet as to what I should do with respect to a plot in which I have found the baroness to be engaged. You have often heard the count and myself speak of poor old Ruffiano. You know him as one of Violet's pensioners, and, indeed, I remember that twice or thrice I have met him in your house. He has been betrayed to the Austrians, and is at this minute in their hands. The prime mover in that matter is the Baroness Bonnar, and her tool was the Honorable George Brunow."

Now surely one would have thought that a charge so plain and dreadful was at least worth investigation, and it had not entered my mind to conceive that even an angry woman could fail to take some sort of account of it. Lady Rollinson took it merely as a tissue of absurdities.

"It only shows," she said, "how desperate your own case must be when you need to bolster it by a story like that—a story which could be proved to be false in half a minute."

"Why should you suppose me," I retorted, "to be so foolish as to bring you such a story if it could not be proved to be true? I ask nothing more or less than that you should inquire into the matter."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," she answered. "I know too much already."

"I am sorry," I answered, "to be so seriously at issue with you on such a theme, but I am compelled to insist upon my right."

"I shall have nothing to say on the matter," she answered, "until the count returns. He will be the final judge of what is to be done; but until he comes I shall do my duty, and it is no part of my duty to allow my niece to listen to the persuasions of a man who has only too clearly proved his powers in that way already."

"Only a few weeks ago," I said, desperately, "I had an interview with the Baroness Bonnar, in which I warned her not to intrude upon your society again."

"I know all about it!" cried Lady Rollinson, with an indignant movement of her fan. "You tried to bully the poor thing into silence. You may save yourself any further trouble, Captain Fyffe. My mind is made up, and I shall do what I have decided to do. In my days," she added, beginning to cry, which made the situation more intolerable than ever—"in my days, when a gentleman was told by a lady that his presence was unwelcome in her house he would never have intruded."

"My dear Lady Rollinson," I responded, controlling myself with a very considerable effort, "you must listen to reason. You have been made the dupe of a thoroughly heartless and unprincipled woman."

"That appears to be your method!" She flashed back at me. "You can say what you please about my character, now that I know yours. Thank God I am too well known to fear your rancorous tongue!"

The position was actually maddening, and I had never dreamed until then that even a woman who was bent on revenging what she conceived to be a gross injury to one of her own sex could be so utterly unreasonable and deaf to argument.

"I repeat, madame," I declared, "that the Count Ruffiano has been betrayed to the enemy by this woman whose lies you accept as if they were gospel. Brunow confessed to me barely six-and-thirty hours ago that he acted as her agent in that villainous transaction. Is that a woman whose bare word is to be taken against the overwhelming proof an honest man can bring?"

I know I was excited, and it is very likely that I was speaking in a louder voice than I was altogether aware of, but her answer gave me a new surprise.

"I am not in the least afraid of you, Captain Fyffe; my servants are in the house, and I can ring for them at any minute."

This cooled me, even in the middle of my exasperation and the galling sense of impotence I felt.

"I beg your pardon, Lady Rollinson. I am bewildered by your manner. I am laboring under an accusation of a very dreadful sort, and you refuse to listen to me, though I can prove my innocence quite easily."

"Why," she exclaimed, "I haven't even told the man what the accusation is! But in spite of his innocence he knows all about it."

"I know all about it," I retorted, "because it has been brought against me before, and withdrawn by the very woman who brings it now. Will you listen to me, Lady Rollinson?"

"I will not willingly listen to another word."

"Where is Violet?" I asked.

"That I shall not tell you," she answered. "I have made up my mind I shall do nothing until the arrival of the count. When he comes back, if ever he does, poor man, the responsibility will be off my shoulders. Until then, I shall take very good care that you have nothing to do with Violet."

This seemed to me to be carrying things with far too high a hand, and there, at least, I thought I had a right to speak with some show of authority.

"Violet," I said, "is my promised wife, and I am not going to allow any folly of this kind to come between her and me. I shall insist upon my right to see her, and to clear myself of any accusation which may have been brought against me in my absence."

"You may insist as much as you please, Captain Fyffe," Lady Rollinson answered. "I have made up my mind as to what is my duty, and I shall do it, even at the risk of your most serious displeasure."

"You tell me," I said, "that she is not here?"

"I have told you already," she replied, "that she is not here. I have made arrangements for her until the count returns."

"And am I to understand," I asked, "that you refuse to allow me to know her address?"

"You may understand that definitely," said her ladyship.

It was all very disagreeable, but at least there was one ray of comfort in the middle of it.

"Violet knows my address," I said, "and she is certain to write to me."

"I might have something to thank you for there, Captain Fyffe," said the old lady, with an almost comical increase of dignity, "if I had not already taken my precautions. I may tell you, however, that Violet is accompanied by a discreet person, who has my instructions as to the disposal of any letters she may write."

This amounted to an open declaration of war, and I felt myself on the point of answering so hotly that I was wise in binding myself, for the moment at least, to silence.

"Pray let us thoroughly understand each other," I said at length. "You, on your side, have resolved to place complete reliance on the statement of an exposed adventuress, without one word of corroboration, and to refuse the clear proof of my innocence, which I undertake to give you." I waited for a moment, but she maintained an altogether obstinate silence. "Very well," I resumed, "that is understood so far. You conceive it your duty to separate Violet and myself, and to attempt to widen any possible separation between us by suppressing my letters to her and hers to me. You must permit me to point out to you that you are adopting a very dangerous course, and I must warn you that I shall do my best to frustrate a design which seems to me so unreasonable and so cruel that I should never have thought you capable of forming it."

"You will do your best, of course," she answered, "and I shall do mine. I wish you good-morning, Captain

Fyffe."

What with perplexity, and what with grief and anger, I scarce knew what to do, but I turned to her with a final appeal.

"I am sure," I said, "that you have your niece's interests at heart. It is not so very long since you professed to be my friend. Ever since I have known you I have had to tell you that you very much overestimated a chance service I have rendered to your son."

"I have been waiting for that," she answered. "That is just the sort of appeal I was expecting you to make. It is of no use for us to discuss this question any longer, for let me tell you I have seen your letters."

"The letters!" I cried.

"The letters," she repeated—"the letters to Miss Constance Pleyel."

"Great Heaven, madam!" I cried, exasperated beyond patience, "I have never denied that I wrote to Miss Constance Pleyel, but the letters were written when I was a boy, and they are as absolutely harmless and blameless as any love-sick nonsense ever written in the world!"

"I have seen the letters," she repeated, "and I have seen Miss Pleyel, and, once more, Captain Fyffe, and for the last time, I have made up my mind."

With that she laid her hand upon the bell-pull, and sounded a peal at the bell which was so rapidly answered that I more than half suspected, and, indeed, do now more than half suspect, that the man who responded to it had been listening.

"Show Captain Fyffe out," said her ladyship. And so, a definite end being put to the interview, I left the house as wrathful and as humiliated a man as any to be found that hour in London. So long as I live I shall not forget the smug alacrity with which the servant obeyed the behest of his mistress. I was in a state to wreak my own ill-humor upon anybody, and it was in my mind, and more than half in my heart, to kick that smug man in livery down the steps. I have suffered all my life from a certain Scotch vivacity of temperament which it has cost me many and many a hard struggle to control. It has not often been more unreasonable or more vigorous in its internal demonstrations than it was then, but I managed to reach the street and to walk away without exposing myself. As to where I went for the next few hours I never had the remotest idea. I must have walked a good many miles, for at last, when I pulled up, I found myself, at five o'clock in the evening, in a part of the town to which I was a complete stranger, and I had a confused remembrance of Oxford Street and the parks, and then of Highgate Archway. I made out, after a while, that I was at the East End, and, turning westward, I tramped back to my own lodgings with a return to self-possession which was partly due to the fact that bodily fatigue had dulled the sting of resentment.

Hinge had dinner ready when I reached home, but I had no appetite for it, and, to the good fellow's dismay, I sent it away untasted. I turned over a thousand schemes that evening, and rejected each in turn. But I decided, finally, to prepare an advertisement for the newspapers, which might perhaps prevent further mischief. I concocted so many subterfuges, each of which in turn proved to reveal too much or to be too enigmatical, that at ten o'clock I found myself with a dozen sheets of closely-written paper before me. But at last I hit on this:

"Dear Violet,—Distrust altogether anything you may hear to my disadvantage until I have found an opportunity to explain. Do not wonder at not hearing from me. Both your letters and mine are intercepted. When you next write, post letter with your own hand."

After much consideration, I hit upon "John of Itzia" as a signature, and having made three clear copies, I drove round to the offices of the three great daily newspapers of that date, and at each secured the insertion of this advertisement for a week. A little comforted by that achievement, I went to bed, and, being dog tired, got to sleep.

The days that followed were among the dreariest I can remember. I spent them for the most part at home, sitting at the open window which looked upon the street, and waiting for the advent of the postman.

I was there in the morning an hour before his arrival could reasonably be expected, and I was there all day, and there still an hour after his last round had been made. Every time he came in sight my heart beat furiously; and as the short official note on the knocker came nearer and nearer, I strove in vain to resist the temptation to run down-stairs and await him at the front door. Every man on that beat got to know me, and I grew to be utterly ashamed of myself at last, for day after day went by, and there came no answer to my advertisement and no note from anywhere of Violet's existence. At last the week for which I had prepaid the advertisement expired. I had determined to renew my warning and entreaty if no answer came, and I waited the last part of that day with a throbbing heart. The minutes of the dull, rainy night—it was mid-April by this time—crawled slowly on, and at last I heard the belated knocker at the far end of the street, and hurried on my overcoat and hat in case I should be disappointed once again. Then I slipped down to the door, and waited in the portico. The postman knocked next door, and I was ashamed to show myself; but only a second or two later he appeared with a single letter in his hand.

"Captain Fyffe?" he asked, inquiringly, and I responding "Captain Fyffe," he handed me the letter.

The superscription was in Violet's hand. I tore it open and read, in embossed letters at the top of the first page, "Scarfell House, Richmond." Then came this:

"My Dearest,—Is the strange advertisement addressed to Violet and signed 'John of Itzia' yours? I almost think it must be, and yet I am half afraid and half ashamed to say so. But since I left town, nine days ago, I have written to you every day, and have not received a line in answer. If you will look in either the Times or the Advertiser, if the advertisement should not have been put there by yourself, you will see what I mean. I shall obey its instructions, and shall post this letter with my own hands. So far I have

given my letters to my maid, and I cannot think of any reason which could induce her to be wicked enough to destroy or suppress them. This, at least, will be sure to reach you, and if my fancy is absurd, I know you well enough to trust to your forgiveness. If you are not 'John of Itzia,' I can only fear that something dreadful has happened, for I do not believe that you could be so unkind as to leave eight consecutive letters of mine unanswered by a single word. I have only just seen the advertisement by chance, and if you are at home when this arrives it ought to reach you at about nine o'clock. It is very little over an hour's drive to Richmond, and I beg you to come down at once. If the whole thing is a mistake, you have still something to explain, and must have, I am sure a great deal to tell me.

"Yours always,

"Violet."

I had no sooner read this than, with the letter crumpled in my hand, I dashed into the street and made at full-speed for the nearest cab-stand. Half a dozen whips were waved at me at once, but I walked up and down the line inspecting the horses before I would choose a vehicle. A sorrier lot of screws I never saw, but I chose the one that looked the least unpromising, and gave the driver the word for Richmond.

CHAPTER XVIII

Overjoyed as I was at the receipt of Violet's letter, and at the prospect of seeing her again, I had not been many minutes on my way before I began to feel embarrassed at the prospect of the unavoidable explanation which lay before me. I felt malevolently disposed towards the ridiculous old lady who was the cause of all this needless trouble, but I soon forgot her in the contemplation of the difficulty she had created. It was a painful and difficult thing even to mention to Violet such a charge as that against which I had to defend myself, and as the vehicle bumped along I threw myself back in the seat and gave up my whole mind to the attempt to approach it delicately, and in the way which would make it least offensive and painful to her ears.

I have said that the hacks on the cab-stand were a sorry lot, and though I had chosen the brute which looked most promising in the whole contingent, I was not long in finding that I had no special reason to be proud of my choice. Since 1848 London has grown enormously, and in those days it was possible, even with such a beast as the one my cabman drove, to be in the country within half an hour of a West End street. I knew very little of the environs of the great city, and when I woke up to a recognition of my surroundings I was in a district altogether strange to me. There were fields on either hand, and here and there the twinkling of a distant light proclaimed a probable human habitation; but there were no lamps about the road as there are nowadays, and the scene looked altogether deserted and desolate. I pulled down the window, and, putting out my head, hailed the driver, who was apparently asleep upon his box. A thin, persistent drizzle was falling, the ill-kept road was wet with recent rain, and the wretched horse was jogging along at a shuffling trot at a rate of perhaps four miles an hour.

"Wake up there," I cried, "and get along! I don't want to reach Richmond after midnight."

"All right," cabby responded, and applied the whip with such effect that for a hundred yards or so he contrived to get a decent pace out of the weary brute he drove. By this time I had fallen back once more into the perplexity of my own thoughts, but in a while I woke to the fact that we had fallen back to our old pace, and I made a new effort to stimulate the driver. He in turn made an effort to stimulate his steed, and so we went on, bumping in the shallow ruts of the road, occasionally standing still, and at our best scarcely exceeding the pace of a smart walk.

"I suppose," I asked the cabman, "that at least you know where you are going to?"

"Richmond," replied the driver. "I suppose it's Richmond, in Surrey, ain't it? There is a Richmond in Yorkshire, but you don't expect a man to drive there at this time of night?"

"When do you expect to get to the end of your journey at this rate?" I asked.

"The fact is, sir," said the driver, leaning confidentially backward, "the 'orse is tired. He's a very good 'orse when he's fresh, but 'e's been in the shafts for sixteen hours at least, and whether he'll get there at all is more than I should like to swear to. 'Ows'ever," said the cabman, "we'll do our best."

Now I was certain that Violet was awaiting my answer to her letter in some anxiety, and I myself was on fire to see her, so that this dilatory method of progress made me feel altogether miserable. We went jogging on in a sad, mournful fashion, and I made up my mind that at the first inhabited place we came to I would discharge my driver, and find either a horse or a new conveyance; and with this resolve I controlled myself with patience. By-and-by, however, after a series of extraordinary jolts and bumpings, the vehicle came to a standstill, and once more lowering the glass and putting my head out into the drizzle, I demanded to know what was the matter.

"I'm afeard, sir," said the cabman, "as I've lost my way. It's so blessed dark here, I've got off the road. All right," he cried, a second later, "I see it! You 'old on, sir, I'll be right in a minute." With this he stood up to flog the horse, and at that instant the vehicle overturned, slid rapidly down a slope, and stopped with a shock which for the moment not only drove all the breath out of my body, but all the sense out of my head. When I recovered I found my hat crushed over my eyes, and in struggling to find my feet made the unpleasant discovery that my right ankle was dislocated. I had sprained a wrist into the bargain, and under these circumstances I had great difficulty in extricating myself from the overturned vehicle. The horse was

hammering with his hind-feet at the front of the carriage with a vigor surprising in a creature who had only lately shown himself so fatigued and feeble; and when at last I contrived to open one of the doors and call to the driver, I received no answer. I scrambled out painfully, and found myself scarcely able to stand. The darkness was intense; both the lamps had been broken and extinguished in the spill, and the rain was now falling with considerable violence. I called repeatedly to the driver, and groping about in the pitchy darkness on my hands and knees, I received a blow on the head from one of the frightened horse's feet, and lay for a little while quite sick and stunned. How long this sensation lasted I have no means of knowing, but when I recovered my senses I was wet through, and found myself lying among furze-bushes in a damp hollow. The horse had apparently resigned himself to the position, and lay quiet. As I struggled to my feet, with a thousand colored lights flashing before ray eyes, the darkness and silence of the night seemed filled with booming noises like those which are made by a heavy sea when the wind has fallen. I crawled about cautiously through the wet and prickly furze, and at last laid a hand upon the driver's sleeve. He was sitting with his head between his hands, and I could just make him out dimly, now that I was close upon him and certain of his presence.

"Are you hurt?" I asked. "You understand what I am saying?"

"Hurt!" he responded. "I'm as near killed as makes no matter. I thought you was done for, sir. I called out two or three times when I came to, but you never made a sign."

"I got a kick on the head," I explained. "It made me stupid for a time. Do you know where we are, or have you lost your way altogether?"

"I don't know," the man responded, with a groan. "I never drove this road before, but it strikes me we're on Barnes Common."

"Is there any house within reach?" I asked.

"How should I know?" he answered.

"Can you walk?" I asked. "I am dead lame, and cannot put one foot before another."

"I'll try," he answered, still groaning, and with an effort he scrambled to his feet. Once there he shook himself, and then began carefully to explore his person with both hands from head to foot; kneeling on the ground there I could see him more clearly against the lowering sky, and when, after a prolonged examination of himself, he drew up his figure and stretched his arms, I could see that he was fairly recovered from the shock his fall had given him.

"Can you walk?" I asked again, this time with a little touch of impatience. He answered that he thought he could, and began to stamp about the wet grass to assure himself that his limbs were still serviceable. "Mark this place well," I told him. "Find the road again, and go for help. Don't leave me here all night."

The man promised to be back as soon as possible, and set off at a stumbling walk. I shouted to him from time to time, he answering, and at length I learned that he had found the road.

"Keep your heart up, governor!" he called, finally. "I'll be back as soon as ever I can," and with that he left me.

For a long time, or for what seemed a long time then, I could hear his heavy boots crunching on the gravel and loose pebbles of the roadway, and then, except for the low voices of the rain and wind, and the heavy breathing of the horse, complete silence reigned. I had been in worse case many a time, and have been since; and I set myself to make the best of things. The wind was rising and bringing the cold rain down in a fierce slant, and the first thing I did was to crawl to the lee side of the overturned four-wheeler, which lay wheels upward, securely wedged into a hollow. There was a little hillock, against one side of which it had rested, which was free from the prickly furze, and, all things considered, made no bad resting-place. The wrenched ankle pained me severely, but I was dazed by the blow on the head, and had more difficulty in fighting against an inclination to sleep or swoon than in enduring that discomfort. In spite of all my efforts, all knowledge of surrounding objects faded away at times, and I passed into a momentary oblivion, though a twinge from the injured ankle always swiftly recalled me to myself. In a while I remembered that I had my cigar-case in my pocket, together with a box of those old-fashioned brown paper fusees which were commonly used by smokers at that time. I had only one hand available, and it cost me a good deal of trouble to get at that bit of solace and companionship; but when I had lit a cigar, and had coiled myself into the most comfortable posture I could find, I felt more patient than before, and smoked away for half an hour or so in a tranquillity more or less enforced. I listened keenly all the time, and anybody who has ever tried the experiment knows how that act retards the slow passage of the moments at any time of anxiety and pain. If anybody thinks that an old campaigner is making much of a very slight accident, I shall ask him to remember the circumstances under which it occurred. I had been bitterly anxious the whole week, uncertain of the whereabouts of the lady who loved me, and whom I loved with all my soul, imagining, in a fashion which seemed contrary to my own nature, a hundred thousand misfortunes, and suffering more in mind than I can ever have the ability to express in words. And now, just as I had come to a knowledge of where to find her, with the note from her dear hand still near my heart, and with the knowledge in my mind that every fruitless minute spent there would be full of weariness and doubt to her, I was as effectually stopped by this trumpery overturn as if it had been the most serious disaster in the world. My cigar was smoked out, and, after a long pause, I lit another. Sometimes the mere act of listening as intently as I did made me imagine noises in my neighborhood, and I called out frequently on the mere chance of these sounds being real. Little by little the cold and wet began to take effect upon me. I grew more and more heavy with it, and at last, with the second cigar still alight between my lips, I fell fast asleep, and lay there unconscious of the wind and rain, and knowing nothing of my own bodily inconveniences. How long this lasted I never had an opportunity of knowing, but I was awakened at last by the grasp of a hand upon my shoulder, and tried to rise, half-blinded by the dazzling rays of a lantern, which was swinging close before me. There were a dozen men upon the ground, attracted by the story the driver had told, and among them was a local medical man, who had had the old-fashioned prescience to charge a big flask with brandy. I was glad enough to get a pull at its contents, and the doctor having gone carefully over me and pronounced that no bones were broken, I was lifted with a good deal of trouble into his dog-cart, and at my own request was driven on to Richmond. It was long after

midnight when we got there, but after a good deal of knocking and ringing we made our way into the Talbot Hotel, where I secured a comfortable bedroom; and when my sprained wrist and dislocated ankle had been put into cold compresses by the doctor, I was got to bed. I passed an uneasy night, afflicted mainly by the thought of Violet's bewilderment about me, and in the morning I scrawled a note to her, telling her where I was, and asking her to send me word that she had received my message. I was more damaged than I had fancied, and the mere writing of the letter with my injured hand was a tough task. The messenger I despatched knew Scarfell House, and told me that it had been bought by General Sir Arthur Rollinson a dozen years ago, but had lately been very rarely used, though an old house-keeper and a general servant were always left in charge of the place. The man came back in an hour, and to my annoyance and surprise told me that Miss Rossano had left at an early hour that morning. Lady Rollinson had driven down from London in great apparent haste, and had taken the young lady back to town with her. I lay raging and helpless half the day, not knowing what to do in this unexpected posture of affairs; but at length, being myself unable to move, and unlikely, according to the doctor's statement, to leave my room for a week to come, I resolved, as a last resource, on sending a message to Hinge, on taking him completely into my confidence, and setting him to work to find out in what direction Lady Rollinson had spirited her ward.

It was late in the afternoon before he came, and the good fellow was full of sympathy about my accident, and was disposed to stop and nurse me through the effects of it. But when he had once learned the facts of the case he took up my business with an almost romantic fervor.

"You lay your life, sir," said Hinge, "I'll find her. There's no go-betweens as 'll get any letter for the young lady out o' my hands. All right, sir; you write the letter, and you trust me to see as it gets to the proper quarter."

Hinge's devotion and loyalty did me good, and when I had struggled through with the letter and had confided it to his care, I felt easier and more hopeful. Hinge's first movement was up to London, and thence he returned to me within half a dozen hours with the dispiriting intelligence that Lady Rollinson and Violet had left town together an hour before his arrival without leaving any instructions as to the forwarding of letters. Hinge, in his occasional visits to the house, had contrived to get on very excellent terms with a pretty parlor-maid, who had given him voluntarily all the information she had at her command. The only definite bit of news he brought was that the ladies had driven to Euston Station; and though that fact opened up, then, a vista of inquiry far less wide than it would to-day, it was still possible to go to so many places, and I had so little to guide me as to their intentions, that the news left me in a perfect fog of despair. However, Hinge, in obedience to my instructions, went to Euston, and attempted there to find out for what place tickets had been taken; but he came back next morning to report his complete non-success, and was evidently a good deal dashed and dispirited by his own failure.

"Never you mind, sir," said Hinge, with outside stoutness, "we'll find 'em yet."

The poor fellow did his best to keep me cheerful, but between bodily pain and suspense, and the sense of my own helplessness, I am afraid he found me rather difficult to manage.

A week had gone by, and I was so far recovered that I could limp about the room. The doctor had found it necessary to warn me more than once that I was retarding my recovery by my own eagerness, and that unless I would consent to absolute repose I might not improbably do myself a life-long injury; but I could feel the injured ankle growing firmer, and I was resolute to try the search next day myself.

Since the complete failure of his enterprise, Hinge had devoted himself entirely to nursing me; and he had been so assiduous in his attentions that I was surprised to find him absent when I called for him. At this time I was liable to be unduly excited by almost anything, and as his absence continued hour after hour, I lashed myself into a condition of wild anxiety. I was convinced that nothing but his interest for my welfare could have kept him away from me so long, and I was certain in my own mind that he had found a clew of some sort. It was seven o'clock in the evening when he came back at last, and my first glance at his face told me that something of importance had transpired.

"Where have you been all day?" I asked.

"Do you think, sir," Hinge returned, with a face and voice of mystery—"do you think, sir, as you'll be able to get about to-morrow? If you can, I'll show you something."

"Speak out plainly and at once, there's a good fellow," I responded.

"Well, sir," said Hinge, "I've found out something." He was like a narrow-necked bottle whenever he had anything which he was eager to communicate, and I knew by experience that it was worse than useless to try to hasten the stream he had to give.

"Give me my pipe," I said, "and get on as fast as you can."

"I've found out something," Hinge repeated. "I've been surprised in my time, sir, but I never was knocked so much of a heap as I have been this afternoon." I lit my pipe and waited for him, controlling impatience as best I might. "Now who in the name of wonder, sir," said Hinge, "do you think is down here colloquing together?"

"How should I know?" I asked, groaning with impatience.

"I was a-walking up the 'ill, sir," said Hinge, "towards the Star and Garter this morning, just to get a breath of fresh air, when you told me as I might go out for half an hour. You remember as you'd given me leave, sir?"

"Yes, yes!" I answered. "Go on with your story."

"Well, sir," said Hinge, "you might have knocked me over with a feather, for coming down the 'ill arm in arm I see the Honorable Mr. Brunow and that there Sacovitch. They was talking together that interested they didn't notice me. Now Mr. Brunow, 'e knows me, sir, if Sacovitch doesn't, and I thought, after all as had happened, it might be worth my while to see what they was up to and not to be seen myself; so I just slips off the roadway behind a house as is a-build-ing on the right-'and side, and right in front of me they stops. I could hear 'em talking, but I couldn't make out what they was a-saying, till all of a sudden Mr. Brunow says, "Ere she is,' 'e says, just like that, sir—' 'Ere she is,' as if they was a-waiting for somebody. In 'arf a minute up drives the Baroness Bonnar in a carriage, with a lady a-sitting beside her. The two gentlemen takes off their

'ats, and they all shakes hands together, and then Mr. Brunow and Mr. Sacovitch gets into the carriage, and they all drives off together." He stopped there with such an air of triumph and perspicacity that I was angry with him. Certainly the news that Brunow was about again was interesting, and might perhaps be useful. But that, being at large, he should be in the companionship of the baroness and the Austrian police spy was not at all by itself surprising, and Hinge had the air of one who had discovered a wonder.

"Is that all?" I asked him.

"No, sir," said Hinge, "that's only the beginning. They drives off through the park, turning the carriage round directly the gentlemen gets into it. They drove as slow as slow could be, just at a lazy kind of walk, sir; and when they was a little bit of a distance off I ventures to follow 'era. Their four heads was that close together you might have covered them with one hat, but of course I never dare venture near enough to find out what they was a-talking about. They drove about for two or three hours, and I kep' 'em in sight all the while-At one time the Baroness Bonnar and the other lady, they gets down to feed the deer from a paper-bag of biscuits, and the gentlemen strolled about smoking cigars. Then they all four gets together again just as eager and as busy as ever. I could see 'em a-talking and a-arguing like mad, and I was just wild myself to know what it was all about, sir, but of course I couldn't get a-nigh of 'em. Finally," said Hinge, "after two or three hours, they drives back to the Star and Garter, and goes in there. I found out, sir," he went on, with a growing air of importance which, considering the triviality of the intelligence he had so far brought me, was hard to bear with—"I found out, sir, as they'd ordered lunch; but I didn't likes to leave 'em without knowing what they was up to, and so I 'ung about, sir. That comes easy, sir," said Hinge, "to a man as 'as been used to barrack life. I 'ung about, and in the course of an hour or more they comes out very jolly, and drives into the park again, and all the morning's business over again. Well, sir, having gone on so long, I didn't like to be put off; and I determined, as a man might say, to see the finish of it. It come, sir, and it come sooner than I expected. They drives back about four o'clock, just as it was beginning to get towards dusk, and they leaves the carriage at the Star and Garter, and they all walks down the 'ill together, the two ladies in front and the two gentlemen behind. I followed, sir, at a respectful distance, and they roams on quite gay and easy for a good mile and a 'arf, and at last they drops down by the river-side on a little cottage. The dusk was falling fast, sir, and I was able to get nearer to them than I had been. I was within twenty yards of them when they all went in together. If you can get out to-morrow, sir, you can see the cottage, and you'll see where I got to. It's just right over the river, and there's a bit of what they used to call a veranda when I was in Bombay, sir. It's right over the river, the veranda is, and I clomb onto it, and through the Venetian blind I see the 'ole party. I was just a-peeping in when Sacovitch comes along and throws the window open, just as if he'd wanted me to hear what they was a-saying. 'And now,' says he, 'it's all ready, ain't it?'"

I suppose I shifted in my chair at this, and turned round with a look of some eagerness and interest, for Hinge, in his excitement, laid his hand upon my shoulder and begged me not to hurry him.

"Don't you 'urry me, sir, if you please. I'm a coming to it now, and I think before I've done you'll say, sir, as I've got it. 'And now,' says Sacovitch, 'it's all ready, ain't it.' The baroness was standing there close by the table. There was decanters on the table, and a lot of soda-water bottles. She 'elps herself and the other lady to a brandy-and-soda, and says she, just as she let the cork fly, 'Yes,' she says, 'I think you've got it.' I'd 'ave give a guinea at that minute," said Hinge, "to know what they'd got, but I never thought I should till Mr. Brunow gets up and says, just at that minute, 'Let's see exactly where we stand,' 'e says. 'Very well,' says Sacovitch; 'it's like this. Now listen, all of you,' 'e says, 'for these is the final instructions.'"

I moved again, half rising from my seat, but Hinge waved a protesting hand against me.

"For God's sake, sir, don't 'urry me! I'm at it now, and you shall have it all in half a minute, sir. 'It's like this,' says Sacovitch; 'we know,' he says, 'that Miss Rossano has drawn that forty thousand pounds. What that forty thousand pounds is for,' he says, 'is thoroughly well beknown to all of you. There's Colonel Quorn,' he says—'Did you ever 'ear of Colonel Quorn, sir?'"

"Yes, yes!" I answered. "Go on with your story."

"'There's Colonel Quorn,' 'e says, 'lying off Civita Vecchia with the count on board 'is ship with the arms and ammunition.' Now I'm a-coming to it, sir; don't you stop me. Such a wicked plot you never heard in all your life. 'The count's on board,' he says, 'and the arms is on board. The count won't land until he gets both arms and ammunition. Colonel Quorn won't 'hand over neither arms nor ammunition,' he says, 'until he gets that forty thousand pounds. The very minute he gets that money he hands it over to Colonel Quorn, he gets the arms, and he lands. But now, mind you,' says Sacovitch, 'there's this to be considered: the count won't trust his foot on Italian soil, arms or no arms,' he says, 'after what's happened to him, unless he's sure of meeting his friends when he get's there. Now what's got to be done,' says he, 'is to time the delivery of the money. That money mustn't be paid until we've got our people ready. The count won't land until he thinks he's safe, and we must take jolly good care,' says Sacovitch, "'e don't land until we're ready,' he says. 'To be a day too soon on the one side, or a day too late on the other,' he says, 'would wreck us all. And mind you,' he says, 'the Austrian government puts more importance onto this affair than anything else as is happening just at present. They'd sooner pay a million pounds,' he says (I'm giving you his very words, sir)—' they'd sooner pay a million pounds,' he says, 'than miss the Count Rossano.'"

In spite of my lame foot I was pacing about the room by this time, altogether too eager to control myself longer to physical quietude.

"And then," said Hinge, "this come out, and this is what I want to tell you. Says Sacovitch to the other lady: 'You bring your messenger,' says he, 'at this time to-morrow here, and I'll give him his last instructions.'"

CHAPTER XIX

My story until now has dragged a lingering length along, but from this point onward it moves swiftly to its close. In the haste I feel to reach that close I strive to obliterate from my mind whatever came between the hour of Hinge's revelation and the hour of the appointment. The task is not easy, for the four-and-twenty hours that intervened were filled with a suspense and anxiety of no common sort. The night passed, as even the most anxious of nights will pass; the day succeeding it crawled on, as even the dreariest of days will crawl; and at last the hour arrived. When, aided by Hinge on one side and by a stout walking-stick on the other, I left the hotel, the night was already dark, and once more a heavy rain was falling. Hinge had secured a vehicle, which carried us to within a hundred yards of our destination, and was there discharged. There was a lamp at either end of the brief lane in which the river-side cottage stood, and we could see that the road was diverted. There was still a chance that the traitors who were plotting against us might keep watch, and we slipped into the garden with some little trepidation. Once within the gate, I made a circuit of the house to assure myself that there was no chance of our being observed, and finding the whole field clear, I climbed, with Hinge's aid, onto the balcony. We had found the whole land in front of the house in darkness, and only a single room on the river-side was illuminated. Hinge touched me on the elbow, and with a forward finger indicated the lighted window, and motioned me on. I went crouching with a stealthy step until I came on a level with the window, and then, kneeling on the wet boards of the veranda, I found within eyeshot Brunow, the baroness, Sacovitch, and Constance Pleyel. The two men were smoking, wine was set out upon the table, and four glasses were filled. The whole party had an air of Bohemian ease and jollity. They were talking together, and I could see Sacovitch pacing the room with great vehemence of gesture; but though I could hear the deep murmur of his voice, and could even ascertain that he was speaking in English with a foreign accent, I could not succeed, strain my ears as I might, in making out the burden of a consecutive sentence. Hinge was crouching at my side, his shoulder touching mine. The rain dripped from the upper part of the house onto the shelving roof of the veranda with a monotonous and incessant noise which drowned the voices within at critical moments, so that we caught no more than detached words. All of a sudden I felt Hinge's hand on my wrist, and at that second a step crunched on the gravel between the gate and the door of the house. Then a bell tinkled faintly, and we both saw the whole quartet turn with varying expressions of waiting and attention. Then the door of the room opened and a servant appeared, explaining in dumb show, so far as we were concerned, but to our perfect understanding, that a visitor had arrived. I saw Brunow wave permission to the visitor to enter, and understood quite clearly what was going on, though at this moment the pattering of the rain and the sudden sigh of the wind robbed my ears of even the murmur of his voice. The servant retired, leaving the door open, and the quartet of conspirators bent towards each other while Sacovitch spoke. I watched the movement of his forefinger and the motion of his lips. The glint of his eye, the elevation of his brow, and the inclination of his head towards the open door all meant caution, and I could tell as clearly as if I had heard his words that he was taking upon himself the burden and responsibility of an approaching interview. An instant later the servant reappeared, laying a needless hand upon the door and swaying it open by a superfluous inch or two as he introduced the visitor.

"Roncivalli!" whispered Hinge, in a tone of unutterable amazement as the man came in.

I thought myself prepared for anything; but the presence of such a man in such company astonished me profoundly. Roncivalli was one of the most trusted of our committee, an Italian *pur sang*, a man whose family had suffered from Austrian misrule for half a century back. He represented a house which had been rich and noble, and had been persecuted into nothingness. No man had been louder in denunciation of the Austrian cruelty, no man apparently more sincere. There never lived a man who had more reason for sincerity. My first impression was that he must be spying upon the spies, for my opinion of his patriotism had been so lofty, that next to the Count Rossano and poor old Ruffiano, whom Brunow had betrayed, I should have counted him the last man in all the Italian ranks to be bought by Austrian gold.

He came in, hat in hand, with a sweeping salute to the ladies, and tossing his sombrero on the sofa, dripping wet as it was, unbuttoned with both hands a paletot shining with rain, and displayed himself in evening-dress, with a big jewel shining in the centre of his shirt-front, after a fashion which became popular a score of years later. Sacovitch stepped forward to help him divest himself of his cloak; and when it was slipped from his shoulders he held it with one hand, groping in the pockets from one side to the other, and in the meantime nodded round with a smiling air, with an allusion which I understood a second later when he held up a long Virginian cigar. Miss Pleyel and the baroness bowed, and Roncivalli set his cigar over the lamp until one end of it became incandescent. Then he began to smoke, and at a wave from Miss Pleyel's hand took an arm-chair close to the window. The baroness rose from her seat and poured out wine for him. Motions of hand and eye, change of feature, and movement of lip indicated an animated social converse, but not a word of it all reached my ears. I was just meditating on Hinge's luck in the fact that on the occasion of his watch the conspirators had thrown open the window as if on purpose that he should secure a hearing of their deliberations, when the baroness put her hand to her round white throat, with an exaggerated gesture of oppression, and then waved it towards the window. Sacovitch bowed and rose from his place. I laid a hand on Hinge, impelling him downward as the Austrian police spy walked towards the window. We each glued ourselves to the wall, and prostrated ourselves on the rainy wood-work of the veranda walk. We heard the grating sound of the window as it rose; and the mingled voices of the people inside—all *five* speaking together—came out with a gush, and brought such anticipatory joy and triumph to my heart as I had never felt before.

"Let us make sure," said Roncivalli, in a laughing tone. "We have important business to discuss—at least, I am advised so—and it would be just as well to be certain that we are not overheard." He raised the Venetian blind by the cord, and for a moment the rattle sounded as disturbing to the nerves as anything I can remember. But I heard Sacovitch say:

"The veranda looks upon the river. There is nobody within hearing."

"We will see, in any case," Roncivalli responded, and with that he thrust his head between the window-sill and the blind, and peeped out into the river. The lamplight took him from behind and illuminated the tips and edges of his hair, his beard, and his mustache, so that they shone bright gold, though he was a man of darkish complexion. As he turned his head sideways the white of his eye gleamed like an opal, and bending suddenly

he looked downward, seeming to stare me in the face so intently that I did not even dare to breathe. I was so absolutely certain that he would give an alarm that it came upon me with a shock of relief beyond description when he drew his head back into the room, and said that everything was clear.

"That is a relief," said the baroness; "but with all you gentlemen smoking, I was afraid that I should faint."

"So?" said Sacovitch, with an altogether insolent disregard in his inquiry. "Let us get to business."

"I am ready," Roncivalli answered, throwing himself anew into the arm-chair.

"A moment," said a voice, which I recognized as Constance Pleyel's; "it is very well to have the window open, but all the same we need not catch our death of cold. Will you be good enough, Signor Roncivalli, to lower the blind."

The signor arose and obeyed her, and as he did so I could see his long figure between me and the whitewashed, lamplit ceiling of the room. Before another word was spoken Hinge touched me again upon the elbow, and I knew at once the meaning of his signal. We rose, both of us, silently to our knees, and each found a crevice through which he could command a view of the occupants of the room.

"The first thing, I take it," said Sacovitch, "is to decide that the negotiations we are about to conclude are not likely to be broken by any betrayal on either side."

"So far as I am concerned," said Roncivalli, "my being here is guarantee enough. I am not risking my life for nothing, or, if I am, I shall know the reason why."

At this moment Brunow broke in with an Italian-sounding phrase, and the baroness interrupted him.

"Speak English," she said. "Herr Sacovitch has no Italian, and Miss Pleyel no German. English is the one language which is understood by all of us, and we may just as well have everything open and above-board."

With one eye glued to the lower interstice of the Venetian blind, I saw the quintet all bowing and bobbing to each other at this with a Judas politeness which was altogether charming to look at. Roncivalli, with his back half turned towards me, was so near that I could have taken him by the hair. A little removed from him, on the right, sat the baroness, in a captivating little bonnet and gloves of pearl gray, smoothing one hand over the other on her silk-clad knees with a purring satisfaction in the charm of her own attire. At her side sat poor Constance Pleyel with a wineglass in her left hand, looking into its last spot or two as drearily as if she contemplated the dregs of her own wasted and weary life. Beyond her again, and almost facing me, just seen across Roncivalli's shoulders, sat Brunow, smoking at his ease, and toying with his eyeglass with the fingers of both hands. Sacovitch stood upright, his cigar balanced between his first and second fingers, dominating, or seeking to dominate, the whole party.

"I especially desire," he said, in his strong German accent, and ticking off on his left forefinger every important syllable, with such emphasis that he scattered the ashes of his cigar into his own wineglass—"I especially desire that Signor Roncivalli should understand with extreme definiteness that there is no escape from the position which he has elected to assume."

"No fear of me, my friend," Roncivalli answered. The liquid Italian played against the German guttural like the warble of a flute answering the snarl of a violoncello. "I am doing what I know. Until our friend Rossano came to England I had a place from which he was good enough to depose me. You may say what you like, Herr Sacovitch, but the independence of my country is secure. Italy wins; and I desire Italy to win. I will help you to your Count Rossano if you want him, and if you will pay me for it, because I hate him, and because he is in my way. But Italy wins, all the same."

There was a candor about this which I could appreciate, but Sacovitch turned upon his purchased traitor with something very like a snarl.

"Understand," he said, in his thick German-English, "that I buy you or I do not buy you. Whether I buy you or not, you are sold already. Our last talk was overheard by a fellow-committeeman of yours, who is in my pay, and who will go back to his old patriotism, or come to me, exactly as I tell him."

"I am here for a service," responded Roncivalli "I will do one thing for you, as I have told you all along, and I will do no more. I will give you the Count Rossano, who is in my way, and I will not give you any real chance over Italy for anything you may offer me. I will take your money because I want it, and I will serve your turn because it suits me. How I reconcile these matters with my own conscience is my own affair."

"Your conscience is your own," Sacovitch answered; "the question of your conduct is our consideration. I want you only to understand that a single false move on either side—" He took a deep pull at his cigar there, and made a purposed pause for effect. "I think, ladies and gentlemen, you will agree with me that I do not exaggerate. Swerve an inch to right or left," he added, "and you lose your life."

Roncivalli's flute-like voice followed the troubled grumble of the German's threat.

"I know my business, Herr Sacovitch, as well as you know yours. I can serve your turn and I can serve my own. Give me what I ask, and you may have the Count Rossano. But if you think that in betraying the man who has usurped my place I betray my cause, you are very much mistaken. So long as Count Rossano is at liberty, it is not worth your while to trap so inconsiderable a person as myself. When once he is in your hands I shall be a great deal too wise to give you the chance of seizing me. When I fight, I shall fight openly—against Austria," he added, with a laugh.

"Miss Rossano," said Sacovitch, "drew the forty thousand pounds yesterday, and it now lies in the hands of Lady Rollinson. You will go to Southampton by the first train in the morning, accompanied by the Baroness Bonnar, who will introduce you to her English ladyship. Lady Rollinson is in direct communication with the Count Rossano, and will be able to give you a meeting-place at which you will hand over the money to the count. Mr. Brunow and the baroness will accompany you, and will undertake to see that the money is delivered. Any one of you may act as intermediaries between the Count Rossano and the forces on shore; but it must be definitely understood that the count is, under no circumstances, to be allowed to land until our own side is ready."

"That is clear enough," answered Roncivalli.

"Let me be clearer still,"—said Sacovitch, turning upon him with a menacing look. "In a case like this, many

things have to be provided for. It is quite possible that it may seem worth your while to play for forty thousand pounds."

"Not at all," said Roncivalli, tranquilly.

"It is assuredly not worth your while," the Austrian returned. "This enterprise is in my hands, and it has never been my practice to leave any of my agents unwatched. I shall not tell you who will watch you, or who in turn will watch him; but it will save possible trouble if you should understand that from the moment at which you leave, until the Count Rossano is in our hands, you will be under my observation and control as definitely as you are at this moment."

"All this," replied Roncivalli, "is a waste of words. I have undertaken this piece of work for my own purpose, and for my own purpose I shall carry it through. When the work is done I shall go my own way, as I have always told you. I am to have the pleasure of your society, madame," he continued, turning to the baroness. "That is charming, and will beguile a journey which might otherwise be tedious. What is the hour of the train's departure?"

Sacovitch drew out a pocket-book, and, extracting a loose leaf from it, handed it to him.

"You will find all your instructions there: the train, the hotel at which Lady Rollinson is staying, and the boat. Mr. Brunow has my certificate to the captain of the boat, who will place himself at your service at any hour."

"*Buono!*" said the Italian, folding the paper with a flourish, and bestowing it in his breast-pocket. "Is there anything more?"

"That is all," said Sacovitch. "I think we understand each other, and we could do no more than that if we talked till midnight."

"In that case," said Roncivalli, rising, "until tomorrow, madame. Until to-morrow, Mr. Brunow." He took up his paletot from the chair onto which he had thrown it on his entrance, and threw it over his shoulder. Then he took his hat, and with a half-theatrical bow all round, and a smile at Sacovitch, he left the room. The hall-door banged a few seconds later, and his footstep sounded on the gravel of the path and then died away.

"I am not quite sure that I trust that fellow," Sacovitch said a minute later. "It will be your business to keep a strict eye upon him."

"Have no fear," said the baroness. "He shall be well watched."

There was no more talk, but it had no interest for me, though I still listened intently in the hope of learning more. In a quarter of an hour or thereabouts the servant was called in, and received instructions to bring the baroness's carriage, which appeared to be put up at a hotel while the conference was being held. She and Brunow and Constance were, it appeared, going back to town together, and I learned incidentally that the cottage had been rented by Sacovitch for his own purposes, as affording a more convenient and secret meeting-place than any he could find in London. Directly the servant had received his orders I gave Hinge a sign, and with infinite precautions we climbed from the veranda to the garden, and thence made our way on tip-toe, like a pair of thieves, to the roadway.

"They're a nice old lot, sir, ain't they?" said Hinge, when we had walked a hundred yards in silence.

I quieted him by returning no answer, and we walked on without another word until I had reached my own chamber. By this time I had quite made up my mind as to the line it was my duty to adopt, and wheresoever it led me I was resolved to follow. I gave Hinge my purse, and instructed him to pay the bill, to pack up my belongings, and to be ready to catch the first train into town. He was full of wonderment and conjecture, but, like the old soldier he was, he obeyed without inquiry. When I arrived at my own rooms I sat down and wrote a statement of the whole truth, as brief and concise as I could make it, and copied it four or five times over; and armed with these documents, I drove to the addresses of such men as I knew where to find among our *sociétaires*. Under ordinary circumstances, since the count's departure and the betrayal of poor old Ruffiano, I should have gone to Roncivalli; but now that he was turned traitor I had to rely upon my own limited information, which served me very awkwardly. I had calculated beforehand on the chance that I might not find any one of the men I sought at home, and my worst forebodings were fulfilled. I left in each case my written statement, and before I returned to my own rooms I had delivered them all. The unfortunate part of the business was, as I knew full well, that hardly a man among them could read English, and in almost every case the recipient of my letter would have to seek a translator before he could find me. I knew, on the other hand, that if once the statement I had made reached the intelligence of any one Italian patriot, the news would spread like wildfire, and that, if I needed them, a hundred men would be at my disposal to check the treason meditated by Roncivalli and Brunow. In each epistle I besought the receiver to follow me without delay to Southampton, and I undertook to wire to each the address at which I might be found, and begged him, in case he should follow immediately, to make arrangements to have that address rewired.

All this being done, I sat down and wrote out a fuller statement of the case for Violet's reading, if ever I should again be so happy as to find the chance of placing it in her hands. This occupied me until an hour after midnight. I went to bed, leaving with Hinge the responsibility of awaking me in time for the first train next morning to Southampton. When we reached the railway station I caught a glimpse of Roncivalli and Brunow and the baroness; but this was no more than I had expected, and it cost me but little trouble to evade them. We reached Southampton without adventure, and I kept my place in the railway carriage until Hinge reported to me that they had left the platform. Then I ventured after them in a fly, and having seen them all enter a hotel together, I made a note of its name and position in my mind, and took a little drive into the country before returning. When I got back and procured rooms, my heart leaped as I signed the visitors' book, for at the top of the page on which I wrote I saw the names of Lady Rollinson, Miss Rossano and maid. It cost me an effort to put the question with untroubled face and voice, but I asked the servant who conducted me to my room if Miss Rossano were still staying in the house. He answered uninterestedly that he did not know the lady. But when I mentioned her as Lady Rollinson's companion, he recalled her to mind.

"No, sir," he said; "the lady stayed in the house the night before last, but she went away with her maid yesterday morning."

As to when she would return, or as to the direction she had taken at the time of her departure, he could tell me nothing. And so, as fate would have it, I was left in the ignorance and uncertainty which had perplexed me from the first. A minute's interview with Violet would, of course, have put an end to the danger of the situation, but in her absence I felt as powerless here as I had been in London. I was on the scene of action, but so long as Lady Rollinson retained her absurd suspicions, I could not approach the actors and actresses in the scene of tragedy which grew every moment more threatening and more imminent.

Hinge was so far in my confidence already that I had not much difficulty in laying before him all my hopes and fears. I wrote an urgent note to Lady Rollinson, and sent it by his hand, instructing him to deliver it to her ladyship personally. I read it over to him when it was completed, and at the end of every sentence he nodded assent to it.

"Dear Lady Rollinson," I wrote, "you have engaged to pay into the hands of Signor Roncivalli a sum of forty thousand pounds, to be handed to Count Rossano. Before you do this I beseech you solemnly to give me a moment's interview. The payment of that money will result in the count's betrayal to the Austrians. You know what he has suffered already, and you know how little mercy he can look for at their hands if they should once more succeed in getting hold of him. I beg you, for his sake, and for the sake of Violet, whom I know you love, to give me an interview of five minutes only. You may question the bearer of this note, who will tell you everything, and you may rely upon his knowledge and discretion. If you are still determined not to see me, I shall be quite content that you should learn the truth from him. But I beg you, by everything you hold dear, not to disregard my warning. Count Rossano is in peril of the gravest sort, and if you should hand Miss Rossano's gift to him without inquiry, you may sign his death-warrant, and will certainly give yourself grounds for the bitterest self-reproaches you have ever known."

Hinge undertook, with a full sense of the responsibility which rested upon him, to deliver this letter, and went away with it; but in ten minutes he came back with the envelope unopened.

"I got to 'er ladyship," he said; "but the minute I told 'er where I came from she threw the letter on the table and told me to bring it back again. I tried my best, sir, but she wouldn't listen to me. She ordered me out of the room, sir; and when I tried to tell 'er what the matter was, she rung the bell and walked out. You can't follow a lady into 'er bedroom, sir; and say what I would I couldn't get 'er to let me get a word in edgeways. A servant comes up in answer to the ring, and 'er ladyship, from inside 'er bedroom, says, 'Waiter, request that man to leave my room, and see as 'e don't trouble me no more.'"

"Where are Lady Rollinson's rooms?" I asked him, desperately.

"They're in this corridor, sir," Hinge answered; "at the far end, numbers 38, 39, and 40."

I snatched up the letter, strode along the corridor, and knocked at the middle door of the suite. Lady Rollinson herself answered my summons, and before I could speak a word slammed the door indignantly in my face and turned the key. I heard the bolt shoot in the lock, and a second later an angry peal at the bell sounded. I stood there, altogether irresolute and disconsolate. A waiter came flying up the stairs, and, bustling past me, knocked at the door.

"Who's there?" cried her ladyship's voice from within. "Send the manager to me. Tell him that I am being persecuted, and that I demand his protection."

What was a man to do in a case of that kind? I could simply retire to my own apartments; but I did it in such a passion of wrath and impotence that I could have taken that stupid and credulous old woman by the shoulders and shaken her to reason. I was too angry and disheartened to speak a word; but while I was pacing up and down the room, and wondering what my next move should be, the manager of the hotel presented himself, with a message from Lady Rollinson.

"It is no affair of mine, sir," said the man, who was extremely polite and business-like; "but the lady declares that she will not see you on any account, or receive any communication from you. I am to tell you that if you persist in attempting to see her she will leave the hotel. I can't afford to have my customers troubled in this way, and I must ask you to go."

I told him I should decline to go. I asked him to sit down, and I related to him the whole story, so far as it was necessary that any outside person should hear it, in order that he might judge of the situation. The man became interested, and even in a way sympathetic.

"It's a very curious case; sir," he admitted; "but I can't allow my customers to be disturbed, all the same. If I were in your place, sir," he added, "I should appeal to the police."

This advice was so hopelessly astray from the point that I dismissed the man, though I had to promise him that Lady Rollinson should suffer no further annoyance. Hinge was hard to pacify, for in his loyalty to me and the affection that had grown up between us, he was almost as much interested as I was, and he kept breaking in with a "Look 'ere, sir, this is Captain Fyffe, my master. It was him as rescued Count Rossano from the fortress of Itzia—you must have seen it in the papers." The man was got rid of at last, and the promise was given. And now there was nothing to be done but to await the arrival of some one or two of the patriotic *sociétaires* from London. Even in the extremity at which things had arrived, I more than half dreaded their coming. If they came at all, they would come with a full knowledge of the facts, and their arrival meant nothing less than murder. It would have been the wildest of dreams to suppose for an instant that any one of them would allow his beloved chief to be handed over to the Austrians at any cost; and though I was willing to pay almost any price to save the count, I had a horror of bloodshed in a case like that.

"Let us leave no stone unturned," I said to Hinge.

"I will go to the railway station to meet any friends of mine that may arrive, and in the meantime you can go to the docks and ascertain what vessels sail for any Italian port to-morrow. Find out if it is possible for me to get berths aboard the boat by which Brunow and Roncivalli sail."

"You trust me, sir," Hinge returned; "I'll do my best."

We parted for an hour or so. My waiting at the station came to nothing, and when Hinge returned he had no news worth the telling. The regular liners were all known, and had been easy enough to find. He had learned by cunning inquiry that luggage had been taken that evening aboard a craft whose destination was

unknown, and he had had her pointed out to him. When he had pulled out into the harbor to speak the craft, he had been warned away by a man who either could not understand him or refused to do so. It was not in itself a suspicious or remarkable thing that a stranger should not have been allowed to board a foreign craft after dark, but in the circumstances it was enough to make me believe that this was the ship by which the traitorous party was to sail. To be so near, to know so much, and yet to be so helpless was downright maddening.

"Once the money is in the hands of those wretches," I said, "once they are away, the count is doomed. That headstrong old woman is throwing away her niece's fortune to betray her niece's father; and if she knew what she was doing she would sooner put her own right hand in the fire."

"If I was you, sir," Hinge responded, "I shouldn't let her do it."

"You wouldn't?" I responded.

"No, sir," said Hinge; "I wouldn't."

"And how would you prevent it?" I asked. I spoke eagerly, for I could not help thinking he had some scheme in mind.

"I don't know, sir," said Hinge; "but I shouldn't let 'er do it. I'd rouse the town agen 'em. Do you mean to tell me, sir, as any set of English people 'ud let a lot of scoundrels like them go off to sell the life of an innocent gentleman? I don't believe it. I should rouse the town."

I bade him hold his tongue and go, and for two or three hours I sat by myself, raging at my own helplessness. There is nothing so intolerable to an active mind as the sense of urgent duty confronted by impotence. And if ever circumstance in the whole history of the world yet justified a man, sane and sober, in a madman's act, I felt myself justified when the last desperate resort occurred to me.

CHAPTER XX

I said not a word; but I sat by myself, and I matured, I think, the maddest scheme that ever entered a sane man's head. Desperate diseases, as everybody knows, ask for desperate remedies, and here I do not know how it was possible for anybody to overestimate the urgency of the case. Count Rossano has gone peacefully to his rest now this many a year, but I had learned to love the man with a loyal affection and esteem, the like of which I never felt for any human creature, except my wife and my own children. It made for a good deal in my affection for him that I had been instrumental in rescuing him from that living death he had suffered for so many years, for I have found over and over again in my own experience that one of the surest ways of learning to love a man is to do him a good turn. And apart from my own affection for him, he was the very apple of Violet's eye, and my affection for her I have never been able to find words for. That her money should be employed to lure her father to destruction was a thing altogether hideous and intolerable; and when I hit upon the only method I could see to prevent so dreadful a consummation, I accepted my own madness with a tranquillity which has surprised me very often in remembering it. I thought it well, before starting on the enterprise I had in hand, to set down my purpose in writing, so that if it miscarried I might at least escape the mischief of misconstruction. So I sat down and wrote deliberately that it was my intention to rob Lady Rollinson of the sum of forty thousand pounds, intrusted to her by Miss Violet Rossano for transmission to her father. If I could have seen any other way out of it I would not have taken this; but I had searched everywhere in my own mind, and until this one extraordinary proposition disclosed itself I had been able to find no road at all. I set down in the document I wrote my purpose in this strange proceeding; I signed and sealed it in an envelope, and put it in my pocket. Then I waited until the house was quite silent, and the last waiter had shuffled along the corridor. It was one o'clock in the morning before I was satisfied that the whole house had sunk to slumber, and then I marched straight to the room in which Lady Rollinson had last decisively refused to grant me a moment's interview. I remember very well that there were three pairs of boots outside the door, that they were all new and neat and fashionable, and that I thought, as I looked at them, that in contrast with my own heavy and mud-stained footgear they looked marvellously small and delicate. I turned the handle of the door, and, to my surprise, it yielded. I found myself within a dimly-lighted room, where the main illumination was refracted in a ghostly fashion from the white ceiling, and came from the street-lamps in the square below. I closed the door behind me, and found that I had light enough to make my way about without difficulty. The room was furnished in hotel fashion, and at one wall of it stood a ghostly piano, its form revealed by mere hints of polish on its surface here and there. On the opposite side was an escritoire with writing implements, and a few scattered sheets of paper. In the centre of the room was a table, and two or three disordered chairs were scattered about the apartment. Faint as the light was, a cursory glance about the place made it evident to me that so large an amount of money as the sum I meant to steal was hardly likely to be there. There were two doors opening out of the room apart from the one by which I had entered, and I was compelled to trust to chance in my choice of the one to be next opened. I cannot in the least tell why, but I walked without hesitation to the one on my left. I tried the handle, and the door resisted me. I tried again more strenuously, and I heard a voice from the other side cry out in sleepy tones, asking who was there. I knew the voice for Lady Rollinson's.

I know very well that I am telling a queer story, but I must tell it plainly. I set my sound knee against that door and threw my whole weight with it, and in a second, with a horrible wrench at the injured wrist and ankle, I stood inside the room. A faint scream greeted me, and I saw a white figure in the act of scrambling upright in the bed.

"You will do well to be quiet," I said, and the figure sank back with a sort of moan and gurgle of astonishment. My own nerves were so overstrung already that I discerned a comedy in a situation sufficiently serious, and if I had given way to the impulse which assailed me I should have broken into a shout of

unreasoning laughter. This was only a surface current, however, and I was as conscious of the serious import of my business as I am now in recalling the incidents of that incredible adventure.

"Your ladyship," I said, with that odd sense of comedy still uppermost, "will regard this as rather a curious intrusion. You have forty thousand pounds belonging to Miss Rossano, and I am here to rob you of it. I propose to do it with all delicacy; but if your ladyship will be good enough to understand me, I mean to have the money."

That she heard me I am sure, but the sole answer I received came in the shape of a muffled scream from underneath the bedclothes.

"The money," I said, "is Violet's property, and to her I shall be perfectly willing to account for it. You must tell me where it is, and I shall take it, and shall keep it until she comes to claim it." I waited, and no answer came at all. I was bubbling with subdued laughter, and fully alive at the same time to the serious side of my own position. "Where is the money?" I asked, in a voice as stern as I could make it. "Tell me, and tell me without delay!"

The blinds of the room were drawn, and even that faint illumination which had guided my steps in the sitting-room was missing here. I could see nothing but the dull gray gleam of the white counterpane and the hangings of the bed.

"Tell me at once," I said. "You may ask me for any explanation in the morning, and I will give it Where is the money?"

I waited, and a dead silence reigned. I repeated my question once, and twice, and thrice: "Where is the money?" Then I heard a muffled voice say: "Here!" I groped forward in the darkness until my hand encountered hers, and took from her grasp a chamois-leather bag, which was all crisp to the touch above and solid below.

"That will do," I said. "You have forced me to do this. You can raise an alarm if you will; I am willing to defend myself, and I have taken the only step that was left me to save the life of Violet's father."

With that I withdrew, stumbling here and there against the furniture in the thick darkness of the room. The sitting-room beyond seemed light by comparison, and the corridor, with its solitary sickly gleam of gas, was as clear as it would have been in broad daylight. I ran to my own room, and flung the bag upon the table. Then I untied the cord which bound it at the neck, and counted its contents. There were twenty notes of the Bank of England for one thousand pounds each, tied up in one little ladylike bundle with a bit of narrow pink silk ribbon. There were thirty-eight notes of five hundred pounds each, tied in the same delicate and feminine fashion. Then there were notes of one hundred and of fifty, to the value of seven hundred pounds. And at the bottom of the bag was a great loose handful of gold, all in bright sovereigns and half-sovereigns, fresh from the Mint. I estimated this little mass of coined gold at three hundred pounds; but just as I was in the act of counting it, the ring of a bell in violent motion tingled through the midnight silence of the house, and I paused. I heard a door thrown open, and an urgent voice at an incredible pitch shrieked, "Thieves!" "Murder!" Then the bell sounded again and yet again, until I heard it fall with a crash upon the stone floor of the corridor below. The wild voice, once loosed, went on shrieking, "Murder!" "Thieves!" I hurried the money I had stolen back into the bag, tied it as I had found it, and awaited the result with perfect equanimity. In less than half a minute doors were banging all over the house, and hurrying feet charged up-stairs and down-stairs. The voice of alarm never ceased for a moment. I stepped out into the corridor, and faced the manager, who was the first man to arrive upon the field.

"Lady Rollinson is alarmed," I said; "you had better send some of your women to her. I have just robbed her of forty thousand pounds, and the money is in my room."

The man glared at me with an expression of profound astonishment. Words were utterly beyond him, and he could only gasp at me.

"Tell Lady Rollinson," I continued, "that the money is quite safe. I shall surrender it to Miss Rossano, to whom it belongs, but to no other person. Now go!"

The corridor by this time was full of half-clad people, who were staring in each other's faces with the bewilderment natural to startled sleep. I returned to my own room, closing the door behind me, and awaited the progress of events. I heard excited voices outside, but could make out nothing of their purport. Thirty or forty people made a very babel of noise outside my door; but by-and-by Hinge came in, wide-eyed, in a very short night-shirt.

"I have saved the count," I said, very quietly. "There is the money which was to have betrayed him."

"Good Lord, sir," Hinge cried, "how did you get hold of it?"

"I stole it," I responded; "it was the only thing to do." While Hinge still stared at me in wordless amazement the outer door was flung open, and the manager appeared, ushering in a policeman.

"This is the man!" he cried.

"Yes," I answered, "I have not the slightest doubt that I am the man you want. You are an officer of the police?" The man said "Yes," bustling forward with a brace of handcuffs in his hand. "I claim this money," I said, laying my hand upon the bag which rested on the table. "There need be no doubt about the matter, officer. I have become illegally possessed of this, but I claim it, and I shall surrender it only to the hands of your inspector. He will keep it until its rightful owner comes to receive it."

"Lady Rollinson claims it!" cried the manager.

"Lady Rollinson," I answered, "has no more right to it than I have. This money is the property of Miss Rossano. It must be handed to her, and I have taken it in order that it may be put into the hands of the legal authorities until such time as she appears to claim it."

"I must trouble you to go with me, sir," said the officer, advancing with the handcuffs in his hand.

"I will go with you," I answered, "and I will go quite quietly on one condition: you will take charge of this."

"You bet I will!" the officer answered, facetiously; and I saw a glance pass between him and the manager which said "madman," as plainly as the spoken word itself.

I had done too much already to permit myself to be foiled at the end. I took the bag of money in both hands, and held out my wrists towards the officer.

"You will handcuff me," I said, "if you think that necessary. I shall submit to anything which you conceive to be within the limits of your duty. But I shall not part with this until I meet your inspector."

The man answered nothing, but he fettered me clumsily enough, keeping so wary an eye upon my face meanwhile that he manipulated the handcuffs without guidance, and pinched me in fixing them. I winced at this, and he got back from me as if he thought I was about to strike him.

"Ha! would ye?" he said, and laid a hand upon his truncheon. I stood still, with the handcuffs still dangling from my wrists, and the man, reassured by my manner, completed his task. The door was open, and any number of dishevelled heads and staring eyes crowded in at us.

"Let somebody find a cab," I said. "Lady Rollinson is naturally a good deal disturbed, and will not wish to make a charge to-night. She can appear against me in the morning, and in the meantime we can see that the money is made safe."

"Make no mistake about that," said the officer. "We'll see that the money is kept safe. You hand that bag over to me; I'll take charge of that."

"No," I answered; "it goes into your inspector's hands. You can send for him, if you like, or you can take me to him."

On a sudden I looked up, and there, among the faces at the door, I caught sight of Roncivalli and Brunow.

"Gentlemen," I said, "I take you to witness why I have done this thing. Here is the money which was to have been handed to you to-morrow. I have told the Brotherhood. I spared you once," I added, to Brunow; "you may go now and take your chance in earnest."

Roncivalli was a man of daring, and had more than once given proofs of courage; but he turned white at my words, and Brunow shrank back in the crowd with a face all ghastly gray, with his teeth gleaming behind his trembling lips. Through all the hurry and bustle of the scene the hotel manager was vainly urging the startled occupants of the house to return to their own chambers. Then, with a sudden leap of the heart, I heard a voice outside:

"Be good enough to make way for me."

"Come along!" cried the officer; "hand me that bag, and have done with it. I know my duty, and I've got force enough behind me."

"Wait a moment," I answered; "here is the owner of the money. Make way for Miss Rossano, and drive all those curious people away."

I saw the crowd divide, and Violet came in, looking about her wonderingly. I stood there manacled, holding out the stolen money in my extended hands. She gave one swift glance of astonishment, and closed the door, leaving us alone, except for the officer and the hotel manager. Hinge, conscious of his dishabille, had retreated at the moment of her entrance.

"My aunt has been robbed, John," she said, looking at me with wondering eyes— "robbed of forty thousand pounds!"

"And I," I answered, "am the thief, and here is the money."

"You the thief!" She fixed me with her eyes that have always seemed like stars of fate to me, and I saw a shadow of dreadful pain and wonder on her face. "You the thief!" she repeated.

"Yes," I answered; "I stole this money from Lady Rollinson five minutes ago." What with the certainty of triumph in my purpose, the surety of being immediately understood, and the joy of seeing her so unexpectedly again, I laughed outright. "I hand you back your own, dear. Take charge of it till you have heard my story. Sit down, and I will tell you everything."

"Is this your property, mum?" the officer asked, setting both hands on the bag as I set it on the table.

"I believe so," said Violet. "I gave the sum of forty thousand pounds into the charge of my aunt, Lady Rollinson, yesterday morning?"

"Then of course," said the policeman, "you give the person in charge?"

Violet looked at me with dancing eyes, and never in all my life have I known such pride and joy as that glance afforded me. There I stood before her, taken red-handed in the act, handcuffed, and openly confessing with my own lips my own deed; but any doubt of me was impossible to her true heart. I sounded at that moment the superb loyalty of her nature, and my pride in her seemed to lift me into heaven.

"In charge?" she asked, with a little tender, mirthful tremor in her voice. "No, I shall not give the gentleman in charge. Tell me what it means, John."

I told her first, briefly and rapidly, the story of poor old Ruffiano's betrayal, and how I had let Brunow go. Then I told her of Hinge's recognition of Sacovitch, of the meeting in Richmond Park, of what Hinge had heard at the cottage; and, finally, of what we had both heard together. I had called for Hinge at the very beginning of my narrative, and by the time I came to his share in it he was present, hastily muffled in an overcoat, and divided between a desire to stand immovably at attention and a contradictory attempt furtively to smooth his hair, which rayed out all round his head in disorderly spikes, and gave him a look of having been frightened out of his life.

"But why," she asked me, "did you take such an extraordinary action? Why not communicate with me?"

Then I had to tell her the story of that wretched Constance, which would have been an awkward thing to do under any circumstances, but was made more awkward still by the presence of the hotel manager and the constable. I went through it, however, without flinching, and I told her most of what has been set down in the latter part of these pages, though of course with less detail than I have given here. She scarcely interrupted me by a word, and when I had done she drew her purse from her pocket, and taking from it a sovereign, tendered the coin to the constable.

"You have done your duty, officer," she said. "But you understand that your services will not be required

any longer."

The constable took the coin and pouched it.

"Do I understand, mum," he asked, with a droll stolidity, "that you're satisfied with the prisoner's story?"

"Yes," returned Violet; "I am quite satisfied. You will not be wanted any more."

The man took out a key from his pocket, and unlocked the handcuffs which confined my wrists. He said not a word, but looked at me in a mute admiration and wonder which spoke volumes. He and the hotel manager withdrew together, and I sent Hinge to bed.

"Suppose," said Violet, "that I had been away, as you thought I was, you would have gone to prison."

"Not for long," I answered. "I should have told my story, and you would have believed it all the same."

"I should have believed it all the same," she said. "Do you know, John, I should think myself and the whole world all mad together rather than believe that you were not true and honest." A second later she laughed and blushed divinely. "As if there were any need of saying that!" she cried, and then and there she gave me the first kiss I had not had to pray for.

She had endured the whole strange position until then with the pluck and steadfastness of a man, but there she broke down and cried a little, realizing all the perils which had beset her father, and his strange escape from it.

"We will take the money ourselves," she said, when she had recovered from this natural emotion. "There shall be no further danger of the poor darling being trapped by those wicked Austrians if we can help it."

And there I saw an inspiration, and hailed it with delight, and took immediate advantage of it.

"My darling," I said, "we can't travel together by ourselves, and Lady Rollinson, I am afraid, is hardly likely to consent to be my fellow-traveller for some time to come."

"I hadn't thought of that," she answered. "Of course we can't travel together. But will you go alone, or shall I? I could take my maid, and I am used to travelling."

"Let us go together, my dear," I urged her. "Let us never be parted again. Let us give no more chances to well-meaning but foolish old ladies to divide us."

She put me aside, and found a host of reasons; but though I am not strong in argument, I managed to combat and confute them all, and she said "Yes" at last. And so I not only turned burglar in her cause, but won my wife by it; for within five days we were married by special license.

Thus this queer story comes to an end, or, rather, like all the stories I have read and heard, glides off into a new one. Everybody knows the history of the last glorious war for Italian independence. I was in the thick of it, I thank Heaven, and so was the Count Rossano, and so was good old Hinge; and while we marched and fought, my dear Violet took her share; for there was no ministering hand in the camp hospitals more constant or more tender, no voice and face better loved and known than hers. We are old folks now, and have lived to prove each other as only married people can; but the greatest pride I have is that at this hour she is no more assured of the righteousness of my intent than she was at the instant when she found me with confession on my lips and every sign of guilt openly displayed about me.

Love is a great treasure. Truth and loyalty are among man's greatest possessions. But the truest solace to the human soul is perfect trust.

THE END

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