



fatal. Let us go slowly, and we may go far." Alfieri, all a-quiver with uncontrollable emotion, fixed his glowing eyes on the door when the servant returned with Mrs. Haxton. She entered with the graceful ease of one accustomed to meet greater dignitaries than the head of a small Italian colony. She had nerved herself to play for a high stake. Though she shrank back a little and caught her breath when she saw Alfieri, there was a restraint in her attitude which might have surprised a more astute person than Governor Marchetti. Alfieri's presence changed the whole situation; and Mrs. Haxton, in whom the stage had lost a great actress, instantly bent her wits to deal with the new set of circumstances thus created.

"You speak Italian, signora? Ah, capital! Pray be seated," said the Governor affably. "As you have honored me with a call at this unusual hour I take it that your business is urgent. Do you wish to confer with me in private? If so, Signor Alfieri, who is not unknown to you, I believe, will leave us for a few minutes. Otherwise, you can talk quite frankly in his presence."

"I am glad that Signor Alfieri is here. Your Excellency, though I must admit that I did not expect to see him," said Mrs. Haxton, taking the proffered chair. "My business concerns him to a certain extent. By all means, let him remain."

Her voice was under control. She spoke Italian fluently, and her smooth, clear accents seemed to stir strange memories in Alfieri's soul. But, thinking to annoy her, he forced a spiteful grin to his thin lips.

"Allowing for the lapse of years, Rita," he said, "and bearing in mind your natural distress at to-day's occurrences, you are looking remarkably well."

She flashed one quick glance at him, then smiled sweetly at Marchetti. "My distress ended when the Signorina Fenshawe was brought back to her friends. Of course it was a dreadful thing that she should be carried off in such a way. Were it not for the skill and resource displayed by one of the Aphrodite's officers, there is no knowing what the consequences might have been."

"But the affair has been misrepresented," said the Governor. "It is a mere bagatelle. There exists—shall we say?—a certain disagreement between you and Signor Alfieri. There was an unhappy mistake, which I would have rectified without any help from the yacht. You see, rumor is likely to exaggerate."

"I think you are taking a very reasonable and proper view, Your Excellency. It will be best for all parties if we try to regard the incident in that light."

Marchetti was vaguely conscious of a too complete agreement in the woman's tone. But he seized the apparent advantage.

"Then that is settled," he said cheerfully. "I have already apologized to Signor Fenshawe. To-morrow a more ample explanation and expression of regret should remove any cause of friction."

"I have reason to think there will be no difficulty in arriving at an amicable settlement, provided you fall in with the suggestion I am here to make."

"And that is?"

"That you release the Baron von Kerber to-night."

"Ha!" snarled Alfieri; but the Governor angrily motioned him to be silent.

"No one is better aware than yourself, signora, how utterly impossible is your request," he said.

"The proposal is not even worthy of debate, then?"

"But no." "That is a pity. My small experience of life has taught me that when two reasonable people, or even three, hold different views on any given subject, there is always something to be said in favor of each contention. Indeed, wisdom leans toward a compromise in such a case."

"You presuppose a mere divergence of opinion. Here we have no room for it. Your confederate, signora, if you will pardon a harsh term, is believed to have stolen valuable documents from my friend Signor Alfieri. My Government has instructed me to arrest him, and to use every means, not stopping short of armed force, to prevent the Aphrodite from undertaking what is little else than a piratical expedition. You see, therefore, that it is not in my power, if I were so minded, to set Baron von Kerber at liberty."

His Excellency was firmly planted on the gubernatorial dais once more. Mrs. Haxton evidently demanded plain speaking. Being a blunt man, he gave it to her. But she smiled again, quite pleasantly.

"That is what I may describe as the correct official attitude," she said. "If it was founded on fact, it would be unassailable. But Signor Alfieri can tell you that the Baron most certainly did not steal anything from him. If a culprit must be found it was I, not Franz von Kerber, who should be charged with theft."

"Ah! *Dio mio!* you hear? She admits!" Alfieri almost screeched the words. He was in a frenzy of passion. This woman had ever the power to drive him beyond bounds. He hated her now with an intensity born of denied love.

The Governor would have stormed at him; but Mrs. Haxton accepted the challenge too promptly.

"I admit nothing!" she cried with a sudden shrillness. "If admissions are necessary, I shall wait until Abdullah confronts you. Then, when I have told my story, he shall tell his."

"Who cares for Abdullah?" came the retort. "Not I! It is well indeed to appeal to the testimony of an unknown Arab."

"You shall have the opportunity of refuting him," said Mrs. Haxton. "He is in Massawa. But that is a question for such tribunal as may exist in this lawless town. Your Excellency's

decision is final!" she added, turning to the Governor.

"Absolutely irrevocable, signora. You see how it stands; my orders are explicit."

"Their explicitness is as nothing compared to the clearness of the next mandate you will receive from Rome!" she blazed out. "Was it according to your orders that an English lady was carried off by brigands, simply to glut the vengeance of my discarded Beppo? You spoke of confederates, Signor Marchetti. What of the confederacy that permits this man to be your guest while your officers are making mock search for him in the bazaar? Your judges, even such as they are, will laugh him out of court when he tries to substantiate the charge he has brought against Baron von Kerber. Poor lovesick fool! To gratify his spite, he attacks his rival with false evidence rather than let it be known that a woman twisted him round her little finger. Look at him now! He would strike me dead, if he dared; but he cannot answer me."

Alfieri leaped to his feet. His voice rose to a cracked falsetto. "You hear, you hear!" was his cry. "She robbed me of the papyrus, yet boasts of it! She is a thief, self confessed!"

Mrs. Haxton also sprang up. Her physical dread of the man had yielded to the triumph of having cornered him. "Truly I hope His Excellency hears," she said. "If I am to blame for the loss of your papers, why is Baron von Kerber in prison on your testimony?"

"You are both in league!" he almost screamed. "I was blind, infatuated, at Assuan. It was the Austrian who planned my undoing, and you, his paramour, who captived me out of my senses."

"I refuse to stay here and be insulted by such a coward," she said, gathering her skirts as though she intended to take her departure instantly. "But it will be a fine story that Signor Fenshawe cables from Aden when he tells how the Governor of Massawa aided and abetted this half-crazy poltroon in onslaughts on defenseless women. It was not enough that Italian law should be misused to further his ends; but the scum of the bazaar is enlisted under his banner, and he is supported by the authorities in an act that would be reprobated by any half-savage State in existence."

"I pray you calm yourself, signora, exclaimed Marchetti, now fully alive to the dangers confronting him. "You must see that I have acted only in an official capacity. I, at least, have no feeling in the matter. I received certain information—"

"Which was entirely misleading and one-sided," she broke in imperiously.

"Which certainly did not refer to you in any particular," was the sharp rejoinder, while he glanced at Alfieri. "If this gentleman is now prepared to say that he was mistaken—"

"Who dares to hint at any admission on my part?" shouted Alfieri.

The stout Governor did not like to be bawled at. He was sufficiently embarrassed already by the quagmire into which Alfieri had plunged him. "You ought to be careful in your choice of words," he said pompously. "There is no question of 'dare' or 'dare not,' where I am concerned. Signora, do me the favor of sitting here while I discuss matters briefly with Signor Alfieri. Signor, be good enough to precede me."

He pointed to the door. With a queer catching at her breath, Mrs. Haxton sank into a chair. Alfieri folded his arms and gazed at the Governor with eyes that blazed under his heavy brows.

"You are the representative of Italy," he said, making a great effort to speak quietly. "I call on you to lodge that woman in a cell so that she may be tried with her accomplice."

"If you do not go instantly, and in silence, into the corridor, I will call on my guards to take you there by force!" exclaimed Marchetti.

Alfieri, with a fierce gesture of disdain, went out.

His Excellency bowed to the woman. "Two minutes," he murmured.

The Governor's two minutes lengthened into ten. Then he hurried back alone. He was manifestly ill at ease, though he spoke glibly enough.

"I am taking a grave step, signora," he said, "but I feel that the peculiar circumstances warrant it. I have released the Baron von Kerber. He is now awaiting you, and it will give me much pleasure to conduct you to your carriage. Yet I pray you give earnest heed to what I have told him. I now tell you this undertaking of yours must be abandoned. Not only is it my duty to prevent it at all costs, but an expedition starts for the Five Hills this very night. So, you see, you are sure to fail in any case. The exact locality is known, and Signor Alfieri has an armed escort."

As one waking in a dream, Mrs. Haxton accompanied Marchetti to the courtyard. There she found von Kerber, who ran to meet her.

"So it is you!" he cried in English. "I guessed it, though they would tell me nothing."

The Governor was most polite. He would not lecture them before natives. "I have spoken as a friend to-night," he murmured. "To-morrow I shall be an official once more."

The alabeyah rattled across the paved square toward the gateway. Alfieri, on whom an officer kept an eye, watched it with malevolence from an upper window.

The driver swung his horses toward the sea front.

"No, no!" cried Mrs. Haxton. "Go through the Bazaar Drive slowly." And in the next breath she explained to von Kerber, "We must find Abdullah! He is somewhere in the main street. Above all things, we must find Abdullah! Alfieri leaves Massawa to-night, and he is making for the Five Hills! Our only hope lies with Abdullah!"



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