

## THE BULLFROG.

and I shall be Count Spezzato to-morrow. How do you like my scheme, little fox? Is it not worthy of your pupil? Oh, it will be a beautiful accident; it will fill the papers. That beast of an English who begged his place in the train will be fortunate; he will cease, for goods trains are heavy. Eh! but it's a grand scheme—the son, the mother, the servant, the stranger, the engine-driver, all shall tell to tales.

'And the stoker?' said the courier.

'Oh, you and he and I shall escape. We shall be pointed at in the street as the fortunate. It is good, is it not, little fox? I have to do him that the Count is the man who betrayed his sister. He believes it, and is my creature. But, little fox, it was not my cousin, it was myself, that took his Beatrix from her home. Is it not good, Alexis? Is it not genius? And Atkinson—he, the driver—is now stupid; he has drunk from his can the poppy juice that will make him sleep for ever. I will be a politician. I am worthy of office. I will become the Minister of a Bourbon Isles. I am Count, my dear fox, and you shall be my comrade again, as of old.'

I was, for a time, lost to every sensation save that of hearing. The fiendish garrulity of the man had all the fascination of the serpent's rattle. I felt helplessly resigned to a certain fate.

I was aroused by something white slowly passing the closed windows of the carriage. I waited a little, then gently opened it and looked out. The stoker was crouching along the foot-board of the next carriage, holding on by his handles, so as not to be seen by the occupants, and holding the signal lantern that I had noticed at the back of the last carriage in his hand. The meaning of it struck me in a moment; if, by any chance, we missed the goods train from Sienna, we should be run into from behind by the train from Florence.

The cold air that blew in at the open window refreshed me, and I could think what was to be done. The train was increasing its pace rapidly. Evidently the stoker, in sole charge, was striving to reach Empoli before the other train, which we should follow, was due; he had to make five minutes in a journey of forty-five, and, at the rate we were going, we should do it. We stopped nowhere, and the journey was more than half over. We were now between Segna and Montelupo; another twenty minutes and I should be a bruised corpse. Something must be done.

I decided soon. Unfastening my bag, I took out my revolver, without which I never travel, and looking carefully to the loading and cupping, fastened it to my waist with a handkerchief. I then cut with my knife the bar across the middle of the window, and carefully looked out. I could see nothing; the rain was falling fast, and the night as dark as ever. I cautiously put out first one leg and then the other, keeping my knees and toes close to the door, and lowered myself till I felt the step. I walked carefully along the foot-board by side steps, holding on to the handles of the doors, till I came to the end of the carriages, and was next the tender. Here was a gulf that seemed impassable. The stoker must have passed over it; why not I? Mounting from the foot-board on to the buffer, and holding on to the iron hook on which the lamps are hung, I stretched my legs to reach the flat part of the buffer on the tender. My legs swung about with the vibration, and touched nothing. I had to hold with both hands behind my back, and stood on the ease of the buffers-spring, and, suddenly leaving go, leaped forward, struck violently against the edge of the tender, and grasped some of the loose lamps of coal on the top. Another struggle brought me on my knees, bruised and bleeding on the top. I stood up, and at that moment the stoker opened the door of the furnace, and turned towards me, slave in hand, to put in the coals. I felt the bright red light from the fire enabled him to see me, while it blinded me. He rushed at me, and then began a struggle that I shall remember to my dying day. He grasped me round the throat with one arm, dragging me close to his breast, and with the other kept shortening the shovel for an effective blow. My hands, numbed and bruised, were almost useless to me, and for some seconds we rolled to and fro on the foot-plate in the blinding glare. At last he got me against the front of the engine, and, with horrible intensity, pressed me against it till the lower part of my clothes were burnt to ainder. The heat, however, restored my hands, and at last I managed to push him far enough from my body to loosen the pistol. I did not want to kill him, but I could not be very careful, and I fired at his shoulder from the back. He dropped the shovel, the arm that had nearly throttled me relaxed, and he fell. I pushed him into a corner of the tender, and sat down to recover myself.

My object was to get to Empoli before the Sienna goods train, for I knew nothing of what might be behind me. It was too late to stop, but I might, by shortening the journey seven minutes instead of five, get to Empoli three minutes before the goods train was due.

I had never been on an engine before in my life, but I knew that there must be a valve somewhere that let the steam from the boiler into the cylinders, and that, being important, it would be in a conspicuous position. I therefore turned the large handle in front of me, and had the satisfaction of finding the speed rapidly increased, and at the same time felt the guard putting on the brake to retard the train. spite of this, in ten minutes I could see some dim lights; I could not tell where, and I still passed on, faster and faster.

In vain, between the intervals of putting on coals, did I try to arouse the sleeping driver. There I was, with two apparently dead bodies on the foot-plate of an engine, going at the rate of forty miles an hour, or more, amidst a thundering noise and vibration that nearly maddened me.

At last we reached the lights, and I saw, as I dashed by, that we had passed the dread point.

As I turned back, I could see the rapidly-dropping cinders from the train which, had the guard's brake been sufficiently powerful to have made me thirty seconds later, would have utterly destroyed me.

I was still in a difficult position. There was the train half a minute behind us, which, had we kept our time, would have been four minutes in front of us. It came on to the same rails, and I could hear its dull rumble rushing on towards us, fast. If I stopped there was no light to

warn them. I must go on, for the Sienna train did not stop at Empoli.

I put on more fuel, and after some slight scalding, from turning on the wrong taps, had the pleasure of seeing the water-grauge filling up. Still I could not go on long; the risk was awful. I tried in vain to write on a leaf of my note-book, and after searching in the tool-box, wrote on the iron lid of the tank with a piece of chalk, 'Stop everything behind me. The train will not be stopped till three lights are ranged in a line on the ground. Telegraph forwards.' And then, as we flew through the Empoli Station, I threw it on the platform. On we went; the same dull thunder behind warning me that I dare not stop.

We passed through another station at full speed, and at length I saw the white lights of another station in the distance. The sound behind had almost ceased, and in a few moments more I saw the line of three red lamps low down on the ground. I pulled back the handle, and after an ineffectual effort to pull up at the station, brought up the train about a hundred yards beyond Pontedera.

The porters and police of the station came up and put the train back, and then came the explanation.

The guard had been found dead on the rails, just beyond Empoli, and the telegraph set to work to stop the train. He must have found out the failure of his scheme, and in trying to reach the engine, have fallen on the rails.

The driver was only stupefied, and the stoker fortunately only dangerously, not fatally, wounded.

Another driver was found, and the train was to go on.

The Count listened most attentively to my statements, and then, taking my grimed hand in his, led me to his mother.

'Madam, my mother, you have from this day one other son; this, my mother, is my brother.'

The Countess literally fell on my neck, and kissed me in sight of them all; and speaking in Italian, said—

'Julian, he is my son; he has saved my life; and more, he has saved your life. My son, I will not say much; what is your name?'

'Guy Westwood.'

'Guy, my child, my son, I am your mother; you shall love me.'

'Yes, my mother; he is my brother. I am his. He is English, too; I like English. He has done well. Blanche still is his sister.'

During the whole of this time both mother and son were embracing me and kissing my cheeks, after the impulsive manner of our passionate natures, the indulgence of which appears so strange to our cold blood.

The train was delayed, for my wounds and bruises to be dressed, and I then entered their carriage and went to Leghorn with them.

Arrived there, I was about to say 'Farewell.'

'What is farewell, now? No; you must see Blanche, your sister. You will sleep to my hotel; I shall not let you go. Who is she that in your great book says, "Where you go, I will go?" That is my spirit. You must not leave me till—till you are as happy as I am.'

He kept me, introduced me to Blanche, and persuaded me to write for leave to stay another two months, when he would return to England with me. Little by little he made me talk about Alice, till he knew all my story.

'Ah! that is it; you shall not be unhappy because you want £500 every year, and I have so much as that. I am a patriot to get rid of my money. So it is that you will not take money. You have saved my life, and you will not take money; but I shall make you take money, my friend, English Guy; you shall have as thus.' And he handed me my appointment as secretary to one of the largest railways in Italy. 'Now you shall take money; now you will not go to your England to work like a slave; you shall take the money. That is not all: I am one of the practice patriots—no, the practical patriots—of Italy. They come to me with their conspiracies to join their societies to adhere to, but I do not. I am director of ever so many railways; I make fresh directions every day. I say to those who talk to me of politics, "How many shares will you take in this or in that?" I am printer of books; I am builder of museums; I have great share in docks, and I say to these, "It is this that I am doing that is wanted." This is not conspiracy; it is not plot; it is not society with ribbons; but it is what Italy, my country, wants. I grew poor; Italy grows rich. I am not wise in these things; they cheat me, because I am enthusiastic. Now, Guy, my brother, you are wise; you are deep; long in the head; in short, you are English! You shall be my guardian in these things—you shall save me from the cheat, and you shall work hard as you like for all the money you shall take of me. Come, my Guy, is it so?'

Need I say that it was so? The Count and his Blanche made their honeymoon tour in England. They spent Christmas Day with Alice and myself at Mr. Morton's, and when they left, Alice and I left with them, for our new home in Florence.

The BULLFROG is published on Saturday at one o'clock, P. M., by T. CHAMBERLAIN, 176 Argyle Street.