

Levett Yeats Sidney

The Honour of Savelli: A Romance



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Levett Yeats S. Sidney

The Honour of Savelli: A Romance

PREFACE

In writing this book the Author has made no effort to point a moral; all that has been done is an attempt to catch the "spirit of the true Romance," and to amuse. The book was partly written in the intervals of work in India, and was completed during the leisure allowed by furlough on medical certificate. In dealing with this period of Italian history, in which the story is set, the Author would say he has taken Dumas for his model, but hopes that he has worked out his scheme on original lines; and he has used, as far as possible, the language in which an Italian living in the beginning of the sixteenth century would express himself. At the time the book was written the Author had not read Mr. Stanley Weyman's brilliant novel, "A Gentleman of France." Had he done so the style of the present book would doubtless have been much improved from the lessons taught by a master-hand. The Author, in bringing this to the notice of the reader, would humbly add that he is making no challenge to break a lance with so redoubted a knight as the creator of Gaston de Marsac.

PRELUDE

I

He rydes untoe ye Dragon's Gate,
And blowes a ryngynge calle:
A gallant Knyghte in armoure bryghte,
'Twere sadde toe see him falle.
Deare Sayntes of Mercy steele hys harte,
And nerve hys arme withalle!

II

Noe glove bears he uponne hys creste,
And lettynge droppe hys visor's barres,
I sawe hys starke soule lookynge forthe,
Toe meete ye whysperes of ye starres.
True Knyghte of God, whose arme is stronge,
Whose harte is pure, whose lance is longe.

III

Lette wyn, lette lose, belyke 'tis true,
Ye issue of ye daye will bee,
Notte toe ye dreamers; butte toe those
Who stayke their alle on victorie.
Notte to ye skiffes uponne ye streames,
Butte ye stronge shippes uponne ye sea.

Vanity Fair, 12th October, 1893.

CHAPTER I. A BOLT FROM THE BLUE

"I do not drink with a thief!"

D'Entrangués spoke in clear, distinct tones, that rose above the hum of voices, and every one caught the words. In an instant the room was still. The laughter on all faces died away, leaving them grave; and twenty pairs of curious eyes, and twenty curious faces were turned towards us. It was so sudden, so unexpected, this jarring discord in our harmony, that it fell as if a bolt from a mangonel, or a shot from one of Messer Novarro's new guns, had dropped in amongst us. Even that, I take it, would have caused less surprise, although for the present there was a truce in the land. Prospero Colonna turned half round in his seat and looked at me. Our host and commander, old Ives d'Alegres, who was pouring himself out a glass of white vernaccia, held the decanter in mid-air, an expression of blank amazement in his blue eyes. Even the Englishman, Hawkwood, who sat next to me, was startled out of his habitual calm. Every eye was on us, on me where I sat dazed, and on D'Entrangués, who was leaning back slightly, a forced smile on his face, the fingers of one hand playing with the empty glass before him, whilst with the other he slowly twisted his long red moustache. I was completely taken aback. Only that afternoon I parted from D'Entrangués, apparently on the best of terms. We had played together, and he had won my crowns. It is true he was not paid in full at the time; but he knew the word of a Savelli. On leaving, Madame D'Entrangués asked me to join her hawking party for the morrow, and he urged the invitation. I accepted, and backed my new peregrine against D'Entrangués' old hawk Bibbo for ten crowns, the best of three flights, and the wager was taken. Never indeed had I known him so cordial. I did not like the man, but for his wife's sake was friendly to him. Of a truth, there were few of the youngsters in Tremouille's camp who were not in love with her, and some of us older fellows too, though we hid our feelings better. I was grateful to Madame. She had been kind to me after the affair of San Miniato, when a Florentine pike somehow found its way through my breastplate. Indeed, I may say I owed my recovery to her nursing. In return, I had been of some service to her in the retreat up the valley of the Taro, after Fornovo—she called it saving her life. In this manner a friendship sprang up between us, which was increased by the opportunities we had of meeting whilst the army lay inactive before Arezzo. Long years of camp life made me fully appreciate the society of a woman, remarkable alike for her beauty and her talent; and she, on the other hand, felt for me, I was sure, only that friendship which it is possible for a good woman to hold for a man who is not her husband.

I do not for one moment mean to imply that Doris D'Entrangués was perfection. I knew her to be wayward and rash, sometimes foolish if you will; but withal a pure woman. I soon found she was unhappy, and in time she got into a way of confiding her troubles to me, and they were not a few, for D'Entrangués was—what all men knew him to be. Finding that I could be of help to Madame, I avoided all difference with the husband, and for her sake was, as I have said, friendly to him. Perhaps my course of action was not prudent; but who is there amongst us who is always guided by the head? At any rate, I expiated my fault, and paid the price of my folly to the end of the measure.

As I sat in the now silent supper-room with the man's words buzzing in my ears, a curious recollection of a scene that occurred about a month ago came back to me. Madame and I had overridden ourselves hawking, and I had dismounted at her request and gathered for her a posy of yellow coronilla and scarlet amaryllis. This, in her quick impulsive way, she held to her husband's face when we met him, a half-league or so on our way back, saying, "See what lovely flowers Di Savelli has given me!" He snatched them from her hand, and flung them under his horse with an oath, adding something which I did not catch. Madame flushed crimson, and the incident ended there, for I did not care to press the matter.

It all came back to me now, in the oddest manner, as I sat staring at D'Entrangués. He had come in late to the supper, and, after greeting D'Alegres, slipped into the seat opposite me in silence. Across him two men were discussing a series of thefts that had recently disturbed us. They were not common thefts, such as are of daily occurrence in a military camp; but were the work of some one both daring and enterprising. Even then the matter would not have attracted the attention it did but for the loss of a ruby circlet by the Duchesse de la Tremouille, which, besides its intrinsic value, was the gift of a king. Madame de la Tremouille made an outcry, and the duke, as the matter touched him, was leaving no stone unturned to find the thief. It had come to be that every robbery in the camp was put down to this same light-fingered gentleman; and Visconti, one of the two men who were discussing the question, was loudly lamenting the loss of a rare medallion of which he had just been relieved. Throughout their conversation D'Entrangués, though once or twice addressed, spoke no word, but maintained a moody silence. When the wine was circling round I, being warmed, and wishing to stand well with the husband of Madame, made some rallying allusion to our match for the morrow, and offered to drink to him. His reply is known.

The silence which followed his speech was so utter that one may have heard a feather fall; and then some one, I know not who, laughed shortly. The sound brought me to myself, and in a fury, hardly knowing what I was doing, I jumped up and drew my dagger, but was instantly seized by Colonna and Hawkwood. The latter was a man of great size, and between him and Colonna I was helpless.

"Give him rope," whispered Hawkwood, and his voice was kind, "this is not an affair to be settled with a poniard thrust."

The whole room was in an uproar now, all crowding around us; D'Entrangués half-risen from his seat, his hand on his sword, and I quivering in the grasp of my kind enemies. Old Ives d'Alegres rushed forwards, "Silence, gentlemen!" he called out, "remember I command here. Savelli, give up that dagger; D'Entrangués, your sword. Now, gentlemen, words have been used which blood alone cannot wash out. M. d'Entrangués, I await your explanation!"

"Liar!" I shouted out, "you will give it to me at the sword's point," and big Hawkwood's restraining arms tightened over me.

"Thanks," replied D'Entrangués, "you remember the sword at last; a moment before I saw in your hands your natural weapon."

"A truce to this, sirs! I await you," interrupted D'Alegres.

"Your pardon," said D'Entrangués. "Gentlemen, you want an explanation. It is simple enough. We have a thief in our midst, and he is there."

"A thief-Di Savelli!" called out a dozen voices, and Ives d'Alegres said, "Impossible! you are mad, D'Entrangués."

"No more so, sir, than you, or any one of us here. I confess, though, I thought I was mad when I first knew of it, for this man has been my comrade, we have fought side by side, and he has borne himself as a gallant soldier. I thought I was mad, I say, when I first knew of this; but the proofs are too strong."

"What are they?" D'Alegres spoke very shortly.

"You shall have them. You all know there have been a series of unaccountable thefts amongst us lately. The duchess's rubies have gone. Hardly a lady but has lost some valuable, my wife, amongst other things, a bracelet. The thief did not confine his attentions to the fair sex; but visited us men as well. They were not common thefts. From the circumstances attending them, the robber must have known us intimately, and had easy access to our quarters. Up to now the matter has been a mystery. A lot of people have been wrongly suspected, and two poor wretches are now swinging on the gibbet, condemned for nothing that I know of."

"It was done by my orders, sir," said D'Alegres, "the matter is beside the point."

"I stand corrected, General. Some little time ago a fortunate chance revealed to me who the culprit was. I made no sign, but set to work until complete proofs were in my hands."

"You have said so before. Why beat about the bush? If you have proofs, produce them?"

"A moment, sir. May I ask any of you to state what your most recent losses have been?"

"My medallion by Cimabue," put in Visconti in his drawling voice.

"Fifty fat gold crowns in a leather bag," grumbled Hawkwood, "the residue of the Abbot Basilio's ransom. God send such another prize to me, for I know not how to pay my lances."

There was a little laugh at Hawkwood's moan, but it soon stilled, and, one by one, each man stated his latest loss.

"I will add to these Madame's bracelet," said D'Entragues, "and shall not be surprised if the duchess thanks me for her rubies to-morrow."

"Tremouille has sworn to crucify the thief if he is found."

"The duke knows the value of his gems."

"He ought to be consoled, for he has a true wife left, and, his eminence of St. Sabines tells me, such a possession is more precious than rubies," drawled Visconti.

"Gentlemen, you interrupt M. D'Entragues. Let us end this painful scene."

"There is but one thing more, sir. I ask you now to have this" – D'Entragues indicated me with an insolent look – "this person's quarters searched."

Whilst he was speaking, D'Alegres gave a whispered order to a young officer, who left the room immediately, although with a somewhat discontented air at being sent away. As D'Entragues finished, the door was opened, a couple of files of Swiss infantry entered, and with them Braccio Fortebraccio, our provost-marshal. At a sign from D'Alegres one of the files surrounded me, the other D'Entragues, and Braccio called out in a loud voice, "Ugo di Savelli, and Crépin D'Entragues, I arrest you in the king's name!"

"At your service, provost," said D'Entragues with a bow, "my sword is already given up. May I ask, sir," he continued, turning to D'Alegres, "if you will put my proofs to the test?"

"At once. Provost, lead your prisoners to M. di Savelli's quarters."

"Thank God!" The expression burst from me, so great was my relief. I was sure of being acquitted, and madame or no madame, I should kill D'Entragues the following day, even though I knew Tremouille had sworn to hang the next man caught duelling within the jurisdiction of his camp. We were, as I have stated, at Arezzo, and had passed the winter there, in the truce following the expulsion of the Duke of Bari from Lombardy. It had, however, become necessary to menace the Pope, who was hilt deep in intrigue as well as crime, and Tremouille leaving Monsignore d'Amboise in Milan, marched south, and with the aid of our Florentine allies, held the Borgia and Spain in check. Acting under the advice of Trevulzio, Ives d'Alegres, and others, the duke had not entered the town; but kept us in camp near Giove, outside the walls. The gates of the city and the citadel were, however, at the same time strongly garrisoned, and Trevulzio held command within. It was all the more urgent to keep the main body of the troops outside the walls, as they were composed, with the exception of a few French regiments, mainly of mercenaries, and by holding the town with picked men, upon whom he could rely, Tremouille would be able, in case of any change of front on the part of his mercenaries, to have them between two fires. Ives d'Alegres, who then acted as lieutenant-general to the duke, was immediately in command of the camp, and had fixed his headquarters in a large villa, the property of the Accolti, and it was here that the supper, which ended so disastrously for me, was given. My own quarters were but a bow-shot or two away, in the direction of the town. When we reached them, I was surprised to find at the door, my servant Tarbes in the hands of two of the marshal's men, a half troop of French lancers drawn up before my tent, and my own small *condotta* of ten lances, which I had raised for the war by pawning my last acre, all under guard. As if any attempt at rescue were possible! I saw in a moment that this accounted for D'Entragues' late arrival at the supper: but entered the tent sure of the results. A dozen blazing torches threw a clear enough light, and D'Alegres briefly requested the provost to begin the search. The practised hands of the

field police did this very effectually, but to no purpose, and I felt that the faces of all were looking friendly towards me. D'Entragues seemed nervous, and his sallow cheek was pale.

"Send for Tarbes," he said, and at a word from the provost my knave was led in. This man was a Spaniard, whom I had taken into my service, some little while ago, on the recommendation of D'Entragues. Except on one occasion when he lost, or maybe stole, a pair of silver spurs, for which I cuffed him roundly, he had served me well. At the present moment he seemed overcome with fear, trembled in every limb, and refused to look at me.

"Signor Tarbes," said the provost, "do you know what the wheel is?"

The man made no answer, and Braccio went on-

"Signor Tarbes, we want a little information which I am persuaded you possess. If you give it freely, we will be merciful; if you prevaricate, if you attempt to conceal anything, we will do to you what we did to the death hunters after San Miniato-you remember?"

"Speak freely, Tarbes. There is no fear," I added.

"Even your master, the excellent cavaliere, advises you, and I must say advises you well," continued Braccio. "Signor Tarbes, you will now show us," and he rubbed his hands together softly, "where the valiant knight, Ugo di Savelli, keeps his prizes of war, the spoils of his bow and spear-I was going to say fin-"

"Have a care, sir," said D'Alegres sternly, "you are here to do your duty, not to play the jester." Braccio shrank back at his look, and the general turned to Tarbes, "In brief, we want to know, if your master, M. di Savelli, has any concealed property here? Will you answer at once, or do you prefer to be put to the question?"

"I will speak-say anything, my lord-only have mercy. I swear what I say is true. His excellency, my master, has nothing beyond what you have seen-and what lies in the leather valise under this rug."

Now this rug in question lay flat on the turf, on which my tent stood, and at the time of the search D'Alegres and others were standing on it. Owing to this, and to the crowded state of the tent, it had hitherto escaped the attention, which it would doubtless have received sooner or later, for nothing ever passed Braccio's eyes. In a moment the rug was swept aside, and, as the torches were held to the turf, it was evident that it had been dug away and then replaced somewhat carelessly.

Braccio was in his element.

"*Pouf!*" he exclaimed, "a clumsy amateur after all! I thought better of his valour. Here! give me a pike! And hold the torches so!"

With a sharp point of the pike he quickly cleared away the turf, and, stooping down, lifted up from the hole he exposed, a small brown valise, which had been concealed in the earth. The interest was now intense. Every one crowded round Braccio. Even the vigilance of the guards over me completely relaxed. I felt a touch on my shoulder, and, looking back, saw Hawkwood.

"Would you like to go?" he whispered rapidly. "My horse is ready saddled-you know where to find him."

I thanked him with a look; but shook my head, and the giant fell back.

"Shall I break it open, excellency?" and Braccio held the bag out to D'Alegres.

"My master has the key," put in Tarbes; "I know no more."

"I-the key!" I exclaimed. "Villain, the bag is not mine!"

"It bears your arms, however;" Braccio pointed to a little metal plate on which they were distinctly engraved.

"You must, I am afraid, submit to the further indignity of being searched," said D'Alegres.

There was no hope in resistance and I endured this. Braccio himself searched me, and almost as soon as he began, pulled from an inner pocket of my vest a small key, attached to a fine gold chain.

"Here is the noble knight's key," he exclaimed, "and see; it fits exactly!" He turned it in the lock, opened the valise, and emptied the contents out on a rough camp table. A low murmur went up, for amongst the small heap of articles was Hawkwood's leather bag, and madame's bracelet, whilst

something rolled a little on one side, and fell off softly to the turf. A soldier picked it up, and placed it face upwards on the table-the lost medallion.

One by one D'Alegres held up the articles sadly, and I looked round in my agony on the faces of those who but an hour ago were my friends. They had all shrunk back from me, and I was alone within the circle of the guards. D'Entrangués stood with folded arms, and a smile on his lips, and Tarbes glanced from side to side, like an ape seeking chance for escape. I looked towards Hawkwood, but even his face was hard and set.

"I do not see the duchess' rubies here," said D'Alegres.

"I am prepared to produce them to-morrow," replied D'Entrangués; "in the meantime, I trust you have sufficient proof?"

"Give M. d'Entrangués his sword. You need not fight this man," D'Alegres added, pointing to me, "even if he challenges you. Were you a French subject," he said to me, "I would hang you in your boots; as it is I will submit the case to the duke. D'Entrangués, I hold you to your word about the rubies. Provost, see that your prisoner is carefully guarded. You will answer for him with your life."

"Prisoner, your excellency! There are two."

"I have restored M. d'Entrangués his sword."

"There is still another," and the provost pointed to Tarbes.

"Pah!" exclaimed D'Alegres, "hang him out of hand-come, gentlemen!"

One by one they went out. Not another look did they give me. I heard the tread of feet, and the sound of voices in eager conversation, dying out in the distance. I stood as in a dream. Tarbes had been dragged away speechless, and half fainting. When he was outside he found voice, and I heard him alternately cursing D'Alegres, and D'Entrangués and screaming for mercy. Braccio touched me on the arm.

"Come, signore," he said, "*you*, at any rate, have a few hours left."

CHAPTER II. RUIN

I started at the man's words, and my rage and despair may be imagined, when I saw that he proposed to bind me, a noble, like any thief! From this I hoped to escape by bringing on death, and, on a sudden, hit the guard next to me on the face, with all my force. Down he went like an ox, and I made a rush to the tent door, little doubting that I should be cut down, and put out of my misery. But they were too quick. I was one, and they were many. In a hand turn I was tripped up, my wrists securely fastened behind my back, and any further resistance on my part impossible. The man whom I felled, scrambled up, and attempted to brain me with the butt of his pike as I went down; but Braccio struck him senseless with the hilt of his sword, and this time he lay in a huddled heap, quiet enough.

I besought Braccio to give me my parole, swearing on the faith of a gentleman, on the honour of a Savelli, that I would not attempt escape, and would go with him quietly, if I were but free from the ignominy of the cords that bound me.

"Shut the cage door, keep your bird," he laughed brutally, "I have to answer for you to-morrow, and I weigh the faith of a gentleman, and the honour-God save the mark-of a Savelli, as *that*," he snapped his fingers, "when it comes to a consideration of Braccio Fortebraccio's head. So your knighthood must even go as you are, with my love-knots on you. Here, two of you, take charge of this tent, and see after Arnulf there-I never thought his skull so thin-march!"

And in this manner was I led out, two men in front of me, two behind, one on either hand, all with their weapons ready, whilst the provost himself brought up the rear, with his drawn sword in one hand and a lighted torch in the other. Not that light was needed, for the moon had risen, and was in its full. I believe, however, that Braccio held the torch, so that the additional light might the more clearly show who his prisoner was, and I hung down my head as, with quick steps, we marched to the military prison.

"*Qui vive là*," the challenge rang out crisply, and on the instant the provost replied, "France and Tremouille."

"Pass on," and the sentry, one of Bucicault's arquebusiers, looked at us curiously as we went by. And now, to add to my shame, we met, face to face, a group of late revellers returning to the camp.

"*Diable!*" called out a gay voice, "our respectable provost is at work I see. What have you got there, Braccio?"

I shuddered, for I recognised Bellegarde, a young noble of the Franche Comte, who had come to seek glory in the Italian war.

"Close up, men-another of my strayed lambs brought back to the fold, Viscompte-pardon me-it is late, and I must hurry on."

But Bellegarde was merry with wine. "Not till you have drunk our health," he laughed, barring the way with his drawn rapier, as he added, "Lowenthal here has a skin of wine from the Rhineland, have a pull at it, man, and let us see the prisoner."

"*Blitzen!* Der brisoner first, he will hang pefore der herr brovost," and the half-drunk Lanzknecht thrust his wine-skin towards me.

"Gentlemen-gentlemen! have you a care! See here, Viscompte," and Braccio whispered to Bellegarde.

"My God!" said the latter; and then hastily, "Come on, Lowenthal! Let them go."

"Let der brisoner drink. Would you deprive a boor man of his liquor?" replied Lowenthal, and to hide my face, I seized the skin, and raised it to my lips. Even Braccio held the torch away, and Von Lowenthal failed to recognise me in the half-light. My throat was red-hot with thirst, and sick as I was with shame, I drank greedily, and handed the wine-skin back to the German.

"*Blitzen!*" he said, giving it a shake, "you drink like an honest man. Now, herr brovost, a health to Germany, in honest German wine. What! No! Then drink to der halter, man, and Lowenthal will knight you," swaying to and fro, he attempted to draw his sword.

Matters were at a crisis, for Braccio was not to be trifled with any longer. At this juncture, Bellegarde and the others with him again intervened, and dragged Von Lowenthal away. The provost instantly pressed forwards with a hurried good-night. We did not go so fast, however, as not to perceive, from the noises behind us, that the Lanzknecht had subsided to earth, and was apparently abandoned there, with his wine-skin, by his companions. The sound of his voice, engaged in a drunken monologue, reached us.

"Der rascal Braccio, der knight of der noose und halter. I will gif him der accolade. I-" But we lost the rest as we hurried on, the guards smiling to themselves, and Braccio very ill-tempered.

In a few paces we passed D'Alegres' headquarters, and through an open window, I saw half-a-dozen of my late companions playing at dice, and heard Hawkwood's bass calling the mains. A few steps more brought us to our point, a fortified wing of the Villa Accolti itself, and Braccio, thrusting me into a strong room, turned the key of the door, and with a gruff order, which I did not catch, walked away. Now, indeed, was I in a distressful state, and the agony of my mind so great, that I heeded not the pain of the cords, but paced up and down like any caged animal. I fully recognised that I was the victim of a deeply laid plot on the part of D'Entragues, and saw clearly that I was completely in his hands. It was a stroke of genius on his part, not to interfere in any way to save his creature, the wretched Tarbes. That hasty order of D'Alegres had removed the only danger of his scheme being laid bare. I tried to think out some plan of action; but to no purpose, for my mind was altogether confused and bewildered, and I was incapable of thought. The room in which I was confined was bare of all furniture, not even a camp-stool. There was only one window, and that, iron-grated, was set high up, near the ceiling. The moonlight straggled through the grating in long white ribbons, and dimly showed up the walls around me. Hour after hour passed away. I could hear the occasional barking of dogs, the distant cries of the sentinels as they called to one another, and the sound of the guard being relieved at my door. Then the moon sank and the morning came. From sheer weariness I threw myself on the floor, and fell into a troubled sleep, from which I was aroused by the cords biting into my flesh. This, and the constrained position in which my arms were held, gave me torture. I attempted by shouting to attract the attention of the sentinel over me; but though I heard the clod tramping up and down, I received no answer.

At length, about the sixth hour, I made another effort to get some one to hear me. I fortunately chose a moment when the guards were being visited. After a short discussion outside, an under-officer entered the cell. I begged him to free me from the cords, pointing out that escape was impossible, swearing that I would not attempt it, and ended by offering him five crowns for the good office. He hesitated at first, but either pity for my condition, or the bait of the crowns moved the man, for he freed me with a touch of his dagger, and for another five crowns I obtained from him the promise of procuring for me a change of attire from my tent. I had, hidden in a belt, worn under my shirt, thirty crowns, and this I reached with some difficulty, owing to the stiffness of my arms, and paid him the money. I specially begged he would get for me a pair of Spanish leather boots, that were lying in my quarters, for the sole of one of my *contigie* had come off during the struggle of last night. The honest fellow promised to do his best, and shortly returned with the articles I wanted, and in addition brought me some food and a cup of wine, for which he refused all payment, saying that I had treated him generously enough. To eat was out of the question, but the wine was grateful, and, after drinking it, I devoted myself to putting my attire in order. And here I may mention an odd circumstance, to wit, that my gold cross of St. Lazare, which I wore pinned to my breast at the supper, had by some chance remained intact, despite the struggle I had gone through, and was still hanging in its place by a shred of the ribbon. I carefully unfastened it, and placed it for security in my belt. To me it seemed an omen of fortune, this lost little tag of honour which clung to me. I succeeded indifferently well

in arranging my dress, and so passed a full hour. Heavens! when I recall that night, although more was to befall me, I do not think I ever endured such misery; nor has the noiseless file of time ever been able to eradicate the memory of those hours.

At about noon Braccio entered the cell. He raged beyond measure at finding me loosed of my bonds, and insisted at first on securing me again. I shrewdly suspected, however, that Messer Braccio was a trifle afraid of the consequences of his violence the night before, and that his furious language was in this case but bluster. I showed a bold front therefore, and the under-officer putting in a word for me, the provost gave in with apparent reluctance. He informed me that my affair was to be dealt with by the duke in person, and that I should make ready to go with him. I replied that I was prepared to go at once, and without more ado was escorted to the main building of the villa. I could see that a considerable crowd was collected, and from the litters and riding-horses that were being led to and fro, perceived that some ladies had heard the news, and were come to gratify their curiosity at my expense, and see such trial as I was to undergo. I was led into the great hall, which was full of people, and in the gallery above the dais saw, amongst other ladies, the Duchesse de la Tremouille, and by her side Madame d'Entragues. The latter kept her eyes down, and fanned herself with a fan of peacock feathers, which, even at that moment, I was able to recognise as my gift. On the dais was a table with seats set about it, which were as yet empty. At the steps of the dais stood D'Entragues, and beside him a small man cloaked in a sad-coloured mantle, with a keen, cleanly-shaven face, and watchful eyes. He held in his hand a small packet, and surveyed me with no little interest. D'Entragues did not meet my look, and his hang-dog face was turned towards the doorway immediately opposite to him. In a moment or so that door was opened, and the duke entered, talking earnestly with a cavalier of a most gracious and distinguished presence. Tremouille himself was a small, slightly-built man, of features in no way remarkable; but redeemed in some part by the alert intelligence of his glance. In early life he had met with an accident which left him lame ever after. Yet he was a good horseman and of a constitution that nothing could tire. As for his companion, his face was then strange to me; but in after times when I was admitted to his intimacy and honoured with his friendship, I came to know him as great beyond all men; and this I do not say in gratitude for the debt I owe him; but simply to add my humble testimony to that of others, his companions-in-arms, and equals in station, who with one consent allow him to be the glory of his age, and of knighthood. Immediately behind Tremouille came D'Alegres and Trevulzio, who had raised himself to his present high position, and was a most capable soldier. These four took their seats at the table, and the numerous and brilliant staff of officers who accompanied them ranged themselves behind. From the manner in which the stranger took his seat, I gathered, and I was not mistaken, that he was there as one of my judges, and for the moment I wondered who he was. That he was of the highest rank was clear from his aspect and bearing, and from the fact that he wore round his neck the collar of the Holy Ghost. The proceedings of this public court-martial began at once. It is needless to set them down in full detail. D'Entragues stated his case, D'Alegres briefly set forth the action taken by him, and Visconti and Hawkwood testified to having found their property in my possession, under the circumstances already explained. I will do them the justice to say that they did so with evident and genuine reluctance. Tremouille, who had doubtless heard all this before, listened patiently to the end, and then asked me what I had to say. What could I say? I looked at the faces around me and saw no sympathy. I looked up at the gallery where the ladies sat, and caught a whisper:

"I do not care-I know it is false; he is not guilty."

The words gave me courage. The charge was false. As false as hell. Then I found tongue. I asked if it were possible that I, a noble, whose career had hitherto been blameless, could have suddenly become so vile as to sink to common theft? I pointed out my long years of service, and called D'Alegres and Trevulzio, under whose banners I had served, to witness if they had ever known me sully my honour.

"It is known, M. di Savelli, that you are hard put for money," said Tremouille.

I admitted the fact, and also admitted that at the time I stood there I owed money lost at play; but that the sum did not amount to more than fifty crowns, and there was twice that amount due to me from the military chest. I then went on to point out how unlikely it was that, even if I had stolen the jewels, I should have hoarded them up and not turned them into money, for which I allowed I was pressed, and wound up by saying I was the victim of a conspiracy, and that I was prepared to assert my honour, man to man, against D'Entragues, or any other who would take up his cause.

"What say you, my lord of Bayard?" and Tremouille turned to the stranger who sat beside him. Even whilst waiting for his answer, and on the cross with anxiety as I was, I could not help looking with the greatest interest at the man. This then was the celebrated Pierre du Terrail, the noblest knight in Christendom. Vague rumours that he was about to join the army of Tremouille, with a high command, had reached us. But we had merely looked upon them as rumours. And now he had come, apparently suddenly, and without warning. I felt sure that he brought war with him, but had no more time to think, for he answered-"A fair offer-M. d'Entragues can do no less than accept."

But Trevulzio then cut in, pointing out, that practically the case was proved. That to allow me the ordeal by combat would upset all the course of military discipline, under which he thought the matter should be decided. Even if the ordeal of battle was allowed, and I won, it would not prove my innocence in the face of the damning evidence against me.

"If there is any shadow of doubt, your excellency," and D'Entragues advanced to the table, "this will clear it up. Messer Vieri, kindly hand that package to the duke."

The man whom he addressed, who was no other than he whom I had remarked, on entering the justice room as D'Entragues' companion, stepped forward and placed the packet before Tremouille, who opened it amidst a dead silence.

"Messer Vieri, how did you obtain this?" asked Tremouille.

"The matter is simple, excellency," replied the banker, "but first may I ask if madame the duchess recognises the trinket?"

The circlet was handed to the duchess, who said in a low voice-

"It is mine: it was stolen from me a month ago-on the seventh of March."

"On the eighth of March a packet was delivered to me at my house of business by one Tarbes, calling himself servant to the Cavaliere di Savelli. He did not know the contents of the parcel; but it was sent to me for safe keeping by his master, so he said. I gave him a receipt for it. I myself did not know what the nature of the packet was until to-day; but hearing the charges preferred against the cavaliere, I opened the case and at once recognised madame's circlet, which I have the pleasure to restore."

"How did you come to hear these charges against the Cavaliere di Savelli?" asked Bayard.

"I was informed of them by the knight, Messer d'Entragues."

"That is to say, M. d'Entragues must have known that the jewels were pledged to you. Is this not odd?"

It was a straw of hope that floated to me, and I could scarcely breathe. D'Entragues, however, replied boldly, "I was told of the matter by one Tarbes, a servant to M. di Savelli."

"You forget to add," I burst out, "that he was a creature of yours, whom I employed on your recommendation."

D'Entragues made no reply, and Bayard said, "M. d'Entragues appears to have usurped the functions of the provost and played catchpole. Could we not see this Tarbes?"

"Call Tarbes," said the duke.

Braccio came forward and explained that he had been dealt with summarily, under the orders of the lieutenant-general.

"Mine!" said D'Alegres in astonishment.

"Yes, excellency, he was the prisoner whom your excellency ordered me to hang last night."

"A pity," remarked the duke, and Trevulzio, between whom and D'Alegres there was little love, smiled.

"I suppose you have nothing to say to this?" said Tremouille to me.

"I was not in the camp on the seventh."

"Where were you?"

But this question I could not answer for I caught Madame d'Entrangués' eye imploring me to silence. I looked back at the duke, and as I did so felt that Bayard had followed my glance, and that his eyes were resting on madame's face. He glanced down almost as soon as I did and turned to me, and there was a grave encouragement in his look from which I took heart. To me it was a great thing to show I was not at or near the camp on the seventh; and yet if I did so I would ruin a woman's name. It had been a harmless frolic, I swear this, as I know I will come to judgment before a higher tribunal than that of man; and yet had I spoken there would have been but one construction. I hated D'Entrangués, too, and this would have struck at a vital part. For a second I hesitated, and looked up once more at madame. She was pale as death.

I looked at Bayard, and his glance seemed to penetrate my thoughts.

"I cannot say!"

There was a sound of a gasping sigh, and a heavy fall. The peacock fan fluttered slowly down from the gallery to my feet, and lay there with its hundred eyes staring at me.

"This ruins you," exclaimed D'Alegres.

"Think again before you reply," said the duke: "I will give you time."

"I thank your excellency; but I have no further answer."

Tremouille shrugged his shoulders with a disappointed air, and dropped his chin between his clasped hands, his elbows resting on the table, a favourite position of his. Whilst he was thus considering, Bayard was whispering earnestly to Trevulzio, and the old soldier seemed to assent, and his hard face almost softened as he looked at me. They then turned their gaze on D'Entrangués, and Trevulzio, with a shake of his head, noted something briefly on a slip of paper and passed it on to D'Alegres. The lieutenant-general looked surprised; but after a moment nodded assent, and in his turn passed the paper on to the duke, saying "I agree." Tremouille read the paper slowly, and then they consulted together in low tones.

And now, in a few brief words I heard my sentence, and it was carried out at once. Braccio himself hacked off my spurs, my sword was brought in and solemnly broken, and I was warned to leave the camp within an hour, on pain of being hanged as a thief. Such property as I had was declared confiscate, and the men of my *condotta* were to be enrolled, by force if necessary, under another banner. How I went through it all I do not know. I cannot say how I passed down that great hall with the eyes of all fixed on me, a dishonoured man, an outcast, and a leper. One thing, however, did happen. Whilst the sentence was being carried out, Tremouille sat apparently absorbed in thought. When the provost broke my sword he rose to leave the room, and as he passed D'Entrangués the duke stopped.

"Monsieur," he said, "you have mistaken your vocation. His majesty does not desire his officers to be thief-hunters. For such talents as yours you will doubtless find room elsewhere, and I have to tell you that the king-my master-regrets he has no further need of your services."

CHAPTER III. MADAME D'ENTRANGUES

When I left the door of the justice room I had to pass through the main court-yard, and run the gauntlet of open scorn and contempt, bestowed upon me by all assembled there. It was a great thing for them, for those whom the French call *canaille*-we have no such appropriate word in our own tongue-to see a noble dragged in the dust and covered with infamy. And they did not spare me, taunt and jeer passed from mouth to mouth. Some even would have gone so far as to strike at me, had not their officers prevented them.

"Ah, *Croque-mort!*" exclaimed an arquebusier, "you should hang;" but the man stepped back a half-pace at my look, and, gaining the outer gate, I pressed on, hardly knowing whither my steps led me. I soon found out I was going in the direction of Arezzo itself, and as that was as good as any other place for me at present, I made no alteration in my course; but anxious to get on as fast as possible, quickened my pace almost to a run, until I was tired out, and perforce compelled to go slower.

This happened when I had covered about a mile, and was beginning the ascent leading to the town; and here I heard behind me the clatter of horses' hoofs, and looking back beheld a party riding in my direction. I turned aside, and, concealing myself behind the stem of a locust tree, waited until the riders should pass. This they did in a few moments, and I saw it was Tremouille and his staff returning to the town. By the side of the duchess, who was riding with her husband, was Bayard, mounted on a bay English horse, which he managed with infinite grace and dexterity.

Madame de la Tremouille was in the best of humours, most probably at the recovery of her circlet, for she was laughing gaily as she said something; but they went by too rapidly for me to catch the words. I waited until the troop was lost in the yellow dust which rose behind them, and then, stepping forth from my hiding-place, became aware that I was not alone; but that a body was hanging from a branch of the tree close to where I was standing, and this I had not noticed in my eagerness to escape observation. It needed but a glance to recognise Tarbes, my scoundrel, who had paid so long a price for his treachery; he was swinging there dead enough, overreached and destroyed by the master-villain.

The sight of my dead knave brought up an angry wave of hatred in my heart towards D'Entrangués, and I prayed that I might not die until I was even with him. So great was the uprising of my anger, that at the time I bitterly regretted not having seized the opportunity to wound him, by plainly answering Tremouille's last question. With my rage against D'Entrangués, there came an almost similar feeling towards Madame, and I began to accuse her in my heart of being the original cause of my misfortunes, and of conspiring, by her silence, to set the seal of my ruin. I did not stop to think that I was ruined already, and that it mattered little whether Madame allowed me to be silent or not. I only felt that she had made me pay too great a price for her reputation, and that she had sacrificed me mercilessly.

When I hastened from the scene of my condemnation, I had no other idea but of death, of self-destruction rather than life as it would be now to me; but I put aside all these thoughts for I had to live for revenge. That would be my first object, and until it was achieved I would not rest. With this in my mind I gained the St. Clement Gate of Arezzo, passing through without notice.

Walking down the Via San Dominico, I turned to the right by the Borgo di San Vito, and here I was recognised and hooted. Pressing hurriedly forwards, and aided opportunely by the passage of a body of men-at-arms, coming through the street in a direction opposite to that of my followers, I succeeded in shaking off my tormentors, and turning again to the right up a narrow street, entered a barber's shop to have my beard removed in order to disguise myself as far as possible. The barber, a fussy little fellow, placed me before a mirror of polished steel, and as he set to work stropping a

razor on the palm of his hand, I removed my cap, and for the first time observed that the hair of my head was thickly streaked with grey.

"Your excellency has doubtless come to join the army," said the barber in a tone of inquiry as he drew his razor across my face.

"Ah, yes, yes; I have just come," I replied, and the little man went on-

"There have been great doings to-day. 'Tis said the duke has ordered the Count di Savelli to be executed for having in his possession a favour of Madame. They say the count stole it, but we know better, don't we, your excellency?" and the little fool chuckled to himself. He went on without waiting for an answer. "Ah, yes; the ladies can never resist us soldiers. I may tell you that I served with Don Carlo Baglioni, and can bear my pike-there now, I think that side is clean shaven-as I was saying before, it was hard on the Marquis di Savelli, a gallant noble whom I frequently saw-pardon, your excellency, it is but a scratch after all-had you not moved so suddenly, still only a scratch, nothing for a soldier. The Marquis di Savelli, as I said, was a regular customer of mine, and he had a lovely head of hair, your excellency. It was not so much before I took him in hand. *Ecco!* but in a month you should have seen! He came in here in his free easy way, and flung me ten crowns. 'Buy a ribbon for Madonna Giulia with that, Messer Pazzi,' says he; 'and harkee, send me over six more bottles of your elixir of St. Symmachus. *Maldetto!*' he exclaimed, twisting his curls between his fingers, 'but she adores me now.' Now who, I say, could *she* have been but-*tchick?* *Diavolo?* it is done; never a cleaner shave in Rome itself. If your excellency's fortune grows as well as your hair, I could wish you no better luck."

I rose in silence, and, flinging him a crown, bade him pay himself, and receiving my change, hurried out, declining all Messer Pazzi's entreaties to bear with me a bottle of his precious elixir of St. Symmachus or any other accursed balsam. I saw at a glance that the removal of my beard caused a considerable alteration in my appearance, and imagined if I could but change my attire, my most intimate friends would not know me unless they observed closely; and even then might perhaps fail to recognise me. This view, as it turned out, was not quite correct, and I had yet to learn how difficult a thing it is to arrange a complete disguise.

A few doors further on I laid out some of my money in the purchase of a stout leather buff coat, along dark mantle, and a cap to match. The cap was ornamented with a single black feather; and when I had donned these garments I felt that, wrapped in the cloak, with the cap pulled well over my eyes, and the feather standing defiantly out to the side, that I wanted but a fathom of sword to make myself as ruffianly-looking a bravo as ever trod the purlieu of Naples or Rome. But the sword was some difficulty, for my crowns had dwindled to sixteen. Fortunately I had on my finger a sapphire ring, and this I pledged for twenty crowns, and made my way to the armourer's. I there selected a long straight weapon, with a plain cross handle and a cutting blade, such as would be useful for rough work, and, after some haggling, got it for ten pieces. The armourer assured me that it was a sound blade, and I may say it did me good service. It now hangs in my bed-chamber, a little chipped, it is true, but as bright and as fit for use as the day I paid for it, with a heavy heart, in Don Piero's shop, near the gate of St. Lawrence in Arezzo.

I began now to feel the want of food, for beyond the cup of Chianti brought to me by the under-officer I had tasted nothing since yesterday evening, and therefore stepping into an ordinary called for a flagon of wine and a pasty. Whilst engaged in assaulting these, half-a-dozen men, whom I recognised as belonging to the garrison, entered the hostel, but to my joy I saw I was not known to them, and after a casual glance at me they fell to eating their meal.

I was however perforce compelled to listen to their conversation, which was carried on in the loud tone men of their class affect, and found to my annoyance that they were discussing me, and the events of the day. In order to escape this I was about to rise, when I heard one of them mention D'Entragues' name, and stopped to listen.

"He has left for Florence, and, it is said, intends to offer his sword to the Signory," said one.

"And the other?"

"Heaven knows! Perhaps Braccio's arm has reached him, poor devil!"

"Well, he was a good soldier and a stout lance."

"*Basta!*" said the first speaker. "What does a little lightness of finger matter? Play it in a small way, you're a thief, and food for Messer Braccio, curse him! Play it on a big scale and you're a prince. I for one don't think the less of Di Savelli because perhaps his hand at cards was always too good, and he made that little error in the matter of the rubies. A gentleman is sometimes driven to hard straits. I was a gentleman once and ought to know. I give you a toast-Here's to a long sword and a light hand!"

They drank with acclamation, and then set to a-dicing. I had however heard enough, and settling my account with the host, stepped forth into the street, intending to depart from the town by the Porta San Spirito or Roman Gate, leaving the camp over my shoulder, and to make my way to Florence as soon as possible. There I would meet D'Entrangués, and kill him like a mad dog. I ground my teeth with rage when I thought I had no horse, nor even the means to purchase one, and must trudge it like any *contadino*. But if I had to crawl on my hands and knees, I was determined to reach Florence and D'Entrangués.

It was however not yet sundown, and my idea was to leave the city when it was well dusk to avoid all possible chance of recognition. I meant to have passed the interval in the inn; but, as I felt this was impossible, it was necessary to find another spot where I could lay in quiet. With this end in view I crossed the Piazza di Popolo in an easterly direction, and went on until I came to the Franciscan church, into which I entered, not, I am sorry to say, with any desire for devotion, but merely because I was less likely to be disturbed there than anywhere else I could imagine. I was right, in so far that on entering the church I found it, as I thought, empty, but on looking round I saw beneath the newly-completed wheel-window, the work of Guillaume de Marseille, a kneeling figure, apparently absorbed in prayer. I had approached quite close before I became aware that I was not alone, and was about to turn away, when, perhaps startled by the sound of my footfalls on the marble pavement, the person rose hurriedly and looked towards me. It was Madame D'Entrangués. Her glance met mine for a second as that of a stranger, but as I was moving away some trick of gesture, or perhaps the hot anger in my eyes, told her who I was, for, calling my name, she came towards me with outstretched hands.

"Di Savelli," she said, for I made no advance, "do you not know me?"

"Madame," I bowed, "I am unfit to touch you."

"No, no-a thousand times no! It is I who am unworthy."

I still remained silent, and she asked with a passionate emphasis-

"Man, have you never sinned?"

The words struck me like a shot. I felt in a moment I had no right to stand in judgment.

"God knows," I replied, "I have, and I have been punished."

With that she took hold of my hand, and then suddenly burst into tears, weeping over me with words I cannot repeat. It was not for me to fling reproaches, and I softened and did what I could to appease her.

"I could not help it," she said, "I was not strong enough to speak or to let you speak. Oh, you do not know what such a thing is to a woman!"

"Let it pass, madame. What is dead is dead."

"I cannot. And yet, what can I do?" Her tears began afresh.

In a little time she grew better, and I seized the opportunity to point out the danger she ran of being seen speaking to me, and suggested that she should make her way home. It was impossible to escort her myself, but I would walk a little way behind, keep her in sight, and see she came to no harm. I urged this all the more as I saw it was growing late, and that she was without any attendants and far from the camp.

"You mistake," she said; "I have not far to go. In fact I am at present the guest of the convent here."

"And-" I did not finish the sentence, but she understood. I had forced myself to ask, to hear, if possible, confirmation of D'Entrangués' movements.

"He," she answered-"he has left the army and gone towards Florence."

"And you?"

"I stay here for the present."

Her tone more than her words convinced me that she had been abandoned by D'Entrangués, and it added another mark to my score against him.

"Why should I not tell you?" she continued. "After, when it was all over, the duke struck his name off the army, and he left in an hour. Before he went, he came and told me all, laughing at your ruin. I did not know man could be so vile. God help me-it is my husband I speak of! He offered to take me with him, but I refused; and he left, mocking like a devil, with words I cannot repeat. He was not done with you or with me, he said, as he went. I came here at once, and perhaps when Madame de la Tremouille returns to France, I shall be enabled to go with her in her train."

"Excuse my asking it," I said, "but have you-?"

"Oh, yes," she smiled sadly, "it is not that in any way."

At this moment I looked up and saw that it was sunset. Through the wheel-window the orange beams streamed in a long banner, and lit up the figure of the saint above us. The rays fell on madame's pale face, and touched with fire the gold of her hair. We stood before each other in a dead silence.

"Good-bye," I said, extending my hand.

She placed her own in it and our eyes met.

It was a moment of danger to both. Leper as I was, I had but to lift my hand, but to say a word, and here was one who would have followed me like a dog. I felt her weakness in her look, in the touch of her hand, which shivered as it lay in mine like a captive bird. At once a fire leapt up within me. I had lost all-everything. Why not throw revenge after my losses, and with her by my side seek a new fortune with a new name? The grand Turk needed soldiers, and what mattered it whether it was cross or crescent that I served?

But the woman became strong as I grew weak.

"Go!" she said faintly.

I dropped her hand, and, turning without a word, strode down the aisle. As I reached the church door the bells of the Angelus rang out, and yielding to a sudden impulse I looked back.

Madame was on her knees before the saint.

CHAPTER IV. A FOOL'S CAP AND A SORE HEART

I was not so dense as to fail to grasp the extent of the peril I had escaped, or to fully realise the evil strength of the temptation, which came upon me as suddenly as a sneeze. It is rare in matters of this kind for wicked thoughts to be of slow growth; they spring at once to life, full-armed. I thanked God in my heart that I was able to sweep aside the base desire, which covered my soul like a black cloud, and refrained from taking advantage of madame's momentary weakness. I could not but see I was to blame myself.

I, the elder and the stronger, should have foreseen the probable consequences of a friendship such as ours, and my sorrow for her was mixed with the deepest regret for my part in the transaction. I banished all idea of attacking D'Entragues through his wife, wondering at the littleness of spirit which had ever conceived such a thought. If it were possible, I would have kicked myself. Perhaps such victory as I gained over my heart was due to the secret springs of my vanity being touched, to the fear of the loss of my self-respect, and this mingling with my pity and regret, gave me the strength to win at the moment of temptation. It is difficult to tell; I have lived long enough in the world to know that the mysteries of the heart will remain veiled to the end. Occasionally we may lift the curtain a little, but more no man has done.

What had happened, however, explained clearly to me the motive for D'Entragues' conduct. He, at any rate, must have seen, long before either of us, how affairs stood with the wife whose life he embittered; but he made no effort to save her, contenting himself with striking an assassin's blow, which had taken from him the last shred of respect madame may have felt for him, and which had in part recoiled on his own head. Be this as it may, his stroke was successful, in that to all intents and purposes it had utterly blasted me. I was worse than dead. It was no ordinary revenge. In those troublous times, a blow from a dagger could have easily rid him of a wife of whom he was sick, or a man whom he hated, and no one would have thrown the matter in his teeth. But with devilish cruelty, he inflicted wounds which could never heal, and left his victims to live. It was impossible to hit such a man back, in a way to make him feel to the utmost extent the agony he had administered; the only thing was to take from him his worthless life: this he doubtless valued most of all things, and I meant to deprive him of it, if he stood at the altar of Christ. Moved by such thoughts, and with my cloak drawn well over the lower part of my face, I hastened towards the Roman Gate, reaching it just as it was to be closed for the night. In fact, as I passed out, the huge doors came together behind me with a groaning, and at the same time I heard the dull boom of the evening gun from the camp, followed immediately by the distant peals of the trumpets of the cavalry brigade.

The sun had now set, and night came apace; a grey haze enveloped the town behind me; above, in the deep violet of the sky, a few stars were shining, soon to be dimmed by the rising moon; from the east a bank of clouds was rapidly approaching, the advance guard of a storm from the Adriatic. To the west, there was still light enough to see the Chiana, lying like a silver thread, flung carelessly to earth in long folds, and the rugged outlines of the roadless Chianti hills stood up in fantastic shapes against the horizon. South-east was the peak of Monte Eavulto; due west, beyond Bucine, Mount Luco was yet visible. I halted for a moment, hesitating what course to take; whether to cross the swamps of the Chiana valley, and make my way over the Ambra to Montevarchi, and on to Florence; or to skirt the camp, cross the Arno at one of the fords between Laterine and Giove, and go on through the Prato Magno.

As the crow flies, Florence was but a few leagues distant; but I obviously would have to journey by side-paths, over hill and across valley to avoid observation, and this would occupy at least two days, unless my travels were permanently stopped by my being cut off by a privateering party from

the camp, or by any other untoward accident. Neither contingency was unlikely, for the writ of the king ran barely a league from the army, and the country was full of banditti. In fact, for a half-pistole one might have had a priest's throat cut. I decided on the former route. So muffling myself well in my cloak, for the wind blew chill, with my sword resting in the loop of my arm, I set forward at a round pace, and avoiding the camp, directed my steps towards Bucine. As far as Chiani I knew the road. Beyond that there was nothing but quagmire and swamp; still I had little doubt of finding my way by the moon, which would soon show, and if, perchance, I fell in with nighthawks, well then, there was little to be gained from me but hard knocks; and it would be an opportunity to test the temper of the blade I had purchased from Don Piero, the armourer.

In this mind I pressed on, intending to lie at Bucine for the night, or, if no better accommodation offered, to sleep as a soldier should, wrapped in my cloak, with the sky for a roof. As I went on, I found I was relying a little too much on my knowledge of the road, and a blue mist, which rose from the ground, made it impossible to pick my way by landmarks. Stumbling along, I took a good two hours to do what should have been done in one, and, by the time I reached Chiani, began to think it would be well to reconsider my decision in regard to making Bucine that night. It was then that I suddenly remembered that Chiani was held by a piquet of Swiss infantry, and any attempt to enter would be impossible, as the gates were doubtless shut. I was a little put out, for had I only recollected the fact before, I might have been saved the extra mile or so of hard work I had to reach within a few yards of Chiani, merely for the pleasure of turning back. The moon, come out by this time, shone fitfully through the bank of clouds, which was shifting uneasily overhead, and the wind, rising steadily, marked rain. I stirred myself all the faster, for I was in no mind to add a wetting to my misfortunes, and a drop or two of rain that caught me, showed I had but little leisure to lose. I made out a narrow cattle track, and hurried along this; but before I covered a mile the moon was obscured, and the wind dropped. It now began to rain, and the darkness was so thick, that I could only just follow the road. Soon the track died away into nothing, and I found myself floundering, over my ankles in mud, and up to the waist in wet rushes. At any moment I might strike a quicksand, with which these marshes abound, so I used my sword as a search-pole, stepping only where I found foot-hold, a dozen inches or so below the surface of the bog. In this perplexity, imagine my relief to see the blaze of a fire shoot up beyond a small rising ground before me, and throw an arc of light into the darkness, against which the falling rain glittered like fine wires of silver. I shouted aloud and to my joy got an answer.

"Who is there? What is the matter?"

"A traveller," I replied, "who has lost his way in this cursed swamp. Whoever you are, you will make a friend and find a reward if you lead me out of this."

"Come straight on, there is no danger beyond getting your feet wet."

"They are that already," I answered, and pressed on, having absolutely to force my way through the wet rushes, which wound themselves round me impeding my progress terribly. Moreover, so sticky was the slime below, that I thought every moment it would pull the boots off my feet. Struggling on in this manner for a hundred yards or more, guided by the fire, and an occasional shout from my unknown friend, I at last touched hard ground, and with a "Thank heaven!" got out of the swamp, and found myself at the foot of the hillock, behind which the fire was blazing.

"Which way to Bucine?" I called out.

"Are you out of the swamp?"

"Yes!"

"Then come round the shoulder of the hill to your right, and follow your nose. You will find shelter here. Bucine you could never reach to-night, and a dog should not be out in this weather."

"True, friend," I muttered, and with a loud "thanks" to the apparently hospitable unknown, I followed his directions, and rounding the hillock, saw before me, spluttering in the rain, a huge fire of pine-logs, at the entrance to a hut of the rudest description. Inside, I perceived a sitting figure, over

which the light from the fire alternately cast a glare, and then left it in darkness. I made my way to the open door, which hung back on hinges of rope, and entered without further ceremony.

"Humph!" snorted my host, without moving from his position. "I said it was no night for a dog to be out, I did not say anything of a wolf."

This change of tone was not so surprising, for dripping wet, covered with mud, and white with fatigue, my general appearance was but little calculated to re-assure any one. Yet, as I hung my cloak on a rough wooden peg which caught my eye, I could not help laughing in mockery as I answered:

"Wolves, friend, come to wolves' lairs."

He took no notice of my remark; but pointing to a heap of rushes opposite to him, said, "Sit down there." He then rose, and went towards the fire with an unlit torch in his hand. This gave me some opportunity of observing him. I saw he was of spare, but elastic figure. His head was bare, and his white hair hung in matted locks over a lean neck to his shoulders. His dress was fantastic, and entirely out of place with his surroundings. It consisted of a tight fitting jerkin of parti-coloured velvet, with puffed breeches to match, pulled over thick black hose. On his feet were the ordinary sandals of the peasantry, and, as he stooped to light the torch-wood, I saw his face was seamed with wrinkles, and that his lips moved rapidly, as if he was speaking, although no sound issued from them. He did not delay about his business; but hastened in, and sticking the torch in a hole in the floor between us, resumed his seat, and said abruptly-

"Let me look at you?"

Apparently his scrutiny was satisfactory, and I did nothing to interrupt him.

"Hungry?"

"No. All that I ask is to be allowed to rest here till to-morrow."

"That is well, for I have no food to offer you; but here is some wine in this skin."

He reached to a corner and pulled out a small wineskin. This he placed before me with the single word "drink."

"No, thanks." The whole manner and aspect of the man were so peculiar, that, although I was much fatigued, I judged it prudent to decline. His quick eye seemed to read my thoughts, for he laughed a little bitterly as he said-

"Tush, man! There is no fear. You bear too long a sword to have a purse worth the picking, and you are not supping," a look of hate passed over his features as he dropped out slowly, "with the Borgia. See, I will give you a toast-Revenge." He took a pull at the skin and flung it to me.

"I drink to that," I said, tasting the wine in my turn. Here then was another who, like me, sought for consolation in vengeance. We sat in silence for some minutes, each absorbed in his own thoughts. The heat from the fire had warmed the hut so, that the blue steam began to rise from my damp clothes. My companion reclined on his elbow tracing some diagram on the floor with a poniard, which from its shape was evidently of Eastern make. The rain, which now increased in violence, had almost quenched the log-fire, and was invading our shelter, for the roof began to leak. There being no wind the torch burned steadily, throwing sufficient light for us to distinguish each other. I began to wonder what manner of man this was before me, dressed in a motley of court-fool and peasant, and my curiosity was aroused to such an extent, that for the time I forgot my own troubles. Nevertheless I made no sign of inquiry, knowing there is no means so sure of obtaining information as to seem not to desire it. My new friend kept his eyes fixed on the point of his dagger, the muscles of his queer-webbed face twitching nervously. At length he became conscious of my scrutiny, for lifting his eyes, he looked me in the face, and then made a motion of his hand towards the wine-skin.

"No more, thanks."

"There will be that left for to-morrow before we start."

"Then you also are a traveller?"

"If you so put it; but I have been here for a week."

"An odd retreat to choose."

"Any hole will do for a rat."

"True; but we were wolves a moment ago," I smiled.

"I did not say I was," he replied drily, "but you looked wolf all over when you came in. Give me your hand."

I stretched out my hand, and he held my open palm near the torch, bent over it, and examined the lines keenly.

"Yes," he muttered half to himself, "strong fingers that can close over a sword-hilt, a soldier too, and one who has seen wars. Too much conscience ever to be great. You will never die a prince as Sforza did. Stay-what do I see? A man changed to a wolf-no-wolf you will never be. A bitter enemy, a woman who loves you, and a free heart for yourself. Sorrow and danger, bale and ruth, then calm waters and peace. There! Are you satisfied? If the devil does not upset this, it is the map of your life. Can you read mine?"

"No," I replied, withdrawing my hand, and somewhat surprised at the general accuracy of this man's knowledge of my past. Yet, I could not help crossing myself as I thought of his allusion to the foul fiend.

"Ay!" he sneered, "cross yourself. Peter and Paul are old and blind. They do not see. Pray if you like. God is too far above the stars to hear you. Go on your knees and beat at the skies with your lamentations. You will surely see the light of a seraph's wings. Do I not know-have I not seen the deep? Some day you will know, too."

He stopped as suddenly as he burst out, and betook himself to his old trick of moving his lips rapidly, forming words without any sound. I began to think I was with a madman, and rapidly cast up the chances of a struggle. I was physically the stronger, but armed as he was, with an unsheathed dagger, the odds were against me. Perhaps it would be prudent to begin the assault myself, and taking him by surprise, overpower him. When, however, I came to consider that I was in a manner his guest, that he had shown me kindness, and given no signs of personal violence, I was ashamed of my fears.

"You say you are going to Bucine?" He asked the question in his usual abrupt manner; but his tone was composed.

"It lies on my road."

"And on mine, too. Shall we travel together? I could point out the way."

"Certainly. It is very good of you."

"Well, it is time to sleep, and the torch has burnt to an end."

As he spoke he stretched himself out at full length, and, turning his back to me, appeared to sink at once into slumber. I watched him for some time by the embers of the torch, wondering if I was wise in accepting his companionship, and then, overpowered by fatigue, lost myself in sleep, heedless of the rain, which dripped in twenty places through the roof.

I slept profoundly, until aroused by my shoulder being gently shaken, and looking up, beheld my host, as I must call him, bending over me. I thought I had slept for a few minutes only, and saw to my surprise that it was well in the morning, and the sun shone brightly. All traces of cloud were gone, though soft billows of mist rolled over the olive gardens, and vineyards of Chianti grape, that stretched towards Montevarchi.

"Heavens, man! How you sleep! I was right when I hinted you had a good conscience."

I scrambled up with a hasty Good-morning; and a few minutes afterwards, having finished the remains of the wine in the skin, we started off in the direction of Bucine. My companion had politely never inquired my name, and I had been equally reticent. He placed on his head a silken fools'-cap, and the bells on it jingled incessantly as he walked along with a jaunty air, at a pace that was remarkable for a man of his age. He seemed to have lost the melancholy that possessed him during the night, and conversed in so cheerful and entertaining a manner, that in spite of myself, I was interested and withdrawn from my unhappy thoughts. He kept up his mood to Bucine where, notwithstanding our strange appearance, we attracted, to my relief, less attention than I imagined we should draw.

With appetites sharpened by our walk, we did full justice to the meal I ordered at the only hostel in the place. Here I played host, as a return for my entertainment, and in conversation my acquaintance said that he was bound for Florence. I told him that also was my point, and invited him to bear me company on the road, to which he willingly agreed. I made an attempt here to hire a horse; but not even a donkey was procurable, all available carriage having been seized upon for the army. So once more descending the hill on which Bucine is situated, we forded the river and continued our journey.

At the albergo we heard that a body of troops were foraging along the banks of the Arno, and resolved to make a detour, and, crossing Monte Luco, to keep on the sides of the Chianti hills, if necessary avoiding Montevarchi altogether. My companion maintained his high spirits until we reached the top of the spur of Monte Luco, known to the peasantry as the Virgin's Cradle. Here we stopped to breathe and observe the view. I looked back across the Chiana valley, and let my eye run over the landscape which stretched as far as the Marches. In the blue splash, to the south of the rugged and conical hill of Cortona, I recognised Trasimene, and beyond it lay Perugia. I turned to call my friend's attention to the scene, and at first did not perceive where he was. Another glance showed him standing on the edge of the cliff, a little to my left, shaking his clenched hand in the direction of Perugia, whilst on his face was marked every sign of sorrow and hate.

Curious to see what this would result in, I made no attempt to attract his attention, but in a moment he shook off the influence which possessed him, and rejoined me with a calm brow. We thereupon continued our journey with this difference, that my companion was now as silent as hitherto he had been cheerful. My own dark thoughts too came back to roost, and in a gloom we descended the Cradle, pushing our way through the myrtle with which it was covered, and walked on, holding Montevarchi to our right.

We kept a sharp look-out for the foragers, and seeing no signs of them, made up our minds, after some consultation, to risk going to Montevarchi, which we reached without mishap a little after noon. It was not my intention to halt there more than an hour or so, which I, hoping I would have better luck than at Bucine, intended to spend in trying to hire an animal of some kind to ride.

We stopped at the Bell Inn, near the gate, and after a deal of bargaining, which consumed a good hour, the landlord agreed to hire me his mule for two crowns. The rascal wanted ten at first. Just as the matter was settled a dozen or so of troopers rode in, and, spying the mule, in the twinkling of an eye claimed it for carriage purposes.

It was in vain the landlord protested that it was his last beast, that it had been hired to the noble cavaliere, meaning me, and many other things beside. The soldiers were deaf to his entreaties, and although I had more than a mind to draw on the villains, I had the good sense to restrain myself, for the odds were too many against me. I therefore hid my chagrin under a smile, and the mule was led away amidst the lamentations of mine host, who was further put out of pocket by a gallon or so of wine, which the troopers consumed, doubtless in honour of the prize they had taken, neglecting in the true fashion of the *compagnes grandes* to pay for it. It was a fit lesson to the landlord, for had he not, in his cupidity, haggled for an hour over the hire of the animal, he might have been the richer by two crowns and still owned his mule. Thus it is that avarice finds its own punishment.

On going off, the leader of the troop, a man whom I knew by sight and by reputation as a swashbuckler, if ever there was one, made me a mock salute, saying, in allusion to my quietness in surrendering my claim to the mule, "Adieu, Messer Feather-Cap-may your courage grow as long as your sword." This taunt I swallowed ruefully, and immediately set about my departure. My companion, who was not mixed up in the altercation, joined me silently, and we followed in the direction taken by the troopers, pursued by the maledictions of the innkeeper, who vented his spleen on us as the indirect cause of his misfortune.

The foragers, who owing to the warmth of the weather had all removed their breast-plates, which were slung to their saddles, were going at a walking pace; and it was amusing to see how the mere sight of their presence cleared the streets. Noting, however, that they did not appear to be bent

on personal injury, we did not think it necessary to go out of our course, or delay our departure until they left the town, and as we walked fast and they went slowly, by the time they reached the main square, we were not more than a dozen yards behind them.

At this moment we noticed the figure of a woman, apparently blind, for she was guided by a little dog attached to a string. The poor creature was crossing the pavement almost in front of the leader of the troop, and as she was right in the path of the troopers, we attempted to warn her by shouting, and she stooped irresolutely, hardly knowing which way to turn. The troop leader, without making any effort to avoid her, rode on in a pitiless manner, and she was flung senseless to the ground. In this her hood fell back, uncovering her face, and my companion, suddenly uttering a loud cry, ran forward, and seizing her in his arms, began to address her with every term of endearment, in the manner of a father to his child.

The troopers halted-discipline it will be observed was not great-and one of them with rough sympathy called to my friend to bear the girl, for so she looked, to the fountain, at the same time that their commander gave a loud order to go on, and to leave off looking at a fool and a beggar. I had, however, made up my mind there was a little work for me, and, drawing my sword, stepped up to the swashbuckler's bridle, and asked for a five minutes' interview there and then.

He burst into a loud laugh, "*Corpo di Bacco!* Here is Messer Feather-Cap with his courage grown. Here! two of you bind him to the mule."

But the men with him were in no mood to obey, and one of them openly said-

"It is always thus with the ancient Brico."

"Do you intend to give me the pleasure I seek," I asked, "or has the ancient Brico taken off his heart with his corselet?"

For a moment it looked as if he were about to ride at me: but my sword was ready, and I was standing too close to him for any such treachery to be carried off. Flinging the reins, therefore, to the neck of his horse, he dismounted slowly and drew his sword. A number of the townsfolk, attracted by the scene, so far forgot their fear of the foragers as to collect around us, and in a few moments a ring was formed, one portion of which was occupied by the troopers.

Brico took his stand so as to place the sun in my eyes, a manifest unfairness, for we should have fought north and south; yet I made no objection, and unclasping my cloak let it fall to the ground behind me.

"*À vous!*" he called out, and the next moment we engaged in the lower circle, my opponent, for all his French cry, adopting the Italian method, and using a dagger to parry. For a few seconds we tried to feel each other, and I was delighted with the balance of my sword. It did not take me a half minute to see that he was a child in my hands, and I began to rapidly consider whether it would be worth the candle to kill him or not. Brico, who had commenced the assault with a stamp of his foot, and a succession of rapid thrusts in the lower lines, became aware of his weakness as soon as I did, and began to back slowly. I twice pricked him over the heart, and his hand began to shake, so that he could hardly hold his weapon.

"Make way there," I called out mockingly, "the ancient would like to run a little."

Maddened by this taunt, he pulled himself together and lunged recklessly at me in tierce; it was an easy parry, and with a strong beat I disarmed him. He did not wait, but with the rapidity of a hare turned and fled, not so fast, however, but that I was able to accelerate his departure with a stroke from the flat of my sword.

"Adieu, ancient Brico!" I called out after him as he ran on, followed by a howl of derision from the crowd, in which his own men joined.

It was lucky that I adopted the course of disarming him, for had the affair ended otherwise, I doubt not but that the men-at-arms would have felt called upon to avenge their leader, poltroon as he was. As it happened they enjoyed his discomfiture, and an old trooper called out to me-

"Well fought, signore-you should join us-there is room for your sword under the banner of Tremouille. What-no-I am sorry; but go in peace, for you have rid us of a cur."

Saying this, they rode off, one of their number leading the ancient's horse by the bridle.

I turned now to look for my companion. He was nowhere to be seen, and on inquiry I found that he had lifted the girl up, and supporting her on his arm, the two, followed by the dog, had turned down by the church, and were now not in view. It would, no doubt, have been easy to follow, and as easy to trace them; but I reasoned that the man must have purposely done this to avoid me; and after all it was no business of mine. I therefore returned my sword to its sheath and walked on.

CHAPTER V. D'ENTRANGUES SCORES A POINT

Before I had gone fifty paces, however, I became aware that there was some law left in Montevarchi, for a warning cry made me look over my shoulder, and I saw a party of the city-guards, who had discreetly kept out of the way when Brico and I crossed swords, hurrying towards me. The same glance showed me that the ancient was already in their hands, and was being dragged along with but little regard to his comfort; and I felt sure that now, as the troop was gone, the citizens would wreak their vengeance on this hen-roost robber, and he would be lucky if he escaped with life. As for me, the catchpolls being out, they no doubt reasoned that they might as well net me. To stop and resist, would only result in my being ultimately overpowered, and perhaps imprisoned; to yield without a blow meant very much the same thing, and, in the shake of a drake's tail, I resolved to run, and to trust for escape to my turn for speed. So I set off at my roundest pace, followed by the posse, and the rabble who but a moment before were cheering me.

More than once I felt inclined to turn, and end the matter for myself; but the fact that this might mean laying aside all chance of settling D'Entrangués, urged me to my best efforts. Some fool made an attempt to stop me, and I was compelled to slash him across the face with my sword, as a warning not to interfere with matters with which he had no concern. I hardly knew where I was going; but dashed down a little bye-street, and was, after a hundred yards, brought to a halt by a dead wall. I could barely reach the top of it with my hands, luckily this was enough to allow me to draw myself up, and drop over to the other side, just as the police reached within ten feet of me. I did not stop to take notes of their action, but was off as soon as my feet touched ground, and found to my joy that I was close to one of the unrepaired breaches in the city wall, made six months ago by Tremouille's cannon. Through this I rushed, and scrambling down a slope of broken stone and mortar, found I would be compelled to climb down very nearly a hundred feet of what looked like the sheer face of a rock, before I could reach level ground. There was not even a goat track. My agility was, however, spurred on by hearing shouts behind me, and preferring to risk death in attempting the descent, rather than fall into the hands of messer the podesta, I chanced the venture, and partly by holding on to the tough broom roots, partly slipping, and aided by Providence and Our Lady of San Spirito, to whom I hurriedly cast up a prayer, I managed to reach the bottom, and fell, exhausted and breathless, into a cistus hedge.

I was too beaten to go another yard, and had my pursuers only followed up, must have become an easy prey. As it was I heard them reach the breach, where they came to a stop, all shouting and babbling at the same time. One or two, bolder than the others, attempted to descend the ledge of rock, down which I escaped, but its steepness damped their courage. They, however, succeeded in loosening some of the débris so that it fell over the cliff, and a few of the stones dropped very close to me; but by good hap I escaped, or else this would never have been written. One great block indeed, just passed over my head, and I vowed an altar-piece to Our Lady of San Spirito, who alone could have diverted that which was coming straight to my destruction; and I may add I duly kept my word. After a time the voices above began to grow fainter, and to my delight I found that the citizens, thinking it impossible I should have escaped like a lizard amongst the rocks, were harking back, and ranging to the right and left. I waited until all sound died away, and cautiously peeped out. The coast was clear. I had recovered my wind, and without more waste of time, I rose and pressed on in the direction of the hills, determined to chance no further adventures near the towns. Indeed, I had crowded more incident into the past few hours, than into the previous five-and-thirty years of my life, and my sole object, at present, was to reach Florence without further let or hindrance.

Keeping the vineyards between me and the town, I avoided all observation, and at a small wayside inn, filled a wallet which I purchased, with food and a bottle of the rough country wine, so that there might be no necessity for my visiting a human habitation during the remainder of my journey. With the wallet swung over my shoulder, an hour or so later I was ascending the slopes of Mount St. Michele, cursing the fallen pine-needles, which made my foothold so slippery, that I slid rather than walked.

Turning the corner of a bluff, I suddenly came upon half-a-dozen men, reclining under the pines in various attitudes of ease. They sprang up at once on seeing me, and one of them, presenting his arquebus, called on me to halt.

"You must pay our toll before you pass, Signore," said the man, who appeared to be the leader of the party.

"As you please," I replied, "but my only metal is cold steel."

"*Corpo di Bacco!*" he exclaimed. "I thought I knew you, and your voice makes me certain. Surely I address the Cavaliere di Savelli?"

I bowed, a little confused at the thought of my disguise being so easily penetrated, and the bandit went on, turning to his comrades-

"Put down your gun, Spalle, this gentleman is one of us, and-hawks do not peck out hawks' eyes. Signore," he added, "you pass free. I had the honour to serve in your *condotta* during the Siena war, and doubtless you remember Piero Luigi?"

"I do," I said, and the memory of a bag of florins which accompanied this same Luigi on his disappearance one fine day came to my mind. I had not however seen the man for three years, but he was apparently of those who do not forget faces. As it turned out, however, he had seen me very recently without my knowing it.

"It is a pleasure to think I am not forgotten, and in a way, Excellency, you have paid your footing." The rascal was alluding to my stolen florins. "To think," he continued, "that you should have joined us! But I suppose it was the dice, and, to be sure, the rubies were worth ten thousand. You should have realised at once and vanished; but experience will come, and mayhap another chance. I saw the trial, Excellency, and we do not war with the profession, least of all with a new recruit. You are free to pass, or, if you prefer it, to accept our hospitality for a while."

I declined the proffered invitation with a brief thanks, and went on, my blood boiling at the impertinence of the scoundrel who so familiarly claimed me as one of his own kind. Innocent myself, I was tasting to the dregs all the humiliation of the guilty, and it was only perhaps a lucky chance that saved me from the rope, or the still worse fate of the galleys at Pisa. Turn which way I would, my own country would never be a country for me again. I was cut out from my order, my infamy would be known wherever my name was heard, and my associates would henceforth have to be the vilest of mankind. Had I committed a murder, or even an act of treachery in war, that could have been wiped out; but to have sunk to the condition of a common thief, this was ignominy beyond repair. I therefore resolved, as soon as I pushed matters to a conclusion with D'Entragues, that I should leave Italy and seek a new life in the strange countries beyond the seas which Messer Columbus, the navigator, had discovered, and there, my past being unknown, perhaps find a future of peace or the rest which fears no disturbing from this world.

My original idea had been to seek the dominions of the Turk, but they were too close to my shame; even the New World was hardly far enough. So I planned, and so doubtless would I have acted had not circumstances worked to give me back what I lost, as I thought hopelessly, and to bring home to my mind the certainty of that tender mercy of God, of which we on earth take too little account.

It was late in the evening before I halted and ate my dinner under an overhanging rock, sheltered from the north wind by a clump of pines. When I finished I rolled myself up in my cloak, and fatigue, together with a good conscience, combined to send me to a sleep as sound as it was refreshing. I was up before the sun and continued my way, determined to reach Florence by evening. I took no

particular notice of the view, where I could see to my right the Prato Magno, and to my left all the valley of the Greve; but kept my eyes before me, intent on my thoughts.

At length, when passing Impruneta, where the black virgin is, Florence came in sight. There was a slight haze which prevented me from seeing as clearly as I could wish; but I plainly made out the houses on the banks of the Arno, Arnolfo's Tower, the Palace of the Signory, the Cathedral, the Bargello, and the unfinished Pitti Palace, whilst beyond rose the convent-topped hill of Senario, where the Servites have their monastery.

As I looked, there was little of admiration in my heart, although the scene was fair enough; but I could give no mind to anything beyond the fact that I was at last within measurable distance of D'Entragues, and that in a few hours my hand was like to be at his throat.

With these thoughts there somehow mingled up the face of Madame, and the scene of our last meeting. I put this aside, however, with a strong hand, and determined to think no more of her, although no such recollection could be anything but pleasant and sweet. Until I met her I had managed well enough without womankind, and for the future I would leave bright eyes alone. Yet I knew I was the better man for holding the privilege of her friendship. However, she had passed out of my life, and across the seas I would have other things to think of than the memory of my platonic friendship with Doris D'Entragues.

It was close upon sunset when I entered the San Piero Gate, and found myself in Florence, and in a difficulty at the same time, in consequence of my wearing a sword. I luckily, however, remembered that La Palisse, the French leader, was then in the city, and explaining that I was from the army at Arezzo with a message to him, inquired particularly his abode, which I was told was in the palace of the exiled Medici in the Via Larga. It so happened that La Palisse was in constant communication with Tremouille, and this and my confident bearing imposed upon the guards. I supplemented my argument with a couple of crowns, and they let me pass without further parley. It will thus be seen that whatever the regulations may have been, they were easily broken. Indeed I found later on that they were, even at that time, a dead letter, and that the zeal of the guards was merely inspired by the prospect of making something out of me, which they did on this occasion. I knew Florence fairly well, having been there under circumstances very different to the present; but as I hurried along the crowded streets, I began to feel I was somewhat uncertain as to whither the roads led. I judged it prudent, however, not to make inquiries, but kept my eyes on the sharp look-out for an hostel suitable to my purse, which was diminishing at a fearful rate. I stopped for a while at a street stall to satisfy my hunger with a cake of wheat and a glass of milk, a wholesome but unpalatable beverage, and entered into conversation with the stall-keeper. It came out that I was in a difficulty about a lodging, and the man very civilly told me where one could be procured, and added to his kindness, seeing I was apparently a stranger to the place, by directing his son, a small bare-legged urchin, to guide me to the house, which he said was an old palace of the Albizzi, that had passed into the hands of the banker Nobili, and was rented out in tenements.

Heaven only knows through what bye-lanes and alleys the imp led me, chattering like an ape the whilst; but at last we reached the house which lay in the street di Pucci. An arrangement was soon entered into with the person in charge, and I paid in advance for two weeks the small rent asked for the room I took. I selected the room, because there was in it some furniture, such as a bed, a table and a couple of chairs, which, I was informed with some emphasis, had been seized from the last tenant in default of rent. I sent the boy away rejoicing, and was surprised to find that the housekeeper did not depart as well; but this worthy soon made it clear to me that a further payment was requisite on account of the furniture. I was too tired to haggle, so paid him the three broad pieces he wanted, and bid him get me some candles. He returned after a little delay with what I needed, and I may say at once that under a rough exterior I found this man, with all his faults, was capable on occasions of displaying true kindness of heart.

I would like to pay him this tribute, for subsequently, as will be seen, we had a grave difference of opinion which ended in disaster for him. At the time this happened I could not but condemn him strongly, for in order to further a plot in which he was engaged, he tried to induce me to crime, and when, by a happy chance, I was able to frustrate his design, joined in an attempt to murder me. I fully believe, however, now that I can look back on affairs coolly, that, in common with others of his age, he thought it no wrong to adopt any means to further a political plot, whilst in the every day observances of life he displayed, in an underhand manner, much virtue.

When he was gone I sat down to count my money, and found I had but ten crowns in all the world. With prudence however this would last some time. Still it was gall and wormwood to me to have to weigh each item of my disbursement. It would be necessary as well to renew my attire, which, with the exception of the leather buff coat, was almost ruined by the hard wear it had been exposed to on my journey. I sat down to rest, but now that I had reached Florence a reaction set in, and assailed by a full sense of my position I gave way to despair. In a little time I became more composed; but it was impossible to keep still with the fire in my heart, and I sallied into the street, taking care to note landmarks, so as to find my way back. In this manner I must have gone for about a quarter of a mile, when I was brought to a standstill by the coming of a gay party down the street, in the direction opposite to mine, all marching by the light of many torches, to the music of a band. The musicians led the procession, which was flanked on each side by a number of flambeaux bearers, and a retinue of servants, all bearing swords despite the law.

The merry-makers walked in pairs, each lady resting her fingers on her cavalier's arm, and all laughing and talking with the utmost good-humour. I was compelled to draw myself to the wall to admit of their passing, and whilst thus giving them the road, the light fell brightly on me, and I became an object of alarm to some of the fair, who gave utterance to pretty little exclamations of terror, with the result that I came in for haughty looks from the gallants.

In the middle of the promenaders were two ladies, who, apparently not having partners of the opposite sex, had linked themselves together, and the attention of the taller of these was bestowed upon me for a moment, and it was not flattering. As she wore a mask, I could see little of her face beyond the half contemptuous look in her eyes which were dark as night, and a short curl of the upper lip, with which she no doubt intended to express the same sentiment as her glance. I waited calmly until the whole party passed on, admiring the grace of the demoiselle who had favoured me with her scornful survey. I watched them until they turned off into another street, and then went on, idly wondering who the people were, and more especially the dark-eyed lady.

The street behind me was in gloom, a few yards in front of me a lamp hanging from a wall threw a dim radiance; beyond that there was gloom again. Through the darkness before me I heard the sound of hurrying feet, coming in my direction, and almost before I was aware of it, the newcomer and I fell into the circle of the light, and met face to face.

It was D'Entragues! He knew me as if by instinct.

"You!" he exclaimed, and on the instant his sword was out. I said nothing. I was blind, mad with anger. My whole soul hungered for his life as I thrust at him, and in doing so slipped my foot over the edge of the narrow pavement and fell heavily. He was on me at once; something flashed in his left hand, and I felt a stinging sensation all over my side. He did not wait to see the result of his blow. Perhaps he made too sure, and springing over me, ran into the darkness beyond. I scrambled up at once, and made an attempt to follow; but my brain began to reel, and I was compelled to lean against the wall to support myself.

The clash of steel had however aroused some of the inhabitants, and hearing footsteps approaching I pulled myself together with an effort, and making across the road, turned back to my lodging. Here again I felt too weak to proceed without help, and sank to the ground, knowing I was bleeding freely. By this time two or three men came up, and after surveying the spot under the street-lamp, crossed over in my direction. The rays of a lantern held by one of them discovered me, and

they hastened up. I begged the favour of their assistance to my abode, saying I had been stabbed, and this the worthy citizens readily accorded; and not content with that, when I reached my room, gave me all help in dressing my injury. The dagger, which I had to extract, had gone through the folds of my cloak, but was turned by a steel buckle on the strap of my buff coat, and had cut through the coat and down my side, inflicting an ugly flesh wound. This in itself was not dangerous; but I had lost much blood, and when the kind citizens had gone, in making an attempt to rise from my chair, I had only just time to reach my bed before I became unconscious.

CHAPTER VI. BERNABO CECI

I cannot say for what time I lay thus bereft of sense; but on coming to myself I saw the candle in my room was all but spent, and the wick flaring in a long flame. I looked to see if my wound had broken out a-bleeding afresh, and was glad to find this was not the case, and that the bandages were in their position. The small effort, however, nearly set me off once more. The room swam round, the bright flame of the candle dwindled down to a little star, no bigger than a pin point, and then began slowly to increase in size as the faintness passed off, and I was able to see clearly again. Any attempt to move gave me agony, and, closing my eyes, I lay still. I heard the candle expire with a splutter, and leave me in darkness. Then I began to get light-headed, and unable to control my thoughts. Somehow my mind travelled back to the days of my childhood, and the figure of the only living relative I can remember, my father, came before me, standing just as he was wont to stand, when about to give me a lesson in the exercise of the sword, and repeating a warning he never ceased to din into my ears. "Learning," he said, "is of little use to a gentleman. You need not know more of books than a Savelli should, but in horsemanship, and in the use of the sword-" he finished with a gesture more expressive than words. And truly old Ercole di Savelli was never a bookworm, although he ended a stormy life in his bed.

He was the son of that Baptista di Savelli, who was ruined with the Prefetti di Vico, and other noble houses during the time of Eugene IV. Such estates as Baptista had, were transferred with the person of his sister Olympia, who married into the Chigi, to that family, and with them the custodianship of the Conclaves. Baptista di Savelli left his son nothing but a few acres. The latter tried to woo Fortune in the Spanish war, but did not obtain her favours. He returned to Italy, and poor as Job though he was, hesitated not to marry for love, and engage in a lawsuit with Amilcar Chigi. What between the one and the other, Ercole was ruined in a hand turn. His wife died in giving birth to me, and disgusted with the world, he retired to a small estate near Colza in the Bergamasque. There he devoted himself to a pastoral life, and to bringing me up as a soldier, until, one fine day, having contracted a fever, he received absolution and died like a gentleman and a Christian.

I followed the profession for which I was intended, joining the levy of the Duke of Urbino, and sharing in all the ups and downs of the times, until Fortune did me a good turn at Fornovo. Subsequently things went well with me, and although I had to mortgage my narrow lands, to raise and provide equipment for the men, with whom I joined Tremouille, I was in expectation of a full reward, when I was so suddenly stricken down.

Thinking of these things in the dark, tormented by a devouring thirst, which I was unable to quench, haunted by the impression that my last hour was come, and that I should die here like a dog, without even the last rites of the church, I fell into a frenzy, and began to shout aloud, and rave as in a delirium. D'Entragues came before me, wearing a smile of triumph, and I strove impotently to reach. Then the whole room seemed to be full of my enemy, from every corner I could see the white face, the red hair, and the smile of successful malice. The figures, each one exactly like the other, floated over me, stood by my side, sometimes brought their faces within an inch of mine, until I imagined I felt a flame-like breath beating on me. Finally they flitted backwards and forwards, rapidly and more rapidly, until there was nothing but a mass of moving shadow around me, which gradually resolved itself again into a single form. I strove to reach for my sword to strike at it, but my arms were paralysed. So through the livelong night the phantom stood at the foot of my bed, until the white morning came in at my window, and I fell into a sleep.

When I awoke, I found the old intendant of the building bending over me. The fever had abated but the thirst still remained. "Water," I gasped through my parched lips, and he gave me to drink.

To cut a long story short, I arranged with this man for such attendance as I should want, and to do him justice Ceci-for that was his name-performed his part of the contract, getting me my food, attending to the dressing of my wound, to which he applied a most soothing salve, and such other offices a helpless person must expect. He did not trouble me much with his presence during the earlier part of my illness, but came as occasion required him, and, when he had performed his work, left me to my reflections.

I may note here that I never again saw the people who helped me when I was wounded. Having assisted me to my lodging, and aided me to dress my hurt, as I have said, they departed, and apparently gave me no further thought. This I am persuaded was not due to unkindly feeling, but to prudence, and a wish to avoid being mixed up in an affair such as mine appeared to be; for the times were such, that it was better for a man's head to be unknown to the Magnifici Signori of Florence.

Subsequently, when things changed with me, I caused public cry to be made, requesting the worthy citizens to come forward; but my attempt was of no avail, beyond producing a half-dozen or so of rascal impostors, who swore to helping me, under circumstances that never occurred, on the off chance of hitting a nail on the head, and obtaining a reward. But this was long after my illness, and the block in the Bargello may have, since that time, been a resting place for the heads of the good Samaritans for all I can say. I took a longer time in mending than I thought I should, for an inflammation set in, the fever came back, and when that was passed I recovered strength but slowly. It was at this time, however, that I discovered the advantage of reading, having up to now borne only too well in mind my father's saying on that subject.

I began with Poliziano's Orfeo, a poor affair, and then procured, to my delight, a translation of Plutarch's Lives. Both these books were obtained with the greatest difficulty, so old Ceci, the attendant said, from the library of a great Florentine noble, in which a nephew of his was employed in copying manuscripts, and the old man charged me an entire double florin for the use of the latter alone; an expenditure I grudged at first; but which I would have willingly paid twice over before I finished the volume. I inquired the name of the nobleman; but Ceci was not inclined to tell me, and I gathered that the owner was probably unaware that his books were taking an airing, and enabling his library-scribe to turn a dishonest penny. On the binding of the Plutarch was pricked a coat-of-arms, a cross azure on a field argent, with four nails azure; but I could not, for the life of me, remember this device, although I had served in every part of Italy except Rome. Finally it came to my mind, that the bearings, no doubt, belonged to some merchant prince of Florence, and would therefore be unlikely to see anything more of fighting than a street riot, and therefore I dismissed the subject.

I did not neglect, whilst lying in enforced idleness, to take such steps as I could to discover the whereabouts of D'Entragues, and specially instructed old Ceci to make inquiries of the followers of La Palisse. He brought me news in a couple of days, that the Frenchman had left Florence a fortnight ago, and it was understood he was going to join the army of Cesare Borgia, that cursed serpent who was lifting his head so high in the Romagna. This was ill news indeed, for I had been lying helpless for close upon a month; but I was on the mend at last, and resolved to follow him as soon as I had strength to travel.

During my illness I had frequently thought of madame, and with the thoughts of her, there mingled recollections of the dark eyes of the lady who had looked at me through her mask, on the night I was stabbed. I could think of madame in no way but with a kindly feeling; but strange as it may seem, any recollection of the other made my heart beat, and I would have given much even to have obtained another glance at her. In the meantime, however, my first business was to try and replenish my funds, for my supplies were almost exhausted by the drain made upon them during my illness.

Old Ceci, the intendant, had in his way formed a sort of attachment for me, and now that I was better, generally spent an hour or so with me daily in converse. One day I let out some hint of my condition, and Ceci, after a little beating about the bush, approached me with a proposal.

"Signore," he said, "there are those in Florence who would like things changed. We want our Medici back; but we want also a few good swords, and I could tell you of a way to fill your purse."

"Say on," I replied, and the old man having first bound me to secrecy, informed me that certain notables in Florence wanted a good sword or two, to rid them of a great political opponent, in order to pave the way for the return of the Medici; and without mentioning names in any way, which, he said, would be given to me later, proposed that I should undertake the task.

I realised at once that his suggestion meant nothing short of assassination, and saw that my old acquaintance was apparently up to the ears in a political plot. My first idea was to spurn the suggestion with indignation; but reflecting that it would be better to know more, and by this means, if possible, save a man from being murdered in cold blood; I affected to treat the matter seriously, and replied that I was as yet unfit for active work; but that as soon as I was better I would discuss the subject again. He then departed.

Perhaps the time will come when the minds of men will shrink with horror from crime, even for the sake of a good object, and however much I loathed the proposal made to me, I could not but recollect that the noblest names of Milan were concerned in the Olgiati conspiracy, and that a Pontiff had supported the Pazzi attempt on the Medici. This being so, there was excuse for Ceci and his leaders, whoever they were; but my whole soul was wrath in me at the thought that I had been deemed capable of doing the business of a common bravo, and if it were not for the reason stated above, I would have flung the old conspirator out of the room. This insult also had to go down indirectly to D'Entragues, and as I grew better, my desire to settle with him rose to fever-heat. The question, however, was my resources. Turn which way I would, there seemed to be no way of replenishing them. The idea presented itself to me to join the Borgia, who with all his faults was ever ready to take a long sword into his pay. But the man was so great a monster of iniquity, that, even to gratify my vengeance, I could not bring myself to accept the gold of St. Valentino.

There were others to whom I could apply, such as Malatesta or De la Rovere; but amongst them I would be known, and the burden of my shame too great to bear. After all, it would perhaps be better to seek to fill my purse in Florence, and let my vengeance sleep for a while. It would be all the sweeter when it came.

With these ideas in my head, I was sitting one afternoon at the little window of my room, putting a finishing touch to the edge of the dagger, which D'Entragues had left with, or rather in me, and congratulating myself that the blade was not a poisoned one, when I heard, as from a distance a hum of voices, which gradually swelled into a great roar, and above this the clanging of a bell with a peculiar discordant note. Almost at the same time old Ceci bustled into my room, evidently in a state of high excitement, and called out-

"Messer Donati-Messer Donati! It is to be war-war!"

I should add here that I had judged it prudent to take another name on entering Florence, and adopted the first one that struck me, although I afterwards thought that Donati was not quite the name to win favour with the Florentines, amongst whom the memory of Messer Corso was still green, although so many years had passed since he was done with. Whether I let my own name out or not during my illness I am unable to say; at any rate, Ceci never gave me any such hint. The news the old man brought was not unexpected by me, yet I caught a touch of his excitement and answered-

"War-where? Tell me."

"It is this way, signore; Naples has risen, and the Great Captain has driven D'Aubigny out of Calabria, all the Romagna has gone from Cesare as that," he waved his hand as if throwing a feather in the air.

"The Holy Father has cast his interdict on Florence, and Pisa is burning the Val di Nievole."

"The devil!" I exclaimed, "this is more than I thought. The interdict is bad, Messer Ceci."

He grinned as he answered, "Bad for the Pope. Medici or no Medici we will not have a priest interfering in Florence."

"I see," I said, "you are Florentine first, and conspirator afterwards; but how do the French stand?"

"With us, for we pay. It is said, however, that things are uncertain with them, that Monsignore d'Amboise, who is now Cardinal of Rouen, has gone to Rome, and that Tremouille is awaiting the king."

"The king! Louis is at Maçon."

"Yes, Louis himself, and the Lord knows how many barons besides, with pedigrees as long as their swords, who will eat up our corn, and pillage our vineyards from the Alps to the Adriatic. But I came here to ask, signore, if you will come with me to see. It is hurry and make haste for I cannot wait. The Carroccio has left St. John's."

I had almost recovered my full strength, and was accustomed to walk out daily at dusk in order to avoid observation, whilst at the same time I could by doing so exercise my muscles; yet at first I felt inclined to decline Ceci's invitation, alleging weakness as my excuse, for my anger was still warm against him on account of his proposals to me. Reflecting, however, that if I offended him, it would probably fatally injure any prospect I had of saving the person whom the conspirators intended to kill, I thought it best to affect a friendliness I did not feel, and changing my mind in regard to accompanying him, slipped on my sword, and followed the old man downstairs. We hastened as fast as we could to the great square. The people were swarming out of the houses, and the streets were full of a hurrying throng, all directing their steps to the point, whence we could hear the bellowing of the mob, echoed with answering cheers by those making towards the place of assembly. Around us there was a murmur like that of millions of bees, as men, women, and children, jostled their way to the Palace of the Signory. My companion, who stopped every now and again to open his jaws as wide as the mouth of a saddle-bag, and give forth a yell, hustled along at a great pace, and I made after him with scarcely less speed.

By good fortune, and a considerable amount of pushing, we made our way through the press, which appeared to me to be composed entirely of elbows, and at last reached the market-place. Here the crowd behind us slowly drove us forwards, and finally gave us the advantage of a good position. The square was lined with men-at-arms and stout citizens, with boar-spears in their hands.

All at once there went up a shout louder than ever, the crowd swayed backwards and forwards, then opened out, and admitted the Carroccio or war-car in Florence. It was painted red, and drawn by oxen housed in red trappings. The great beasts had dragged the car slowly from the chapel of St. John's, where it stood in times of peace, and laboured along under its weight. From the car itself projected two poles on which hung the banner of the Commonwealth, a red giglio on a white field. Immediately behind this came another car, bearing the Martinello or war-bell, which was incessantly clanging out its angry notes. It was to ring now for a full month, without ceasing.

Around the cars were the principal nobles of the city, and the oxen being guided to the "bankrupt stone," were there unharnessed. Pietro Soderini, the brother of his eminence of Volterra, who was then Gonfaloniere for life, raised his hand. In a moment there was silence, and the vast audience listened to the brief oration that fell from the lips of their chief magistrate. He painted in stirring words the dangers of the times; he called to the people to forget party hatreds in the face of the common crisis; he appealed to their past, and then concluded: "Therefore," said he, "for the safety of the State, have we to whom that safety is entrusted put our hope in God, and our hands to the sword. Citizens, we give to our enemies, to Rome, and to Spain, war, red war-and God defend the right!" With that, he drew off his glove of mail and flung it on the pavement, where it fell with a sudden crash.

The silence of the crowd continued for a little, and then, from forty thousand throats rang out cheer after cheer, as the sturdy citizens roared out their approval of the gage thrown down.

In the midst of all this some partisan of the Medici, hysterically excited, raised a shout of *Palle! Palle!*

"Blood of St. John!" exclaimed Ceci, "who is that fool? He will die."

It was the well-known cry of the exiled Medici, and it drove the crowd to madness. Instantly there was an answering yell.

"*Popolo! Popolo!* Death to tyrants!" I cannot tell what happened exactly; but in the distance, I saw a man being tossed and torn by the mob. For a moment, his white face rose above the sea of heads, with all the despair in it that the face of a drowning man has, when it rises for the last time above the waves; then it sank back, and something mangled and shapeless was flung out into the piazza, where it lay very still. I stood awestruck by this vengeance.

"Yet the Medici *will* come back, signore!"

Ceci whispered this in my ear, as he stood with his hand on my shoulder.

CHAPTER VII. THE GARDEN OF ST. MICHAEL

On our way back Ceci was somehow separated from me, whether by accident or design, I cannot say. I did not quite regret this, as I had made up my mind to see as little as possible of him for the future, thinking he had repaid himself for his kindness, by the proposals he had made to me. Indeed, I may say I never sought his society, although, until he showed his hand, his visits and conversation gave me some pleasure, for notwithstanding his position, he was a well-informed man, who, in the earlier part of his life, must have seen better days, and perhaps hoped to see them again, if his plot succeeded. The words he had let drop, to the effect that the Medici would come back, had given me a hint as to what that plot was. It was evident that my old friend was an active member of the Bigi, or Grey Party in Florence, that were then working secretly for the restoration of Lorenzo's sons. It seemed clear too, that the attempt to be made, was to be directed against some very eminent member of the State—perhaps the Gonfaloniere himself, and I began to wonder if it was not my duty to lay the information I had before the Signory. I could not, however, reconcile this with my promise of silence, and therefore my tongue was tied. Still I could not sit tamely by, and see a man murdered in cold blood, and I decided therefore, to remain in Florence somehow, and if possible avert the crime, although it would interfere, no doubt, with my own business. But one cannot always be thinking of one's self. Perhaps also, though not quite conscious of it then, I had some idea of again meeting the unknown lady of the gala procession, in whom, in spite of myself, I felt I was taking too great an interest.

During the night I had but little sleep, for the affair of the mad partisan of the Medici, and the declaration of war, had roused the citizens to fever heat, and all night long, crowds thronged the streets, their hoarse shouts of *Popolo! Popolo!* mingling with the incessant clanging of the war-bell, which itself was loud enough to wake the dead. The next day, however, I resolved to take the bull by the horns, and with a view to fill my purse, determined to present myself before La Palisse, and offer him my sword. I sallied out, therefore, finding the streets fairly empty, the all-night indignation meeting of the Florentines having wearied them a little. Still, however, there were knots of people here and there, all in a more or less excited condition. I was in no particular hurry, and taking a lesson from the snail, went at a leisurely pace, and eventually reached the headquarters of La Palisse, which were in the Medicean palace, in the Via Larga. The courtyard and entrance-hall were full of soldiers, and evidently active preparations for the campaign were in progress, for there was a continuous stream of people going in and out. No one took any notice of me, and holding my cap in one hand, and straightening the feather on it with the fingers of the other, I advanced unquestioned through the crowded rooms. In this manner I proceeded until I came to a gallery, on one flank of which there was a series of windows overlooking the street; at the end of the gallery hung a purple curtain, covering, as it happened, an open door. On the curtain itself was embroidered a crimson shield, bearing the *palle* of the Medici. Before this I was stopped by a young officer, who asked me my business, and I replied it was with La Palisse himself.

"Impossible!" he replied; "you cannot see the General."

"Why not, signore?"

"Tush, man! You look old enough to understand that orders are orders."

"What is it, De Brienne?" a sharp voice called out from within. The officer lifted the curtain, and went inside. I was determined to gain an interview with the great man, and had therefore said my business was of importance. The leanness of my purse is my excuse for the subterfuge, which I subsequently regretted, as will be seen further on. Shortly after De Brienne came out. "Well, messer-messer—"

"Donati," I said.

"Well, Donati, the General will see you. You may enter."

I accordingly did so, and found myself in the presence of a short, thick-set man, seated at a small table, on which was spread a map, over which he was looking intently. In a corner of the room lay his helmet and sword, and he himself was in half-mail, wearing a Milanese corselet, on which was emblazoned the red dragon of his house. As his head was bent over the paper, I could not at first make out his features, and remained standing patiently. Suddenly he lifted his face, and looked at me with a quick "Well-your business, sir?"

I was accustomed to strange sights, but for the moment was startled, so horribly disfigured was the man. The sight of one eye was completely gone, and half his face looked as if a red-hot gridiron had been pressed against it. The other eye was intact, and twinkled ferociously under its bushy grey eyebrow. I recovered myself quickly, and made my request in as few words as possible. He became enraged as I finished. "Bah!" he said, "I thought your business was of importance. I can do nothing for you, my list is full. You have gained admission to me under a pretence-go!" and he resumed his study of the map. I would have urged the matter, but all my pride was aroused at his words, and so, with a short good-day, I turned on my heel and walked out. Passing through the gallery, I saw De Brienne, leaning against an open window, talking to another young officer. They both looked at me, and burst into a loud laugh. At any other time I might have treated this with contempt, but I was sore all over at my reception, and approaching the two said, "You seem amused, gentlemen-it is not well to laugh at distress."

They stopped their laughter, staring haughtily at me, and De Brienne said, "Your way, signore, lies before you," and he pointed down the corridor.

"Perhaps the Signor de Brienne would care to accompany me-unless," and I looked him steadily in the face.

"Unless what?" De Brienne flushed angrily.

At this moment we heard a hasty footstep on the marble floor, and La Palisse advanced. "Still here," he said to me, "did I not tell you to begone?"

"My business is with the Signor de Brienne," I replied stiffly, for my blood was hot within me.

"I am quite prepared," began De Brienne, but the free-captain interposed.

"Not in the least. I cannot allow my officers to go fighting with every *croque-mort*, who comes here with a long sword and a lying story. Look at him, De Brienne-every inch a bravo! Harkee, Donati! Begone at once. Not another word, or by God, I will have you hanged from the nearest window!"

It did not require me to carry my perception in my right hand, to be aware that La Palisse was capable of fulfilling his threat, and although I was inclined to draw on him there and then, I knew what the ultimate results would be. So swallowing my pride as best I could, and regretting the ill-humour which had subjected me to this insult, I stalked into the street.

I made my way to my ordinary, and sat there to cool, which took some time. I was able to see, that the rebuff I received was due in great part to my own mismanagement; also that there was no hope for me from La Palisse, and that my steps must turn elsewhere if I wished my purse to show a full-fed appearance. I dined sparingly, drinking but a half measure of Chianti, which I mixed with water, and it made but a thin fluid. When I finished my slender repast, there was nothing left but to kill time. It was useless to go back to my lodging; for want of funds had compelled me to discontinue, until better times, my newly acquired habit of reading, and Ceci, despite the kindness he had shown me, was precise in the exaction of payment for offices performed by him. No more indeed could be expected from a huckstering mind such as his, inherited no doubt from a line of bargaining citizens, whose hearts were in their bales of wool. So I strolled towards the garden of St. Michael, passing on the way the piazzas, where there were still numbers assembled, and wondering at the implacable hatred of the Florentines towards their noblest blood, a hatred they carried so far, as to build the walls of the Palace of the Signory obliquely, rather than they should touch the spot where the Uberti once dwelt. And this set me reflecting on the unreasoning stupidity of the *canaille*, in their enmity towards

gentle blood. Perhaps I was a little influenced in these thoughts, from the fact that the Uberti were connected by marriage with the Savelli, a daughter of Maso degli Uberti having wedded that Baptista di Savelli who upheld by force of arms his right to attend the Conclave of Cardinals. It was sad to think that of the Uberti not one was left, and of the Savelli-I alone. I will not include the Chigi, for they come through the female line, and although Amilcar Chigi, the son of my father's old enemy, subsequently made advances of friendship towards me, I felt bound to explain to him that I was the head of the house, despite the broad lands his father got with his mother Olympia, by an unjust decree of the Chamber of Lies. This, however, is a family affair, which does not concern the narration in hand. Having reached the garden, I sat myself to rest on a stone seat, set against a wall overhung by a large tree. At the further end of the walk were two ladies in earnest conversation. Their backs were to me at first, but on arriving at the end of the walk, they turned slowly round, and came towards me. As they approached, I was almost sure they were the two I had seen in the gala procession, and my doubts were soon at rest, for, on passing, they glanced at me with idle curiosity, and in a moment I recognised them by their air and gait. On this occasion they wore no masks, and I saw they were both young and passing fair. The face of the shorter of the two, whose figure had a matronly cast, was set in a mass of light hair, and looked brimful of good-humour. The other, who, in marked contrast to her companion, had dark hair and dark eyes, possessed a countenance of exceeding beauty, marred perhaps by its expression of pride. Be that as it may, my blood began to tingle as I saw her, and an indefinite thought of what might have been rose into my mind. When they had gone a few yards, the one, whom I took to be a married woman, said something to her friend, and glanced over her shoulder; but the other appeared to reprove the remark, increasing as she did so the pride of her carriage. I wondered to myself that two ladies, should be out unattended, in so sequestered a spot, at a time too when the city was so full of excitement, and watched them as they turned the corner of the walk, and went out of sight beyond the trees. I began in a useless manner to speculate who they were, and to weave together a little romance in my heart, when I was startled by a shriek, and the next moment the fair-haired lady came running round the corner of the road, crying for help. It was not fifty yards, and in less time than I take to write this, I whipped out my sword, and was hurrying to the spot. I saw, when I reached, the taller lady struggling in the arms of an ill-looking ruffian. She called out on my coming, and the man, loosening his hold, was about to make off, when, unwilling to soil my sword with the blood of a low-born scoundrel, I struck at him with my fist, and the cross handle of the sword clenched in my hand, inflicted an ugly gash on his forehead, besides bringing him down. I stood with the point of my sword over him, and the affrighted women behind me.

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