

The Scarlet Runner

Vitagraph Company

From the Popular Novel of the same name by C. N. and A. M. Williamson

Stars of This Episode
MR. EARLE WILLIAMS as CHRISTOPHER RACE
MISS JEAN STEWART as ALEXA MURGIENEFF
Next Week Another Story and New Picture

CHAPTER VIII. THE GLOVE AND THE RING.

"I ask nothing of life—except death," said the Marchese Baria. "The one thing life cannot give," answered Christopher Race. "They were sitting together at Florian's, in Venice, at one of the out-of-doors tables. They had not been first to meet at night when the place had been crowded, and they had been forced to sit down at a table together, if they would sit at all. Now it was in the morning (for Florian's never closes) and they had talked ever since."

Christopher knew that Baria had loved a lady, the most beautiful on earth—according to her lover, that they had been engaged, and that he had lost some thousands of pounds and had received an adverse opinion concerning his health from an eminent doctor. The lady admired strong men and threw Baria over to take on those lungs and that bank account were both more satisfactory than his. She was now the wife of this person, who happened to be a prince, and the Marchese Baria wished to forget her as soon as possible. He found in her which he felt himself able to do this was by death, and at present he was engaged in shortening the short lease of life given him by his doctor by taking too much alcohol. He found a delicate patient. But he had hopes of pneumonia. That was why he had chosen to sit out of doors on an unseasonably chill, cold, rainy night, clad in the lightest of garments.

"Is it murder to annihilate a person whose one wish is to die?" the Marchese asked. "I'm inclined to think the law would find it so. But you and Christopher spoke slowly, as if on mature deliberation. 'I'll tell you what I can do. You say you're trying a course of freezing treatment to hurry up matters. Well, I'll give you a course more like October weather, and I can give you a long, strong dose of cold air in my motor. What about coming on with me until you pick up pneumonia, or, if not that, a visit to attack of the influenza or the flu or even pleurisy, as you may do if it doesn't soon stop raining?'"

"You are a good fellow!" exclaimed Baria. "The moment we exchanged our first words I felt you would be a friend." "And I you," replied Christopher. "The pity is, our friendship's likely to be so short."

"Well, I shall be together till the end," said the Marchese. "It's worth trying," assented Christopher. "Scarlet Runner and I are at your service for the experiment. I've got rid of my passengers. I've got a motor, and I'll be in time for another engagement, and I shall be delighted to have a companion."

"For as long as I last?" said Baria. "For as long as you last," echoed Race. They started next morning, the Marchese having wound up his more pressing affairs in case of the other end, and giving all necessary instructions to the servants who looked after his palace on the Grand Canal.

Their way led through southern country, where the weather had been abnormal days; but the weather was normal. There were cold winds and bursts of rain, which delighted the Marchese Baria. He would wear no coat, and he would sit in the front beside Christopher. Each night he expected to be ill, but he had instead an enormous appetite and slept as he had not slept since the marriage of his faithless lady. This annoyed and puzzled Christopher, who was somewhat comforted by Christopher's suggestion that the seeming improvement might be a mere flash of life before the end.

They drove through Padua and Verona to Milan and to Alessandria; across the plain of Lombardy to Cuneo, all by easy stages, and when the sun shone on them again Baria longer coughed, except when it occurred to him as the duty of a fitted lover. Now Scarlet Runner was set to climb the mighty barrier of the Alps which shuts off Piedmont from the Mediterranean, and darkness had fallen for the third time since its start, when it had passed through the long tunnel of the Col di Tenda and had begun to descend past San Dalmaizo into the valley of the Roja.

to take the quickest and most likely way of getting to the roof of this queer business, my idea is—let us go on with the cart and see what happens. "Good!" said the Marchese, thrilling at the thought of the danger, the mystery, ahead. His eyes sparkled in the lantern light. He did not want to fade away now. Indeed, he had forgotten that he had even wanted to fade away. "Good! But the car—"

"We'll tow it, lights out, behind the cart, so that it may make no noise. You shall sit in it to steer and put on the brakes, if necessary. I'll be low in the cart, ready for anything with my revolver. I'd give that part to you, for I know you'd like it, but you're not quite strong enough yet for a job where both our lives may depend on strength as well as quickness."

Baria saw that it was Race's intention to keep him screened and protected in case of sudden assault, but he could not object. He could only regret, for a poignant instant, that he had so busily wanted instead of husbanding his strength. As for Christopher, he saw Baria's silent disappointment and was sorry.

"Keep these," he said, handing his friend the glove and the ring. "We may be going into a den of thieves and assassins," said Baria, cheering up as he prepared to change places with Race. "If so," said Christopher, trailing the ray of his lantern along the canvas cover of the cart, "it may not be long before we get there. Look! here's the name of the owner—or alleged owner—of the motor."

"What he saw was Christopher, standing up, his revolver cocked and aimed, for now there seemed little hope for explanations. The name of the owner—or alleged owner—of the motor, was 'Lorenzo Arnesse, Marchese Baria, of Venice. We came here as avengers, not as spies. If you miss any friends of yours from the cart you had better think you as innocent as we are, we will answer. And, meanwhile, if you doubt our identity, we have papers as well as an automobile to prove it.'"

"His impudence was impressive. The men consulted together, asked a few questions and got dramatic answers, with a description of the meeting of the cart and car on the road, and what had been found under the canvas cover. As he finished Baria showed the glove and ring and at the sight of them the tide of angry suspicion turned against him and his friend again, until Christopher whipped out the knife which had held the reins fast.

"Tell them where we found it and why we came here, he said to Baria, for though he could understand, he could speak no more than enough Italian for servants, an inn or a garage. The men, still guarding their prisoners, no longer wholly antagonistic, looked at the knife, touching it and examining the blade and handle with care.

"It is Russian," commented the oldest of the men to his comrades. Then he turned to Baria. "You may both show the papers you spoke of, to prove your identity," he said. "That one word 'Russian,' spoken in no other way, was a clue instantly seized by both Race and Baria. The language which they had not been able to comprehend was Russian. These men's features were Russian—their high cheek-bones, their narrow gray eyes and short noses."

"Why did you come to us?" the last speaker asked, in Italian, and Baria, prompted now and then by Christopher, explained, with perfect frankness. "We wanted to know who had plotted the murder—if murder had been done—and we thought the quickest way to find out was to travel with the cart. But it seems as you suspect us, as we suspected you."

on the collar of a curiously-fashioned brown coat, appeared on the threshold. "Whatever happens, don't let him be seen!" cried one of the men, speaking in Italian. At this the woman ran ahead into the house, pushing the tall old man with her hands on his breast, then shutting the door he had opened, and bolting it.

Even in this moment of extreme peril Christopher Race and the Marchese Baria, in the hands of their captors, were stabbed with curiosity because of the old man. He was beautiful, wonderful with the face of a prophet. Who was he, that the young men of this strange house had cried out in an accord, as if in fear, "Don't let him be seen!"

They were now all inside the lighted room, a big farm kitchen with white-washed walls, and only one other door, besides the door of exit. That door the woman had bolted, and at a word from one of the men she flew to lock the other.

Christopher and Baria saw themselves at the mercy of five young men, all tall and broad-shouldered beyond the common, and not one beyond the age of 30. They were fair-haired, having the look of brothers, and their features were the hard, set features of the far north, their eyes gray and full of fire, but not the easily kindled fire of the south. Only the woman was of the south, if she might be judged by the soft brown oval of her young, frightened face and the dark velvet of the startled eyes, which seemed already to see the vision of a double

murder. She stood before the door and just looked, pale and trembling. "Are you going to kill them?" she asked. "We are going to execute them," answered the oldest of the five men, whose age could not have been much beyond 30. "What else? They are spies, and worse." Then, having quieted the girl—his young wife, perhaps—in her native tongue, he had begun to speak again in his own language to brothers, when Baria interrupted, in Italian.

"You had better make sure first that we are spies. My friend can speak only French and English. He is an Englishman, from London; I, half English, half Italian. His name is Christopher Race; I am Lorenzo Arnesse, Marchese Baria, of Venice. We came here as avengers, not as spies. If you miss any friends of yours from the cart you had better think you as innocent as we are, we will answer. And, meanwhile, if you doubt our identity, we have papers as well as an automobile to prove it."

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footsteps, and I have married an Italian wife." "Ask them if they know French," suggested Christopher. They did, one and all, and began speaking it rapidly. Now Christopher could enter intelligently into the conversation, and presently they were conversing like friends. There was a secret, evidently, and that secret none of those who were in it intended to reveal to those who were not, but they admitted that one of themselves—the second brother of six—had gone to Ventimiglia ostensibly with a load of eggs to dispose of, but really upon a different errand. He had got rid of his eggs—that was proved by the emptiness of the boxes. Then he had picked up a passenger—a woman. She was the daughter of an old friend, to whom the family had been deeply indebted in years gone by—indebted, in fact, for their escape from Russia in a time of terrible danger. Nothing that the Ravellis could have done for

could possibly follow. Doesn't it occur to you that a yacht would suit their purpose better than anything else? "Michael half sprang up in his seat beside Christopher, who was driving. "A yacht!" he echoed. "You are right. They would have a yacht. It would be the one plan of all others. And there are men who would gladly lend their yachts for this scheme, if it were possible. The yacht would lie in Mentone harbor," said Christopher thoughtfully.

"It is as if you spoke on inspiration," cried Michael. "Scarlet Runner flew into Mentone and made straight for the harbor. Out of season as it was, there were two yachts in port—one small one and a fine, large craft which had got up steam and was ready to go out. At sight of its lights in the distance Christopher slowed down Scarlet Runner and stopped the engine. He was not anxious to advertise the presence of his car."

"What yacht is that?" he asked the harbor master, whom he sought when he had left his automobile in charge of the youngest of the Ravelli brothers. He had said, "I'll wait up along the quay for a late walk after a hot day, and where would a breeze be found astir if not put by the port?"

Christopher put his question as if in the curiosity of idleness and the harbor master, who was sleepy and would rather have been in bed than where he was, answered carelessly: "Nadege, belong to a Russian prince. Been here for a week." Christopher did not inquire the name of its owner. It was enough for him that it was Russian and that it was about to leave.

"What's it waiting for?" he seemed to ask. "Been waiting for an automobile which it's to take on board," said the harbor master. "It's come now and they're going to ship it from a pontoon. The motor car was drawn up near a crane close to the edge of the quay and late though it was a knot of three or four idle onlookers had collected to watch the sailors. Christopher and Baria stood by the harbor master, absorbed in the preparations to sling the automobile."

As the Russians did not dream that pursuers from the Roja valley could possibly arrive at the harbor, they were of guard for the moment and there was nothing to prevent Christopher and Baria from going close to the car. They peered into the dark depths, while the two Ravellis eyed the weary harbor master in conversation, lest he should chance to follow with his eyes the movements of his late questioners.

In the covered tonneau of the automobile, half sitting, half lying, they could make out the slender figure of a woman, who appeared to be sleeping. This, after the statement of the donkey, was what they had expected to see, and they had laid their plans accordingly, hoping, and with hope for just such a chance—just such a clear moment—as Fate offered them now.

Softly Baria opened the door of the car and caught a strong whiff of chloroform, which was a relief to their fears—since it is not necessary to drug the dead. Reaching in, Christopher took the limp form in his strong arms and in his joy would have forgotten the last of his friends, if Michael Ravelli: "Remember to look for a bag or a bundle of papers," if the unconscious girl's feet had not dragged against a leather snaphook case on the floor. Baria snatched it out on the instant and shut the door as noiselessly as he had opened it. Then each of the young men supported the girl, taking her between them, and the darkness of the night, intensified by the glare of the lamps ahead, as well as the preoccupation of every other person concerned—or not concerned—favored their quickly carried out maneuver.

As for the glove, nailed conspicuously to the seat, holding the reins in a kind of horrible mockery, it had been put there for a purpose, the young men said gloomily to each other. There were those who wished them to know that a certain plan had failed, and through whom it had failed. "Let us go, then, and find them and punish them before it is too late," said Christopher.

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"But I thought he was in Siberia." "All the world thinks so, and Russia does not contradict the world. But he escaped after incredible difficulties and hardships. It was arranged by his friends that he should come to us if he could. We are his relatives, though distant, and have always responded with him. The book which he was writing when he was arrested would have been confiscated, but his daughter contrived to hide it, and papers, in cipher, which would compromise many persons in high places, yet which must for the good cause of liberty, be preserved. The daughter, being so young, and still at school when her father was sent to Siberia, was not suspected until after his escape, when she disappeared. Twice she was all but taken, yet we hoped the last plan would succeed, it had been made so well and so secretly. But we were mistaken. She was tracked. If they could have kept her, they would have had her father between their fingers. He might have died of the shock at seeing her glove blood-stained and pinned with a knife to the reins of the cart. They would have been glad to have kept her, but she would cease to trouble the enemies of freedom. If he had not died they would have been by and when it suited them, have let him know that Alexa was in their hands; that they would torture her if he did not lead them to Russia, and he would have gone back, old and weak as he is. Now, knowing who they are, do you still wish to befriend them?"

"More than ever," Baria answered. "Prince Alexander Murgieneff is no anarchist, but a prophet—a friend of peace as he is of liberty, and some day his country will learn to value him."

"It values him now—as a prisoner," said Baria. "There is no one more important, for he has connections of the highest. We can do nothing to show you our gratitude, for, as we told you, our father died in time of trouble from persecution, and we are poor farmers in our adopted country. Yet you will have our blessings forever, if you can save this lady and her father."

"I would do it even without the blessings," replied the Marchese. They reached the farm without accident or sign of pursuit, and this time Christopher and Baria entered the farm-house, where the administration of Michael Ravelli's young wife the girl was revived, and she and her father were told of the plan that had been hastily made for them.

The old man did not hesitate, but decided for himself and his daughter, while she was still unable to decide for herself. They would go to Venice with the Marchese Baria in the car of his English friend, if necessary, Alexa should pass as the fiancée of the Marchese. But it seemed improbable that the car could be traced by the enemy farther than Milan, where there were many motors going in different directions, and the Russian pursuers could not possibly know the name of the Marchese Baria in connection with the rescue at the Ravelli farm.

Instead of sleeping quietly at Mentone or Monte Carlo, as they had expected to do, the two young men spent the night on the driver's seat of Scarlet Runner, while the father and daughter sat together in the rear. Never stopping, they drove back over the Col di Tenda, and on through the dark hours and into the morning. At a farm house they stopped for food, and there were many motors going in different directions, and the Russian pursuers could not possibly know the name of the Marchese Baria in connection with the rescue at the Ravelli farm.

By that time both young men would gladly have given their lives for the old Russian and his brave, beautiful daughter. Christopher risked being late for the morning train, but he was engaged by waiting to see the refugees installed in the Palazzo Baria, while Baria himself found quarters with a neighboring cousin. There was no other word of pursuit; therefore, when all was settled peacefully, Christopher had no longer an excuse for lingering. He left after three days, but they were epoch-making days, and he was not surprised to receive a long telegram when he had arrived at Southampton and unshipped his faithful car.

"Best of friends, I cannot wait to tell you that I am really engaged to her. She is adorable. There is no other woman like her. I am perfectly happy, and hope not to die until I am a hundred and she ninety-one." "Yours until then, BARIA."

Christopher sent as a wedding present a little model of Scarlet Runner, done in red enamel and gold.



WHAT HE SAW WAS CHRISTOPHER, STANDING UP, HIS REVOLVER COCKED AND AIMED, FOR NOW THERE SEEMED LITTLE HOPE FOR EXPLANATIONS.

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-621
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Single Room, with bath, \$2.50 and \$3.00
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Single Room, with bath, \$3.50 to \$5.00
Double Room, with bath, \$5.00 to \$7.00
Parlor, Bedroom and bath, \$10.00 to \$14.00

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