

# The Contrabandist; OR One Life's Secret!

A TRUE STORY OF THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

## CHAPTER XII.—(Continued.)

The brigands were having a merry carousal after their return; and Gasparde, maddened by the cool, courageous defiance of his prisoner, and with reflecting on the loss of the prize he had thought so safe, joined recklessly in the insane riot. The leaping, dancing fire of fagots glowed redly in the center of the cavern, casting a ruddy light upon each of those dark, swarthy, unshorn countenances, grim and fierce, that clustered about it. Higher and higher leaped the flames, and more noisy grew the merriment of the brigands, till, finally, there came a lull in the wild tempest of mirth. One by one grew less clamorous, slowly drowsiness overcame them, and shortly every man lay stretched upon the heaps of skins that covered the cavern floor, in a torpor, even to Gasparde himself.

With cat-like caution, a light tread descended the rough-hewn steps; a dark form was visible by the red glow of the smoldering embers; slowly and carefully down from the mouth it came, pausing at each step, and Raimonde's eyes glanced from face to face of those sleepers. He had been watching ever since this noisy revel commenced, and now was the time come when, without guard or watcher, the way was left clear for him.

Stealing noiselessly in, he scattered upon the dying embers, from a small parcel in his hand, a fine powder that caused a light crackling sound as it fell among them, and almost immediately a cloud of thin white vapor arose, spreading and circling till it filled the entire cavern, and a curious odor, faint, yet overpowering, was perceptibly proceeding from it. Raimonde, holding a handkerchief to his face, waited some five or ten minutes, then, approaching the senseless form of Gasparde, dexterously removed from the leathern belt about his waist the ponderous keys that belonged to the cells.

"Safe enough now, monsieur le capitaine, I'll warrant!" he muttered, with a low chuckle. "You should be a little less careless. All people are not as honest as yourself!"

Swiftly and quietly he traversed the gallery leading to the cells and opened the first door. It chanced to be the one in which the count was confined. Louis heard the heavy key turning in the wards; he looked to see Gasparde. But it was a careful hand that unlocked the door, and silently into the cell stepped Raimonde.

"Hush! be quiet, monsieur le compte," he whispered, as Louis, recognizing him, sprang to his feet, with a half-suppressed exclamation of surprise; "do not speak. I have come to give you your liberty!"

"My liberty, Raimonde! Where are the brigands? Where is Gasparde?"

"Sound asleep, monsieur; and I have some reason to believe they won't wake in a hurry. I have given them something to help. Here—I will take off these jewels of yours; I dare say you won't be sorry to be rid of them." And stooping down, he unhooked and knocked off the fetters of the count.

"Ten thousand thanks, Raimonde!" exclaimed Louis, warmly. "But how did you know we had been retaken?"

"I had returned to the cavern to get something which I had left here, monsieur, and was going away again, when we saw the men coming back with you and Jacques. You were in a swoon, I suppose, for it took two or three to carry you. We had some ado to get out of their way—Michel and I—without being seen. I watched, afterwards, while they were carousing around the fire, and stole in. They are quiet enough now. Come, monsieur; but stop a moment. I see you will need something more than what you wear now. I will come back in a moment."

He left the cell, and directly returned, carrying a bundle of garments very much like those Louis was accustomed to wear in his excursions about the country. The young man lost no time in assuming them, and then left the cell with his companion. How his heart leaped! What a thrill ran through him as he felt that he was once more at liberty!

Raimonde's next step was to liberate Jacques. The poor fellow was almost beside himself with joy, and only the absolute need of silence kept him from giving unbounded expression to his delight.

Stepping cautiously among the extended forms of the drugged slumberers, the three rapidly ascended to the entrance, sprang out upon the forest soil and sped rapidly and silently away in the early dawn. Cool and fresh the morning wind came to the brows of these men, so lately prisoners, and it was like the benediction of an angel. For some distance they pursued their way together, and then Raimonde paused.

"Now, monsieur le compte, I will leave you, as I wish to strike off to the right here. I should like to have Jacques go with me."

"Well—well; then I bid you adieu!" returned the count, warmly, grasping his hand; "and I trust we shall meet again, when I may offer you a more adequate reward for your services than you received last night. I thank you a thousand times, my friend!"

And they separated, Raimonde and Jacques taking a right-hand direction, and Louis keeping the path to the chateau.

Suddenly, as he advanced, some object upon the ground attracted his attention. Picking it up, he found it to be a little

tiny slipper. It was one of hers! He had seen her wear it often. He gazed upon it for a moment with feelings of unutterable emotion, and then placed it in his breast.

"Poor little Rose!" he murmured tenderly; "where are you now?"

With the little relic safe in his breast, he pressed on. Soon he observed that the turf all about him appeared to have been trampled and crushed with many feet, whose impress it still bore. Everywhere as he went this appearance continued. Further on, he came upon a torch lying extinguished upon the ground. Anon he picked up a handkerchief, embroidered with a delicate cipher—Francis Egerton's own. What could it mean? He reflected a moment. Yes—they had been seeking her—the people from the chateau—seeking for Rose, their lost darling. And this torch was evidently one which they had carried in their search by night. He was encouraged to think that they had found her.

"And now, Gasparde," he said, involuntarily speaking aloud—"now, if all your anticipated victims are safe from your toils, look to your own safety! For that den of yours shall be opened to the light, and its iniquitous secrets revealed. An hundred men shall gather this day and rout you from your fancied security!"

Even as he spoke he suddenly seemed to hear voices shouting, one to another, at a distance, though so faintly that he paused to find whether he were not deceived. No! faintly still, but sufficiently perceptible not to be mistaken, the echo of those voices came to his ear on the still, clear air of the morning, and the sound came from the direction in which he was going. He could scarcely doubt that they proceeded from parties in search of him.

But at that very moment, as he was hastening forward, he also heard sounds from the opposite direction—a confused mingling of men's voices, with harsh, discordant shouts, and the crashing and tearing of forest branches. Could it be that his captors had aroused from their torpid slumber, discovered his escape and were pursuing him? He paused to look back.

Even as his glance pierced the interstices of those leafy shadows behind he distinguished, at a considerable distance, the figures of men whom he could not



LOUIS PURSUED BY GASPARDE.

mistake—those wild-looking forms which he had so lately beheld lying about the smoldering embers of the cavern fire. Three or four were in sight, but one was far before the others, and dashing forward with mad speed. It was Gasparde! with his unshorn hair streaming wildly about his face, and a long and glittering knife brandished in his hand.

With sudden and firm resolution, Louis turned, unarmed as he was, save with the stick which had served thus far to clear his path, and prepared to meet him.

With a louder yell of triumph at beholding his anticipated victim so near, the brigand rushed on.

"I have you, monsieur!" he cried, with a fiend's laugh—"I have you! Who will win Rose now?"

"Not you, villain!" answered Louis, sternly. And meeting the assassin, in his mad career he struck down, with his stick the uplifted knife that was ready to drink his heart's blood.

"Ah!" shouted Gasparde, raging and gnashing like a wild beast, as he snatched a pistol from his belt; "I will know—I will know who is to win! Come on, my men! Strike—stab—slay!" And, blind with rage, he dashed at his adversary.

What was to be the fate of Louis? There were four to one! But the other three, tearing forward to the assistance of their master, suddenly paused, and then hastily turned and fled. Neither Louis nor Gasparde, however, saw anything beyond each other; while the young count, with firm courage, grappled with the brigand chief, and wrenching the discharged weapon from his grasp, cast him at full length upon the turf.

And now aid was at hand; for the Marquis of Montauban and Francis Egerton, followed by two or three of the villagers, dashed into the little glade, to the scene of combat. With exclamations of joy, Louis and his uncle threw themselves into each other's arms; while Francis Egerton waved his cap gaily in the air, and stepped lightly forward to greet Louis, calling, "Found—found! my dear—dear fellow!" and he clasped the young man in a cordial and laughing embrace; but his handsome, deep-blue eyes sparkled with tears.

But their attention was attracted in another direction; for Gasparde had risen to his feet, and his cry of rage and despair rang through the forest. Deserted by his companions, who had fled on witnessing the numbers of the approaching party, and destitute of weapons, he turned and was bounding away, when a shot from one of the villagers struck him. With one horrible cry he sprang into the air and then fell heavily to the earth. There was a convulsive movement of the limbs, a contraction, a sudden spasm, and the form was stretched out in motionless silence. Gasparde was dead!

There was a time of silence, and then Francis clasped the hand of Louis and drew him gently away from the scene.

"It is too horrible!" he uttered, with a shudder. "Come, dear Louis, to where a fairer sight awaits you; let us go and meet Rose, our sweet little blossom, who owes to you her safety!"

"She is safe, then?" said Louis, with animation; "ah, that repays me for all!"

"Ay—safe! We found her in the wood an hour or two since; and without waiting longer than to meet Helen, and assure her of her safety, the dear girl insisted on guiding us instantly in the direction of the cave in which she had been confined. We were proceeding thither, with the domestics and villagers, armed with any weapons at command, when we perceived your form and that of your assailant. But see—yonder comes Rose on the arm of the Count de Clairville!"

It was indeed the beautiful Rose, pale, but smiling, who, advancing lightly in her white robes, over the forest turf, met Louis with a low cry of joy, and with fervent gladness returned his silent but eloquent embrace. Then she stood apart as the Count de Clairville, with unexpressed emotion, greeted the escaped captive.

The bands of people who had gathered to assist in the search for the young count were gay with rejoicing as they wended their triumphant way back to their homes; and at the gates of the chateau, the good marquis extended to them, one and all, a cordial invitation to a merry-making, during the following week, to celebrate the happy return of his lost children. And then, among that joyful family, there were fervent thanksgivings and explanations followed and recitals of past plot and peril; and not the least blessed of all was Helen—Montauban, who rejoiced none might know how deeply, for it was as if life itself were restored to her with the restoration of her cousin.

Jacques, making his appearance next day at the chateau, was made a hero of; and fain would all have heaped favors and rewards upon him, but he would none of it. "He was going to Lyons, to seek master Hugh," he said, "and follow his fortunes." And that very day he departed. Rose was deeply affected when she heard of this resolution. She longed to see her father, and confide to him all the trouble she had so lately endured—all that had been on her mind concerning Robin; but, with further thought, she decided that it was better to retain her vexation and trouble within her own breast until she had confessed all to the marquis; for now she resolved to delay that confession no longer.

And so Jacques went, and Rose only gave him a thousand loving messages for her father, and bade him tell of her adventure, and her final safety, and of the death of the villain Gasparde. Nothing of all her sorrow did she desire her father to know yet. He must think of her only as happy and content.

The next day there was a gathering of stout and sturdy men from far and near, armed with serviceable weapons; and the forest was searched, and the robbers' cave discovered—a place never known till then by the dwellers in that region. But the brigands had fled—their chief no longer with them; and the cavern was empty—deserted. The robbers never returned to it. It is probable that the horde broke up, and the men went in various directions to gain an unlawful living elsewhere; but they never were heard of again. Raimonde went to Italy, and thenceforth was unheard from.

(To be continued.)

### Greatest Book Thief of All.

Probably the most audacious and successful book thief that ever lived was Count Libri of Florence, who, emigrating to France, became in 1842, secretary of a government commission to examine and catalogue the books and manuscripts in the many communal libraries of the country. Availing himself of his opportunities, of the carelessness and ignorance of the custodians, and a consummate knowledge of the treasures unveiled to him, he quietly and leisurely despoiled the libraries of hundreds of their choicest manuscripts and most precious heirlooms, carefully obliterating afterward all signs that might lead to their identification.

How the collection thus acquired came into possession of the late Lord Ashburnham; by what means Libri's robberies were afterward discovered and traced back to him; together with the recent sale of the library at a stupendous increase of price, and the methods by which the French government finally recovered a portion of their long-lost treasures, form a most remarkable and romantic chapter in literary history.

### Doctor and Patient.

Dr. Yungun—No, sir; I do not approve of admitting others than the physician to the sick room. If the physician understands his business he can prepare the patient for the hereafter.

Dr. Oldun—You mean, if he doesn't understand his business.—Baltimore American

### Women Are Scarce.

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### Correct.

Gobang—I wonder who this is who advertises for the return of a watch, "and no questions asked"?

Uperdek—Some man. No woman would do it.—Judge.

## Colds

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