

CHAPTER XII SILVIO'S GOLD

Jason Jones urged his little car to its best speed until he gained his villa. Entering the ground, he was confronted by his factotum, the Italian, Silvio.

He sprang out and approached the man.

"Is the prisoner safe?" he whispered.

"Certainly, Signore."

"Is she still in the grape-house?"

"With the wine presses, Signore."

"And she can't get out?"

"Unless she becomes small, like a rat, Signore."

Jones glanced around suspiciously, then fixed his gaze on a little outbuilding of stone, with a tiled roof, which stood quite removed from the others of the group.

"Has she screamed, or cried out?" he asked the man.

"Not since I put her in, las' night, Signore."

"Good. You've fed her?"

"The plenty. She eat very well. It's a nice lady, Signore."

"She's dangerous. Listen, Silvio: we must keep her there a week longer."

"If I am jailer a week, I mus' double my price," he asserted, shrugging his shoulders.

"Nonsense!"

"The lady will offer me more to let her out. She say so."

"What! You'd betray me?"

"Not if I have the gold--here, in my hand--now, Signore."

Jones grew red and then white. He eyed the man wickedly. He scowled, and Silvio smiled pleasantly. Silvio was big for an Italian; big and brawny; as his smile faded his face assumed a look of stubborn determination.

"So you want the gold now, Silvio?"

"At once, if it please the Signore. The gendarmes are ugly if the law is broken. Their jails are not as pleasant as the grape-house. So the gold must be twice the amount we had spoken of, Signore."

"And you will promise she shall not escape; that you'll keep her safe until--until I tell you to let her go?"

"That is our bargain, Signore."

Jones sighed regretfully.

"Very well, then, Silvio," he said. "You're a robber--the son of a brigand--the spawn of a bandit! But come with me to the house, and you shall have your gold."

* * * * *

Alora stayed all that week with Mary Louise, hearing nothing of her father and almost forgetting her unhappiness in the society of her delightful new friend. It was Sunday evening when the Colonel and Mary Louise drove their guest over to the villa and the two parties did not see one another again until they met on the deck of the steamer in Naples on the following Tuesday morning.

The Joneses came aboard very quietly just at the last moment and at the gang-plank Alora's father was confronted by a grimy Italian boy who handed him a letter. Without pausing to read it, Jones hurried below, and he kept his stateroom until the ship was well out in the blue Mediterranean, on its way to Gibraltar and New York. But no one missed him, for Alora and Mary Louise were happy at being reunited and Gran'pa Jim was happy in seeing them happy.