

The Adopted Daughter.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE BRIGADS.

We must now turn our attention to the fortunes of Sir John.

As Greys, Sir John's valet, had stated, on his return to Courtney Hill, the baronet journey to Salerno had been performed without incident.

On the morning subsequent to his arrival at that place, however, a simple-looking peasant had called upon him with a note, without signature, which stated that the bearer would conduct him to a rendezvous with the brigand chief. The note concluded by warning him to beware of treachery, as such a contingency would be provided for. It also promised that if he came in good faith, Sir John's person should be respected and his safety guaranteed.

Under these circumstances the baronet determined to go in person to his brother's rescue.

He removed from his person his watch and other valuables, retaining only a purse not very well filled. His papers and money he secured on the person of his faithful valet, and with him and the guide then set out for the place appointed.

"I'm afraid you ought to have stayed at the inn, Sir John, and let me go on alone," said Greys, anxiously, as they rode along. "Had you not better go back now?"

"Hush, Greys. Don't call me by my title," returned the baronet. "I wish to appear as my own agent, you know. I do not desire to give them any inducements to capture me."

The valet gave a quick glance toward the guide, and answered:

"But that simple-looking peasant—doesn't understand English, I am sure, sir."

"I dare say not, but he may be acquainted with English titles for all that. Simple as he looks, though, Greys, he is one of the brigands, or I am greatly mistaken."

Greys uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"And as to going back, Greys," continued the baronet, "that would be foolish, I have heard, in Naples and elsewhere, that this *Diavolo*, as he is always respectfully called by the ransomed, and always keeps his word. He guarantees my safety if I am not treacherous, so we are safe. This little journey, with his spies and guides, will give you something to talk about when you return to the Hall, Greys," added Sir John, with a smile.

The valet shook his head, saying:

"I'm sure I hope you'll all turn out right, sir, and I don't see why it shouldn't, when they say the brigand chief prides himself on never having broken his word; still, I feel anxious, you can never depend on a bad man."

For some time the little party rode in silence.

At length, after some hours' ride, they came to a wild gorge between high hills. There was a profusion of shrubbery, mingled with trees or rocks, and at the bottom of the gorge rolled a swift mountain stream, which here and there broke into small cataracts.

"This is the spot!" declared the guide, in Italian, halting. "The chief will see you here, signor. I will step back a little with your servant for the chief would speak to you alone."

Greys hesitated about retiring to a little distance, but his master said:

"Go with him, Greys. Have no fears. You needn't go out of sight, you know. Remember that the captain has a reputation for keeping his word, and that you and I are safe."

"I shall I transfer the money and papers to you now, sir."

"No. Keep them till I call you. It might be better if I should appear to have nothing with me."

With a heavy heart Greys followed the guide to the shadow of some trees a few rods distant, but he took good care to keep in full view of his beloved master.

The baronet dismounted, throwing the bridle of his horse over a bush near at hand and awaited an interview with the dreaded brigand.

He had not long to wait.

Greys had no sooner dismounted and taken his position near the guide, than that person uttered a loud, shrill whistle, which was evidently a signal. He immediately answered by a similar sound, and the next moment a man came out from among the dense shrubbery and advanced toward Sir John.

The new-comer was a dark-faced Italian, with a sinister countenance whose expression seemed treacherous. His dress was modeled somewhat after the style usually affected by the Calabrian brigands, his hat being tall and pointed, and adorned by a tall, straight feather, and his jacket being of black velvet, made in the jaunting fashion. It was open in front, displaying a ruffled shirt, of the finest linen, and his other garments were equally costly and unique. Suspended from his waist by chains of wrought silver were a single and a white dagger. From his belt protruded several costly weapons, which appeared to be worn more for ornament than use.

All this Sir John observed at a glance.

"Do you speak Italian, signor?" asked the brigand in that language, pausing in front of the baronet.

Sir John replied in the affirmative.

"Your name?"

"John Haughton," replied the baronet, truthfully, giving his first and middle names. I am an agent to treat with you for the release of your prisoner, Colonel Courtney.

"You are not a milor?" asked the fellow, doubtfully, eyeing the noble face and form of the baronet with keen scrutiny.

"I am not," replied the brigand chief, *Il Diavolo*, I suppose?"

"No, signor. The captain has gone away for a few weeks. I am the first lieutenant, and in his absence I take command. I am called Barb. I am, of course, empowered in the captain's absence to transact business in his name, and can free your friend from the prison; the ransom demanded for his release is paid into my hands. You will pay the ransom demanded for the *Inglesse*?"

"Do you feel better now?" he asked, as Sir John made an effort to rise.

The only reply he received was a vacant stare, and the flushed countenance of the prisoner a moment, and then he fell his pulse, saying:

"The *Inglesse* has a fever coming on. Better put him out of the way, Barb, than than to have him make so much trouble!"

"You forget the laws of the band," responded the lieutenant. "Besides, I don't like to see a man die. He is the cause of my cousin's death at the hands of the soldiers, and he shall live to give me my revenge. Take care of him, then, Giorgio. Nurse him well. You shall have your reward."

"I am no woman that I should nurse him!" grumbled Giorgio. "I like the fight, the retreat, the excitement of combat, and I don't like to see a man die. Barb's nurse, and that man my enemy."

Barb was thoughtful for a moment, and then said: "Well, well, my nurse shall wait upon him. She will nurse him so that he will live. He knows the properties of all the medicinal herbs, and has once or twice cured me of a dangerous fever. Lay him back on the settle, Giorgio, and you shall see me to treat him with the utmost respect."

And does the captain say you may take the *Inglesse* to our cottage? asked Barb, gloomily.

Barb smiled with relief, and his wife continued: Why should I linger here to beg of you the life of this poor *Inglesse* when the captain has said he will let him go to him. She skipped away, avoiding Barb's outstretched hands, and hastened to a small cavern, at the farther end of the main cave. In a few minutes she returned, and in her hand she held a bundle of linen bandages, and a pair of scissors.

"Can you cure him?" questioned Annetti, eagerly.

"I think so—I hope so. Yes, I see what the trouble is. A piece of bone presses upon his brain. Give me my case of instruments."

THE INVALID.

Annetti, Barb's wife, was a fresh-looking woman, with all the charms of youth and beauty—that is, beauty of color more than of expression. Her eyes were intensely black, as was also her hair, her cheeks were vividly red, as were also her lips, and this vividness of color, this wealth of bloom, made her seem like some hardy tropical flower.

Her dress was a short black skirt with a red bodice, over which was laced a shorter bodice of black velvet. Her hair was confined in a net which she wore with genuine gold coins around her neck.

"You sent for me?" she said, approaching Barb.

"I did; I want you to nurse this *Inglesse*. He has fever coming on."

Annetti looked at the baronet with considerable interest, demanding: "What is his name? Who is he?"

"He is a milor, an officer, but I do not know his name. He came to ransom the other *Inglesse*, and betrayed us to the soldiers. He was shot at the hands of our milor, Annetti. He is the cause of my cousin's death, for Rigi is killed."

"Is he a milor, Annetti, carelessly, shrugging her pretty brown shoulders above her head, and saying: "Will he's no great loss. I never liked him, you know—the ill-mannered fellow. If you want this *Inglesse* cured, though, to get a grand ransom for him, I will attend him, on one condition."

"What is that, you pretty witch?" demanded Barb.

"Why, if I cure him, and you get a grand ransom, I must have half."

Barb laughed, as did his companions. "Yes, let her have half the ransom we get for him," cried several voices, in such hearty tones that it was evident that Barb's wife had many friends among the banditti.

"Yes, you shall have half, Annetti," declared Barb. "The captain will give you a grand ransom, and he will let him know. I never liked him, you know—the ill-mannered fellow. If you want this *Inglesse* cured, though, to get a grand ransom for him, I will attend him, on one condition."

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A SURGICAL OPERATION.

One afternoon the brigands returned from one of their usual excursions with two prisoners, both blindfolded, as their captives usually were. On entering the cavern the bandages were removed from their eyes, and Barb, who was in command of the band, proceeded to search their persons for money and valuables.

The prisoners were both Frenchmen, with philosophical calmness.

The bandit lieutenant found a couple of well-filled purses, two watches, and a few trinkets upon them. The elder of the captives had also a neat case of surgical instruments.

"What's this?" cried Barb, opening the case and examining its contents.

"What do you do with these, signor?"

"Perform surgical operations," was the reply. "I am a surgeon."

"A surgeon?" repeated Barb. "That is well. We have three or four men who are badly wounded—our best men. You shall attend them, extract the balls, and set their limbs—"

"I'll repeat the surgeon. 'Not I, indeed. I have no time to prolong the lives of these poor sufferers of any of your band of miscreants.'"

This bold speech was greeted with angry exclamations by the brigands.

"You are rash, signor!" exclaimed Barb. "I have power to make you do as I wish."

The surgeon smiled.

The bandit lieutenant saw that his prisoner was likely to be intimidated by threats, and he therefore changed his manner.

"Cure these men," he said, "and you shall have your liberty. What do you say?"

"His offer is very tempting, *non mi*, is it not?" said the Frenchman, turning to his fellow-captive. "I think I had better accept his offer."

"Very well," said the surgeon, addressing Barb. "I will cure your men, if cure is possible, on condition that you set both myself and friend at liberty. We're a couple of surgeons, who can never pay a ransom in the world."

The brigand lieutenant hesitated for some time about accepting this offer.

On the one hand, it was possible that one of these captives might be a rich prize.

On the other, every member of the band would grumble if their comrades were allowed to linger in suffering when means were at hand to relieve them.

The latter consideration finally prevailed, and he promised to surrender their liberty, on condition that they exerted themselves to cure the wounded men.

The surgeon and his companion were then conducted to their patients.

After the task of dressing their wounds, etc., was completed, they returned to the outer cavern.

Barb and a companion conversed with Barb's wife, and Sir John Courtney. The baronet's melancholy countenance instantly attracted their attention.

"It can't be possible that that gentleman is one of the brigands!" exclaimed the surgeon. "And yet, if he is not, how comes he to have his freedom to leave about? What a courtly air! What a melancholy face! I will speak with him."

He paused in front of the baronet, asking in Italian:

"Are you a prisoner, sir?"

The baronet replied only by a sad smile.

Perhaps he don't understand Italian, suggested the younger Frenchman. He looked at the baronet with interest.

"Yes, I will speak to him in that language," said the surgeon.

He did so, repeating his former question.

As the familiar accents of his own language fell upon his hearing, Sir John looked troubled and anxious, as his memory was making a great effort to ascend to the top.

At this juncture Annetti approached the group.

"The poor *Inglesse*," she said, touching her forehead. "He understands nothing, signor."

"Is he insane?" asked the surgeon, with considerable interest.

"I suppose so. He has never been right in his mind since the wound he received in the head more than a year ago."

"A wound in his head?" repeated the surgeon, pityingly.

"Yes; and it's not well yet. He doesn't like me to touch it, so it must pain him."

"I would like to look at it," said the surgeon, with professional ardor. "Perhaps I might do something for him."

"Come into his chamber, then," said Annetti. "Oh, if you could only cure him, signor!"

She took the hand of the invalid and led the Frenchman to Sir John's chamber.

The surgeon found it difficult to gain the invalid's confidence, and he was permitted to look at his wound. He stroked his hair, addressed him in the kindest manner, and finally the baronet yielded his head to the surgeon's scrutiny.

"This was a bad wound," exclaimed the surgeon. "The poor gentleman must have suffered greatly."

"Can you cure him?" questioned Annetti, eagerly.

"I think so—I hope so. Yes, I see what the trouble is. A piece of bone presses upon his brain. Give me my case of instruments."

Annetti obeyed, and turned his face away, that she might not witness the sufferings of the invalid, which would result in the discovery of the retreat. He decides that the *Inglesse* must remain here, but that I may attend upon him every day, if I like. The captain knows of the rich *Inglesse*, and is coming in soon to see if he remembers or has ever seen this prisoner. So, Barb, and the rest of you, mind you treat the poor gentleman with respect!

There could be no appeal from this decision, and the men returned to their employment in the main cave.

THE INVALID.

No. He fears he might be seen there by some passing soldier or traveler, and the inquiries would follow which would result in the discovery of the retreat. He decides that the *Inglesse* must remain here, but that I may attend upon him every day, if I like. The captain knows of the rich *Inglesse*, and is coming in soon to see if he remembers or has ever seen this prisoner. So, Barb, and the rest of you, mind you treat the poor gentleman with respect!

There could be no appeal from this decision, and the men returned to their employment in the main cave.

The baronet was well treated and well fed, choice wines were given him—for such were in daily use by the brigands—and it was not many weeks before he recovered his former strength and vigor.

The wound he had received had deprived him of all memory of the past, and his manner was full of a gentle melancholy, as if he had a faint consciousness of his great loss.

He came and went among the caverns at his will, no one interfering with him, and the compassionate Annetti took him out several times on the mountain above her head, and said: "Will he's no great loss. I never liked him, you know—the ill-mannered fellow. If you want this *Inglesse* cured, though, to get a grand ransom for him, I will attend him, on one condition."

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