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THE AMERICAN BARON.

(BY JAMES DE MILLE.)

(Continued.)

Her impression was correct, and the speaker was Girasole. He had heard the sibilant sounds of the whispering, and, knowing that Minnie could not speak Italian, it had struck him as being a very singular thing that she should be whispering.

Hallo, you woman there! didn't I tell you not to let the ladies speak to one another?

Of course no answer was given, so Girasole grew more angry still, and cried out again more imperatively.

Why do you not answer me? Where are you? Is this the way you watch?

Still there was no answer. Ethel heard, and by this time knew what his suspicion was; but she could neither do nor say anything.

Come down here at once you hag! But the "hag" did not come down, nor did she give any answer.

Girasole now came to the top of the stairs, and spoke to Minnie.

Charming mees, are you awake? Yes, said Minnie.

Ees your sistaire wit you. No. How can she be with me, I should like to know, when you've gone and put her in some horrid old room?

Ah! not wit you? Who are you whisperin' to, den? Minnie hesitated.

Toes de maid, said she. Does my maid speak Ingles? asked Girasole.

Yes, said Minnie. Ah! I did not know eet. I mus have a look at de contadina who spiks Inglik. Come here Italian. You don't spik Italiano, I tink. Come here.

Ethel rose to her feet. Girasole ran down, and came back after a few minutes with a lamp. Concealment was useless, and so Ethel did not cover her face with the hood.

What did you come for? he asked. For her, said Ethel making a gesture toward Minnie.

What could you do wit her? I could see her and comfort her. Ah! an' you hope to make her escape. Ha, ha! ver well. You mus not complain eef you haf to souffrir de consequence.

It don't pain you, said Minnie—it don't pain you at all. You're always teasing me. You never do what I want you to. You wouldn't even give me a chair.

Alas, carissima mia, to morra you shall haf all! But dis place is so remote. It is not remote, said Minnie. It's close by roads and villages and things.

Why, here is Ethel; she has been in a village where there are houses, and people, and as many chairs as s'wants.

Oh, mees, eef you will but wait an' be patient—eef you will but wait an' see how tender I will be, an' how I lof you.

You don't love me, said Minnie, one bit. Is this love—not to give me a chair? I have been standing up till I'm nearly ready to drop.

Let ees because she deceif me—she come wit a plot—she steal in here Eet she had wait, all would be well.

You musn't dare to touch her, said Minnie, vehemently. You shall leav' here. She shall stay with me.

I am ver pain—on, very; but oh, my angel—sweet—charming mees—eet eedangaire to my lof. She plot to take you away. An' all my life is in you. Tink I haf to do to gain you!

Minnie looked upon Girasole, with her large eyes dilated with excitement and resentment.

You are a horrid, horrid man, she exclaimed. I hate you. Oh, my angel, pleaded Girasole, will leep agitation, take back dat word.

I'm sorry you ever saved my life, said Minnie, very calmly; and I'm sorry I ever saw you. I hate you.

Ah, you gif me torment. You do not mean dis. You say once you lof me. I did not say I loved you. It was you who said you loved me, I never liked you.

And I don't really see how I could be engaged to you when I was engaged to another man before. He is the only one whom I recognize now. I don't know you at all. For I couldn't be bonnd to two men; could I, Ethel dear?

Ethel did not reply to this strange question. But upon Girasole its effect was very great. The manner of Minnie had been excessively perplexing to him all through this eventful day.

He went up softly, and the whispering still went on. He therefore concluded that the "Italian woman" was not doing her duty, and that Mrs. Willoughby had joined her sister.

This he would not allow; but as he had already been sufficiently harsh he did not wish to be more so, and therefore he called to the "Italian woman."

Hallo, you woman there! didn't I tell you not to let the ladies speak to one another?

Of course no answer was given, so Girasole grew more angry still, and cried out again more imperatively.

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against the coffin, sending a cold chill of horror through every nerve. Already enough earth had been thrown to cover three-quarters of the lid, and at the foot it was heaped up some distance.

And now, in the midst of this, the attention of all was attracted by a loud stern voice, which sounded from some one near. The priest looked around. The men stopped shoveling, and turned to see the cause of the noise.

Girasole was seen approaching, and was already near enough to be distinguished. Behind him followed a female figure. At this sight the priest's mind misgave him.

Girasole came up, and now the priest saw that the female was no other than Ethel.

Where is this priest? asked Girasole, angrily speaking of course, in Italian. The priest advanced.

I am here, said he with quiet dignity. At this change in the state of affairs the priest regained his presence of mind.

The cessation in the work gave him relief, and enabled him to recall his scattered and confused thoughts. The men stood looking at the speakers, and listening, leaning on their shovels.

You were sent for? Yes. And a maid? Yes.

You brought this lady? Yes. You put her in disguise; you pass'd her off as an Italian? Yes.

The priest made no attempt at denial or equivocation. He knew that this would be useless. He waited for an opportunity to excuse himself, and to explain rather than to deny.

But every answer of his only served to increase the fury of Girasole, who seemed determined to visit upon the head of the priest and Ethel the rage that he felt at his last interview with Minnie.

Then why, cried Girasole, did you try to trick us? Don't you know the punishment we give to spies and traitors?

I have nothing to do with spies and traitors. You are one yourself. I am not.

You lie! I do not, said the priest, mildly. Hear me and let me tell my story, and you will see that I am not a traitor; or, if you don't wish to listen, then question me.

There is but one question. What made you bring this lady? That is simply answered, said the priest, with unflinching calmness.

This lady and her friends arrived at my village and claimed hospitality. They were in distress. Some of their friends had been taken from them. A message came from you requesting my presence, and also a lady's maid. There was no stipulation about the kind of one. This lady was the intimate friend of the captive, and entreated me to take her, so that she should see her friend and comfort her, and share her captivity. I saw no harm in the wish. She proposed to become a lady's-maid. I saw no harm in that.

Why did she disguise herself? So as to pass without trouble. She didn't want to be delayed. She wanted to see her friends as soon possible. If you had questioned her, you would no doubt have let her pass.

I would, no doubt, have done nothing of the kind. I don't see any objection, said the priest.

Objection? She is a spy! A spy? Of what pray? She came to help her friend to escape. To escape? How could she possibly help her escape? Do you think it so easy to escape from this place?

Girasole was silent. Do you think a young lady who has never been out of the care of her friends before, could do much to assist a friend like herself in an escape? She might.

But how! This is not the street of a city. That house is watched, I think. There seem to be a few men in these woods if I am not mistaken. Could this young lady help her friend to elude all these guards? Why you know very well that these guards?

Yes; but then there is—Who? Yourself. Myself? Yes. What of me? What do I know about your designs? What designs could I have? Do you think I could plan escape? Why not?

Why not? What! living here close beside you? I be a traitor? I with my life at your mercy at all times—with my throat within such easy reach of any assassin who might choose to revenge my treachery?

We are not assassins, said Girasole angrily. And I am not a traitor, rejoined the priest mildly.

Girasole was silent and stood in thought. The men at the grave had heard every word of this conversation. Once they laughed in scorn when the priest alluded to the absurdity of a young girl escaping. It was too ridiculous. Their sympathies were evidently with the priest. The charge against him could not be maintained.

Well, said Girasole at length, I don't trust you. You may be traitors after all. I will have you guarded, and if I find out anything that looks like treason, by Heaven I will have your life, old man, even if you should be the Holy Father himself; and as to the lady—well I will find plenty of ways, he added with a sneer, of inflicting on her a punishment commensurate with her crime. Here, you men come along with me, he addressed looking at the men by the grave.

But we want to finish poor Antonio's grave, remonstrated one of the men. Bah! he'll keep, said Girasole, with a sneer. Can't one of us stay? asked the man.

No, not one, I want you all. If they are traitors, they are deep ones. They must be guarded; and, mind you, if they escape, you shall suffer.

With these words he led the way, and the priest and Ethel followed him. After these came the men, who had thrown down their shovels beside the grave. They all walked on in silence, following Girasole, who led the way to a place beyond the grave, and within view of one of the fires formerly alluded to. The place was about half-way between the grave and the fire. It was a little knoll bare of trees and from it they could be seen by those at the nearest fire. Here Girasole paused, and, with some final words of warning to the guards, he turned and took his departure.

The priest sat down upon the grass, and urged Ethel to do the same. She followed his advice, and sat down by his side. The guards sat around them so as to encircle them, and, mindful of Girasole's charge, they kept their faces turned toward them, so as to prevent even the very thought of flight. The priest addressed a few mild parental words to the men who gave him very civil responses, but relaxed not a particle of their vigilance.

In the priest's mind there was still some anxiety but much greater hope than he had dared to have for some time. He remembered that the coffin was not all covered over, and hoped that the inmate might be able to breathe. The fact that the work had been so unexpectedly interrupted was one which filled him with joy, and gave rise to the best hopes. The only offset to all this was his own captivity, but that was a very serious one. Besides he knew that his life hung upon a thread.

Before the next day Girasole would certainly discover all, and in that case he was a doomed man. But his nature was of a kind that could not borrow trouble, and so the fact of the immediate safety of Hawbury was of far more importance, and attracted far more of his thoughts than his own certain but remote danger.

As for Ethel, she was now a prey to the deepest anxiety. All was discovered except the mere fact of Hawbury's removal, and how long that would remain concealed she could not know. Every moment she expected to hear the cry of those who might discover the exchange.

And Hawbury, so long lost so lately found—Hawbury whom she had suspected of falsity so long and so long avoided who now had proved himself so constant and so true—what was his fate? She had gazed with eyes of horror at that grave where he lay, and had seen the men shoveling in the earth as she came up. The recollection of this filled her with anguish. Had they buried him?—how deep was the earth that lay over him?—could there indeed, be any hope?

All depended on the priest. She hoped that he had prevented things from going too far. She had seen him watching the grave, and motionless. What did that inactivity mean? Was it a sign that Hawbury was safe, or was it merely because he could not do anything?

She was distracted by such fearful thoughts as these. Her heart once more throbbled with those painful pulsations which she felt when approaching Hawbury. For some time she sat supporting her agony as best she could, and not daring to ask the priest, for fear their guards might suspect the truth, or perhaps understand her words.

But at last she could bear it no longer. She touched the priest's arm as he sat beside her, without looking at him. The priest returned the touch.

Is he safe? she asked in a tremulous voice, which was scarcely audible from grief and anxiety. He is, said the priest.

And then looking at the man before him, he added immediately in an unconcerned tone.

She wants to know what time it is, and I told her two o'clock. That's right isn't it? About right, said the man.

Now that was a lie, but whether it was justifiable or not my be left to others to decide.

As for Ethel, an immense load of anxiety was lifted off her mind, and she began to breathe more freely.

CHAPTER XXXIII. THE DEMON WIFE.

When Darcas was overpowered by his assailants no mercy was shown him. His hands were bound tight behind him, and kicks and blows were liberally bestowed during the operation. Finally, he was pushed and dragged into the house, and upstairs to the room already mentioned. There he was still further secured by a tight rope around his ankles after which he was left to his own meditations.

Gloomy and bitter and fierce indeed, were those meditations. His body was covered with bruises and though no bones were broken, yet his pain was great. In addition to this the cords around his wrists and ankles were very tight, and his veins seemed swollen to bursting. It was difficult to get an easy position, and he could only lie on his side or on his face. These bodily pains only intensified the fierceness of his thoughts and made them turn more vindictively than ever on the subject of his wife.

See was the cause of all this, he thought she had sacrificed every thing to her love for her accursed paramour. For this she had betrayed him, and her friends, and the innocent girl who was her companion. All the malignant feelings which had filled his soul through the day now swelled within him, till he was well nigh mad. Most intolerable of all was his position now—the baffled enemy. He had come as the avenger, he had come as the destroyer; but he had been entrapped before he had struck his blow, and here he was now lying, defeated, degraded, and humiliated! No doubt he would be kept to afford sport to his enemy—perhaps even his wife might come to gloat over his sufferings, and feast her soul with the sight of his ruin. Over such thoughts as these he brooded, until finally he had wrought himself into something like frenzy; and with the pain that he felt, and the weariness that followed the fatigues of that day, these thoughts might finally have brought on madness, had they gone on without anything to disturb them.

To be continued.

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