

daughter—who was his only child, the sole companion of his widowed home,—the consul bore his enforced imprisonment with patience and good humor. Each succeeding day he liked his host better and better, and he actually felt sorry when the day of his return home was fixed upon.

"I shall miss you, monsieur, when you are gone," Desmoro observed, as they were sitting together at breakfast on the morning of the consul's departure. "Ay, I shall sorely miss you!" The consul drew forth his purse—a purse well-crammed with bank-paper,—and offered it to the bushranger.

"I have been most courteously entertained by you, Red Hand," he said, with some little embarrassment of manner. "You will not, I hope refuse to allow me to make a suitable compensation for—"

Desmoro's face flushed with pride and indignation.

"Monsieur!" he exclaimed, with knitted brows, "Red Hand is a bushranger, not the keeper of a tavern. I have deemed you my honored guest, and for the trifling hospitality I have showed you, I only crave a small place in your memory, an assurance on your part that I shall not be altogether forgotten by you!"

Desmoro had uttered these latter words with so much feeling, that, Neddy, who was kneeling before the rude and capacious fire-place, using his lungs in place of a pair of bellows, looked up in mute astonishment.

"Be assured, Red Hand, that I will be your staunch friend if ever you should stand in need of such," returned the gentleman. "Come or send to me at any hour, near or afar off, and I will attend to the summons."

"Is the mare saddled, Neddy?" asked Desmoro, turning to the man, who was still employed in coaxing the dying embers to look alive again.

"She's all right, mister,—tethered to the fig-tree yonder," the man answered, nodding his head in an uncertain direction.

Desmoro now disappeared, and, after the lapse of ten minutes, returned with a bunch of bush flowers in his hands. Glistening with morning dew were these gems of the Australian wilds—these scarlet globes of the waratah—these soft golden-bued buds of the mimosa—these scented native roses—and these rich purple blossoms of the sweet tea-plant. You know his natural taste for artistically arranging bouquets. The present nosegay, although composed of a careless gathering, came gracefully out of the hands of Desmoro.

"Your kindness has emboldened me to solicit a favor. May I presume, monsieur, to send this to mademoiselle?" he asked, with considerable hesitation. "I may never see her or you again, monsieur," he added, presenting his simple flowers, which the gentleman smilingly received.

"I will take care that Marguerite receives them safely," he rejoined.

Then there was a shaking of hands under the shade of the tall fig-tree, which was leaning over, and resting its leafy head amid the branches of its nearest neighbor, and then the gentleman mounted the horse, which Desmoro at once began to lead up the pass, the steepness of which was the safeguard of his cavern-retreat.

Upward, upward, winding along the craggy, precipitous cliffs, the bushranger, and the horse and rider, slowly made their way. The poor consul, who was a very timid man, and far from being a decent horseman, clung to his saddle most tenaciously, never once daring to look backwards, and uttering exclamations of fear all the while.

At length they arrived at a place of safety, at a cleared spot on the flat top of a hill, whence they could see the surrounding country laid all before them.

"You will no longer require a guide now, monsieur," spoke Desmoro. "Keep yonder high tree in constant view until you arrive at the road; then turn to your left, and heaven guard you to the end of your journey."

"Thanks—thanks!" exclaimed the gentleman. "You have a most secure retreat here," he continued. "I should never be able to discover again either of the entrances to your home."

Desmoro laughed.

"You will never try to do so, I think."

"Nay, who knows!" he replied, as he waved his hand, touched his steed, and prepared to ride away.

"Take care lest you encounter the owner of the beast!" said Desmoro, as he moved from the spot. "Remember that I've made you a present of a stolen horse! Ha, ha!"

But the gentleman heard not Desmoro's parting words, he was already galloping onwards.

CHAPTER XXVII.

We left Colonel Symure plunged in amazement and distress at what he had just heard relative to his unhappy son—the convict Desmoro.

The Colonel paced his chamber for hours and hours, unable to keep still.

Merciful powers! he had clasped hands with his own son, and had been in utter ignorance of that fact until this moment, when that son was beyond his reach—gone heaven alone knew where.

What was he to do now? His heart was yearning towards the poor outlaw—his arms aching to enfold him.

He trembled when he reflected on the terrible dangers that encompassed Desmoro; that the scaffold was awaiting him should he ever be caught.

His face convulsed with the mental agony he was enduring, Colonel Symure fell on his knees, and prayed—prayed with a fervent spirit, and a contrite soul—prayed that heaven would watch over his unhappy son, and lend him out of further guilt and peril.

Colonel Symure would have flown out into the night and darkness, could he have hoped to overtake the poor fugitive whom he had so lately befriended; but the Colonel was in complete ignorance of the direction of that fugitive's flying steps, and consequently would be at a loss whither to direct his own.

The men had searched the grounds, but finding there nothing to repay their pains they had at once departed, and were now pursuing a fresh route, the contrary one to that which our hero had taken.

But the Colonel was not aware of that fact; these agents of the law might be on the very heels of Desmoro for aught the gentleman knew to the contrary.

Had the Colonel been standing before the mouth of a loaded cannon, expecting to be blown to pieces, he could not possibly have endured more mental anguish than now was his.

He paced the floor until broad daylight streamed through the chamber windows. As he passed by one of the mirrors, the Colonel started to see the haggard face it reflected.

He was a lonely man in the world now, for his brother, Percy Symure, was long since dead, and the fiery-tempered Caroline still lived apart from him. The Colonel still clung to the army, and had gladly accompanied his regiment when it was ordered abroad. He knew that he was going to the country where his own and only son abided in degraded bondage, and he was nursing a hope that by some means or other he might be able to obtain the young man's pardon.

On reaching the colony, military duties had so occupied his attention and time, that, as yet, he had had no opportunity of making any inquiries whatever respecting Desmoro. He was a painfully sensitive man, and, being such, wished to pursue his search as secretly as possible. The event of this night had, however, given him information—terrible information, concerning the object of his constant and aching thoughts.

For several days, Colonel Symure, was to be seen hanging about the police-office. He was listening to the different cases, fearful that Desmoro might be caught, and brought up there for examination. He was looking wretchedly ill, and there was a restless, wild expression in his eyes, which betokened a mind sadly disturbed, and full of sore distress. Every morning he devoured the contents of the different newspapers, and afterwards he would walk about the town, stopping to read every handbill on his way. Yet no tidings could he obtain of Desmoro.

Often the poor Colonel might be seen talking to constables, asking them questions concerning Red Hand, his looks all the while filled with nervous anxiety and trepidation. His brother officers thought their Colonel going demented, for little could he converse about now, save bushrangers and their doings.

The Colonel visited the theatre one evening, in the hope of seeing there the rascal Pidge, thinking that that individual might be enabled to give him some information concerning the hapless Desmoro. But the gentleman failed to get a sight of the billsticker, and left the temple of the drama in much disappointment.

A few evenings subsequent to his visit to the theatre, being present at a dinner-party given by the French consul, Colonel Symure adroitly introduced the name of Red Hand; at the mention of whose name Mademoiselle d'Auvergne changed color and trembled, while her father puffed out his cheeks, and looked full of mysterious importance.

Marguerite, on whose left was seated the Colonel, was wishing that officer far away at the present moment. She was afraid of her father being led to recount his late adventure with the bushranger now in question. You see, the consul was a sad gossip, and his daughter was well aware of that fact.

Marguerite tried to turn the conversation into another channel; but she tried in vain, the subject she so dreaded was in full swing.

"Red Hand!" cried one of the company, a red-whiskered Irishman. "By St. Patrick, I know the fellow; may the furies fly away with the scoundrel, say I! Did any of ye hear how I was stopped and robbed by him?"

"Stopped and robbed by Red Hand!" echoed half a dozen voices, in full chorus. "What—you, Major O'Moore?"

"To be sure! Is it possible that ye've never heard of that adventure of mine?"

"Never—never, Major!"

"You'd like to hear it, I dare say?" added the officer, clearing his throat, and preparing to commence his narration.

"Oh, yes, yes, Major!"

At this moment, Marguerite's knife and fork dropped from her nerveless fingers. She dreaded to hear of any of Red Hand's wrongdoings, and would have given much could she have escaped from listening to the Major's forthcoming story.

To commence, then, as I was journeying from Lascelles Station—Lascelles, who was once in the army, is a friend of mine, whom I'd been visiting on this occasion, ye must understand. Well, as I was journeying along this road—which was as bad as one as I'd ever wish to see 'twixt this and any place—longing to reach Sydney again—I was then about fifty miles on the other side of Parramatta, and intending to put up at the first inn I reached—I fell at once upon

the greatest row I ever heard in the whole course of my life. "Oho!" said I to myself, stopping my horse for a moment, and looking around me, "there's a big scrimmage going on somewhere!" And by-and-by, guided by the hooting and yelling, I arrived upon such a scene. It was an immense farmyard, filled with a crowd of men, whom one in their midst, mounted on a fine horse, with a pistol in his hand, was evidently commanding to do something or other.

"Bed ad!" said I to myself. "Here's some fun here, I'm thinking," and accordingly I drew up, and listened to what was going on before me. There was a large weatherboard and brick place, into which the men were being forced to enter, and to come back laden with all sorts of stores and provisions. I pretty soon comprehended the scene by what followed.

"Strip the stingy hound!" cried the man on horseback, whom, I'll give you my word, was one of the handsomest fellows I ever clapped my two eyes upon, and worthy to be a soldier any day of the week. "Strip him, lads, of his stores! We'll teach him to dock the wages and rations of his honest workmen! Go on, it's Red Hand himself who is answerable for this deed!"

"Red Hand, the murderous bushranger!" exclaimed I within myself. "Peculiar company for Major O'Moore, I'm thinking. Sure, my best plan will be to put distance 'twixt ye and me."

And with this, I was just about to ride on again without taking a haporth of notice further, when oh! may I never live to taste Monsieur d'Auvergne's claret again, if a hand of iron hadn't clutched hold of my shoulder, and that big rascal, Red Hand, was close by my side.

"Come!" said he, pointing to the house in front of us; "I'll trouble you to alight, go in there, and help yourself to any article ye like."

"I!" replied I, in the biggest flurry I was ever in in the whole course of my life. "Thunder! do ye take me for a thafe? I'm Major O'Moore, of her Majesty's—"

"Oh, oh!" returned he, laughing fit to kill himself, and at the same time helping himself to my watch as gingerly as possible. "We'll take the liberty, Major, of relieving you of this bauble; and now your purse, if you please."

And this was happening in the broad face of day, and in the presence of about forty farm labourers, whom Red Hand had been ordering about as if they had been so many bundles of straw, forcing them to rob their master, just because that master had been reducing their wages and rations.

Well, I handed the scoundrel my purse; by Jove! I couldn't do any other, for his pistol was placed at my ear. I was sorry to part with my watch, which had belonged to my dead and gone father; and I told him as much, never once thinking that he would pay any attention to my words.

"Go in there, Major," he answered, again pointing to the building.

"But—"

"No words, but obey me, Major."

And, by all the saints, if I weren't bundled off my beast, then and there, and marched into a store, out of which I returned with a small chest of tea in my arms. I vow I didn't know how the article came in my possession, but I was hugging it close enough—that same blessed chest of tea.

I then regained the back of my animal. I was purple with rage and shame, and resolving to cast the chest into the very first gully I should come across, when the bushranger, in a most gentlemanly manner, once more addressed me. "Major," said he, laughing as if it were all a good joke; "I believe ye said that this watch was once your father's property?"

I replied in the affirmative. Whereupon he actually handed me back the timepiece, which is here to speak for itself.

And as he finished speaking, the Major drew forth a handsome gold watch, and held it up to view.

Marguerite d'Auvergne was as white as any marble statue, and her lips were twitching painfully.

"There's much good in this man, it seems," quivered the Colonel, after two or three of the guests had made sundry observations on the Major's narrative.

"Well, I'll admit that there are bigger scoundrels in the world than Red Hand," rejoined the other officer, refreshing himself with a glass of wine after his somewhat long recital.

Marguerite glanced at her father, who she could perceive was fidgeting in his chair, all anxious to recount to his guests assembled his late adventure with Red Hand.

"He must not utter one word about him," cried she, within herself. "It would not be generous—it would not be just to do so."

Yet, how was she to prevent her father from speaking of his acquaintance with the notorious bushranger, with whom she had all unconsciously suffered herself to become so strangely interested? She must invent some plan whereby she might gain a moment's conversation with her parent. She did not like to create a scene, by pretending to be seized with a sudden fit of faintness. Marguerite hated all sorts of mean manoeuvring, and disdained to act a false part for her own advantage alone. But on this occasion, she remembered, that it would be for one who united courage and charity with all his lawless doings, that she should dissemble for a short time.

It was one of the hottest evenings of the declining year. The large French windows, opening upon the beautifully-kept grounds, were stretched wide, in order to admit as much fresh air as possible. On Marguerite's plate there was a bunch of luscious grapes, rich

muscatel, purple, and full of cool, refreshing juice.

Just at the moment when the consul's lips were unclosing to relate his story, a woman's ploring shriek rang through the dining-room; and Marguerite, looking pale as a spectre, fell back in her chair.

The master of the house suddenly closed his mouth, and started from his seat. The guests likewise rose from their seats, and all was amazement and confusion.

Monsieur d'Auvergne was by his daughter's side, beseeching her to tell him what was the matter with her.

"A contipede, papa, had hidden itself in that bunch of grapes," she gasped, pointing to the fruit on her plate; "and I am afraid that it has stung my hand. Do not let any of the ladies disturb themselves; but pray take me away for a few moments, until I assure myself whether or not there is any cause for alarm—pray do, papa, or I shall die with absolute fright!"

Puffing with heat and terror, the consul waved his hand to the company, and, muttering some unintelligible sentences, led his daughter out of the room into another—the consul's study—whither they were not likely to be followed by any one.

"Papa," said Ma guerite, in a wholly altered tone,—papa, I am not injured in the least; I have only used a little rose—"

"A rose!" echoed the bewildered parent.

"Yes; I saw that you were about to speak of Red Hand, and I wished to prevent your doing so."

"I do not comprehend you, Marguerite."

"Papa, you must not say one word about Red Hand. In many ways it would be unwise and unsafe to do so."

"Umph! Well, I dare say you are right, Marguerite," agreed he. "I had not given the matter a serious thought when I was on the point of speaking; but now I perceive how unjust and cruel I should have been to have breathed one syllable concerning the man who acted so humanely and nobly towards me. Yet, observe, I should not have forgotten my pledge—I should not have forfeited my honor—by betraying the whereabouts of his dwelling-place. No, no; a d'Auvergne knows how to keep his word, even when that word has been given to a bushranger."

"Then you will be silent, papa—you will not utter his name again to-night?" she cried, earnestly.

"Indeed, I should have said little against the poor fellow!"

"No matter; our silence can do him no injury."

"That's true."

"You dear, good papa!" exclaimed Marguerite, throwing her arms about his neck, and kissing him. "Now go you back to our company, and explain to them that I am not hurt at all—that I have only been foolishly alarmed."

The worthy consul hesitated, or rather paused, to collect his troubled thoughts. He was not a very wise little gentleman, I am sorry to say, nor was he quick at understanding what people meant; but his kindness of heart covered all his little defects. He was a vain man, nevertheless, who highly prized his head of hair; but he would have given every inch of that hair rather than willingly injure any one. Marguerite knew all her father's weakness, and all his goodness as well, and she did not fear his ready and implicit observance of her wishes.

"Well, Marguerite," he said, "I must say that I should have made a most capital story of my late adventure—a far more romantic one than that related by our friend, Major O'Moore, who, between ourselves, quite spoiled the effect of his own narrative. Ah, he should have heard me rehearse such a tale! He has no descriptive talent whatever and failed entirely. I am so sorry that I cannot give them just a mere sketch—a bare outline of the affair—the tilting over of the carriage, for instance—my broken arm—the horse madly prancing on the verge of a black gully—the sudden and mysterious appearance of the handsome bushranger, armed to the teeth,—and so on, eh? I should extinguish the Major's story, regarding which I do not believe a single word. Those Irishmen can pull a long bow whenever they choose."

"To be sure, papa," agreed Marguerite. "I, like yourself, do not credit one syllable of the Major's relation."

Thus consoled, the Frenchman puffed his way back to the drawing-room, and, with a smiling face, assured all others that Mademoiselle d'Auvergne had needlessly alarmed herself all over one else.

And, by-and-by, Marguerite herself appeared in person; and, as tranquillity was once more restored to all, the lady of the mansion led the way to the drawing-room.

Marguerite said that she was exceedingly sorry that she had been so foolish as to alarm her friends; but that she would take care never again to allow silly nervousness to so far overcome her presence of mind.

While she was yet uttering her excuses, pretending to laugh at her own folly, Colonel Symure, who had followed the ladies, approached her.

"Pray, pardon me mademoiselle," he said; "but a most strange and uncontrollable instinct draws me towards you. Will you allow me to converse with you for a short time?"

At this request, made with the utmost gravity, Marguerite opened her eyes a little wider than usual, and, bowing, allowed the gentleman, who was almost a stranger to her, to take his seat by her side.

(To be continued.)