

'Per la vita mia!' was his startled exclamation when I told him the story. 'Lost—and since yesterday, Signora? I found him hidden in the boat when I started for V—; but I put him ashore and told him we could be friends no longer.' Poor Nicola! a fallen idol and a chastisement all in one morning! 'The Signora knows,' continued Alessandro as his head went up straighter. 'I am going to America next week.'

'But, Nicola—?' I began, ignoring his words. 'You must find Nicola. Maddalena will lose her reason if—'

'I will find him with God's help,' he replied quietly. 'Will the Signora tell me where the men have searched?'

'Everywhere,' I answered. 'They are still looking. Surely, Alessandro, he was with you so much you must know his fancies, did he ever talk of running away? Battista says he was always talking of being a brigand.'

A smile lighted his face as a recollection of the boy's talk came to him. 'He was forever one thing or another; a brigand one day, a padre another, and again a noble signor with a villa among the olive hills. Yesterday, when I put him out of the boat, I told him if he did not mind, his mother would punish him, he said he was too old to be punished by a woman, even though it was his mother. And he only comes to my elbow,' he added admiringly. 'He must be found, Signora. I will go at once. You know the old ruined villa,' pointing towards the sunset. 'We were always talking of it—both of us. I will look there first.'

'But the road is so steep,' I cried. 'No boy could climb that path.'

'Boys are monkeys—but I must start, it is hard to find in the darkness.'

'You must see Maddalena before you go; tell her of the villa; it will give her courage,' I said. He hesitated as if in doubt, then, raising his cap, turned and strode towards the open door, where I could see her standing. They were best alone, so I turned away, hoping that now in her loneliness she would forget the village gossips and show her heart to Alessandro as she had shown it to me.

I stopped idly at the fountain tinkling in the sunlight, and recalled the day when Angelo, in all the bravery of his festal clothes, had been forced to do penance for the sin of vanity in its shallow waters. I prayed that the small knave, Nicola—not Alessandro—was alive somewhere, though my heart misgave me when I thought of the hours he had been away without food or shelter. My words were brave ones when the desolate mother was within sound; but I feared the worst.

All at once a sound of many voices in the distance made me turn. Down the winding path that led to the old villa came the villagers, their shrill voices cutting through the quiet air. Nearer and nearer they came, their excited gestures telling me something had happened. That they had found the boy I was certain, but whether alive or not—I dared not think. Alessandro had started, taking another path, one more direct, but so precipitous that it was considered impassable. The cries had attracted him, and I saw him now, running down the road, throwing his cap up in the air and shouting: 'He is found, Maddalena. He is found.'

It was as Alessandro had told me when we stood outside Maddalena's door; the boy had climbed the precipitous path, found the villa—deserted, of course, no one had lived in it for ten years—crept into a sheltered corner of the courtyard, and cried himself to sleep. In the morning he hunted vainly for something to eat, and when the men found him he was quite ready to be rescued. Poor little mite! All his courage had fled away, and he was crying bitterly for his mother. They carried him home triumphantly on their shoulders, but it was Alessandro who put him in Maddalena's arms—arms that held both the big and the little man for an instant's time in a loving embrace; and when the big man turned to me with a look that said much, the wee one was being smothered in kisses. I saw that all was well, that Alessandro had entered the land of his heart's desire, that the ticket for the Promised Land would never be used, neither would the letter be delivered to the man who, as Alessandro told me later, could turn stones into gold.—'Catholic World.'

A WOMAN'S VICTORY

The bells in the high belfry of St. George's Church, which had remained silent for months, were ringing joyously to announce to the population of the Adlum the arrival of Doctor Bugenhagen, the ambassador of the preacher of Wittemberg.

All the influential men of the town were assembled to welcome the Reformer. At the head, riding on a richly caparisoned white horse, was Baron Hermann von Schaukeltatt. This young noble was chatting familiarly with a young artisan named Louis Schuback, who was walking beside him.

'And what about your fiancée?' asked the Baron.

'Oh, there is nothing easier than to bring a young girl to reason.'

'How have you begun, then, with her?'

'I have not done much—just yet, your excellency. Yesterday evening I visited her and informed her that I would marry none other than a convert to the true Gospel.'

'Well?'

'She just wept. That is all a woman can do; then she said, "Very well, it is all over between us, for I shall remain a Catholic, and I may tell you all the women of this town will remain so, too."'

'"Are you quite sure of that?" I asked her. "What about your friend, Elizabeth, and Marguerite Muller and Lydivine Bomborg?'"

'"They are a little shaken, perhaps, but I assure you all three will remain firm—yes, all the women of Adlum, without a single exception."'

'What absurdity!' exclaimed the Baron, shrugging his shoulders. 'But you have not yet told me, Louis, how you succeeded in overcoming your fiancée's prejudices.'

'I didn't stop to argue with Therese; I simply repeated that I would only marry one converted to the Gospel. "Reflect," I added, "do you not see that the reign of papacy has come to an end? Why, all Germany welcomes Martin Luther. No more fasting, no more confessions. All that sort of thing was too bothersome. Faith alone will now suffice." Therese tried to reply, but I said to her, "if you are not at St. George's Church to-morrow to hear the new doctrine, which is to be preached by Doctor Bugenhagen, then we must break our engagement."'

'Splendid!' said the Baron, 'and what did she do?' Loud cheering drowned the response made by Louis. A little way off could be seen the emissary of the Preacher of Wittemberg, wearing a long black gown, a four-corned cap, the insignia of a doctor, on his head, advancing solemnly, rocked to and fro by the slow, calm walk of his black mule. A number of cavaliers, sent by the newly-converted town of Nuremberg, escorted the new apostle.

Baron Hermann von Schaukeltatt dismounted, and in the name of the people of Adlum heartily welcomed Doctor Bugenhagen. 'All hearts,' he added in terminating, 'all hearts are already won to our cause, and in a few days you will be able, without any difficulty, to root out all the old superstitions. The men are all impatiently awaiting your exposition of the New Gospel. Already, before your arrival, we—and I was one of the valiant number—expelled the priests who were in charge of St. George's; we broke the confessionals, the crucifixes, and the statues of the Virgin. The women alone are not yet converted, but before many days we will let them see that we are the masters.'

'Pardon, your excellency, they are already converted,' added a voice.

The Baron turned around in surprise. Who had dared to interrupt him in his brilliant address?

Louis, the watchmaker of Adlum, with whom we are already acquainted, stepped forward in an excited manner.

'Yes, most reverend Doctor Bugenhagen, I assure you, even the women are now gained. That is just precisely what I was about to say to the Honorable Baron von Schaukeltatt when the arrival of your grace interrupted our conversation. I have just now looked into the church to make sure that everything was in readiness for the ceremony, and imagine my surprise when I beheld all the women of the town assembled in the holy edifice.'

'And to what cause do you attribute their conversion?'

'The divine grace has touched them, and I believe my fiancée was used as an instrument, for in the front bench, wrapt in contemplation, I saw my Therese.'

'That is extraordinary, young man, but you should not interrupt the orator.'

'A thousand pardons, venerable Doctor, but I am sure his excellency will forgive my audacity.'

'I forgive you willingly, Louis.'

When all had been presented to the Doctor, the procession restarted, and an hour later reached Adlum.

The town was gaily decked with flags and bunting. Continuous cheering greeted Luther's disciple.