

THE BANDIT QUEEN. A TALE OF ITALY



BY EMERSON BENNETT

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CHAPTER I.

THE ATTACK AND RESCUE.

I was in Naples, master of my own time, at the romantic age of twenty-two years. After finishing my collegiate course, my father, a banker of the city of New York, advised me to travel a year in Europe, and satisfy the craving of youth for sight-seeing and adventure, and then return and settle down for life. Shortly after, with my passport and letter of credit, I sailed for England, spent some time in London, went to Paris, and thence departed for Italy.

I had been in Naples a week, had obtained my permit to remain, and had visited several places of note, when a series of rather curious, remarkable and romantic adventures began, of which I propose to give a true and faithful account.

One calm, lovely evening in May, as I was nearing the suburbs of the city, on my return from a short excursion I had that day made on foot, a carriage passed me at a rapid pace, going in the same di-

rection as myself. In a minute or so it was lost among a grove of trees; but scarcely had it disappeared from my view, ere I was startled by a piercing scream, followed by a loud cry for help in a different voice, and then the sharp report of some two or three firearms.

I had read and heard much of the boldness of Italian brigands, and I at once conjectured that the party in the carriage was being assailed by some of these pests of the country. Though armed with a good revolver, and naturally as courageous as men in general, I think if I had stopped a single moment to reflect on the consequences, I should have kept out of danger; but as it was I acted solely on an impulse, and darted forward to the assistance of those in distress.

As I entered among the trees, I dimly saw some dark object ahead of me, which proved to be the carriage, and heard several voices speaking excitedly in Italian. Though I could understand the language nearly as well as a native, I could not at first distinguish anything that was said; but I soon caught the

words, spoken in the clear, loud tone of command:

"Quick, comrades! take what you can get and be off, for we are in danger here!"

"Come on!" I shouted, as if calling to my companions; "we have the villains in a trap at last."

As I spoke, I discharged my revolver in the air, hoping thus to frighten the robbers. My ruse succeeded, and, much to my satisfaction, the rascals all fled at my approach.

On coming up to the carriage, I found the door open and a man lying on the ground and groaning. The driver was on his seat, with the reins in his hand, and I fancied was looking on too calmly to be honest himself.

"What is all this, sirrah?" I exclaimed in Italian.

"His excellency resisted, and I'm afraid the robbers have killed him," replied the man on the box.

"Well, it seems you at least made no resistance!" returned I, rather sharply.

"No, your excellency, I am an Italian, and know better than to resist the brigands," coolly replied the fellow.

I was about to tell him I thought him one, but changed my mind and asked:

"Who is this gentleman?"

"An Englishman, your excellency."

"A stranger here?"

"He has been some months in Naples."

"Has he a dwelling here?"

"Yes, on the hill."

"We must get him to it then as soon as possible. Is there not a lady here? I thought I heard a female voice."

"San Gennaro!" exclaimed the man; "I hope the rascals have not killed her!"

I thrust my head into the carriage, and found a lady leaning back in one corner and very still. I took hold of her and

asked her if she was hurt. She did not move or answer.

"Either killed or fainted," said I.

The man on the ground now groaned heavily, and seemed to make a feeble attempt to get up. In a moment I was bending over him, with my hand upon his breast. I felt something warm and wet, and knew it was his blood. He probably had been shot and might be dying.

"Villains!" he now exclaimed in Italian, evidently supposing me to be one of the robbers; "take all we have, but——"

"I am a friend, come to assist you, sir," I said in English.

"What? I don't understand!" he returned, apparently not a little surprised to hear himself addressed in his native tongue.

"You have been assailed by some cowardly ruffians, and I fear dangerously hurt; but they all fled at my approach, and I am now here to render you what service I can."

"Sure you're not one of the cursed thieves?"

"Sir," returned I, rather sharply, "I will charitably suppose you are not aware of the insult conveyed in your language—or, in other words, that you do not know what you are saying!"

"Bless my soul, I believe not!" he muttered, "for my head sings like a tea-kettle. Ah! I've a wound in my breast I find."

"Yes, and you should get to a surgeon as quick as possible!" said I, placing my arms under his and assisting him to rise. "If you will get into the carriage, I will have you driven into the city with all speed."

"No, sir—home! home!"

"As you please."

"Georgine?" he called; "Georgine

Delamere? where are you? Heaven preserve us! have they killed the girl too?"

"There is a lady in the carriage who is very still, but I hope she has only fainted."

"Quick, quick, then—see to her and don't mind me!"

"If you will get into the carriage, Mr. Delamere, I will render her what assistance I can while you are being driven home, and thus no time will be lost."

"You've got some sense I find," he said, as he fairly stumbled into the vehicle.

I followed him, closed the door, and shouted to the coachman in Italian.

"Drive home, man, and don't spare your horses!"

In another moment we were whirling over the smooth road.

"Georgine dear? Georgine?" exclaimed the wounded man, in a tone of the deepest anxiety.

"Here!" groaned a female voice.

"Bless my soul, she's alive!" was returned in a tone of joyful relief.

"Oh, uncle, are you here and alive too?"

"Yes, and worth twenty dead men yet, as the scoundrels will find some day if I can catch them? Are you hurt, Georgine?"

"Only frightened, I believe, dear uncle. And you?"

"Well, my head's bruised, and there's a wound in my breast; but I'll do well enough, so don't be scared, my poor puss!"

"Had you not better stanch the wound in your breast, Mr. Delamere?" said I.

"My name 's not Delamere, sir," he replied, "but Blakely—Chester Blakely. I've got my handkerchief there. Thank you."

"We are not alone then it seems?" observed the lady, evidently much surprised at hearing my voice, for it was too dark in the carriage for her to see me.

"No, there's somebody here that we'll have to thank for coming to our rescue and frightening off the robbers," replied the uncle. "I don't know his name yet, and haven't seen his face; but if he's not a young American, I'm much mistaken."

"Why do you think me a young American, Mr. Blakely?" I queried, in some surprise.

"Because an old head would have staid away; from America, I know, by your accent."

"You are right, Mr. Blakely, and it proves you a shrewd observer. I am twenty-two years of age, from the city of New York, and my name is Alfred Thornton."

"May Heaven bless you, Mr. Thornton, for the generous deed that has saved our lives!" said the lady, in a voice that to me sounded sweetly melodious.

"Tell us all about it, Alfred!" said Mr. Blakely. "Excuse me! but I always call young men by their Christian names. If you don't like it, call me Chester."

"When I feel like retaliating for the liberty I will," returned I, not a little amused at his idea of an equivalent, and believing I had found a rather eccentric character.

I then stated the facts of my coming to his assistance, as I have already given them to the reader, and was again rewarded by the thanks of the young lady, expressed in the same sweet tones as before.

For a few moments Mr. Blakely made no further remark, and then said abruptly:

"Alfred, you can't see me yet; but I'm

a blunt-mannered, gray-haired, bald-headed Englishman, having some friends and a good many enemies. I feel the worse for my abuse to-night, and so I'll spare my words and come to the point. You're going home with us now, and you can stay there, if you like, till one of us gets tired of the other. This is my niece here, Georgine Delamere, a sister's child, an orphan, who's living in my family, and a good little girl, not yet out of her teens. I've got a wife and daughter who make some pretense to fashion, consider Georgine a poor relation, have got more pride than is good for them, and don't like Americans at all. Now if you find them any way disagreeable, you must charge the blame on them, and not on Georgine or me. That's all."

"Am I to understand, after this statement, that you wish me to accompany you home, Mr. Blakely?"

"If I hav'n't frightened you—yes."

"Then, sir, I will not leave you till I put you under the surgeon's care at least."

Shortly after we entered a gateway, dashed up among a grove of trees, and stopped before a white dwelling, some two or three of whose windows were sparkling with lights. A servant in livery was apparently waiting for the carriage, and in a moment he had the door open.

"Quick, John, run for Dr. Graham, and bring him here in all haste!" was the startling order the man received from the lips of Miss Delamere. "We have been attacked by brigands, and your master is dangerously wounded."

"Oh, Miss Georgine!" cried the servant, holding up his hands in horror.

"John, you rascal," exclaimed his master, "don't let puss frighten all the little sense you've got out of you! I'm not

half so dead as I might be. If you'd been driving, instead of Luigi, you'd been killed. You ought to learn to drive and try it once."

"Oh, master!"

"There, be off, and don't frighten the doctor!"

In a minute John had alarmed the inmates of the dwelling; and before I could assist Mr. Blakely out of the carriage, we were surrounded by half-a-dozen persons, some of them speaking excitedly.

I did not stop to answer any questions; but, with the help of Luigi, who had now condescended to get down from his box, assisted Mr. Blakely into the dwelling, and saw him comfortably placed upon a bed, in an elegantly furnished chamber, the windows of which were open, for the weather in Naples in May is of summer heat.

"Don't be frightened, anybody," he said to those crowding around him, "for I'm sure I'm not badly hurt. Water! water! get me some water!"

This was quickly brought by a female servant, and soon after the wounded man declared he felt much better.

In the light of the apartment I now saw he was a short, stout man, with a full, florid face, bald on the crown of his head, and iron-gray hair at the sides. Just above the right temple he had received a wound from some dull instrument, probably a club or musket, which had laid open the flesh and caused an immense swelling, and from which the blood had run down one side of his face so as to stain his garments. There was also an ugly stain of blood on his waistcoat, from a wound just below the right lung, made I supposed by a bullet, and this was, I feared, a dangerous one—though he kept

up his spirits remarkably well, declared it was nothing serious, and refused to have it examined before the arrival of the surgeon.

While waiting for the doctor, I had an opportunity of observing the appearance of those among whom I had been so unceremoniously introduced. Three of them were servants, whom I shall dismiss without description. Of the others, one was the wife, and another the daughter, of the wounded man; and the third was a young dandy, who chanced to be at the dwelling on an evening visit. Mrs. Blakely was a tall, stately, rather handsome, only very haughty-looking brunette; her daughter was what her mother might have been at her age, say two-and-twenty; and the dandy was a slender, effeminate specimen of humanity, with light, curly hair, blue eyes, and having a very downy mustache on his upper lip, which he was continually trying to twist into sharp points at the corners, though unfortunately the hair was only long enough to afford him an imaginary hold. Neither wife nor daughter seemed to be much affected by the condition of the husband and father, from which I judged they had more pride than heart.

From the faces mentioned I turned to that of Georgine Delamere, and was struck with her loveliness, and the shrinking timidity and affectionate anxiety with which, standing back behind the others, she seemed to regard her uncle, and which so forcibly contrasted with the want of feeling displayed by his nearer kin. I remembered what he had told me, and I could see that she alone loved him; but, being in a measure a dependent, or poor relation, was kept under painful restraint by her haughty female relatives. She

was slender and delicate, with a sweet, pale, classic face, sunny hair and blue eyes, and some years younger than her cousin.

"Mrs. Blakely, this is my preserver, Alfred Thornton, from America," said the wounded man, after a few questions had been asked and answered.

The lady of the mansion bowed quite stiffly.

"This is my daughter, Carile," pursued Mr. Blakely.

Another formal, fashionable, but somewhat haughty inclination of the head and body.

"And this," continued the wounded man, as if he were trotting out some animal, "is the Hon. Augustus Drummerly, a younger son, who may some day be a lord."

There was nothing very noticeable in the words, but something in the tone and manner of the speaker, which led me to believe he did not regard the Hon. Augustus as the greatest man in the world.

Mr. Thingumbob—I crave pardon, Mr. Drummerly, I mean—seemed to think it was all right, however; and first glancing at the ladies, with a slight simper, and giving his would-be mustache an imaginary twist with his gloved fingers, he bowed slightly, and stared at me, and felt for his eye-glass. He was got up externally in the best style of the tailor's art, and I was covered with dust; he was the son of an English lord, and I was only an unknown adventurer from the wilds of America. I knew, therefore, he felt the difference between us to be great—so great, in fact, as to lead him to doubt whether he ought to notice me or not.

Now a number of things had combined to render me a little mischievous just

then, and I determined to annoy the dandy by seeming anxious to make the most of his acquaintance. So, after looking at him a few moments, in an admiring sort of a way, I stepped forward, presented my ungloved and somewhat bloody hand, and said, in my blandest manner:

"Honorable sir, I am delighted to have the honor of greeting you in the hearty manner with which we children of America delight in honoring those we honor of the Mother Country."

With these words I seized the half-withdrawn hand, shook it well, and squeezed it so hard that the owner winced, and tears almost came into his soft eyes.

"Weally," he answered, in a drawling, affected way, with what he intended for cutting dignity, glancing at the ladies with a kind of simper for their approval, "you do me too much honaw—indeed you do."

"Not a bit of it," returned I, bluntly. "England, we all know, is the mother of America, and grand-mother to the children of America; and, of course, grandchildren cannot do too much honor to the children of their grand-mother, you know. What would America be without England, sir? and what would England be without her aristocracy? and what would her aristocracy be without some noble representative like yourself?"

This little speech, so logically deep that I could hardly comprehend it myself, completely nonplussed my little hero, and he answered, with considerable confusion:

"Weally, I don't know—I don't, weally."

Neither did I.

I glanced at the bed, and saw that the wounded man was secretly enjoying the joke.

"Why do you look so frightened, Georgine?" now spoke Mrs. Blakely, with haughty sternness, compressing her thin lips, as she suddenly turned upon her niece.

"The poor child's been scared out of her senses," replied Mr. Blakely.

"Did she lose much?" was the sneering rejoinder.

"Quite as much as you ever had, madam," was the cutting retort.

Instantly the poor girl was overwhelmed with confusion, and I pitied her.

"You are very dusty at least, and may retire and change your dress," pursued the unfeeling mistress of the mansion.

The fair object of her scorn seemed only too glad of this dismissal, and immediately left the apartment.

Shortly after, Dr. Graham made his appearance—a stout, hale, intelligent-looking Englishman, then a resident of Naples on the hill, to whom I was presented by the host as a young American who had risked my life to save his, and by whom I was received in a kind and genial manner that quite won my good opinion.

The doctor proceeded to examine the wounds of his patient, at the same time inquiring into all the particulars, and I felt no little anxiety to know his professional opinion of the case. Not to enter into the matter in a technical way, it will be sufficient to say that Mr. Blakely had received no mortal hurt, though he had been shot through the body, dragged out of the carriage in a brutal manner, and knocked senseless by a heavy blow on the head from some blunt instrument.

The doctor dressed his wounds and told him he must keep himself perfectly quiet for a few days, by which time he hoped to see him about again as well as ever.

When I took my leave of Mr. Blakely that night, not one of the ladies was present. At his urgent request I promised to call early on the following day. By his orders his carriage was in waiting, and I was soon whirled down to my hotel in the heart of the crowded, noisy city.

Somehow the pale, sweet, sad face of Georgine Delamere went with me and hovered around me in the dreams of my chamber.

CHAPTER II.

THE INVALID AND HIS FRIENDS.

The next morning after breakfast, I made a careful toilet, and, ordering a carriage, paid a visit to my new acquaintance, who occupied a very beautiful villa on the hill, overlooking the picturesque city and lovely bay, with old smoking Vesuvius rising grandly on the left.

Early as it was, some three or four carriages were at the door, and quite a number of visitors within, for news of the outrage had spread, and had already occasioned much excitement among the foreign residents of Naples, especially the English.

In answer to my inquiry, the footman informed me, in a rather surly way, that his master had not rested well through the night, that the surgeon had advised him not to see many visitors, and that in consequence he had denied himself to nearly every one.

"You may take up my card," said I, "and then you can inform me whether I am one of the excluded parties or not."

The man, who either feigned not to

know me or really did not, hesitated, and expressed by his looks that he thought it would be of no use. At length he turned away, with a surly "Walk in, sir," and showed me into a small, elegantly furnished parlor, where I remained alone during his absence. I say alone, because there was no other person in the room; but a door, opening into a large saloon or drawing-room, was sufficiently ajar for me to overhear a conversation evidently not intended for my ear.

"Those odious Americans," said a voice that I instantly recognized as that of Mrs. Blakely. "I do wish there were any way to keep them out of our family, short of a quarrel with my liege lord, as the saying is."

"I do wonder at papa's taste!" said the daughter. "I fear he will be worse than ever now, since he claims that a newcomer of that crew saved his life last night."

"From the fellow's appearance I should rather believe he had a hand in the robbery first," rejoined the mother. "Like things have happened, you know, count."

"Very true, madam," replied a smooth, mellow, insinuating, masculine voice, with a slight Italian accent, "I once knew of a similar case myself."

"Do tell us about it, Count!" sweetly pleaded Miss Carile Blakely.

"It was an affair like this just mentioned. A rich gentleman and his daughter were assailed by robbers, a stranger came to their rescue and saved them. He was invited home and became intimate with the family, and at length married the young lady. Two years after he was apprehended as the robber chief, and, to save his reputation, swallowed poison."

"Was he an American?" queried Mrs. Blakely.

"Now I think of it, I believe he was, madam."

"I was sure of it."

"I cannot bear them!" said another feminine voice.

"They are so inquisitive and impertinent!" said still another.

"I always avoid them when I can," was remarked, in a masculine tone, by still another speaker.

"Aw, yes, weally, I do myself," coincided the Hon. Jackanapes whom I had met the night before.

"This affair, though, will never have the termination of the one you mention, my lord," said Miss Blakely; "for in this case, I am the daughter of the rescued gentleman, and I am sure I shall never marry an American!"

At this moment the servant returned and said his master wished to see me immediately. I arose and followed him, feeling somewhat indignant at the scandal I had heard, and yet, on the whole, not a little amused at the idea of being taken for a *bandit chief*. What would my fashionable friends of New York say to such complimentary conjectures?

"I found Mr. Blakely undressed in bed, with his head bandaged, his features unusually pale, and having a general appearance of much nervous excitability.

"I'm glad you've come, Alfred," he said, in a kind of rough but cordial way, extending his hand and grasping mine as if he had a soul in him.

"I hope I see you better this morning, Mr. Blakely?"

"I wish you did, but you don't. I didn't rest well last night. I don't like being confined to my bed at all; but Dr. Graham says I'll have to stay here for a while.

Ah! I only wish I had those scoundrels where I could pay them off! I'll have them yet, too. I've already sent for Mr. Barber, the acting English consul, a friend of mine, and I'm going to offer a heavy reward for the detection and conviction of the villains."

"If what I have heard of the Italian manner of catching and dealing with criminals of that class be true, I am afraid it will not amount to anything," I observed.

"Did you see any one of them, Alfred, so that you'd know him again?"

"No, it was too dark, and they all fled before I came up. By-the-by, Mr. Blakely, did you make any resistance that led them to assault you in that murderous way?"

"Well, you see, when they stopped the carriage, and ordered me to hand over my watch, jewelry and purse, Georgine, she screamed, I cried out, and fired off a small pocket pistol to scare them. The next minute I was shot and dragged out in the roughest kind of way, and that's about all I recollect till I heard your voice."

"I suppose they robbed you?"

"Yes, to be sure they got my watch and purse, a diamond breast-pin, a seal ring, and Georgine's earrings. The whole affair wouldn't amount to much, taking but the insult of robbing an Englishman, only that the watch and ring were heirlooms, that I wouldn't have parted with for five times their value."

"Perhaps by offering a reward for them of more than their real value, you may get them back!"

"Your suggestion's a good one, Alfred, and I'll think about it. I would like to have those trinkets back, that's true. I think I'll try it. By-the-by, do

you think my Italian coachman had anything to do with the robbery?"

"He was certainly taking matters very coolly when I came up, and I had my suspicions. But then his coolness might have been only an Italian habit. The people of this country are so used to brigandage, that they rather expect it, and are seldom unprepared for it."

"You talk as if you knew the country well. How long have you been here?"

"Only a week or so, but I was pretty well read up before I came."

"After all, I've no right to suspect the fellow, for he was recommended to me by a very warm friend of the family, no less a person than Alfonzo Count Saverini."

"An Italian who speaks English well?" queried I.

"Yes, do you know him?"

"No, but while waiting below, I heard some one in the adjoining apartment addressed as count, and I heard his voice in reply."

"That must be him then! I wonder he hasn't sent up to see me!"

I was tempted to repeat to Mr. Blakely the whole conversation I had overheard, but on reflection decided not to do it.

"How long have you known the count?" I inquired.

"I've only known him about eight months myself—since I first came to Naples to live—but my wife and daughter met him a year before, at a German watering-place."

"Is he a resident of Naples?"

"Well, not exactly, I believe. He's here and there, and travels a good deal."

"Wealthy?"

"So reputed. He's got a fine castle and estate, back among the mountains. I've never seen it; but he proposes to take

us all out there for a sojourn during the hot weather."

"Do you intend going?"

"I did think of it, and may if I get well enough in time, replied the invalid, now fixing his eyes upon me in a peculiar way. But why these questions, Alfred?"

"I hardly know," I answered, with some confusion, "curiosity I think. You know we Americans are proverbially inquisitive. I beg your pardon, though! I did not intend to inquire into your private affairs!"

"Oh, pshaw, Alfred! there's nothing private about it, I didn't mean that. And so you think my coachman, Luigi, is a sort of a spy, eh?"

"I merely stated my first suspicion, Mr. Blakely; but you know the man better than I do, and should be the best judge."

"I've a mind to discharge him—though the fellow, if honest, is very useful, for he's a good driver, and knows the roads and country well for miles around."

"Do not be hasty in your conclusions then, for you might make a mistake."

"At any rate I'll have a talk with the count about him, and see what he thinks."

After some further conversation, I asked the question which had all along been uppermost in my mind:

"How is Miss Delamere this morning? I hope she has entirely recovered from her fright."

"Not altogether, poor girl! and she didn't rest well last night," replied the invalid, in a sympathetic tone. "She worries too much about me—though I've tried my best to make her believe it's not anything very serious."

"She loves you, Mr. Blakely, that is very evident."

"Bless her sweet little heart, I believe she does," he replied, looking at me in a peculiar manner. "And, Alfred," he added, glancing around the chamber, and lowering his voice in a confidential way, "I'm afraid she's the only one of my family who does."

"Oh, I hope not, sir."

"Yes, I'm feared it's too true," he pursued, with a rather sorrowful shake of the head. "You see, I'm a plain, blunt, straightforward sort of a man, and not stylish enough for my proud, haughty wife and daughter—not fashionable enough for them, nor yet simple enough to be used as a mere tool. Lady Blakely, as I sometimes call her—for her maternal grandfather was a knight—is always boasting of her blood, and thinks nothing under some ninny of rank her equal. She was poor and I was rich, and so she condescended to marry me and tease me—though when I do get roused, she finds I'm no driveling fool to be led by the nose. She hates Georgine, too, the poor child! and that worries me at times, for it's so unpleasant for one to live in a family where one's not welcomed by all. Poor puss! she's had trouble. Her mother, my sister, married a man who got led off by gamesters, spent all his money and hers, too, and then blew his brains out. His wife loved him, and didn't long survive him. And then, three years ago, I brought Georgine home to live with me. But they don't make anything by treating her coldly," he pursued, looking at me with a meaning smile. "I only take to her the more, and I've fixed things so that when I get out of the way she'll be provided for. All

this to yourself, though, Alfred! It isn't my habit to be communicative to strangers, and I've told you more than I should, perhaps; but somehow one feels as if he could make a confidant of the man that saved his life."

"Depend upon it, Mr. Blakely, your confidence shall never be abused," said I.

"I knew that before I told you, Alfred. I can read faces and hearts, too. By the way, would you like to see Georgine?"

"If agreeable to herself, I should be much pleased to meet her again," said I, feeling a quickening of the blood at the thought.

He rung the bell and sent for his niece.

CHAPTER III.

THE NIECE AND NOBLEMAN.

In a few minutes Georgine appeared, looking very beautiful, and her neatly attired figure was slight, symmetrical, and full of grace. The features were regular, delicate, and pretty; but there was a light in them—something born of angelic purity and mortal suffering—a clearness and brightness of spirit, shadowed with touching melancholy—of which no language can more than convey a faint idea. When her clear, soft, blue eyes looked at you, they appealed to your heart, if you had one, and won your sympathy; when her coral lips parted and showed her pearly teeth, you naturally expected to hear a voice of gentle, saddened melody, and you heard it. For the rest, your imagination must fill up the picture. When she appeared, her face was pale and anxious. When she saw me, there sprung into it a faint tinge of emotion. With a slight, melancholy smile of welcome, she advanced with the delicate timidity of the fawn, offered me her hand, and said;

"I am so glad to meet you again, Mr. Thornton, to express once more my gratitude for what you did for us last night! To your generous daring we probably owe our lives."

"I did but my duty, Miss Delamere; but I am certainly rendered very happy in thinking I may have been of some service to you and your uncle."

The color deepened in her lovely features, and she seemed a little embarrassed.

"Of course, we're very grateful and all that, and of course you don't merit anything in particular, and so on," said Mr. Blakely. "That's all as it should be."

I laughed, and Georgine smiled; and turning to him, she said:

"I hope you feel better, dear uncle."

"Oh, don't worry about me, Puss! I'll be all right in time."

I soon managed to draw Georgine into conversation, and was highly gratified at finding she had intellectual abilities of a high order, a poetic temperament, a delicate fancy, a singleness of heart, and a most exquisite refinement of thought, sentiment, and feeling. She was indeed a rare human flower, blooming in a world all too selfishly chilling.

While seated by an open window, looking out upon a most beautiful scene, with the soft air of southern Italy stealing in upon us from balmy groves of the orange and olive, the footman entered and whispered to his master.

"Show him up at once, John," was his answer.

"The Count Saverlini, Alfred," he said to me, as the servant withdrew. "I'll introduce you."

At the mention of the name of the count, the sweet features of my compan-

ion suddenly became much flushed, and she seemed not a little embarrassed. I confess I was surprised and annoyed at this; but I did not feel that our brief acquaintance would justify me in asking any questions.

Shortly after, the count entered with a bow and a smile, and kindly greeted the uncle and niece. I was then presented to his lordship by Mr. Blakely, in what to me seemed a little too obsequious a manner.

"Allow me, my lord, the pleasure of making known to you Mr. Alfred Thornton, a young gentleman to whose courageous daring my niece and self are probably indebted for our lives."

"Most happy to know you, Mr. Thornton, and quite envy you," said the count, in the same soft, insinuating tone I had heard below, accompanied by a dignified and graceful bow, and a smile intended to express a most fascinating suavity.

"As an odious American, I feel myself highly honored by such distinguished notice," returned I, with a low bow; "and I shall only be too happy if I am not eventually arrested as a robber chief."

Count Saverlini was no ordinary man, as will be shown hereafter. His feelings and features were usually quite under his control, but in this instance he was so completely taken aback at hearing me repeat the disparaging remarks of his lady friends, that he slightly started and flushed, and glanced quickly at Mr. Blakely and Georgine, as if to see if they understood the words as well as he did. They did not, of course, and the features of both expressed surprise.

Perhaps it was not very polite in me to answer thus at such a time; but somehow

I could not help it. I felt that the opportunity for flinging back the slurring words was too good to be neglected, and I used it.

"How? What, Alfred? What do you mean?" exclaimed Mr. Blakely, in surprise.

"Only a little pleasantry of mine, sir," I answered, with a smile, and a marked glance at the count. Though we never met before, I fancy his lordship understands me."

The latter drew himself up rather haughtily, compressed his lips, and passing me without further notice, took a seat by the side of Miss Delamere, and, renewing his habitual smile, at once entered into conversation with her, congratulating her on her providential escape in his blindest tones, and saying how happy he was at finding she had sustained no personal injury.

As I had risen from my seat on being presented to the count, and still remained standing, and now began to feel my rather out of place in that company, I was naturally in the mood to be more critical in my observation of the nobleman than I might have been under ordinary circumstances.

He was a tall, finely-formed, graceful, elegantly-dressed man, of perhaps eight-and-twenty. His dark, Italian features were classic and handsome. He had long, black hair, which swept down around his neck and shoulders; a broad, intellectual forehead; a straight nose; a beautiful mouth, with a heavy mustache on his upper lip, and a well turned chin. So far as mere physical beauty went, his face was almost perfect; but there was something in the expression—the looking out through all, as it were, of a dark, unprincipled spirit—that I did not like.

The glittering eyes had too much of the serpent in them for me—the smile too much of deceit—and there was in, over, and through all, a certain undefinable something, that to my view bespoke the mere selfish, sensual voluptuary. Having a wonderful command over the external man, even with passion boiling and seething within, and being a perfect master of all fashionable art, with every confidence in his own powers of fascination, he was certainly a dangerous person to bring in contact with the young, and lovely, and innocent of the opposite sex.

And yet he was now seated by the side of the lovely Georgine Delamere, talking to her with a familiarity that seemed to tell of a long and intimate acquaintance. She was blushing and embarrassed, too—the natural result, it might be, of feeling flattered by the marked attention of such a brilliant, charming man of rank in the presence of a comparative stranger who was steadily observing her. Perhaps I was in the way and ought to take my leave. In spirit I trembled for her, and longed to warn her against an insidious enemy, at the same time knowing that by all the laws of good breeding I had no right to interfere. Had it been otherwise, his countship would have been speedily removed, either quietly or by force. But I was powerless to act, and I knew and felt it—felt it painfully.

And yet what was she to me, or I to her, on an hour's acquaintance? She was very sweet, very lovely, very innocent—but I was not her Mentor. We had first met under very peculiar circumstances. I had risked my life to save hers; she had called me her preserver, my deepest sympathies had been excited by the scornful treatment she had received from her aunt the night before,

and the statement of her uncle that morning, and somehow my romantic nature had been wrought up in a manner that I had not stopped to analyze. Without due consideration, I had let my fancy run forward and unconsciously begin to build some airy castles. I had been poetically dreaming, only to be suddenly and rudely awakened.

"My dear Georgine, I have not seen so much of you of late as I could wish," I at length heard the count remark, in his most insinuating tone, and with his most charming smile.

She was at the moment looking up into his face, and the color deepened on hers. I did not listen for her reply. I had no right to stand there, even if I had desired to do so. My resolution was instantly taken. I would leave at once. Approaching Mr. Blakely, therefore, I extended my hand and said:

"I really hope, sir, that the next time I have the pleasure of seeing you I shall find you in a fair way of recovery."

"Bless me, Alfred, you're not going already?" he exclaimed in a tone of surprise.

"Yes," said I, with a furtive glance at Georgine, whose sweet, blue eyes I now found were fixed earnestly, I somehow fancied almost reproachfully, upon me, "I have some matters to which I must give immediate attention."

"I'm really sorry, Alfred, you're in such a hurry. I wanted to talk over this outrage a little more, and settle upon some plan of action, with your approval; but of course I can't ask you to stay against your interest."

"You have a counselor in your noble friend," said I.

"Very true. How long do you remain in Naples?"

"I do not know—I may leave at any minute."

I again glanced furtively at Georgine, and I fancied that I saw her lovely features turn pale. This might have been fancy, however, but they were certainly very sad.

"Surely, Alfred, you won't go without seeing me again?"

"No, Mr. Blakely, I promise you that."

"Where are you stopping?"

"At the Hotel des Etrangers."

"Will a note there find you?"

"Yes."

"Well, come soon again, and Heaven bless you."

He shook my hand warmly, and I was turning away, when Georgine started up rather suddenly and came forward. The count still remained seated, and now studiously gazed out of the window.

"Are you about to leave us, Mr. Thornton?" she inquired, in that timid, hesitating way which seemed to express regret.

I replied the same as to the uncle, that I had some affairs to look after.

Her clear, sweet, blue eyes seemed to look into my very soul, as she said, so earnestly:

"I hope you will believe, Mr. Thornton, that I shall always feel very, very grateful to you, as the preserver of my dear uncle's life, not to mention my own!"

I quietly took her little lily hand, and, as I slightly pressed it, replied, in a low tone, that reached no ears but hers:

"Miss Delamere, I hope you will believe in return that I shall always be the happier for knowing that I have in any manner served you."

I do not know what my face expressed, but hers flushed and paled as from some strong internal emotion; and, as if in spite of herself, a tear gathered in her eye.

At this moment, which had become not a little embarrassing to both of us, the footman entered to announce the arrival of Mr. Barber, the English consul, and with another gentle pressure of the hand and a "good morning, Miss Delamere," I took my leave, with a feeling so strangely different from that I had ever experienced before. In parting from any human being, that I began to fancy that I had fallen in love.

CHAPTER IV.

SURPRISES.

I returned to the Hotel des Etrangers in a very peculiar frame of mind, different from any I had ever before experienced. The day was hot, it was approaching the hour of noon, and I resolved not to go out again till the mountain shadows should be thrown far to the eastward. I had a fine, airy room, commanding a view of the beautiful bay and the hill of Posilipo. I repaired thither, locked myself in, seated myself by an open window, and gazed out upon an animated scene. There was enough of the picturesque to attract the eye, had it sought only external things, in the moving boats, vessels and steamers upon the glassy waters; but I soon lost sight of everything in a reverie which reproduced the persons of those from whom I had so recently parted, and the sweet, innocent Georgine Delamere was before me, as an angel of light, beside the dark spirit of Count Saverlini.

Suddenly I was aroused and half startled by a thundering knocking at my door, accompanied by the words, in English:

"Open Sesame!"

"Whoever you are, your impudence far exceeds your wisdom," thought I, as, in no very amiable mood, I arose and gave my visitor admittance.

The next moment I found myself in the embrace of the last man in the world I expected to see—a wild, hare-brained, rattle-headed fellow, who had once been my class-mate at Yale, but who had been expelled for severe practical jokes and mischievous conduct generally.

"Bless your heart and soul, Al, it is you, isn't it?" he cried, in a loud voice, first giving me a squeeze that nearly took the breath out of me, and then shaking me by both hands till I feared he would dislocate my arms. "Glad to see you, my boy—never more so—though I always liked you, you know. Whe-e-w!" he whistled and rattled on, without giving me time to speak; "thunder and lightning! what a place for noise, crowds, filth and beggars! I've been nearly torn to pieces by the infernal crew that have blocked up every inch of my way since I landed from the steamer. I showered some coin among the wretches, and such scrambling and fighting you never saw, and I believe it made the rascals worse instead of better. How I got here alive is more than I can tell, and there's a mob outside now big enough to sack a city. 'Any Americans here, in this Pandemonium of yours?' I said to the governor of

the hotel; and he pointed out three or four names on the register, yours among them, and I broke for you, and here I am, right side up with care, as they label glass. And now how how are you, my dear boy, and what are you doing with yourself here, eh?"

I replied to his questions, and then asked what brought him to Naples.

"Well, to see the sights, I suppose—I don't know what else to say. A man must live, go somewhere, do something, you know, Al, and I've been roving round this six months. After the old gentleman died——"

"Is your father dead, then?"

"Yes, he's been gone over a year. His old friend the gout stepped in one day, and stayed so long that he stepped out to get rid of him. Well, as I was saying, after he died, and left me the snug little sum of a hundred thousand, I thought I'd steady myself down and be somebody. I tried it for six months, and then concluded it wasn't my style, you know. I'd sowed a good many wild oats, but I found I'd quite a stock still on hand, and concluded I might as well get rid of them; and as I had scattered pretty freely in America, I thought it wasn't fair to Europe not to give her a sprinkling too. So I first went to London; but the eternal rain and fog soon soaked me out of there, and I shot over to Paris, where I spent the winter and saw some fun. About six weeks ago I pulled up stakes and planted myself in Madrid, but that place didn't suit me at all. I saw two or three bull-fights, made love to a few pretty women, fought a couple of duels, and left the country for the country's good—and mine too. Come, man, I'm dry as a baked clam; and so let us have in some of the governor's best and drink each other's health.

"Pon my soul, I'm glad to meet you!"

I could have echoed the words heartily, had the man before me been any other acquaintance than Wild Nat, as we used to call him; and even as it was, my soul yearned to him as one I had known in my native land and now beheld on a foreign shore.

Ah! how strong is the tie of country when we are thousands of miles from the scenes of our youth, among those of a different nation and race! and how near and dear to us seems any one from our worshiped land. The man whom, as a neighbor at home, we might never have known, we now greet as something akin to us; and to find an acquaintance there, is to find a brother indeed.

I liked Matthew Larkins—I had always liked him—I could not help it—there was for me in him a magnetic attraction that I could not resist—a great soul worthy of a brighter name. But then, withal, he was such a fellow in the way of mischief, that I was afraid of him—afraid of being drawn into some difficulty when least expecting it. I could never tell when I was safe. He had talents of a high order, and would have made a remarkable actor. I never saw a man who could so completely change himself from one character to another—losing his own identity for the time and becoming an entirely different being. It was with such tricks he used to amuse himself at college,

One day, when a certain member of the Faculty was hearing a class, Mat Larkins, disguised as an old woman, came in boldly, claimed to be the Professor's aunt, and conducted himself in such an unsophisticated way, that the man of lore, who was naturally supercilious, was mortified beyond measure, and all the students were convulsed with laughter. And yet, though personally known to everyone present, the fellow actually departed, made his escape, and no one suspected him. It was not till long after, when he showed the disguise and told the story himself, that the truth was known.

From all this the reader will perceive that my friend was indeed a character, and will, I trust, be prepared for some of the remarkable things to be presented in the course of my narrative.

Matthew Larkins was of medium height, slender, graceful, and so exceedingly well formed, so firmly and compactly knit together that his physical strength far exceeded any estimate that could be based upon his personal appearance. His features were almost regular, animated; and quite handsome, with a high forehead, dark hair, large, brown, expressive eyes, a nose slightly inclined to the Roman, a fine mouth, and a beautifully rounded chin. Though a year my senior in age he looked much younger—in fact almost boyish—for he had scarcely any beard, and always kept his face cleanly shaved. Wild and boisterous though he might be at times, he was often sober and demure, and soft-spoken as a girl in her teens, for he had varying moods, and often made sudden and unexpected changes. In short, you might be with him daily and yet never know how you would find him from one minute to another and perhaps never be able to fully understand his eccentric nature. He was a native of southern Virginia, an only son of a once rich, indulgent father, and had been quite spoiled in his youth. He had many noble, generous traits, and was as brave as a lion, and at times bold and daring to a reckless degree.

Over our wine we talked of the past, and brought up many pleasing reminiscences, and some that were rather painful. I did not mention my late adventure, being undecided whether I ought to tell it to my friend or not. I would wait and be governed by circumstances. He declared he must room with me, and rather reluctantly I gave my consent; whereupon he ordered up his baggage, and proceeded to doff the careless dress he first appeared in, and don one of black, with a white neck-tie, which, with the demure, sanctified look he then chose to put on, gave him the appearance of a clerical student. Late in the afternoon we sallied out for a walk; and though a crowd of beggars was about the hotel and importuned us for charity, they did not recognize in Mat the man who in the morning had drawn them thither by his liberality, and for whom they were really lying in wait, it being the custom of the wretches to lay siege to whoever is so imprudent as to display a sympathizing or generous disposition.

An hour before sunset is just the time to see Naples in all its human glory, for then the after-dinner siesta is over, and everybody is

abroad, high and low, rich and poor, the noble and the beggar.

All who can afford it, ride—all who cannot, walk—but all are in the streets at the same time; and such another throng and jam, with the noise of a thousand Bedlams let loose, is presented nowhere else in the world. The baker, the hatter, the carpenter, the shoemaker, the tailor, with many other trades, are all at work in the open air, in the narrow streets, which are crowded with animals, people and vehicles of every description—horses, donkeys, priests, soldiers, lazzaroni, beggars, women and children.

As there are no side-walks for pedestrians, the wonder is that in the crush and jam of the human swarm many are not killed daily. And then everybody talks in his loudest key, as if everybody else were deaf, and everybody gesticulates as if he were fighting all the rest of mankind. Vendors shout and scream, drivers curse and beat their half-starved beasts, cattle low, horses neigh, donkeys bray, females sing, and the bewildered stranger, if afoot, is often glad to enter the first carriage that wants a fare and save his life and brain.

Mat and I had set out for a walk, and therefore we declined every public conveyance that offered. As I had been a whole week in Naples, and he had only just arrived, I assumed the superiority of a cicerone, pointed out various curiosities, and answered his questions with the air of a man who knows what he is talking about.

After passing through several minor streets, we entered the grand thoroughfare of Naples, the Strada di Toledo, where we beheld more moving life and seemingly greater confusion, and heard the thousands of human voices as the roar of a mighty cataract. At a booth of the *acquajolo*, we stopped and quenched our thirst with lemon juice and water, the latter cooled by snow instead of ice; then looked at a party of macaroni eaters, as with great dexterity and evident gusto they threw into their mouths and devoured the long, white, quill-shaped paste, prepared from flour, which may be called the national dish of the lower orders; listened a while to the comic drolleries and witticisms of punchinello, which I translated for my friend, who only imperfectly understood Italian, and at length halted near the table of a public scribe.

"What is the business of this old, gray-headed man?" inquired Larkins.

"He writes letters, messages and the like, for the ignorant and illiterate," replied I. "Most of the lower classes neither know how to read or write, and therefore he finds plenty of employment in his vocation."

"I see! and he evidently has one customer now, in that hang-dog fellow sitting near him. What a cut-throat countenance that rascal has, Al! and as he is pretty decently dressed for a Neapolitan, I suppose villainy thrives in this country as well as in ours."

"No doubt of it," laughed I.

"I wonder now if he is dictating a love-letter, or appointing some meeting with a brother-thief."

"It is not likely we shall ever know, Mat."

"I tell you what, my boy, if I only understood Italian well, I should like to follow the profession of a public scribe for a few days."

"For what purpose?"

"Oh, curiosity—to get at some of the secrets that would have to be poured into my ear, you know."

"And what good would they do you?"

"I don't know, perhaps none, except to amuse me for the time, which is about all the good I get out of anything. Ah, that old man must know a good deal of Italian life, love and intrigue, and doubtless could some tales unfold worth listening to."

"For my part," returned I, "I do not care for what does not concern me."

"But when you care for it, my boy, it does concern you, don't you see? There, he has finished the epistle, and is folding it up, and I'm going to try and see the superscription."

"Pshaw, Mat, what is it to you? Let us move on!"

"Wait a minute, Al."

As he spoke, Mat Larkins sauntered up to the table, in a careless way. The old scribe, who was busy folding up and sealing the letter he had just written, took no notice of him; but the fellow who was waiting for it, and who had now risen from his seat, stared at him in a bold, impudent, and rather suspicious manner.

He was a short and rather stout-built person, of perhaps five-and-thirty, with a black, bushy


beard, covering most of his sinister face, and with small, black, piercing eyes, looking fiercely out from under shaggy brows. He wore a blue striped shirt, with falling collar; a dark neckerchief, tied sailor-fashion; a sort of roundabout, fancifully trimmed; gray pantaloons, belted around his waist, shoes on his feet—a luxury seldom indulged in by the lower orders—and a blue cloth cap, set rather jantly on one side of his head, below which his long, jet-black hair descended in great profusion.

The look which this fellow bestowed upon my friend, induced me to draw near, fearing some insult might be offered him, and a dangerous quarrel result before I could interfere. My coming up drew the attention of the man from Mat to myself, and he seemed about to make some unpleasant remark, when the old scribe asked him for the address to the letter. Instantly he produced a small strip of paper and handed it to the latter, who unfolded and held it before him. Scarcely had he done so, when Larkins, who was now looking over his shoulder, exclaimed, in English:

"Good gracious, Thornton, it is your name!"

"Mine?" cried I, springing forward.

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