

mire your nobleness, and believe me when I say that my royal master shall hear of it."

"Well, tell him that, if it lies in my power, Max Emmanuel shall learn to dislike Austria and love France."

"Signora, you are the instrument of a great purpose. I give you a whole year wherein to work; and if, at the end of that time, you have prevailed upon the elector to sign a treaty of alliance with France, *you*, as one of France's noblest allies, shall receive from my royal master one million of francs. Meanwhile you shall have ten thousand francs a month for pin-money."

"Alas!" said Lucretia, "I am forced to accept; for my husband has so effectually impoverished me that I live on the bounty of my brother. And he is so arrogant that I am almost as glad to be independent of him as to be delivered from my detestable husband. I shall endeavor to let my acts speak my gratitude for the deliverance."

"Allow me, signora, to present you with your pocket-money for this present month, and give me a receipt in the shape of your fair hand to kiss."

So saying, he laid a purse of gold at Lucretia's feet, and covered her hand with kisses.

"I shall want to consult you frequently, dear marquis," observed Lucretia.

"I shall always be at your service."

"And now, I take it as a matter of course, that what has passed between us this morning is to remain a profound secret."

"As a matter of course, signora, it goes no further," returned De Villars, \* "and to insure perfect secrecy, you must pretend not to know me when we meet abroad. Not even the elector—or, perhaps I should say, above all men, the elector is not to know of my visit. I must, therefore, take my leave, for—hark! your clock strikes one, and lovers are sure to be punctual."

"I shall expect you every morning at eleven; and so we can take counsel together, and I can report daily progress to you."

\* "Memoirs of the Marquis de Villars," vol. i., p. 104.

"Aurevoir, then, signora. Allow me one word more. If, before the close of the carnival, you leave Venice in company with the elector, I shall take the liberty of refunding to you the entire cost of the refurnishing of your palace to-day, as compensation for its temporary loss. And now, fairest of the allies of France, adieu!"

The French ambassador had hardly time to make his escape, before the doors of the drawing-room were flung open, and the lackey announced, "His highness the Elector of Bavaria!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE LOVERS REUNITED.

Two weeks had elapsed since that unhappy meeting between Eugene and Laura—two weeks of expectation and hope frustrated. In vain had Eugene attempted to reach her with a message; in vain had he remained for hours before her windows; in vain had Antonio tried to penetrate into her presence. Day after day came the same sorrowful news: the marchioness was very ill, and no one was allowed to pass the threshold of the palace. Her husband watched day and night at her bedside, and, excepting Mademoiselle Victorine, no living creature was allowed to enter her room.

When, for the fourteenth time, Antonio returned unsuccessful from his mission, Eugene became so agitated and grew so pale that the bravo was touched to the heart, and, taking the prince's hand, covered it with kisses.

"Do not be so cast down, excellenza," said he, imploringly; "have courage, and hope for the best."

"Oh, Antonio!" murmured the prince, "she is dead!"

"No, excellenza, no! I swear to you that she lives, nor do I believe one word of this rumored illness."

"Why should you not believe it, my friend?"

"Because I know the marquis well; and this is merely a pretext for keeping his wife imprisoned."

"Thank you, Antonio, thank you," replied Eugene, "for



this ray of hope. Then I depend upon you to deliver my message sooner or later. Remember my words: 'The Prince of Savoy knows why the marchioness did not speak to him. He lives, loves, and hopes.' And if you will but return to me with one word from her lips, I will feel grateful to you for life, Antonio."

"I will serve you with my life, *eccellenza*," said Antonio, bowing and leaving the room.

He had not been long away, before the door was opened, and Conrad announced the Elector of Bavaria.

"I have come to entice the hermit of the Capello out of his cell," cried Max Emmanuel. "My dear Eugene, was ever a man so obstinate a recluse? Every time I come I am told that you are at the arsenal, the dock-yards, the armory, a picture-gallery, or some other retreat of arts and sciences."

"Well, dear Max, I am a student, and find much to learn in Venice."

"To whom do you say that?" cried Max, laughing. "As if I, too, were not a student, only that my tastes lie not in the same direction as yours, and as if I were not making tremendous progress in my studies!"

"No wonder: you are far advanced in every branch of learning, while I am but a neophyte."

"No such thing; you are much more deeply learned than I; but you are the victim of an unfortunate passion which you are striving to smother under a weight of study, while I—I, my dear fellow, am distancing you every hour of the day, for my studies are all concentrated upon the 'art of love.'"

"God speed you, then, and deliver you from the malady that is wasting away my life!"

"You are an incomprehensible being, Eugene. I cannot comprehend your dogged fidelity to such an abstraction as a woman whom you never see. You have not trusted me with your secret, and yet I might have done you some service had you been more frank with me."

"You mock me," replied Eugene, gloomily.

"No, Eugene, I do not mock you. I know your secret, despite your taciturnity. I know that you love the Marchioness Strozzi, and that the jealousy of her husband is such that

you have not been able to speak a word with her since your arrival in Venice."

"Who could have told you?"

"My houri—she whose love has made of Venice a Mussulman's paradise to me. Oh, Eugene! I am the happiest man alive! I am beloved and loved for myself. My beautiful mistress is noble and rich; she refuses all my gifts, and yet she is about to give me unequivocal proof of her love: she is about to leave her lovely Italian home, and fly with me to Munich."

"Are you about to leave Venice so soon?"

"The archduchess is dangerously ill, and yesterday a courier was sent to summon me home. And, would you believe it? my Lucretia consents to accompany me, on condition that I force no gifts upon her acceptance, but allow her to furnish her house in Munich at her own expense. Did you ever hear of such disinterestedness? Now I am about to give you a proof of my confidence, and tell you the name of my mistress. It is the Countess Canossa. Well!—You are not overjoyed? You do not understand!"

"How should I be overjoyed or understand, when I do not know the lady, Max?"

"Great goodness, is it possible that this unconscionable snail has lived so closely in his shell that he does not know how fortunate for him it is, that the Countess Canossa loves me! Hear me, Eugene. My Lucretia is the sister of the Marquis de Strozzi."

"My enemy!" murmured Eugene, his brow suddenly darkening.

"Yes; but not his sister's friend; for although he makes a confidante of her, she hates him. Except Victorine, the countess is the only person permitted to have access to her sister-in-law's apartments."

Eugene's eyes now brightened with expectation, and he looked gratefully up into the elector's handsome, flushed face.

"Yes, Eugene, yes," continued Max, "and through her angelic goodness, you shall visit your Laura. To-day, Lucretia appears as Mary Stuart, at a masked entertainment given by



Admiral Mocenigo. Before she goes, she is to show off her dress to the poor prisoner of the Palazzo Strozzi. Her long train is to be borne by a page, who of course will have to follow whithersoever Mary Stuart goes. This page is to be yourself, my boy !”

Eugene threw himself into the elector's arms. He was too happy for speech.

At noon, on the same day, the gondola of the Countess Canossa stopped before the Palazzo Strozzi. The countess, dressed in a magnificent costume, went slowly up the marble stairs, her long train of white satin borne by a page in purple velvet. His face, like that of his mistress, was hidden by a mask ; and the broad red scarf which was tied around his slender waist, confined a small dagger whose hilt was set in precious stones. His eyes were so large and bright that the mask could not entirely conceal their beauty ; and it was perhaps because of their splendor that the porter hesitated to admit him within the palace.

The countess, who had gone a few steps before, turned carelessly round, and asked why her page did not follow.

“Your ladyship,” replied Beppo, the porter, “the marquis has forbidden the admission of strangers.”

“And you call that poor, little fellow of mine a stranger ? You might as well ask me to cut off my train, as expect me to wear it without my page !—Come, Filippo, come !”

Filippo passed on, while the old porter grumbled.

“Never mind, Beppo,” said the countess, looking back kindly, “I will tell my brother of your over-watchfulness, and inform him what a love of a Cerberus he has for a porter.” And on she went, having reached the top of the staircase, before Filippo and the train had gone half way.

Mademoiselle Victorine was awaiting their arrival, and made a profound courtesy to Lucretia.

“Signora, the marchioness awaits you in her boudoir.”

“And the marquis knows that I am here ?”

“Yes, signora. He was anxious to accompany you in your visit to my lady ; but she would not consent ; and you know that he dares not go without it. He never has crossed the threshold of her dressing-room.”

“I know it well. Now go and announce my visit to her. But first, go to the marquis and tell him that, as soon as I shall have returned from the apartments of my sister-in-law, I wish to see him in his cabinet, on important business.”

This was spoken in an elevated tone, so that all the spies, whom Lucretia knew to be eavesdropping around, might hear her words and repeat them.

“I go, signora,” replied Victorine, in the same tone ; but she added in a whisper to the page, “For God's sake, be discreet !”

The lady's maid, in obedience to Lucretia's orders, went directly to the cabinet of Strozzi, while the countess proceeded in an opposite direction. At the end of the grand corridor was a lofty door, which, being shut, the countess remained stationary ; while Filippo, who seemed not to have remarked it, went on with his train, until he stood immediately behind his mistress.

She chided him for his familiarity. “Back, Filippo,” said she, impatiently. “When I stop, how do you presume to go on ? You are too unmannerly for a page !”

Filippo murmured a few unintelligible words, and retreated, while the countess knocked several times at the door.

“It is I, Laura, the Countess de Canossa.”

If anybody had been near, the beatings of poor Filippo's heart might have been heard during the pause that ensued before the door was opened. At length its heavy panels were seen to move, and a sweet, soft voice was heard :

“Come in, dear Lucretia.”

The countess disappeared within ; but scarcely had she entered the room before she grasped Laura's arm, and hurried her into the room beyond.

“Not here, not here,” whispered she. “Go into your private apartment, Laura. In this one you would be unsafe. There will be listeners at the door.”

Laura made no reply ; she flew back and disappeared behind the portière that led into her boudoir. The countess looked back at her page, who leaned trembling against a marble column close by.

“Shut the door, Filippo,” said she, “and await me here. I



will see the marchioness in her boudoir, and Mademoiselle Victorine will be back presently, to entertain you."

The door was shut, and Filippo, letting Mary Stuart's train drop without further ceremony, sprang forward and touched the arm of his royal mistress.

"Where is she?"

"In her boudoir." The page would have gone thither at once; but Lucretia stopped him. "Mark my words well. Speak low; and when Victorine summons you away, obey at once, for delay may cost you your life. And now, impatient youth, begone!"

They were together. Laura would have sprung forward to meet him, but emotion paralyzed her limbs, and chained her to the floor. He clasped her in his loving arms, kissed her again and again, and each felt the wild throbbing of the other's heart. Forgotten were the long years of their parting, forgotten all doubt, all anguish. It seemed but yesterday that they had plighted their troth in that moonlit pavilion; and nothing lay between, save one long night which now had passed away, leaving the dawn of a day that was radiant with sunshine.

"I have thee once more, my own! Close—close to my heart, and would to God thou couldst grow there, blending our dual being into one!"

"Not once more, my Eugene, for thou hast never lost me. I have kept unstained the faith I pledged, and never have I belonged to any man but thee!"

"But alas, my treasure, I may not possess thee! Let me at least drink my fill of thy beauty, my Laura!"

She drew him gently to her divan, and there, just as he had done in the pavilion, he knelt at her feet, and gazed, enraptured, in her face. With her little white hands she stroked his black locks, and lifted them from his pale, high brow.

"My hero," murmured she, tenderly. "Thou hast decked that brow with laurels since I loved thee, Eugene; and the world has heard of thee and of thy deeds of valor. I knew it would be so; I knew that the God of the brave would shield thy dear head in the day of battle, and lift thee to mountain-heights of glory and renown."

"And yet I would so gladly have yielded up my life, Laura! What was life without thee? One long night of anguish, to which death would have been glorious day! Oh, Laura! that day—that fearful day—on which I was bereft of thee!"

She laid her hand upon his lips. "Do not think of it, beloved, or thou wilt mar the ecstasy of the present. I, too, have suffered—more, it must have been more, than thou! And yet in all my anguish I was happy; for I was faithful, though sorely tried, and never, never despaired of thy coming."

"And yet thou art the wife of another."

"Say not so. When the priest laid my hand in his, I laid it in thine. To thee were my promises of fidelity, to thee I plighted my troth. That another—a liar and deceiver, should have inserted his odious name for thine, laid his dishonored hand in mine, has never bound me! I was, I am, I will ever be thine, so help me, God! who heard the oath I swore, and knew that, swearing, I believed thee there!"

"And I could doubt her, my love, my wife! Forgive me, Laura, that in my madness I should have accused thee."

"All is forgotten, for I have thee here!"

It was well for these impassioned lovers that a friend watched for them without. Lucretia had mounted guard for half an hour, when Victorine returned to say that the marquis would be glad to see his sister; her visit had lasted long enough.

"Take my place, then, Victorine; bolt the door, and admit nobody."

"Oh, signora, if the marquis finds us out, he will assassinate me!" said Victorine, trembling.

"He will not find us out; and you can very well endure some little uneasiness, when for a few nervous twitches you are to receive two thousand sequins. Think that, by to-night, you will be on your way to Paris."

"Would to God I were there, away from this frightful robbers' nest!"

Lucretia laughed. "You flatter the city of Venice. But I am not surprised that you are not in love with the Palazzo Strozzi, for when its master is contradicted, he is a rag-



ing tiger, whose thirst nothing save human blood will quench."

"O God! O Lord! I am almost dead with fright!"

"Have patience, mademoiselle. Look at yonder clock on the mantel. Precisely at the expiration of one hour, come with your message to my brother's cabinet. That will be the signal for your release. Are your effects out of the palace?"

"Yes, signora; they are all at the hôtel of the Marquis de Villars."

"And the gondola of the elector will be here to speak the prince's adieux. Now remain just where you are; and, instead of opening your ears to what is passing in yonder boudoir, make use of your leisure to say your prayers, which you may possibly have forgotten this morning."

The countess lifted up her long train, and, passing it over her arm, went on her way to meet the amiable Strozzi.

"Really, Ottario," said she, entering the cabinet, "your palace is singularly like a prison. As I came through the corridor, I felt as if I were passing over the Ponte de' Sospiri. The atmosphere of the place is heavy with your jealous sighs."

"True; there is little happiness under the marble dome of my palace. But let us speak of other things. What can I do to serve you?"

"You seem to intimate that I can never desire to speak with you, except to ask a favor."

"I find that, generally speaking, the case."

"For once you are mistaken. I want nothing from you whatever."

"You seem to have grown rich by some legerdemain or other, Lucretia. I hear that you have refitted your palace with great magnificence. Has Canossa come into a fortune? or has he been winning at the card-table?"

"Neither; but it was precisely of my newly acquired wealth that I came to speak with you. I am about to quit Venice, perhaps forever; and before leaving I wished to have an explanation with you."

"Gracious Heaven! who will take your place by Laura?"

"Very flattering that my departure occasions no emotion in my brother's fond heart, save regret for the loss of his spy!

But never mind, I overlook the slight, and proceed with my confession."

So Lucretia went over all the humiliations and hardships she had undergone within the past six months; and, after dwelling pathetically upon her own sufferings, she related the manner of her meeting with the Elector of Bavaria, and its consequences. They loved each other to adoration; he lavished every gift upon her that his wealth could purchase, and now she was about to give him substantial proof of her attachment, by going off with him to Munich. No mention was made, in the recital, of her episode with the French minister.

The countess had barely arrived at the end of her confidences, when a knock was heard, and Mademoiselle Victorine walked in with a message from the marchioness.

"What message?" cried Strozzi, rising at once to receive it.

"Pardon me, excellenza, it is only a message for the signora," said Victorine, courtesying. "My lady wishes to know if the countess has the French book that she promised to bring to-day?"

"Dear me! I had forgotten it," cried the countess. "But stay, Victorine, it is in the gondola below. Let little Filippo go after it."

"Who is Filippo?" asked the marquis, frowning.

"My page, to be sure. Have you never seen him? Of course I could not carry Mary Stuart's long train up the staircase without a page to help me."

"And he is here, in the palace?"

"Of course he is: where else should the child be but here with me? And, as I was not anxious to have him eavesdropping about your cabinet while we were conversing, I gave him in charge to Victorine."

"I shall discharge Beppo," growled the marquis. "How dared he—"

"Let me intercede for poor Beppo," laughed Lucretia. "He would have kept out Filippo, but I insisted that your prohibition could not extend to boys, and I insisted upon having him to carry my train. Since his presence here annoys you, he shall be made to leave, and await me in my gondola."



"But the book, signora," said Victorine, with quivering lip.

"True—the book for Laura. Will you permit Victorine to go with Filippo, and get it? But bless me! Without her protection, Beppo would not allow him to pass. You consent for her to accompany him?"

"Yes," said Strozzi, roughly. "But if ever you come again, leave your page at home."

"The watchword, signor?" asked Victorine.

"Venetia," returned Strozzi.

"What!" exclaimed Lucretia, "does Victorine, too, need a password to leave the palace? My dear brother, I admire your genius! You are qualified to make a first-rate jailer."

Mademoiselle Victorine had not tarried to hear the ironical compliment of the countess. She flew along the corridor to the apartments of the marchioness, and, first knocking at the door, she drew back the portière.

"Your highness," said she, "the hour has expired." Then dropping the portière, that the lovers might part without witnesses, she waited without.

Laura's arms were around his neck. Eugene drew her passionately to his heart. "Must I then go without thee?" murmured he.

"Yes, my Eugene; this time thou goest alone. But be patient and hopeful, and thy spouse will find means to escape from her jailer."

"I cannot go," cried Eugene, despairingly. "Nor can I leave my enemy's house like a frightened cur, while the woman I love remains to bear his anger. He must—he shall renounce my wife!"

"That is, you would see me murdered before your eyes!" exclaimed Laura, well knowing what argument would move him most to discretion. "Eugene, he has sworn to assassinate me, if I ever speak to you—and, believe me, he will keep his oath."

"And I must leave my treasure in his bloodthirsty hands?" cried the prince, pressing her still more closely in his arms.

"The tiger will do me no harm, Eugene, if thou wilt go before he sees thee."

"Your highness," said Victorine, imploringly through the portière, "for God's sake, tarry no longer!"

Laura, freeing herself from his embrace, led him to the door. "Farewell, my beloved," said she. "God is merciful, and will reunite us."

"One more look into those dear eyes, one more kiss from those sweet lips."

"Oh, your highness!" whispered Victorine, a second time.

Laura raised the portière, and led him forward. She saw Victorine reach him his mask, and then, darting back into her boudoir, she fell upon her knees, and prayed for an hour.

Meanwhile the Countess Lucretia was still discussing her affairs; but she seemed to have become absent-minded, sometimes stopping suddenly in her speech to listen, occasionally directing anxious glances toward the windows.

The marquis was too keen for these symptoms to escape his penetration.

"Are you watching or waiting for any thing?" asked he.

"Yes," replied she, "I await something, and—oh! there it is!"

As she spoke these last words, a voice from the water called out three times: "Addio! addio! addio!"

"Do you know what that 'addio' signifies?" asked Lucretia.

"How can I understand the signals that pass between you and your loves?"

"I will tell you what it means," said she, looking full into her brother's face. "I—but no! your eyes glare too fiercely just now; you are ready for a spring, and I dare not wait to be devoured. Addio, Ottavio, addio. Take this note, and swear that you will not open it before ten minutes."

"What childishness!" exclaimed Strozzi, rudely.

"You will not? Then you shall not see its contents, which, nevertheless, concern your Laura."

"Laura!—Then I swear that I will not open it before ten minutes."

"It is on the table. Be careful how you break your oath. You would not be safe were you to unfold that paper before ten minutes."



So saying, she kissed her hand, and tripped merrily away to her gondola.

At the expiration of the time required, Strozzi took up the paper, and broke its seal. It contained the following :

"MY DEAR BROTHER : You sold me to Count Canossa, and you have degraded me to the trade of a spy. You have forced me, more than once, to play the dragon by your poor, unhappy wife ; but I have repaid her for my unkindness, and have avenged myself also. My little Filippo is Prince Eugene, and he is to remain alone with your wife, exactly as long as I converse with you in your cabinet. The three 'addios' which you will have heard ere this from the Canale, signify that the prince has reached his gondola, and is safe. Also that Made-moiselle Victorine, my accomplice, has fled. You gave her ten ducats for each betrayal of her mistress ; we offered two thousand sequins, and of course she betrayed you. Addio !"

To describe the fury of the marquis would be impossible. But his paroxysm of rage over, he at once began to revolve in his mind the means of revenge.

"There must be an end to this martyrdom," said he. "It must end !" He looked at the clock. "'Tis time Antonio were here, and he shall do it."

He struck three times on his little bell, and the door in the wall glided back, giving entrance to Antonio.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### ANTONIO'S EXPIATION.

THE next morning Antonio asked admittance to the cabinet of his new employer.

"Your highness," said he, "I have seen the marchioness."

"What greeting does she send, good Antonio ?"

"My lord, she awaits Filippo at eight o'clock this evening."

"She awaits me !" echoed Eugene. "And you are to conduct me to her ?"

"Yes, my lord. I am acquainted with the secret passages of the palace. I will show you the way, and, as God in heaven hears me, I will bring you safely back."

"How solemnly you speak, Antonio !"

"Ah, eccellenza, it is easier to enter that palace than to leave it ! But you shall leave it in safety, as I hope to be saved from perdition !"

"At what hour did you say ?"

"At eight this evening. And now, my lord, allow me to leave you for a time. The marquis requires me to remain at the palace, and I must be punctual, or he will suspect me. You will be obliged to engage another commissionnaire ; but, believe me, I shall better serve you in the palace than here."

Antonio was allowed to depart ; but instead of going toward the Strozzi palace, he betook himself to that of the Elector of Bavaria, where the household were in that state of confusion which precedes a departure. The elector had chosen to leave Venice by night.

"I have an important message from my lord, Prince Eugene of Savoy to his highness of Bavaria," said Antonio, making his way through the busy throng of servants. "Is he in his cabinet ?"

"Yes. The chamberlain is in the anteroom. He will announce you."

"His highness will receive the messenger of Prince Eugene," was the reply ; and Antonio, having been admitted, had a conversation of some length with the elector, which left the latter in a state of great agitation.

"I wish it were in my power to render assistance ; but I dare not. He made me promise that I would not interfere in any way ; and I must keep my word. I would but act in the dark, and might ruin him.—And now to Lucretia, to devise other means of rescue, if these should fail—"

After leaving the elector, Antonio directed his steps toward the prison near the palace of the doge. The porter that stood near the grated door looked searchingly at the mask that pre-



sumed to tarry before those dismal gates whereof he was the guardian.

"Would you earn a thousand sequins?" said Antonio, in a whisper.

"How?" asked the porter, opening his eyes like two full moons.

"Do you know in which cell Catherina Giamberta is confined?"

"Yes, I know."

"Take this flower to her. It is her birthday, and she loves flowers. Tell her it comes from Antonio, and ask her to send him the ribbon she wears around her neck. If you return with it, I will give you one thousand sequins."

He handed the porter a large rose, whose stem was carefully wrapped in paper. Christiano scarcely saw what it was, so dazzled were his eyes by the approaching glitter of a thousand sequins. But he thrust it in his bosom, drew the bolts of his prison, and disappeared within its gloomy depths.

Antonio leaned his head against the clammy prison-wall and waited. In half an hour the turnkey returned.

"Have you your thousand sequins with you?" asked he.

"Here they are," said Antonio, drawing from his cloak a purse, through whose dingy silk meshes the gold was visible.

The turnkey put his hand through the grate, and Antonio saw a faded, yellow paper, tied with a silken cord. He took the packet, and in return gave Christiano the purse. As he did so, he said: "Make good use of it; I have passed through five years of misery to earn it. Make good use of it, and if you will have a mass said for the repose of my soul, 'tis all I ask in addition to the service you have just rendered me."

He turned away, and, hurriedly taking the direction of St. Mark's, entered a side-door, and stood within its sacred walls. The church was empty and dimly lighted. Antonio knelt down behind one of the pillars, and opened the paper.

It contained a lock of golden hair—the hair of a child. The bravo pressed it to his lips, and, murmuring a few fond words, laid it lovingly upon his heart, and began to pray. When his prayer was ended, he approached a confessional

wherein sat an old Benedictine monk, and, kneeling down, began his confession.

The recital was a long, and apparently a terrible one; for more than once the monk shuddered, and his venerable face was mournfully upraised as if in prayer for the penitent. When Antonio ceased, he remained silent, still praying.

"Reverend father," murmured the bravo, "may I not receive absolution for my sins!"

"Yes, my son, you shall receive such absolution as it rests with me to give. If, as I hope, you are truly repentant, God will do the rest. You have sinned grievously, but you are ready to expiate." And the priest performed the ceremony of absolution.

"Reverend father, give me your blessing—your blessing in *articulo mortis*."

"Come hither and receive it."

Antonio emerged from the confessional, and knelt on the marble pavement, while the rays from a stained window above fell upon his head like a soft, golden halo. The priest, too, stepped out, and, laying his hand upon that bowed head, made the sign of the cross, and blessed him in *articulo mortis*. Then going slowly up the aisle, and kneeling within the sanctuary, he passed the night in praying for a soul that was about to depart this world.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE DUNGEON.

THE clock on the Campanillo of St. Mark's struck eight. The day of longing expectation had at last worn away, and Eugene was once more to be admitted to the presence of his beloved.

Before leaving his cabinet he had sent for Antonio, and, reaching him a purse of gold, had said: "Here, my brave—here are two hundred ducats. Take this purse, and, when you



make use of its contents, remember that I gave it as a token of my gratitude for your fidelity and friendship."

"No, your highness," replied Antonio, in a tearful voice—"no, your highness, I need no gold. If you would give me a souvenir, let me have the glove that has covered the right hand of a hero whose sword has never been unsheathed save in the cause of right."

"Singular man," exclaimed Eugene, "take them both, and believe that I thank you for your attachment. And now, let us away!"

"Yes, my lord; but I implore you, not this rich cloak of velvet. Take this black wrapping of cloth; it is more appropriate for an adventure such as ours."

The little gondola lay moored at the stairs, without gondolier or light. Nobody was there except Eugene and Antonio, who rowed without help. They made for a channel leading to a wing of the Palace Strozzi, whose dark, frowning walls, unrelieved by one single opening, were laved by the foul and turbid waters of the narrow estuary. Antonio's practised eye discovered the low opening that gave access to the palace; and, after fastening his gondola to a ring in the wall, he knocked three times at the door. It was opened, and they entered a small vestibule, dimly lighted, where they were confronted by a man who asked for the password.

Antonio whispered something in his ear, and they were permitted to ascend a steep, narrow staircase leading to a passage so contracted that Eugene's shoulders touched on either side, as he struggled along toward a second staircase. When they had reached the last step, Antonio said: "We have no farther to go. Pass in, signor, and, whatever ensues, remember that you must patiently await my return."

A door opened, Eugene passed through, and it closed behind him. He was in a room of singular shape and construction. It was a rotunda, whose blank walls were without opening whatsoever; neither door nor window was to be seen therein. Suspended from the lofty ceiling was an iron chain, to which was attached a small lamp, whose light fell directly over a table that stood in the centre of the room. On the table lay a piece of bread and a glass of water; near it was placed a

wooden chair, and this was all the furniture contained within the dismal apartment.

"A dungeon," said Eugene to himself. "One of those dungeons of which I have heard, but in whose existence I never believed until now."

He was perfectly collected; but he comprehended his position, and knew that he had been betrayed. He had been lured into this secret prison, there to die without a sign! But he must make one desperate effort to escape. Death he could confront—even the death that stared him in the face; but to know that Laura would be doomed to a life of utter wretchedness, was a thought that almost unsettled his reason.

He surveyed the place, and then felt every stone, every crevice, that came within his reach. As he raised his mournful eyes to look above him, the wall just below the ceiling began to move, a small window was opened, and within its iron frame appeared a pale, sinister face—the face of the Marquis de Strozzi.

Eugene tore the mask from his face, and his large eyes flashed with scorn.

"Assassin!" cried he, "cowardly assassin!"

The marquis laughed; he could afford to laugh. "Yes," said he, "I am any thing you may please to term me; but *you*, Prince of Savoy, are no longer among the living. Your days are numbered: farewell!"

The window closed, and the wall moved slowly back until no trace of the opening was to be seen. A dungeon! A grave! Eugene of Savoy would die of hunger! no human ear would hear his dying plaint; within a few steps of one that loved him he would disappear from earth; and, until the great day whereon hell would yield up its secrets of horror to the Eternal Judge, his fate would remain a mystery! Alas! alas! And was this to be the end of his aspirations for glory?

But hark! What sound is that? The invisible door, for which he had been groping in vain, was once more opened, and Antonio glided noiselessly into the room.

He raised his hand in token of warning. "Not a word, my lord," whispered he. "I come to save you."



"To save me, traitor! You, the despicable tool of Strozzi?"

"Oh, my lord! Have mercy, have mercy! Every moment is precious: listen to me, listen to me!"

Antonio sank on his knees, the mask dropped from his face, and his pale, suffering countenance wore any aspect but that of treachery.

"In the name of the Marchioness Laura Bonaletta, hear me," said he, imploringly.

"Laura Bonaletta!" echoed Eugene, in a voice of piercing anguish. "What can such as you know of Laura Bonaletta?"

Antonio gave him a folded paper containing these few lines: "If thou lovest me, do as Antonio bids thee. If thou wouldst not have me die of grief, accept thy life from Antonio's hands, and oh, love! believe me, we shall meet again. Thy Laura."

Eugene pressed the paper to his lips, and when he looked at Antonio again, his eye had lost its sternness, and about his lips there fluttered a sad smile.

"What does this mean, Antonio?" said he.

"Eccellenza, it means that I was a hardened sinner until you rescued my soul from perdition. Would that I had time to lay before you the sins of my whole life, that you might know from what depths of crime you delivered me! But time is precious. I can only say that I am no brave soldier that was scarred in battle. This wound upon my face was from the hand of my father, and, for the crime of his murder, my right hand was hewed by the arm of the executioner. Nay—do not start, my dear, dear lord! 'Tis you that brought me to repentance; 'tis you that inspired me to seek reconciliation with Heaven. I came to you a bravo—the emissary of the Marquis Strozzi; but when you touched my mutilated arm with your honored hand—when you trusted me because you believed me to be brave—I swore in my heart that you at least I would not betray. 'Tis true, I led you hither where Strozzi would have left you to die of hunger. Ah, my lord! you are not the first that has looked upon these cruel walls. Giuseppi, the gondolier whom the countess loved—he, too, poor youth,

came hither—and six days after I was sent for his corpse, and consigned it to the sullen waters of the lagoon, that covers the secrets of Strozzi's atrocious murders."

"But why, then, did you not warn me?"

"Because Strozzi would have murdered me, and employed another man to betray you into his hands. Or, if you had believed me, you might have remained in Venice, and you must fly this very night—this very hour. Until you are safe, Strozzi must believe that you are his prisoner."

"Am I, then, forever doomed to turn my back upon this man?"

"My lord, my lord, no vain scruples! The Marchioness Bonaletta will die if you do not live to rescue her from his tyranny."

Eugene grasped his arm. "Ah, yes, indeed! Then come, Antonio—let us fly."

"My dear lord, one man only can leave this room. The porter is ready with his dagger if both should attempt to pass."

"You would remain here in my place! You would sacrifice your life to liberate me, Antonio!"

"The parricide would fain be at rest," replied Antonio, gently. "The sinner would gladly suffer death, that, expiating his crimes, he may hope to be forgiven by his Maker."

"Never will I purchase life at such a price," was the reply of the prince.

"My life is accursed," said Antonio; "my death will be triumphant. My lord, if you knew how I longed for death, you would not refuse me the blessing I covet. My Catherina ere this awaits me in the other world; I long to rejoin her—I long to obtain the pardon of my murdered father."

Eugene's face was buried in his hands, and he was weeping. "I cannot, I cannot," gasped he.

"You would drive your Laura to despair, then? You would go to your grave without renown?"

"No; I would live. Come: we can overpower the porter—if nothing less will save us, we can kill him."

"Before he dies he will call for help, and help will be near. But one of us can escape; and, by my eternal salva-



tion, I swear that I will not be that one ! Away with you ! Away ! In a moment it will be too late ! Do you not hear me ? Whether you go or stay, I never will leave this place again !”

Eugene staggered against the wall, and sighed heavily. Antonio knelt at his feet. At last he murmured almost inaudibly, “I will go.”

Antonio sprang from his knees, threw his cloak around the prince, and, with eager, trembling hands, adjusted his mask.

“Thank God !” said he, “we are of the same size and build. There is not the least danger of recognition. The porter will suspect nothing. The password is, ‘*One of two.*’ The gondola is moored in the place where we left it, and your friends are at the landing, awaiting you now. The marchioness knows that you are to leave Venice to-night. God in heaven bless you. And now away !”

“Antonio,” replied Eugene, greatly affected, “with my latest breath I will bless and thank you.”

Then folding the bravo in his arms, he would have spoken his thanks again, but Antonio hurried him away, closed the door, and then fell upon his knees to pray.

The password was spoken, the door was opened, and Eugene was saved ! He sprang into the gondola, and it flew across those sullen waters like an arrow. As he reached the landing, a well-known voice called out, “Eugene !”

“Max Emmanuel, I am here !” was the reply, and the friends were locked in each other’s arms.

At length the elector spoke :—“I have confronted death,” said he, “but never in my life have I passed an hour of such anguish as this. Come, Eugene, yonder lies the ship that is to bear us away from this sin-laden city. Step into my gondola, we have not a moment to lose.”

They rowed to the ship’s side ; they mounted the ladder, and before the dawn of day Venice with her palaces and their secret prisons had disappeared, and the friends were far on their way to Trieste.

## BOOK V.

### CHAPTER I.

#### A TWOFOLD VICTORY.

THE winter of 1688 had gone by ; the snows were melting from the bosom of reviving earth ; and the trees that bordered the avenues of the Prater were bursting into life. At the court of Austria nobody welcomed spring ; for its approach betokened the cessation of gayety, and the resumption of hostilities. The year 1687 had been rendered illustrious in the annals of Austrian history, by Charles of Lorraine, who, on the 12th of August, had gained a signal victory over the Turks. The rebellion in Hungary, if not suppressed, was smothered ; for the weary and exhausted Magyars had been totally crushed by the iron heel of General Caraffa, and they had submitted to Austria. The conditions of the surrender were hard : they demanded the relinquishment of some of the dearest rights of the liberty-loving Hungarians. First, they were to renounce all right of resistance against the King of Hungary ; second, they were no longer to elect their own sovereigns ; the crown of Hungary was made hereditary in the house of the Emperors of Austria. The Archduke Joseph, then ten years of age, was crowned king ; and the Hungarians were compelled to take the oath of allegiance to this irresponsible sovereign.

This being a decisive victory, the campaign ended early, and the season of festivity had therefore been a prolonged one. Not only the aristocracy of Vienna had celebrated the heroism of the victors by balls, concerts, and assemblies, but the emperor himself sometimes prevailed upon his retiring and devout empress to participate in the national gayety, by giving entertainments to her subjects at the imperial palace.