

## TRUE TO HIS WORD.

A NOVEL.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

HARD TIMES.

For a long time Walter walked on in darkness, stumbling as his companions moved rapidly along, notwithstanding that two of them kept close beside him and held him by the arms. He believed them to be Santoro and Colletta, but not a word was now spoken by any one, even Corrali himself. At the expiration of an hour the bandage was removed from the captive's eyes and he found himself in a locality that was altogether strange to him. The sea had disappeared, nor could the white summit of Etna be seen in the distance as when he had last looked forth; but he knew by the direction of the sun that they were marching towards that mountain, that is, to the south-east. The way was steep and difficult, to which circumstance rather than to any mercy upon the captain's part he attributed the removal of the bandage. At times the brigand chief would stop for a few seconds to sweep the landscape with his spy glass, but otherwise there was no halt. Now plunging down steep ravines; now pushing through tangled scrub; now leaping from rock to rock across torrents, they hurried on. Yet the brigands showed no signs of fatigue. Walter could not but admire the indifference with which the various obstacles to their progress were met and surmounted. He had long ago given up his first opinion as to their want of activity. Dislike to own himself as an Englishman vanquished in athletics by men of a race whom he had always held to be indolent, prevented him from demanding at all risks a respite from this unceasing toil, while Santoro, a man nearly double his age, and who had had an extra journey that morning, walked on without a murmur by his side. To add to the difficulties of their march, the rain had begun to fall so fast and thick that it not only wetted them in spite of their capotes, but made the cliff paths slippery and dangerous. Presently, as they descended into a little dell, a small thin column of smoke was seen rising from the opposite bank. A halt was called at once, and the two men who had had charge of the cavern were sent forward to reconnoitre. Instead of returning, the brigand call was heard from the place where they had disappeared, and upon Corrali's face there appeared a look of satisfaction. Even this, however, did not last long, for, on their ascending the little hill, where, huddling around a fire, were found the remainder of the brigand forces, he broke into a passion at their imprudence, and rushing at the cherished flame extinguished it. At this spectacle a murmur of disapproval ran round the band.

'What!' cried he, 'do you prefer then to be taken prisoner like Manfred and Duano rather than to suffer a little cold and damp? Suppose it had been the soldiers instead of ourselves who had discovered you here?'

There was no reply; his logic was indisputable; but the rain was also descending in a continued stream, and the appearance of the whole party was wretched. The camp from which the brigands had been driven out by the troops that morning had been a paradise compared with their present place of refuge. It was, now that the smoke had ceased, concealed from observation by a circle of shrubs; but those were of no avail to keep off the rain, nor the wind, which blew in furious gusts from the snow-topped hills to eastward; the turf was sodden with wet; nor was there a sign of either meat or drink to be seen among the men. The sheep had evidently fallen into the hands of the soldiers; nor had there been time to secure so much as a leg of mutton.

'Have you brought bread with you, captain?' inquired Corbara.

'I have brought what I went for,' answered Corrali, pointing to Walter.

'Where is the other prisoner—the English milord?' inquired Corrali.

'We have put him under shelter,' answered Corbara.

'You mean to say you grudged him his share of your fire,' replied the captain.

'But who is guarding him?'

'Oh, he is safe enough! The fact is, in order the better to keep him warm and to make sure of his remaining where he was, we put a rope round him.'

'If he has come to harm your life shall pay for it!' exclaimed Corrali passionately and going hastily towards the place the other had indicated. Walter followed, Santoro and Colletta permitting him so to do, and of course accompanying him. The spectacle he beheld would have been ludicrous had it not been so pitiful. In a hollow space at the foot of a thorn tree, from which the wet earth had fallen away, lay, swathed from head to foot in a sheepskin, the unhappy form of the British merchant.

'Why, they have trussed the man like a fowl!' ejaculated Corrali.

'Have you brought me a fowl?' inquired Mr. Brown, his knowledge of the Sicilian tongue enabling him to comprehend that single word.

'No, Milord Inglese; nor is it likely you will taste one in this life unless your ransom reaches my hands pretty quickly.'

'At least you can cut his bonds,' pleaded Walter, 'even if you cannot give him food. Such cruelty will not bring your ducats a moment earlier.'

'Do you call this cruelty?' answered Corrali. 'Ah, in a day or two, if the gold does not come, you shall see what you shall see! In the meantime the man may do as he has a mind; and he stooped down and freed the captive from his bonds. Then the poor merchant, who had been lying with his face within a few inches of the wet earth, was enabled to recognize his fellow-prisoner.'

'Ah, Mr. Litton, what news of Lillian?' were his first words.

'She is in Palermo by this time and in safe hands.'

'Thank Heaven for that!' cried the old gentleman. 'Is she quite well? Has she been taken care of?'

'She was suffering from the shock of all she has endured and from anxiety on your account; but the women who had charge of her had done for her what they could.'

'Ah, then, they are human—not like their husbands and brothers,' answered Mr. Brown. 'I must not grumble since my darling is safe; but may she never know what I have suffered!'

'Nay; I hope in a few days you may be able to tell her yourself, when your misfortunes, being over, will seem to you to have been less terrible than they now appear.'

'Ah, you don't know what I have gone through, sir!' answered the merchant, putting up his hands. 'Nothing has past my lips since you left me. I have doubtless caught my death in this wet place. Yes, these villains will see the end of me, Mr. Litton; I can never stand such another day's march as this has been. If I was your age there would be a chance for me.'

Walter expressed his hope that they would not again be disturbed by the troops, so as to render another retreat in face of the enemy necessary.

'In that case, my young friend,' answered Mr. Brown, 'it seems to me that we shall die of starvation. Nothing, as I say, has passed my lips for the last ten hours. I would give a piece of gold for some bread and cheese, or for a sandwich and a glass of ale, such as they used to sell in the old days in Holborn for fourpence.'

'I am afraid I can command neither of those delicacies, Mr. Brown,' said Walter; 'but I believe I have something in my coat pocket—a bit of meat and a slice of bread, which was given to me by the signora.'

'I am sure you would not have mentioned it had you not intended to give me some of it, eh?' interrupted the merchant.

'My dear sir, you need it more than I, for I had a hearty meal before our march, and therefore you are welcome to the whole of it.' And Walter proceeded to empty the contents of his coat pocket into the other's outstretched hand.

'Be careful,' whispered the old merchant, 'or those rascals will observe us. Mr. Litton, you're a good fellow, you're a gentleman, you're a Christian. I don't think I ever tasted such bread! Where do they bake it, I wonder? You must have a piece—just a little piece, even if you don't want it.'

Walter did want it very much and he accepted it.

'I know I am greedy,' continued Mr. Brown. 'I have not had such an appetite since I was so high and used to put the skid on the omnibuses. The signora, as you call her, didn't happen to give you anything to drink with it, did she?'

'She had no opportunity for that,' said Walter.

'Never mind,' said Mr. Brown; 'there's plenty of water. Come, I drink the signora's health. What did you say her name was?'

'The name of the lady who gave me the bread and meat was Joanna.'

'Heaven bless her! I only wish she had given you some more. There is no woman, with the exception of my own daughters, for whom I have so much respect.'

'I don't think Mrs. Sheldon would like to hear you say so, sir,' observed Walter.

'I don't care for Mrs. Sheldon,' answered the old gentleman. 'Why, it was through her advice that I was induced to come into this country. It was she who set me against you at Willowbank, and I believe she told me lies, for a man who will give such mutton and bread as that away, when he does

not know when he may get another meal himself, cannot be bad.'

There is no doubt that Mr. Christopher Brown had come to a correct conclusion respecting his young friend; but the reason which had led him to it at last was curious enough, when one considers how many others might have convinced him of it before. The knowledge that Walter had lost his liberty in attempting to give aid to himself and Lillian had evoked in him no such gratitude as the sacrifice had deserved; their position had not then appeared to him so dangerous; and above all, he had personally suffered neither pain nor privations; but now—now that Lillian was safe and he had nothing to think about but his own wretched condition—the gift of the bread and mutton had appealed to all the feeling that was left in him with irresistible force. His observation with respect to Mrs. Sheldon was perfectly genuine; he disliked the woman as one of those who had induced him to take his ill-fated journey; but also because she told lies to him about Walter Litton, who had not only shared with him his last crust and meat but offered him the whole of it. If the young fellow had done his best for the next year to conciliate Mr. Christopher Brown he could not possibly have made so much progress with him as he had done in one hour, and especially in the last few minutes. Their position in the brigand camp had become perilous in the extreme. Even if the required ransom should be raised without difficulty, there would be a hundred obstacles to its being paid. The Government would forbid it; and now the troops had been called out, how was such a sum to reach the camp, when even the brigands themselves had escaped their hands only by the greatest exertions? That it would take time to do so was certain; a time of hardship and privation, such as one of the age and habits of Mr. Brown was very ill-fitted to endure; and above all, was it likely that a man of the temper of the brigand chief would give them time? It was probable that in a moment of anger he would take his vengeance upon them both.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ON PAROLE.

The apprehensions of Walter respecting the fate of himself and his companion were by no means shared by Mr. Brown. Even when told that there would be some difficulty in getting the ransom into the hands of Corrali, he could not conceive but that he would be willing to wait for days and even weeks for a sum that must needs appear to him 'beyond the dreams of avarice,' and which he himself had been occupied for fifteen years in amassing. He was not so incredulous regarding the audacity of brigand behavior as during the first twelve hours of his capture; but he did not believe that they would proceed to such extremities as those at which the brigand chief was wont to hint. They had been now a week up in the mountains without any news from Palermo, and during that period he had become unexpectedly communicative with him concerning his household affairs. It was easy to see that Sir Reginald Selwyn was no longer an object of admiration with his father-in-law, and his antipathy towards him obviously increased with every day's delay in the arrival of the ransom. A man of business would have got the thing managed within a few hours of the receipt of the authorization, he would say; and a man of courage and action, such as Sir Reginald had the reputation of being, would have seen that the troops had made short work of the brigands and procured their release that way; but nothing was done, and there might as well be no Sir Reginald. It would have been easy for Walter to have inflamed the old merchant's mind against his relative still more, but he did all he could to discourage the topic. His harshness to Lotty, which her sister's eyes had long detected, had become visible to her father's also, who had not hesitated to express his opinion on the subject.

'I am not a man to be blinded by the glitter of a title, Mr. Litton,' said Mr. Christopher Brown, 'and you will remember how I opposed myself to poor Lotty's marriage with this gentleman. It would have been better for my own peace of mind if I had refused to countenance it at all. The money that that fellow has had out of me in one way or another,' added he, 'would astonish you, Mr. Litton; and my impression is, that that money has been wasted.'

So frankly did Mr. Brown converse about his relations and private affairs that Walter, feeling it was only to the circumstances of their position that he owed this confidence, was quite embarrassed and did all he could to turn the conversation. He questioned him about the time he had spent at Palermo—and, strangely enough, Mr. Brown never reciprocated this curiosity; either he did not want to inquire what had brought Walter to Sicily, or having some suspicion of the cause, he refrained from alluding to it. Concerning the circumstances of his capture, however, the merchant conversed readily enough. The seiz-

ure of the Sylphide had happened almost as much by accident as design. Had even the light wind held with which the yacht had sailed from Palermo, its owner would have escaped their hands; but they had speculated upon the very thing that had taken place and been successful. They had followed the course of his vessel, which was of necessity along the coast and close in shore; and embarking in a small fishing boat, had boarded her in sufficient numbers to make resistance without avail. The crew had been overpowered without a struggle, and since it was by no means Corrali's policy to encumber himself with prisoners, had been set upon the road to Messina, from which town no danger could be apprehended from the troops for many days. Lest any of these sailors should make their way back to Palermo, the road, as we have seen, had been strictly guarded, though that did not prevent Francisco's return to that city, upon whose report no doubt the soldiers had been sent out by the governor.

It was to the well-meant efforts of these emissaries of justice that the inconveniences of Mr. Brown and Walter were now owing. It was positively certain that Corrali would never permit his prestige to suffer by allowing them to be rescued out of his power; and on the other hand the cordon was drawn so strictly all around them that it was most improbable that those in charge of the ransom would be able to break through and reach their ever-shifting camp. It was not even certain—for they had had no news from the city since Lillian had been sent back—that the ransom was on its way. Poor Mr. Brown had now become as eager to pay it as he had previously been disinclined to do so. Fatigue and privations had not only shaken his determination, but experience of his lawless masters had opened his eyes to their true character. Walter, however, was well aware that some important steps were in contemplation in case the three hundred thousand ducats were not presently forthcoming. Corrali maintained a gloomy reserve, never addressing himself to his captives as heretofore, but regarded them with a significant look. They were more strictly guarded too than ever, nor were they permitted as before to be together, but were located at opposite ends of the camp. The cordon drawn by the soldiers grew every day more strict, and made the task of provisioning the brigands very difficult to the people who undertook it at the risk of their lives.

When they had been living for more than a fortnight under these wretched conditions, which, as Walter was well convinced, were not likely to be exchanged for better ones, an incident happened which filled all hearts with joy. A little after sunrise one morning the brigand call was heard in the direction of Palermo, and the whole camp was at once on the qui vive. Certain members of the band had been stationed in the neighborhood of the city to expedite the arrival of the ransom, and it was confidently expected that they had now arrived with their precious burden. Even Corrali's face smiled at the prospect of this happy result, and he addressed a few words to Walter.

'It is very well both for you and for me,' said he, 'that I have been so long-suffering; but my patience had almost reached the end.'

In the meantime Canelli had been sent down to see that all was right and welcome the new comers. Presently he reappeared, making the signal of 'no danger,' but not that which had been agreed upon to signify the arrival of the treasure. The captives were not aware of the reason, but they saw that Corrali's face began to change.

With Canelli were now seen two women. 'Alas!' said Walter, 'I fear there is no money.'

'Then Heaven help us!' sighed the merchant.

Walter did not answer; he had recognized Joanna and Lavocca in the two newcomers. He felt confident that the former would help them if she could.

The two women came up the hill without raising their eyes from the ground. It was easy to see that they had brought neither ransom nor good news.

'What brings you here, Joanna,' inquired the brigand chief in displeased tones, 'when I bade you stay in the cave until you heard from me?'

'A very good reason—the mere want of meat and drink, brother,' answered she. 'The villagers have brought us nothing for these three days on account of the soldiers.' Joanna's face was very pale and her eyes were failing. Lavocca looked worse, and when she had reached the first tree that fringed their camp she held on to it as though she needed support. It was evident that both of them were half starved. Santoro was going forward to welcome his love, when the captain grasped his arm and pushed him back. 'Look to your prisoner,' cried he; 'that is your first duty.—Corbara, let the women have food.'

It was an order by no means easy to execute, yet some morsels of coarse bread were handed to them and some wine in a tin cup. When they had refreshed themselves Corrali began to make a speech, to which

every one listened with the utmost interest. His words were uttered with such haste and passion that Walter could with difficulty catch his meaning; but he seemed to be narrating the history of the band during the last few weeks. Whenever he alluded to his prisoners his tone increased and he pointed rapidly from one to the other, and then in the direction of Palermo. The words 'starvation,' 'loss' and 'death' recurred again and again, and then he drew attention to the pale faces of the women. It was plain that he was crediting the unhappy captives with all the misfortunes that had befallen them since the soldiers had been called out. 'And this ransom,' continued he, speaking more slowly, 'that was to pay us for all our trouble and which we thought had just come to hand, where is it? Have we heard even if it exists or if the bankers are willing to pay it? No; we have heard nothing.'

'Nothing!' echoed the brigands. 'For all we know, this old man here may have been aware from the first that the money would not be sent; there may have been something wrong in his letter of authorization; he may have trusted all along to the accidents, to the chances of escape or of his being rescued by the troops; and in the meantime he may have been making fools of us.'

A murmur broke out at this, and many a face was turned in the direction of the unhappy merchant, who looked eagerly at Walter, as though he had not been as powerless as himself.

'At all events,' resumed the chief, 'it is my opinion that it would be idle to wait this gentleman's pleasure any longer. We have borne with him far more patiently than is customary with us and folks are beginning to say: The presence of the soldiers alarms Corrali and his men; captives have only to be obstinate and they will carry their point against these stupid brigands.'

'Stupid!' repeated Corbara, glancing from Walter to Mr. Brown. 'We will let them know that we are not stupid.'

'It has always been our rule, that when a ransom is not settled within a reasonable time the captive should pay it in another fashion,' proceeded Corrali; 'and in this case, when we have been driven from our camping ground, shot at by the troops, into whose hands two of our men have fallen, is it right that we should make an exception? Shall we ever see Manfred again or Duano, thank you?'

'Never!' cried the brigands; 'they are as good as dead.'

'We have the absence of three friends to avenge; one life as it were to count against us in any case.'

'You are right, captain,' said Corbara. 'But there is no reason why we should not set about the matter at once.'

The two brigands to whose custody Mr. Brown was confided here each laid a hand upon his wrist, and Santoro and Colletta drew a pace nearer to Walter. It was evident that the long-delayed hour of revenge had come at last.

'I would wish to say a word or two, brother,' said a clear voice, 'before a deed is done of which we may all repent ourselves.'

'You may say what you please, Joanna,' observed Corrali; 'these men, however, are not your prisoners, but ours.'

'The English girl was mine until you sent me word that she was to be set free,' answered Joanna; 'and since you have taken her I claim him yonder—and she pointed to Walter—as my captive in her place.'

A shout of disapprobation burst from all sides at this audacious demand.

(To be Continued.)

## Wouldn't be Caught Again.

An old bachelor who lives in the suburbs of Austin, Texas, hires a colored man of about eighteen to clean up his room, fill the lamp and perform like services. A few days ago the colored domestic, who had been using his employer's blacking, said:

Boss, our blacking ain't done out.

What do you mean by our blacking? growled the sordid employer; everything belongs to me and nothing belongs to you. Don't let me hear you say "our" again.

The terrified darkey promised to comply with the request. On the following Sunday the boss happened to meet the colored male accompanied by a chocolate colored female pushing a baby carriage.

Was that your baby in that carriage? he asked, quite a number of his friends being present at the time.

No, boss, dat's not our chile; dat's your chile. Ise nebber gwine ter say nuffin belongs to me no more.—Texas Siftings.

Mrs. DeVisite—Good afternoon, Miss Blank. Is your mother at home? Miss Blank—No. She has gone to Mrs. De Mugg's progressive conversation party. By the way, what sort of a party is that, Mrs. DeVisite? Mrs. DeVisite—It is at which conversation begins with art, science and literature and progresses very rapidly to fashion gossip and servants.