

TRUE TO HIS WORD.

A NOVEL.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE CAPTAIN AND HIS CAPTIVE.

Unless brigands are pursued they are not apt to be in a hurry, any more than other fine gentlemen who have time to spare and no mechanical profession; and the morning was far advanced before the camp on the hill top began to stir itself. This was a great advantage to Walter, who had fallen asleep at last under the warm rays of the sun. When he awoke he found Il Capitano Corrali sitting on the ground at his feet, with pens, ink and paper placed on the turf before him, and with quite a businesslike expression of countenance.

"I have a little matter to arrange with you, signor," said the captain affably; "it will only demand a scratch of your pen."

"What! before breakfast?" inquired Walter jocosely, for he had already discovered that it was well to fall in with brigand humor.

"As you please," replied the other.—"Boy!" He made some gesture signifying food, and the youthful brigand was beside them in an instant with a cabbage—apparently frost-bitten—some garlic and a sausage, black and of an intense hardness. There did not happen to be any bread in the encampment, and the coffee was represented by some melted snow, which had been found in a sort of natural ice house on the hill top. Walter's appetite was keen, and he wished to appear much at his ease and without apprehension. The captain watched the sausage disappear.

"You take matters easy, signor," said he softly; "doubtless you are pretty confident of soon returning to your friends."

"I have no friends to return to in this country, Captain Corrali," answered Walter frankly; "but as to my cheerfulness there is a proverb that a man with empty pockets is not cast down by falling among thieves."

"That may be so in England, signor," returned the captain; "but with us brigands it is different; when we cannot take a man's purse we take his life. Now, listen and be sure you do not tell me a lie. At what hotel are you staying in Palermo?"

"At no hotel; I cannot afford their charges. I have been residing for the last few weeks at Signor Baccari's, on the Marina."

"A very good house," remarked the captain.

"That is as people think."
"Oh! doubtless you are accustomed to much better lodgings in England, where they give large sums to artists for pictures."

"I am sorry to say you are mistaken, captain. It is possible that some day I may win a name and command good prices for my handiwork, but at present I am ill off enough; I have not even what every Englishman of property possesses when he comes abroad—a banker. You may find out that for yourself. All the available cash I have in the world is in a table drawer of my bedroom at Signor Baccari's. It is about eighty pounds—not five hundred ducats."

"Bah!" answered the captain incredulously. "You are down here"—he pointed to the paper—"for three thousand; and I seldom make a mistake in my valuations. This is the place for your signature."

"I cannot sign what I have not read," said Walter quietly.

An ugly look crossed the captain's face, a look that gave an insight into the nature of the man, between which and his prisoner had hitherto been kept up a screen of courtesy and good humor. "Do you know," he began, in a harsh voice, "that you are just the sort of person one sometimes burns?—Well, read it."

Walter took the paper, on which was written, in a sprawling hand, a few words of Sicilian, so ill spelled that he found it very difficult to discover in his pocket dictionary for what they were intended:

"I am in the hands of Corrali; he requires three thousand ducats for my ransom, which, if not sent within a few days, I shall be in danger. The sum must be paid in gold, and in such a manner as you shall be informed of. If my life is dear to you, hasten this."

"I have no objection to sign the paper," observed Walter calmly; "but I give you my word that I have not this money, nor any means of procuring it."

The captain smiled incredulously as he put the pen in his hand, and Walter wrote his signature in the place indicated.

"You told me you had no friends among your fellow-countrymen here, signor; had you not better reconsider that statement? Do not lie to me twice; it is sometimes for the second lie that I shoot a man."

"I am not in the habit of lying, Captain Corrali," answered Walter firmly. "I

told you I had no friends 'to return to,' and that is true. There are four English persons in Sicily with whom I am acquainted; but, as it happens, they are not even aware of my having left London. You can verify this for yourself if you have a mind, for two of them are, I believe, in your custody. When I was taken up by your carriage on the road yonder I told you as-much."

"I thought you might have forgotten it," said the other. "It is not every one who has so good a memory about trifles. It is unfortunate that half your acquaintances should be in the same boat as yourself. Now for the other half. Who are they?"

"I am acquainted with Sir Reginald Selwyn and his wife, who are at present stopping at the Hotel de France, on the Marina, but who go to day by the steamer to Messina."

"Not they," said the captain smiling. "However, this looks like truth. I should have been sorry to have had to kill a lad like you. It was touch-and-go though, let me tell you, for my temper is but short and I was getting angry. Well, then, instead of addressing this little note to your landlord, it will go to Sir Reginald Selwyn; he is rich, and will never let a fellow-countryman be put under ground before his time, for the sake of three thousand ducats."

"Captain Corrali," cried Walter earnestly, as the brigand stooped down to write, "I adjure you not to do that. This gentleman, although he is acquainted with me, is not my friend; nay, worse, he is my enemy. I would rather die—if death must be the alternative—than make appeal to such a man."

"How droll!" exclaimed the brigand, finishing the address. "You would rather be shot than ask a favor, would you? Well, I have nothing to do with these fine feelings, you see, though at the same time I admire them. This English milord will perhaps pay for you, in order to put you under a humiliating obligation. I am sorry, but I have only to look to my own interests and that of my comrades."

"He will not pay one ducat for me," said Walter confidently.

"Then I shall be still more sorry for myself, and also for you. This is no child's play, signor, that I am proposing," added he. "I will have your gold or your blood, I mean it. This letter will reach Palermo before sunset; and if within ten days"—

"Look yonder, captain; the soldiers!" It was the sentinel who spoke, and at the same time handed his field glass to Corrali.

The high road on which Walter had been captured on the previous night could be seen winding like a narrow ribbon at their feet, though at a great distance; in one part of it could now be seen, like ants upon the march, certain small dark masses moving. The next instant Walter was thrown to the ground.

"Do not stir or you are a dead man," whispered a stern voice, that of his guard Colletta, in his ear. All the other tenants of the encampment had prostrated themselves; those who were near the edge of the hill were talking rapidly to their companions, probably giving them notice of what was passing; but they spoke in some sort of argot, which for Walter had no meaning. No one seemed alarmed, but every one transported with fury. Even Santoro—the mildest of the gang—looked towards his captive menacingly.

"If your Englishman has done this, sir," cried Corrali, white with passion and pointing to the troops, "you are right, indeed, to deem him your enemy; for if harm should come of it, he has signed your death warrant and that of others also. I have never yet shot a woman, but there is no knowing to what one may not be forced."

Walter knew that this wretch was referring to Lillian. Was it possible that Heaven could permit such a deed? But, alas! were there not martyrdoms in the world now as of old; tyrannies, oppressions of the gentle by the strong; sufferings of the innocent, inexplicable to the believers in dominant good!

"If your gentleman moves, Santoro," observed the captain, to whom such indications of passion were probably not unfamiliar, "shoot him."

These ebullitions of bad feeling on the part of the brigands manifested themselves, for the most part, within a very short space of time, and lasted only so long as the cause of them—namely, the soldiers—remained visible. As these latter pursued their eastward march and disappeared along the road, the general excitement became allayed. The troops were obviously not in sufficient force to surround the mountain (even if they had known the position of their enemies) and to cut off the band from their supplies, and this was the only danger the brigands really dreaded. Those who

were not on guard proceeded with their morning meal or, having finished it, began to gamble. What the game was Walter could not quite determine; it seemed a sort of "odd and even" of the simplest kind, but the stakes were considerable—indeed, there was nothing played for under gold coin—and the voices and temper of the players were at least as high as their stakes. Corrali alone—though, as he afterwards showed himself, a most desperate gambler—took no part in their amusements. He was for ever turning his field glass in the direction which the troops had taken, although it was scarcely possible, by reason of the configuration of the country, that they should again come into view. Walter acquired him of any apprehensions upon his own account, and rightly concluded that his anxiety was excited for the safety of the other portion of the band, in whose custody were his more valuable prisoners. Impeded by Lillian's company, it was probable, notwithstanding some hours of "start," that they had not attained a position so safe and advantageous as the camp upon the hill, which, indeed, had not been reached without great toil and trouble.

Presently, after long and apparently deep cogitation, the captain shut his glass and joined the throng of revellers. His brown face, if no longer smiling, had at least lost its scowl, and the voice that could be so short and fierce was once more courteous in its tone as he addressed his prisoner: "You know this English milord and his daughter, it seems?" he said.

"I am acquainted with them, although, as I told you, they are not even aware of my presence in this country."

"You must have a deep regard for them, however, to run twelve miles of road, in order as you foolishly imagined) to bring them succour by calling out the troops."

"I have a deep regard for them, Captain Corrali."

"Which involves your knowing their private circumstances," observed the captain quickly.

"Not so. I know, of course, that Mr. Brown—he is no milord at all, but a plain merchant—is a wealthy man; but as to the actual extent of his means I can say nothing."

"Or will not, eh?" replied the other incredulously. "You are an obstinate lad; but I have known others equally determined whose mouths I have found means to open."

"I am quite aware I am in your power," said Walter calmly; "but I can only tell what I know."

After a long pause: "What is a ship such as the Sylphide worth?" asked Corrali abruptly.

"I am a landsman and can give you no information on that head for certain," replied Walter. "Perhaps twelve thousand ducats."

"The income of a man who keeps such a vessel for his amusement must therefore be very large—ten times that sum at least."

"It is very unlikely. There are not many men, even in England, who possess such a fortune as that."

"If a man gives that sum for a pleasure boat, what would he give, think you, for a ransom for his daughter?" asked Corrali.

"He would give all he had to spare, no doubt, so long as she was alive; but if you kill her—it is no matter whether by accident or design; so delicate a creature might perish of one night's exposure to the cold"—A shadow flitted across Corrali's face; and Walter felt that the arrow he had aimed at a venture had gone home.

"I say, if she died upon your hands, it would raise every man's hand against you, mine for one—yes, I say, in that case you had better kill me also, Captain Corrali, for should any evil happen to her I would never rest till I had avenged it."

"Let us confine ourselves to business, Signor Litton," answered the captain. "Emotions are out of place here; and as for the luxury of revenge that is not for captives, but for him who holds them at his mercy. We were speaking of Milord Brown and the ransom."

"Yes; I was about to say that if his daughter's health should give way, by reason of this rough mode of life, you would miss your mark, besides raising the whole country against you. Existence would not be worth purchasing to the old man if you once deprived him of his child."

"You think it would be killing the goose with the golden egg, do you?" said Corrali. "Perhaps you are right. It is better to look at these matters from all sides. I suppose this young lady, being so rich, has had a first-rate education; knows foreign languages—Italian, for example?"

"I believe so. She told me on one occasion that she had studied it."

"And her father?" This question was put with an indifferent air, but Walter noticed that the captain's eyes here regarded him with particular intensity.

"I should think Mr. Brown knew little of Italian—much less of Sicilian. Indeed, I may positively state that he is unacquainted with any tongue beside his own." The captain frowned and looked per-

plexed. "Corbara!" cried he, after a minute's thought, and beckoned to the man who acted as his lieutenant. This was a stunted fellow, with a bull neck and arms as long as those of an ape. He had been unlucky at his "odd and even," and, as he rose to his feet, cast a look at Walter, as though he would like to make his prisoner's life pay for his own ill fortune. The captain and this worthy conferred for several minutes in low tones, the former pointing once or twice to eastward, in the direction of the sea, and then Corrali, taking his gun from the place where the arms were stacked, went down the hill alone. Whither he was gone or on what errand, Walter, of course, could only guess, but he felt pretty certain that his departure was connected with Lillian and her father. The questioning to which he had just been subjected gave him extreme anxiety, for why should the captain have inquired as to Lillian's knowledge of Italian (since he had certainly been in her company), unless she were too ill to speak? Would he have been so moved too by Walter's hint at the delicacy of her constitution unless she had already shown some signs of its giving way? As to his inquiries about the old merchant, it was probable that Corrali had suspected him of pretending ignorance of the language, in order to avoid debate upon his ransom. Was it not likely that he (Walter) should be employed as an interpreter between the brigands and his captives? Even in the evil case in which he stood, he felt his heart beat high at the thought of his seeing these companions in misfortune.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BRIGAND DISCIPLINE.

Within one hour of Corrali's departure Walter Litton had his sketch book out, and was pencilling the picturesque surroundings of his prison, not without some sense of pleasure in the employment. Curiously enough, the brigands had robbed him of nothing, but only convinced themselves that he carried no weapons of offence. He knew that this forbearance was not usual with them; that in ordinary cases his watch and chain would have at once been added to the profuse adornments of his captors' persons, and that this had not been done gave him additional disquiet, for it showed that Corrali & Co. were bent upon some great coup, in which all minor considerations were merged as of no account. That this project could not be connected with himself alone was certain; for even if the amount which the chief had set his ransom at could be forthcoming, it was but a small sum, as Santoro went; and indeed that would have been only another reason why they would have taken all they could. He had an idea too that, considering their slender expectations from his capture, he had been treated with unusual tenderness and consideration. However, now that he was at work with his pencil, all these reflections were in abeyance; he was only thinking what a fine model Colletta would have made in Beech street, where he could not have shifted his position three times a minute, as he was now doing, as he watched the gamblers.

He was a magnificent fellow, with a long pointed beard, and except for an expression of interest now lighting up his soft black eyes as the gold tinkled, might have been elder brother to Francisco. He was by far the tallest of the band, and probably, except Corbara, the most physically powerful.

"It is wonderful!" said a musical voice beside him; "I have seen nothing like it since I beheld the altar piece at Termini."

The speaker was Santoro, who, peering over his shoulder, was regarding his little sketch with a look of intense admiration.

"It would be better worth your attention if your friend would stand still," said Walter smiling. "Why does he not join the game, like the others?"

"We are forbidden—he and I—to do so."

"Oh, I see! for fear I should give you the slip."

"Yes, signor; you see (this apologetically) one is obliged to obey orders. Would it be asking too much, when you have done with Colletta, if you would do a picture of me?"

"By all means," answered Walter good naturedly. "Never mind Colletta; if you will stand quiet, or, better still, sit down, I will do it at once."

"I must trouble the signor to sit down also," replied the other hesitatingly. "You see, one is obliged"—

His sense of duty, struggling with the desire to conciliate, was most amusing to behold; nor did it escape Walter's quick eye that, in taking up his position, the brigand took care to present his face in profile, so that the scar which disfigured one half of it was scarcely to be discerned.

"This portrait is for your lady love, I presume?" said Walter.

"Yes, signor; for Lavocca," answered the other, in grave low tones, and with an uneasy glance over his shoulder at his companions.

"And who is Lavocca?" asked Walter, not so much from curiosity as to secure a good sitting; he had now guessed the case, son of Santoro's exceptional reserve and si-

lence—for when they were not absolutely menaced with danger the brigands, as a rule, were as noisy as boys just let loose from school; this gentleman was consumed by the tender passion.

"Lavocca is the attendant of Joanna, signor, and her dearest friend."

"And who— Hold your head a little less stiffly, my good fellow." Walter felt a kindness for this poor sufferer, charged with the task of shooting him if he ran a yard, who had tender hopes of his own, with perhaps as slender chances of their fulfilment as himself. "And who is Joanna?"

The question was evidently as extraordinary to Santoro as though some benighted being, on hearing mention of the Pope, had inquired: "And who is the Pope?"

"Joanna—surely the signor must have heard—is the captain's sister; the handsomest woman I ever saw, save one; but"—Here he threw his hands up instead of finishing the sentence.

"Ah, with a devil of a temper, I suppose?" said Walter. "Some handsome women are troubled in that way."

His tone was careless, but in reality he had become greatly interested; for, from what Francisco had told him about this woman, it was probable that Lillian herself might at this moment be in her custody.

"Temper, yes. Why, the captain himself is at times afraid of her. How Lavocca can put up with it astonishes me, but she says her mistress has a good heart; indeed, she is both kind and generous, and there is no doubt that she has been cruelly tried. When one is young, and things go hard with one, that makes the blood run wrong for the rest of one's life, you see."

"It is too likely, Santoro. But would you mind telling me her story?"

"Lavocca's story, signor?" inquired the other with simplicity and a blush upon his dishonest cheek.

"No, no; I wish to hear about Joanna and this captain of yours, of whom everybody knows the history, it seems, but myself."

"Well, the captain—though you would never imagine it from his grand airs—was at one time but a poor farm servant. Much intercourse with gentlemen such as yourself, who have been his guests from time to time, as well as his own high position, have made him what he is; but at nineteen he was just a farmer's boy, such as one may meet any day in the fields down yonder, except that he had a noble soul."

"That is a fine thing to have," observed Walter.

"True, signor; it makes one independent of everything; a man who possesses it is a king, and knows himself equal to kings. Whereupon it came about that Rocco Corrali fell in love with his master's daughter. He was not to blame for that, you will allow; if he had been of the same rank, nobody would have blamed him; but as it was, complexities arose. The brothers of the girl beat him, and left him for dead."

(To be Continued.)

A SERIOUS AND FATAL FIRE.

A few days ago some of our daily papers gave a brief account of "a house badly gutted by fire and one life lost." The writer, anxious to obtain particulars, visited one of the boarders who narrowly escaped death, and from him gleaned the following:

"Fred was one of the boarders, and slept on the same flat with me. He was awakened as soon as I was, but seemed to have lost time in dressing and in trying to save his effects. I urged him strongly to seek refuge and leave all behind, as the fire was fast gaining on us, and the smoke was very dense. My warnings and entreaties were of no avail, and I was obliged to save my own life."

The writer, moralizing seriously, came to the conclusion that this brief story might prove a warning to thousands to-day who are in positions of danger and peril.

That there are thousands in our land to-day who are placed in positions as perilous as was the victim of the fire referred to, cannot be denied. The treacherous and deadly foe of disease has already been kindled in the bodies of many Canadians, in the form of overworked and tired out brain, unstrung nerves, a used up feeling, sleeplessness and headaches. Allow these symptoms to run on unchecked, and the fierce, sharp flames of morbidness, paresis and insanity will soon follow, which will almost surely put an end to life.

For all sufferers, shut off from the joys and pleasures of true life by these dreaded ailments, there is only one avenue of escape—one life preserver for all; it is Paine's Celery Compound. By its timely use life is saved, and the victim of disease and suffering placed on solid ground, to go on building up a new and vigorous constitution and a healthy appetite.

Paine's Celery Compound restores and strengthens the whole brain and nerve system, which is the great substructure of a healthy body. Try it, sufferers, and you will have cause to bless its great discoverer.

What time is it when the clock strikes 13? Time to have it repaired.