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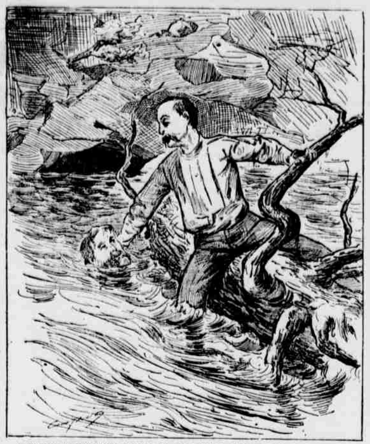

A MOMENT AFTERWARDS BATHORY WAS SEIZED BY THE ARM, AND AFTER A VIOLENT EFFORT HOISTED ONTO THE TRUNK.

Mathias Sandorf.

—BY—

JULES VERNE.

AUTHOR OF "JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH," "TRIP TO THE MOON," "AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY DAYS," "MICHAEL STROGOFF," "TWENTY THOUSAND LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA," ETC., ETC.

[TRANSLATION COPYRIGHTED, 1885.]

[CHAPTER ELEVEN—CONCLUDED.]

not yet yielded in despair. He rejoiced that his companion was almost senseless. Had he retained the instinct of self preservation he would struggle, and then Sandorf would be obliged to leave him to his fate, or both would be overwhelmed.

Nevertheless the state of affairs could not continue very long. Sandorf's strength began to fail him. Every now and then as he supported Bathory's head his own would sink back into the liquid pillow. Suddenly respiration became difficult. He gasped for breath, he was choking, he was wrestling with asphyxia. Often he had to leave go of his companion whose head sank instantly, but invariably he managed to grip him again, and that amid the wild racing of the waters which shouldered back and piled on each other by he occasional narrowing of the channel thundered along in foam.

At last Count Sandorf thought that all was lost. Bathory slipped from his grasp. he tried to rescue him. He could not. He had lost him; and he himself was dragged down to the torrent's bed.

A violent shock nearly broke his shoulder. He stretched out his hand instinctively. His fingers closed in a clump of roots which were swimming by.

The roots were those of a tree trunk being brought down by the torrent. Sandorf fastened on to this raft and dragged himself back to the surface of the Foiba. Then, while he grasped the root with one hand he sought for his companion with the other.

A moment afterwards Bathory was seized by the arm, and after a violent effort hoisted on to the trunk, where Sandorf took his place beside him. Both were for a time saved from the danger of drowning, but they had bound up their destiny with that of their raft, and given themselves over to the caprices of the rapids of the Brico.

Sandorf had not lost his consciousness for a moment. He made it his first care to make sure that Bathory could not slip from the tree. By excess of precaution he placed himself behind him, so as to hold him in his arms. In this position he kept watch for the end. At the first glimpse of light that penetrated the cavern he would see what the waters were like as they emerged. But there was nothing as yet to show that they were near the end of this wonderful stream.

However, the position of the fugitives had improved. The tree was about twelve feet long, and the spreading roots were now and then struck against the projections. If it were not subjected to a very violent shock its stability, in spite of the the irregularities of the stream, seemed to be assured. Its speed could not be less than nine miles an hour, being equal to that of the torrent that bore it.

Sandorf had recovered his coolness. He tried to revive his companion, whose head rested on his knees. He found that his heart still beat, but that his breathing was difficult. He bent over and tried to breathe a little air into his lungs. Would that the preliminaries of asphyxia had not injured him without hope of relief!

Soon Bathory made a slight movement. More marked respirations came from his parting lips. At last a few words escaped his mouth.

"Wife! My boy! Mathias!"

His whole life was in those three words.

"Stephen, do you know me? do you know me?" asked Sandorf, who had to shout to make himself heard above the wild tumult with which the torrent filled the vaults of the Brico.

"Yes! Yes! I know you. Speak! Speak! Your hand in mine!"

"We are no longer in immediate danger," answered Sandorf. "A raft is carrying us. Where? I cannot say, but it will not leave us!"

"Mathias, and the donjon?"

"We are far away from it now! They will think we found our death in the torrent, and assuredly they will never dream of pursuing us. Wherever this torrent flows out, into sea or river, we shall go; and we shall get there alive! Keep your courage up, Stephen! I will look after you. Be quiet for a little, and recover the strength you will soon want. In a few hours we shall be saved. We shall be free!"

"And Ladislas?" murmured Bathory.

Sandorf gave no answer. What could he say? Zathmar, after giving the alarm from the window, must have been seized, so that flight was impossible, and now under strict guard could in no way be helped by his friends.

Stephen's head again fell back. He had not the physical energy to master his torpor. But Sandorf watched over him, ready for anything, even to abandon the raft if it happened to crash up against the rocks which in the midst of the profound darkness it was impossible to avoid.

It was nearly two o'clock in the morning before the speed of the current, and consequently that of the tree, began sensibly to slacken. Evidently the channel was getting wider and the waters, finding a freer passage between the walls, were traveling at a more moderate pace. And it was not unreasonable to expect that the end of the subterranean pass was close at hand.

But if the walls were widening the roof was closing down on them. By raising his hand Count Sandorf could skim the surface of the irregular schists which stretched above his head. Frequently there came a grating noise as the roots of the tree ground against the roof. Then the trunk would stagger as it recoiled from some violent collision and swing off in a new direction. And then it would drift across the stream, and twist and writhe till the fugitives feared they would be wrenched away. That danger over—after it had been experienced several times—there remained another, of which Sandorf coolly calculated the consequences. What was to happen if the roof continued to close down? Already his only way of escape was to fall backwards the instant his hand felt a projecting rock. Would he have to take to the stream? As far as he was concerned he might attempt it; but how could his companion keep afloat? And if the channel kept low for a long distance how were they to come out of it alive? How indeed—and was death to be the end after so many escapes from death?

Sandorf, energetic as he was, felt his heart wrung with anguish. He saw that the supreme moment was approaching. The tree roots ground against the overhanging rocks more violently, and at times the top of the trunk was driven so deeply into the current that the water completely covered it.

"But," said Sandorf, "the outlet cannot be far off."

And then he looked to see if some vague streak of light did not filter into the darkness ahead. By this time was the night advanced enough for the darkness outside to have lifted? Was the lightning still flashing beyond the Brico? If so, a little light perhaps would show itself in this channel, which threatened to get too small to hold the Foiba. But there was nothing. Nothing but absolute darkness and roaring waters, of which even the foam remained black!

Suddenly there was a terrific shock. At its forward end the tree had dashed against an enormous pendant from the roof. As it struck it completely turned over. But Sandorf did not let go of it. With one hand he desperately clung to the roots, with the other he held his companion. And the tree sank, and with it the men sank into the mass of waters which then filled the channel to the roof.

This lasted for nearly a minute. Sandorf felt that he was lost. Instinctively he stopped breathing so as to economize the little air that remained in his lungs.

Suddenly through the liquid mass, although his eyes were closed, he felt the impression of a vivid light. A lightning flash, it was, followed by the noise of thunder.

It was the light, at last!

The Foiba had emerged from the subterranean channel and was flowing in the open. But whither was it flowing? On what sea coast was its mouth? That was still the insoluble question—a question of life or death.

The trunk of the tree had floated to the surface again. Bathory by a strong effort was dragged up and took his place at the end. Then Sandorf looked before him, around him, above him.

Up stream a dark mass was being left behind. This was the huge cliff of the Brico in which the underground channel opened which gave passage to the waters of the Foiba. Day was already showing itself by the scattered streaks of light overhead, vague as the nebulæ which the eye can only just see on a winter's night. From time to time a few pale lightning flashes lighted up the background amid the dull roll of occasional thunder. The storm was slowly going or else dying away.

To the right, to the left, Sandorf threw a glance of keen anxiety. He saw that the river flowed between two high cliffs and that its speed was terrific.

They were in a rapid which was taking them along amid all its races and eddies. But above their head now was the infinite, and no longer the narrowing vault with its ledges threatening each instant to crush them. But there was no bank on which they could set foot, no slope on which they could disembark. Two steep high walls shut in the narrow Foiba, and it was really the old channel with its vertical walls, but without its roof of stone.

The last immersion had greatly revived Bathory. His hand had sought Sandorf's, who clasped it as he whispered:

"Saved."

But had he a right to use the word? saved, when he did not even know where the river ended or what country it traversed or when they would be able to abandon their raft? Such, however, was his energy that he sat upright on the tree and three times shouted aloud:

"Saved! Saved! Saved!"

Who could hear him? No one on these rocky cliffs whose boulders and schists had not mold enough to bear even a bramble. The country hidden by the high banks would be sought by no human being—a desolate country through which the Foiba runs imprisoned like an artificial canal between its rocky walls. Not a brook flows in to feed it. Not a bird skims its surface, not even a fish ventures into its too rapid waters. Here and there huge rocks rise in its bed, and their parched summits show that the watercourse with all its violence is nothing but a sudden overflowing due to heavy rain. At ordinary times the bed of the Foiba is simply a deep ravine.

The only danger now was lest the tree should be hurled on the rocks. It avoided them of itself as it kept in the middle of the currents which swept round them. But it was impossible to check its speed to get to shore in case a suitable landing place was noticed.

An hour passed and no immediate danger appeared. The final flashes had died out in the distance, and the storm only manifested itself by the heavy thundering which reverberated among the lofty clouds whose long narrow bands streaked the horizon. Day was breaking and the gray was rising over the sky that had been cleared by the tumult of the night. It was about four o'clock in the morning.

Stephen lay in Sandorf's arms.

A distant report was heard towards the southwest.

"What is that?" asked Sandorf, who was still on the lookout. "Is that a gun announcing that a harbor is open? If so we cannot be far from the sea. What port can it be? Trieste? No, for there is the east, where the sun is rising. Can it be Pola at the extreme south of Istria? But then—"

A second report was now heard, and this was almost immediately followed by a third.

"Three cannon shots?" said Sandorf. "That is the signal for an embargo placed upon ships that are anxious to sail? Has that anything to do with our escape?"

He might fear so. Assuredly the authorities would neglect nothing to keep the fugitives from getting away from the coast.

"Heaven help us!" murmured Sandorf.

And now the lofty cliffs which shut in the Foiba began to shorten. Nothing could be seen of the country. Sudden bends marked the horizon and bounded the views a hundred feet away. To take the bearings was impossible.

The much widened river bed, silent and deserted, allowed the current to flow more slowly. A few trees brought down by the stream were floating near them. The June morning was quite chill. In their wet clothes the fugitives shook till their teeth chattered.

Toward five o'clock the cliffs had given place to long low banks, and the country on each side was flat and naked. The Foiba had widened to about half a mile, and become a stretch of stagnant water which might be called a lagoon, if not a lake. In the distance towards the west there were a few vessels. Some at anchor, some with their canvas set waiting for the breeze, and these seemed to show that the lagoon was a haven cut well back into the coast. The sea then was not far off, and there would be no difficulty in finding it. But it would not be prudent to seek shelter with the fishermen. To trust themselves intheir power, supposing they had heard of the escape, would be to chance being handed over to the Austrian gendarmes, who were probably now scouring the country.

Sandorf knew not what to do, when the tree struck a stump on the left side of the lagoon and stopped dead. The roots got entangled with a clump of brushwood and the tree swung round parallel with the bank as if it had been a boat under the control of a steersman.

Sandorf got ashore and looked around. He wished to make sure that no one saw him.

As far as he could see there was no one, fisherman or otherwise, within sight on the lagoon.

And yet within a hundred yards of him there was a man stretched at full length on the sand who could see both him and his companion.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RUINED FARM.

Sandorf thinking all was safe went back to the tree, lifted his companion in his arms and laid him on the bank. He knew nothing of where he was or where he was to go.

In reality this sheet of water, which serves as the mouth of the Foiba, is neither a lagoon nor a lake, but an estuary. It bears the name of Leme Canal and it communicates with the Adriatic by a narrow creek between Orsera and Rovigno on the western side of the Istrian peninsula. But it was not known before this voyage that its waters come from the Foiba and were brought throught the gorge of the Brico during heavy rains.

A few paces from the bank there was a deserted hut and Sandorf and Bathory after a short rest took shelter in it. There they stripped and waited while the sun dried their clothes. The fishing vessels were leaving the Leme Canal and as far as they could see the place was deserted.

The man who had been watching them since they landed now got up and carefully noted the position of the hut. And then he disappeared around a knoll and made off towards the south.

Three hours afterwards Sandorf and his companion resumed their clothes. They were still damp, but it was necessary to move on.

"We must not stay too long in this hut," said Bathory.

"Do you feel yourself strong enough to start?" asked Sandorf.

"I am almost exhausted with hunger!"

"Let us try to reach the coast! There we may perhaps procure something to eat and something to take us to sea. Come Stephen!"

And they left the hut, evidently suffering more from hunger than fatigue.

Sandorf's intention was to follow the southern bank of the Leme Canal until he reached the sea. The country was deserted, it is true, but quite a number of streams intersected it on their way to the estuary. This watery network along the banks is nothing more nor less than a vast sponge, and the mud is impassable, so that the fugitives had to strike southward obliquely, easily keeping their course by the sun, which had now risen. For two hours they kept on without meeting a human being, and without finding anything to satisfy the hunger that was devouring them.

Then the country became less arid. They found a road running east and west, which boasted a mile-stone that gave no indication as to the region across which they were feeling their way like the blind. There were, however, some hedges of mulberry trees, and farther on a field of sorghum, which enabled them to allay their hunger or rather to cheat the wants of their stomachs. The sorghum chewed and even eaten, and the refreshing mulberries, might perhaps be enough to keep them from exhaustion before they reached the coast.

But if the country was inhabited, if a few fields showed that the hand of man was employed about them, the fugitives had to be careful how they met the inhabitants.

About noon five or six foot passengers appeared on the road. As a matter of caution Sandorf thought he and Bathory had better get out of sight. Fortunately an enclosure around an old ruined farm lay some fifty yards to the left. There, before they had been noticed, he and his

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companion took refuge in a kind of dark cellar, where in the event of any one stopping at the farm they ran little risk of discovery if they waited till the night.

The foot passengers were peasants and salt marsh workers. Some were driving a flock of geese, doubtless to market at some town or village which could not be very far from the canal. Men and women were clothed in Istrian style, with the jewels, medals, earrings, breast crosses and filigree pendants which ornament the ordinary costume of both sexes. The salt marsh workers were more simply dressed, as with sack on back and stick in hand they marched along to the salterns in the neighborhood, or perhaps even to the important establishments at Stagnone or Pirano in the west of the province.

Some of them stopped when they reached the farm and rested for a little on the doorstep. They talked in a loud voice, not without a certain animation, but only of things concerning their trade.

The fugitives leant against the corner and listened. Perhaps these people had already heard of the escape and were talking about it? Perhaps they were saying something which might reveal in what part of Istria they then were.

Not a word passed on the subject. They could only continue to guess.

"If the country people say nothing about our escape it is a fair inference," said Sandorf, "that they have not yet heard of it."

"That," said Bathory, "would go to prove that we are some distance from the fortress. Considering the rapidity of the torrent which kept us under ground for more than six hours I am not surprised at that."

"That must be it," said Sandorf.

A couple of hours passed, and then some salt-workers as they passed the farm without stopping were heard to speak about the gendarmes they had met at the gate of the town.

What town? They gave it no name.

This was not very reassuring. If gendarmes were about it was probable that they were scouring the country in search of the fugitives.

"But," said Bathory, "considering how we escaped, they might well believe us dead and never think of pursuit."

"They will believe we are dead when they find our bodies," answered Sandorf.

There being no doubt that the police were afoot and in search of them, they decided to stay till it was night. Although they were tortured with hunger they dared not leave their retreat; and they were wise.

About five o'clock the tramp of a small troop of horse was heard along the road.

Sandorf, who had been out to the gate of the enclosure, hurriedly rejoined his companion and dragged him into the darkest corner of the cellar. There they hid themselves under a heap of brushwood and remained motionless.

Half a dozen gendarmes headed by a sergeant were coming along the road towards the east. Would they stop at the farm? Sandorf anxiously asked. If they searched the place they could not fail to find them.

They halted. The sergeant and two of the men dismounted, while the others remained in the saddle and received orders to search the country along the canal and then return to the farm, where the rest would meet then at seven o'clock.

The four gendarmes moved off immediately. The sergeant and the two others picketed their horses and sat down to talk. From the corner of the cellar the fugitives could hear all that passed.

"Yes," we shall go back to the town this evening and get the orders for tonight," said the sergeant in reply to one of the men. "The telegraph may bring us fresh instructions from Trieste."

The town in question was not Trieste; that was one point of which Count Sandorf made a note.

"Are you not afraid," said the second gendarme, "that while we are looking about here that the fugitives may have got down the Quarnero Canal?"

"Yes, that is possible," said the first gendarme, "for they might think it safer than here."

"If they do," said the sergeant, they none the less risk being found, for the whole coast is being looked after from one end to the other."

Second fact worth noting. Sandorf and his companion were on the west coast of Istria, that is to say, near the Adriatic shore, and not on the banks of the opposite canal which runs out at Fiume.

"I think they are having a look round the salt works at Pirano and Capo d'Istria," said the sergeant. "They might hide there easily and get on board a vessel crossing the Adriatic and bound for Rimini or Venice."

"They had much better have waited patiently in their cell," said one of the gendarmes philosophically.

"Yes," added the other, "sooner or later they'll be caught, if they have not fished them up out of the Buco! That would finish it, though, and we should not have to trot about the country in all this heat."

"And who says it hasn't finished it?" replied the sergeant. "Perhaps the Foiba has been the executioner, and while it is in flood, the wretched men could not have chosen a worse road out of the donjon of Pisino."

The Foiba then was the name of the river which had carried off Count Sandorf and his companion. It was the fortress of Pisino to which they had been taken after their arrest, and there they had been imprisoned, tried and sentenced. It was from its donjon they had escaped. Count Sandorf knew this town of Pisino well. He had at last fixed on this point which was so important for him to know, and it would no longer be by chance that he would cross the Istrian peninsula, if flight was still possible.

The conversation of the gendarmes did not stop here; but in these few words the fugitives had learned all they wished to know—except, perhaps, the name of the town by the canal on the Adriatic coast.

Soon the sergeant got up and walked about the enclosure, watching if his men were returning to the farm. Twice or thrice he entered the ruined house and looked into the rooms, rather from professional habit than suspicion. He even came to the door of the cellar, and the fugitives would certainly have been discovered if the darkness had not been so great. He even entered it, and tossed about the brushwood in the corner with his scabbard, but without reaching those beneath. At this moment Sandorf and Bathory passed through almost the whole gamut of anguish. They had resolved to sell their lives dearly if the sergeant reached them. To throw themselves on him, profit by his surprise to deprive him of his arms, to attack him two to one, to kill him or make him kill himself, they had fully made up their minds.

At this moment the sergeant was called out, and he left the cellar without noticing anything suspicious. The four gendarmes sent off to search had just returned to the farm. Despite all they could do they did not come across any traces of the fugitives in the district between the coast and the canal. But they had not come back alone—a man accompanied them.

He was a Spaniard employed in the salt works in the neighborhood. He was returning to the town when the gendarmes met him. As he told them that he had been all over the country between the town and the salt works they resolved to bring him to the sergeant for him to interrogate him. The man had no objection to go with them.

The sergeant asked him if he had noticed any strangers in the salt works.

"No, sergeant," said the man; "but this morning, about an hour after I left the town, I saw two men who had just landed at the point along the canal."

"Two men, do you say?" asked the sergeant.

"Yes, but as in these parts we thought the execution at Bisino took place this morning, and had heard nothing about the escape, I did not pay much attention to the men. Now I know what has occurred I should not be surprised if they were the two you want.

From the corner of the cellar Sandorf and Bathory could hear every word of this conversation which affected them so nearly. Then when they landed on the bank they had been seen.

"What is your name?" asked the sergeant.

"Carpena, and I am employed at the salt works."

"Could you recognize these two men you saw this morning?"

"Yes, probably!"

"Well, you can come and make a declaration, and put yourself at the disposal of the police."

"I am at your orders."

"Do you know there is a five thousand florins reward for the discovery of the fugitives?"

"Five thousand florins!"

"And the hulks to him who harbors them!"

"You don't say so!"

"Go," said the sergeant.

The Spaniard's news had the effect of sending off the gendarmes. The sergeant ordered his men to mount, and as night had fallen he started for the town, after having thoroughly searched the banks of the canal. Carpena at the same time set out, congratulating himself that the capture of the fugitives would be worth so much to him.

Sandorf and Bathory remained in hiding for some time before they left the cellar which had served them for a [illegible]. Their thoughts ran as follows: The gendarmerie were on their traces, as they had been seen and were likely to be recognized, the Istrian provinces were no longer safe for them, and they must leave the country as soon as possible, either for Italy, on the other side of the Adriatic, or across Dalmatia and the military frontier.

The first plan offered the best chances of success, providing they could possess themselves of a vessel, or prevail on some fisherman to land them on the Italian coast. And this plan they adopted.

Hence about half-past eight o'clock, as soon as the night was dark enough, Sandorf and his companion, after leaving the ruined farm, started off towards the southwest, so as to reach the Adriatic coast. And at first they were obliged to keep to the road to avoid being lost in the marshes of the Leme.

But did not this unknown road lead to the town which it put into communication with the heart of Istria? Were they not running into great danger? Undoubtedly, but what else could they do?

About half-past nine the vague outline of a town appeared about a quarter of a mile ahead in the darkness; and it was not easy to recognize it.

It was a collection of houses clumsily built in terraces on an enormous mass of rock which towered over the sea above the harbor cut back into the re-entering angle on one of its sides. The whole was surmounted by a high campanile, whose proportions were much exaggerated in the gloom.

Sandorf had quite decided not to enter the town where the presence of two visitors would soon be known. He tried, therefore, to pass round the walls so as to reach one of the points on the coast if possible.

But this they did not do without being followed for some distance by the same man who had already seen them on the Leme Canal—the same Carpena whose information they had heard given to the sergeant of gendarmerie. In fact as he went home and thought over the reward that had been offered, the Spaniard left the road so as to watch it better, and chance, luckily for him but unluckily for them, again put him on the track of the fugitives.

Almost at the same moment a squadron of police came out from one of the gates of the town and threatened to bar the way. They had only just time to scramble out of sight, and then to hurry at full speed towards the shore by the side of one of the walls of the port.

Here they found a fisherman's hut, with its little windows lighted up and its door open. If they could not find a refuge here, if the fisherman refused to receive them, they were lost. To seek refuge was to risk everything, but the time had gone by for hesitation. Sandorf and his companion ran towards the door of the hut and stopped on the threshold. Inside was a man mending his nets by the light of a ship's lantern.

"My friend," asked Count Sandorf, "can you tell me the name of this town?"

"Rovingo."

"And we are speaking to?"

"Andrea Ferrato, the fisherman."

"Will Andrea Ferrato consent to give us a night's lodging?"

Andrea Ferrato looked at them, advanced towards the door, caught sight of the squadron of police at the end of the wall, divining doubtless who they were that asked his hospitality and understood that they were lost if he hesitated to reply.

"Come in," he said.

But the two fugitives did not move.

"My friend," said Sandorf, "there are five thousand florins reward for whoever will give up the prisoners who escaped from the donjon of Pisino."

"I know it."

"There are hulks," added Sandorf, "for him who harbors them."

"I know it."

"You could not deliver—"

"I told you to come in; come in, then," answered the fisherman.

And Andrea Ferrato shut the door as the squadron of police came tramping past the hut.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FISHERMAN'S HUT.

Andrea Ferrato was a Corsican, a native of Santa Manza, a little port in the arrondissement of Sartene, situated at the back of the southern point of the island. This port and Bastia and Porto Vecchio are the only ones that open on to that monotonous eastern coast of which the sea has gradually destroyed the capes, filled up the gulfs, effaced the bays and destroyed the creeks.

It was at Santa Manza on that narrow portion of the sea between Corsica and the Italian mainland, and often among the rocks of the straits of Bonifacio that Andrea Ferrato followed his trade as a

[TO BE CONTINUED.]