

The Amulet eBook

The Amulet by Hendrik Conscience

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THE AMULET.

CHAPTER I.

Previous to the close of the fifteenth century, the direction taken by European commerce remained unchanged. America had not been discovered, and the only known route to India was by land.

Venice, enthroned by her central position as queen of commerce, compelled the nations of Europe and Asia to convey to her port all the riches of the world.

One single city, Bruges in Flanders, serving as an international mart for the people of the North and South, shared, in some measure, the commercial prosperity of Venice; but popular insurrections and continual civil wars had induced a large number of foreign merchants to prefer Brabant to Flanders, and Antwerp was becoming a powerful rival to Bruges.

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At this period two great events occurred, by which a new channel was opened to trade: Christopher Columbus discovered America, and Vasco de Gama, by doubling the Cape of Good Hope, pointed out a new route to India. This latter discovery, by presenting another grand highway to the world, deprived Venice of the peculiar advantages of her situation, and obliged commerce to seek a new emporium. Portugal and Spain were the most powerful nations on sea; countless ships left their ports for the two Indies, and brought back spices, pearls, and the precious metals for distribution throughout the Old World. This commercial activity required an emporium in the centre of Europe, halfway between the North and the South, whither Spaniards, Portuguese, and Italians, as well as French, English, Germans, Swedes, and Russians, could resort with equal facility as to a perpetual mart for all the commodities exchanged between the Old and the New World.[1]

A few years before the commencement of the religious wars which proved so disastrous to the country, Antwerp was in a most flourishing condition. Thousands of ships of every form and size covered its broad river like a forest of masts, whose many-colored flags indicated the presence of traders from all the commercial nations of the globe.

Portuguese gallions carried thither the gems and spices of the East; Spanish gallions the gold and silver of America; Italian vessels were laden with the delicate fruits and rich stuffs of the Southern countries; German vessels with grains and metals; and all returned to their own countries heavily freighted with other merchandise, and made way for the ships which were continually arriving, and which, according to contemporary chronicles, were often obliged to wait six weeks before they succeeded in approaching the wharf.[2]

Small craft, such as *hers*, ascended the Scheldt, and even ventured out to sea in order to trade with the neighboring people. Transportation into the interior of the country was effected by means of very strong wagons, several hundred of which daily left Antwerp. The heavy vehicles which conveyed merchandise through Cologne to the heart of Germany were called *Hessenwagens*.[3]

This extraordinary activity induced many foreigners to establish themselves in a city where gold was so abundant, and where every one might reasonably hope for large profits.

At the period of which we speak, Antwerp counted among its inhabitants nearly a thousand merchants from other countries, each of whom had his own attendants; one chronicle estimates, perhaps with some exaggeration, the number of strangers engaged in commerce at five thousand.[4]

Twice a day these merchants met on Change, not only for purposes of trade and for information of the arrival of ships, but principally for banking operations.

To convey an idea of the amount of wealth at the disposal of the houses of Antwerp, it suffices to say that the king of Portugal obtained in one day in this city a loan of three millions of gold crowns, and Queen Mary of England contracted a debt of seventy millions of francs.

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One merchant, called the rich Fugger, left at his death legacies amounting to nearly six millions of gold crowns, a sum which for that period would seem fabulous, if the fact were not established by indisputable documents.

This wealth and the presence of so many nations vying with each other had carried luxury to such a height that magistrates were frequently obliged to publish edicts, in order to restrain the lavish expenditure. This was not done on account of the foreign inhabitants of the place, but for the advantage of many noble families and the people of the middle classes, who were tempted by the example of others to a display of magnificence which might have seriously injured their fortunes.

The greater part of the Italian merchants from Lucca, Genoa, Florence, and other cities beyond the Alps, were noblemen, and from this circumstance they were thrown into intimate intercourse with the noble families of Antwerp, all of whom spoke fluently three or four languages, and who particularly studied to speak with purity and elegance the soft Italian idiom.[5]

In the *Hipdorp*, not far from the Church of St. James, stood an elegant mansion, which was the favorite resort of the elite of the Italian merchants. It was the residence of William Van de Werve, lord of Schilde.

Although this nobleman did not himself engage in mercantile transactions, because the aristocratic families of Brabant regarded commerce as an occupation unsuitable to persons of high birth,[6] he was very cordial and hospitable to all strangers whose rank entitled them to admission to his home circle. Moreover, he was extremely wealthy, luxurious in his manner of living, and so well versed in three or four different languages, that he could with ease enter into an agreeable and useful conversation in either of them.

The house of Mr. Van de Werve had still other attractions to noble foreigners. He had a daughter of extraordinary beauty, so lovely, so modest, notwithstanding the homage offered to her charms, that her admirers had surnamed her *la bionda maraviglia*, "the wonderful blonde."

One morning in the year 1550 the beautiful Mary Van de Werve was seated in her father's house in a richly sculptured arm-chair. The young girl had apparently just returned from church, as she still held in her hand a rosary of precious stones, and her hood lay on a chair near her. She seemed to be engrossed by some pleasing thought which filled her heart with a sweet anticipation, for a slight smile parted her lips, and her eyes were upraised to heaven as if imploring a favor from Almighty God.

Against the wall behind her hung a picture from the pencil of John Van Eyck, in which the great master had represented the Virgin in prayer, whilst she was still ignorant of the sublime destiny that awaited her.

The artist had lavished upon this masterpiece the most ardent inspirations of his pious and poetic genius, for the image seemed to live and think. It charmed by the beauty of feature, the majestic calm of expression, the sweetness of the smile, the look full of love cast from earth to heaven.



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There was a striking resemblance between the creation of the artist and the young girl seated beneath in almost the same attitude. In truth, the youthful Mary Van de Werve was as beautiful as the poetical representation of her patroness. She had the same large blue eyes, whose expression, although calm and thoughtful, revealed a keen sensibility and a tender, loving soul; her golden hair fell in ringlets over a brow of marble whiteness, and no painter had ever traced a cheek of lovelier mould or more delicate hue; her whole being expressed that calm recollection and attractive gravity which is the true poetry of the immaterial soul, and which was comprehended only by the believing artists of the North before the material inspiration of pagan art had been transmitted to them from the South.

Mary Van de Werve was most richly attired; but there was in her dress an absence of ornament which appeared strange at that period of extreme pomp and show. A waist of sky-blue velvet encircled her slender form, and a brocade skirt fell in large folds to her feet. Only on her open sleeves appeared some gold thread, and the clasp which fastened the chamois-skin purse suspended from her girdle was encrusted with precious stones.

All her surroundings betokened her father's opulence: large stained-glass windows, covered with the armorial bearings of his ancestors, cast their varied hues upon the inlaid marble floor; tables and chairs of oak, slabs supporting exquisite statuary from the chisel of the most celebrated artists, were ranged along the walls; an ivory crucifix surmounted a silver basin of rare workmanship containing holy water. Even the massive andirons, which stood in the broad fireplace, were partly of gold and ornamented with the coat of arms.

Her prayer was finished, or it might be that her thoughts had taken another turn; she arose and walked slowly towards the large window which overlooked the garden. She fixed her eyes upon the beautiful blue sky; her countenance was bright, as though a sweet hope filled her heart, and a rosy hue suffused her cheeks.

An old man at this moment entered the room. Heavy moustaches shaded his lips, and a long beard fell upon his breast. There was something grave and severe in his imposing appearance and even in his dress; for although his doublet was of gold cloth, his whole body was enveloped in a long cloak, whose dark color was relieved by a lining of white fur.

"Good morning, Mary," he said, as he approached the young girl.

"May the blessing of God always be with you, dear father," she replied. "Come, see how lovely the sky is, and how brightly the sun shines."

"It is charming weather; we might almost imagine ourselves in the month of May."



“It is the eve of May, father.” And with a joyous smile she drew her father to the window, and pointing to the sky, said: “The wind has changed; it blows from the direction of England.”



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“True; since yesterday it has been south-east.”

“So much the better; the ships which have been kept out at sea can ascend the Scheldt with to-day’s or to-morrow’s tide.”

“And you hope,” said Mr. Van de Werve, shaking his head, “that among these vessels will be found the *Il Salvatore*, which is to bring the old Signor Deodati from Lucca?”

“I have so long implored of heaven this favorable wind,” replied the young girl. “I thank the God of mercy that my prayer has been heard!”

Mr. Van de Werve was silent; his daughter’s words had evidently made a disagreeable impression upon him.

She passed her arm caressingly around his neck, and said:

“Dear father, you are sorrowful; and yet you promised me to await tranquilly the arrival of Signor Deodati.”

“It is true, my child,” he replied; “but, as the time approaches when I must come to a decision, my soul is filled with anxiety. We are the descendants of an illustrious family, and our style of living should be so magnificent as to reflect credit on our rank. The Signor Geronimo, whom you seem to prefer to all others, lives very economically; he dresses simply, and abstains from all that kind of expenditure which, being an evidence of wealth and chivalric generosity, elevates a man in the eyes of the world. That makes me fear that his uncle is either in moderate circumstances or very avaricious.”

“But, father, permit me to say that the Signor Deodati of Lucca is very rich and of high birth,” replied the young girl, sadly. “Did not the banker Marco Riccardi give you satisfactory information on that point?”

“And should he be miserly, Mary, will he accept the conditions I propose? I shall demand of him the renunciation of a considerable portion of his possessions in favor of his nephew Geronimo. Would it not be an insult to you, which your brothers would avenge, were your hand to be refused from pecuniary motives? I regret that you have so irrevocably fixed your affections on the Signor Geronimo, when you might have chosen among a hundred others richer and of higher estate. The head of the powerful house of Buonvisi had more claim upon my sympathy and yours.”

“Simon Turchi!” said the young girl, sorrowfully bowing her head.

“What has this poor Signor Turchi left undone during the past three years to prove his chivalric love?” replied her father. “Festivals, banquets, concerts, boating on the Scheldt, nothing has been spared; he has expended a fortune to please you. At one time you did not dislike him; but ever since the fatal night when he was attacked by



unknown assassins and wounded in the face, you look upon him with different eyes. Instead of being grateful to the good Turchi, you comport yourself in such a manner towards him, that I am induced to believe that you hate him.”

“Hate the Signor Turchi!” exclaimed Mary, as if frightened by the accusation. “Dear father, do not indulge such a thought.”



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“He is a handsome, dignified gentleman, my child.”

“Yes, father; he has long been an intimate friend of the Signor Geronimo.”[7]

Mr. Van de Werve took his daughter’s hand, and said, gently: “Geronimo may be finer-looking to a woman’s eye; but his future depends upon his uncle’s kindness. He is young and inexperienced, and he possesses nothing himself. The Signor Turchi, on the contrary, is rich and highly esteemed in the world as partner and administrator of the well-known house of Buonvisi. Think better of your choice, Mary; satisfy my desires and your brothers’: it is not yet too late.”

Tears filled the eyes of the young girl; she replied, however, with a sweet resignation: “Father, I am your submissive child. Command, and I will obey without a murmur, and humbly kiss the venerated hand which imposes the painful sacrifice. But Geronimo! poor Geronimo!”

At these words her fortitude forsook her; she covered her face with her hands, and wept bitterly; her tears fell like bright pearls upon the marble floor.

For some moments Mr. Van de Werve contemplated his daughter with ever-increasing pity; then overcome by the sight of her grief, he took her hand, and tenderly pressing it, he said to her: “Cheer up, my dear Mary, do not weep. We will see what answer the Signor Deodati will return to the conditions I will propose to him. Geronimo is of noble birth; if his uncle will consent to bestow upon him a suitable fortune, your desires shall be fulfilled.”

“But, dear father,” said the still weeping girl, “that depends upon the magnitude of your demands. If you ask impossibilities of the Signor Deodati—”

“No, no, have no anxiety,” said Mr. Van de Werve, interrupting her. “I will endeavor to fulfil my duty as a father, and at the same time to spare you any future sorrow. Are you satisfied now?”

Mary silently embraced her father, and her eyes expressed such gratitude that Mr. Van de Werve was deeply moved, and said, tenderly:

“Who could refuse you anything? Age, experience, prudence, all yield before one glance of your eye. Conceal your emotion; I hear some one coming.”

A servant opened the door, and announced, “The Signor Geronimo.”

The young nobleman thus introduced was remarkable for his fine form, and the graceful elegance of his manners and carriage. His complexion was of that light and clear brown which adds so much to the manly beauty of some Southern nations. The dark beard



and hair, his spirited black eyes, gave a singular charm to his countenance, while his calm and sweet smile indicated goodness of heart.

Although upon his entrance he strove to appear cheerful, Mary's eye detected a concealed sadness.

The dress of Geronimo was simple in comparison with the rich attire of the other Italian nobles, his compatriots. He wore a felt hat ornamented with a long plume, a Spanish cloak, a cloth doublet lined with fur, violet satin breeches, and gray boots. His modest attire was relieved only by the sword which hung at his side; for the hilt glittered with precious stones, and the armorial bearings engraved upon it proved him to be of noble birth.



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“Che la pace sia in quelle casa!” (May peace be in this house!) he said, as he entered the hall.

He bowed profoundly to Mr. Van de Werve, and saluted him most respectfully; but the traces of tears which he perceived on Mary’s face so startled him that he interrupted his ceremonious greetings, and fixed his eyes inquiringly upon her. She had been weeping, and yet she smiled joyously.

“Mary is naturally very susceptible, Signor Geronimo,” said Mr. Van de Werve. “I was speaking to her of her beloved mother, and she wept. You appear, and she smiles as though she knew no sorrow.”

The young girl did not await the conclusion of this explanation; before her father had finished speaking, she led her lover to the window, pointed to the weathercock, and said: “Look, Geronimo, the wind is from the west.”

“I noticed it last night,” replied the young man, with an involuntary sigh.

“Rejoice then, for to-day your uncle may be in sight of the city.”

“I do not think so; however, it is possible,” said the young man, sadly.

“How coldly you speak, Geronimo!” exclaimed the young girl, in surprise; “what cloud obscures your soul?”

“I myself notice something extraordinary in your manner, signor,” remarked the father. “You seem dejected; have you received bad news of your uncle?”

Geronimo hesitated for an answer; then, as though endeavoring to drive away unpleasant thoughts, he said, in a faltering voice: “No, no, it is not that. I witnessed just now near the Dominican Convent something which touched me deeply, and I have not yet recovered from the shock. Have you not heard of a Florentine merchant named Massimo Barberi?”

“Is he noble?” asked Mary. “I do not remember him.”

“No, a commoner, but a man highly esteemed.”

“I know him well,” said Mr. Van de Werve. “I met him lately in company with Lopez de Galle, for whom he had attended to some financial affairs. What have you to tell us concerning him?”

“Something terrible, Mr. Van de Werve. I saw the corpse of poor Barberi taken out of a sewer; he had two dagger-wounds in his throat. He was undoubtedly attacked and slain last night.”



“It is had to see so many murders committed in Antwerp,” said Mr. Van de Werve. “This is the fourth during the past month. The victims each time have been either Spaniards or Italians, and that vengeance or jealousy was the cause is sufficiently proved by the fact that in no case have the bodies been despoiled of their money or jewels. This custom of lying in wait, attacking and killing each other, often without cause, is an outrage both against God and man. And do you not yourself sometimes fear, Signor Geronimo, the assassin’s dagger?”

The young man shook his head.



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“For instance,” continued Mary’s father, “this is the eve of May, I need not ask if you intend to offer to Mary the homage of a serenade. It is the custom of your countrymen to pay this attention to young girls, and you would not omit this opportunity were it not for the advice of a man of experience. Geronimo, listen to the words of calm reason: do not rashly expose yourself to the danger of death; abandon your design this time. Many of your compatriots have aspired to Mary’s hand; they have been less successful than you, and on this account they may harbor unkind feelings towards you.”

The young man received this advice with a smile which indicated its refusal.

“It is difficult, sir, to speak of such things in the presence of the one who is to be the object of our homage. Permit me, however, the liberty to decide upon the manner in which I will acquit myself of my duty to this young lady.”

“But permit me, signor, to tell you,” said the old man, in an offended tone, “that it does you no honor to reject the advice of a man of experience, in order to carry out an unimportant fancy. Rashness does not indicate courage, but rather an absence of good sense.”

“Father,” exclaimed Mary, in a supplicating tone, “be not angry with Signor Geronimo; he will incur no danger.”

“Foolish confidence!” said the old man. “Why should Geronimo think himself less exposed to danger than others? That Geronimo should be rash is excusable; but, Mary, you deserve a severe reprimand for encouraging your friend in his perilous design.”

The young girl bowed her head at this reproof of her father, and murmured as if to excuse herself: “Geronimo has a relic, father.”

This revelation embarrassed the young man, and he glanced reproachfully at Mary.

She said, caressingly:

“Don’t be displeased, Geronimo; show the relic to my father, and he will then know why you do not fear that any accident will happen to you.”

The young man felt that he could not refuse Mary’s request. He drew from under his doublet an object suspended on a steel chain, and, approaching Mr. Van de Werve, he placed it in his hand.

It was a flat medal of greenish copper, on which were engraven unknown letters and signs. A cross between two bent sabres, and beneath them a crescent, filled up the centre of the medal. At the foot of the cross was a gray stone, rudely inlaid. The whole was rough and heavy.



Mr. Van de Werve examined this medal attentively for some time; he turned it over and over, as though he sought to comprehend the signification of this singular emblem.

“A relic!” he murmured. “Here are two cimeters, a crescent, and cabalistic characters. It is a Mohammedan talisman, and, perhaps, an emblem shocking to our holy religion!”

“You are certainly mistaken, sir,” replied Geronimo.

“Is not the cross placed above the crescent, and would not that signify that the faith of Christ has triumphed over the doctrines of Mahomet?”

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“But why do you call it a relic?”

“Mary so named it, not I. It is an amulet, and if it has any power, it derives it from the gray stone beneath the cross. This stone is a *draconite*, taken, at the risk of life, from the head of a dragon in the country of the negroes.”

A half contemptuous smile curled the lips of the old man as he contemplated the talisman in silence. At last he said: “I remember, Signor Geronimo, to have read in Pliny curious details of the draconite and its extraordinary powers, but I also remember that the great naturalist forgets to tell us the inherent qualities of the stone. Alas! signor, would you trust in this talisman, and believe that it could protect you against the dagger of the assassin? The people of the South have a strange piety: in their superstition they confound what is holy with things which owe their efficacy, if they possess any, to the conjurations of sorcerers.”

The young noble colored slightly, and replied: “You are mistaken, sir, as far as I am concerned. For my justification allow me to tell you that this amulet belonged to a pilgrim; that it rested one entire night of Good Friday upon the tomb of our Lord at Jerusalem; but I will be candid, and say to you that I do not consider it possessed of the power to preserve me from danger. And yet I always wear it with the firm and unshaken conviction that it will protect me in a critical hour from some misfortune.”

“Perhaps it belonged to your deceased parents,” said Mr. Van de Werve, struck by the singular explanation of the young man.

“No, sir,” replied Geronimo; “this amulet is to me a cherished souvenir of a day upon which God gave me the grace to perform a good action. I would willingly tell you how the amulet fell into my hands, and why I believe in its power to protect me, but it is a long story.”

“I would, nevertheless, be much pleased if you would satisfy my curiosity,” said the old noble.

“If you desire it,” replied Geronimo, “I will comply with your wishes.”

“You know that five years ago, when I undertook for the first time the voyage from Lucca to Antwerp, I was made prisoner by Algerian pirates, and carried as a slave to Barbary. I was sold to a Moorish lord, who made me work in the fields until my uncle should send the ransom which would restore me to liberty. In the same field in which some light work was appointed me, I saw an old blind woman attached like a mule to a plough, and driven on by blows from a heavy stick. She was a Christian slave, whose eyes had been put out in wanton cruelty. I learned that she was an Italian by birth, a native of a small village in the environs of Porto Fiero, a seaport not far from Genoa. She had no relatives who could pay her ransom, and she had consequently been fastened to the

plough like a beast of burden until death should come to deliver her. The frightful fate of this miserable slave so filled me with compassion, that I shed tears



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of grief and rage when I heard afar off her piercing cries as the rod of the overseer descended upon her. One day my indignation was so roused, when the pagan wretches had knocked her down and were treating her even more cruelly than usual, that I dared to defend her by force. Had not my master expected a large sum for my ransom, a frightful death would have been the punishment of my audacity. After being kept a few days in prison and harshly treated, I was sent back to the fields to work as before. The condition of the blind slave was not in the least changed; she was still inhumanly beaten. Her misfortunes pierced my heart, and I was maddened by my inability to protect from pagan cruelty a woman who was my sister by our common faith and a common misfortune. No longer venturing to have recourse to force, I sought other means to mitigate her sufferings. During the few hours of repose granted to us, or rather to our overseers, I hastened to the blind woman and shared with her the best of my food; I strove to fortify her by the hope that God would liberate her from this terrible slavery; I told her, that should I ever become free, I would procure her liberation, even were it necessary to renounce for years my own pleasures that I might amass sufficient for her ransom. I spoke to her of our country, of the goodness of God, and of the probability of my liberation. The poor blind woman kissed my hands, and called me an angel sent by God to illumine the darkness of her life by the sweet rays of consolation and piety. I was only a few months her fellow-slave. My uncle, learning my captivity through messengers I had employed, sent to Algiers an armed vessel to liberate me. Besides the amount of my ransom, he sent me means to transport some valuable merchandise from Barbary to Italy. When I took leave of the blind woman, I was so deeply touched by her sorrow, that I pondered upon the means of restoring her to liberty. It is true that in order to effect this, I would be obliged to employ a large portion of the money sent me by my uncle for the purchase of merchandise, and I was convinced that my uncle, who was inflexible in exacting fidelity to commercial regulations, would overwhelm me with his anger, but my heart gained the ascendancy over my reason, and Christian charity triumphed. Listening only to my compassion, I ransomed the unfortunate woman, and with my own hands I unbound her chains. That was the happiest moment of my life."

Mary and her father were both touched by the recital of the young man.

"Oh, Geronimo," exclaimed Mary, "may God bless you for having been so compassionate to the poor Christian slave!"

"You did well, Geronimo," said Mr. Van de Werve, "and I esteem and love you more for your generosity to the unfortunate blind woman. How happy her unexpected liberation must have made her!"



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“When I told her she was free, and that she could accompany me to her native land, she was almost wild with joy; she laughed and wept by turns; she cast herself upon the ground, and raising her hands to heaven, thanked God; she embraced my knees and watered my feet with her tears. Not knowing how to testify her gratitude, she drew this strange amulet from her bosom and presented it to me, conjuring me to wear it always. She told me that it possessed the power of protecting and saving the one who carried it on his person, when all human aid failed or was insufficient. As to the origin of the amulet, she only knew that it had been brought back from Jerusalem by one of her ancestors, who had made a pilgrimage thither in expiation of an involuntary homicide, and from that time it had been, religiously guarded in their family as a precious relic. She had no doubt of its power, and related many strange things to justify her faith. She maintained that she owed to the amulet her unexpected return to Italy.”

“Does she still live?” asked Mary.

“When in sight of Italy, I put her on board of a boat bound to Porto Fiero; I gave her a small sum of money, and begged the boatman to attend to her comforts. Poor Teresa Mostajo—that is her name—I doubt not, is living peacefully in her native village, and prays much for me. This is the only reason why I attribute any virtue to the amulet; I believe in the protection of this sign because it has been sanctified by an act of Christian charity, and by the grateful prayers of the poor blind woman tormented by the pagans for the name of Christ.”

The old cavalier remained a moment silent, absorbed in thought. Then taking the hand of the young man, he said to him: “I did not know you before, Geronimo. I hope it may be in my power to prove to you how much your generosity ennobles you and elevates you in my esteem; but although your confidence in the amulet rests on so laudable a sentiment, I would not rely too much upon it. You know the proverb says: ‘Help yourself, and Heaven will help you.’”

“Do not suppose, Mr. Van de Werve, that on that account I would be guilty of any foolish imprudence. I know that the eye and sword are good sentinels. When I pass through the streets at night, I am always well accompanied, and my hand never leaves the hilt of my sword. Therefore have no anxiety on this point, and permit me to perform my duty to her to whom I owe homage and respect.”

At that moment the painted—glass windows trembled under the stroke of a large clock from some neighboring belfry. This suddenly turned Mary’s thoughts into another channel.

“The clock of St. James is striking ten,” she said.

“Father, will you walk with me to the dock-yard to see if any new ships have arrived?”



“What is the hour of high tide?” her father asked Geronimo.

“At noon,” he replied.

“Why need we go so soon to the dock-yard?” asked the old cavalier. “Many days may yet pass before the *// Salvatore* appears in the Scheldt. Do not fear, Mary, that the Signor Deodati will take us by surprise. Don Pezoa, the agent of the king of Portugal, has given orders that I shall be notified as soon as the galley we are awaiting is signaled in the river, at noon.”

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He was interrupted by the entrance of a servant, who announced that the Chevalier John Van Schoonhoven,[8] the bailiff, desired to speak with him.

Geronimo was about to withdraw, but Mr. Van de Werve said to him, cordially:

“Remain, signor; I will send Petronilla, Mary’s duenna as a companion for her; the interview with the Chevalier Schoonhoven may not detain me long. We will afterwards go to the dock-yard, and we will at least enjoy the fine weather. Stay, I beg you.”

Hardly had he left the hall when an old woman entered, and seated herself near the door. She drew a chaplet from her pocket, and commenced praying in a low voice. This was apparently an habitual act with her, for neither the young girl nor the young man took the least notice of the duenna.

Mary approached her lover, and said, gaily: “Rejoice, Geronimo! My father has just promised not to propose very heavy conditions to your uncle.”

“I am most grateful for his kindness,” said the young man, sadly.

“What can be the matter?” asked Mary, surprised by his indifference. “I noticed you were depressed when you first came. Be more hopeful; perhaps the *Il Salvatore* will ascend the Scheldt to-day.”

“God grant it may not arrive!” said Geronimo, heaving a deep sigh.

“Do you then fear your uncle’s arrival?” exclaimed Mary, in an agitated voice.

“Do not speak so loud, Mary; your duenna must not hear what I am about to communicate to you. Yes; since yesterday morning I have dreaded my uncle’s arrival. Previously I implored it of Heaven as the choicest blessing, and now the thought of it makes me tremble.”

“Have you then heard from your uncle?”

“Alas! my friend, at the very moment when all seemed the brightest, when I was thanking God for a happiness which I thought already mine, a dark cloud comes to overshadow my life. I seem even now to hear my uncle’s voice pronouncing the cruel sentence which condemns me to a life-long sorrow.”

The young girl turned deadly pale, and anxiously awaited an explanation of the mystery.

“My beloved Mary,” he whispered, “it is a secret which I can only confide to you in part, and which in strict honor I should perhaps conceal entirely. Four weeks ago a merchant, highly esteemed, was left by a curious train of circumstances without funds, and he begged me to lend him ten thousand crowns. Should I refuse his request, the



credit of his house would be irretrievably ruined. His name I considered sufficient security for ten times the amount he wished to borrow. At all events, although it pained me to disobey my uncle's positive injunctions, I could not deny the assistance which was asked of me. I lent the ten thousand crowns, and obtained a receipt with a written promise of payment in one month. Yesterday the note fell due; my debtor asks a delay until to-morrow. I met him an hour ago, and he has not yet obtained the money."



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“But if your debtor is rich and powerful, you need not indulge your fears to-day; to-morrow, perhaps, he will fulfil his promise,” remarked the young girl, with ill-concealed anxiety.

“My fears may mislead me, Mary, but I am sure that my debtor’s affairs are in a very bad condition. At his urgent entreaty I made no entry of the loan upon the books, in order to conceal the transaction from the clerks; but still I have not the amount in hand. O Mary! my uncle has an eagle eye in business affairs; he will at once discover the deficit of ten thousand crowns—a deficit resulting from my lending money: a thing he has always warned me against, and which, even recently, he strictly forbade. My uncle is a good father to me, but this act of disobedience is sufficient to deprive me forever of his favor. I foresee many future evils.”

“Why were you so imprudent, Geronimo? You ought to have refused so large a loan.”

“I could not possibly refuse, Mary.”

“But you hold an acknowledgment of the debt and a promise of payment. Summon this merchant before the magistrates; at Antwerp justice is promptly and impartially dealt to all.”

“Impossible!” replied the young man, in a plaintive voice; “my debtor is a man to whom I owe many obligations; a complaint from me would be the cause of irreparable ruin to him. Let us hope that he will succeed in procuring the ten thousand crowns. He told me even this morning that he would endeavor to give me bills of exchange on Spain.”

“But of whom are you speaking?” said Mary; “your language is so mysterious.”

“I will not tell his name. Be not offended by my reserve; there is between merchants a law of secrecy which honor forbids us to violate.”

Mary appeared to respect this law; but she was evidently absorbed in bitter reflections.

Either the communication of his difficulties to his beloved had given him new strength, or the sight of her sorrow made him affect a confidence he did not feel, for he said to her in a cheerful manner:

“Come, Mary, you must not yield to discouragement. Perhaps I exaggerate the danger. My debtor is a member of a house which equals any other in consideration and wealth. In a few days, to-day even, or to-morrow, he may acquit himself of the debt, and should my uncle arrive before the restitution, I will endeavor to delay his examination of the books.”

He took the young girl’s hand, and exclaimed, with joyous enthusiasm: “O Mary, my beloved, may Heaven be propitious to our vows! May the benediction of the priest



descend upon our union! We will pass in Italy the first months of our happy life; Italy—that earthly paradise where God has lavished all the treasures of nature, and man all the treasures of art.”

They heard Mr. Van de Werve’s voice in the hall giving urgent orders to the servants.

“Mary,” said Geronimo, “your father is coming. I implore you not to divulge, in any manner, what I have told you. Keep my secret even from your father; remember that the least indiscretion might cause the ruin of an honorable merchant.”



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“Make haste, Geronimo; Mary, prepare for a drive,” exclaimed Mr. Van de Werve, as he entered the hall. “Signor Deodati has arrived; the *// Salvatore* is in sight. Don Pezoa has just sent me information to that effect, and he has placed his gondola and boatmen at our service. The weather is beautiful and calm; we will go to meet the *// Salvatore*.”

Mary, as though forgetting in this unexpected news all that Geronimo had told her, ran joyfully and put on her hood before her duenna had time to approach her. Geronimo also looked happy, and prepared to meet his uncle without loss of time.

In a few minutes all was ready; the horses were harnessed to the carriage, the great gate was flung open, and the equipage was driven rapidly through the street.

CHAPTER II.

Signor Deodati.

On that day the Scheldt presented at Antwerp a striking spectacle. Many ships which had been detained in the North Sea by the east wind were approaching the city, with their various colored flags floating on the breeze, while, far as the eye could reach, the broad expanse of water was covered with sails, and still, in the dim horizon, mast after mast seemed to arise from the waves as harbingers of an immense flotilla.

The sailors displayed gigantic strength in casting anchor and manoeuvring their vessels so as to obtain an advantageous position. The crews of the different ships vied with each other, and exerted themselves so energetically that the heavily laden crafts trembled under the strained cables. From each arose a song wild and harsh as the sharp creaking of the capstan, but joyous as the triumphant shout of a victorious army. These chants, sung in every tongue of the commercial world by robust sailors, seemed, as they were wafted over the river to the city, like the long, loud acclamations of a vast multitude.

The only sounds which could be heard in the midst of these confused cries were the voices of the captains speaking through the trumpets; and when a Portuguese gallion, coming from the West Indies, appeared before the city, a salvo of cannon rose like the rolling of thunder above all other sounds.

The sun shone brightly upon this animated scene of human activity, and broke and sparkled in colored light up in the rippling waves of the broad river.

Hundreds of flags floated in the air; gondolas and longboats furrowed the waters; from boat and wharf joyous greetings of friends mingled with the song of the sailors. Even the wagoners from beyond the Rhine, who had ranged their strongly-built wagons near the cemetery of Burg, in order to load them with spices for Cologne, could not resist the influence of the beautiful May-day and the general hilarity; they collected near the gate

of the dock-yard, and entoned in their German tongue a song so harmonious and sweet, and yet so manly, that every other sound in their vicinity was hushed.



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At this moment an elegant vehicle passed the gate of the dock-yard, and stopped near the German wagoners as the last strain of their song died upon the air.

A young man, and after him an old man and a young girl richly attired, alighted from the carriage.

Those immediately around, merchants as well as workmen, stepped respectfully aside and saluted Mr. Van de Werve, whilst glancing admiringly at his daughter. Some Italians of lower rank murmured loud enough to reach Mary's ears: "*Ecco la bionda meraviglia.*"

Mr. Van de Werve ordered his people to await him at the gate of the dock-yard, and passed on, saluting those whom he met, to the place where the Portuguese flag indicated the gondola of Lopez de Galle, which was prepared to receive him. They threw a carpet across the plank upon which Mary was to step in passing into the gondola. Mary, her father, and Geronimo entered the boat; the six oars dipped simultaneously into the water, and, pushed by the strong arms of the Portuguese sailors, the gondola sped rapidly through the waves. Swift as a fish and light as a swan, it skimmed the surface of the Scheldt, and made many a turn through the numerous vessels until it had succeeded in finding an open way down the river. Then the sailors exerted all their strength, as if to show the beautiful young girl what they were capable of in their trade. The gondola, obeying the impulse given it by the oarsmen, bounded forward under each stroke of the oars, and gracefully poised itself on the waves caused by its rapid passage.

Complete silence reigned in the gondola; the sailors looked with timid admiration upon the beautiful countenance of the young girl. Mary, with downcast eyes, was persuading herself that Geronimo's uncle would undoubtedly consent to their union. The young man was absorbed in thought, and yielded by turns to joy, hope, and fear. Mr. Van de Werve contemplated the city, and seemed to enjoy the magnificent spectacle presented by Antwerp when seen at a distance, and which, with its lofty towers and splendid edifices, rose from the river like another Venice.

Suddenly Geronimo rose and pointed in the distance, exclaiming, joyously, "See, the *// Salvatore!*"

Mary, glancing around, eagerly asked: "Where? Is it the vessel bearing a red cross on its flag?"

"No, Mary, it is behind the ships of war; it is that large vessel with three masts—on its flag is a picture of the Saviour: *// Salvatore.*"

While the gondola rapidly sped on its way, the eyes of all were fixed upon the galley, in order, if possible, to distinguish the features of those who stood on deck.



Suddenly Geronimo clapped his hands, exclaiming, “God be praised! I see my uncle.”

“Which is he?” inquired Mr. Van de Werve.

The young man replied, joyously: “Do you not see standing on the forecastle five or six passengers who wear parti-colored dresses, with plumed hats? In the midst of them is a man of lofty stature, completely enveloped in a brown cloak. He has long white hair, and his silvery beard looks like snow-flakes resting on his dark mantle. That is my old uncle, Signor Deodati.”



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“What a superb-looking old man!” exclaimed Mary, in admiration.

“In truth,” said Mr. Van de Werve, “as well as I can judge at this distance, his appearance is very striking.”

“My uncle inspires respect wherever he goes,” said the young man, enthusiastically. “His sixty-five years appear on his brow as an aureola of experience and wisdom; he is learned, good, and generous.”

And waving his hat, he cried out: “Ah, he recognizes us! He salutes us; he smiles. At last I see him after four years of separation. My God, I thank thee for having protected him!”

The young man’s joy was so great that Mary and her father were also moved.

“So lively an affection for your uncle does you credit, Geronimo,” said Mr. Van de Werve. “God loves a grateful heart; may He grant you to-day the desires of your heart!”

But the young man did not hear these words of encouragement; standing in the gondola, he waved to his uncle as if endeavoring to express to him by signs his joy at seeing him.

The gondola approached the galley, which slowly ascended the Scheldt in a favorable wind and with a rising tide.

The light boat soon gained the large ship. Before the ladder was lowered, Geronimo caught the cable of the galley, and ere Mary had recovered from her terror, he had reached the deck and was in his uncle’s arms.

Mr. Van de Werve mounted the ladder cautiously, and approached Signor Deodati, with whom he exchanged the most cordial salutations.

Mary remained in the gondola; she saw Geronimo embrace his uncle repeatedly; she rejoiced to perceive that the eyes of the old man were filled with tears of emotion. She was still more happy when she saw the affability with which her father and Geronimo’s uncle conversed together, as though they were old friends.

Very soon the Signor Deodati descended into the gondola to accompany Mr. Van de Werve and Geronimo to the city.

The Flemish cavalier introduced his daughter to the Italian noble.

The old man gazed upon the ravishing beauty of the young girl in speechless admiration. Mary’s lovely features were illumined by an enchanting smile which moved the old man’s heart; her large blue eyes were fixed upon him with so soft and



supplicating an expression that the Signor Deodati, extending his hand, murmured: “*E la graziosa donzella!*” (The beautiful girl!)

But Mary, encouraged by his look of affection, and unconsciously urged by a mysterious instinct, extended both hands to the old man, who folded her in his arms and pressed her to his heart.

Geronimo, overjoyed at the reception given to Mary by his uncle, turned aside to conceal his emotion.

“*Iddio vi dia pace in nostra patria!* May God grant you peace in our country, Signor Deodati!” said Mary, taking the old man’s hand. “Come sit by me; I am so happy to know you. Do not think me bold; Geronimo has spoken so much of you, that I have long respected and loved you. And then, in our Netherlands we always welcome a stranger as a brother.”



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Signor Deodati seated himself by her as she desired, and as the gondola returned to the city, the old man said, in surprise: "But you speak Italian like a native of Lucca. How soft and musical my native tongue sounds from your lips!"

"There is my teacher," said Mary, pointing to Geronimo.

"That is not true, my uncle. Her modesty causes her to mislead you. Miss Van de Werve speaks equally well both Spanish and French, nor is she ignorant of Latin."

"Can that be so?" asked the elder Deodati, with an incredulous smile.

"That is nothing extraordinary in our city of Antwerp," said Mr. Van de Werve. "Most ladies of noble birth, and even merchants' daughters, speak two or three foreign languages. It is a necessity rather than a pleasure for us; for since the people of the South will not or can not learn our tongue, we are obliged to become familiar with theirs."

The Signor Deodati, as though a new and sudden thought possessed his mind, seized his nephew's hand, and fixing his eyes affectionately upon him, said in a calm tone: "I am pleased with you, Geronimo. Young as you are, you have conducted prudently the affairs of a large commercial house; you have acted as an experienced man; in order to please me, you have denied yourself pleasures which are so seductive to youth. Taking the place of your father, I have kept a vigilant eye upon you, and it gladdens my old heart to know that I have in my successor a virtuous cavalier and a prudent merchant. I know your desires, my son. Be not disturbed, but hopeful. I undertook a long voyage only to recompense you, if possible, for your gratitude."

He arose, and said to Mary: "I am loath to leave you, my dear young lady; but I have a few words to say privately to your father. You will excuse me more readily, as I yield my place to Geronimo."

Saying this, he walked with Mr. Van de Werve to the extremity of the boat, where both seated themselves upon a bench.

Trembling with fear, hope, and joyous anticipations, Mary and Geronimo watched the two parents, endeavoring to divine from the expression of their countenances the result of their conversation. At first both were perfectly calm; by degrees they grew more excited; the derisive smile on the lips of Mr. Van de Werve betrayed the bitterness of his feelings, as the Signor Deodati in a decided manner counted on his fingers. They were discussing the great affair—the dowry and inheritance. Their only thought was money!

Geronimo turned pale as he saw his uncle shake his head with evident dissatisfaction; and Mary trembled as she noticed the displeased expression of her father.



The private conversation lasted a long time, and still took no favorable turn; on the contrary, the two old men ceased speaking, as though displeased with each other.

Signor Deodati addressed a question to Mr. Van de Werve, to which the latter replied negatively.



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Both then arose, and approaching Geronimo and Mary, sat down in silence. Their countenances betrayed vexation and mutual displeasure.

The young man, with tearful eyes, looked inquiringly at his uncle. Mary bowed her head, but her heaving bosom gave evidence of the struggle of her heart.

For some time there was a painful silence in the gondola. Mr. Van de Werve contemplated his daughter, who seemed overwhelmed by sorrow. Signor Deodati was deeply moved by Geronimo's earnest gaze.

The Italian noble was the first to break silence. "Come, sir," he said, "let us make these young people happy."

"With all my heart, signor; but what will you do? My daughter is descended from an illustrious house; she must live in the world in a manner to do honor to her birth; as her father, I have duties to fulfil which I cannot disregard."

"Poor Geronimo!" said the Signor Deodati, in a tone of compassion, and with a deep sigh. "You would accuse me of cruelty, would you not? and this lovely young girl would hate the old man for his insensibility. It was not for that I crossed the seas in my old age."

He reflected a few minutes, then extending his hand to Mr. Van de Werve, he said: "My lord, I wish to show my good-will. I accept entirely your conditions, and in recompense for my sacrifices I ask only your friendship. Shall our children then be happy?"

Mr. Van de Werve grasped cordially the hand which was extended to him, and said to his daughter: "Mary, embrace this good gentleman; he will be your second father."

Mary cast herself into the arms of the old man; a cry of joy escaped the lips of Geronimo; even the sailors, although they comprehended but little of what they saw, were touched.

Whilst they were yet exchanging felicitations, the gondola swept around the point of land which had concealed the city from view, and Antwerp, with its thousand vessels, its lofty spires and noble edifices, lay spread out in all its majestic beauty before the eyes of Signor Deodati.

A cry of admiration burst from his lips.

"*O che bella citta!* What a beautiful city!" he exclaimed.

"What is that magnificent tower, which like sculptured lace lifts its beautiful spire proudly to heaven, and like a giant looks down upon all others? What are those singular buildings whose rounded cupolas and pointed roofs so far exceed in height the

surrounding houses? Oh! let the gondola float with the current; your city enchants me, and I wish to enjoy the view for a few moments.”

Mr. Van de Werve gratified the curiosity of the Italian gentleman by pointing out to him the most remarkable buildings of the city, saying: “Before you now is the new city constructed at his own expense by Gillibert de Schoonbeke—a man to whom Antwerp owes its later increase and the creation of countless streets and houses.[9] Those large and massive towers, in which you may notice loopholes, and which



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stand immediately upon the Scheldt, were the ancient fortifications of the city. That small, graceful spire is the Convent of Faucon; it is called here, Our Lady of Valkenbroek. Yonder, near the river, is the church of Borgt, the oldest temple of our city; for in 642 a wooden chapel stood on the spot, and in 1249 it was consecrated as a parish church, just as it now is.[10] That lofty edifice at the foot of the gigantic tower of Notre Dame is the entrepot of Spain. Every nation has its own manufactories and magazines, where every one may claim the protection of his flag. The massive, unfinished tower belongs to the church of Saint James; the original plan was to elevate it above the spire of Notre Dame, but the work has been long discontinued for want of funds. Do you see, a little further on, that square building surmounted by a dome? It is the palace of Fugger, the Croesus of our times: he was elevated to the nobility by Maximilian on account of his wealth. Furnishing money to kings and nations, he sees gold daily pouring into his coffers, and if God does not interfere, the royal power will bow before that of the opulent banker. On the right you have the church of Saint Andrew, and near it the convent of Saint Michael, where our Emperor Charles stays when he visits his good city of Antwerp." [11]

While the gondola was skimming over the surface of the water, and Mr. Van de Werve was explaining to Signor Deodati the various edifices which were worthy of remark, there stood upon the shore, at a corner of the dock-yard, a man who coolly followed the boat with his eyes, and who endeavored to comprehend what was passing in the gondola, and to discover what might be the emotions of the young man and the young girl who were seated within it.

Notwithstanding the fine weather, the man was enveloped in an ample cloak, and wore a hat with broad brim, over which fell a purple plume. His doublet was of gold cloth, and his breeches were of brown satin. At his side glittered the jewelled hilt of a sword.

He was of lofty stature, and his whole bearing indicated noble birth; his style of dress and black hair and eyes attested his Italian origin. The most remarkable thing about his person was a long narrow scar across his face, as though he had been wounded by a sharp blade. The mark was not disfiguring, particularly when his features were in repose; but when he was agitated by some violent passion or uncontrollable emotion, the edges of the scar assumed different hues, and appeared of a dull white mixed with red and purple.

At the moment of which we speak his eyes were fixed upon the gondola with an expression of irritated jealousy, and his lips were strongly contracted. The color of the scar had changed with his increasing emotion, and it was of a deep red. He stood so near the water that his feet touched it, and thus he prevented any one from passing before him and witnessing the tumult of his soul.



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Even the peculiar expression of his countenance did not betray the current of his thoughts; but certainly he was preoccupied by no good design, for his whole demeanor bespoke a wild despair and burning jealousy.

For some time he watched in the same attitude the course of the gondola, which drifted with the current, until he saw the oarsmen seize their oars, and he supposed they were about to land.

Then his whole frame shook convulsively under his efforts to control his emotion. He became exteriorly calm, the scar on his cheek paled, and in an unconcerned manner, with a light step and bright smile, he walked along the wharf to the spot where he supposed the gondola would stop.

Geronimo, who had seen him approaching, sprung upon the bank before the boat was moored, and ran to him with singular haste. He took his hand, and said in an undertone:

"Ebbene, caro mio Simone? Have you obtained the money, Simon? My uncle has arrived. Should he discover that the money-vault lacks so considerable a sum, you and I are both lost. But you have the money, have you not? You will give it to me to-day?"

"Pity me, Geronimo," said the other, sighing. "Various fatal circumstances render all my efforts unavailing."

"You have not the money?" murmured the young man, despairingly.

"No; to-morrow, or perhaps day after to-morrow."^[12]

"Good heavens! suppose my uncle reproves me in anger. I implore you, Simon, to procure the amount. Do not cause my destruction!"

"Oh!" muttered the other, in a hoarse, altered voice, "were I to be the cause of any misfortune to you, I would avenge you upon myself in a bloody manner."

"No, no," said the young man, in a compassionate tone, "banish these horrible thoughts. I will wait; I will seek a delay, and endeavor to divert my uncle's attention for a few days. Alas! I am filled with anxiety: at the very moment, too, that my uncle has consented to my marriage with Mary!"

Simon's face became fearfully contorted.

"Your uncle has consented?" he said, in a stifled voice.

"And Mr. Van de Werve?"



“He agrees to it also. O Simon! pardon me my happiness. I know, my poor friend, that this news is most painful to you; but did we not loyally promise each other, that were one of us to succeed in our suit, it should not break our long-tried friendship?”

“Fool! God has abandoned me!” muttered the other between his teeth.

“There is my uncle with Mr. Van de Werve,” said Geronimo.

“Cheer up, Simon; hide your emotion. When I am my own master, I will aid you in your affairs. In the meantime put your trust in God.”

The man with the scar made a powerful effort to control himself, and advancing cheerfully to meet Mr. Van de Werve, he said to his companion:

“My emotion was natural under the circumstances; now that the blow has fallen, it is all over. Pained as I am, Geronimo, I congratulate you cordially. If I could only obtain the money, and spare you anything disagreeable! I will do all in my power.”



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Mr. Van de Werve joined them, and after the first salutations said to the old Deodati: "I am happy to present to you my friend, the Signor Simon Turchi, who is at the head of the house of the Buonvisi, and who frequently does me the honor to visit me."

"Ah! I know him well," said Deodati, cordially taking Simon's hand. "The signor is from Lucca, and the son of an esteemed friend."

"You are welcome this side of the Alps, Signor Deodati," replied Simon Turchi. "My father often spoke of your mutual friendship. May God grant you prosperity in Brabant!"

"I am under many obligations to you, signor," replied the old Deodati, "for the affectionate interest you have shown in my nephew. That my business affairs have been as well transacted in this country as though I had been here myself, I am indebted to your experience and wise counsels. I know from Geronimo's letters that he is sensible of the favor and deeply grateful for it."

Simon Turchi was about to disclaim the praise bestowed upon him, but the carriage drew near, and Mr. Van de Werve said:

"I hope, signor, that you will honor us with your company this evening. We will pass together a few hours with our noble guest."

Simon excused himself, saying that some important commercial affairs demanded his attention; but as Mary and Geronimo urged him to accept the invitation, he promised to see them, at least for a short time.

They bade adieu as the carriage drove out of the gate of the dock-yard.

Simon Turchi followed it with his eyes, immovable as a statue, until the sound of the rolling wheels was lost in the distance. Then he convulsively crossed his arms and dropped his head, as though the certainty of a terrible misfortune had overwhelmed him.

He remained a long time plunged in thought; but he was startled from his reverie by a vehicle which dashed along near him, and by the call of the driver warning him of his danger. He stepped aside and looked around him, as though seeking a way of escape from the wharf and the crowd of workmen. He walked slowly towards the church of Saint Walburga, and around the wall enclosing the cemetery. He entered, wandered awhile among the tombs, until reaching an obscure spot, where he was concealed by an angle of the church, he paused.

He pressed his brow with his hands, as if to shut out painful thoughts; the scar on his face frequently changed color, and at intervals his whole frame shook with emotion. At last, as if his reflections had assumed a determined form, he muttered:



“The arm-chair? it is not completed! And then he would be too late. A dagger, a sword, an assassin lying in wait? If Julio were only more courageous; but he is a cowardly boaster. Why did I take into my service such a poltroon? He would not dare run the risk of striking a fatal blow; but I can force him to it, force him even to be bold. I need but pronounce his real name; but the murder of a friend is a frightful crime; and then, perhaps, to be discovered, betrayed—to die on a scaffold like a common felon—I, the head of the house of the Buonvisi!”[13]



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This thought made him shudder. After a few moments' reflection, he said, more calmly: "I will go to the bailiff Van Schoonhoven; he has espoused my cause with Mr. Van de Werve; he will, perhaps, be offended that Mary's hand has been disposed of contrary to his urgent solicitations. Perhaps he may have influence to prevent the marriage."

An ironical smile curled his lip.

"Fool that I am!" he muttered. "And the ten thousand crowns? and the disgrace of bankruptcy? Oh, the infernal thought! might I not take from a corpse the acknowledgment of the debt? I will go to Mr. Van de Werve's; I must speak with Geronimo; I must know where this evening he—"

The words died upon his lips, and a sudden terror shook him from head to foot.

He had heard behind him the voice of a man who spoke in a low tone, and who seemed to be a spy.

Could he have heard what Simon Turchi had so imprudently spoken in this solitary corner of the cemetery?

Turning in his anguish, he saw two persons, three or four steps behind him, looking at him with a mocking air.

Under other circumstances the Italian cavalier would certainly have called the unknown men to account for their insolent curiosity; but fear deprived him of all courage and energy.

He dropped his head, concealed his face as far as possible, crossed the cemetery with long and rapid strides, and disappeared behind the wall of the enclosure.

CHAPTER III.

The palace of Simon Turchi, and what occurred there.

Not far from the bridge De la Vigne, Simon Turchi had a magnificent dwelling, where the offices of the commercial house of Buonvisi were situated; but he possessed also, at the extremity of the city, pleasure-grounds, where in fine weather he was accustomed to invite his friends and acquaintances to festivals, banquets, and concerts. His domains were near the church of Saint George, surrounded by grounds belonging to the hospital.

Exteriorly it appeared to be only a wall of enclosure, shaded by lofty trees, and without openings. Against the horizon were seen two glittering weathercocks surmounting two small towers arising in the midst of foliage. Within there was, however, a vast garden diversified with winding paths, flowery parterres, hillocks, and grottos. Here and there,



scattered among the thickets of verdure, appeared marble statues representing principally the gods of pagan mythology. In the centre of the garden was a pond, in which seemed to float a crowd of monstrous animals, such as dragons, basilisks, lizards, and salamanders. It was a fountain; and when the robinets were opened these monsters spouted the water in every direction from their eyes and mouths.

But at the bottom of the garden and at some distance from the wall of enclosure was an antique pavilion of gray-stone, the walls of which were nearly covered with ivy, and which, in spite of their dark hue, presented a very picturesque appearance.

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With the exception of the small and narrow windows, which were protected by iron bars, and the staircase of slate which gave admittance, this heavy building presented nothing remarkable, unless it were two round turrets, which rose above the surrounding roofs and even above the gigantic trees in its vicinity.

The garden had been evidently long neglected, for all the walks were covered with weeds, and in the flower-beds were the half decayed props which had supported the plants of the previous autumn. The statues were spotted by the dust and rain; a fine moss covered the monsters of the fountains, and the little water remaining in the pond was stagnant.

These evidences of the absence of man, the sombre hue of the edifice, the shrubs growing untrimmed, but, above all, the complete silence, gave a mournful air of abandonment to the place, and in this solitude the soul was necessarily filled with painful reflections.

It was already late in the afternoon; the sun was about to sink below the horizon, its slanting rays illumined only the weathercocks on the top of the towers. Within the thickets and at the entrance of the grottos, night already reigned. Not the slightest sound was heard in this place. The noise of the people at work in the city resounded in the air, the chiming of the church-bells was wafted from the distance over this solitary dwelling; but as no sound arose from the habitation itself, the distant hum from an active multitude rendered the silence of the spot all the more striking.

Only at intervals a dull sound like the grating noise of a file seemed to issue from the old edifice; but it was so indistinct and so often interrupted that it was not sufficient to destroy the solitude and silence of the place.

Suddenly two heavy strokes, as if from a hammer, resounded through the garden. Some one had knocked at the exterior door for admittance.

A few moments afterwards a man appeared on the staircase of the pavilion, and descended into the garden.

He was tall and slender; his hair and beard were red, and a red moustache covered his upper lip. His cheeks, though sunken and emaciated, were very red. His eyes were wild in their expression. His arms and legs were of extraordinary length; his movements were heavy and slow, as though his limbs had been dislocated and his muscles without strength.

His dress denoted him to be a menial: he wore a vest of black leather, a red doublet and breeches of the same color, without embroidery or ornament.



At this moment his sleeves were rolled up, and his thin arms were bare to the elbows. In his hand he held a file, and apparently he had been interrupted in some urgent work by the knock at the door. Having reached the outer door, he drew a key from his doublet, and asked in Italian:

“Who knocks?”

“Open the door, Julio; it is your companion Bernardo,” was the reply in the same tongue.



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“Of course, on the way you stopped at the *Camel*, and drank some pots of Hamburg beer? Did you bring me as much as a pint?” asked the man with the red beard.

“Nothing? have you nothing? I have worked until I am exhausted; I am dying of hunger, and no one thinks of me. Let me see the spring.”

Saying these words, he took from his companion’s hands a bent steel spring and examined it attentively, closing and opening it as if to judge of its form and power of resistance.

Bernardo was a deformed man of low stature; the projection on his back might be styled a hump—it was so prominent. His physiognomy denoted pusillanimity; but there was, at the same time, a malicious sparkle in his eye, and it was with a mocking smile that he contemplated the man with the red beard.

The latter said to him in a commanding tone: “The spring appears to be good. Go bring me a pint of Rhenish wine from the Saint George.”

“You know well that our master has forbidden it. Let me go; the signor ordered me to return immediately to the factory.”

“Get me the wine, or I will break this spring in a thousand pieces over your hump.”

“Always threatening!” muttered Bernardo. “You know I am not wanting in good-will. I will go for the wine; give me the money.”

“Money? I have not a farthing in my pocket. Lend me the price of this pint.”

“My purse is empty, Julio; but yours? Our master gave you ever so many shillings yesterday. You told me so yourself.”

“Bah! the dice made way with the whole of it.”

“Hardened gambler!” said Bernardo, with a sigh. “You would risk your soul at the gaming-table if any one held out to you a gold coin.”

“Very likely!” replied Julio, in an indifferent tone; “my soul is hardly worth more.”

“What impious words! We are alone now, but there is One above who hears what we say. He will punish you, Julio.”

The red-haired man shrugged his shoulders.

“Continue your dissolute habits,” resumed Bernardo; “lose your money in gambling, drown your senses in intoxication: at the end of this path there is a gallows, and behind



it the devil, to whom all such souls are welcome. Adieu! reflect upon my words, and remember that the justice of God will one day demand an account of your life. Adieu!”

Julio sprang towards the small door, locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

“Cease this trifling,” said the other, evidently ill at ease.

“Open the door, Julio, or I will complain of you to our master.”

“What do I care for our master?” said the man, laughing.

“You say, Bernardo, that I shall end my days on the gallows. No, no; the proverb says, that he who draws the sword shall perish by the sword. I have pierced so many with my dagger, that my turn must come to fall by the dagger. Last night, Bernardo, I had rare sport. I knocked down eight, wounded one in the arm, and as to three or four others whom I left extended on the ground, my dagger knows better than I what mischief was done them. Come in with me, and I will tell you all about it.”



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“No, I have not time.”

“You must take the time. You shall not leave here until you have heard my adventures of last night.”

“It is always the same story over again. If I believed you, I would suppose that the cemeteries were too small to contain the bodies of all whom you have slain. Open the door, Julio, and let me go, I beg you.”

The other took his hand, and dragging him by force into the house, said: “I am here alone all day, with no one to whom I can speak one word; it is enough to paralyze my tongue. You shall listen to my adventures whether you wish it or not. Judge, Bernardo, by the recital of my great deeds what an honor it is to you to be the comrade of so intrepid a man. Be not ill-humored; you know it is useless to resist me. Don’t laugh; were I to try it, I could toss you about like a ball; but you are my friend, and besides, you are too weak to contend with me. Therefore, fear nothing.”

They reached the house and entered a kind of parlor, where Julio threw upon the table the spring he held in his hand, and seating himself, he said to his companion:

“Take a chair, Bernardo. You are about to hear some strange adventures. Do you know the ruffian Bufferio? He is a jolly fellow, who cares as little for the life of a man as for that of a fly. There is not a man in the parish of Saint Andrew who does not tremble at the sight of him. In a by-street there is a tavern in a large cellar, where one can hear the rattling of dice all night long, and they play for piles of gold—where it comes from, the devil only knows. Late yesterday evening I was passing through this street, when the noise of the dice fell upon my ear. You must know, Bernardo, that this sound is as enchanting music attracting me; it overpowers my will. I descended into the tavern and called for a glass of beer. I seated myself among the players, and challenged any of them to play against me. I won and lost; but at last good luck was on my side, and my pockets were so full that they could hardly bear the weight of the florins. To console the losers, I ordered the hostess to bring a pint of wine to each of them; but in spite of my generosity the villains looked at me angrily, and seemed to excite each other to take revenge upon me. They strove to pick a quarrel. They were like a band of thieves and assassins; but the rascals saw with whom they had to deal. My defiant look, my bold words, my intrepid countenance, kept them at a respectful distance from me. Suddenly the dreaded Bufferio entered the cellar. He had no sooner learned from his comrades how fortune had favored me than he challenged me to play with him. It was just what I wanted. I don’t know how it happened, but I lost every game. Each time we doubled the stakes; a cold sweat bathed my brow as I saw florin after florin quietly put in the pocket of my adversary, until I had only one farthing left. This time fortune favored me; but Bufferio

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insisted that the dice had not been fairly thrown, and he swept the table of all the money staked. I sprang to my feet and called him a cheat. He instantly dealt me a heavy blow. Furious and thirsting for vengeance, I drew my dagger. Immediately twenty daggers glittered above my head. Perhaps, Bernardo, you think that I trembled? You do not know me; when I am thus in the midst of danger, an entire army could not terrify me; for in whatever other qualities I may be deficient, I do not lack courage and intrepidity. When I saw the villains about to rush upon me, I darted forward like a lion, and I cut about on every side so furiously with my dagger, that all, even to the gigantic Bufferio, fled from the cellar. I pursued them into the street; there the combat recommenced; but my adversaries fared badly. In a few moments Bufferio lay dead upon the ground between two of his comrades; the others, being badly wounded, had taken flight. I stood alone upon the field of battle, a triumphant conqueror! I remained in the same spot for a quarter of an hour, to see if any other enemies would present themselves, but the wretches had had enough for one night.”

Bernardo listened to this recital with an incredulous smile. When it was concluded, he silently shook his head.

“Well! what have you to say of this adventure?” asked Julio. “Might it not be narrated in the chronicles as an heroic adventure?”

“Certainly; in your place many others would have died of fright. But this morning I saw this Bufferio, whom you declare to be dead, walking alive in the public square.”

“Impossible; you are mistaken.”

“Perhaps so; but I know the ruffian well, for I have twice seen him in the pillory.”

“If he is not dead, he will certainly not be able to make his appearance in the streets for six months to come.”

“Of course, you took your money from Bufferio?”

“How could I?”

“Since he lay lifeless at your feet, why did you not recover the money he had stolen from you?”

The red-haired man was at a loss for an answer; but after awhile he stammered out: “You are right. In the hurry of the struggle I did not think of it, and then I had not the time: the watchmen ran on hearing the noise of the affray, and you may imagine that I did not care to fall into the hands of the bailiff.”



“I do not understand you; it seems to me you mentioned having remained a quarter of an hour upon the spot,” said Bernardo, with a slight smile. “I suppose, Julio, there was much blood shed.”

“It flowed in torrents.”

Bernardo eyed his companion from head to foot in great surprise.

“I would like to ask you something, but you might not understand the joke, and you would be angry with me,” he said.

“Say candidly what you think,” replied his companion.

“I am extremely surprised, Julio, that there is not the smallest drop of blood, not the least spot, upon your clothes. With your permission, I will say you dreamed all that?”

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Julio sprang from his seat, gnashed his teeth, and looked at his companion as if ready to devour him.

“What! you dare to laugh at me? Are you then tired of life? Fool! were I only to lay my hand upon you, you would be crushed to atoms.”

Bernardo arose also, and said, in a tone half ironical and half supplicating: “Pardon me, Julio; I believe all you told me, and I never doubted your marvellous courage. If sometimes I laugh at serious things, do not be offended; this kind of joking is usual with men.”

“If you were not so feeble and powerless a being, I would have already laid you at my feet,” said Julio; “as it is, I long to plunge my dagger in your breast.”

“Leave it in its scabbard, Julio, and I will go to buy you a *stoop*[14] of Hamburg beer.”

“Ah, hypocrite!” exclaimed Julio, “then you have money. I will renew my friendship for you, if you will do me a favor. I am in absolute want of money; lend me a few shillings, and the first one who insults you, I promise you, shall be a dead man.”

“But, Julio, were I to give them to you, you would gamble with them at once.”

“No, you are wrong this time; I would pay for some things our master ordered me to buy yesterday.”

Bernardo drew a small purse from his doublet, and handed to his companion its scanty contents.

“Here is all I possess,” he said. “I fear they will go like the others.”

Julio thrust the shillings into his pocket, and muttered:

“I do not deny that I may go this evening to the parish of Saint Andrew, to see if any one would dare play against me.”

“Julio, Julio, I pity you!” said Bernardo, sadly. “I do not wish to lecture you; but you have an unfortunate and aged mother who requires your aid. You are always talking of sending her assistance, and for six months past every farthing has been lost at play. Perhaps in the meantime your mother has suffered for want of food.”

This reproach seemed to affect Julio deeply. He looked down abashed, and then said, dejectedly: “Bernardo, never speak to me again of my mother. You touch the only sensitive spot in my heart. And yet you are right; I am a monster! Oh! this miserable play! I will do better in future. Go away now, and let me continue my work.”



“What are you making?” asked Bernardo. “This is the third spring you have ordered, and each time from a different locksmith.”

“It is a secret known only to my master and myself.”

“A secret?” said Bernardo. “Springs, a secret! What can it mean?”

“Come with me, and I will show you. The signor may be angry if he chooses, I don’t care. But, Bernardo, you must be as silent as one deaf and dumb.”

He conducted his companion to a room, and throwing open the door showed him a large arm-chair, which in form was like the other chairs around, excepting that from each arm extended two bent springs.



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"This is what I have worked at, without stopping, for four days. I wish the bewitched chair to the devil! I have already exhausted myself; but the new spring is good, and in a few minutes I will have finished."

Bernardo examined attentively the unfinished chair, and looked frightened.

"Heavens!" he exclaimed, "a chair for a trap! Do you entrap men here?"

Julio nodded his head affirmatively.

Pale from anxiety, Bernardo muttered: "May God preserve me! What crime is in contemplation? Does our master know anything of this terrible piece of furniture?"

"Was it not from him that you received the order to bring me the springs?"

The humpbacked man made the sign of the cross, and muttered a few indistinct words.

Suddenly Julio laughed immoderately, and slapping him on the shoulder exclaimed: "Foolish boy! he already sees a victim in this chair, and the blood flowing as freely as in some old woman's story. Be at ease, Bernardo; this is done only to satisfy a caprice of our master. He intends to clean the garden and repair the fountain. He will place this arm-chair in an arbor near the fountain; the guest who seats himself in it will be caught, and the salamanders may throw the water upon him as long as they please. It is a mania of our master."

"What a coward I am!" said Bernardo, laughing at his own fears. "Open the door now, Julio; I should have been at the factory long ago."

They both left the house talking together, and they turned their steps towards the exterior door.

The red-haired man soon returned alone. He removed the spring from the parlor-table, and took it with him to the room where he had terrified his companion by the revelation of his master's secret. He seated himself on the ground near the chair, and taking some tools he began to arrange the spring, and to try if it would produce the effect intended. Whilst thus occupied he laughed aloud, and said:

"The stupid humpback! One could make him believe that cats laid eggs! He believed all I told him of Bufferio and his comrades as though they were gospel truths. The coward! To empty his pocket of its last farthing, it is only necessary to frighten him! I have two shillings. Night is coming on, and it is growing dark. Presently I will go to the tavern of the 'Silver Dice.' I will play at first with a few farthings, then for white pieces, at last for florins and even crowns! This time I will stop playing as soon as my pocket is full of money. Then at least I will send something to my poor mother. In what condition is she now? Perhaps she no longer lives on earth; that would be better for her. Poor



and blind, and her only dependence a son who must conceal his true name in order to escape the gallows; a gambler, drunkard—in a word, a real jail-bird! Yes, if fortune favors me, I will send her something. The signor promised me to have it conveyed to Lucca. Ah! the spring is fixed. Let me see if the machine does its duty.”



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He rose, placed his hand on the arm of the chair as if about to take his seat in it; suddenly he sprang aside, exclaiming: "Fool that you are, you were about to do a fine thing! I would have been caught by my own trap; and if the signor had forgotten to come this evening, I would have remained clasped in that traitorous chair. But don't I hear some one coming? A key grating in the lock of the garden gate? Yes, it is the Signor Turchi."

Seating himself on the ground before the arm-chair, with his back turned to the door, Julio began to work with apparent eagerness; and in order to assume a greater air of indifference, he sang snatches of a well-known song.

The door opened, and Signor Turchi stood upon the threshold. He remained for an instant motionless, contemplating in silence his servant, who continued his song as though unconscious of the presence of his master.

Simon slowly approached him and laid his hand upon his shoulder; but before he could say a word, Julio drew his dagger from its scabbard, and springing to his feet, made a motion as if to stab his master.

"*O cielo, e voi signor?* Is it you, signor?" cried Julio. "You slip through the garden like a thief. It is almost dark; an accident might have happened."

"Stop your foolish jesting, Julio. A man does not kill another without finding out with whom he is dealing."

"Do you think so, signor? Why, if five or six men were to take me by surprise, not one would be left alive."

"You speak as if the life of a man were of no more value than that of a bird."

"Less, signor; it is not worth a farthing."

"We will have proof of this," said Simon, in a peculiar tone, as he turned towards the door. "For years I have heard you boasting; this evening I will discover what you are—a brave man or a coward."

Julio drew himself to his full height, put his arms akimbo, and was about to speak, but his master prevented him.

"No useless words!" said Simon, imperiously, "Light the lamp, and come to my bedroom."

He left the room without making any inquiry in regard to the chair, and ascended a winding staircase. Opening the door of a large room, he threw himself upon a chair, and rubbed his brow with his hands like a man tormented by painful thoughts.



After awhile his hands fell upon his knees, and his eyes wandering in feverish agitation through the dim twilight, he muttered:

“At last it is decided! the murder of a friend! He my friend? He is my mortal enemy! Has he not deprived me of Mary’s love? Has he not destroyed all my hopes? Has he not devoted me to eternal infamy? His uncle has consented; he will become his partner, the proprietor of an immense fortune, the husband of Mary—of Mary, who was destined by her father to be my wife! He will be powerful, rich, and happy; he will be surrounded by every luxury; he will astonish the world by the



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magnificence of his style of living, and from the pinnacle of his grandeur he will cast an eye of lawful pride upon Turchi dishonored and ruined! Miserable dog that I am! Deodati will discover that I owe him ten thousand crowns. He will appeal to the courts of justice, and I will be condemned as a rogue; they will discover that I have spent more than I possessed. Outraged, despised, mocked, shall I fall forever into the abyss of misery and infamy? No, no; let him die! His death alone can save me. If he perishes as I have planned, I no longer owe him the ten thousand crowns; Mary becomes my wife, and I am master of her dowry. In that case I am still the powerful, honored chief of the house of Buonvisi! But time presses; to-morrow it may be too late! I hear Julio coming. Upon him rests all my hope."

The servant entered and placed a lighted candle upon the table.

"Now, signor," he said, "to what trial do you wish to subject my courage? However difficult it may be, it will not be beyond my strength."

"Close the blinds; lower the windows," said Turchi; "sit down and listen attentively to my words. I am about to talk to you of an important affair."

The red-haired man regarded his master with a malicious and incredulous smile, but he took the seat indicated to him without a word of comment.

"Julio," said Simon, "I am dejected and undecided. There is a man who pretends to be my friend, but who has secretly been my bitter enemy. He has always artfully calumniated and deceived me, and injured me in my fortune and honor; he has pushed his machinations to such a degree that I will soon be condemned to eternal infamy and misery, unless, by a bold stroke of vengeance, I break through the snares he has laid for my destruction. Be calm, Julio; it does you honor to be inflamed with anger against the enemies of your master; but listen. I discovered, three days ago, that it was this treacherous friend who paid the assassins to inflict the wound of which I still bear the scar on my face. Thus, he first shed my blood and attempted my life; now he plans my ruin and dishonor. Julio, what would you do in my place?"

"What would I do? Ask my dagger, signor; if it could speak, it would tell you of wonderful exploits."

"Then you would not hesitate to undertake a difficult task?"

"Hesitate! you insult me, signor. I would not hesitate were twenty swords brandished over my head."

"Understand, Julio, that had I doubted your intrepidity, I would not have spoken to you of such grave affairs. I give you the highest proof of confidence by intrusting my



vengeance to your hands. I will tell you who is my enemy, and where you can strike him secretly. Kill him, and you shall be liberally recompensed.”

This mission appeared unpalatable to Julio.

“Yes,” he stammered; “but that is not my way of acting. I will pick a quarrel with your enemy, and if he dares to raise a finger against me, he is a dead man.”



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“Impossible; he is of noble birth.”

“And if I insulted him, his valets would fall upon me and beat me.”

“That is true. There is but one way, Julio; I will tell you where you can stab him at night without the least danger.”

“I? shall I treacherously kill your enemy? This gentleman has never injured me. Since how long has it been the custom for valets to avenge the grievances of their masters? It is your own affair, signor.”

“You value the life of a man as little as a farthing, you said,” replied Simon Turchi, with bitter irony; “and now you allege the most puerile reasons as excuses. You are a coward, Julio.”

“I am not; but I do not choose to lie in wait and stab a man in the dark.”

“That is a feint, a subterfuge, to conceal your cowardice.”

“Since it is so simple and easy, why do you not deal the blow yourself, signor?”

The scar on Simon Turchi’s face became of a livid white; his whole frame trembled with rage; but by a strong effort he controlled his emotion, and after a few moments he said, with a contemptuous smile upon his lips:

“Four years ago I took you into my service through pity; I have paid you well, excused all your faults, your intoxication, your passion for gambling; I have not dismissed you, although you have deserved it a hundred times; and now, when for the first time you can be useful to me, you have not the courage. I wished to try you. What I said was only a jest. To-morrow, Julio, you will leave my service. You are a liar and a coward.”

“Do not condemn me so severely, signor,” said the servant, in a supplicating tone of voice. “I am willing to risk my life a thousand times for you; but to lie in wait for an unknown man and kill him deliberately—this is an infamous crime of which I am not capable.”

“Hypocrite!” exclaimed Simon Turchi; “you speak as though I were ignorant of your past history. If a price is set upon your head in the city of Lucca, if at this moment you are under sentence of death, is it not because you assassinated or helped to assassinate the Judge Voltai?”

These words struck Julio with terror. He replied, humbly:

“Signor, I have already told you that in this affair I was more unfortunate than guilty. I was upon the spot where the murder was committed, and I was arrested with those who



gave the fatal blow. Believe me, I knew nothing of their designs. I do not deny that in a contest or quarrel I spare no one; but up to this moment my dagger has never shed blood without provocation.”

Simon fixed his eyes upon his servant, and said in a menacing tone: “Suppose, in order to avenge myself for thy base ingratitude, I should make known to the superintendent of Lucca who is the man I have in my service? Suppose I were to tell him that the real name of Julio Julii is Pietro Mostajo? Who would be bound hand and foot and sent in the hold of a ship of war to expiate his crimes upon a scaffold in Italy?”



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Julio turned pale and trembled. He moved restlessly upon his chair, and complained in a low voice of the false accusations and injustice of men; but his master eyed all his movements in a scornful manner, until at last the servant, disconcerted, exclaimed impulsively:

“Tell me what to do; I am ready!”

“Will you accomplish my orders with unwavering will and without hesitation?”

“I must do so, since you compel me to it! But fear nothing; my decision is made.”

“And suppose that Geronimo Deodati were my enemy?”

“Geronimo Deodati!” exclaimed Julio, in indescribable terror. “Geronimo, your intimate friend? That noble and generous cavalier who loves you as a brother? He is as gentle as a girl!”

“He is a false friend, a traitor.”

“Geronimo gave you the wound on your face?[15] He would betray you and seek your ruin? That is false, false! It is impossible!”

“He is my mortal enemy. You shall kill him, I say!” exclaimed Simon Turchi, in a menacing voice.

“Must I kill the Signor Geronimo? Ah! to what horrible crime would you urge me?” said Julio, in a plaintive tone.

Simon seized his servant by the arm, shook him violently, and whispered hoarsely in his ear: “Pietro Mostajo, remember the superintendent of Lucca!”

Julio, as if stupefied, said not a word.

Simon arose and walked towards the door, saying: “It is well; I will go and deliver you up to justice.”

The terrified servant sprang after him, retained him, and said, supplicatingly: “I submit myself to your will, and accept the fate I cannot escape. I have never before committed a murder; you take his blood upon yourself, do you not, signor? Tell me when I must accomplish this horrible crime.”

“This very day, Julio.”

“To-day?—so soon?”



“To-morrow would be too late.”

“Well, command; the sooner the better.”

“To-day is the eve of May. Geronimo intends to serenade Miss Van de Werve. Only two lute-players will attend him. He invited me to accompany him. I will go to bed at the factory under pretence of indisposition; all the servants will know that I have not left my dwelling. Do you put on the old Spanish cape which has been laid aside for five years; no one will then recognize you. You must be in Hoboken Street, near the Dominican Convent, before eleven o'clock. There is at that spot a well which Geronimo must pass both in going and returning. Hide behind the well until Geronimo approaches, then rush upon him and deal him a fatal blow; strike several times. The lute-players are cowards, and they will run away. Take from the dead body of Geronimo a pocket-book which you will find in a pocket on the left side of his doublet; there is in this pocket-book a writing which he took from me by a cheat. Leave the spot after having accomplished this, and return by the darkest streets; you will not be discovered. Above all, do not forget the pocket-book.”



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Julio's countenance expressed stupefaction and terror. During the development of the frightful plot he kept his eyes fixed on his master's lips, and he continued to stare at him without moving.

"Well," asked his master, "is not the project cunningly devised?"

"It is astonishing, astonishing!" stammered the servant, lowering his eyes.

"You are ready, I suppose, to strike the blow? But why do you hesitate? Are you afraid?"

"No, no; but let me reflect a moment," said Julio.

After a few minutes of silence, he looked at his master, and said:

"With your permission, signor, I will say that the plan, as you have arranged it, appears to me to be fraught with danger to yourself. Suppose that Geronimo should perceive me too soon and defend himself; that by chance the lute-players should be men of courage; that I should be wounded or made prisoner: any of these events might occur. I would certainly be broken on the wheel or burned alive. That, however, would be of little consequence, if by my death I could be useful to you. But I am your servant, and known as such by all your acquaintances; and as I could have no motive of hatred or vengeance against a cavalier who has never spoken an unkind word to me, you would be at once suspected of having ordered the murder."

"And you, I suppose, would betray me?" said Turchi, with bitter irony.

"Betray you, signor? that would not save myself; but under torture my tongue might against my will pronounce your name."

Simon strode up and down the room, muttering between his teeth with suppressed rage. His servant glanced at him stealthily, with an almost imperceptible smile of joy and triumph.

At last Simon stood still in the middle of the room; the scar on his cheek was of a fiery red, and his eyes rolled around restlessly.

"Shall I then be forever ruined? Nothing is left me in the world but misery and infamy! Julio, is the arm-chair progressing?"[16]

"The arm-chair! Then the arm-chair was destined as a snare for Geronimo?" said the servant, stupefied. "What do you mean?"



“No, no, the chair would come too late!” said Simon Turchi, in an agitated voice. “Talk no more about it; this evening you must lie in wait for Geronimo and kill him. It is decided; it must be done!”

“I know a means to accomplish your purpose without danger either to you or me, signor,” said the servant.

“Ah, if what you say be true! Tell me this means of safety!”

“There lives in the parish of Saint Andrew a man of giant stature and strength; he is named Bufferio; he will do anything for money; whether it be to beat, wound, or kill a man, it is all the same to him. He fulfils his mission to the satisfaction of his employers, and he never betrays a secret. He has five or six intrepid companions engaged in the same trade as himself; they may be relied upon. Give me money to pay this ruffian, and you need have no anxiety; Bufferio will think that I am acting from personal vengeance; besides, he does not know me. Thus neither of us will be suspected nor accused should the affair prove unsuccessful.”



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Simon seemed surprised by Julio's words, and he remained a few moments in deep thought. By degrees a smile parted his lips; it was evident that the proposed plan met his approval. He opened his purse and put four gold pieces in Julio's hand.

"Is that sufficient?" he asked.

"You jest, signor," replied the servant. "Four gold pieces for the life of a nobleman!"

Simon handed him four more.

"Will that do?" he said.

"It is not enough yet."

"How much will be required?"

"I do not know. Perhaps twenty crowns."

"Twenty? I have only fifteen about me, with some small change."

"Give me all, signor. If I had not enough I should be obliged to return without concluding the affair."

Simon heaved a deep sigh and emptied the contents of his purse into Julio's hand.

"You will bring me back what is left, will you not?"

"Certainly; but I do not think much will remain."

"Come, Julio, I am in a hurry to return to the factory. Fulfil your mission skilfully, and I will recompense you largely. But a thought strikes me. The pocket-book must not fall into the hands of Bufferio."

"I had forgotten that," said Julio, embarrassed.

"Ah! I have it!" said Simon Turchi, after a moment's reflection, "A little before ten o'clock you must go to the house of Geronimo and tell him I am ill with fever, and that I have sent you in my place to accompany him armed. Follow him closely, and when he falls, take the pocket-book from him. Tell Bufferio that it is an unimportant document."

Julio made a movement of displeasure on receiving this new order. He had rejoiced in the idea of not being obliged to witness this wicked attack, and now he was commanded to take part in it. For fear of being subjected to something worse, he did not venture to make any remark.



“Go now,” said Simon Turchi, “and get the old Spanish cape. It may serve to disguise you from Bufferio. Gird on a sword also, that Geronimo may think you are armed for the purpose of defending him in case of attack.”

The servant took the lamp from the table and prepared to obey the order.

“What are you doing?” said his master. “Are you going to leave me in the dark? Are you afraid to go without a light?”

“I might knock my head against the beams, for I have forgotten where the cape was put.”

“You had it in your hands only three days ago. You are afraid in the dark, Julio. Take the lamp.”

The servant soon returned. He had the Spanish cape around his shoulders. It was a wide cloak, in which the whole body might be wrapped; and when the hood was drawn down it entirely concealed the face.

The master and servant descended the staircase in silence and approached the little garden-gate. There Julio put the lamp upon the ground and extinguished it.



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The lock grated as the key turned; the door was opened and closed, and Simon Turchi and his servant disappeared in the dark and solitary street.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION—THE ASSASSINATOR SLAIN.

A black shadow gliding like an almost impalpable spot, might be seen moving along the street of Saint John.

Thick clouds covered the sky. Not a star was visible. Here and there—at the corners of the streets and alleys—flickered a small lamp, lighted before an image of the Virgin; but these slight flames, far from diminishing the obscurity, shone in the foggy atmosphere as glowworms in the woods, which glitter but do not give light.

Silence reigned in the deserted streets. If the inhabitants, behind their oaken windows, heard occasionally some sound interrupting the stillness of the night, it was the hurried step of some benighted artisan who made as much noise as possible with his feet in order to frighten away the robbers; or it was the slow tread of a highwayman, who, listening attentively and peering through the darkness, was on the watch for his prey; or it might be the watchmen, who cried the hour and made the pavement resound under the stroke of their halberds as if to give evil-doers a warning of their approach.

The shadow gliding at this moment along the street of St. John was that of a man completely enveloped in a large cloak, his head so covered by the hood that his eyes alone were visible. As in passing before an image of the Virgin a feeble ray from a lamp fell upon him, one might have seen as he hurried along that his hand rested on the hilt of his sword.

Was this person an evil-doer, bent upon the commission of some crime, or, fearing danger, was he securing to himself the means of defence?

However that may be, he pursued his way undisturbed and reached a narrow winding alley, from beneath the ground of which seemed to proceed the confused noise of many voices.

The man stopped at the entrance of a cellar, to which admission was gained by a ladder, and listened to the joyous sounds which issued from within.

He put his hand in his pocket and chinked some pieces of money.

“The sign of the *Silver Dice!*” said he, sighing. “How merry they are! The dice are rolling upon the table. Shall I not risk a shilling? Only one?”



Yielding to the irresistible temptation, he placed his foot upon the ladder; but a sudden thought seemed to arrest him. He sprang back, trembling, and hastened from the cellar. A little farther in the street he stopped and murmured in an anxious voice:

“Heavens! what was I about to do? Risk the money upon dice? I would certainly have lost the whole. Pietro Mostajo, do not forget the Superintendent of Lucca! I am saved. Infernal temptation! I was about to stake my head. But, perhaps, I would not be unlucky. I might win a fortune. The temptation returns. No, no, I must go seek Bufferio, and I have no time to lose. He lives yonder: a low dark door beside the pump.”



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As he said these last words, he proceeded down the alley, but soon stopped near the pump, and said in an undertone:

“Bufferio lives here. How dark it is! I can hardly see the door; but I am not mistaken. Here the terrible ruffian has his lair. Strange, how I tremble! Perhaps it is a warning of some misfortune about to happen to me! Suppose they should take my money and murder me to conceal the theft. What shall I do? Shall I tell my master that I could not find Bufferio? Alas! the Superintendent of Lucca!”

After a moment of anxious thought he walked towards the low door, saying, with a sigh:

“Come, come; I can do nothing else. Of two evils choose the least!”

Although his words indicated an energetic resolution, his hand trembled as he raised the knocker of the little door and twice let it fall.

It gave out a deep hollow sound, as though it were the door of a vault for the dead.

A long time passed, and no noise within gave evidence that his call was heeded.

The visitor became still more terrified in the supposition, that no one was in the house, and that consequently he would be obliged to return, without concluding the affair, to his master, who would not believe him.

In the little dark door was a small opening, protected by a grating. Behind the iron bars two eyes were fixed on the person who had knocked, and if he had been left apparently unnoticed, it was probably because two inquisitive eyes endeavored to pierce the darkness in order to recognize the untimely visitor.

A harsh voice at last asked from behind the grating:

“Who knocked?”

The man in the cloak started back. The unexpected question so close to his ear made him tremble violently. However, he soon controlled himself and replied in Italian:

“Woman, I do not understand the Flemish tongue. You must know Italian, as Bufferio is a Roman. Tell me if Bufferio is at home.”

“Who are you?” she replied, in Italian jargon.

“Who am I? I come to arrange a secret affair with Bufferio, and I do not choose to tell my name.”



“You are an agent of the bailiff, and you wish to deceive me. Go on your way and leave me in peace. Bufferio is not at home.”

The man took some pieces of silver from his pocket and rattled them together.

“You are mistaken, woman. I have need of the services of Bufferio for an important affair. He may gain a few crowns of gold. I come with the cash in hand: you understand.”

Two bolts grated in their rusty staples, and the door opened.

“Enter, signor,” said the woman, “and follow me.”

“I do not see you; it is as black as Erebus; where is the staircase?” cried out the other.

“Follow me, signor. Give me your hand; I will precede you.”

She seized the hand of the visitor, and whilst guiding him to the staircase, she said:



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“Your hand trembles, signor. Are you afraid?”

“I afraid!” said the other, in a faltering voice. “Afraid of what? The darkness makes me totter.”

“It may be, signor; but I thought your hand was cold and trembling. Here is the staircase; now follow me.”

The man ascended the staircase behind her, stumbling up the well-worn steps, striking his head and elbows against invisible objects, and grumbling and swearing as if to show that he was not agitated by fear.

Having reached the first story, the woman opened a door and introduced her companion into a room lighted by the smoking flame of an iron lamp. She showed him a miserable chair, and said:

“Sit down, signor, if you please, and wait a while. I will go call Bufferio, he is engaged at play in the neighborhood. Should any one knock at the door during my absence, pay no attention to it; I will lock the door on the outside and take the key with me.”

The man looked at her surprised and troubled. Her bony limbs, the gray locks which fell upon her cheeks, her large mouth and long teeth, made her appear to his eyes a hideous being, a worthy companion for Bufferio.

He listened to the sound of her receding steps, until he heard the key grate in the lock of the door.

Then he looked around him and examined with mistrust and surprise the apartment of Bufferio and the objects it contained.

The room was neither well furnished nor clean: a table, three rickety chairs, an oaken bench, a few earthenware vessels near the fireplace, and a bed, constituted all the furniture. It was not, however, these common objects which fixed the gaze of the visitor. What he could not see without shuddering, was the number of strange arms suspended all around the walls of the room. In the midst of rusty swords, sharp daggers and knives of every size and shape, he saw short clubs with iron heads, steel chains like the bit of a horse, ropes with running knots, and various other articles whose use was inexplicable to him, although he was convinced that these singular instruments were intended for no good purpose.

On the table, beside the lamp, was a large knife, and near it a piece of linen and some sand for scouring, showing that the woman had been occupied in cleaning these arms when the knock at the door interrupted her.



All these instruments of murder filled with terror the heart of the man who was contemplating them. He turned his eyes away from them, trembling as he reflected upon the horror of his position. However, a few moments only were left him, for the door of the house soon opened and he heard steps on the staircase.

The woman entered and said:

“Bufferio will soon be here. When he has the dice in his hand, it is difficult to tear him away. Nevertheless, he will come. I think, signor, that he has drank deeply. Look well to yourself, and if you value your life, do not irritate him, for he would make as little scruple of maltreating you as he would of crushing a worm. Apart from that, he is the best man in the world.”



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She seated herself at the table, took up the knife and linen, and continued her occupation, whilst observing the stranger with a suspicious eye.

He had pulled the hood of the cloak over his face and seated himself in silence, fixing his eye vaguely upon space, like a man wearied by long waiting. He was deeply agitated, and from time to time his whole frame shook. Every time that he glanced towards the table he met the penetrating look of the frightful Megaera, who, while continuing to clean the blade of the large knife, considered him from head to foot, and seemed endeavoring to discover who he was and with what intention he had come.

At last, no longer able to resist his feeling of anxiety, he rose and said:

“Woman, show me the way out. I have not time to wait longer. I will return to-morrow, during the day.”

“I hear Bufferio whistling in the street,” she replied.

“He is even now placing the key in the door.”

The stranger, as if perfectly satisfied with this intelligence, fell back in his chair, with a suppressed sigh, and listened in an agony of fear to the heavy footsteps on the staircase.

Bufferio appeared at the door, and looked distrustfully at the man who had interrupted him at his game.

The ruffian Bufferio was of giant build. He was obliged to stoop in order to enter the door. His head was thrown back defiantly, and his hand rested upon the hilt of a dagger which was held by his girdle. A broad-brimmed hat shaded his face; his whole dress was of dark-brown cloth, scarcely distinguishable in the darkness of night. Under his prominent eyebrows twinkled very small eyes, and a cruel, withering smile played about his mouth.

He made an imperious gesture to the woman and pointed to the door. She left the room grumbling, but gave no other evidence of dissatisfaction.

The ruffian shut the door, took a chair, and said to the stranger, in a rough and coarse voice:

“*Perche me disturba? Why do you disturb me? Who are you?*”

This question was very embarrassing to the stranger. He replied, stammering:

“Is it necessary, Signor Bufferio, that you should know my name before doing me a service for which I will pay you liberally?”



On hearing these words, the ruffian struck his forehead with his hand, as if he thought he recognized the voice of the visitor; but he did not stop to reflect longer.

“Come tell me quickly what you want; they are waiting for me at the tavern of the *Silver Dice*, and I have no time to lose.”

“It is an affair of importance, Signor Bufferio.”

“Yes; my wife told me I might gain a few crowns of gold. Speak. Why do you beat about the bush in this manner? What embarrasses you? Do you think you are dealing with a dishonest man? Fear nothing. Not a hair of your head shall be touched in my house.”



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This assurance restored the stranger's confidence, and he said, in a more steady voice:

"Signor Bufferio, you must know that I have an enemy who insults and outrages me, and who threatens to drive me to ruin."

"I understand. You wish to be avenged by my instrumentality."

"Yes, signor. How many golden crowns do you ask for such a service?"

"That depends upon the rank of the individual, and upon the kind of service you desire. A few blows with a stick, a scratch on the face, do not cost as much as a mortal wound."

"The wound must be mortal, signor."

"And who is your enemy? A nobleman or a common citizen? Rich or poor?"

"He is a nobleman, signor, and the possessor of an ample fortune."

"A nobleman? And who are you, who make yourself responsible for payment?"

"I am a poor servant out of service."

The ruffian smiled incredulously.

"Ah!" said he, ironically, "a poor servant out of service! Come, throw back your hood. You have red hair; you often play at dice; your name is Julio; you live near the bridge *De la Vigne* with the Signor Simon Turchi. Is not that true? You were trying to deceive me."

Julio, thus unexpectedly recognized, was mute from astonishment, and, trembling from head to foot, stared at the ruffian, who did not appear in the least displeased, but said, in an encouraging tone:

"Be calm; you need not be disturbed because I know who you are. My trade is to keep the most important affairs secret. Fear nothing, I will not betray you."

It was some minutes before Julio had recovered himself sufficiently to speak.

"I am sorry that you know my name," said he; "but no matter. I desire to know, Signor Bufferio, what price you demand for ridding me forever of my enemy?"

"Your enemy?" said the ruffian, laughing. "A gentleman your enemy? You are still endeavoring to deceive me. You mean your master's enemy?"



“No, my personal enemy, who has calumniated me to my master, and who has striven to have me ignominiously discharged.”

“And you offer me golden crowns? How long is it since servants became possessed of such treasures? You request to have a mortal wound inflicted upon a gentleman? Well, you must give me fifteen gold crowns.”

“Fifteen crowns!” exclaimed Julio, with assumed astonishment. “So large a sum! I do not own that much.”

“Then pay me twelve; but it must be in advance, before I strike the blow.”

“I will pay you immediately, before leaving.”

“Give me your hand, Julio; it is a bargain. Now tell me exactly what you or your master requires of me.”

“Not my master: I alone.”

“It is all the same. What am I to do, and when is it to be done?”

“This very night, Bufferio.”

“To-night? This will oblige me to renounce my game with the Portuguese sailor; and yet I might have won some gold pieces there.”



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“Listen, Signor Bufferio. To-night, at eleven o'clock, a young nobleman, accompanied by two lute-players, will come from the direction of the convent of the Dominicans; he will turn the corner at Prince Street, and will proceed towards the church of St. James. He will thus be obliged to pass before the stone well at the head of Hoboken Street. You will conceal yourself behind the well with two or three faithful companions, and as the young gentleman passes, you will attack and kill him.”

“The affair has been well planned,” remarked the ruffian. “I could manage it by myself; but since you desire it, I will take with me a couple of my brave companions. How will I recognize the one I am to strike?”

“His dress is entirely brown, and his cap is ornamented with a white plume; in the darkness you will be able to perceive only the white plume: that will be a certain sign.”

Bufferio shook his head doubtfully.

“Have you nothing else to observe?” he asked.

“I will merely inform you that I will accompany the young gentleman, and when he falls, I will take from his person a writing, which, if it were discovered, might involve me in great danger. You will recognize me by this Spanish cape, and I will cry out very loud, that you and your men may know that I am not an enemy.”

“Now where are the gold crowns?”

“Do you accept the commission, Bufferio?”

“I will fulfil it as though I were laboring for myself.”

Julio took from his pocket some gold crowns, then continued to draw them out one by one, until he held twelve in his hand. He endeavored to conceal from the ruffian that he possessed more than the sum agreed upon; but Bufferio must have suspected his intention, for he smiled, and said in a decided manner:

“You have more gold crowns. I knew it from the first; people do not generally enter into such affairs with only the sum absolutely required. You need not deceive me. Give me the stipulated amount; I ask no more.”

As soon as the other had handed him the money, Bufferio approached the lamp, examined and weighed each piece of gold, and then said:

“It is good coin. Have no anxiety, Julio, I will go for my comrades. There is but little time left—only a good half hour.”



Julio took leave of the ruffian, and was about to quit the room, but he stopped and said: "Signor Bufferio, you will not tell your companions who requested this service of you?"

"I tell nothing to my companions. The proverb says, If you wish to lose your liberty, trust your secrets to others."

"You perfectly understand what you have to do?"

"Yes, yes. At eleven o'clock, behind the well in Hoboken. Street, a young gentleman with a white plume in his hat. Be quiet, I myself will deal the blow, and I will not miss the mark."

"Adieu, Bufferio."

"Adieu, Julio."



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The ruffian accompanied the servant to the lower story, opened the door of the street, and closed it behind him.

When Julio found himself in the open air, he walked a short distance, then stopped, drew a long breath as if a heavy weight had fallen from his shoulders, and said, joyously:

“Heavens! what an escape! I doubt if I am really alive. The difficult affair is at last concluded. The signor says that I am a coward. I would like to see him in that room with that infernal woman and the terrible Bufferio. Now I must go to Geronimo. My greatest difficulty is yet to come. If I get through it successfully, I may well say that I was born under a lucky star. But I cannot tarry, I have still a long distance to walk.”

He quickened his pace and soon reached the street on which the Dominican Convent stood; he passed the Abbey of Saint Michael and the Mint, and entered the grand square without being molested.

On the way he kept his hand in his pocket, that he might enjoy the pleasure of passing the gold coin through his fingers. He muttered to himself that he had gained three gold crowns which his master would never see again, were he to live a hundred years. Once free from his present care and anxiety, he would take his seat at a gaming-table, where he would remain all day, and perhaps he could win heaps of gold.

Absorbed in these thoughts, he reached Geronimo's residence and knocked at the door. It was soon opened, and he was conducted into a room on the ground floor, where the young gentleman, in his cap and cloak, seemed to be waiting the arrival of friends.

“Peace be to this house!” said Julio, bowing. “Signor, I bring you a message which I would deliver with more pleasure were it less sad. My poor master is ill with fever, and is unable to leave his bed. He begs you to excuse him from accompanying you to-night to the serenade.”

Geronimo's countenance assumed an expression of deep compassion. The young man concluded that his own happiness, his approaching marriage with Miss Van de Werve, had touched the heart of his poor friend, and that his present state of health was the consequence of these painful emotions.

“Did the fever attack him suddenly, Julio?” he asked. “Is he very ill?”

“No, signor. It may not have any bad consequences; but he could not venture to expose himself to the cold and damp night-air.”

Geronimo seemed in deep thought.



“Signor, my master did not send me solely to inform you of his indisposition; he directed me to accompany you to the serenade, and to protect you in case of danger. He knows how courageous I am, and that were five or six to attack you, I would not flee before them.”

“I accept your services, Julio. You always seemed to me to be a devoted servant. The lute-players have not yet arrived. Go to the kitchen and tell the cook to give you a pint of beer.”



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Julio went to the kitchen, but found the cook asleep. He awoke him, gave him his master's order, and received the pint of beer.

He expected, while drinking, to talk with the servant, and he had commenced speaking of quarrels, combats, knives, and the heroic deeds in which he had been the actor, but the servant had scarcely seated himself before he fell again into a deep sleep. Julio emptied his glass in silence, until a knock at the door and the sound of stringed instruments announced the arrival of the lute-players.

Geronimo called him, and on entering the ante-chamber he found Geronimo ready to go out with the lute-players.

Julio was troubled on remarking that these latter were armed. If these people were brave men, Bufferio and his comrades would have to deal with an equal number of adversaries. Who could foresee the termination of the struggle? However, he felt reassured on reflecting that Geronimo and the lute-players, being attacked unexpectedly, would not have time to defend themselves.

They left the house together, passed the Dominican Convent, and soon reached Prince Street, at the upper end of which was the stone well behind which Bufferio was concealed, if he had been faithful to his promise.

Up to that time Julio had walked in advance of the others, in order to appear bold and intrepid; he now commenced to fall back, and placed himself in the rear. His heart failed him; for, however well the plans had been laid, the blow might miss its aim, or might not cause death.

They were within about one hundred feet of the well.

The young gentleman, wholly ignorant of the danger which threatened him, was thinking of his unhappy friend, Simon Turchi, overpowered by a heart sorrow, tossing on a bed of suffering, while he was on his way to serenade his beloved Mary. He also, in his own mind, deplored the involved condition of Simon's business affairs, and determined to save him, even at the cost of great personal sacrifices, as soon as his marriage would render him independent.

What would the young cavalier have thought had he known that at a few steps, distance from him, three assassins, hired by Simon Turchi, were lying in wait to kill him. But no, his mind was filled with compassion and affectionate feelings for his cruel enemy.

The little band was not far from Hoboken Street; Julio gazed fixedly into the darkness to discover if any one was near the well.



Suddenly he perceived a dark shadow advancing. Trembling in an agony of fear, and in order to make himself known to the ruffians, Julio suddenly drew his sword and exclaimed:

“Al assassino! Ajusto! ajusto! Murder! help! help!”

But he had spoken too soon for the success of his designs; for, being put upon his guard by this exclamation, Geronimo drew his sword, and placed his back against the wall of the house that he might not be assailed from behind.



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The lute-players, screaming from fright, ran away, and Julio stood in the middle of the street brandishing his sword.

All this had passed almost instantaneously after the first alarm given by Julio. The man whom he had seen coming from the well, followed by two companions, rushed to the side of the street where Geronimo had made a stand to defend himself. The assassin, who was in advance of the two others, fell upon Geronimo and gave him a sword-thrust which he supposed pierced his body; but a skilful movement parried the blow, and the aggressor himself fell with such force upon Geronimo's sword that the blade passed through his body.

The assassin fell heavily, and in a plaintive voice, as though bidding adieu to life, exclaimed:

"O moja! I die! Bufferio is dead!"

Disregarding the villain who had fallen, the gentleman rushed upon the other two and wounded one in the shoulder. Convinced that they had to deal with a powerful and skilful adversary, they turned and fled, Geronimo pursuing them far beyond the well.

Julio followed him, crying, vociferating, and striking with his sword in the dark, as though he were contending with numerous enemies. When Geronimo returned with the servant to the spot where he had left the dead body of the ruffian, he found three or four watchmen calling for help. Many heads were thrust from the windows, and one citizen even ventured out of his house with a lamp in his hand.

The watchmen, having inquired as to what had taken place, examined the body to see if there were any signs of life.

"Leave him!" said one; "it is Bufferio. God be praised! the man has at last met the fate which he deserved."

In the meantime, Julio had commenced to boast. He related that he had to deal with two assassins at once, that he had wounded one in the face, and pierced the other with his sword. How the latter had been able to run away, was unaccountable; no doubt he would be found near at hand, dead or dying.

The young gentleman, who really believed the story of Turchi's servant, thanked him for his assistance, and acknowledged that he owed his life to him, as he had given the warning of the approach of the assassins.

The dead body was removed behind the well until the city authorities should order its burial.

The head watchman approached Geronimo, and said to him:



“Where do you live, signor? Two of my men will accompany you, lest some other accident might befall you. Do not refuse the offer. The villains who escaped might be on the watch for you, in order to avenge the death of their companions.”

“What shall I do?” said the gentleman to Julio. “I cannot give the serenade without the lute-players, and, besides, I could not sing after such emotion. But Miss Van de Werve is expecting it, and if I do not go, she will imagine that some accident has happened to me. It would be better for me to see Mr. Van de Werve, so as to remove any cause of anxiety. I accept your offer, watchmen, and I will liberally recompense the services you render me. I must return to Kipdorp, and you will do me the favor to wait a few minutes, in order to accompany me to my dwelling. Follow me.”



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Geronimo, the watchmen, and Julio soon reached the residence of Mr. Van de Werve. He knocked, and was immediately admitted.

The young gentleman again thanked Julio with the liveliest gratitude for his assistance, and promised to tell his master how courageously he had acted, and the eminent services he had rendered him.

Julio bade adieu, and hastened to his master's dwelling. He was about to knock, but, to his great terror, the door was opened at once, as though some one were waiting for him.

"Is it you, Julio?" asked a man, in the darkness.

The servant recognized his master's voice, and entered the door.

"Well," said he, in a stifled tone, "is he dead?"

"Who?"

"Who! Geronimo?"

"On the contrary, Bufferio is dead. Geronimo ran him through the body."

"Then you have not the pocket-book?"

"Certainly not."

"And the gold crowns?"

"I gave them to Bufferio."

"Pietro Mostajo, you have betrayed me!" hissed the infuriated signor in the ear of his servant, shaking him convulsively by the arm. "Tell me quickly what has happened! Tremble, stupid coward! the Superintendent of Lucca shall know who you are!"

"*Ebbene che sia!*" answered Julio. "Then the Signor Geronimo shall also know who hired Bufferio to assassinate him."

A hoarse cry like a stifled groan resounded through the vestibule. The door was closed.

CHAPTER V.

VAN DE WERVE'S RECEPTION—SIMON TURCHI'S JEALOUSY AND HATRED.

Mr. Van de Werve, whose large fortune justified a lavish expenditure, was accustomed to receive at his residence every month the principal gentlemen of Antwerp, strangers



as well as citizens. His love for art and science induced him to bring together the best artists and the most noted literary men of the day with the high-born, wealthy, and influential members of society at Antwerp; and his house had become the rendezvous of all that was excellent and celebrated in the city.

Nearly the whole of the anterior part of the house was occupied by a vast hall, called the *Ancestral Hall*, because it was decorated by numberless souvenirs of his illustrious family. The walls, for a certain distance were sculptured in oak wood, so artistically designed, and so delicately wrought, that at the first glance it looked like embroidery in various colors. To produce this effect, the natural brown of the oak had been left in some places. All the rest shone with gold and silver, which was relieved by a beautiful scarlet, brilliant yellow, and the softest sky-blue. The many small figures scattered over the ornaments were highly gilded. From the wooden wainscot arose slight pillars, which, uniting in the Gothic style, supported the heavy beams of the ceiling. Six of these beams were visible: all were covered with highly colored sculptures. Their decorations harmonized with, those of the wainscot, and seemed an expansion of it, as though the architect wished the exquisite ornaments of the beams of the ceiling to be considered a luxuriant verdure, springing from trunks rooted in the oaken wainscot.



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The escutcheon of the Van de Werve family, together with the families allied to them, was artistically sculptured in the wood. The emblems and devices were in profusion: lions, wild boars, eagles, ermines, bands and crosses of gold, silver, green, and blue quartz, so numerous and sparkling, that when the noonday sun penetrated into the hall, the eye could with difficulty bear the dazzling magnificence.

The armorial bearings of the Van de Werves, Lords of Schilde, painted in larger proportions than the others, were at the extremity of the hall. They consisted of a black boar on a field of gold, quartered by three chevrons of silver on black, surmounted by a helmet ornamented by mantlings of black and gold, and above this was a boar's head.

Around these family arms shone a large number of escutcheons of smaller size; among others, the coat of arms of the Wyneghem, the Van Immerseel, the Van Wilre, the Van Mildert, the Van Coolput, the Van Bruloch, and the Van Zymaer, families the most nearly related to that of Van de Werve.

Above the wainscot, within the niches formed by the pillars, hung the portraits of some of the most illustrious ancestors of William Van de Werve, as well as his own, in which he was represented as captain of a German company in the service of Charles V.

The portraits did not occupy all the panels formed in the richly carved oak. In a large number appeared valuable paintings from the pencil of the most celebrated masters of Netherlands. The eye rested on the creations of the immortal brothers Van Eyck, the touching Quintin Massys, the intellectual Roger Van der Weydens, the spiritual Jerome Bosch, the laborious Lucas de Leyde, and others whose names were favorably mentioned in the world of art.

In a corner of the room, beside the fireplace, stood a piano richly enamelled in woods of different colors, and upon it lay two lutes and a violin—a proof that the charming art of music was cultivated by the family of Mr. Van de Werve.

From the ceiling were suspended six gilded chandeliers; on the mantelpiece were two candelabras; along the walls, where the pillars formed projections, numerous sconces were fastened; and when Mr. Van de Werve received his friends in the evening, the reflection of the numberless wax candles from the many gold and silver ornaments gave a princely air to the hall.

Three days after the attempted assassination of Geronimo by the ruffian Bufferio, Mr. Van de Werve was to entertain his friends in the evening, it being the time appointed for their reunion. Although he had been deeply moved by the murderous assault, and his daughter Mary had scarcely recovered from the shock, he had not withdrawn the invitations, hoping that the social gathering might help to dissipate painful thoughts.



At the appointed hour the dwelling of Mr. Van de Werve was in a blaze of light. The large double door was thrown open, and in the vast hall were crowds of domestics, the attendants of the guests who had already arrived.

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The large parlor was filled with persons of different conditions and ages. There were, however, only men present, for this evening was by a previous arrangement to be devoted to artists, men of letters, and notable men of commerce.

The first salutations had been exchanged among the guests of Mr. Van de Werve; they had separated according to their pleasure in different groups, and were engaged in cordial and familiar conversation.

Five or six of the more aged were seated near a table examining some new works which excited their admiration; others, whose more simple attire proclaimed them to be artists, were showing each other their designs; another party, evidently formed of young noblemen, surrounded Geronimo, and were asking particulars of the recent attempt upon his life.

At the end of the room, not far from the fireplace, were collected the foreigners who were engaged in commerce at Antwerp. Although they had assembled for amusement, they were conversing, through habit, upon the expected arrival of vessels, and the price of gold and different kinds of merchandise. Among these foreigners was to be seen every description of costume, and every variety of tongue could be heard. The Spaniard found himself beside a native of Lucca, the Portuguese near the Florentine, the English with the Genoese, the German next to the Venetian; and, as on Change at Antwerp, they found means to understand each other.

Mr. Van de Werve had at first remained near the door in order to welcome his guests as they entered; but supposing that the greater part of those invited had arrived, he left this place and was walking from group to group, joining in conversation for a few moments, and saying some pleasant words to each.

The old Deodati had seated himself in an arm-chair apart. So many had welcomed him on his arrival at Antwerp, and he had been the object of so much polite attention, that, being fatigued from standing and talking, he was now seeking some repose.

By his side was Simon Turchi, conversing familiarly and in a low tone with the old man. The hypocrite feigned an extraordinary affection for the venerable nobleman, and flattered him by every expression of respect and esteem. They had already spoken of the attempted assassination, and Simon Turchi had expressed his astonishment, for he did not believe that Geronimo had an enemy in the world. It was quite likely that Bufferio had made a mistake as to the individual, a thing which might easily have happened in so dark a night.

While Simon Turchi, with apparent calmness, thus conversed with the old gentleman, he was evidently meditating some wicked design; for while talking, his eyes incessantly wandered to Geronimo, and he endeavored to divine from his countenance the subject of his conversation. He did not for one instant lose sight of Mary's betrothed.

After speaking of the assassination, the old Deodati glanced around the room upon the different groups of guests, and he asked Turchi:



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“Who is the gentleman in purple velvet, who is the object of such marked respect from the merchants around him? I do not mean the tall old man, I am acquainted with him, he is the rich Fugger of Augsburg; I am speaking of the one who stands beside him.”

“He is a banker, signor,” replied Simon Turchi. “He is very rich, and his name is Lazarus Tucher. The gentleman before him is the head of the house of the Hochstetter. The gentlemen conversing with him belong to the distinguished commercial houses of the Gigli, the Spignoli, and the Gualterotti. A little apart, and behind them, is Don Pezoa, the superintendent of the king of Portugal; he is speaking with Diego d’Aro, and Antonio de Vaglio, superintendents from Spain. The gentlemen near them are Italian and Portuguese merchants, whose names I could tell you, for I know them all, but such details would not interest you.”

“I am indebted to you for your kindness, Signor Turchi,” replied Deodati. “My nephew, Geronimo, would give me all this information, but he is surrounded by his young friends, and as he sees me with you, he is undoubtedly convinced that I could not be in better or more agreeable company. Have the kindness to tell me the name of the fine-looking old man seated near the table, and to give me some information regarding those who are listening to him with so much attention.”

“Around the table, signor, are the most learned men of Netherlands. That gray-headed orator is the old Graphaeus, secretary of the city of Antwerp, and the author of several well written Latin works. The young man, on whose shoulder he leans, is his son, Alexander, who is also very learned. Before him is seated Abraham Ortelius, the great geographer, who is regarded as the Ptolemy of his age. Beside Ortelius is his friend and fellow-laborer Gerard, also a learned geographer, and one of the luminaries of the day. The only one whose dress indicates his Italian birth is Louis Guicciardini, a Florentine gentleman, who is here for the purpose of collecting materials for an extensive work on the Low Countries, and particularly on the powerful commercial city of Antwerp. The gentleman plainly dressed, with a black beard, holding a book in his hand, is Christopher Plantin; he is engaged in establishing at Antwerp a printing-press of great importance. Its dimensions are so large that it will occupy the ground on which several spacious houses now stand; hundreds of workmen will be employed all day in composing, correcting, and printing books in every civilized tongue. You must not fail, signor, to visit the building; even in its unfinished state it will cause you astonishment.”

“The Netherlands is a favored country,” said the old Deodati. “If the climate is not as mild as in our own beautiful Italy, the men are bold, active, intelligent, industrious, and learned, and they possess all the qualifications requisite for the material prosperity and moral progress of a nation. I am surprised to see you, who are a foreigner, as well acquainted with the inhabitants as a native.”



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"I have lived here many years," replied Turchi. "These gentlemen are frequent visitors at the house of Mr. Van de Werve, and I have seen them so often, that I know them as old friends. Look at the corner near the piano, where those collected together laugh merrily, jest, and chat socially. You may easily recognize them by their light playful manners as artists."

"Yes. Is not that handsome man with noble features Frans Floris, the Flemish Raphael?"

"Yes; he was presented to you yesterday by Mr. Van de Werve, and you may remember how enthusiastically he eulogized Italian art."

"Near him is a singular-looking person; his very attitude is amusing, and his gestures force one to laugh."

"He is Peter Breughel, a humorist, who so designs his pictures that they seem painted only by way of jest. He is, however, in good repute as an artist. I saw recently one of his pictures in which he represents the Saviour carrying his cross to Calvary. In this he represents pilgrims with their staves, Spanish soldiers in doublets, monks and nuns; there is even a statue of the Blessed Virgin suspended on a tree, and that at a time when there was no Christianity, no Saint James of Compostella, neither convents nor Spaniards."

"That is indeed singular," said Deodati, smiling. "It seems to me that such conceits do but very little honor to the artist. Is it a custom among other artists in the Netherlands to sport thus with holy things?"

"No; Signor Breughel is an exception. The other gentlemen in company with the Flemish Raphael are more serious men. Michael Coxie, whom you may distinguish by the gray doublet, excels in his portraits of women. The handsome young man standing behind him is Martin de Vos, a pupil of Floris; he evinces a high order of talent and gives promise of great perfection in his art. The others, as well as I can recognize them at this distance, are Lambert Van Noord, Egide Mostaert, William Key, Bernard de Rycke, and the two brothers Henry and Martin Van Cleef, all celebrated historical, fancy, or portrait painters. Near them is Master Grimmer, a famous landscape-painter; and the gentleman now speaking is a certain Ack of Antwerp, who has painted the large glass windows of the church of Saint Gudula at Brussels. The old man sitting apart near the piano is Christian; he has marvellous skill in playing on many instruments, but he excels most on the violin. You will probably hear him this evening."

Simon Turchi continued to converse familiarly with the Signor Deodati, who was charmed with his intelligence, but still more with the kind consideration which made him refrain from joining in the general conversation in order to entertain an old man.



Geronimo had several times approached his uncle, but each time the latter had playfully sent him away, telling him that the agreeable company of the Signor Turchi sufficed for him, and that he preferred a quiet conversation.

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In the meantime the conversation among the guests had become more general. Noblemen and bankers, merchants and literary men, manufacturers and artists, were mingling with each other; rank and condition were disregarded, and the animated conversation of the company resounded through the hall like the humming of a swarm of bees.

At this moment the servants entered, bringing silver waiters on which were wines of every description, pastry, cakes, rare fruits, and other refreshments.

They passed through the room offering the wines to the guests.

“Gentlemen, a glass of Malmsey, Rhenish wine, claret, sherry, Muscatel?”

Whilst these delicious drinks and delicacies were thus distributed, Geronimo never lost sight of Mr. Van de Werve, but observed him with an eye full of hope and expectation.

When at last he saw Mr. Van de Werve leave the room, a bright smile illumined his face. Geronimo knew that Mr. Van de Werve sometimes gratified his friends and acquaintances by allowing his beautiful daughter to be present at their evening reunion for about an hour, and he had been impatiently awaiting the moment when the young girl would appear.

Simon Turchi, although apparently so unmoved, had constantly watched Mary's betrothed, noticed the radiant expression of his countenance, and understood the cause.

Mary was coming! Perhaps the whole company would know that his suit had been rejected, and that Geronimo had succeeded where the powerful administrator of the house of Buonvisi had failed!

This thought deeply wounded his pride. He scowled at Geronimo, who was looking in another direction. Rage and jealousy goaded him almost to madness; he felt that the scar on his face, by its deepening hue, would betray his emotion, and to conceal it he covered his eyes with his hand.

Deodati asked him with interest:

“What is the matter, Signor Turchi? Are you ill?”

“The heat is intolerable,” said Simon, endeavoring to master his feelings.

“Heat?” murmured Deodati; “it does not seem to me very warm. Shall I accompany you for a few moments to the garden, signor?”

But Turchi raised his head, and smiling in an unconcerned manner, said:



“Many thanks, signor, for your kindness. I feel much better. I had been looking too long at the large lustre, and its brilliant light made me dizzy. But let us rise, signor, there is the beautiful Mary, *la bionda maraviglia!*”

Mr. Van de Werve appeared at this moment at the door, and introduced his beloved child. A murmur of admiration ran through the assembly, and room was made for the father and daughter.

The beauty of Mary surpassed all expectation. Her dress consisted of a flowing robe of silver-colored satin, with no other ornament than a girdle of gold thread. Her own blonde hair was arranged around her head in the form of a crown, in the centre of which were placed some white flowers fastened by choice pearls. But the admiration of the spectators was excited by her large blue eyes, her brilliant complexion, the dignified sweetness of her expression, the gentle, innocent, modest smile which mirrored on her face the peace and joy of her soul.

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Geronimo had never before seen Mary dressed in this style. On the contrary, she generally wore dark or unobtrusive colors. Decked as she now was in pure white, she had the appearance of a bride. It was, of course, by her father's request; but what did it mean? Did he intend by this to make it known that Mary was betrothed, and would soon be wedded? Such thoughts as these agitated Geronimo as the young girl accompanied her father into the room.

The old Deodati rose and advanced to meet her. Simon Turchi took advantage of this movement to retire a short distance; for, as his eye fell on the beautiful girl, rage filled his heart as he reflected that this noble and pure woman would have been his wife had not Geronimo blasted the happiness of his life.

The lightning-like glance of hate and envy which he cast upon Geronimo was a sinister menace of death. Happily for him, all eyes were turned towards the young girl, otherwise many a one might have read the dark soul of Simon Turchi and discovered the horrible design he had conceived.

Mr. Van de Werve introduced his daughter to his guests. All expressed in courteous terms their admiration and their pleasure in her society.

The noble young girl received the felicitations and compliments addressed to her with a gentle and dignified self-possession. There were in her manner and tone of voice a rare modesty and reserve, and at the same time an exquisite politeness. Still more astonishing was her rich and varied knowledge. Whether conversing with a Spaniard, Frenchman, Italian, or German, she spoke to each in his own tongue; but the beautiful Italian language assumed additional sweetness on her lips.

When presented to the old Deodati, she took both his hands and spoke to him so tenderly and affectionately that, overcome by emotion, he could only say a few grateful words in acknowledgment.

Passing by Simon Turchi, she said cheerfully:

"God be praised, Signor Turchi, that your health is so soon restored! I am happy to see you here this evening. I am sincerely grateful to you, signor, for the friendship you manifest to the nephew of Signor Deodati. You have a good and generous heart, and I thank God for having given so devoted a friend to Geronimo and his uncle!"

The gentle words of the young girl were intolerable torture to Turchi; the wound on his face, betraying his emotion, became of a deep-red color. And yet it was absolutely necessary for him to appear calm, and to reply cordially to the kind salutation of the young girl; for there were at least twenty persons near him and within hearing of what passed.



By a powerful effort he mastered his emotion, referring it to the impression made upon him by her appearance. He spoke also of sacrifices, which, even when voluntarily made, painfully wound the heart; of a self-abnegation which could find its consolation in the happiness of a friend, but which failed not to leave a sting in the soul that had cherished fallacious hopes.



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Mary understood him, and was grateful for his kindness.

“Thanks, thanks, signor,” she said, warmly, as she passed on to salute other guests.

When Mary approached the piano, and addressed a few kind words to Master Christian, many Italian gentlemen begged her to favor them with a *canzone*.

With her father’s permission, the young girl consented to gratify the guests. She hesitated awhile as to the language in which to sing, and was turning over the leaves of a book handed her by Master Christian. The old Deodati expressed a wish to hear a song in the language of the Low Countries, and begging pardon of the Italian gentlemen, Mary said she would sing a *Kyrie Eleison* in her maternal tongue.

Master Christian seated himself at the piano, to accompany her, and commenced a prelude.

The first notes of the young girl were like a gentle murmur. By degrees her voice became firmer and stronger, until at the end of each strophe the word *eleison* rose like a sonorous hymn to heaven.

The measure was remarkably slow, simple, and full of a tranquil melody. Mary evidently felt the peculiar character of this chant, for instead of endeavoring to add to the effect, she softened still more her singularly sweet voice, and let the words drop slowly from her lips, as if the songstress herself were ravished in contemplation and was listening to celestial music.

At first the Italian gentlemen exchanged glances, as if to express the thought that this chant could not compare with the brilliant lively style of the Italian music. But this unfavorable opinion was not of long duration. They, like all others, soon yielded to the irresistible fascination of Mary’s exquisite voice. They listened with such rapt attention that not the slightest movement was made in the room, and one might have heard the murmur of the leaves in the garden as they were gently stirred by the breeze of May.

Mary had concluded her song and lifted her eyes to heaven with an expression of adoration. All who gazed upon her felt as though they were contemplating an angel before the throne of God. Even Simon Turchi was subdued by admiration, and he even momentarily lost sight of the hatred and jealousy which lacerated his heart.

Mary thus sang:

Kyrie! Lo, our God comes,
Mankind to save from ill and bless:
What grateful joy should break our gloom
And fill our hearts with happiness!



Kyrie eleison!—God is born!
A virgin mother gives him birth;
And sin's dark bonds asunder torn,
Sweet heaven again inclines to earth.

Kyrie!—hear!—the sacred font

Pours forth its saving waters free—
And Thou impresses on our front
The sign that drives our foes away.

Christe!—anointed victim!—Thou,
Who in thy death bestowest life—
The healing remedy for woe—
Ah! earth with many a woe is rife.



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Christe eleison!—brother dear—
Our liberator from all ill—
Strong in Thy virtue, free from fear,
And be our help to virtue still.

Christe eleison! God and man—
Our only consolation here—
Oh! do not leave us 'neath the ban
Of sorrow perilous and drear.

Oh! Kyrie, Father—Kyrie Son—
Kyrie Spirit—we adore
The Triune God—Thee, only One!
Grant we may praise Thee evermore!

Silence reigned in the room some moments after the last sound had died away, and then arose a murmur of admiration, and the young girl was overwhelmed with felicitations.

Whilst being thus complimented, Mary noticed Geronimo at a little distance from her. Desirous, perhaps, of escaping the praises lavished upon her, or, it may be, yielding to a real desire, she approached the young man, drew him towards the piano, and insisted upon his singing an Italian aria.

Geronimo at first refused, but his uncle requested him to yield to the entreaties of the young girl. Taking up a lute, he hastily tuned it, and sang the first word of the aria *Italia!* in such a tone of enthusiasm that it struck a responsive chord in every Italian heart. The notes fell from his lips like a shower of brilliant stars; his bosom heaved, his eyes sparkled, and his rich tenor voice filling the hall produced an indescribable effect upon the auditors. As his song proceeded, it seemed to gain in expression and vigor, and as he repeated the refrain *Mia bella Italia!* for the last time, his compatriots were so carried away by their enthusiasm that, forgetful of decorum, all, even the most aged, waved their caps, exclaiming:

"Italia! Italia!"

Tears stood in the eyes of many.

Geronimo was complimented by all present. His uncle called him his beloved son, Mary spoke to him in the most flattering manner, and Mr. Van de Werve shook hands with him cordially.

As to Simon Turchi, he was overpowered; all he had just seen and heard was such a martyrdom; jealousy so gnawed his heart that he sank deeper and deeper into the



abyss of hatred and vengeance. He stood a few steps from Geronimo, his eyes downcast, and trembling with emotion.

No one noticed him. Had he attracted attention, his friends would have supposed that, like the other Italians, he had been moved by the chant of his compatriot.

Turchi soon roused himself. Like a man who has taken a sudden resolution, he walked up to Geronimo, smiled pleasantly, and threw his arms around his neck.

“Thanks, thanks, Geronimo!” he exclaimed. “You have made me truly happy by giving me additional cause to be proud of my country.”

While embracing him, he also whispered:

“Geronimo, I wish to speak privately to you this evening. I will go to the garden presently; try to follow me; you will be pleased.”

Having said these words, he fell back as if to make way for Mr. Fugger, the rich banker, who wished to offer his congratulations.



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The servants reappeared in the hall with wines and various delicacies.

Master Christian was tuning his violin. The guests, informed that this excellent artist was about to entertain them with his wonderful skill, drew near the piano.

Geronimo, perplexed by the words of Simon Turchi, watched his friend and sought an opportunity to speak to him alone. He saw him leave the room, and as the entrance of the servants with refreshments, and the desire of the guests to approach Master Christian, had caused a stir among the company, the young man was enabled to rejoin Simon in the garden.

The garden, situated in the rear of the house, although not large, was crossed by several winding paths, and along the wall were wide-spreading trees and blocks of verdure.

When Geronimo entered the garden, he perceived several persons who had left the heated apartment to enjoy the fresh air, and who were walking in different directions.

As he was seeking in the dim light to distinguish Simon Turchi, the latter approached from an arbor, took his arm and led him in silence to a retired part of the garden, where he seated himself on a bench, and said in low tone:

“Sit down, Geronimo! I have good news for you.”

“Ah! have you succeeded in obtaining the money?”

“I have been successful. But come nearer! no one must overhear us. A foreign merchant, whom I saved two years ago from dishonor and ruin, at the risk of my own destruction, will furnish me with the means of returning you the ten thousand crowns.”

“God be praised!” said Geronimo, with a sigh of relief. “He will not long delay, I hope, to fulfil his generous designs.”

“I will pay you to-morrow what I owe you.”

“To-morrow? how fortunate!”

“But, Geronimo, I cannot bring you the money; you must come for it yourself.”

“It would be a trifle were I obliged to go to Cologne.”

“You need not go so far. Only go to my country-seat near the hospital. Silence! some one approaches!”

After a moment's silence, Turchi resumed:



“He has passed. You must know, Geronimo, that the foreign merchant desires his presence in Antwerp to remain unknown, and I have promised to keep him concealed in my garden for several days.[17] He wishes to assist me, but he is over-prudent and distrustful. I will sign the receipt for the sum he lends me. He requires, for greater security, that you sign it also.”

“What mystery is this?” said the young man. “I must sign with you for security! Who is this merchant? Is he a fugitive from justice?”

“What has that to do with the affair? It is not my secret, Geronimo, and I promised to conceal his name. If you be saved from your present embarrassment, will you not have attained your object? It is true that you will be my security, but the ten thousand crowns will be in the money vault, and your uncle will not find one florin missing. Your only danger would arise from an inability on my part to meet the note. But you need fear nothing in that respect. In a few months my resources will be abundant. I take this step only to save you from a present imminent danger. You must know, Geronimo, that I would prefer to have you alone for my creditor.”



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“Certainly, Simon, and I am most grateful to you for your kindness. Will this merchant give me the amount in coin?”

“No, but in bills of exchange on Milan, Florence, and Lucca.”

“Good and reliable bills, Simon?”

“You shall be the judge before accepting them. Fear nothing, you shall be fully satisfied.”

“Well, I will go. After Change, between five and six o’clock, will that answer?”

“It makes no difference to me, provided I know the hour beforehand.”

“Expect me, then, to-morrow, between five and six o’clock. But let us return to the house. Our long absence might cause remark.”

Simon Turchi arose, but remained standing in the same spot, and said:

“Geronimo, I have promised the merchant that none but yourself shall know of his presence in Antwerp. Say nothing, therefore, to your uncle, to Mary, nor to any one else. The least indiscretion might disarrange our plans, and be perilous to the stranger. Come alone, without any attendant.”

“I will do as you direct,” said Geronimo, “but it will be impossible for me to remain until dark. My uncle will be seriously displeased if I go out again at night without a sufficient guard.”

“I will not detain you over half an hour.”

At that moment a servant from the house entered the garden looking for Geronimo.

“Signor Geronimo,” he said, “Mr. Van de Werve is inquiring for you, as Miss Van de Werve is about to retire from the company, and Signor Deodati wishes to return home. He is awaiting you.”

The two gentlemen followed the servant; on the way, Turchi again said in a low voice:

“To-morrow, between the hours of five and six.”

The old Deodati was already at the door with five or six attendants. He was displeased by the long absence of his nephew, and was about to remonstrate with him. But, by Turchi’s explanation, this want of attention was pardoned, and he was even permitted to bid a hasty adieu to Mary and her father.

He returned almost immediately, and offering his arm to his uncle, he left Mr. Van de Werve's house.

As he moved on, Simon Turchi glanced at him entreatingly, as if to insist upon secrecy.

CHAPTER VI.

SIMON TURCHI WREAKS HIS VENGEANCE ON GERONIMO.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon. Julio was seated in one of the rooms of his master's dwelling, his arms crossed upon his breast. Absorbed in deep thought, he had his eyes fixed on an arm-chair which stood near the only window in the room, and from time to time he shook his head with an expression of anxious doubt.

The footsteps of a man in the room above interrupted his reflections; an ironical smile passed over his features as he muttered:



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“He calls me a coward, the dastard that he is! For one hour he has been running about from room to room as though pursued by invisible spectres. How cunningly he has devised the whole affair in his own interest. Julio is to kill poor Geronimo! Julio is to bury the body in the cellar! Julio is to do all by himself! When we deal with false people, we must be on our guard. His intention is clear enough to me; he wishes to secure means, in case of necessity, of accusing me alone of the crime. He may threaten and rage as much as he pleases; he shall deal the mortal blow him self, or Geronimo shall leave this place unharmed.”

Julio remained silent for a few moments, passed his hand across his brow, and said, looking at the chair:

“Think that in one hour that infernal seat will hold a corpse! The corpse of the most noble, affable gentleman I have ever known. May his good angel prevent him from visiting this cut-throat place! Signor Turchi will kill him; but I must aid him.[18] What will be the end of this bloody tragedy? The scaffold for the master, and the gallows for the servant. This is the consequence of my disorderly life. Had I not gone, in a moment of intoxication, and without knowing it, to the place where Judge Voltai was assassinated, I would not have been obliged to fly from my country, and Signor Turchi would not have it in his power to force me to become his accomplice in a frightful crime. The old cure of Porto-Fino said truly, that ‘Sin is a labyrinth; if once we enter, we loose the thread which enables us to return to virtue.’ Ah! would I were with my mother in Italy. Useless wish. It is too late; I am banished from my country, and a price set on my head.”

He reflected for a few moments, then, with a gesture of impatience, he resumed:

“Come, come; of what good are all such thoughts? I am in his power, and I must yield to necessity; but once let the blow be struck, once let him commit a crime of which I can produce the proofs, then I will be master, and in my turn I will cry in his ears: ‘Simon Turchi, fear the bailiff and the executioner!’ At the present moment I am powerless; if I took any means to prevent the attempt, he might destroy all evidence of his criminal design, and deliver me up to the authorities of Lucca. I would be taken into Italy and broken on the wheel, in the very place where my poor old mother lives. I have always been a cause of sorrow to her; at least I will spare her this last disgrace. But the signor is coming down. He will reiterate his entreaties to me to strike the fatal blow; but I will not have the blood of this innocent gentleman on me.”

Simon Turchi was approaching. His face was very pale, but the scar which furrowed his cheek was of a more ashy hue. He did not tremble, but he walked precipitately, and he clasped his hands convulsively, like a man whose impatience can brook no delay.

He noticed that his servant was in deep thought, his head bowed upon his chest, and it was only on his near approach that Julio suddenly roused from his preoccupation. He entered the room and said:



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“Julio, the hour is nigh. Of what are you thinking? Are you afraid?”

“Afraid?” replied Julio, with a light laugh; “why should I be afraid?”

“True, true,” murmured Simon, “since I alone shall shed his blood.”

“But,” continued Julio, “if I have no cause for personal fear, would not love for my master fill me with painful thoughts? Signor, you are playing for dangerous stakes.”

“Who will know what has taken place here?”

“Who? Is there not an eye above which sees all? And whilst here, in the deepest secrecy, you immolate a human being to your thirst for vengeance, will not God hear the cry of agony of the Signor Geronimo?”

Julio saw, with a secret joy, that his words made his master tremble, although he tried to dissemble his feelings under an assumed insensibility.

“What a good joke!” replied Simon; “Pietro Mostajo talking of God! My precautions are too well taken; when the cellar will be the depository of the secret, there will be none to tell it.”

“Do you think so, signor? When has such a murder ever remained concealed? It is not surprising that I bowed my head in thought. In imagination I saw such terrible things that I dare not tell them to you. Tears still fill my eyes at the thought.”

“What did you see?” asked Turchi, with increasing anxiety.

“What did I see? The bailiff and his attendants. They bound a man’s hands behind his back; they dragged him through the streets like an odious criminal; the people cast filth and dirt upon the prisoner, and cried out, ‘Murderer!’ What did I see? A scaffold, and on this scaffold an executioner and one condemned to death; then a sword glittered in the sunlight, it fell, a stream of blood flowed, and a head rolled in the dust.”

The servant stopped intentionally; but his master convulsively caught his arm, and said in a hoarse voice:

“What then? What then?”

“And then the crowd applauded and poured out maledictions upon the name.”

“Whose name?”

“Yours, signor?”



Simon Turchi was so overpowered by the picture thus presented of his probable end, that he uttered a cry of terror and sprang back, trembling. He cast down his eyes for a moment in silence.

Julio contemplated the signor, thus overpowered by emotion, with a derisive smile. He had not called up this vivid scene solely as a means to induce his master to renounce his perilous enterprise; his motive was also to terrify him and to revenge himself for the violence he had been forced to endure from him.

The impression made upon Simon Turchi by this highly-wrought prediction did not last long. He raised his head, and said, in a contemptuous manner:

“Base hypocrite; it is your own fear which excites your imagination to see such things. The most courageous man would become cowardly with the cowardly. It is unfortunate for me that I need you, otherwise I would soon rid myself of your presence. But I, at least, will not recoil from the undertaking. Speak; tell me how far I may depend upon you. The clock will soon strike, and there is no time for hesitation.”



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“We will see which of us will the more coolly perform his part of the task. You are mistaken, signor; fear does not disturb me. Sympathy for you suggested the train of thought, and I considered it my duty to place before your eyes once more the abyss into which you might fall.”

“Be silent; it is too late,” exclaimed Simon Turchi, beside himself with rage. “Fool, do you desire my ruin—my eternal dishonor? Shall I let my enemy live? Shall I let him—him the husband of Mary Van de Werve—look down upon me from the height of his grandeur and felicity? No, no. I myself will be, must be, happy, rich, prosperous; and even should all escape my grasp; should the scaffold be my lot, the rage of vengeance which lacerates my heart must be satisfied.... Nothing, nothing, can restrain me; and, Julio, were you an obstacle in my path, I would pass over your dead body to strike a fatal blow at him who has poisoned my life. Do not attempt to thwart me, or I will crush you where you stand.”

At these words Simon Turchi placed his hand on the hilt of his sword; his face was scarlet, his lips trembled, and his eyes flashed.

This threat did not disturb Julio, probably because he thought his master could not execute it. An ironical smile played upon his lips; he stepped back one or two paces, drew his knife, and said, mockingly:

“It would be strange, signor, if Geronimo should find us engaged in a combat. It might save his life.”

“What! would you dare?”

“Why not? Do you think Julio would permit himself to be led like a sheep to the slaughter?”

“Listen! Ho comes!” exclaimed Simon Turchi, starting with terror.

The repeated strokes of the knocker resounded through the court-yard where the little door gave entrance into the garden.

“Julio, I ask you again,” said Turchi, anxiously, “what reliance I may place upon you?”

“I will do what I have promised—neither more nor less.”

“Then go open the door. Be guarded in your words, and show no disquietude. Bring him to this room; tell him that I am engaged with the foreign merchant; if he does not sit down at once, watch a favorable moment to lead him to the arm-chair. Then call me and I will do the rest.”



“You, then, are determined to make me entice the Signor Geronimo to sit down in the arm-chair?”

Turchi replied in a threatening voice and with flashing eyes:

“Pietro Mostajo, remember the Superintendent of Lucca.”

Julio left the building, went to the garden-gate and opened it.

“Benvenuto, Signor Geronimo,” he said, “what good luck brings you here on a visit to my master? It is a long time since we have seen you.”

“It is indeed a long time,” replied the young noble with a genial smile, as he walked towards the house. “But the place looks so wild and uncared for. Did not the Signor Turchi speak of having the garden put in order?”



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“Yes; but for some time my master has been very melancholy, and nothing seems to give him pleasure.”

“I know it, Julio; but things will be better for him now.”

“Would that your words were true, signor!”

“What a heavy sigh, Julio. You excite my fears. Is your master ill?”

The servant felt the importance of self-control, if he would not arouse the gentleman’s suspicions. He therefore said, in a careless manner:

“Nothing is the matter, signor. My master is very well, and to-day is in a good humor. Ever since I saw Bufferio’s sword lifted against you, I have suffered from an occasional sudden palpitation of the heart. I find relief only in a deep sigh.”

As they thus talked together, he conducted Geronimo to the room containing the large arm-chair.

“Signor Geronimo,” he said, “my master is up-stairs. I will inform him of your arrival. Please be seated.”

Julio left the room; but instead of ascending the staircase, he hid himself behind a door and listened attentively to hear the clasp of the springs of the chair.

After having waited in vain, for a long time, he returned to the room, and said to the gentleman:

“Signor, my master begs you to excuse him for a while. He is engaged transacting some business with the merchant of whom he spoke to you yesterday. They are preparing a writing for you. Have the kindness to wait a few moments.”

He now thought that Geronimo would, of his own accord, take the arm-chair, and with a beating heart he observed his movements. But he was disappointed, for the young cavalier stood at the window, gazing thoughtfully into the garden.

Although Julio knew with what mistrust and impatience his master was counting each passing moment, he said to Geronimo, with assumed indifference:

“It is at least half a mile from the Dominican Convent to this place, and you must be fatigued after your walk. Will you not rest in this arm-chair, signor?”

“No, I thank you. I am not in the least fatigued. I love to look at those beautiful trees clothed in their fresh May verdure.”



An involuntary movement of impatience escaped the servant.

“You need not remain here on my account, Julio,” said Geronimo. “Go to your work; I will stay alone.”

“I have no urgent occupation, signor. If I still remain, contrary to your wish, it is to ask you a question; and yet I fear that you will be displeased at my boldness.”

“Not at all, Julio. Can I render you any service? It will give me pleasure to show my gratitude for the courage with which you defended me when I was attacked by the ruffians.”

“I had no reference to that. I heard you were about to marry the beautiful Miss Van de Werve. The news rejoiced me; but may your humble servant make free to ask you if it be true?”

The name of his betrothed flushed his cheek with joy, and he answered, with a smile:



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“Yes, Julio, it is true.”

“How blessed you are, signor!”

“Yes, Julio, God has bestowed upon me the greatest earthly blessing, for which I shall eternally thank him. On the solemn day of our nuptials you will have cause to rejoice.”

“I, signor?”

“Yes, you, Julio. Miss Van de Werve wishes to recompense you herself for the assistance you gave me against Bufferio and his comrades. The day of my marriage you will receive a new cloak, a new doublet, new small-clothes of fine cloth and silk, such as a servant has never worn.”

Julio, touched by this proof of kindness, stammered his thanks indistinctly. He heard the young man speaking to him and telling him how richly he deserved such a present, but he paid no attention to the words; he was endeavoring to bring himself to the degree of audacity requisite to fulfil his master’s orders. Geronimo stood immediately in front of the arm-chair.

With bitter repugnance, but incited by the fear that no more favorable opportunity would present itself, he approached Geronimo as though to express his thanks anew. With one bound he sprang upon him, placed a hand on either shoulder, and pushed him forcibly into the chair.[19]

The seat of the deceptive piece of furniture sank down; from the arms started two powerful springs, which caught the young man around the waist, and held him so tightly against the back of the chair that it was impossible for him to move.

“Julio, Julio, what horrible jest is this?” he exclaimed. “Is it a trap? Do you act by your master’s orders?”

But the servant, without saying a word in reply, left the room, closing the door behind him.

“Tell me, Julio,” asked Turchi, descending the staircase to meet his servant, “is he caught?”

“The chair has done its work,” replied Julio; “go do yours. Lose no time; he might give an alarm which would betray us. The fear of death gives superhuman strength to a man’s lungs. Signor, it seems to me that my head is not safe on my shoulders. How does yours feel?”



But Simon Turchi heeded not this jest. He muttered a few indistinct words, drew his sword, and rushed down the steps to wreak his vengeance on the unfortunate Geronimo.

The servant remained where his master left him, listened to his footsteps until he heard the door of the fatal room open and then close again.

At first no sound reached his ear, but soon he heard Geronimo calling for help, and his master mocking and menacing him; at least he judged this by the tones of their voices, for he was too far off to distinguish the words. Urged by feeling rather than curiosity, he descended the staircase, and listened at the door of the room in which so horrible a crime was about to be committed.

He heard Geronimo say, in an earnest, pleading tone:

“Dear Simon, your mind is deranged. You, my friend, kill me! It is impossible. Put down that dagger; at least let me not die without confession. If it be the ten thousand crowns exasperating you, I make you a present of them; tear up in my presence the acknowledgment of the debt, and I will never speak to you of it again.”



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“Mary, Mary Van de Werve!” howled Simon Turchi, with biting sarcasm.

“I will renounce her hand and leave for Italy, and never again will I see a country so fatal to me, to her, to all that I love.”

“It is too late—too late. You must die!”

“No, no, Simon; in pity to yourself do not imbue your hands in my innocent blood. God sees us; your conscience will torture you; never again will there be peace for you on earth, and your poor soul will be miserable for all eternity. No, Simon, do not kill me.”

Then came a frightful cry, as though he were crushed, and Julio heard a sound which seemed like that of a dagger against metal.

This blow, however—if it were a blow—was not mortal, for Geronimo raised his voice with the strength of despair, and cried out:

“Help! help! Simon, let me live! Mercy! mercy!”

Then a mournful groan escaped his lips, while, as his voice died away, he prayed:

“My God, my God, forgive him! I am dying.”

On hearing the conclusion of this horrible tragedy, Julio retired to the foot of the staircase. He had hardly reached it, when the door of the room opened, and his master appeared.

Disfigured as Simon Turchi’s countenance had been by the thirst for revenge, crime made it still more frightful. The signor could hardly have been recognized. His hair stood upright; his eyes rolled in their sockets; a hard, hoarse sound escaped his lips; blood dripped from his hands.

He ran by his servant without speaking to him, ascended the staircase, and having reached his room he threw himself panting upon a chair.

Julio, who had followed him, placed himself before him, and asked:

“Well, signor, is the deed accomplished?”

“It is; let me take breath,” said Turchi, breathing heavily.

After waiting a few moments, Julio resumed:

“Did he offer any resistance, that you are so fatigued, signor?”



“Resistance? No; but when I attempted the first time to pierce him to the heart, the blade of my dagger struck against metal, and grated harshly. He wears a breastplate, Julio. Could he have suspected my intentions?”

Turchi’s dagger had evidently struck the amulet which the young man always wore around his neck.

“Possibly,” replied Julio, “Geronimo may wear some guard on his breast; it is the place against which a poignard is always aimed, and no one is secure in the darkness of night from the assault of an enemy or an assassin; but what is there in this circumstance to move you so deeply?”

“So much blood spouted from the wound. The sight of the blood, together with Geronimo’s piteous cries, struck me with anguish and horror. I tottered so that I feared I would fall before completing the work; but happily I gained the strength to finish what I had commenced. I pierced his throat with my poignard, and hushed his voice forever.”



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“And is he really dead?”

“Not a drop of blood is left in his veins.”

Simon Turchi had recovered from his excessive emotion. He arose and said:

“I must wash the blood from my hands, and efface the least spot that might betray me. Then I must go on Change and transact some business with people who will remember to have seen me there at that time. Later, I will call on Mr. Van de Werve. I must be seen in different places and speak with many people. Go down, Julio, and drag the corpse to the cellar. Then clear away every sign of blood. I need not tell you that your life, as well as mine, depends upon the care with which you perform this task.”

“I know it, signor. The blow has been struck, and I am not a man to neglect the precautions necessary to escape the gallows, if I can.”

“I have accomplished my task, Julio; go do yours.”

“Drag the corpse, by myself, into the cellar? No, no, signor; you must help me.”

“I have not the time, Julio. I must go immediately to the city.”

“It is of no consequence to me. I will not remain alone in this cut-throat place.”

“And what if I ordered you to do so?” exclaimed Turchi, trembling with anger.

“You would do so in vain, signor. You will work with me until all is done.”

“Pietro Mostajo, do you dare to defy me, and that too at the very moment when the blood is boiling in my veins? Do as I command, or before night the authorities of Lucca shall know who you are.”

“Ah!” said Julio, with a scornful laugh, “Pietro Mostajo and the authorities of Lucca have lost their power over me. As long as I had no proofs of crime against you, I had cause to fear you; but would you dare now to reveal my real name, now that by one word I can deliver you into the hands of the executioner? Hereafter, signor, you will speak to me neither so harshly nor so haughtily. In this affair there is neither master nor servant. We are two men, guilty of the same crime. Draw your dagger, if you choose. Vain threat! Can you do without me?”

Simon Turchi grit his teeth in impotent rage; but soon recovering himself, he took his servant's hand, and said beseechingly:

“You are right, Julio; we are rather two friends than master and servant. Let me then, as friend and companion, implore a favor at your hands. You must see that it is important



for me to go without delay to the factory to change my dress. For the safety of both of us I ought to leave immediately for the city, in order to prevent suspicion. Geronimo is not heavy; you can, without difficulty, drag him down stairs.”

The servant shook his head, but was evidently hesitating.

“Come, Julio; I beg, I entreat you to do what the safety of both of us requires. You still hesitate, Julio? I will reward you generously. This very evening I will give you two crowns if you tell me you have done faithfully and carefully what I have requested.”



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“Will you be here, signor, when I return from the cellar?”

“I don’t know, Julio; as soon as I have washed off the blood, I shall leave. Make haste, and possibly you may find me here. In all events I will wait for you this evening at the factory, and besides the two crowns, I will give you a whole bottle of Malmsey.”

“Agreed,” said Julio; “I will do my best to please you.”

He descended the staircase, and when he reached the room where the horrible murder had been committed, he stood for a moment with his arms folded. He turned pale and shook his head compassionately.

The poor Geronimo was extended in the chair, with his eyes closed. His head had fallen on the arm of the chair; his two hands were joined, as if in prayer for his cruel murderer. His garments were saturated with blood, and his feet rested in a pool of blood. There was a large wound in his neck and another in his breast; his face was not in the least stained, and although it was covered by the pallor of death, his countenance wore a sweet, tranquil expression, as though he had gently fallen asleep.

“Poor Signor Geronimo!” said Julio, sighing heavily. “Beauty! generosity! wealth! all fallen under the blade of a wretch! What is man’s life? He, however, will in heaven, with God, be indemnified for his horrible death. And we? But the present is not the time for reflections and lamentations; my pity will not restore this corpse to life. I must now close my eyes to the future, and fulfil my horrible task.”

He knelt behind the chair, passed his arm under it, and turned a screw. The springs opened and loosed their hold upon the inanimate body.

Julio held it by the arms and dragged it through the hall until he reached a staircase conducting to a cellar. There he left the corpse, entered an adjoining room, and returned with a lamp. Holding the light in his hand, he descended until he reached a subterranean passage. Very deep under the ground, and at the end of this passage, was a kind of vaulted cellar closed by a heavy door. Julio opened the door, and by the light of the lamp examined a grave which had been dug in one corner of the cellar, and on the sides of which lay the earth which had been excavated.[20]

After a rapid survey, he placed the lamp outside the door against the wall of the passage, and returned for the dead body.

When he had carried his burden as far as the subterranean passage, he panted for breath and seemed overcome by fatigue. He, however, exerted all his strength in order to finish as soon as possible his painful task, and dragged the corpse into the cellar. There he let it fall upon the side of the grave already prepared for its reception. After



resting a few moments, he was about to cast it into the grave and cover it with earth, but he desisted, saying:

“Bah! the poor young man will not run away. Perhaps Signor Turchi has not yet left. At any rate, I will first wash away the blood stains, and then I will return to bury the body.”



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He took the lamp and left the cellar, without closing the door.

On reaching the room he found that his master had gone.

The solitude disquieted him, particularly as it was now nearly dark, and he could hardly hope to finish before night cleaning the blood-stained floors and staircase.

He appeared, however, to submit to necessity, and prepared for his work by getting water and brushes.

The evening was far advanced, and still Julio was occupied in scouring. How it happened he could not understand, but new spots of blood were continually appearing, even in places that he had washed several times. This was particularly the case in the room where the murder had been committed. Do what he would, he could not efface the marks of blood. The sweat poured down his cheeks and he vented his rage in angry words against his master.

It may have been fatigue, or perhaps the deepening shades of night rendered his nervous system sensitive to the slightest impression; for at the least sound of the wind through the leaves of the trees, at the least grating of the weathercock as it turned on its pivot, he stopped his work and looked anxiously around him.

He succeeded, however, in stifling these emotions, and continued his labor on the fatal spot where the chair had stood.

Finally he arose, took the lamp, examined attentively the whole floor, and said, with a kind of satisfaction:

“At last I have finished! He who could discover a spot there could see through a stone. My arms are almost broken; I can scarcely straighten myself. Now for my last task! a grave is soon filled; in a half hour I shall be far from this accursed place.”

Saying these words, he left the room, and taking the lamp descended again the staircase leading to the cellar.

When he had reached the middle of the subterranean passage, he suddenly stopped, turned pale from terror, and looked tremblingly around him. He thought he heard something, an unusual, mysterious sound, faint but distinct.

Having listened for some time, he concluded that his imagination had deceived him. Summoning up all his resolution, he walked on towards the cellar, and through the open door he saw the corpse of Geronimo lying as he had left it.



As he was approaching the cellar, full of anxiety and slackening his pace, suddenly a human voice fell upon his ear. There was articulate sound, no spoken word, but only a hollow groan.

Julio, in an agony of terror, dropped the lamp. The oil extinguished the flame, and thus left in total darkness he fled from the cellar as rapidly as he could by groping along the wall. His heart beat violently, and his limbs tottered under him.

He recovered himself a little only after attaining a distant apartment and lighting a lamp. Here he remained a long time seated and buried in thought; various expressions of fear, anger, and even raillery flitted across his face.



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At last he arose, drew a knife from its scabbard, and trying its sharpness, murmured:

“I cannot bury him alive! Therefore I am forced to deal the death-blow! No, no, I will not; I have even braved the vengeance of my perfidious master in order not to imbue my hands in his blood, and I will not now be guilty of it. But what can I do? I have no other alternative. I must either bury him alive or kill him! And I cannot stay here all night.”

He took up the lamp and slowly and silently he cautiously descended the stairs leading to the cellar; after some hesitation he entered; Geronimo's body still lay in the position he left it.

Julio had taken this time a much larger lamp, and it lighted the whole cellar; he heard no sound from the breast of the unfortunate victim, although he saw plainly that life was not extinct, for there was a slight heaving of the breast.

After listening a moment, Julio muttered, with a kind of joy:

“No additional cruelty is necessary. He is in his death-agony, and he will soon die. I will shut the door and finish my work to-morrow. But my master will ask if all is done? He need know nothing of this circumstance. But I long to get away; and may the vengeance of God fall upon this spot to-night, and blot out all memento of it!”

Shortly after he left the garden, and with rapid strides threaded the obscure streets to rejoin his master, and also to cast off his blood-stained garments.

CHAPTER VII.

GRIEF AT GEROME'S ABSENCE—TURCHI'S HYPOCRISY.

Mary Van De Werve was in her own apartment, kneeling before a silver crucifix; she seemed bowed down by a weight of woe. Her head rested upon her clasped hands. She had been weeping bitterly; for there were traces of tears upon the *prie-Dieu*.

Had a stranger surprised the young girl in this attitude, he might have thought that sleep had overpowered her during prayer; but the gasping breath and heaving chest sufficiently attested that she had not sunk in sleep, but that she was plunged in an expressible sorrow.

Behind her was seated an old woman, her duenna, with a rosary in her hand. She gazed upon the young girl with deep compassion; from time to time she shook her head, and wiped away the tears which dimmed her eyes whenever Mary's sighs became heavier.



For some time the silence was unbroken; Mary even appeared somewhat calmer, when suddenly, influenced by some peculiarly painful thought, she extended her arms to heaven and cried out;

“My God and my Saviour! through thy precious blood spare his life! Have mercy on him! reject not the prayer of my broken heart!”

Again her head fell on her hands, as if this burning petition had exhausted her strength. The duenna approached her, took her arm, endeavored to lift her, and said, authoritatively:

“My lady, you must rise and cease your prayer. God may be displeased with you for thus deliberately endangering your health. Come, obey me.”



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Mary arose without reply, and took the seat offered her by the duenna. She was very pale, and her eyes were swollen from weeping.

The duenna looked upon her with an eye of pity; she took her hand, and said, gently:

“Mary, my child, you cannot continue this; such an excess of sorrow would shorten your days. And what pain to the poor Geronimo on his return, to find you condemned to a short and suffering life! Through love for him, I beg you to control yourself.”

“On his return?” repeated Mary, raising her tearful eyes to heaven.

“Why not?” replied the duenna. “Why despair before being certain of the evil you dread? More extraordinary things have happened.”

“Already five days—five centuries of suspense and fear! Ah! Petronilla, what a frightful night I passed! I saw Geronimo extended on the ground, the pallor of death on his face, a large wound was in his breast, and his lifeless eyes were fixed on me as if with his last breath he had bade me adieu.”

“These are illusions caused by grief, Mary.”

“More than twenty times I saw him thus; in vain I strove to shut out the horrible vision; day alone brought me relief.”

The duenna took her hand, and said, tenderly:

“You are wrong, Mary, to cherish your grief in this manner. Your dreams at night were but the reflection of your thoughts by day. I, too, saw Geronimo in sleep more than once.”

“You, too, Petronilla, you saw Geronimo?” exclaimed the young girl, with emotion, as though she feared the confirmation of her own terrific dream.

“Why not, Mary; do I think of him less than you?”

“You saw him dying, did you not?”

“On the contrary, I saw him return joyfully and cast himself into the arms of his uncle and embrace your father. And you, my child, I saw you kneeling on this same *prie-Dieu*, thanking God that your dreams were false and deceiving.”

Mary smiled as she listened to the duenna’s consoling words, but scarcely had Petronilla ceased speaking than she suspected the artifice.



“You deceive me through friendship and compassion,” she said, sadly. “I am grateful to you, my good Petronilla; but tell me to what cause you can attribute Geronimo’s absence. Come, call upon your imagination; find a possible, probable explanation.”

Disconcerted by this direct interrogation, the duenna shook her head.

“There is no plausible reason,” said Mary.

The old Petronilla, in the greatest embarrassment, stammered out a few words as to an unexpected journey, secrets he might be unable to divulge; she even suggested that his friends might have prevailed upon him to join in a party of pleasure; but all these were such vague suppositions that Mary plainly saw in them an acknowledgment that she could find no reasonable explanation of Geronimo’s absence.

Mary’s tears flowed faster.



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“Oh, Petronilla!” she exclaimed, in heart-rending tones; “the light of my life is forever extinguished. Geronimo, so young, so good, so noble, so gifted, the unfortunate victim of a mysterious murderer! Frightful thought! and no room for hope! Mercy, my God, mercy! My heart is breaking; never more will I see him in this world.”

And uttering a cry of anguish, she covered her face with her hands.

“I acknowledge, Mary,” said the duenna, dejectedly, “that Geronimo’s absence is inexplicable; but why look on the worst side and accept it as truth? You know that during the last four days every possible effort has been made to discover Geronimo. Mr. Van Schoonhoven, the bailiff, has pledged his honor to find him dead, or alive.”

Mary wept in silence, and heeded not the words of the duenna.

“Perhaps, my child,” the old woman resumed, “this very day the doubt which has caused you so much suffering for five days may be cleared up. Do not close your heart against all hope. I remember that once an individual was sought for weeks, and found alive when there seemed almost a certainty of his death. The bailiff was speaking of it this morning to your father, and I recollect having heard my parents relate it. It happened to a banker, Liefmans, who was considered very wealthy.”

The young girl regarded the duenna with an air of doubt.

“They found him after several weeks of absence? Had he gone on a journey without giving notice to any one?”

“No; he was discovered in the cellar of a house in the little by-street of Sureau. Robbers had laid in wait for him in the darkness of night, and cast him bound into a subterranean cave, in order to obtain a heavy ransom. The agents of the bailiff discovered him and liberated him unharmed. If God has so decreed, why may not the same have happened to the Signor Geronimo? You are silent, Mary. You cannot deny that a similar train of circumstances may have been the cause of his disappearance. Is it not so? but you yield to despair, and even in the act of begging consolation from Almighty God, you reject obstinately every motive of consolation.”

“Pity me, dear Petronilla,” answered the young girl; “your kind words are a solace to me, but I dare not open my heart to the whisperings of hope. If I accepted your explanations, and afterwards heard of Geronimo’s death, it would be double suffering to me. No, no, rather let me encourage the feeling that there is no room for hope.”

“It is impossible to make any impression upon her,” said the duenna, in a disappointed manner, and as if she were resolved to cease her efforts and to abandon the young girl to her grief.

The silence was broken by the sound of voices in the hall.



“I hear the voice of the Signor Deodati,” said the duenna; “perhaps he brings tidings.”

Mary rose quickly to descend; but Petronilla wished to detain her, saying:



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“My child, in pity to a sorrowing old man, restrain your grief. Control yourself, Mary, for yesterday each word you uttered pierced the heart of the poor Deodati like a dagger. It would be cruel and guilty in you to cause his tears to flow anew; at his age such affliction wears down the strength and shortens life.”

“No, Petronilla, I will hide my feelings, and I will appear hopeful. I saw that the old man was overpowered by anxiety and trouble. Trust me, Petronilla, and let me go; I must know from the Signor Deodati if he has received any information.”

The duenna accompanied the young girl to the door of the room where Mr. Van de Werve and Signor Deodati were conversing together, but she let her enter alone.

As soon as Mary's eye fell on the old man, and she read in his face the sorrow of his soul, she uttered a stifled cry of anguish. She cast her arms around his neck, and rested her head on his shoulder.

The Signor Deodati, deeply moved, seated her by his side, and said, with tender compassion:

“My poor Mary, we have no tidings yet of our Geronimo. Are we not unhappy? Why did not God recall me to himself ere this? Did I leave Italy and come hither to drink the bitter dregs in my chalice of life? Could I weep like you, Mary, I might find some relief, but old age has dried up my tears. Alas! alas! where is my poor Geronimo, the child whom God gave me, to close my eyes on the bed of death? I would give my fortune to save him, and the little that remains to me of life to know that he still lives.”

Tears filled Mr. Van de Werve's eyes as he contemplated his daughter and the desolate old man; but he controlled his emotion, and said:

“Mary, I requested you to stay in your own apartment, because you cannot moderate the expression of your sorrow. You have disregarded my desire. I willingly pardon you, my child; but if you wish to remain longer with Signor Deodati, you must exercise some self-control; otherwise I shall send for your duenna to take you away.”

He then added, in a more gentle manner:

“Now, Mary, I beg, I supplicate you, comprehend the duty devolving upon you. Be courageous, and do your best to console our unhappy friend.”

With a heroic effort Mary raised her head, and although still weeping, said:

“You are right, father. We grieve as though there were no room for hope; but—but—”

So great was the violence she was doing herself that she could scarcely draw her breath; but conquering this emotion, she resumed:



“Ah! signor, we cannot know. God is so good, and Geronimo has so pure a heart!”

“God is indeed good, my child; but his designs are impenetrable. If I could only imagine some probable cause to explain my nephew’s absence. But nothing—nothing!”

“The bailiff gave us, this morning, a reason for supposing that Geronimo may yet return to us unharmed.”



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“You speak of the banker Liefmans, do you not, father?”

“Yes, my child. He disappeared suddenly. A fortnight had passed in useless inquiry; his parents had the service for the dead offered for him, and he was found alive and well in a cellar, where some robbers had imprisoned him, in order by it to obtain a large sum of money.”

“And the same may happen, to Geronimo!” said Mary, with a confidence she did not feel, in order to aid her father in his kind intentions.

Signor Deodati shook his head incredulously.

Mary took his hand tenderly, and said, cheerfully:

“We must hope, signor. Perhaps the Lord in his mercy will grant that our fears may not be realized. Would we not for the remainder of our lives offer our grateful prayers to heaven?”

“Yes, yes; during our whole lives. And I would go in my old age to Our Lady of Loretto to express my boundless gratitude to the Madonna. But suppose he has fallen under the assassin’s sword?”

Mary shuddered at the thought, but she interrupted the old man.

“Signor, Geronimo possessed an amulet which had rested on the tomb of our Lord. He was convinced that it would preserve him from a violent death, and he always wore it around his neck.”

“I know the circumstances under which the amulet was given him,” replied Deodati. “I myself had some faith in this talisman, because it was the recompense of a good action; but we have no proof that the woman who gave it to Geronimo had any certain knowledge of its efficacy. However, Mary, we will still hope. Your sweet voice has mitigated my sorrow. May my poor nephew be restored to me. The happiness I expected in my old age may yet be a reality. You, Mary,—pure image of piety, goodness, and love,—you will be my child! And when old Deodati will be called to leave this world, he will see you and Geronimo by his dying bed, like two angels, pointing out to his expiring goal the path to heaven. Oh! no, no; this would be too much happiness. My mind wanders. And yet, Mary, let us hope!”

The young girl was deeply moved by the picture of that happiness which she had thought was lost to her forever. Her eyes were suffused with tears; her limbs trembled, and had not a stern look from her father reminded her of her duty, her oppressed heart would have found relief in sobs.

Mr. Van de Werve thought it better to change the conversation, and said to Deodati:



“Let us not forget, signor, that we are men, and that it becomes us to bear up courageously under a painful suspense, and in a manner to which a young girl might be unequal. Have you heard nothing since the morning? Have you not seen Signor Turchi?”

“I spoke to Signor Turchi about an hour before 'Change,” said the old gentleman, more calmly. “The good Turchi! he seemed even more dejected than we. Within the last five days, he has lost so much flesh that one would scarcely recognize him. He does not give himself a moment's repose. From morning until night he is running about from place to place, seeking Geronimo as though he were a beloved brother.”



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“Truly,” said Mary, “his is a generous heart. Poor Simon! I have sometimes been unjust to him; but it is in affliction that we learn who are our true friends. For the rest of my life I will respect and esteem him.”

“He will meet me here, presently,” replied Deodati. “He may have some particular communication to make to me, for he seemed to desire a private conversation. The arrival of some merchants of his acquaintance prevented him from speaking to me. I almost quarrelled with Signor Turchi.”

“Quarrelled!” said Mr. Van de Werve, in astonishment.

“Yes; but it was to his praise, at least. He told me that it was his intention to offer a large reward to the first person who would bring certain tidings of Geronimo.”

“How grateful I am for his generous friendship!” said Mary.

“Of course,” continued the old man, “I would not permit it. Whilst thanking him for his kindness, I told him that I would offer the reward myself. I left Signor Turchi in company with the merchants, and went to the town-hall for the purpose; but when I arrived there, I found a decree of the burgomaster already issued, promising three hundred florins for any information of Geronimo.[21] I spoke with the bailiff at noon. He told me that, notwithstanding the most active search, no trace had yet been discovered of Bufferio’s wife, nor of his companions. All of them must have left the country immediately after the ruffian’s death. But this afternoon the bailiff expects to hear the result of several important researches ordered by him this morning. If he receives any communication of consequence he will come himself to impart it to us. I hear the clock strike five. Signor Turchi will soon be here.”

During this explanation Mary remained immovable—her eyes cast down. She had probably heard only confusedly what had just been said, for her thoughts were evidently far away.

It was only when the servant threw open the door and announced Signor Turchi that the young girl, aroused from her reverie, rose hastily and went eagerly to meet him, as though she expected him to be the bearer of important news.

Mr. Van de Werve and Deodati also met him at the door; Mary involuntarily took both his hands in hers, and all three regarded him inquiringly.

“Alas! my friends, I know nothing,” said Turchi, in a voice which seemed but the echo of a bruised and broken heart. “All my efforts have proved unsuccessful. I have vowed before God to spare no expense or trouble in order to discover what has become of my unfortunate friend; but so far impenetrable darkness covers the terrible secret. What



shall we do? Let us hope that the bailiff and his officers may be more fortunate than myself, who have only my anxiety and affection to guide me.”

The words of Simon Turchi effaced the last lingering hope from Mary’s heart, and she seated herself, exhausted from previous emotion.



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Turchi drew a chair beside her, regarded her with an expression of profound compassion, and said:

“My poor Mary, your affliction is intense! I know by my own sorrow how your loving heart is suffering from this terrible suspense!”

The young girl lifted her eyes to his face, and she saw the tears running down his cheeks. Then she began to weep bitterly, and sobbing, she said:

“Thanks, thanks, Simon! I will beg Almighty God to recompense your affection and generosity.”

Simon’s countenance at this moment presented a singular appearance, from the remarkable contrast between the pallor of his cheeks and the deep scarlet which marked the margin of the scar on his face. The hypocrite could shed tears at pleasure and assume an expression of extreme sorrow, but the scar was not submissive to his will, and in spite of him its deepening red betrayed the wicked joy of his heart at the gentle and affectionate words of the young girl.

These words encouraged him to hope that he might fully attain the prize for which he strove. He had, it is true, taken from his murdered friend the proof of the debt of ten thousand crowns; true he had, as he supposed, buried all evidence of his crime in the subterranean vault; but this did not satisfy him. In order to feel that he had received the price of the frightful assassination, in order to remain rich, powerful, and honored, he required the hand of the beautiful Mary Van de Werve. He well knew that a long time must elapse before the consummation of his hopes; still, from the very day that he had committed the murder, he commenced to lay his schemes, weigh his words, and so direct his plans that sooner or later he would certainly take Geronimo’s place in Mary’s heart. He felt secure of the consent of the young girl’s father. It was on this account that he feigned excessive sorrow, and gazed upon Mary with tearful eyes, as though the sight of her grief pierced him to the heart.

He took Mary’s hands in his, and said:

“Do not yield, to despair, Mary; all hope is not lost. Last night a thought—a strange thought—occurred to my mind. And if I be correct, there are still well-founded reasons for expecting Geronimo’s return.”

“Speak, Simon,” said Mary, anxiously. “Tell us this thought.”

Signor Turchi cast down his eyes in feigned embarrassment.

“Impossible, Mary; it is a secret which I have no right to divulge.”

“Alas! is even this consolation refused me?” she exclaimed, despairingly.



“This is unkind, Simon,” said Mr. Van de Werve. “Why do you cheer us up and awaken our curiosity only to cast us down by your silence? Give no names; but at least give us some idea of the reasons we have for hope.”

Simon Turchi shrugged his shoulders.

“Ah, signor,” said Deodati, reproachfully, “you are ungenerous. This morning before ’Change you were about to confide the secret to me, when you were interrupted by the approach of friends. Tell it to me now.”

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Simon glanced expressively at Mary, as if to convey the idea that her presence prevented him from complying with the old man's request.

"Mary," said Mr. Van de Werve, "I beg you to go to your room. These varying emotions are more than you can bear; if I learn anything of interest, I will, my child, communicate it to you at once."

The young girl rose without reply, but she glanced reproachfully at Simon Turchi.

"Do not blame me, Mary," he said; "I am deeply grieved to cause you pain; only rest assured that what I do is caused by affection for Geronimo and yourself."

Without noticing this excuse the young girl obeyed her father, and slowly left the room.

"Now," said Mr. Van de Werve, "what is the secret you wish to impart to us?"

"I am greatly embarrassed," replied Simon Turchi, shaking his head doubtfully; "my intention was to speak only to Signor Deodati of the affair; perhaps it would be indiscreet in me to reveal to you also, Mr. Van de Werve, a secret which, under different circumstances—"

"For the love of God, abandon these useless evasions!" said Signor Deodati, roused to a high pitch of excitement by his impatience. "Why should not Mr. Van de Werve know that which, in your opinion, would give us a clue to my nephew?"

"Since I am forced to speak," said Turchi, with a sigh, "approach and listen."

As soon as Deodati and Mr. Van de Werve had drawn their chairs nearer to him, Simon said in an undertone, as if he feared his words might be overheard:

"Have you not remarked, Mr. Van de Werve, that for some time past Geronimo has been disturbed and anxious; that even in the midst of cheerful conversation he appeared absent-minded; in a word, that some great trouble seemed weighing upon him?"

"I have noticed it," said Mr. Van de Werve.

"And you, Signor Deodati?"

"I have also remarked it. But what do you infer from this?"

"About a month ago I interrogated Geronimo as to the cause of his melancholy, and he informed me in confused, vague terms, that he had lost a considerable sum at play_."

"At play!" exclaimed Mr. Van de Werve, overpowered by astonishment.



“Was Geronimo a gambler?” exclaimed Deodati, with ill-suppressed indignation.

“It is the custom at Antwerp to play for money, and often for considerable sums of money,” continued Simon Turchi. “I never remarked that my friend Geronimo had a passion for play. However that may be, I could never discover to whom he had lost the amount, nor would he tell me how much it was. His melancholy and agitation were caused by the circumstance I have just mentioned. He was tortured by the certainty that his uncle would discover, upon examination, the loss of a large amount, which was not accounted for on the books. I proposed to advance him the deficit, but he absolutely refused, because he preferred to meet his uncle’s just anger rather than deceive him.”



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This revelation was stunning to the old Deodati. Nothing could have more keenly wounded the honorable, high-toned nobleman than the thought that Geronimo had been so dishonest and ungrateful as to use the funds of the establishment in gambling.

Trembling with emotion, he asked:

“You say the sum is considerable. What is the amount?”

“I have no idea, signor. Perhaps you might discover it by an examination of the books.”

There was a short silence. Mr. Van de Werve’s eyes were fixed upon the ground. Signor Deodati passed his hand across his brow, and was absorbed in painful thoughts.

Simon watched for a few moments, with an inquisitive eye, the effect of this revelation upon his two companions, trying to penetrate their very souls. Then he said to Deodati:

“You look on the bad side of the affair, signor. If there were not a brighter, reverse side, I would have considered the confidence of my friend sacred, and guarded his secret until death. Up to this time we all feared, nay, considered it certain, that Geronimo had fallen under the assassin’s steel. Now I begin to think that, in order to escape his uncle’s anger, he has left the city and country.”

“Impossible!” exclaimed Mr. Van de Werve.

“Impossible?” repeated Turchi, “he would have gone ere this, had I not persuaded him that he would obtain his uncle’s pardon. Even on the day of your arrival, Signor Deodati, when Geronimo met me in the dock-yard on the bank of the Scheldt, he begged me to inquire for an English vessel which would leave on that or the next day, and secretly to engage his passage on board. You may well know that I combated this foolish project, and I left him only when he promised me to abandon the idea.”

“Could he so lightly sacrifice my daughter’s love?” said Mr. Van de Werve. “Were his expressions of affection for her only hypocrisy? No, no; nothing can induce me to believe that.”

“His love was real,” replied Turchi, “and its very depth, perhaps, blinded his judgment. He thought that the discovery of his losses at the gaming-table would inevitably deprive him of all hope of Mary’s hand. My poor friend! he wished to fly from the fate which threatened him, that he might not witness the affliction of his beloved uncle.”

No one replied to Simon’s remarks, and he said, with hypocritical surprise:

“How sad you both are! You should rather rejoice at my revelation. Is it not a happiness to think that Geronimo, although guilty of a fault, is still alive, and not to be forced to believe that he is forever lost to our affection by a frightful death?”



Old Deodati arose and said:

“My friends, I must leave you; my mind is troubled; I am ill. Besides, I wish to discover by the books the truth or falsity of Signor Turchi’s statement. Do not attempt to detain me, I beg you. Adieu! May God guard you!”

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Simon Turchi prepared to accompany the old man; but whilst they were speaking together the bailiff, Messire John Van Schoonhoven, suddenly entered, and without the formality of a salutation, he exclaimed:

“Gentlemen, I have news!”

Turchi trembled and turned pale; but as the unexpected announcement of the bailiff had startled the others, his emotion was not attributed to terror.

“For the love of God be calm, gentlemen, and do not anticipate too much. I do not know what has become of the unfortunate Geronimo, but I have just cause to hope that we will soon find him—at least we have a clue.’ I have learned, beyond doubt, that on the day of his disappearance, about five o’clock in the evening, he was seen beyond the Square of Meir. A monk from the Dominican Convent, who knows him well, saluted him and noticed the direction he went. Acting upon this information, one of my most intelligent subordinates has been tracing him. A banker saw him pass through the quarter of the Jews. This is all I know at present, but these facts are sufficient to determine the direction of our researches, and may perhaps lead to a fortunate issue. By early dawn to-morrow I will collect all the agents at my disposal; I will divide them into small bands, and I will order them to search every house, cellar, and garden in a certain part of the city, and that in the most thorough manner, without leaving a spot unexamined.[22] I myself will superintend the work, and will visit in person each hand of workmen to see that my commands are properly executed.”

Simon Turchi had covered his face with his hands, in order to conceal his terror.

Surprised by his emotion, the bailiff said:

“What have I said, Signor Turchi, to excite so much feeling?”

“Ah, you know not how much suffering you cause me,” replied Simon. “I thought I was about to learn from your lips that my friend was safe, and what do you promise me if your search proves successful? Only his dead body!”

“It is true,” said the bailiff. “It is no use to deceive you. My opinion is that he has been assassinated in some by-street near the hospital grounds, or in one of the dark alleys between the parishes of Saint George and Saint Andrew. But I am determined to discover the truth. Dead or alive, I will find him, even if it be necessary to tear up the pavements of all the cellars, and dig up all the gardens to the depth of ten feet. The whole city is in a state of excitement; the people complain of the authorities of Antwerp as though we were accomplices in the crime. This affair shall be brought to light, I pledge my honor and my name.”



"I thank you for your zeal and solicitude," stammered Turchi. "May God direct your steps! How we will all bless you, if you restore Geronimo alive to us."[23]

"I have little hope, little hope, signor; but all things are possible," said the bailiff, shaking his head.



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Deodati took his hand, and said:

“Messire Van Schoonhoven, I am most grateful to you. Excuse me for the remaining longer in your honorable company; but I am indisposed, and I must return home. May God protect you, signor.”

“And are you going also, Signor Turchi?” asked the bailiff.

When Simon gave him to understand, by a glance of the eye, that he could not let the old man go alone, he took his hand affectionately, and said:

“I understand, signor; you are right. Adieu, until to-morrow.”

Turchi offered his arm to Deodati, and supported his tottering steps. They took leave of Mr. Van de Werve, who accompanied them to the door, and admiring Simon Turchi's kindness, he followed them with his eyes as long as they were in sight.

CHAPTER VIII.

SIMON TURCHI TRIES TO CONCEAL HIS CRIME.

After having accompanied Deodati to his residence, Simon Turchi went to his own dwelling near the bridge *De la Vigne*.

He was greatly excited, either by extreme anxiety or by a feverish impatience; for he descended to the ground-floor, entered his office, pretended to be looking for some papers, went up stairs again, paced the room, opened the window, looked up and down the street, closed the window petulantly, and at last, stamping his foot, he angrily exclaimed:

“The miserable gamester! he is in some tavern drinking, gambling, amusing himself, while I am here on burning coals, almost overpowered by anxiety and terror! Julio, Julio, if I escape the fate which now threatens me, I will have my revenge for your ingratitude!”

Again he went to the window, and again he was disappointed. Thoroughly discouraged, he threw himself upon a chair, heaved a heavy sigh, and after a moment's silence exclaimed in accents of despair:

“Alas! alas! is it then true that my crime cannot remain concealed? Who was it, to my great misfortune, who sent the Dominican brother just to the spot to meet Geronimo, and thus furnished the bailiff with a clue to the murder? Who put the Jewish banker on his track, so that the constables might be led to my garden? Who suggested the idea to the bailiff to search the cellars? Was it chance? But chance is blind, and does not



proceed with such precision to the fulfilment of a purpose. How frightful if God himself conducted justice! if the Supreme Judge, who cannot be deceived, has condemned me to an infamous death! How vain then all hope, all effort to escape!”

Overpowered by these reflections, Simon Turchi bowed his head upon his breast; his hands worked convulsively, and at intervals heart-rending sighs escaped him.

Confusedly arose before him a horrible vision: he saw the scaffold erected; he beheld the sword of the executioner glitter in the sunlight; he heard the shouts of the populace calling down the vengeance of heaven upon his guilty head and devoting his name to eternal infamy; he seemed to feel the mysterious stroke from the uplifted blade, for his frame shook violently, and he uttered a piercing cry of anguish.



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He thrust his hand into his doublet, and drew from it slowly a small phial half filled with a yellow liquid, and held it before him with a shudder of disgust and horror.

“Poison, deadly poison!” he muttered. “He who has the courage to take a few drops will sleep a sweet sleep from which there is no awakening. And is this my only refuge from the ignominy of the scaffold? Instead of wealth and happiness, is a miserable death to be the price of my crime? No, no; I must chase away these horrible thoughts.”

He replaced the phial in his doublet, and abandoned himself again to his dark reflections; but at last he conquered, in a measure, his dejection, and he said, less despairingly but still sorrowfully:

“And yet everything was going on so smoothly! I had recovered my note; the possession of the ten thousand crowns enabled me to conceal for the present the ruined condition of my affairs; Mary did not appear indifferent to me, and Geronimo being out of the way, I was certain of succeeding with her in the course of time. I would in that case become rich and powerful; her dowry would be sufficient to save me from poverty and a humiliating discovery. Alas! why do the people accuse the magistrates of want of zeal? Things more surprising than the disappearance of Geronimo have happened lately without any disturbance among the populace. It was the public feeling that forced the bailiff to make extraordinary efforts to discover what had become of him; it will be the cause of my destruction! Can there be a mysterious impulse to this unwonted excitement of the multitude? Vainly then would I struggle to escape! Would it not be God himself pursuing me?”

The recurrence of this thought struck terror to the soul of Simon Turchi, and he buried his head in his hands. Suddenly he started up, and although his lips twitched convulsively, he said, in a firm, strong voice:

“Ah! ah! fatality is a spur which inspires the most cowardly with coinage. Avaunt, foolish fears! I must struggle on to the end. The bailiff seeks a corpse; he pledges his honor to discover one. Let him find it! Suppose he should find it elsewhere than in my summer-house? in a sewer, for example? Ah! anxiety had clouded my mind! Still, still, I have means for triumph! Oh, if Julio would come! Could I only imagine in what tavern the rascal is gambling, I would send Bernardo for him.”

Saying these words, he approached the window and looked out.

“There comes the loiterer! He walks as composedly as if nothing weighed upon his conscience! He cares not for the preservation of my honor and my life; since the death of Geronimo he hates and despises me. I must appear angry and indignant, for should he suspect the fear and anxiety torturing my soul, he would be insolent, and perhaps would laugh at my anguish.”



As Julio approached the house, Simon attracted his attention by loud talking, and having succeeded in this, he made signs of his impatience and anger until Julio reached the door. He then closed the window, and assuming an expression of rage he turned to meet his servant.



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When Julio on entering saw his master standing with folded arms and menacing countenance, a slight and ironical smile flitted across his face.

“Wretch!” exclaimed Simon, “did I not order you to await me here after Change? Look well to yourself, or I will avenge myself by your blood. You laugh! beware, or I will crush you like a worm!”

“Come, come, signor, why give way to such useless anger? It is not long since Change. It is not my fault that you have been obliged to wait.”

“Have you not been going from tavern to tavern, gambling, as you have been doing the last five days?”

“Yes, truly. I was intolerably thirsty; but if I was not here in time, you must blame the clock of Notre Dame; it could not have struck right, I am sure. So be calm, signor: you know that your anger makes no impression on me. Make haste and tell me what you want me to do. We lose precious time in this nonsensical sort of talk. I left some friends to come and receive your orders, and I must add that I intend returning to them as soon as I have fulfilled your commands. You need not shake your fist at me, nor get into a passion; it will do no good.”

The disrespectful language of his servant wounded and provoked Turchi; but perhaps seeing how useless it was to give expression to his feelings, he suddenly changed his manner. Tears filled his eyes; grief was depicted upon his countenance, and seating himself, he sighed and said:

“Forgive me, Julio, for my harsh words; they were spoken in impatience. It is too early yet for you to do what I wish, and I was wrong to complain of your long absence.”

The servant, surprised at his master’s humble language, regarded him distrustfully.

“Is there any danger?” he demanded.

Turchi took his hand, and said, piteously:

“Alas! Julio, my friend, to-morrow, in all probability, we will be cast, manacled, into a dungeon, there to await an infamous death.”

“Is it not your own fear, signor, which inspires such a thought?” asked Julio, trembling.

“No; I have heard a terrible piece of news. Geronimo was seen in the Quarter of the Jews, and he was met going towards the Hospital Grounds. The bailiff has determined to search to-morrow morning all the cellars in that vicinity, and even to dig the ground on the spot where my garden lies. The police agents are to proceed at daybreak to the Hospital meadows, and as they cannot fail to remark that the earth has been newly



turned up, they will certainly discover what they seek. You pushed Geronimo into the arm-chair; you buried his body; consequently you will accompany me to the scaffold, unless, in your capacity of servant, they may choose to hang you or break you on the wheel. O Julio! does not this information awaken you to a sense of our perilous condition?"

"From whom did you learn all that?" asked the affrighted servant.

"From the bailiff himself."



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“From his own lips?”

“Yes, my friend, from his own lips. In spite of your courage and coolness, I think I may say that you have no stronger desire than myself to die by the hand of the executioner.”

Julio put his hand to his throat and said, dejectedly:

“The affair looks serious. I seem to be strangling; I feel the rope around my neck. It is all your fault, signor. Why did you murder your best friend? Did I not warn you that so frightful a crime would come to light?”

“Call it crime, if you will; but at least my just vengeance is satisfied, and now neither complaints nor recriminations can recall the past nor shelter us from danger.”

“But, signor, what can we do to escape punishment?”

“There is a means, easy and certain. There is a means; but, Julio, it requires good will and resolution. May I rely upon you for this last effort?”

“What would not one be willing to do in order to escape this gallows or the wheel?”

“Then listen to me. I told you that the bailiff would search the cellars. If he finds the corpse in my house, we are both ruined.”

“Certainly, signor.”

“But suppose it be found in another place, far from this spot, who would suspect us of the murder?”

“An excellent thought!” exclaimed Julio, joyfully. “We must carry the dead body to a distant street and leave it there.”

“Not so. They would naturally suppose that it had been removed to that spot from some other place. A better plan is to throw it into the sewer in the Vleminck Field. The officers of justice will then conclude that Geronimo fell under the hand of some unknown assassin.”

“That is still better! Ah! signor, you frightened me without cause. I place very little value on my life, and yet the thought of a certain death shatters my nerves. Now I am myself again. But how shall we manage to transport Geronimo’s body to the Vleminck Field?”

“It was for that purpose, Julio, that I was waiting so impatiently for you,” said Simon Turchi; “it was because I needed your aid to execute a project which will save us both. Nothing is easier. You will disinter the body, and you will throw it into the sewer.”[24]



“Alone?” said the servant, in a tone which prognosticated a refusal.

“Why not alone, since you are able to do it?”

“It is very easy, signor, for you to say: ‘Take the body on your shoulders and traverse three or four streets.’ Signor Geronimo is heavier than you suppose, and I doubt if by the exertion of all my strength I could carry it twenty steps.”

Simon Turchi took his servant’s two hands in his, and said, supplicatingly:

“Julio, my friend, be generous; it is not a difficult task for one like yourself. Reflect that it is our only means of safety; it is as much for your interest as mine. I will recompense you largely, and I will be grateful to you all my life.”



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“Well, signor, if you say so, I will try it; but I am afraid it will turn out badly. I shall be obliged to rest on the way, and that will take more time than will be prudent. And then how shall I be able each time to replace the body on my shoulders? It requires two to transport it with sufficient rapidity.”

“Two?” said Turchi, “You know well that we can confide our secret to no one.”

“To escape death, one would submit to anything. Suppose you help me yourself, signor?”

“I!” replied Turchi, shuddering, “I carry a dead body through the streets! I, a nobleman! No, no; better a dungeon and death!”

“What a strange sentiment of honor!” muttered the astonished servant. “Would to God, signor, that you had sooner remembered that you were a nobleman, we would not thus be seeking, in mortal anguish, the means to save our lives. Consider the affair as you will, you must confess that if I carry the corpse alone, ten chances to one we shall be discovered.”

While the servant thus spoke, Turchi seemed preoccupied by torturing thoughts. After a moment he said, with a sigh:

“Alas! there is no other means; it is dangerous, but necessity demands it. Julio, go to the summer-house, and I will send Bernardo this evening to help you.”

“What” said Julio, ironically, “will you reveal your secret?”

“No; I will command him, under penalty of his life, to do whatever you order him; threaten to stab him at the least show of resistance, and he will obey you.”

“Impossible! Signor Bernardo is a good, pious man. He would inform upon us. I might as well put the halter around my neck. I will have none of his aid.”

Simon Turchi, in despair at the failure of all his efforts to succeed in his design, paced the floor impatiently. Suddenly he stopped before his servant, and with sparkling eyes he said, in a suppressed voice:

“Julio, there must be an end to all this hesitation. We have no choice, and whatever may be the means, we must not deliberate in presence of the death which menaces us. Stab Bernardo, and throw him into the sewer above the body of Geronimo.”[25]

“Oh, signor, murder Bernardo!” exclaimed Julio, in horror. “And do you suppose that he would not defend himself? that he would not give the alarm? In that case, your servant would be recognized, and thus they would put them on the track of the criminals. Your mind wanders.”



Grinding his teeth in his agony, Turchi tossed his arms convulsively, and at last said, hoarsely:

“You will not undertake it alone? You have not the wish to succeed. Coward that you are, for what are you fit but to boast and drink and gamble in the taverns? Would that I had never seen you! Leave the corpse in the cellar; let the bailiff discover it there; we will see which of us will meet the more courageously an infamous death!”

A prey to the keenest emotion, he fell back in his chair, and while uttering bitter invectives against his servant, he tore his hair in real or feigned despair.



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The sight of his master's desolation seemed to make some impression upon Julio; he regarded him compassionately, and at last said, kindly:

"Come, signor, calm yourself. All is not lost, and if my good-will can save you, I will show you that Julio has the courage and resolution to carry him through a difficult enterprise. Since you think I am able to take the corpse alone to the sewer, I will attempt it. Perhaps I may overrate the difficulties. Be calm, and rely upon my word."

The signor knew that once having made up his mind, his servant would unhesitatingly execute what he had undertaken, and he comprehended by his manner that his promise was seriously made. He pressed his hand, and said, joyfully:

"Thanks, Julio, I owe to you my honor and my life. I will never forget it, and when once the sword, now hanging over my head, is removed, I will reward you magnificently. Go now to the country-house, disinter the body, and carry it up to the ground-floor. This will give you less work later. Fill the grave thoroughly, and as far as possible destroy all appearance of the earth having been recently dug."

Julio apparently let his master's words fall unheeded on his ear; he suddenly struck his forehead with his fist, as if an unwelcome idea had forced itself upon him.

"What is the matter?" asked Turchi, anxiously.

"Fool that I am!" exclaimed Julio.

"Speak lower," said Simon. "What troubles you?"

"Did you not notice, signor, how bright it was last night? It is clear weather, and the moon is full! How could I carry a dead body to the sewer with such light to betray me? It is impossible; I cannot think of it."

These words forced from Simon a cry of anguish. He seemed crushed under the fate which was visibly pursuing him. The cowardice and ill-will of his servant had not cast him into despair like this last obstacle; for he well knew that either by threats or promises of reward he could overcome Julio's resistance; but what could prevent the moon from shining? It was clear that no way remained of removing Geronimo's body from the cellar, and the officers of the law would infallibly discover where the murder had been committed.

It was then true that for him there was no escape from ruin; that a mysterious power opposed all his plans; perhaps God himself was interposing to prevent him from saving his life.

The supposition made him shudder; nevertheless he tortured his mind to discover some plank of safety; a thousand tumultuous thoughts presented themselves. Might they not



bury the body in a retired spot of the garden, plunge it in the basin of the fountain, or conceal it under the stones of the grotto? But none of these plans could be accomplished without leaving traces which would lead to certain discovery.

Suddenly a happy idea seemed to occur to him, for his face brightened; he arose and said:



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“Julio, you must leave the country; it is your only means of safety.”

“I leave the country!” said Julio; “and you, signor?”

“Would that I could accompany you! but I cannot say as you can: ‘Where my body is, there is all I have and all I care for.’ I must of necessity remain here: I have many interests to detain me.”

Julio was astonished by the advice.

“Where shall I go? In Italy a price is set upon my head; I dare not be seen beyond the mountains. It is too late for me to leave for England; there are no vessels ready to sail. What could I do in Germany, ignorant of the language of the country and without means of subsistence?”

“Save your life, Julio; go to Germany,” said Turchi. “I will give you money, plenty of money.”

The deep red of the scar on his master’s face, his expression of cunning, his evident satisfaction, made Julio suspect some deception. He was unable at first to imagine his secret design; but a light suddenly broke upon his mind, and recoiling with horror and anger, he exclaimed:

“What an odious trap you are setting for me! You intend to accuse me of the murder in my absence? And while poor Julio, charged with a double crime, finds no resting-spot upon earth, you will enjoy here in entire security, in the midst of wealth and honor, the price of the innocent blood which you have shed. No, no, I will bring no new anathema on my head.”

“You are silly, Julio,” said Simon Turchi, disdainfully. “Should we be arrested to-morrow, and the truth known, would you not be equally punished for having treacherously pushed Geronimo into the chair?”

“Yes; but all would know that I neither conceived the crime, nor profited by its commission.”

“A fine consolation, to contend on the scaffold!” said the signor ironically, repressing his impatience. “But I will speak to you plainly and without reserve. I will state my conditions; if you refuse them, then all is at an end between us. Each of us is at liberty to save himself even at the sacrifice of the other. The worst part of the whole is that I might feel myself obliged, for my own security, to make known to the authorities of Lucca who you are.”

The servant regarded his master with an expression of disgust and aversion.



“These are my conditions,” said Simon. “You will leave immediately for Germany, and reach the Rhine as soon as possible. I will give you two hundred crowns. Procure a carriage and horse at the very first village, and do not stop until you are in a place of safety. To prevent any detention on the way, I will give you a letter to Signor Mazzuchelli, a banker at Cologne. If on the journey you are asked why you have undertaken it, say that you are on urgent business for your master, and if necessity require it, show the letter; but once in Cologne, do not present the letter to Mazzuchelli. Two hundred crowns! that is a fortune, Julio. With that you can live luxuriously for two or three years. And what difference will it make whether you know the language of the country or not. Money understands and speaks all languages.”[26]



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“And when the two hundred crowns are spent, what will become of me?” said the servant.

“I will not forsake you, Julio,” said Turchi. “Whenever you need money, inform me of it, and I will send you enough to keep you from want. But you must change your name and simply notify me that you need money to continue your business. And your new name? It seems to me that ‘Marco Castagno’ would answer. What say you?”

Julio shook his head doubtfully, muttering between his teeth. Although the promise of two hundred crowns was seductive, he hesitated to accept his master’s proposition.

“Why deliberate so long?” said Simon. “I offer you a certain means of escaping the gallows, and you hesitate! Moreover, I secure you a life of ease, independent, without cares, the free, joyous life of a lord, and yet you refuse.”

Julio seemed to have come to a decision.

“Will you give me two hundred crowns?” he demanded.

“Two hundred crowns in coin.”

“Before my departure?”

“Immediately.”

“Give them to me. I am in a hurry to depart.”

“I will go for them,” said Turchi, leaving the room.

Julio seated himself and rested his head upon his hands. But he had not long for reflection; his master returned after a short absence.

Simon Turchi held a purse in his hands. He went to the table and counted out four piles of gold pieces.

The sight of so much money made an impression on Julio, and he approached the table. Joy sparkled in his eyes, and whilst he contemplated the shining pieces, he nodded his head with an air of satisfaction.

“You see,” said Simon, “that the sum is correct, and you will not find the gold heavy to carry. Now put it in your doublet. Going down stairs I reflected upon your good-will, and I considered whether I might not avoid accusing you of the murder of Geronimo, and my friendship for you suggested a means. Now that I am sure of being able, under any circumstances, of exculpating myself, it is not necessary for me to bring any accusation



against you. Besides, Julio, I dislike to be separated from you. If in two or three months I could bring you back without danger, I would be delighted.”

“I would be well pleased, signor,” said Julio, with a sigh.

“In order to secure this chance to ourselves, Julio, you must, before leaving, go to the country-house, level, as far as possible, the earth in the cellar, throw sand and dust upon the grave, and then fill the cellar with fire-wood and empty casks.”

“But, signor, that would take time.”



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“That is of no consequence. At this hour there are too many people passing through the city gates. It is better for you to pass the night at the pavilion, and to-morrow morning, as soon as the gates are open, you will leave. At daybreak you will be certain of meeting no one who would notice what direction you had taken. I suggest this for your own sake, Julio, not mine; for suppose the officers of the law should search my summer-house, those precautions would divert their attentions from the cellar, while otherwise they would infallibly discover that the earth had been recently dug. Perhaps, through respect for me, the bailiff may exempt my lands from search. In either case I will wait until the impression made by the murder has worn away. I will say nothing of you, except that you left me in consequence of a sharp rebuke, and that I do not know what has become of you. As soon as the present excitement subsides and the search is abandoned, I promise to recall you. Now will you go to the pavilion and accomplish faithfully what I advise?”

“I will.”

“Do not forget your new name.”

“Marco Castagno? It is easily remembered.”

“Yes; Marco Castagno, and you are travelling on business. I had nearly forgotten the letter of recommendation. Wait here an instant; do not come down-stairs. I will write it at once.”

When Julio was left alone he put his hand in his pocket, chinked the gold coins, and drew out a handful for the pleasure of contemplating them; but he soon returned the money to his doublet, and fell into deep thought.

“If,” he muttered, “I could only set off at once! Here I am obliged to pass a whole night in that accursed pavilion! The signor thinks that Geronimo has been buried for five days, and his corpse is still above ground. To fill up the grave is not much. Suppose I let that alone, and leave this evening with the money? No, no; I will execute faithfully what I promised. My master is so generous to me, I will show him that I am not ungrateful.”

“Here is the letter of recommendation,” said Simon Turchi, entering the room. “It is in the name of Marco Castagno. Forget your other names, and be prudent, remembering that the least indiscretion might cost our lives. Go to the pavilion, Julio. I bid you adieu, with the hope of soon seeing you again at Antwerp.”

“Shall I not take my clothes, signor, or a traveling cloak?”

“No; the cloak you have on will suffice. Were you seen with any baggage, your intention might be suspected. Appear indifferent. You can buy whatever you may need.”



The servant extended his hand to his master, and going to the door, said:

“Adieu, signor; if you do not refuse to aid me when I am in want, I will keep your secret faithfully.”

“Do your work in the cellar carefully, Julio. I wish you a pleasant journey.”

Julio descended the staircase and walked slowly down the street.



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His master opened the window and watched him until he was out of sight.

Simon Turchi drew a long breath, as though the weight of a mountain had been removed from his heart. A smile lighted up his face, and he said in an accent of intense joy:

“He has gone! Now I have nothing to fear. The bailiff may find the body; Julio committed the crime; I know nothing of it; I am as innocent as a lamb. Ah! I thought I was lost. Now I must arrange my plans as though I were certain of the discovery of the body. I feel new strength; hope and certainty animate my heart. Mary, Mary, your name, your fortune, your love will be mine. My life will yet be crowned with grandeur, wealth, and happiness.”

And in feverish excitement he closed the window.

CHAPTER IX.

GERONIMO RESURRECTED.

The clock in the steeple of Saint George struck seven, and night was coming on, when Julio opened the garden-gate of his master's country-seat and walked with a light step towards the house.

He kept one hand wrapped in his cloak, as if to conceal some object; the other was in his pocket, turning over the gold pieces given him by Simon Turchi. Joy sparkled in his eyes, as he said to himself:

“God be praised! I resisted the temptation. They urged me to drink and play at the ‘Swan,’ but my gold coins reminded me that I had a serious duty to perform. After work comes the recompense. What I hold in my hand will indemnify me for the thirst I have suffered and for the time lost. It is the very best Spanish wine—as dear as if it were melted silver, and as strong as if it were liquid fire.”

On entering a room in the house, he drew two bottles from his doublet and one from under his cloak, placed them upon the table, and looked at them longingly.

“No, no, not now; presently! Business first. Your bewitching smile cannot seduce me. Patience, my friends; an hour hence we will become acquainted. To fill up a grave and roll some empty casks into the cellar is a small matter. But it is getting so dark that I can no longer distinguish the image of the emperor on the gold pieces; I must light the lamp.”



Taking a wooden box from the mantelpiece, he drew out a flint and struck it. It was some time before the tinder took fire, and Julio laughed at his own failures; but at last he succeeded in his efforts, and a large lamp made the whole room bright with its rays.

Julio approached the table and said:

“Now at least I can gratify the desire which has irritated my nerves during the last hour. To possess two hundred crowns, to be as rich as a banker, to feel my pockets weighed down by gold, and still unable to feast my eyes on the treasure! Now I am alone; there is no one to ask whence it came. The time has arrived. I may enjoy my wealth without anxiety!”

He drew an arm-chair to the table, reclined in it comfortably, with extended limbs, and placed the gold coin by handfuls under the light of the lamp.



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After searching his pocket and doublet and convincing himself that all the crowns were spread out before him, he heaped them up and ran his hands through them as if to enjoy the sparkle and jingle of the gold. He held his breath, for fear of losing the least sound; with eyes wide open he contemplated the brilliant treasure.

For a long time Julio remained, with a smile of happiness upon his lips, in mute admiration, and, perhaps scarcely aware of what he was doing, he ranged the crowns in a line and counted them; then he separated them into piles of twenty pieces each; then he tossed them from hand to hand, until, wearied of this amusement, he looked at them musingly. At last he exclaimed in a joyous outbreak:

“Two hundred crowns! What will I do with them? How will I spend them? Shall I drink Malmsey, Muscatel, the very best, such as brings pleasure to the heart? But at that rate I shall soon see the end of my money. Shall I play for florins and crowns? That would be an excellent means, certainly, of either becoming a hundred times richer or of losing every farthing. Strange! how fearful and avaricious money makes me! I do not even care to play; no, I will not do it. I will dress like a nobleman: in satin, velvet, and silk; I will drink and eat of the most exquisite dishes; I will live in luxury and abundance, as though the world were a terrestrial paradise. Ah, what a glorious life!

“But what a cowardly wretch I am! My only anxiety is to know how to spend or rather squander this treasure, and at this moment there lives, far from me, one who perhaps is stretching out her hand to me to beg an alms! My poor mother! she may even need bread. Were she to curse her ungrateful son, would he not have deserved it a hundred times? I am afraid of myself! With ten crowns, with the twentieth part of what I am going to throw away in dissipation, she might be saved from misery for more than a year. Why did I not give twenty crowns to my master to send to her? Suppose I return to the factory to execute this good thought? Impossible! Signor Turchi would be enraged; besides, I have no confidence in him. I will inquire, when in Germany, if she still lives, and if she be in want I will send her money.”

He took up twenty crowns, one by one, from the table, counted them, regarded them wistfully, and said, as he dropped them into his pocket:

“Twenty crowns! that is a large sum; but it may make my blind old mother happy. I will put her portion by itself.”

His eye again rested on the glittering coin. The sight appeared to deject him.



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“How visibly it has diminished!” he said, sighing. “I believed my treasure inexhaustible, and by one thought the twentieth part has disappeared. Will it not go as fast in Germany? Will not gambling and drinking deprive me of the whole in a few months and leave me in misery? What sombre thoughts! A moment ago, and everything wore a smiling aspect; now, my mind is tortured by fear and anxiety. But why need I be troubled? When I have spent the two hundred crowns, Signor Turchi will send me more. But it is not well to rely too much upon that; his head may fall under the axe of the executioner. In that case I would be as badly off myself. The discovery would drive me from Germany into Netherlands or Italy. Instead of living in luxury, I would infallibly fall into the lion’s jaw, and the gallows or the wheel would be my well-merited fate. But if the murderer of Geronimo be not discovered, I can return quietly, and my master would receive me kindly for fear I would betray his secret. That depends in a great measure upon my care in acquitting myself of the task entrusted to me. I will accomplish it loyally and well. The sight of this gold no longer gives me pleasure. A full cup of wine first, and then to work bravely!”

He uncorked one of the bottles and half emptied it; then muttering a few words as to the strength and energy imparted by the liquor, he took the lamp, and fixing his eye on the bottle, said:

“It will take me only a few minutes to throw the body into the grave and fill it up; but the rest of the work will require more than an hour. That is a long time to be separated from you, is it not? To keep me company, I will take the half-empty bottle; that will not hinder me from doing my duty properly; on the contrary, it will give me courage and strength. Now to work!”

He re-corked the bottle, put it inside of his doublet, took the lamp, and slowly descended the staircase.

The passage leading to the cellar in which Julio had thrown Geronimo’s body was rather long, and he had time to feel the effect of the wine, and it so raised his spirits that he commenced jesting about his past anxiety, and on nearing the cellar he sang the first notes of a joyful song.

But the words expired upon his lips, he trembled in every limb, and turned ashy pale.

A voice answered him from the cellar.

Immovable from terror, Julio fixed his eyes upon the door, and strove to comprehend the words which fell indistinctly upon his ear.

“Heavens!” he exclaimed, “it is Geronimo; he lives!”



Shuddering, he withdrew a short distance down the passage, and was for a time as motionless as a statue. At last, with deep emotion, he said:

“What can this mean? The signor said at the first thrust his dagger met metal, but that the wound in his neck was deep. Suppose it were merely a flesh-wound? What shall I do? Shall I let him live?”

He was painfully undecided.



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“Impossible!” he said. “It would be the death-warrant of both my master and myself. I must choose between his death and ours. Implacable fatality urges me on—in truth, I have no choice. One blow, and all is over! I must not hesitate; my knife is sharp.”

He drew his dagger from its scabbard, examined the blade, tried it with his finger. He shuddered, and a cry of horror escaped him.

“Fatal position!” he exclaimed. “To kill a man in cold blood! an innocent man! What harm has poor Geronimo ever done me? Stab him! My heart fails me—I cannot perpetrate such a cruelty. And yet, and yet I must! The crime horrifies me, but I have no alternative. Only by the sacrifice of his life can my master escape the scaffold, and I the gallows. Fate irresistibly pursues me; I am the slave of necessity—I must follow whither it leads!”

With staggering step and in a blind frenzy, Julio ran down the passage, caught his dagger between his teeth, put the key in the lock, and turned the light so that it might fall upon his victim.

He stopped trembling in the middle of the cellar, and pity filled his soul as his eye rested on Geronimo. He had indeed drawn his dagger to complete the horrible crime; but now, touched and moved by compassion, he considered the unfortunate young man, who extended to him his suppliant hands and begged for help.

Geronimo was kneeling on the side of the grave which had been dug to receive his corpse. His face was partly covered with clotted blood; the portion visible was excessively pale, and his cheeks were so sunken that those few days of suffering had left only the skin to cover his bones. His eyes, rolling wildly, were sunk in their sockets; his neck, weakened by the wound, could not support his head, which fell upon his right shoulder. His clothes were blood-stained and covered with dirt. It was evident that in his struggle against death he had dragged himself around the tomb to try, if possible, to escape it.

“Whoever you may be,” cried out Geronimo, “for the love of God, one drop of water!”

His voice was weak, but capable of moving the hardest heart.

Julio shook his head, without speaking.

“Water! water!” repeated the young man. “I am burning up, consumed by thirst. Water! water! one drop of water! Save me from a frightful death!”

Moved by pity and forgetting, as it were, his own situation, Julio thrust his hand under his doublet, drew out the bottle, uncorked it, and without speaking gave it to the wounded gentleman. He uttered a cry of joy, seized the bottle with feverish energy, and kissed with transport the hand which presented him the saving beverage.



Julio, with palpitating heart, watched the unfortunate Geronimo, as with trembling joy he placed the bottle to his lips, as if the contents were imparting to him a new life.

And indeed, after having quaffed a deep draught, Geronimo appeared to have new strength; for a sweet smile appeared upon his face, his eyes sparkled with gratitude, and lifting his hands to Julio, he said:



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“May God bless you! you have saved me from a frightful death. May Heaven hear my prayer and reward you on the day of judgment for all the good I may have done in my life. The light blinded me; I could not see. Are you not Julio?”

This recognition struck Geronimo with terror, and in a feeble and discouraged voice he said:

“Julio, Julio, you pushed me into the chair!”

Then seeing the dagger in Julio’s hands, he shuddered.

“A dagger in your hand! Ah! you come to kill me?”

“Yes, signor,” replied Julio, sadly, “I come to take your life; but do not suppose I fulfil this fatal mission without emotion; on the contrary, my heart bleeds for you, and I feel an indescribable repugnance to deal the fatal blow.”

“Ah! you are not merciless; you will have pity on me,” said Geronimo.

“Impossible!” replied Julio. “Fatality governs us both; it has irrevocably condemned you to death, and me to inhumanity. All prayer, all supplication is useless; nothing can save your life. I beg you, signor, not to increase the difficulties of my task; accept with resignation a fate you cannot escape.”

A sharp cry escaped Geronimo, as these unfeeling words convinced him that all hope was lost.

“My God!” he exclaimed, “is it then true that this dungeon is to become my tomb? Must I die without confession? Shall my body lie in unconsecrated ground? Oh, mercy! mercy!”

“Necessity is a merciless law, signor,” replied Julio, “and I have more cause than you to complain of its harshness. You, at least, will receive in heaven the recompense of your innocent life, while I must commit here a crime from which I recoil with horror, but which is forced upon me by an irresistible power, and for which my poor soul will stand accused before the judgment-seat of God. But do not cherish a deceitful hope; there is no hope for you. Before I depart from here, that grave must receive your body. That I did not immediately on entering fulfil my sad mission is partly owing to the fact that an uncontrollable compassion paralyzed my arm, but still more, to my desire to afford you time to say some prayers. Therefore prepare your soul for its last passage. I will wait patiently even for a quarter of an hour. Pray with a tranquil mind—I will not strike without giving notice.”

Saying these words, Julio put down the lamp replaced his dagger in its scabbard, and seated himself on a block of wood which was in a corner of the cellar.



Geronimo, overwhelmed by Julio's insensibility, bowed his head upon his breast. For some time he neither spoke nor moved, seeming to accept his fate with complete resignation. But the terror of death again possessed him.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed. "You will not kill me, Julio? I conjure you, by your soul's salvation, not to imbrue your hands in my blood!"

And the unfortunate young man endeavored to drag his feeble body to Julio's feet; but the latter drew his dagger in a threatening manner.



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Geronimo uttered a cry of despair, crawled back to the side of the grave, and fell exhausted on the ground, where he bewept his sad fate.

His stifled sobs were so heart-breaking that Julio's soul was stirred within him, and without being conscious of it, he wiped away the tears which fell from his eyes.

In a voice full of compassion he said:

"Come, signor, be calm, and submit with resignation to the irrevocable decree of fate. When one has lived like you in the fear of God, honorably and loyally, death is but the passage to a better life."

A cry of indignation mingled with the convulsive sobs of the young gentleman.

"I understand you," said Julio; "you think that my pity is a cruel irony; you believe me to be inhuman. Even in the tomb you might justly call down maledictions on the head of the murderer who of his own will and choice would deprive you of life. But, alas! signor, I have neither will nor choice in the matter. To-morrow the officers of justice will search this house and cellar."

"To-morrow!" exclaimed Geronimo, a new hope-springing up in his heart.

"If I let you live, they would infallibly find you here," pursued Julio. "This hope inspires you with joy; vain hope! signor, for should it be realized, my master would perish on the scaffold, and I would expiate my crime on the gallows!"

"Julio," said Geronimo, beseechingly, "I will remove all suspicion from you; I will declare you innocent; I will reward you magnificently."

"It would be useless, signor. The law knows no mercy. My master would betray the part I had in the deed; and do you think the judges would pardon me for having pushed you into the chair?"

"Save me, spare my life, Julio; and if necessary for your acquittal, I will kneel to the bailiff, I will appeal to the emperor himself."

"There is another reason, unknown to you, signor," replied Julio, bitterly. "I am a fugitive, condemned to death by the laws of Italy. My master alone knows my real name. The least infidelity on my part would make him deliver me into the hands of those who for five years have been seeking me. Think you, then, that it is in my power to spare you? It is my own and my master's death you demand. And what a death! For him, the axe of the executioner and eternal infamy to his family; for me, the rack, the wheel, the gallows. Do not blame me then, signor; do not contend against implacable fate; employ your last moments in prayer, or tell me that you are ready to receive the mortal blow. Nothing can save you; that open tomb tells you a sad but pitiless truth."



Again I beg you, signor, lift up your heart to God, and do not force me to make use of sudden violence.”

“Die so young and guiltless!” lamented Geronimo. “Never again to see the light of heaven! O Mary, my beloved! how you will deplore my fate! My poor uncle! sorrow will bring your gray hairs to the grave!”



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The accents of despair made Julio shudder; but he said, in a cold manner:

“Are you ready, signor?”

“A moment more, one moment for prayer!” said Geronimo.

He joined his hands and uttered a fervent prayer; but although he apparently accepted his fate with resignation, it was equally evident that his soul struggled against the death which was hanging over him.

By degrees, however, prayer brought resignation and consolation to Geronimo, for the nervous trembling of his limbs ceased and his voice became more distinct and calm.

Julio fixed his eyes on Geronimo, and his heart was touched when he thought he heard him ask pardon of God for his enemies; but when the lips of the young man pronounced his own name in ardent supplication, and he distinctly heard his unfortunate victim praying for the soul of his murderer, Julio dropped his knife, and said, with a deep sigh:

“My courage has forsaken me! I have not the strength to accomplish this cruel act.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Geronimo, as Julio pronounced these words, “it is a voice from heaven speaking to your heart. Hearken to it. Have pity on me! spare my life!”

Julio was too absorbed in his own thoughts to heed Geronimo. In accents of despair he muttered:

“Frightful situation! Beside the very grave I have dug for him, he prays for my soul! And can I shed his blood? But there is no help for it. I must—I must!”

The young gentleman remarked the struggle in Julio’s soul, and he mustered up all his strength to approach him; but Julio, seeing Geronimo’s design, picked up his knife, took the lamp, and left the cellar, saying:

“It is useless, signor. Fate is more powerful than we are; and struggle as we may against its inevitable decrees, they must be accomplished! The sight of your sorrow has deprived me of all courage. I go to regain strength. I will soon return. Be prepared, for this time I will act without delay!”

He closed the door and walked slowly down the passage. Having reached his room, he stamped with anger, uttered desperate words, struck his forehead with his fist, vented his impatience, because he could see no solution of his difficulties. He paced the room like a madman, fought the air, stopped, resumed his walk,—until exhausted he threw himself into a chair. Sorrow, anguish, and rage, by turns were depicted on his countenance. He lamented the necessity of the murder, and complained in bitter terms



of his sad fate. But in vain he tortured his brain—not a ray of light came to illumine his darkness. The pitiless “I must do it!” was the invariable refrain.

By chance his eye fell upon the two bottles which he had placed upon the table, and as if the sight had inspired him with a sudden resolution, he seized one of the bottles, uncorked it, and putting it to his lips, drank a long draught, stopped a moment for breath, then emptied the bottle.



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He remained some time immovable as if to test the influence of the wine on his mind, swallowed half of the second bottle, drew his dagger, took the lamp, and descended the stairs, saying:

“Now my courage will not fail me! No more words: a single blow and all will be over! I must strike him in the back; he wears a cuirass on his breast.”

Opening the door of the cellar, he placed the lamp on the ground without speaking, and raising his dagger, he walked directly towards Geronimo, who lifted his hands imploringly.

Within a few steps of his victim, Julio, with an exclamation of surprise, stopped suddenly as if immovable. His eye fell upon an object which Geronimo held in his hand and extended to him, as though it had power to turn aside the mortal blow.

It was a flat copper medal, in the centre of which was a cross and other emblems, and attached to it was a bright steel chain.

Julio, forgetful of what he was about to do, sprang forward, seized the strange medal, examined it closely, and said, in astonishment:

“This amulet in your hands, signor! What does it mean? How came you by it?”

Geronimo, whose every thought was fixed upon death, was too much startled by the sudden transition to reply immediately.

“Speak, tell me whence comes this amulet? Who gave it to you?”

“From Africa—from a blind woman,” answered Geronimo, almost unintelligibly.

“In Africa? And the woman's name?” said Julio, beside himself with impatience.

“Mostajo. Teresa Mostajo!”

“Teresa Mostajo! You are then the liberator of my poor blind mother!”

“Then you will spare my life! God of mercy, I thank thee, there is still hope!”

But Julio heeded not the words of the young man.

“This amulet,” he said, “recalls my native village. I see again my father, mother, friends. I see myself as I was before dissipation led me to sin and vice. This amulet, brought by my grandfather from Jerusalem, protected my father against many dangers, saved my mother's life; and you, signor, you owe to the same amulet escape from a violent death,



for it turned aside my master's dagger from your breast. Strange and mysterious power which thus shields the victim from his executioner!"

"Julio," said Geronimo, "keep me not in suspense. Say that you will not take my life. Be merciful to the man whose name is blessed by the lips of your mother!"

"Fear not, signor; rather than shed one drop of your blood, I would pay the penalty of my guilty life on the gallows. But I must reflect upon our peculiar situation, for my mind is not clear; perhaps I may discover a means of escape. Do not disturb me, I beg you."

He withdrew to the corner of the cellar where he had been previously seated, and remained motionless for some time, without giving any sign of the agitation of his mind.

Geronimo regarded him at first with a look of joyful anticipation; by degrees, however, his face wore an expression of sadness and surprise; it seemed to him that Julio had fallen asleep. He was mistaken, however, for Julio arose after a while, and said:



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“Now I see my way clearly. I will save you, signor; but in doing that, I might as well avoid securing a halter for myself. You must have patience until to-morrow. It is now about nine o’clock in the evening, and the time, I know, will be very long to you. But you must submit to a condition which is necessary for the preservation of my own life. To-morrow, at daybreak, I shall quit the city and country. Before leaving, I will set you at liberty. Do not attempt to shake my resolution; let me go now, signor, and expect with confidence your deliverance.”

Geronimo joined his hands, and said, feebly:

“Thanks, thanks, and may the good God show you the mercy you have shown to me! I have yet a favor to implore, a benefit to ask.”

“Speak, signor, what do you wish?”

“It is long since I awoke from my death-like stupor. I know not how long, and I am tormented by hunger and thirst; you have kept life in me by the wine so kindly bestowed, but now my body demands nourishment. Give me bread.”

“Bread!” said Julio, “there is not a mouthful of food in the house.”

But seeing Geronimo’s eyes fixed in supplication upon him, he added:

“It is not late; perhaps I may find some shop still open. I will return presently; remain quiet, and have no anxiety, signor.”

He took the lamp, left the cellar, closing the door after him, and ascended to his room. There folding his arms, he began to muse:

“How strange! the young merchant who, at the risk of his own life, defended my mother from her Moslem master, who paid her ransom, and liberated her from slavery—that merchant was Geronimo! By some mysterious influence the amulet protected his heart from the blade of his vindictive enemy; and when I am about to shed his blood, behold, the amulet paralyzes my arm. It is incomprehensible!”

The current of his thoughts changed. Seizing the half empty bottle, he drank its contents.

“Strange,” said he, “how the bad effects of liquor are controlled by the emotions! I have taken enough to deprive me of consciousness, and I feel my mind as clear as though I had not touched a drop. This last draught, however, has mounted to my brain. So it is decreed that my master, Simon Turchi, must die upon the scaffold? It is disagreeable for both of us, but I could not help it. I shall not know what to do when the two hundred crowns are spent; necessity will force me to seek other resources, even at the risk of the gallows, and in all probability the fatal noose will encircle my neck. Bah! if it is



predestined, who can prevent it? My master and I will receive only what we deserve. But I am forgetting the starving young gentleman; I must go out to procure him some food. It will be a fine opportunity to drink a pint of wine at the *Swan*; that cannot be closed yet, for gamblers do not keep early hours. Only one pint in passing! not more, for if my reason became clouded, I cannot answer for the consequences; but there is no need to fear that, for my life is at stake. I will return in half an hour.”



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He extinguished the lamp, and hastily traversed the garden.

CHAPTER X.

SIMON TURCHI'S ALARM—CRIME BEGETS CRIME.

Some time after the hour of Change, Simon Turchi had returned home, and was apparently preparing to go out again, for he had changed his doublet for one of a darker color, and his cloak lay on a chair beside him.

The signor was in high spirits; he carried his head proudly, a radiant smile illumined his countenance, and from time to time he rubbed his hands with an air of triumph. Julio had left for Germany! Nothing could have prevented his departure, for he had not been seen in the city. Simon Turchi has therefore no cause for fear, for if, contrary to expectation, his garden be searched and the corpse of Geronimo be discovered, the murder could easily be fastened upon Julio.

Already, by vague remarks to his servants and acquaintances, Turchi had prepared the way for making the accusation in case of necessity. He had exhibited great anxiety at Julio's absence the night before and during that day. He said that he had sharply reproved his servant for his dissipated habits and his neglect of duty. Julio had left him in evident anger.

The servants, who could not comprehend their master's anxiety, thought that he might be in some tavern, drowning his feelings with drink and awaiting the night to return home. To this Turchi answered that he had remarked for some time Julio's strange manner, that he seemed so absent-minded, was often heard to sigh and weep—in a word, something weighty appeared pressing on his conscience.

Early in the morning he sent Bernardo to the pavilion to see if Julio were there. Bernardo reported that there was no evidence of his having been there, except two empty bottles upon a table. Simon pretended that he had the bottles placed in the room, and Bernardo thought no more of the affair.

Simon Turchi would have satisfied himself by personal examination if Julio had thoroughly performed his work before his departure, but he feared to excite attention by his appearance in that direction; or, perhaps, he might even be obliged to assist at the search of his garden, should the bailiff refuse to exempt it. He determined to go to the cellar at nightfall, when the search must be interrupted, to examine the arrangements made by Julio. When therefore twilight was commencing to replace the glare of day, and Simon was certain of not meeting the officers of the law, he threw his cloak around his shoulders, turned with a light step and joyous heart the corner of the street, and took the direction to the square of Meir.



He had gone but a short distance, when he met Messire John Van Schoonhoven.

A smile lighted up Turchi's countenance. He was delighted to be accidentally brought into the bailiff's company, as he would thus learn the result of the researches already made.



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After a polite salutation, Messire Van Schoonhoven said:

“I am happy to meet you. I was on my way to your house.”

“To my house?” said Turchi. “Have you news of my friend?”

“No, signor; I wish to see you concerning an affair which, although not serious, necessitates a conversation with you. I would have spoken to you on this subject this evening when at Mr. Van de Werve’s, but the place was inappropriate to such discussions.”

“Return then with me,” stammered Turchi, with ill-disguised anxiety.

“Where were you going, signor?” said the bailiff.

“I was going to take a walk along the Scheldt, in order to seek some diversion to the grief I feel for the disappearance of the unfortunate Geronimo.”

“What I have to say, signor, need not interfere with your walk. I will accompany you a part of the way and enjoy with you the evening breeze.”

The bailiff turned and walked by Turchi’s side.

Looking around, to assure himself that they were not overheard, Messire Van Schoonhoven said:

“The affair in question would not require so many precautions were I not bailiff and you my friend. But in consequence of these two reasons, my mission becomes painful, and I must claim in advance your forbearance. You know that my agents are searching every house, building, and garden in the vicinity of the Hospital Grounds where Geronimo was last seen. The greatest part of this quarter has been carefully examined without any result.”

Simon Turchi perfectly understood the bailiff’s design, and although his heart beat painfully, he mastered his emotion, and said in an indifferent tone:

“And you think, Messire Van Schoonhoven, that my garden should be searched in like manner? It is very natural. No one is above the law—the knight and the peasant are there equal.”

“Believe me, signor, that the thought of so disrespectful a conduct towards an honorable nobleman, and that nobleman my friend for years, would never have occurred to me. But the search became a necessity without any fault of mine. The presence of at least twenty of my agents in that quarter attracted the curious. A crowd followed those engaged in the search, and when it was noticed that your summer-house was the only



one exempted, the magistrates were openly accused of injustice. The people were told that this was done by my order; but so great was the commotion that the affair reached the ears of the burgomaster and the constables, and these gentlemen waited on me, urging me to visit your garden likewise, so as to remove all cause of complaint.”

“This explanation is wholly unnecessary, at least as far as regards myself,” interrupted Simon Turchi. “I desire you to search my country-house as you do all the other dwellings in the vicinity.”

They were not far from the bridge of Meir, and they ceased speaking, as in so frequented a place they were in danger of being overheard. Farther on, Turchi said:



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"I acknowledge, however, that I am hurt and irritated by the disrespect and audacity of the populace. One might be tempted to suppose that they considered me capable of killing my best friend! My blood boils at the idea of such a suspicion!"

Simon gladly availed himself of the opportunity thus offered of attributing to a just indignation the cruel anxiety which tortured him. He had anticipated the announcement just made him by the bailiff, and in consequence had taken suitable measures to screen himself in case of discovery; but now a terrible doubt as to the result of the search, and as to the confidence which might be reposed in his statements, arose in his mind. The least unforeseen accident, the slightest oversight in his arrangement, might be his ruin.

"It is scandalous!" he exclaimed, shaking his fist. "To express publicly the opinion that a nobleman could so far degrade himself as to become a secret assassin! I will know who my insolent calumniators are, and I will then see if justice has power at Antwerp to protect an innocent stranger against the defamation of the people!"

"Calm yourself, signor," said Messire Van Schoonhoven; "I comprehend your well-founded indignation; but you are mistaken if you think the perquisition ordered by the burgomaster and constables be, in your regard, aught but a condescension to the clamors of the multitude. As for myself, I beg you not to be displeased with me for accomplishing my duty."

"You need offer no excuse, messire," said Simon, speaking more calmly. "It is but proper and natural to search my garden. I am irritated solely by the insolence of the people. Do your duty, and continue to honor me with a friendship of which I am proud, and of which I will always strive to be worthy."

"When will it be convenient to you, Signor Turchi, to have the officers visit your house?" asked the bailiff.

"The time is perfectly indifferent to me."

"But appoint an hour; I would regret causing you any inconvenience or trouble."

Simon Turchi reflected a moment, and said:

"To-morrow morning urgent affairs demand my attention; come then about noon."

"Suppose we say two o'clock?"

"Very well; between two and three."

"I will call for you to accompany me, signor. Do not be disturbed by this domiciliary visit; it implies no suspicion, but, as I said before, it is a simple condescension to the



populace. Shall I have the honor of meeting you this evening at the house of Mr. Van de Werve?"

"I do not know, messire. Mary's excessive grief affects me so much that it haunts me day and night. Would that I could offer the least consolation to the afflicted young girl! But of what use is it to mingle my tears with hers, when there is no ray of hope to illumine the darkness of her despair?"

Messire Van Schoonhoven pressed Simon's hand.



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“Your sincere friendship for Geronimo does you honor, signor,” he said. “Were he your own brother, you could not be more deeply grieved. And how great is your generosity! Geronimo was your friend, but he was at the same time an obstacle to the accomplishment of the dearest wish of your heart. Through affection for him you have sacrificed your fondest hopes of happiness. But the inexplicable disappearance of Geronimo spreads out before you a brighter future. Time will alleviate the bitterness of Mary’s sorrow, and who so well as yourself, signor, could restore her to happiness—you who possess her father’s confidence and esteem?”

“Speak not of such things,” said Simon. “I would gladly yield all the happiness the future might have in store for me to see my friend once more unharmed. But alas! alas!”

“That does not prevent me, signor, from cherishing the hope that, if Geronimo is really dead, you may one day receive the reward of your sincere friendship and your magnanimous generosity. To-morrow at two o’clock! May God be with you, signor!”

“And may He protect you, messire!”

Simon Turchi watched him until he was lost to sight, and then glanced around in order to note the degree of darkness. He drew his cloak closely around him, and walked rapidly down a side street, which soon brought him before the gate of his own garden. Unlocking the door, he traversed the walk rendered almost invisible by the darkness.

Beaching the house, he lighted a lamp and ascended the stairs to a room, which, in better times, he was accustomed to use as a bed-room, when occasionally he passed the night at the pavilion.

Casting his cloak upon a chair, he seated himself near a table, evidently a prey to distracting thoughts. He drew a phial from his doublet, and fixed his eyes upon it. By degrees, however, the clouds seemed to pass from his mind. He replaced the phial in his doublet, and said, calmly:

“Why am I so terrified? Did I not expect the search? Have not my precautions been well taken? What have I to fear? Julio is already at such a distance that he cannot be overtaken. If the corpse be found in the cellar, I will impute the crime to Julio. My explanation will be such that there will be no room for suspicion. But suppose it should be known! O torturing doubt! What a desperate game! Wealth, honor, power, and the hand of Mary Van de Werve, against my life and the honor of my family! Triumph and happiness on the one hand; disgrace and death on the scaffold on the other! Suppose I go to the bailiff, and accuse Julio of the murder? That would put me above suspicion. But no; the search will be superficial, mere matter of form for the sake of appearances. If Julio as arranged things properly, they will merely cast a glance into the cellar. My presence will be a restraint upon the officers, and will prevent them from pushing their search so far as to imply a suspicion. If they do not find the body, as is probable, the



affair will forever remain secret, and I will have in future no cause for alarm. I must take courage and descend into the cellar, to see how Julio performed the task assigned him before his departure.”



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He approached a large wardrobe, took from it a bottle, poured out a large glass of wine and drank it. Lighted by the lamp, he descended the staircase and approached the cellar; but before proceeding through the subterranean passage, he hesitated and stepped back:

“Singular!” he said; “I am overpowered by fear! I recoil in terror before that dark cave, as though the dead could arise from the grave to take revenge. What! I had the courage to stab him while living, and yet I tremble upon approaching the spot where lie his inanimate remains! Away with this childish terror!”

However bold his words, the Signor Turchi did not become calm, and his heart beat violently as he again slowly approached the entrance to the cellar. He hesitated an instant, as he looked down the long, dark passage, but was about to proceed, when a noise outside the building made him shake with fear.

“What can it be? Am I not mistaken? Some one unlocks the garden-gate! Will I be found here? Am I betrayed?”

After a moment of torturing doubt he fled from the cellar to his room, his hair bristling with terror.

“They open the door of the house! They are within! They come! Great heavens! What can it mean?”

A man appeared on the threshold of the room in which Simon Turchi had taken refuge.

“Julio! it is Julio!” exclaimed Simon, in despair.

The servant reeled under the influence of liquor. His cheeks were flushed, his eyes wandering, and while the smile upon his lips indicated a disagreeable surprise at the presence of his master, it also said plainly that he feared not Simon’s anger. He held in his hand a small wheaten loaf, but he hid it hastily under his doublet as if unwilling for Turchi to see it.

Casting upon him a look of fury, Simon Turchi sprang to his feet, clenched his fist, and exclaimed in a rage:

“This is too much! Infamous traitor! cowardly rascal! whence do you come? Does hell itself bring you here for the destruction of both of us? Speak, base drunkard, and tell me why you are here! Quick, or I will stretch you dead at my feet. I thirst for your blood.”

Julio drew his knife from the scabbard and stammered, in a voice indistinct from intoxication:



“Wait awhile, signor. Wine, good wine has dulled my senses. You want to kill me? It would be very fortunate for one of us to die here—the executioner would have less work. But which of us must first render our account before the supreme tribunal, my knife and your dagger will decide. I am ready.”

“Insolent wretch!” cried Turchi, grinding his teeth, “my own safety and yours compel me to a painful circumspection; but beware how you brave me! Tell me why you are not on your way to Germany.”

“You ask me something that I don’t know myself. But let me see. Just as I was about to leave I went to the *Swan*, and drank a few pints of wine. This morning, when I awoke, I was seated before a table at the *Silver Dice*. How I came there, I cannot tell. It was then too late for me to pass the gate. I determined to wait until to-morrow, and I came here to take a night’s rest before setting out on the journey.”



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“And you played at dice?” said Turchi.

“I think I did; for the rattling of the dice still sounds in my ears.”

“And the money? the two hundred crowns?”

“Be quiet, signor, on that point. I ask you for nothing. What business is it of yours that I have spent or lost a few pieces of gold, provided I leave for Germany to-morrow at daybreak?”

Simon Turchi was like one frenzied.

“Yes,” he exclaimed, “and at the first tavern you meet on the way you will drown your senses with drink, and you will squander my money.”

“Not so, signor; rely upon me—I will leave to-morrow morning at daybreak, and if I drink on the way it will only be to quench a burning thirst.”

Simon Turchi’s eye shone with a sudden and mysterious light, excited by some secret thought. He became calm, and shrugging his shoulders, said quietly, as though he submitted with resignation to the contradictions which he could not avoid:

“I ought, Julio, to punish your want of fidelity. If the bailiff had come here to-day, as I expected, your culpable neglect of duty would have placed us both in the hands of justice. Fortunately the visit will not be made before noon to-morrow. As your negligence has had no evil consequences, I fully pardon you, upon condition that you leave the city before sunrise, and that you travel without stopping until you reach the Rhine.”

“Never fear this time, signor,” replied Julio. “I will pass the night here, and at early dawn I will be beyond the city gate. In the first village I will buy a horse, and I will make such speed that he who would catch me must needs have wings.”

He yawned, stretching his arms above his head, and said:

“I am overpowered by fatigue and sleep. If you have no other directions to give, permit me, signor, to go to bed, that I may be ready for the morning.”

“Then I may rely upon you, Julio?”

“Have no anxiety about my journey; the rising sun will not find me at Antwerp.”

“Are you certain?”



“As certain as I am that a halter hangs over my head, and over yours something quite as disagreeable.”

This jest of his servant made Turchi convulsively contract his lips, but he restrained any expression of feeling, and arose, saying:

“Julio, would you like a glass of good Malmsey?”

“Ah, signor,” replied the servant, “I was just thinking that a cup of Malmsey would relieve my parched throat, when, lo! my desire finds an echo in your heart.”

“One single glass—a parting bumper.”

“One or many, signor, as you wish—either will be welcome; but the excellent wine locked in the cupboard of your room will be particularly acceptable.”

“Well, Julio, come with me, and we will drink to the happy termination of your journey.”

He arose, traversed a passage, and ascended to the upper story. The servant followed him staggering, and trying to steady himself by the wall.



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Having reached his bed-room, Turchi drew a second chair to the table, and said:

“Sit down, Julio; here is a bottle already opened. If I did not fear its effects, we would empty it in honor of your departure.”

Julio sat down, and held the bottle before the lamp.

“Bah!” he exclaimed, “it only contains about four glasses. You need not trouble yourself about that quantity.”

Signor Turchi took two large glasses from the cupboard, placed them on the table, and filled them to the brim.

“A pleasant journey to you, Julio,” he said, “and may you arrive safely at your destination.”

They both emptied their glasses at one draught, but the servant pushed his glass to his master, saying:

“Oh, the divine liquor! it is a cooling balm to my burning throat. One more glass, signor, I beg you.”

Simon filled the glasses again, and said:

“Yes, but on condition that you wait awhile before drinking it.”

Hoping that his obedience might procure him a third glass, Julio resisted the temptation to gratify himself at once.

In the meantime, Turchi contemplated his servant with a peculiar expression. There was a malicious sparkle in his eye, and a smile of triumph on his lips. He evidently had some purpose in thus watching Julio; but what could be his secret design?

At last he pretended that he was about to take the wine, but by a quick movement he upset it.

With an exclamation of impatience he raised the glass, and said:

“It is a sin to spill such wine. Now I have no more in which to drink your health. Get another bottle, Julio, from the cupboard; it is perhaps the last time that we shall drink together. On the third shelf, the bottle with the long neck.”

Julio arose with difficulty from his chair, and staggered to the cupboard.



Simon Turchi thrust his hand in his doublet, and drew out a very small phial. He hastily poured nearly the whole contents into Julio's glass, and immediately concealed the phial; and although he trembled in every limb, he said, calmly:

"A little higher, Julio—to the left; that is the right bottle."

The servant brought the bottle to his master, who uncorked it; but as he was about to pour out the wine, he said:

"Empty your glass, Julio; this is a different wine, and the mixture would spoil both."

Julio drank the wine, but no sooner had he swallowed it than he exclaimed:

"What was in my glass? It had a strange, bitter taste. Did you put poison in it?"

"What a silly idea!" said Turchi, turning pale.

"You are capable of such a deed, signor."

"The lees gave the bad taste, Julio. Take another glass, and it will pass away."

Emptying his glass again, Julio said:

"You are right; it is gone. I never tasted anything in my life more disagreeable."



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Turchi watched his servant narrowly. With assumed carelessness he said:

“Take care, Julio, to be up by daybreak. Go on foot to the village of Lierre; buy a good horse there, and make all possible haste to reach Diest; that is the shortest route, and you will be more likely to escape notice than on the highway. Once in Cologne, you are out of danger; but be careful not to remain there. Merchants from Antwerp frequently visit that city; you might possibly be recognized and arrested. You must leave the territories of the emperor. When the affair is forgotten, and when by my marriage with Miss Van de Werve I will have acquired a considerable fortune, I will send for you, and you will live with me as a friend rather than a servant. You shall spend your days in pleasure, and you will never have cause to regret what you have done for me. But, Julio, you do not answer? Is not such a fate desirable?”

“I am overpowered by sleep,” stammered Julio, almost unintelligibly.

A triumphant smile flitted across Turchi’s face.

“To-morrow at two o’clock,” he continued, “the officers of justice will make a domiciliary visit here, but the bailiff will permit no search which intimates a suspicion. Since you have filled the cellar with fire-wood and empty casks, the bailiff will be satisfied that all is right. Perhaps, Julio, I may be able to recall you in two or three months.”

Julio’s head had fallen upon the table, but from time to time he started and muttered some indistinct words, showing that he was not in a deep sleep. Without once removing his eye from him, Simon continued to speak, although he was convinced that Julio no longer heard his words.

Suddenly Julio groaned. His head and limbs fell as though he had been struck by death; but the heaving of the chest and the deep scarlet of the cheeks proved that he was in a heavy sleep.

Simon quietly contemplated him for a while longer with a smile of satisfaction. Then he arose, approached his servant, shook him violently, and cried out:

“Julio, Julio, wake up!”

Julio did not stir.

“It succeeds according to my wishes,” he said. “The poison is doing its work. He is deaf and insensible; he reposes in an eternal sleep. Life will be extinguished by degrees until sleep makes way for death. But I must not tarry. I must act quickly and forget nothing. And first the money!”

He searched Julio’s pocket, and found in it one hundred and twenty crowns. After counting them on the table, he exclaimed:



“Eighty crowns spent already! It is impossible. He has either lost them at the gaming-table, or been robbed while he was sleeping in the tavern.”

Still doubtful, he examined his garments, and found in a purse under his girdle the twenty crowns which he had destined for his mother.

“Ah, ah!” said Simon, laughing; “I had not all; I hear the sound of gold.”



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He put the twenty crowns with the rest of the money, and having satisfied himself that no more remained on the person of Julio, he was about to transfer the crowns to his pocket, when a sudden idea occurred to his mind.

“If I leave all this money on his person, they might think he had been paid to commit the deed; if I leave nothing, there will be no reason to conclude that he killed the Signor Geronimo to rob him. I wonder how much money Geronimo generally carried about him. I should suppose five or six crowns, or perhaps ten. I will leave six crowns and all the small change. And the keys? He must keep them, or, of course, he could not have entered without my knowledge. But should he be roused to consciousness by the death-agony, he might have sufficient strength to get out. I will leave him all the keys but that of the outer building. Iron bars render the place secure; he could not even enter the garden. Now I will put the phial in his doublet—no, in the pocket of his girdle; it will be as easily found. I will remove the bottles and everything which could indicate the presence of two persons.”

He locked up the bottles and glasses, arranged the chairs, and wiped up the wine which had been spilled on the table and the floor.

While thus engaged, he muttered to himself:

“I must not remain longer. I myself must go to the bailiff and accuse Julio of the murder. Shall I go this evening? No; they might come and find him alive, and a powerful antidote might perhaps rouse him from sleep. To-morrow, then—to-morrow morning. But how shall I explain the affair? When and how did he reveal his crime? Night will suggest a means. All is done. I will go home and appear calm and cheerful.”

He threw his cloak around his shoulders, took the lamp from the table, and walked to the door. There he stopped for a moment to contemplate his victim and precipitately descended the staircase. At the foot of the steps he extinguished the light, traversed the garden, opened the gate, and disappeared in the darkness.

CHAPTER XI.

FOOD AT LAST—DEATH OF JULIO.

When Julio left the cellar for the purpose of procuring bread, Geronimo cast himself on his knees, full of gratitude to God, to return thanks for the unexpected deliverance.

Julio had said “soon,” but an hour passed, then another, then many more, and he came not.



A painful doubt began to take possession of Geronimo's mind. Had an accident happened to Julio? Had he perhaps cruelly abandoned his victim? Had he set out for Germany with the certainty that hunger would kill him whom the dagger had spared?

The unfortunate cavalier had no means of measuring the flight of time. What in the immutable darkness of his prison seemed to him a century, might in reality be only a few hours, and the promised bread would soon appear to his eyes as the star of safety—in a quarter of an hour, in a minute—that very instant.



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By such reflections Geronimo sought to endure patiently the pangs of hunger. He put his ear to the keyhole and ceased breathing that he might catch the slightest sound. Alas! hour after hour passed in unbroken silence. Although Geronimo knew not whether it was day or night, his increasing sufferings were to him a sure indication of the passage of time. For a while he encouraged himself by the thought that Julio would not bring him the promised bread until dawn, and that he would give him at the same time food and liberty.

This hope by degrees diminished, and at last vanished entirely. The suffering young man could not longer deceive either his body or his mind; it became evident to him that the hour which he had hoped would restore him to freedom had long passed.

He had been abandoned—devoted to a cruel martyrdom, a frightful death! He was then to die in the midst of the torments of hunger—to die slowly in indescribable suffering, and fall into the yawning grave prepared for him!

Struck with terror by the conviction thus forced upon him, the unfortunate cavalier arose despairingly and ran panting and crying around the cellar, as though he could thus escape the death which menaced him.

The pain of his wounds was increased by this violent and feverish agitation. His breast heaved under his difficult respiration, but the gnawing hunger which agonized him made these sufferings seem light. Falling to the ground from exhaustion, he commenced, as soon as he had gained a little strength, his struggle against the tortures of hungry. At times his despair was cheered by the thought that even yet Julio might come. But Julio was plunged by the influence of poison into a mortal sleep, and in all probability would appear before Geronimo at the judgment-seat of God.

Hoping against hope, the young man seated himself on the ground. The violence of his sufferings seemed to abate and leave him at rest for a few moments. His thoughts wandered to all he loved upon earth, but the respite was of short duration. Soon the agony he endured drew from him piercing cries. During his long martyrdom no torment had equalled the present. It seemed as though he were being devoured by flames, or as if molten lead were coursing through his veins.

He writhed in convulsions, beat his breast, and in heart-rending accents called upon God for help. But nothing relieved his horrible sufferings.

He filled the air with his groans and screams, he beat the door with blind fury, tore the flesh from his fingers in his useless efforts to make an opening in his prison-walls, and ran from side to side as though the pangs of hunger had driven him mad.

At last, exhausted and convinced that there was no escape, that he must soon enter into his last agony, he threw himself upon the ground, bowed his head and joined his



hands in prayer, begging for resignation to meet the death which would end his cruel martyrdom. His mind now appeared clear, and he was perfectly conscious, for after a while he shed a torrent of tears. His lips moved, giving utterance to confused sounds, but by degrees his words became more distinct, and fixing his eye in the darkness on the spot where he knew the grave had been dug, he said:



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“No more hope! All is over. I must die! The grave yawns to receive me. Alas! what a place for my mortal remains! Forgotten, unknown, concealed by the darkness of a horrible crime! Not a tear will fall upon the tomb of the unfortunate victim; not a cross will mark the spot where I lie; not a prayer will be whispered over my body! Death approaches. Ah! I must not thus cling to life; I will pray and lift my hands in supplication to God. He alone—”

He stopped under the influence of a sudden emotion.

“Heavens! did I not hear a noise?”

He listened breathlessly for a time to catch the indistinct sound he thought he had heard; but he was mistaken.

“Why should I hope, when hope is no longer possible? Let me rather seek strength in the consideration of the better life which awaits me. The death I endure will purify me from all my sins. If God, in His impenetrable designs, has appointed this to be my earthly fate, He will, in His mercy, take into account before his judgment-seat what I have innocently suffered here below. Consoling hope, which, encourages me to look with confidence into eternity!

“And yet my life was so happy! Everything in the world smiled upon me; my path was strewn with roses; the future spread out before me like a cloudless sky resplendent with stars. God had not only given me health, fortune, and peace of heart, but also the hope of uniting my fate with that of a lovely young girl. Mary Van de Werve! the incarnation of all that men admire and heaven loves: virtue, piety, modesty, charity, beauty, love! Alas! alas! must I leave all that? Must I say a last adieu, renounce my hopes, and never see her again? Die and sleep forever in an unknown tomb, while she lives!”

A cry of anguish escaped him. But it was caused rather by his train of thought than by the adieu he had just spoken, for he added, in a suppliant voice:

“Pardon, O Lord, pardon! Thy creature clings to life; but be not angry with the weakness of my nature. Should I die by the terrible death of starvation, I humbly accept Thy holy will, and I bless Thy hand which deals the blow! God of mercy, grant that I may find grace with Thee!”

Calmed by this invocation, he resumed, with less emotion and in a tone which proved that his soul had received consolation:

“And if I be permitted in my last hour to offer to Thee my supplications, I pray Thee, O God of mercy, to spare my uncle, and let not my misfortune deprive him also of life. He was my father and benefactor; he taught me to live in the fear of Thy holy name. By the cruel sufferings which I endure, by my terrible death, have pity on him! Let Thy angels



also guard and protect the pious and pure young girl who is before Thee as an immaculate dove! Jesus, Saviour of mankind, on the cross you prayed to your heavenly Father for those who crucified Thee. Demand not an account of my blood from my enemy. Pardon him, lead him back to the path of virtue, and after death grant him eternal rest! My strength fails; the sweat of death is on my brow. O my God! in this, my last hour, grant me the grace to die with Thy love alone in my heart, and Thy holy name alone upon my lips!"



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The last words of this prayer had scarcely fallen from his lips, when he cried aloud, arose trembling, and eagerly fixed his eyes upon the opposite wall, upon which a faint streak of light flickered.

“O my God! what means this?” he exclaimed. “Light? light? a voice? Is some one coming? Is there still hope? I shall not die! Cruel dream! Frightful illusion! But no, it is indeed a light; it becomes brighter. I hear a human voice. Alas! this suspense is worse than death!”

Tottering from weakness, and supporting himself by the sides of the wall, he gained the door, and trembling between hope and fear, he put his eye to the keyhole in order to discover who was approaching his person.

He saw in the distance a man with a lamp in his hand; but his gestures were so strange, and his countenance so singular, that he was at a loss to know whether it were a human being, or only a creation of his own disordered brain.

Still he heard confused sounds in the passage; a voice seemed to complain, curse, and call for aid.

By degrees the mysterious apparition drew nearer, and Geronimo recognized the servant of Simon Turchi; but why was Julio writhing in such horrible convulsions? Why was his face so horribly contorted? Why did he threaten and rage in such harsh accents?

A horrible conviction forced itself upon Geronimo’s mind. Julio had sought in drink the courage necessary to accomplish the work which fate exacted of him. He had thus drowned his senses, and had come now to slay his victim without mercy.

The thought for the moment roused his fears; but he remembered that he had just offered to God his life in expiation of his sins. He retired to the other side of the cellar, knelt by the side of the grave, and with a smile upon his lips and his eyes lifted to heaven, he calmly awaited the fatal blow.

He heard Julio trying to insert the key in the lock as if his hand were unsteady. He noticed that there was no finger in his tone of voice; on the contrary, the cries which escaped him were rather those of alarm and distress; but before he had time for reflection the door opened.

Julio put down the lamp as if his strength had entirely failed him, and fell upon the ground, exclaiming in a supplicating voice:

“O signor, help, help! I am poisoned! A burning fire consumes me! Take pity on me! For the love of God, deliver me from this torture!”



“Poisoned!” exclaimed Geronimo, hastening to Julio. “What has happened to you? The mark of death is on your face!”

“Simon Turchi gave me last night poisoned wine, in order to destroy the witness who could prove your death by his hand. He made me pay Bufferio to assassinate you. He wishes to marry Mary Van de Werve, and he desires to remove any cause of fear that his happiness may be disturbed. Ah! the poison consumes me!”

“Tell me, Julio, what I can do for your relief.”



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Saying this, he knelt by Julio, and threw open his doublet to give him air:

“Thanks, thanks, O my God! here is bread!” exclaimed Geronimo, almost wild with joy, and snatching with feverish haste the small loaf which Julio had concealed, and which he had entirely forgotten since his fatal stupor.

The young man, absorbed in satisfying his devouring hunger, no longer heeded Julio’s complaints, but having soon appeased its cravings, he took his hands, saying:

“I bless you, Julio, and may the omnipotent God reward you in heaven. Tell me what I can do to save you. Set me at liberty, and I will fly for physician and priest. The keys—quick, the keys!”

“Alas!” said Julio, in a hopeless voice, “my cruel murderer took from me the keys of the door. We are shut up in the building. But I cannot die thus, consumed by poison, without confession, without hope of pardon for my soul! Go up-stairs, signor, call aloud, break open the door, wrest the iron bars from the windows. Collect all your strength, take pity on me and help me!”

Geronimo seized the keys, and, lighted by the lamp, he hastily traversed the subterranean passage, and mounted the staircase.

The gray dawn was appearing in the east, but to the eyes of the young man so long accustomed to utter darkness it was almost as bright as noonday.

Convinced that Julio’s condition demanded immediate aid, Geronimo hastily tried all the keys in the exterior door, pulled all the bolts, endeavored to wrench the door from the hinges, and worked with so much energy that at last he fell from weakness.

Taking a short rest, he arose, threw up the windows, shook the iron bars, ran up-stairs and called aloud for help. But all his efforts were useless—the pavilion was too far removed from any habitation to permit him to indulge the hope that his voice, weak as it was, could be heard.

In running through the building—almost maddened by despair—to seek an outlet, he entered the kitchen, where he perceived a vessel full of water. The sight filled him with joy. Perhaps water, taken in large quantities, might deaden the effects of the poison and save Julio’s life. At any rate, he had no other remedy, and as it was his only hope, he grasped at it as if it were an inspiration from heaven.

Filling a pitcher, he ran with it to the cellar, and radiant with joy, approached Julio, who had barely strength to ask in a feeble voice:

“Is the priest coming? Will the doctor be here? Ah! it is too late!”



“Drink,” said Geronimo, holding the pitcher to his lips; “the water will cool the inflammation and refresh you.”

Julio took the water.

“Thank you, signor; it is useless, the water does me no good.”

“Take more, I beg you, Julio,—as much as you can.”

Julio obeyed mechanically and nearly emptied the pitcher. His respiration became very labored, and the sweat ran in big drops from his brow.



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“Do you feel better, Julio?” asked the young man.

“A little better; the heat is not so burning.”

“There is still hope!” exclaimed Geronimo, joyfully. “Take courage, Julio; have confidence in the mercy of God. When all human aid fails us, then God gives his omnipotent assistance.”

“But,” said Julio, “my heart beats so feebly, my limbs are benumbed. Signor, I am dying. The poison is killing me.”

“Die? Julio! You have delivered me from death, and shall I be powerless to save you? What shall I do? O my God, what can I try?”

“Think no more of it, signor,” said the dying man. “I feel that there is no hope. Alas! I was partly the cause of your bitter sufferings: I pushed you into the chair; I intended to kill you, the deliverer of my blind mother! Take pity on me! Let not your just malediction follow my poor soul into eternity. Pardon me, signor, pardon!”

“Speak not thus, Julio. But for you, that yawning grave would now cover my corpse. Shall I refuse pardon to you who spared my life? No; I will pray for you, I will give alms for the repose of your soul. Have confidence in the goodness of God.”

“Confidence?” said Julio, in a dying voice. “I shudder to think of the judgment which awaits me. In this, my death agony, I see with frightful clearness. I dare not hope in God’s mercy. I have done nothing to merit it. A dark veil is before my eyes.”

The death-rattle was in his throat.

Geronimo passed his arm around his neck and raised his head, and seeing Julio’s eyes fixed upon him, he said, tenderly and fervently:

“Julio, listen to me! You say you dare not hope in the mercy of God’ Have you forgotten that Jesus Christ shed his blood to redeem fallen man? Do you not know that there is joy before the angels when a sinner, by sincere repentance, escapes the eternal enemy of man and enters triumphant into heaven? You repent, do you not? You sincerely repent?”

Julio bowed affirmatively.

“Ah!” exclaimed Geronimo, “if I cannot save your body from death, at least let me keep your soul from eternal torments. Oh! if I could thus repay the debt of gratitude I owe you! Julio, were God to prolong your life, would you renounce evil and return courageously and sincerely to the path of duty and virtue? You say yes? You implore God’s mercy, do you not? You have confidence in the inexhaustible treasure of his



goodness? Then, Julio, raise your dying eyes to heaven, direct your last thoughts to Him who is the source of all mercy, and with full confidence let your soul wing its flight to the supreme tribunal. Already from the highest heaven God absolves the repentant sinner!”

A triumphant hope illumined the countenance of Julio as he endeavored to raise his eyes to heaven.

“Saved—his soul is saved!” exclaimed Geronimo, transported with a pious joy.

A slight convulsion passed over the limbs of Julio, his muscles became paralyzed, his head fell heavily on Geronimo’s shoulder, and drawing his last breath, he murmured, almost unintelligibly:



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“Mercy! O my God!”

“He is dead!” said Geronimo. “May thy soul receive my fraternal embrace in its passage to eternity! May this mark of reconciliation weigh in the balance of eternal justice!”

He bent over the dead; but as if contact with the corpse had deprived him of his little remaining strength, he fell as it were lifeless. Not a limb moved, his arms dropped motionless, his eyes closed, it seemed that his soul had also taken its flight to heaven to accompany the soul of Julio before God’s judgment seat.

CHAPTER XII.

IS IT HIS GHOST?—THE GUILTY EXPOSED.

It was scarcely eight o’clock in the morning when Signor Deodati was on his way to the residence of Mr. Van de Werve.

The old merchant was walking very slowly, with his eyes cast down. From time to time he shook his head, as if disturbed by painful thoughts. His countenance expressed dissatisfaction rather than sorrow; indeed, it might even be said to indicate angry and bitter feelings.

The servant who opened the door ushered him into a parlor and went to call his master. Deodati threw himself into a chair, covered his face with his hands, and was so absorbed in thought that he was not aware of Mr. Van de Werve’s entrance.

“Good morning, signor,” said the Flemish noble, saluting him. “Your early visit encourages me to hope that you have news of our poor Geronimo.”

“Bad news, Mr. Van de Werve, bad news,” said the old man, with tearful eyes. “Sit down near me, for I have not power to raise my voice.”

“I notice, signor, that you are very pale. Are you ill?”

“My emotion has its origin in something worse than illness. Day before yesterday Signor Turchi asserted in your presence that Geronimo had lost a considerable sum at play, and that he had fled the country to escape my just indignation. Great as was my confidence in Turchi, I could not credit the truth of this revelation. I determined to seek in my nephew’s accounts the marks of his ingratitude, or rather the proofs of his innocence. I passed a portion of the night in calculating over and over again; for the invariable result was so frightful that my mind and heart refused to accept the evidence of my senses. The sum lost in gambling by my nephew is incredible.”



“What!” exclaimed Mr. Van de Werve, “then the Signor Turchi was not mistaken in his suspicions?”

“Ten thousand crowns!” said Deodati sighing.

“Ten thousand crowns!” replied Mr. Van de Werve. “Impossible! That is a fortune of itself.”



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“And yet it is true. There is a deficit of ten thousand crowns in the money vault of the house, and there are exactly ten thousand crowns unaccounted for on the books. Not a line, not a mark refers in any manner to the employment or destination of this sum. Evidently it must have been used otherwise than in the business transactions of the house, and as Geronimo himself told the Signor Turchi that he had lost a considerable amount at play, I am forced in spite of myself to admit the painful truth. Ten thousand crowns! Can neither virtue nor fidelity be found upon earth? A child whom I treated as my own son, whom I loved with blind affection, and over whose welfare I would have watched as long as I lived. And this is the return for all my love! Ah! signor, this ingratitude is like a dagger in my heart.”

Mr. Van de Werve gazed abstractedly as if in deep thought. Then he said, seriously:

“You are truly unhappy, signor, and I commiserate your sorrow. How can it be possible? All is deceit and perfidy. Geronimo seemed the soul of virtue and loyalty; he lived with so much economy and conducted himself so honorably, that to those who knew him not he might have appeared either a poor man or a precocious miser. And this tranquil, modest, prudent young man loses at the gaming-table ten thousand crowns, the property of his benefactor! His laudable course of conduct was but a base hypocrisy!”

“And nevertheless,” murmured the old Deodati, “my unfortunate nephew had a pure and loving heart! Might not his blindness have been the effect of one solitary and momentary error? Perhaps so. Man sometimes meets fatal temptations which attract him irresistibly, but to which he yields only once in his life.”

“Why then did he fly, and thus acknowledge his guilt? No, signor, no excuse can palliate such misdeeds. I burn with indignation at the thought that such signal favors have met with such cold and base ingratitude. The idea of your affliction restrains me from speaking of the outrage done my daughter. Fortunately, the reputation and social position of my family is such as to screen it from the consequences of such an act. But, signor, I hope you will agree with me that there can no longer be a question of an alliance between my daughter and your nephew. He may return and obtain your pardon, but that will not change my determination. From this day forward the Signor Geronimo is as a stranger whom we have never known.”

Deodati regarded the irritated nobleman with tearful eyes, and seemed to deprecate the inflexible decree.

Mr. Van de Werve took his hand, and said in a calmer manner:

“Be reasonable, signor, and do not let yourself be blinded by affection. What a dishonor to my name, were I to permit a man with so tarnished a reputation to enter my family! Could I confide the happiness of my good and noble child to one who was not



withdrawn from a culpable love of play by life-long benefits? Could I accept as my son a man whom I could not esteem, whom on the contrary I would despise for his ingratitude to you? Acknowledge with me that such a union is impossible, and let us talk no more of it. Be still my friend, however, as long as you remain at Antwerp.”



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The merchant shook his head, and after a few moments' silence, he replied:

"Alas! I ought to admit that there is no hope of realizing this honorable alliance. What happiness Geronimo has staked on the cast of a die! I thank you, Mr. Van de Werve, for your proffered friendship, but I shall not remain at Antwerp. To-day I shall beg Signor Turchi to settle up the affairs of the house in this city. Now that I have no one in the world to care for, none for whom to work and amass money, I shall retire from commerce. I have ordered the *Il Salvatore* to be provisioned, and I shall set sail by the first favorable wind."

"You are right, signor. By returning to your own beautiful country, you will the sooner forget this misfortune."

"God knows when I will revisit my country!" replied the old man.

"Are you not going to Italy?" demanded Mr. Van de Werve.

"No, sir; but to England."

"In search of your nephew? Signor Turchi led us to suppose that he had sought refuge in that island. I admire your unbounded love for a man so little deserving of it; but, signor, you require rest. Follow my advice: go to Italy, and do not shorten your life by the sorrows which may await you in England."

"The advice is no doubt good," replied Deodati; "but I cannot follow it. However guilty he may be, Geronimo is the only son of my deceased brother, whom I promised on his death-bed to watch over his child as if he were my own. Were I to abandon Geronimo entirely, he might be pushed by want and misery into the path of vice, perhaps of infamy. I will fulfil my duty to the last. If I love him less than formerly, at least I will save him from utter ruin."

"What generosity!" exclaimed Mr. Van de Werve, in admiration. "You travel about in search of your nephew; you endanger your health. I foresee that he has but to speak to obtain pardon. And this great sacrifice, this magnanimous affection meets with such a return! It is frightful!"

"No, sir," replied Deodati, "I will not pardon Geronimo. He will never be the same to me. Should I find him, or should he return to me, I will give him an income sufficient to keep him from want; that being done, I shall renounce the world and retire into a cloister, to await there in solitude and peace the time when it may please God to call me to himself."

Mr. Van de Werve heard the street-door open, and said eagerly to the old merchant:



“Signor, my daughter is at church and may return at any moment. I beg you not to speak of these things in her presence. Since the disappearance of Geronimo, she does nothing but weep and pray; no consideration alleviates her sorrow, nothing consoles her. If she were suddenly to lose all hope, it might cause her death. Heavens! Signor Turchi, what has happened to him?”

He arose hastily and regarded in astonishment Simon Turchi, who entered and attempted to speak, but the words seemed to die upon his lips; for he stood trembling in the centre of the room, uttering unintelligible sounds. He was pale as death.



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Deodati arose also, and looked inquiringly at Turchi.

The latter said, hurriedly:

“I went to the house of the bailiff; he was not at home. He has been sent for, and he will be here immediately with his officers to accompany me to my garden. Oh! I have terrible news to communicate; but my mind wanders, I am losing my senses. I can tell nothing, particularly to you, Signor Deodati. Unhappy old man! Why did God reserve such a trial for your old age?”

“Another misfortune? Speak, Simon, speak,” said Deodati, in suppliant tones, and trembling from anxiety.

Turchi fell, as if from exhaustion, upon a chair, and said, in a voice broken by sobs:

“No, signor, ask me nothing; I could not break your heart by such stunning tidings. Alas! alas! who anticipated such a misfortune? My unhappy friend! my poor Geronimo!”

A torrent of tears fell from his eyes, and while Deodati and Mr. Van de Werve begged him to tell the cause of big extraordinary emotion, he stammered:

“Oh! let me be silent; despair tortures my heart. I can tell no one but the bailiff; he will soon be here. If I could but doubt! But no, it is too true; there is no more hope! May the God of mercy receive his poor soul into heaven!”

“Of whom do you speak?” exclaimed Deodati. “His soul? Whose soul? Geronimo’s?”

Steps were heard in the vestibule. Simon Turchi went to the door, and said:

“Here is the bailiff! He will know the secret which is breaking my heart.”

The bailiff entered the room, looked around in surprise, and at last said to Simon Turchi, who continued to talk confusedly:

“You have sent for me in all haste, in order to make a terrible revelation; I am here with my officers. Have you discovered Geronimo’s assassins? Speak, Simon, and tell us what you know.”

“So horrible is this secret, messire, that my tongue refuses to tell it. Ah! if I could forever —”

“Calm yourself, signor,” said the bailiff, with perfect self-possession. “What have you learned?”



“But—but I must be alone with you. The news I have to communicate must not be revealed before Signor Deodati.”

The old man said, with tearful eyes:

“You are cruel, Signor Simon! What could you say more terrible? You speak of Geronimo’s soul; you announce his death, and yet you leave me in this horrible doubt. Speak, I conjure you.”

All that Simon Turchi had said was only a deception practised upon his auditors, in order to make them believe that grief had affected his mind, and to prepare the way for his revelation.

At last he appeared to yield to necessity, and said:



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“God grant that the frightful news may not afflict you as it did me! Listen! you know that two days ago my servant Julio left my service because I severely reproved his irregularities. This disquieted me, because I had noticed that he was pursued by some secret remorse. Just now, hardly a half hour ago, I left my residence, and was going towards the Dominican church to pray for my poor friend. On the way I thought of my servant Julio, and feared that in his despair he might have taken his life. When I was near the bridge, I heard my own name timidly pronounced. I turned and saw Julio. I commenced to reproach him with his absence, but putting his finger on his lips, he whispered:

“Signor, I beg you to follow me; I have a secret to reveal to you.’

“His manner and tone of voice were so peculiar that I accompanied him to a retired spot. His revelation caused me such intense grief that I could hardly stand, and I was obliged to support myself against the wall as I received the confession of the penitent assassin.”

A cry of horror escaped Deodati. Eager to hear the remainder, Mr. Van de Werve gazed fixedly upon the narrator. The bailiff was more calm—he listened attentively and nodded his head, as if he foresaw the conclusion of Turchi’s narrative.

“I hardly dare continue,” he said. “My soul revolts—but I must disregard my feelings,” and in a more tranquil manner, he resumed:

“Shuddering with horror, I heard Julio say:

“Master, I have committed a frightful murder. Remorse pursues me as a malediction from God. I shall put an end to my guilty life. In an hour I shall be in eternal torments, but I wish the body of my victim to be buried in holy ground. Go to your pavilion. In the lowest cellar, at the extremity of the subterranean passage, you will find the corpse of Signor Geronimo buried.”

Tears fell fast from the eyes of Signor Deodati, and sobs convulsed his frame.

Turchi continued:

“Signor Geronimo!’ I exclaimed, in terror. ‘Have you killed my poor friend?’

“Yes, I put to death Signor Geronimo. I needed money to spend at the taverns, and you would not give it to me. I killed him in order to get the money he might have about him. Adieu! This very day all will be over with me.’ Before I had sufficiently recovered from the shock to think of seizing Julio, he had disappeared. Probably, to-day—”

“Heavens!” exclaimed Simon Turchi, “I hear Miss Van de Werve.”



“For the love of God, not a word in her presence,” said Mr. Van de Werve.

Mary entered the room, looking around anxiously. She had seen the officers at the door, and she seemed to inquire of her father the cause of their presence.

She remarked her father’s pallor and embarrassment. Simon Turchi looked down, as if in despair. Deodati covered his face with his hands.

A cry of anguish escaped the young girl, and she glanced in turns at her father, Deodati, Turchi, and the bailiff; but they each seemed anxious to avoid her eye.



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“Go to your room, Mary,” said Mr. Van de Werve.

“Give me this proof of affection. Ask nothing.”

The young girl, struck by these evidences of some misfortune, ran to her father and exclaimed, joining her hands:

“Speak, father, and tell me what has happened. Leave me not in this terrible suspense. Tell me that they have not found Geronimo’s dead body. Alas! he is dead! Is it not so?”

Throwing her arms around her father’s neck, she wept bitterly, conjuring him to tell her the cause of their emotion.

Without giving her any explanation, Mr. Van de Werve attempted to lead his daughter out of the room; but she, like one crazed by grief, released her hand from her father’s, fell upon her knees before Turchi, and exclaimed:

“By the love you bore him, signor, take pity on me and tell me what has happened to him. Let me not leave the room under the frightful conviction that he is dead!”

Turchi remained silent, gazing upon her with an expression of profound sadness.

“You, too, are implacable, inexorable!” she said, rising.

“But you, at least—his uncle, his father—will be more merciful.”

She ran to the weeping merchant, gently forced his hands from his face, and conjured him, in piteous accents, to give her some information which would relieve the torturing suspense.

The old Deodati, still weeping, threw his arms around her neck, and murmured:

“God bless you, my child, for your love. Let us pray for him!”

Mr. Van de Werve had left the room to call Petronilla. He returned with her, and said to his daughter:

“Mary, go with your duenna. You must not remain here longer.”

The young girl seemed not to hear her father’s words, for she was immovable as if petrified by grief.

He added, in an impatient, severe tone:

“Mary, leave the room. I wish it; I command it. Obey me.”



She arose and walked slowly towards the door. Tears flowed down her cheeks; she supported her trembling limbs by leaning on the arm of her duenna. Mr. Van de Werve feared she would lose consciousness before reaching her own apartment.

All, with the exception of the perfidious Turchi, were moved by compassion for the unhappy young girl.

As the duenna opened the door to let her mistress pass out, strange sounds were heard in the vestibule.

Mary started, and stepped back into the room, as though in presence of some apparition.

“It is his ghost, his spirit,” she exclaimed, “arisen from the grave to demand vengeance upon his murderers!”

She gazed with intense emotion, then added, in accents of the wildest joy:

“He smiles upon me; it is himself! He lives! It is Geronimo!”

Pronouncing this cherished name, she fell insensible in the arms of her attendant, who, assisted by the bailiff, carried her to an armchair.



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Signor Geronimo entered. His face was as pale and fleshless as that of a skeleton. The wound he had received in his neck appeared like a large spot of clotted blood—his garments were disordered, soiled, and blood stained. He seemed really a spectre just arisen from the tomb.

As soon as Turchi recognized his victim, he recoiled, uttering a cry of terror; and imagining that God had permitted a miracle in order to punish his crime, he extended his trembling hands to Geronimo, as if to implore pardon.

The young man cast upon him a look of disgust and contempt, and exclaimed:

“You here, assassin? Tremble, for the Supreme Judge will demand of you an account of my blood and of Julio’s death.”

A murmur of surprise and terror ran through the room; all eyes were fixed on Simon Turchi, who seemed crushed by Geronimo’s words.

Having thus addressed Turchi, Geronimo rushed into his uncle’s arms and embraced him in a transport of joy.

“Oh, unexpected happiness!” he exclaimed. “It is permitted me to see my uncle again in this world! I know you have suffered; you have suffered as a father deprived of his only child! No more sorrow now. I will repay you for your tender affection; I will love you; I will show my gratitude; I will venerate you. Ah! bless the God of mercy, who has saved me from the fangs of that tiger thirsting for my blood! But Mary, where is Mary? Ah! there she is! My beloved friend, what has happened?”

He ran to the insensible young girl, knelt before her, and endeavored to recall her to consciousness by every endearing epithet.

In the meantime Mr. Van de Werve aided the duenna in her exertions to restore animation. Taking advantage of this, Simon Turchi walked towards the door with the intention of making his escape; but the bailiff discovering his design, drew his sword and placed himself in the doorway.

Then Simon Turchi understood the fate awaiting him. He bowed his head and covered his face with his hands. He trembled in every limb, and his breast heaved with sighs of anguish. Every expectation of escape by flight, or by making an appeal for pardon, vanished as he beheld the indignant expression of the bailiff.

Mary at last recovered from the faint into which she had fallen. She looked around her in surprise, as if ignorant of what had happened; but when Geronimo’s voice fell in joyous accents on her ear, a bright smile irradiated her countenance, and she exclaimed:



“It is not a dream! He lives! I see him once more! Geronimo! Geronimo!”

The young noble was too overpowered to do more than call the name of his beloved.

Only a few minutes had elapsed since Geronimo’s entrance; all were too much moved to express their surprise in words. But the bailiff resolved to put an end to this harrowing scene by the performance of a painful duty.

He said, in an imperative manner:



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“Signor Geronimo, be pleased to interrupt for a moment the expression of your happiness. By the authority of the law I ask you what has happened, and why you stigmatize the Signor Turchi as an assassin. Approach, and obey my order.”

Turchi, foreseeing that his frightful crime was about to be revealed, writhed convulsively and was covered with shame and confusion. He dared not look upon his accuser.

“Declare the truth,” ordered the bailiff.

“Five or six weeks ago,” said Geronimo, “Simon Turchi told me that unforeseen circumstances made it an imperative necessity for him to raise the sum of ten thousand crowns, adding that if he did not succeed in obtaining it immediately, the credit of his house would be gone, and that he himself would be irretrievably ruined. He needed the sum, he said, only for one month. I lent him the ten thousand crowns, and at his earnest solicitation, in order to conceal the knowledge of this loan from the clerks, I made no entry upon the books of the transaction, but was satisfied with an acknowledgment in writing of the debt.”

Old Deodati made an exclamation of joy, ran to his nephew, and embraced him affectionately.

“God be praised! Dear Geronimo, you restore me to life. That wicked man tried to persuade me that you had lost ten thousand crowns at play. You were too virtuous, too grateful for that, my beloved boy!”

“Observe the respect due the law, Signor Deodati. Continue your statement, Signor Geronimo.”

“What an odious falsehood!” said the young man.

Then turning to the bailiff, he continued:

“When we last met in this house, Signor Turchi told me that a foreign merchant, who wished to remain unknown, would repay me the ten thousand crowns. I was to go to his country-house alone, and secretly to return the note I held, and receive reliable bills of exchange upon Italy. When I went, Julio, Simon Turchi’s servant, pushed me into a chair prepared as a trap, in which my body was caught and held immovable by steel springs. Then Simon entered with a dagger in his hand; he took from me the note, and destroyed it in my presence. He attempted to stab me in the breast, but the blow was warded off by a copper amulet which I wore around my neck. I then received in my neck what I considered a mortal wound; I felt my blood flowing freely, and I bade, as I supposed, an eternal adieu to life.”

Old Deodati, without being aware of it, had drawn his sword from the scabbard as if he were about to pierce Turchi to the heart; but he was restrained by a look of severity from



the bailiff, although he continued playing with the hilt, and muttering in an undertone menaces against the murderer.



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“I awoke to consciousness,” continued Geronimo, “in a dark dungeon; I was lying beside a grave which had been dug to receive my remains. When Julio returned to bury my corpse, he found me living. He was about to kill me, but he recognized the amulet I wore around my neck, and I was saved. The old blind woman who gave me the amulet as a recompense for delivering her from the hands of the Moslems was Julio’s mother. Last night Signor Turchi gave poisoned wine to Julio, who died in my arms, declaring to me that Signor Turchi hired Bufferio to assassinate me. I labored for hours before I succeeded in obtaining egress from the garden. Now behold me saved from a frightful death through the miraculous protection of God, and restored to all that is dear to me on earth!”

The bailiff’s voice was heard, issuing his commands, in the vestibule. Turchi comprehended the order. He cast himself on his knees, extended his hands, and weeping, cried out:

“Oh! Messire Van Schoonhoven,—Geronimo,—I have been guilty of a frightful crime. I deserve your hatred, your contempt and death; but have pity on me! Spare me the shame of the scaffold; do not cover my family with eternal infamy. Exile me to the ends of the earth; but pardon, pardon, deliver me not to the executioner!”

Five officers of justice appeared at the door.

“What are your commands?” asked the chief.

“Bind the signor’s hands behind his back!”

“Heavens! bind my hands like a thief!” exclaimed Turchi.

“Bind the hands of a nobleman?” repeated the chief in surprise.

“Execute my order immediately! This nobleman is an infamous robber and a cowardly assassin. Cast him in the deepest dungeon; he shall pay the penalty of his crime upon the scaffold.”

The command was promptly obeyed, and Turchi, in spite of his resistance, was dragged from the room followed by the bailiff.

Mary and Geronimo wept with joy. Deodati claimed their attention saying:

“My dear children, let us fulfil a sacred duty of gratitude. God has so visibly protected innocence that the feeling of His presence in our midst overpowers me. Your hopes will become a reality. Let us pray!”

He knelt before the crucifix, bowed his head and joined his hands.



Geronimo and Mary knelt beside the old man, Mr. Van de Werve behind them.

For a long time they lifted their grateful hearts in thanksgiving to the God of goodness.

CHAPTER XIII.

MARY VAN DE WERVE'S (NOW MADAME GERONIMO DEODATI) DEPARTURE FOR ITALY—THE PUNISHMENT OF SIMON TURCHI.

It was six o'clock in the morning.

The height of the sun indicated that the warm season of summer had replaced the mild month of May. It was apparently a festival day at Antwerp, for through all the gates people poured from the surrounding country into the city. The streets were filled with persons of all ages, who, talking and laughing, hastened to the centre of the city, as though they anticipated some magnificent spectacle.



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Before Mr. Van de Werve's residence was a compact mass of citizens who seemed impatient at the delay. Through a sentiment of respect, they were perfectly quiet, speaking in very low tones, and making way to afford a passage through the crowd every time that a cavalier or any notable personage presented himself for admission into the house.

The attraction to the centre of the city must have been very powerful, for the greater part of those who passed neither stopped nor turned their heads. Some approached, and learning upon inquiry as to the cause of the gathering, that Miss Van de Werve was about to leave for Italy, they immediately resumed their walk, as if the sight of this departure were no equivalent to the imposing spectacle they were going to witness. A few, however, remained in order to discover the real object of so large a concourse of people.

An old gray-headed peasant, after having listened to the conversation going on among the peasants, recognized in the crowd a man from his own village, who had been residing for some time in the city, near the church of Saint James, and who consequently, he thought, must be better informed than the others in regard to Miss Van de Werve.

He elbowed his way through the crowd until he reached his friend, struck him on the shoulder, and said:

"What is going on here, Master John, to collect such an assembly? I heard some one say that Miss Van de Werve was about to leave for Italy."

"Ah! Master Stephen," said the other, "call her Madame Geronimo Deodati."

"Is she married?"

"One would say, Master Stephen, that our village is at the other end of the world. Even the children of Antwerp bless this marriage as a striking proof of God's justice."

"I did hear, friend John, that God had visibly avenged virtue and punished crime. The assassin dies by a frightful death, and the victim becomes the husband of the noblest and wealthiest young lady in the marquisate. Do you know her, Master John?"

"Do I know her? She passes my house twice every day in going to church. I furnish the family with bread, and I have frequent opportunities of speaking with this amiable young lady."

"I would like to see her," said the old man, "but if I wait, I shall arrive too late at the public square."



“You need not fear,” replied Master John. “The executioner’s car will not leave the prison for an hour to come.”

The peasant hesitated as to what he should do.

“Are you sure that the young lady will leave at once?”

“Immediately, Master Stephen. Mr. Van de Werve urges the departure—he wishes to be out of the city before the executioner commences his work.”

“Why,” said the peasant, “did they wait until to-day? In their place I would have gone long ago.”

“Ah!” replied Master John, “here is another evidence of God’s intervention in these terrible affairs. The vessel which bears them to Italy has been ready to sail for a week. During all that time the wind blew constantly from the south-west; it changed to the east only last night, so that their departure before was impossible. But the tide is high now and will commence to ebb at the very hour fixed for the death of the assassin. You see that God himself willed Mr. Van de Werve to remain here until his vengeance was accomplished.”



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“Does she go to Italy to reside?”

“Oh, no; she only goes on a wedding trip. She will return in the course of a year, when the impression of the perfidy and cruelty of Simon Turchi will be less painful. Back, back, Master Stephen, they are coming!”

From the crowd arose a joyous shout. Each was anxious to approach Madame Deodati. Those who did not know her desired to see the noble young woman whose name was so painfully connected with the bloody history of Simon Turchi, and who was esteemed a model of pure virtue, fervent piety, and ideal beauty. The neighbors and those who had the honor of knowing her collected in order to salute her, to bid her a respectful and cordial adieu, and to wish her a happy voyage.

Mary Van de Werve, now Madame Geronimo Deodati, appeared at the door accompanied by her husband. As soon as the people perceived her, loud and long acclamations greeted her; they waved their caps, clapped their hands, rent the air with their cries of joy, and strove to obtain a glance of the angelic features of the beautiful lady and the noble countenance of her husband, who had been so miraculously preserved, by the providence of God, from the hands of his cruel enemy, Simon Turchi.

Mr. Van de Werve walked by his daughter's side; the old Deodati was near his beloved nephew Geronimo. Then followed Mary's two married brothers and a large number of her father's near relatives and friends, as well as many Italians, Portuguese, and Spaniards, who wished to escort Geronimo to the ship.

When Mary heard the benedictions and joyous shouts of the people, and saw all eyes fixed upon her with looks of love, the blood mantled to her cheeks, and she modestly cast down her eyes. But immediately raising them, she saluted the crowd as a mark of her gratitude for their kindness. The multitude, at a sign from Mr. Van de Werve, opened a passage for the party, and they proceeded to the Scheldt amid acclamations testifying the love and respect they inspired. Their drive resembled a triumphal procession. The old Deodati was deeply moved. He seemed rejuvenated. A sweet smile was upon his lips, and he looked proudly upon Geronimo. Thus full of the thought of their future happiness, they reached the dock-yard. In the middle of the Scheldt was the *Il Salvatore*, decked with flags and rocking upon the waves as if conscious of the precious treasure about to be confided to it.

A part of the sailors were occupied in unmooring the vessel; even the harsh grating sound of the capstan could be heard on the wharf. The rest of the crew manned the masts, and they waved their caps in the air, shouting:

“Benvenuto! benvenuto! Viva, viva la nostra signora!”

At the same time the sound of five or six cannon from the *// Salvatore* boomed over the waters, prolonged by the echoes from either side as it floated down the river. The multitude replied by three cheers, and the last reverberation of the cannon was lost in the *vivas* of those on the shore and ships.



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In the meantime parents and friends were bidding adieu. Many tears were shed, and it was with tearful eyes that Mary Van de Werve received upon her brow her brothers' kiss.

The *// Salvatore* weighed anchor; the sails caught the wind, and the vessel floated majestically down the river with the tide.

Mr. Van de Werve, Deodati, and their two happy children, entered the bark which awaited them. Petronilla seated herself beside her mistress. They exchanged a last adieu, and the eight oars fell simultaneously in the water. The bark, under the strokes of the robust oarsmen, cut the waves in a rapid course.

At this moment Geronimo's eyes were filled with tears. Lifting his eyes to heaven, he said:

"Blessed be Thou, my God, for all the sufferings Thou hast sent me; blessed be Thou for Thy infinite goodness. I thank Thee for the wife it has pleased Thee to give me; she will be my companion in my much loved country. A thousand thanks for all Thy benefits!"

The bark had reached the galley. A ladder was lowered, and, aided by the sailors, the party ascended the deck. The pilot gave the signal, the sails were unfurled, the ship rocked for a moment as if courting the breeze, and then it rapidly cleaved the waves.

The cannon again boomed from the *// Salvatore*, and again the acclamations of the crowd rent the air.

* * * * *

The sounds had hardly died away when the spectators, as if impelled by one thought, immediately retired, and made all speed to reach the central part of the city.

The crowd which left the wharf so precipitately soon arrived at the grand square, but they found it already occupied by so compact a mass of human beings, that it was impossible for them to penetrate it. As far as the eye could reach, there was a sea of heads; all the windows were crowded with women and even children; the roofs swarmed with curious spectators; the iron balustrades seemed to bend under the weight of the children who had climbed upon them.

A solemn silence reigned in the midst of the vast multitude. Not a sound was heard save the slow and mournful tolling of the death-bell, and at intervals a scream so piercing, so frightful, that those who listened to it turned pale and trembled. Every eye was fixed upon a particular spot, whence clouds of smoke curled in the air, and from which escaped the cries of distress.



What passed that day on the grand square of Antwerp is thus related by Matthew Bandello, Bishop of Agen, who lived at that period, and who wrote from the testimony of an eye-witness:

* * * * *

“Upon the appointed day, Simon Turchi was enclosed in the same chair and driven on a wagon through the streets of Antwerp, the good priest accompanying him and exhorting him. When they reached the grand square, the chair was removed from the wagon. The executioners lighted a slow fire, which they kept alive with wood, but in such a manner that the flames should not rise too high, but sufficed to roast slowly the unhappy Turchi. The priest remained as near to him as the heat permitted, and frequently said to him:



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“Simon, this is the hour for repentance!”

“And Simon, as long as he could speak, replied:

“Yes, father.”

* * * * *

Simon Turchi evinced great repentance and much patience, and he accepted with resignation the painful and infamous death to which he was condemned. When it was certain that he was dead, his body, partially consumed, was conveyed outside the city gates and attached to a stake by an iron chain. The dagger with which he had stabbed Geronimo was thrust into his side. The stake was so placed on the public road that it could be seen by all who passed, in order that the punishment inflicted for murder might serve as a warning to others, and prevent the commission of infamous crimes.

THE END.

ENDNOTES

[Footnote 1: “All the foreign merchants who resided at Bruges, with the exception of a few Spaniards, established themselves here about the year 1516, to the great disadvantage of Bruges and to the advantage of Antwerp.”—Le Guicciardini, *Description of the Low Countries*. Arnhem, 1617, p. 113.]

[Footnote 2: C. Schibanius, in his *Origines Antwerpien Sum*, says that he has often seen in the Scheldt twenty-five hundred vessels, many of which were detained at anchor for two or three weeks before being able to approach the wharf.]

[Footnote 3: The stables, and coach-houses used by this company for transportation still exist at Antwerp. Although they are now occupied as barracks, they preserve their original name—*Hessenhaus*.]

[Footnote 4: See the statistics of population given by Schibanius in the *History of Antwerp*, by Mertens & Torfo, Part IV., ch. v.]

[Footnote 5: The inhabitants of Antwerp are experienced and skilled in commercial affairs, and although they may not have left their own country the greater part of them, even the women, can speak four, five, and sometimes seven different languages.]

[Footnote 6: “The nobles of Netherlands do not engage in commerce like the Italian noblemen from Venice, Florence, Genoa, and Lucca.”—L. Guiccardini, *Description of the Low Countries*, p. 140.]



[Footnote 7: “Two well-known Italian merchants, both of noble birth, natives of Lucca, who were great friends.” Van Mertens, *History of the Low Countries*, Vol. I.]

[Footnote 8: The bailiff (schoat) was the representative of the prince in the prosecution of crimes. He alone, and his agents by his orders, could make arrests, except in cases of flagrant crime or of persons lying in wait. This high functionary was also called the *margrave*, because the margrave of the Low Countries was, in virtue of that office, the bailiff of the city of Antwerp.]

[Footnote 9: “It is estimated that three thousand new houses were either erected by himself, or by others through his assistance.”—Mertens & Torfo, *History of Antwerp*.]



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[Footnote 10: This church was demolished at the commencement of this century. The spot upon which it stood is now called the "*Plain of Saint Walburga.*"]

[Footnote 11: In the *History of Antwerp*, by Mertens & Torfo, Part IV., chapter iii., is found a view of the city, from the banks of the Scheldt, as it was in 1556, and details concerning the principal edifices.]

[Footnote 12: "Geronimo went to Simon and demanded payment of the sum lent, and for which he held a note. Turchi made various excuses, and put off payment from day to day."—*Matteo Bandello.*]

[Footnote 13: "A fierce desire of vengeance took possession of Simon, and he sought to kill Geronimo."—*Matteo Bandello.*]

[Footnote 14: A measure of four pints.]

[Footnote 15: "One night, when passing through the streets, he received from the hands of an enemy an ugly wound in the face. He suspected Geronimo of having inflicted it; in which he was mistaken, for the author of the attack was afterwards discovered."—*Matteo Bandello.*]

[Footnote 16: "After Simon Turchi had determined to revenge himself, and after long consideration, he ordered a large wooden arm-chair, to which were attached two iron bars, so arranged that whoever should sit down in it would be caught by the legs below the knees, and would be unable to move."—Van Meteren, *History of the Low Countries.*]

[Footnote 17: "Geronimo, a merchant from Lyons desires to see you, but as he does not wish to be known at Antwerp now, he is concealed in my garden. He begs that you will meet him there."—*Matteo Bandello.*]

[Footnote 18: "This chair being made, he told one of his servants, named Julio, who was proscribed in Italy, and under sentence of death."—Van Meteren, *History of the Low Countries.*]

[Footnote 19: "And the said Julio pushed Geronimo into a large arm-chair, which sprang and closed."—*Origin and Genealogy of the Dukes and Duchesses of Brabant.* Antwerp, 1565; p. 308.]

[Footnote 20: "In the cellar ... in a grave which had been prepared by the said Julio to bury Geronimo after the commission of the murder."—*Origin and Genealogy of the Dukes and Duchesses of Brabant.*]

[Footnote 21: *Order and Proclamation of Messire Van Schoonhoven, bailiff, and of the Burgomaster, Constables, and Council of the city of Antwerp:*



“It having come to the knowledge of the bailiff, burgomaster, and constables of this city that Geronimo Deodati, a merchant of Lucca, went out yesterday afternoon, about four o’clock, from his residence in this city, near the Convent of the Dominicans, and that he was seen for the last time beyond the Square of Meir, and since then he has not been heard of, and we know not what has become of him, so that there is great suspicion that the said Geronimo has been maltreated, or even put to death; therefore, the magistrates of the same city do proclaim that he who first will give information as to what has become of the said Geronimo, will receive the sum of three hundred florins.”—*Extract from the “Book of Laws of the City of Antwerp.”*]



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[Footnote 22: “The bailiff said that the magistrates had determined to search all the stables, cellars, and gardens, to discover whether the ground in any of these places had been recently dug.”—E. Van Meteren, *History of the Low Countries*.]

[Footnote 23: “Simon Turchi was known to be a perverse and immoral man; in a word, he was a compound of every vice and every evil inclination.”—*Matteo Bandello*.]

[Footnote 24: “Go and do what I have commanded you. Disinter the body, take it on your shoulders and cast it into the sewer which is in the square where the three streets meet.”—*Simon Turchi*.—*Matteo Bandello*.]

[Footnote 25: “I will send Bernardo to help you, and I will order him to obey you, whatever you may command. When you have thrown the body into the sewer, you can, by a quick movement, push Bernardo in also. The sewer is deep, and whoever falls into it is immediately drowned.”—*Matteo Bandello*.]

[Footnote 26: “Simon Turchi begged Julio to take the crime upon himself.”—Van Meteren, *History of the Low Countries*.]