

"What did you say?"

"I was saying that of course you will break the news to her."

Life, and all the horror of life, came back into Martini's face.

"How can I tell her?" he cried out. "You might as well ask me to go and stab her. Oh, how can I tell her—how can I!"

He had clasped both hands over his eyes; but, without seeing, he felt the smuggler start beside him, and looked up. Gemma was standing in the doorway.

"Have you heard, Cesare?" she said. "It is all over. They have shot him."

CHAPTER VIII.

"INTROIBO ad altare Dei." Montanelli stood before the high altar among his ministers and acolytes and read the Introit aloud in steady tones. All the Cathedral was a blaze of light and colour; from the holiday dresses of the congregation to the pillars with their flaming draperies and wreaths of flowers there was no dull spot in it. Over the open spaces of the doorway fell great scarlet curtains, through whose folds the hot June sunlight glowed, as through the petals of red poppies in a corn-field. The religious orders with their candles and torches, the companies of the parishes with their crosses and flags, lighted up the dim side-chapels; and in the aisles the silken folds of the processional banners drooped, their gilded staves and tassels glinting under the arches. The surplices of the choristers gleamed, rainbow-tinted, beneath the coloured windows; the sunlight lay on the chancel floor in chequered stains of

orange and purple and green. Behind the altar hung a shimmering veil of silver tissue; and against the veil and the decorations and the altar-lights the Cardinal's figure stood out in its trailing white robes like a marble statue that had come to life.

As was customary on processional days, he was only to preside at the Mass, not to celebrate, so at the end of the Indulgentiam he turned from the altar and walked slowly to the episcopal throne, celebrant and ministers bowing low as he passed.

"I'm afraid His Eminence is not well," one of the canons whispered to his neighbour; "he seems so strange."

Montanelli bent his head to receive the jewelled mitre. The priest who was acting as deacon of honour put it on, looked at him for an instant, then leaned forward and whispered softly:

"Your Eminence, are you ill?"

Montanelli turned slightly towards him. There was no recognition in his eyes.

"Pardon, Your Eminence!" the priest whispered, as he made a genuflexion and went back to his place, reproaching himself for having interrupted the Cardinal's devotions.

The familiar ceremony went on; and Montanelli sat erect and still, his glittering mitre and gold-brocaded vestments flashing back the sunlight, and the heavy folds of his white festival mantle sweeping down over the red carpet. The light of a hundred candles sparkled among the sapphires on his breast, and shone into the deep, still eyes that had no answering gleam; and when, at the words: "Benedicite, pater eminentissime," he stooped to bless the incense, and the sunbeams played among the diamonds, he might have recalled some splendid and fearful ice-spirit of the mountains, crowned

with rainbows and robed in drifted snow, scattering, with extended hands, a shower of blessings or of curses.

At the elevation of the Host he descended from his throne and knelt before the altar. There was a strange, still evenness about all his movements; and as he rose and went back to his place the major of dragoons, who was sitting in gala uniform behind the Governor, whispered to the wounded captain: "The old Cardinal's breaking, not a doubt of it. He goes through his work like a machine."

"So much the better!" the captain whispered back. "He's been nothing but a mill-stone round all our necks ever since that confounded amnesty."

"He did give in, though, about the court-martial."

"Yes, at last; but he was a precious time making up his mind to. Heavens, how close it is! We shall all get sun-stroke in the procession. It's a pity we're not Cardinals, to have a canopy held over our heads all the way— Sh-sh-sh! There's my uncle looking at us!"

Colonel Ferrari had turned round to glance severely at the two younger officers. After the solemn event of yesterday morning he was in a devout and serious frame of mind, and inclined to reproach them with a want of proper feeling about what he regarded as "a painful necessity of state."

The masters of the ceremonies began to assemble and place in order those who were to take part in the procession. Colonel Ferrari rose from his place and moved up to the chancel-rail, beckoning to the other officers to accompany him. When the Mass was finished, and the Host had been placed behind the crystal shield in the proces-

sional sun, the celebrant and his ministers retired to the sacristy to change their vestments, and a little buzz of whispered conversation broke out through the church. Montanelli remained seated on his throne, looking straight before him, immovably. All the sea of human life and motion seemed to surge around and below him, and to die away into stillness about his feet. A censer was brought to him; and he raised his hand with the action of an automaton, and put the incense into the vessel, looking neither to the right nor to the left.

The clergy had come back from the sacristy, and were waiting in the chancel for him to descend; but he remained utterly motionless. The deacon of honour, bending forward to take off the mitre, whispered again, hesitatingly:

"Your Eminence!"

The Cardinal looked round.

"What did you say?"

"Are you quite sure the procession will not be too much for you? The sun is very hot."

"What does the sun matter?"

Montanelli spoke in a cold, measured voice, and the priest again fancied that he must have given offence.

"Forgive me, Your Eminence. I thought you seemed unwell."

Montanelli rose without answering. He paused a moment on the upper step of the throne, and asked in the same measured way:

"What is that?"

The long train of his mantle swept down over the steps and lay spread out on the chancel-floor, and he was pointing to a fiery stain on the white safin.

"It's only the sunlight shining through a coloured window, Your Eminence."

"The sunlight? Is it so red?"

He descended the steps, and knelt before the altar, swinging the censer slowly to and fro. As he handed it back, the chequered sunlight fell on his bared head and wide, uplifted eyes, and cast a crimson glow across the white veil that his ministers were folding round him.

He took from the deacon the sacred golden sun; and stood up, as choir and organ burst into a peal of triumphal melody.

"Pange, lingua, gloriosi
Corporis mysterium,
Sanguinisque pretiosi
Quem in mundi pretium,
Fructus ventris generosi
Rex effudit gentium."

The bearers came slowly forward, and raised the silken canopy over his head, while the deacons of honour stepped to their places at his right and left and drew back the long folds of the mantle. As the acolytes stooped to lift his robe from the chancel-floor, the lay fraternities heading the procession started to pace down the nave in stately double file, with lighted candles held to left and right.

He stood above them, by the altar, motionless under the white canopy, holding the Eucharist aloft with steady hands, and watched them as they passed. Two by two, with candles and banners and torches, with crosses and images and flags, they swept slowly down the chancel steps, along the broad nave between the garlanded pillars, and out under the lifted scarlet curtains into the blaz-

ing sunlight of the street; and the sound of their chanting died into a rolling murmur, drowned in the pealing of new and newer voices, as the unending stream flowed on, and yet new footsteps echoed down the nave.

The companies of the parishes passed, with their white shrouds and veiled faces; then the brothers of the Misericordia, black from head to foot, their eyes faintly gleaming through the holes in their masks. Next came the monks in solemn row: the mendicant friars, with their dusky cowls and bare, brown feet; the white-robed, grave Dominicans. Then followed the lay officials of the district; dragoons and carabineers and the local police-officials; the Governor in gala uniform, with his brother officers beside him. A deacon followed, holding up a great cross between two acolytes with gleaming candles; and as the curtains were lifted high to let them pass out at the doorway, Montanelli caught a momentary glimpse, from where he stood under the canopy, of the sunlit blaze of carpeted street and flag-hung walls and white-robed children scattering roses. Ah, the roses; how red they were!

On and on the procession paced in order; form succeeding to form and colour to colour. Long white surplices, grave and seemly, gave place to gorgeous vestments and embroidered pluvials. Now passed a tall and slender golden cross, borne high above the lighted candles; now the cathedral canons, stately in their dead white mantles. A chaplain paced down the chancel, with the crozier between two flaring torches; then the acolytes moved forward in step, their censers swinging to the rhythm of the music; the bearers raised the canopy higher, counting their steps: "One, two;

one, two!" and Montanelli started upon the Way of the Cross.

Down the chancel steps and all along the nave he passed; under the gallery where the organ pealed and thundered; under the lifted curtains that were so red—so fearfully red; and out into the glaring street, where the blood-red roses lay and withered, crushed into the red carpet by the passing of many feet. A moment's pause at the door, while the lay officials came forward to replace the canopy-bearers; then the procession moved on again, and he with it, his hands clasping the Eucharistic sun, and the voices of the choristers swelling and dying around him, with the rhythmical swaying of censers and the rolling tramp of feet.

"Verbum caro, panem verum,
Verbo carnem efficit;
Sitque sanguis Christi merum——"

Always blood and always blood! The carpet stretched before him like a red river; the roses lay like blood splashed on the stones—— Oh, God! Is all Thine earth grown red, and all Thy heaven? Ah, what is it to Thee, Thou mighty God—— Thou, whose very lips are smeared with blood!

"Tantum ergo Sacramentum,
Veneremur cernui."

He looked through the crystal shield at the Eucharist. What was that oozing from the wafer—dripping down between the points of the golden sun—down on to his white robe? What had he seen dripping down—dripping from a lifted hand?

The grass in the courtyard was trampled and red,—all red,—there was so much blood. It was

trickling down the cheek, and dripping from the pierced right hand, and gushing in a hot red torrent from the wounded side. Even a lock of the hair was dabbled in it,—the hair that lay all wet and matted on the forehead—ah, that was the death-sweat; it came from the horrible pain.

The voices of the choristers rose higher, triumphantly:

"Genitori, genitoque,
Laus et jubilatio,
Salus, honor, virtus quoque,
Sit et benedictio."

Oh, that is more than any patience can endure! God, Who sittest on the brazen heavens enthroned, and smilest with bloody lips, looking down upon agony and death, is it not enough? Is it not enough, without this mockery of praise and blessing? Body of Christ, Thou that wast broken for the salvation of men; blood of Christ, Thou that wast shed for the remission of sins; is it not enough?

Ah, call Him louder; perchance He sleepeth!

Dost Thou sleep indeed, dear love; and wilt Thou never wake again? Is the grave so jealous of its victory; and will the black pit under the tree not loose Thee even for a little, heart's delight?

Then the Thing behind the crystal shield made answer, and the blood dripped down as It spoke:

"Hast thou chosen, and wilt repent of thy choice? Is thy desire not fulfilled? Look upon these men that walk in the light and are clad in silk and in gold: for their sake was I laid in the black pit. Look upon the children scattering roses, and hearken to their singing if it be sweet: for their sake is my mouth filled with dust, and the roses are red from the well-springs of my heart.

See where the people kneel to drink the blood that drips from thy garment-hem: for their sake was it shed, to quench their ravening thirst. For it is written: 'Greater love hath no man than this, if a man lay down his life for his friends.'"

"Oh, Arthur, Arthur; there is greater love than this! If a man lay down the life of his best beloved, is not that greater?"

And It answered again:

"Who is thy best beloved? In sooth, not I."

And when he would have spoken the words froze on his tongue, for the singing of the choristers passed over them, as the north wind over icy pools, and hushed them into silence:

"Dedit fragilibus corporis ferculum,
Dedit et tristibus sanguinis poculum,
Dicens: Accipite, quod trado vasculum
Omnes ex eo bibite."

Drink of it, Christians; drink of it, all of you! Is it not yours? For you the red stream stains the grass; for you the living flesh is seared and torn. Eat of it, cannibals; eat of it, all of you! This is your feast and your orgie; this is the day of your joy! Haste you and come to the festival; join the procession and march with us; women and children, young men and old men—come to the sharing of flesh! Come to the pouring of blood-wine and drink of it while it is red; take and eat of the Body—

Ah, God; the fortress! Sullen and brown, with crumbling battlements and towers dark among the barren hills, it scowled on the procession sweeping past in the dusty road below. The iron teeth of the portcullis were drawn down over the mouth of the gate; and as a beast crouched on the moun-

tain-side, the fortress guarded its prey. Yet, be the teeth clenched never so fast, they shall be broken and riven asunder; and the grave in the courtyard within shall yield up her dead. For the Christian hosts are marching, marching in mighty procession to their sacramental feast of blood, as marches an army of famished rats to the gleaning; and their cry is: "Give! Give!" and they say not: "It is enough."

"Wilt thou not be satisfied? For these men was I sacrificed; thou hast destroyed me that they might live; and behold, they march everyone on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks.

"This is the army of Christians, the followers of thy God; a great people and a strong. A fire devoureth before them, and behind them a flame burneth; the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them."

"Oh, yet come back, come back to me, beloved; for I repent me of my choice! Come back, and we will creep away together, to some dark and silent grave where the devouring army shall not find us; and we will lay us down there, locked in one another's arms, and sleep, and sleep, and sleep. And the hungry Christians shall pass by in the merciless daylight above our heads; and when they howl for blood to drink and for flesh to eat, their cry shall be faint in our ears; and they shall pass on their ways and leave us to our rest."

And It answered yet again:

"Where shall I hide me? Is it not written: 'They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall; they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief?' If I build me a tomb on the mountain-

top, shall they not break it open? If I dig me a grave in the river-bed, shall they not tear it up? Verily, they are keen as blood-hounds to seek out their prey; and for them are my wounds red, that they may drink. Canst thou not hear them, what they sing?"

And they sang, as they went in between the scarlet curtains of the Cathedral door; for the procession was over, and all the roses were strewn:

"Ave, verum Corpus, natum
De Maria Virgine:
Vere passum, immolatum
In cruce pro homine!
Cujus latus perforatum
Undam fluxit cum sanguinæ;
Esto nobis prægustatum
Mortis in examinæ."

And when they had left off singing, he entered at the doorway, and passed between the silent rows of monks and priests, where they knelt, each man in his place, with the lighted candles uplifted. And he saw their hungry eyes fixed on the sacred Body that he bore; and he knew why they bowed their heads as he passed. For the dark stream ran down the folds of his white vestments; and on the stones of the Cathedral floor his footsteps left a deep, red stain.

So he passed up the nave to the chancel rails; and there the bearers paused, and he went out from under the canopy and up to the altar steps. To left and right the white-robed acolytes knelt with their censers and the chaplains with their torches; and their eyes shone greedily in the flaring light as they watched the Body of the Victim.

And as he stood before the altar, holding aloft with blood-stained hands the torn and mangled

body of his murdered love, the voices of the guests bidden to the Eucharistic feast rang out in another peal of song:

"Oh salutaris Hostia,
Quæ cœli pandis ostium;
Bella præmunt hostilia,
Da robur, fer, auxilium!"

Ah, and now they come to take the Body—
Go then, dear heart, to thy bitter doom, and open the gates of heaven for these ravening wolves that will not be denied. The gates that are opened for me are the gates of the nethermost hell.

And as the deacon of honour placed the sacred vessel on the altar, Montanelli sank down where he had stood, and knelt upon the step; and from the white altar above him the blood flowed down, and dripped upon his head. And the voices of the singers rang on, pealing under the arches and echoing along the vaulted roof:

"Uni trinoque Domino
Sit sempiterna gloria:
Qui vitam sine termino
Nobis donet in patria."

"Sine termino—sine termino!" Oh, happy Jesus, Who could sink beneath His cross! Oh, happy Jesus, Who could say: "It is finished!" This doom is never ended; it is eternal as the stars in their courses. This is the worm that dieth not and the fire that is not quenched. "Sine termino, sine termino!"

Wearily, patiently, he went through his part in the remaining ceremonies, fulfilling mechanically, from old habit, the rites that had no longer any meaning for him. Then, after the benediction, he knelt down again before the altar and covered his face; and the voice of the priest reading aloud the

list of indulgences swelled and sank like a far-off murmur from a world to which he belonged no more.

The voice broke off, and he stood up and stretched out his hand for silence. Some of the congregation were moving towards the doors; and they turned back with a hurried rustle and murmur, as a whisper went through the Cathedral: "His Eminence is going to speak."

His ministers, startled and wondering, drew closer to him and one of them whispered hastily: "Your Eminence, do you intend to speak to the people now?"

Montanelli silently waved him aside. The priests drew back, whispering together; the thing was unusual, even irregular; but it was within the Cardinal's prerogative if he chose to do it. No doubt, he had some statement of exceptional importance to make; some new reform from Rome to announce or a special communication from the Holy Father.

Montanelli looked down from the altar-steps upon the sea of upturned faces. Full of eager expectancy they looked up at him as he stood above them, spectral and still and white.

"Sh-sh! Silence!" the leaders of the procession called softly; and the murmuring of the congregation died into stillness, as a gust of wind dies among whispering tree-tops. All the crowd gazed up, in breathless silence, at the white figure on the altar-steps. Slowly and steadily he began to speak:

"It is written in the Gospel according to St. John: 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son that the world through Him might be saved.'

"This is the festival of the Body and Blood of the Victim who was slain for your salvation; the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world; the Son of God, Who died for your transgressions. And you are assembled here in solemn festival array, to eat of the sacrifice that was given for you, and to render thanks for this great mercy. And I know that this morning, when you came to share in the banquet, to eat of the Body of the Victim, your hearts were filled with joy, as you remembered the Passion of God the Son, Who died, that you might be saved.

"But tell me, which among you has thought of that other Passion—of the Passion of God the Father, Who gave His Son to be crucified? Which of you has remembered the agony of God the Father, when He bent from His throne in the heavens above, and looked down upon Calvary?"

"I have watched you to-day, my people, as you walked in your ranks in solemn procession; and I have seen that your hearts are glad within you for the remission of your sins, and that you rejoice in your salvation. Yet I pray you that you consider at what price that salvation was bought. Surely it is very precious, and the price of it is above rubies; it is the price of blood."

A faint, long shudder passed through the listening crowd. In the chancel the priests bent forward and whispered to one another; but the preacher went on speaking, and they held their peace.

"Therefore it is that I speak with you this day: I AM THAT I AM. For I looked upon your weakness and your sorrow, and upon the little children about your feet; and my heart was moved to compassion for their sake, that they must die. Then

I looked into my dear son's eyes; and I knew that the Atonement of Blood was there. And I went my way, and left him to his doom.

"This is the remission of sins. He died for you, and the darkness has swallowed him up; he is dead, and there is no resurrection; he is dead, and I have no son. Oh, my boy, my boy!"

The Cardinal's voice broke in a long, wailing cry; and the voices of the terrified people answered it like an echo. All the clergy had risen from their places, and the deacons of honour started forward to lay their hands on the preacher's arm. But he wrenched it away, and faced them suddenly, with the eyes of an angry wild beast.

"What is this? Is there not blood enough? Wait your turn, jackals; you shall all be fed!"

They shrank away and huddled shivering together, their panting breath thick and loud, their faces white with the whiteness of chalk. Montanelli turned again to the people, and they swayed and shook before him, as a field of corn before a hurricane.

"You have killed him! You have killed him! And I suffered it, because I would not let you die. And now, when you come about me with your lying praises and your unclean prayers, I repent me—I repent me that I have done this thing! It were better that you all should rot in your vices, in the bottomless filth of damnation, and that he should live. What is the worth of your plague-spotted souls, that such a price should be paid for them? But it is too late—too late! I cry aloud, but he does not hear me; I beat at the door of the grave, but he will not wake; I stand alone, in desert space, and look around me, from the blood-stained earth where the heart of my heart lies

buried, to the void and awful heaven that is left unto me, desolate. I have given him up; oh, generation of vipers, I have given him up for you!

"Take your salvation, since it is yours! I fling it to you as a bone is flung to a pack of snarling curs! The price of your banquet is paid for you; come, then, and gorge yourselves, cannibals, bloodsuckers—carrion beasts that feed on the dead! See where the blood streams down from the altar, foaming and hot from my darling's heart—the blood that was shed for you! Wallow and lap it and smear yourselves red with it! Snatch and fight for the flesh and devour it—and trouble me no more! This is the body that was given for you—look at it, torn and bleeding, throbbing still with the tortured life, quivering from the bitter death-agony; take it, Christians, and eat!"

He had caught up the sun with the Host and lifted it above his head; and now flung it crashing down upon the floor. At the ring of the metal on stone the clergy rushed forward together, and twenty hands seized the madman.

Then, and only then, the silence of the people broke in a wild, hysterical scream; and, overturning chairs and benches, beating at the doorways, trampling one upon another, tearing down curtains and garlands in their haste, the surging, sobbing human flood poured out upon the street.