

The Great Betrayal


Firebrand, #2

by George Challis, 1892-1944

Serialized: 1935
in »Argosy«



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Tizzo turned quickly after striking the man down with his sword

PART I

Chapter I

Tizzo Rides to Beatrice.

TO the credit of Tizzo there stood a number of things for a man who was not much past twenty and who had no more family than a rabbit in the fields.

Item: Five duels with the best blades of the town of Perugia, in all of which he was the conqueror, through luck and a certain nameless cunning of the hand none had resulted fatally.

Item: The great favor of Messers Astorre and Giovanpaolo, war lords and battle-leaders of the powerful and ruling house of the Baglioni.

Item: A purse filled either by his patrons, the Baglioni, or by clearheaded gambling, or by the wealth of his foster-father, Luigi Falcone; a purse worn out by these emptyings and fillings.

Item: Handsome lodgings in the inn.

Item: A one-eyed cut-throat with a patch on his face, a leering smile, and the cunning of the devil, named Elia and devoted to the service of Master Tizzo.

Item: A head of hair which, being cut short to accommodate a helmet; looked a little less burning red than in younger days when it had gained him the name of Tizzo, the Spark.

Item: Eyes the color of the blue of flame.

Item: An engagement to meet this night, under the moon, in the summer house of the country estate of Astorre Baglioni outside the city, the beautiful sister of Messer Astorre, the Lady Beatrice.

Of all of these articles in his favor, young Tizzo was most burningly aware. For the blue flame of his eyes showed him one who was enjoying the full savor of life to the very roots of his palate. He was this evening dressing with care, helped busily by Elia Bigi. He had drawn on long purple hose, a green doublet heavily embroidered with crimson, green shoes of soft leather that came half way up the calf of his leg; he had belted on his sword which was balanced at the right hip by a dagger. Scabbard of both sword and dagger were enhanced by rich golden chasings. Over his neck he hung a chain of massive gold, each link variously and curiously worked by a Florentine goldsmith, and supporting an intaglio which showed the noble profile of the famous Giovanpaolo, that Achilles of the *condottieri* of Italy. He was now swinging over his shoulders a black cloak which shone with an elaborate arabesque in silver when a messenger came to the door with a letter.

When Elia gave him the letter, he was about to throw it aside, but his eye saw the arms of the Bardi stamped into the seal and therefore he knew that it was a missive from his dearest friend in the entire city. So he opened the letter and read:

To my brother Tizzo, given in haste from my house; greetings, life, happiness, honor.

Tizzo, go not where you have willed to go on this night. Let your heart sleep. Do not follow it.

Ask me no more for my meaning or for the source of my information.

If I were free to come to you, I would be with you now and beg you on my bended knees to stay at home.

If ever you entered my house like a brave angel from heaven; if ever you saved me from a foul death beyond the holy hand of the church, alone, desperate, hateful to men; if ever I have sworn to you the eternal love of a brother for a brother, believe me now, ask me nothing, and lie quietly in your chamber tonight. It is your time of danger. If it passes, tomorrow will dawn brightly and the rest of your life may be spent in peace.

Farewell. My heart burns with anxiety. Be wise. Be prudent.

With all the blood of my body, thine—

Antonio.

When Tizzo had finished the reading, he was so overwhelmed that he threw himself into a chair and bowed his head.

Elia, that hardy brigand, muttered: "You have lost a good legacy, at least. But take a glass of wine and lift your head again. There are still throats to be cut and purses to be taken in this jolly old world."

As he spoke, he poured from a silvered pitcher a goblet of the rich, thick red wine of Tuscany and held out the glass to Tizzo, who took it, tasted it, and pushed it back into the hand of his servant.

"Or if it is merely a woman," said Elia, "I can swear that there are others who—"

"Be silent!" commanded Tizzo.

He rose and paced the room, thinking aloud.

"He begs me as he loves me.—True, Antonio loves me. 'Go not where you have willed to go on this night.'—How should he know where I am to go this night? Beatrice, my beautiful, noble, glorious, generous, brave, gracious, most perfect Beatrice!—Let my heart sleep? How can I let it sleep when it strides like a lion through my body?—Ask not for his source of information, which means that he has it from a high and dangerous authority.—This is my time of danger? No, by God, it is my time of love!—If this night passes in safety—by the Lord, poor Antonio has been visiting an astrologer. Elia!"

"Messer Tizzo?"

"Do you believe in astrology?"

"Well," said Elia, "the sky is a large, clean page, and it would be a pity if God had not put some good writing on it, for wise men to read."

"True!" said Tizzo.

HE went to the window and thrust it open to look up past the nearest battlemented heights and into the brightness of the heavens. A wind which never touched the earth made the stars tremble like leaves. Awe fell upon the irreverent soul of Tizzo.

He murmured: "But how could God waste his time to arrange symbols in the high heavens concerning the life of Tizzo?"

"Sparks in heaven to speak of a spark on earth," said Elia. "How could the stars be better employed than to speak to you, master?"

"I shall remain at home."

"The will of God be done," said Elia, grinning behind his master's back, because he was sure that this safe impulse would not be followed.

It happened that, at this moment, a sound of music turned a distant corner, the tremor of strings, singing, and the mingled laughter of women. Tizzo threw up his hands.

"I am called!" he said. "And I must go. 'Is my horse ready?'"

"It is, Messer Tizzo."

"Not the mule-headed bay for carrying an armored man, but the chestnut Barb that flies?"

"The Barb is saddled. The silver bridle is on him and the yellow housings with the bells."

"Bells?" said Tizzo. "Well, if they are waiting for me, let them hear me come! But give me that hat with the steel lining."

"And the breastplate of Spanish mail?" queried Elia.

"Yes. Let me have it.—No, I shall not take it.—What manner of man would I be, Elia, if I feared to die? Love of her is my armor. Arrows will turn from me tonight."

"I would put my money on a good cross-bow bolt," said Elia, "or more still on a knife-thrust aimed at the back, or perhaps a little in a few dozen tiles, dropped from an overhanging roof."

Tizzo, staring for a moment at his servant, suddenly broke out of the room and ran hastily down the stairs. In the courtyard he found the slender chestnut Barb standing, a gift from the richest of all the Baglioni, that Gridone who was the most fortunate of men, married to the loveliest of ladies, with the whole world of happiness already in his hands, as it seemed. The occasion of the gift hung now beside the saddle in a case of embossed leather, a common woodsman's axe. The deceptively slender frame of Tizzo had seemed incapable of great efforts and yet with that axe he had cloven the massive jousting helmet, the finest product of the Milanese armorers. It had been put on a horse-post and he had split it from top to bottom with that deft, quick swing which he had learned from Falcone's foresters in his boyhood. The reward had been a loud exclamation that ran all the rounds of Perugia—and this beautiful Barb mare which now put out her lovely head and whinnied for her new master.

Once in the saddle, he flew the mare down the crooked, winding, paved streets of Perugia until the dark and massive arch of a city gate appeared before him.

"Open! Open!" he shouted, as he came up.

The captain of the gate stepped into his path, a tall man in complete armor except for the head, which was shaven close and gray with premature age.

"Are you drunk or a fool?" he asked bluntly, for the soldiers of the Baglioni were at ease in their manners to the townsfolk. "It is my duty to open the gate to every young hot-head who wishes to take the country air at night?"

"Does this help you, captain?" asked Tizzo, thrusting out a hand on which appeared a ring with a large incised emerald on it.

The captain, regarding the design with a bowed head, stepped back and frowned.

"The ring may be stolen, for all I know," he said.

Tizzo snatched off his hat.

"Do you know me better now?" he exclaimed.

The captain saluted instantly. "Messer Tizzo!" he said. "The light is dim; I could not see your face; forgive me!"

He ordered the small portal to be unlocked and it was done at once.

"Give me fortune, my captain," said Tizzo.

The captain of the gate laughed. "If I don't give it to you, you'll take it anyway. I give you fortune, Messer Tizzo. May she be the daughter of the richest merchant in Perugia!"

THE last exclamation came as Tizzo leaped the Barb through the barely opened portal and let the mare speed away down the slope. He crossed the hollow at the same wild gallop, but let the mare draw down to a trot as he climbed into the hills again. To the right he saw the misty lights of the city of Assissi, the sacred place of pilgrimage, but those lights meant no more to Tizzo, on this night, than the distant stars of the sky. It was the face of Beatrice Baglioni that filled his mind, it was her remembered voice that silenced the hoofbeats of the mare as he drew near the high, dark shoulders of a great villa.

He did not go directly to the big house, but tethering the mare at a short distance from the corner of the stone wall, he climbed that wall like a cat, and dropped lightly down inside it.

Already he was well inside a realm of danger. It was true that he was a chosen friend and supporter of both Astorre and Giovanpaolo Baglioni, but the armed guards they maintained were apt to strike an intruder dead before they looked into his face or asked for his name. Besides, no matter how they valued him, they could not be expected to smile on a romance between him and their own sister, a lady rich enough and famous enough in name and in beauty to marry a prince of a great estate. The Baglioni were, he knew, generous, brave and true to their friends; but they were also ruthless in matters of important policy.

These things softened his step as he stole from place to place through the garden, dropping flat on the grass when he heard the jingling of steel and staying under the shadowed lee of a hedge until three men went by, the moonlight glinting on their armor.

But he went on again until he saw, in the midst of a silver sheen of lawn covered by the moonlight as with dew, the little summer-house which was the jewel of the garden. About it, statues stood at the corners of the hedges, dancing figures that seemed to move in this light.

And the fragrances of the garden flowers came as intimately as voices to the heart of Tizzo.

There was almost infinite peril about him, but to him it was the spice in the wine, the savor in the breath of life. He would not have altered anything.

When he looked up, he took note of the position of the moon and saw that it still lacked perhaps half of an hour of the position in the sky on which he had agreed with Beatrice. But now she was filling her heart with expectancy in the great villa. That was her room, there at the upper corner of the building—that one with the two lighted windows.

Yes, she was there, preparing to steal from the house.

Illustration:
Tizzo

And now she must be coming down the little winding steps which were cut into the wall. She would wear a dark cloak to hide her beauty and defy the moon. Slipping over the lawns like a shadow, she would enter the summer-house and then he would see, from his place of covert at the hedge above, the signal which they had agreed upon: the triple passing of a light across the face of a window.

He had to sit down on the grass and bow his head in his hands and tell himself stories of his past to make the time pass. When he looked up, the moon was already at the proper place in the sky. The moment had come!

But no signal flashed for him! He waited with a sudden coldness of the heart.

Strange things are done by the great to the humble. What if she had been playing with him? What if she had named the hour for him and, afterwards, had told the story to her maids, laughing pleasantly, wondering how long in the chill of the night the poor red-headed fool would wait in vain?

The window of the summer-house which faced him was, to be sure, unshuttered; but perhaps it was habitually left open to the cool of the night.

Impatience suddenly overwhelmed him, swept him away. He ran swiftly as the shadow of a stooping hawk across the lawn and peered in through the window. The moonlight made a slant path before him, and in the midst of it he saw nothing except a chair which lay on its side.

He was through the window instantly.

The air within was warmer, softer, and a perfume breathed in it that sent an ecstasy through his brain, for it was that fragrance which his lady preferred, he knew. That one chair overturned—that sparkling eye—he leaned and picked from the floor a small ring set with diamonds and knew it for one of the jewels of the Lady Beatrice. At the same time shadows moved softly from the dark corners of the room; he saw them by instinct rather than with his eyes.

Chapter II

A Letter.

AS full awareness leaped into the mind of Tizzo, he heard a voice more hateful to his ears than any other in the world, the young Mateo Marozzo crying: "Now! Keep him from the window! Now! Now!"

And those shadows were lunging from the corners of the room with a sudden thundering of feet.

This was the danger of which Antonio Bardi had warned him, faithfully. He heard the peculiar grating, clanging noise of the steel plates of armor; he saw the sheen of naked weapons already sweeping past the open window behind him.

There was no refuge in that direction. And since he could see no means of flight he followed the first impulse of a very brave man: with his sword swinging he leaped straight into the face of danger and charged the men immediately before him.

Their own numbers clogged their efforts. Two blades struck at him almost in the same instant. He caught one with the sword, one with the dagger, and burst straight through the fighting men. There was a door before him, barely ajar. Through it he leaped as a hand grappled his cloak and a sword smote the ledge of the doorway above his head. That assailant he heard crying out in the voice of Marozzo, once more.

He turned and struck the man to the floor with the pommel of his sword. Those others, recovering from their confusion, had turned to follow at his heels but he slammed the door and shot home the bolt. By the moonlight he saw a point of steel struck straight through the heavy wood and heard the impact of armored shoulders against the barrier.

It held firm and he turned to the senseless form on the floor. By the hair of the head he raised Marozzo and laid the back of the man's neck across his knee.

"Take the rear way; cut him off; a thousand florins for him!" he could hear voices shouting.

But with the point of his dagger, with cruel deliberation, he cut a cross in the forehead of Marozzo. The point of the keen weapon shuddered against the bone, so strong was the pressure. And the blood looked black as it flowed down the face of Marozzo.

He, wakening with a groan, heard the voice of Tizzo saying: "Where is the lady? Marozzo, here is your death waiting in my hand if you lie; but you live if you tell the truth."

"The convent of the Clares!" groaned Marozzo.

Tizzo flung the helpless body from him and sprang up. A fellow with an axe was smashing in the outer door to this room and there was a clamor of many voices near him. So Tizzo drew back again the bolt which he had just shot and leaped back into the first room.

Two soldiers were still in the place, but totally unprepared for this sally, and Tizzo leaped through the window and raced over the gentle slope of the lawn.

They were hopelessly lost behind him, in a moment, those fellows in the anchoring weight of their armor. He leaped the first hedge, gained the wall, and was over it and in the saddle of the Barb, while the clamor still poured aimlessly towards him from the distance.

The swift mare carried him from all danger, now, like a leaf in a strong wind.

And still, as he looked up, he saw the same moon which had promised him happiness sliding over the wide arch of the night and tossing a meager drift of clouds into shining spray.

But in an hour the entire prospect of his life had changed. He had been the friend of the Baglioni; what was he to them now? The red hair which had been his passport through the city gate might be his death-warrant now. And Lady Beatrice was closed inside the icy walls of a convent until it pleased her lordly brothers to set her free!

HE could not cast forward to any conclusion; the speed of the mare had brought him back to the same gate of the city before anything was settled in his mind; he was knocking again at the portal with an instinctive hand, and he heard a voice calling through the shot-window: "Who is there?"

"I've come through this way once before, tonight," said Tizzo.

"Ah, it is-he!" Tizzo heard a quieter voice mutter before the hole in the gate.

The middle door was opened at once, and he saw that same tall captain approaching, now with a naked sword in his hand and a helmet on his head.

"Messer Tizzo," said the captain, with a certain happy unction, "I arrest you in the name—"

"Of my foot!" cried Tizzo, and driving a spur into the side of the Barb, he made her bound like a deer while he drove the heel of his other foot straight into the face of the captain.

"Cross-bows! Cross-bows!" shouted the captain in a muffled voice as he staggered and fell.

The cross-bows were quickly at the shoulder, but before a single quarrel could fly, the Barb had rounded the corner of the first building and was raising loud echoes down the narrows of the street.

So Tizzo came back into Perugia easily enough, but would he find it such a simple matter to get out again? If he were wanted, he probably would be caught, because the Baglioni knew how to turn their city into a bird net which was capable of catching even the swiftest hawk in the highest sky.

But here he was riding on the street which contained the convent of the gentle order of the Clares, that sisterhood which followed the mind of St. Francis. But however good their lives and sweet their ways, the gray of their habits was not so gloomy as the bitterness in the mind of Tizzo. The gray gowns seemed to Tizzo to have claimed his lady, and she was shut away from him already as though by the veil of twenty years.

And now he sat the Barb under the lofty wall of the convent, staring hopelessly up at the barred casements. Somewhere inside the building a bell was striking, as though to hurry penitents to their prayers. The knees of Tizzo weakened, also. He would have been glad to throw himself down on the pavement of the street and to ask God for mercy in the midst of his wretchedness.

It was now that a figure detached itself from the arched shadows near the door of the building and came slowly across the street towards him, a ragged beggar, walking with a staff. When he came closer, he lifted his tattered hat.

"Messer Tizzo?" he asked, humbly. "Well?" demanded Tizzo.

"This is for your hand, signore." And he handed to Tizzo a letter from which there came the slightest scent of perfume, a fragrance more grateful to Tizzo than all the music of the spheres.

He ripped open the letter and read the writing by the dim moonlight.

Tizzo, we are betrayed. Astorre is wild with rage. Even Giovanpaolo has struck his hand on his sword and sworn an oath.

A wretched woman of my own household has told everything. I shall spend my days kneeling, praying for your life. Fly, Tizzo, fly! My love follows you.

Beatrice.

Chapter III

A Sword at his Throat.

THE gift of a florin made the beggar begin to bless Tizzo and all his ancestors.

"I don't know their names," said Tizzo harshly, interrupting the long benediction, "so keep your prayers for your own spindleshanks."

Out of the letter came two great facts: that his lady loved him, which lifted earth to heaven and spread blue fields of eternal happiness before him; and that Giovanpaolo had struck his sword hilt with rage—which swept all of this happiness out of existence again.

He could see them together, the Lady Beatrice and the noble face of Giovanpaolo. Only long continued wars had taught him the vice of cruelty, but his heart was as glorious as his face. Of that Tizzo was sure.

He could wish, now, to have the council of the boldest man he had ever known, that famous English warrior, Henry, the Baron of Melrose. What would the baron have advised in a time like this? Why, his counsel would have been to strike at the root of the fire in order to put out the flames. And Giovanpaolo was the root of the danger, of course. Astorre mattered less because one word from his famous brother would rule him.

Tizzo sat his saddle musing through a long moment until he heard the clanking of armor down the street and saw the dim swinging light of a lantern approaching. Then he turned the head of the Barb mare and rode on the wildest errand he had ever attempted in all his wild life.

Danger came to him from the Baglioni. The innermost brain as well as the strongest striking hand of the Baglioni was Giovanpaolo. Therefore he intended to go straight to that man on many devices.

Giovanpaolo, he knew, was spending the night at the house of his cousin Grifone, in order to discuss with him late and early, the plans for the reception of Astorre's wife, who was to arrive the next day from Naples. The whole city was to be given over to a great fiesta in honor of the newly married pair and already the preparations were making the town hum day and night.

Towards the house of Grifone he went, therefore, and rode his horse slowly past the great facade. At all the corners of it were posted small groups of men-at-arms to keep watch, for the Baglioni were masters of the city, though Perugia was full of danger to them. The exiled house of the Oddi still retained a great number of adherents within the walls and these were likely to strike whenever the opportunity was good. What bait more tempting than to find within the walls of one house both the richest and the wisest of the Baglioni?

Since it was obvious that he would not be able to enter the house through one of the lower windows, he determined to take the place in the rear. So he went to the next lane, left the good mare tethered in it, and looked up the gloomy height of the side wall of that house which adjoined Grifone's.

He took off his hat to have the weight of the steel lining from his head. He put away the heavy cloak, also. In doublet, hose, and the soft green leather shoes he prepared to climb, but first he hung his sword by its shortened belt from around his neck. So lightened he went up the side of the house with ease. As a cat climbs, at home in the branches, swift-footed and confident, so he ran up the window bars which were like ladders, clawed his way over the great projecting ledges, and came at last to the high cornice, which thrust well out from the wall of the building. Balanced on a mere edging of stonework that girdled the house, he looked up to study this hazard, and made sure that he could hardly hope to surmount the barrier. Then he saw a projecting coping stone on which he might be able to fasten, but it was well beyond his reach.

He slipped off his sword and stretching out his arm, hooked the belt over the stone. As well as he was able, he tested the strength of this anchorage; he looked to the fastening which, except in time of action, held the sword blade to the sheath.

However, he was a fellow who usually found the first thought better than the second. In another moment, setting his teeth, he grasped the sword blade and allowed himself to swing out from the wall of the building. Above him, he felt the belt slide on the stone and made sure that he would drop the next instant into thin air.

That was why he looked down and saw in the street, made narrow by the height at which he hung, two lanterns and a dozen men gathered about his mare.

Would they glance up and find that dim, small object dangling under the great eaves of the house?

THE belt no longer slipped. It had stuck precariously, at the very end of the projecting stone, and Tizzo pulled himself up gingerly, hand over hand, until he could grasp the stone itself. Then, in a moment, he had swung himself onto the steep slant of the roof, gathering the sword up after him.

Lying flat, he peered down and made out the mare being led away, while one lantern went swaying down the street and another was hurried up its length. For all he knew, they might well have seen him above their heads and they were now going to spread the alarm. Nevertheless he went forward.

That moon which had appeared to him like a bright face of promise earlier in the night was now sloping into the west and the stars were wheeling slowly after it. He gave them one glance and then crossed the roof to its farther side. The roof of

the great house of Grifone Baglioni began here, with hardly a ten foot gap between the two cornices.

He bounded across that chasm quickly and nimbly.

A flat roof-garden stood in the center of the space with a door leading downwards. The door was locked, but the bolt was so flimsy that it gave at once to the pressure of his shoulder, and so he passed down into the house of Grifone. Past the upper corridor, he went down to the second hall and through this to the end because he knew perfectly where Giovanpaolo would be lodged. It was not the first time that Tizzo had been in this palace and he knew that the suite of honor adjoined a fine open loggia which overlooked the piazza. Here he expected to find Giovanpaolo.

It was said that the house of Grifone was painted from top to bottom and, except for the servants' quarters above, this was entirely true. A night-lamp, hanging from the ceiling of the hall showed him the walls moving with a great procession of figures and even the ceiling itself, of coffered wood, was painted and gilded so that it shone over his head like a bright autumn forest.

In a niche at the end of the hall crouched a white Venus, shrinking from his approach.

He turned to the loggia. The door was not locked and he stepped into the open, peering down from between the columns into the width of the piazza.

No one stirred across that great pavement; he could hear the sound of the fountain waters in the middle of the place like the soft rushing of a wind.

From the loggia he turned through the next door and found himself in a large anteroom lighted clearly enough by two lamps which no doubt had been supplied with oil to burn all the night through. There lay the hat of Giovanpaolo, shining with an incrustation of pearls all over the crown. On a chair were piled the cuirass, the leg armor of finest steel; a two-handed sword leaned in its sheath against the chair. On the table were a pair of golden spurs with immensely long rowels. And beside the spurs lay an open book, beautifully printed according to the new art which had been introduced through Italy from Germany, that distant nation of northern barbarians. It was strange, thought Tizzo, that any art could come from that misty, northern region!

Through a doorway adjoining he passed into a chamber far more dimly lighted by a single small lamp from whose wick a mere tremor of flame rose, so that the shadows washed up and down the walls ceaselessly and the entire apartment became a ghostly thing.

The paintings along the walls seemed more real than the figure of the man who lay on the great bed. It stood huge as a house at the side of the chamber.

The sleeper must have had restless dreams, for even now he was stirring uneasily, gripping a hand above his head, and muttering. Half of the covers had slipped from him and spilled towards the floor.

Illustration:

Baron Melrose

Over him leaned Tizzo and recognized the strong, handsome face of Giovanpaolo.

He had come to the end of his short quest!

His sword was naked in his hand, now. He placed the point of it close to the throat of the sleeper and, leaning still closer, heard Giovanpaolo muttering: "Once more, men of Florence, brave fellows! If you are hungry, remember that there is bread and wine in their tents. The fat, red wine of Siena, comrades! Charge once more with me and we shall have it!"

The warrior was fighting again some battle in his sleep as Tizzo murmured; "Waken, my lord! There is a sword at your throat."

Chapter IV

To Be Beaten—and Spared.

THE rousing of such a warrior as Giovanpaolo was like the rousing of a lion, Tizzo knew, and he watched with apprehension and curiosity. Giovanpaolo, opening his eyes, looked without a start along the steady gleam of the sword and up into the eyes of the youth.

"So, Tizzo?" he said. "Murder?"

"If I'd wanted to murder you," said Tizzo, "as much as you've wanted to murder me, I could have drawn the edge of this sword across your throat or dipped the point of the dagger into your heart. I have come to talk to you."

"Let me reach the sword in that chair and I can answer all your questions," said Giovanpaolo.

He sat up in the bed, looking earnestly at Tizzo.

"Why have you wished to murder me?" asked Tizzo.

"I've had no such wish," said Giovanpaolo.

"You knew that armed men were posted at the summer house of Messer Astorre, waiting for me," said Tizzo.

"I knew that a trap was baited. I could not believe that such a clever cat as Tizzo would play the mouse and walk into the danger."

"But if I were fool enough to go—there was the end of me, so far as you are concerned?" asked Tizzo.

"My dear Tizzo," said the warrior, "what use have I for fools in my life? I knew you were a brave man and a good fighter, so I valued you; but if you were fool enough to throw your eyes on Lady Beatrice with hope, you are no more to me than a dog that bays the moon."

Tizzo regarded the Baglioni with a curious eye. There was no fear in this man, and there was a ruthless frankness of truth in his remarks, as though the long, keen blade of the sword were no more than a pointing finger.

"Sir Giovanpaolo," said Tizzo, "if I have looked at the lady it is because I love her as other men love angels in heaven."

"My friend," answered the Baglioni, "every pretty girl is as bright as a star—while she is at a distance. I want to keep you from Lady Beatrice."

"Who means to you," agreed Tizzo, gloomily, "a strong marriage with some powerful house."

"She means that to us," answered Giovanpaolo. "Men who rule cities, Tizzo, cannot be governed by ordinary motives. Beatrice is a pretty thing, and moreover she is a Baglioni, therefore she has to be of use to the house. And what are you? A fellow with a fine flame on his head and a fine spark in his eye—but no more."

"My lord," said Tizzo, straightening, "the reason I came to you was to ask for an explanation."

"I have given you one," said Giovanpaolo, looking both at the sword and the man without fear.

"I was sworn to your service," said Tizzo, "and yet you were willing to throw me to the dogs of Marozzo."

"It was he who had the forethought and the information," answered the other, shrugging his shoulders.

"The Lady Beatrice was to be the bait, and I was to be the rat for the trap!"

"If you play the rat's part, you must die the rat's death."

"And you, my patron, for whom I have fought with my sword—you let me go to my death?"

"No. I gave you a fighting chance but a good one. To a man who loves you like a brother, to that same Bardi who owes his life to you, I let a hint be given that you should keep at home to- night."

Tizzo started. "And if I had done as he advised me to do?"

"Then, when Marozzo's trap had closed on nothing, I should have seized his house and his possessions, given a moiety of them to you, and had him beaten from Perugia with whips; as a man who dared to conspire against and falsely accuse my nearest followers."

TIZZO was staring, now. There was a queer, crooked, cruel morality in this attitude of mind that he could not fathom. He could see the fact, but he could not feel any understanding of it.

"Instead," he said, bitterly, "the lady is closed inside a convent until you choose to bring her out for a political wedding, and I am an enemy of your house forever."

"Not unless you wish to be one," said Giovanpaolo. "All the qualities that I saw in you before are in you still. I have removed the temptation of Lady Beatrice from your way and I have flashed a sword in your eyes. There is no reason why we should not carry on as we have done before."

"There is a reason," said Tizzo, his heart beating high.

"Name it to me, then," answered Giovanpaolo.

"You have set a trap for me and therefore you are a traitor to me, my lord. What keeps me from driving this sword through your heart, then?"

"A certain foolish set of scruple prevents you," said Giovanpaolo. "Am the light in your eyes, Tizzo, is the love of battle, not of murder. You cannot strike an unarmed man."

"It is true," said Tizzo. "But then is plenty of light in the next room. You have a sword there and another on this chair. These apartments are set off from the rest of the house so that the clashing of swords will bring no interruption to us. Your highness, we will fight hand to hand and wash our stained honors clean with our blood."

"That," said Giovanpaolo, "is as childish and mad an idea as I have ever heard, but I like it."

He rose from the bed and picked up from the chair beside it a sheathed sword. The scabbard fell away with a hissing sound and left in the hand of the Baglioni a blade as like that of Tizzo's as a twin brother. Giovanpaolo led the way straight into the next room and from the scattered clothes selected hose, doublet, and slippers. Now that he was dressed, he took his position and weighted the balance of his weapon. His sleeve, thrust back to the elbow, showed a forearm alive with snaky muscles. The wrist was perfectly rounded by the distention of the big tendons. Stories of the terrible cunning and strength of this man rushed back upon the brain of Tizzo; for in Giovanpaolo there was the brain to plan great battles and then the courage of a hero to lead his soldiers through the fight.

"Now, Tizzo," said Giovanpaolo, "I'm to thank you for this pretty little occasion. How often do we have a chance to fence with honest, edged weapons? How often does blood follow the touch?"

He began to advance, slowly.

"I shall have to let the world know that you burst in on me like an assassin," he said, "but I shall have you honorably buried. Tizzo, I salute your courage, I smile at your folly. Defend yourself!"

On the heel of these words, he rushed suddenly to the attack. Tizzo, having marked everything in the big room, gave back before the assault, and at the first ringing touch of steel against steel, he knew that he had met a great master.

Let the teachers, the schoolmasters of fencing, talk as they pleased; the important matter was not the clumsy swaying of the edge of the sword but the snakelike dartings of the point, which gave a more dangerous wound without exposing the assailant so widely. In that understanding, Tizzo had fenced many a long hour with Luigi Falcone; it was the point, also, which the wild daredevil of an Englishman, the Baron of Melrose, had used against him. And now it was with the point that Giovanpaolo pressed home the attack. He attacked hungrily, and yet with a smooth beauty of movement. For a moment, Tizzo was bewildered, his heart in his throat. Then he thought of the shadowy murderers who had waited for him in the summer house of Messer Astorre, and he met the attack with a savage countering.

THE lightning feet of Tizzo were his defense and his attack. The sleights of a magician's hands were no more subtle than the flying of his feet, the intricate dancing measures through which they passed.

Twice, in as many minutes, Giovanpaolo cornered his man and set his teeth with a grim, furious purpose to drive the sword through the body of the enemy; and twice, with hardly a parry, Tizzo swayed from the darting point and was away.

Giovanpaolo began to sweat. He drew back to take breath, measuring his man and the work before him.

"By God, Tizzo," he said, "you are such an exquisite master that my heart bleeds to think that I must lose you through my own handiwork. Defend yourself!"

He leaped again to the attack. The man was as cunning as a fox, leaving apparently wide openings to invite the point of Tizzo's blade and flashing a murderous counter attack the moment Tizzo lunged at the opening. But Tizzo,

holding back, with a carelessly hanging guard, met the assaults, moving his sword arm little, his feet much. There seemed to be an intricate pattern on the floor, in every one of whose divisions he had to step. Death darted past his face, his throat, his body, but it always missed him by a hair's breadth.

And then Tizzo began to attack in earnest. He had fathomed the consummate science of his man, by this time. Now he pressed steadily in, until Giovanpaolo began to groan faintly in his breathing. His face turned pale; it was polished with sweat.

Here a heavy beating came against the door.

"Who is there?" called Giovanpaolo.

"In the name of God, your highness, we have heard swords clashing in your rooms!"

Giovanpaolo looked at Tizzo for an instant. A faint, cruel smile dawned on his face.

But he answered: "I am fencing with a friend. Be gone and leave us in peace."

"There is one other thing, your highness. The noble Mateo Marozzo is now in your house, his face horribly wounded. Tizzo, men say, has escaped from a dozen men, branded the face of Mateo Marozzo forever, and escaped. But he is still in Perugia. Shall all the gates be guarded for him?"

"No!" called Giovanpaolo. "He is already gone! Let me be in peace!"

Footfalls obediently withdrew.

Tizzo said: "Your highness, I have always known that you must be such a man as this. You could have let your servants in to kill me like a blind puppy. I thank you. Your highness is troubled; your breath is short and your arm is tired. Shall we end this fighting?"

"End it?" exclaimed Giovanpaolo. "Do you think that I shall ever give over a battle I have entered upon?"

He came in with a desperate, last strength. Twice the leap of his sword blinded the very eyes of Tizzo. And he, half down upon one knee, used suddenly the secret stroke which the Baron of Melrose had given to him as a treasure.

The sword of Giovanpaolo, knocked from his hand, wheeled brightly in the air and then descending, thrust straight through the cushioned bottom of a chair.

Giovanpaolo himself, unabashed, hurled himself straightforward at Tizzo, in spite of the level gleam of the weapon that pointed at his breast.

And Tizzo could not strike the final blow! His arm turned weak and senseless to make the stroke. Giovanpaolo, brushing past the bright point of danger, grasped the doublet of Tizzo at the neck and thrust him back against the wall. The other hand caught Tizzo's sword hand at the wrist.

So for a moment they stood, with the glare of savage beast in the eyes of Giovanpaolo.

But this fire died out. His hands left their holds. His head dropped forward wearily on his breast. He turned from Tizzo and, slipping into a chair, rested his forehead on the heels of his hands.

Tizzo sheathed his sword and felt gingerly the bruised muscles about his throat.

"To be beaten—and then spared—like a dog!" groaned Giovanpaolo.

Tizzo went to the loggia door and paused there.

"Your highness," he said, "I cannot fight under you any longer; and it is seen that God will not let me strike against you. Therefore I leave Perugia forever. Farewell. To the Lady Beatrice, say that I send my prayers—"

"Be silent!" commanded Giovanpaolo. "Pour wine for us at that table, and bring it at once."

Chapter V

Wine of Friendship.

TIZZO, with his brain quite adrift, unfathoming the purpose of the Baglioni, obediently poured two silver goblets full of pale, golden wine and brought the drink. Giovanpaolo raised himself suddenly from his chair. He picked up one of the beakers in his left hand and motioned Tizzo to do the same.

"Now, Tizzo," he said, "you have taken service under me before. In the meantime, you have dared to look past your height to the Lady Beatrice. In reward for that, I have allowed you to be trapped. You were a step from death in the summer house of Astorre tonight. I have been half an inch from death in this room. Tizzo, for the evil I have done you, forgive me."

"Forgive you?" said Tizzo, overcome by the humility of this fierce master of Perugia. "Highness, I have forgotten all offense!"

"You have beaten me," said Giovanpaolo. "It could be in my heart to hate you, Tizzo; it is also in my heart to love you. I cast the hate away"—here he spilled a little of the wine purposely on the floor—"and I take the love, instead. This cup, Tizzo, is filled with immortal friendship. Beware before you taste the wine. If it passes your lips it is as though you drank my blood. Do you hear me?"

"I hear you, highness," said Tizzo, beginning to tremble with a great emotion.

"Are you prepared to be with me two hands, two hearts, two souls of friendship?"

"I am!" said Tizzo.

"Then give me your hand!" said Giovanpaolo, grasping that of Tizzo at the same moment. "I drink to you, Tizzo, in token that so long as blood runs in my body, it is your blood and ready to flow for you."

They drank, and setting down the silver goblets stared at one another for a moment, as men who already saw a strange future stretching before them.

"Giovanpaolo," said Tizzo, "this is a beginning. Whether it be a dry death or a wet one, by steel, or fire, or bullets, or starvation, may we come to the same ending together."

Giovanpaolo, picking up from the table a heavy ring of gold, laid it on the floor and stamped on it. He lifted it, snapped it in two parts.

"Take this," he said to Tizzo. "Whatever message comes with it, night or day, if the half of the ring fits with my half, I shall go at once to answer you."

"If your portion comes to me in the same manner," answered Tizzo, "by the blood of God I shall come to you in spite of ten thousand."

"So, so!" said Giovanpaolo. "We have spoken in a very high strain for a few moments. Sit down, my friend. But—sacred heaven! When I think that a moment ago I stood with a naked breast in front of the point of your sword, I am still amazed. Where did you learn that last trick of the blade, Tizzo? Or did some devil of an enchanter teach you the thing? Will you teach it to me?"

"Whatever I know I shall teach you—and that same stroke as soon as I have the permission of the man who taught it to me."

"Who was that?"

"Henry, Baron of Melrose."

"That wild-headed Englishman loves you, I know, Tizzo. He put his head in jeopardy to keep you from death when he rode into this city and gave himself into the hands of Astorre to have you set free. Do you give medicine to make them love you, Tizzo? What is Henry of Melrose to you—except that he is the chief leader of the forces of the Oddi and plots daily against the lives of the Baglioni?"

"He is," said Tizzo, "a friend of the Oddi, for what he chiefly serves is chance and the bright face of danger. To follow danger, he has left his country and ridden around the world. At last he came seeking for me; and for what mysterious reason I still cannot tell. He values me, I know, and again I cannot tell why. And that not in modesty, but because the strange love of this man amazes me! I only know that he came one day into my life, dashed me away from all the future I had come to accept, and swept me away at his side in the pursuit of adventure. There the Lady Beatrice crossed my way. You know how I set her free from the Oddi and followed her here. You know how that pursuit of her almost won me my death at the hands of Marozzo. And now it has led me to the rooms of your highness—and made us pledge our hands together."

"ALL spoken like a prophet," said Giovanpaolo. "It is true that you are a wild-headed lover of the Lady Beatrice. Now tell me what you would have me do? Marry you to her?"

"Five minutes ago," said Tizzo, "I would have stolen her with poison or swords. Now I would not lift a finger to come near her without your special permission."

"So?" said Giovanpaolo. "If men were like you, I should have to give up war and my old way of living; I should have to take to frankness, honesty, truth and mercy. Let me tell you this—if the time comes when I can persuade old Messer Guido, the head of our house, you shall marry Beatrice on that day. And I'll carry you to see her this moment."

"You will?" exclaimed Tizzo.

"This moment," said Giovanpaolo, "she shall be set free from the house of the Clares and permitted to see you."

"Wait!" said Tizzo. "Before I take so much from you, tell me in what way I shall be able to serve you? Tell me, quickly, before my heart bursts, that service of which you are most in need."

"I should have to drop you like a plummet into the sea, deeply into the heart of a man who smiles in my face but who is, I fear, my greatest enemy," said the Baglioni.

"Let me go to him then," cried Tizzo, "and I shall read his mind and you shall know his present attitude."

"Tizzo, if you could do that, the weight of the world would be remove from me!"

"What is his name?"

"Jeronimo della Penna."

"But he is one of the chief friends of the Baglioni."

Illustration:

Luigi Falcone

"So he seems," said Giovanpaolo, "but as a matter of fact he is known to have been kind to our enemies, of late."

"Would he then have been kind to me if the world did not know that you and I have been reconciled to-night?" asked Tizzo.

"How?" asked Giovanpaolo sharply.

"For all that is known to others," said Tizzo, "I have been pursued through the city by your riders—"

"There I was at fault," said Giovanpaolo.

"It is forgotten," answered Tizzo. "But suppose that tomorrow you put a price on my head and proclaim me an enemy? I return to the house of my foster-father. There is an estate of this della Penna close by. If he truly hates you, and learns that I also am your enemy, will he not try at once to make me his friend?"

Giovanpaolo laughed, suddenly and loudly.

"Our friends are the eyes that look into the hearts of the world; the ears that listen to its mind. With two more like you, Tizzo, I should be able to conquer Italy in six months.—But wait—there is a frightful peril. You and I alone will know the truth. All of my family will hunt you down like a wild beast the moment I put the price on your head; and you know already that the Baglioni can be cruel enemies."

"You, and I, and the Lady Beatrice will know the truth," said Tizzo. "That is enough for me. Nothing is gained without danger. If della Penna is your enemy, within two days I shall know the degree of his hatred. You may depend on that."

"It is done!" said Giovanpaolo. "Here, cloak yourself with this and pull the hood down over your head. Already it is dawn. We shall go to Beatrice now!"

Wrapped in a length of blue velvet that muffled his body and his sword, with the hood pulled down over his face, Tizzo a moment later was passing down the halls, down the great stairs, through the tremor of life which the night lights revealed along the painted walls of the house of Grifone and so out onto the street, where he walked eastwards with Giovanpaolo towards a great, golden Venus which blazed in the green forehead of the morning sky. But the lesser stars already were withdrawing to their distances like the lights of a retreating army.

So they came to the high, bald front of the convent of the Clares, where the porter saw the face of Giovanpaolo and bowed very lowly as though he would strike his forehead against the floor.

Illustration:

Tizzo, smiling, was always ready for a encounter

PART II

Chapter V

Wine of Friendship (continued).

TIZZO, striding anxiously up and down in the reception room, looked again and again towards the shimmering bars of iron which set off the room from the little cell in which the sisters of the order might appear to converse with their friends. He had waited, he was sure, for hours, before hinges moved with a dull, grating sound, and then a candle was carried into the cell by a veiled girl with a beautiful face.

Tizzo leaped to the bars and grasped them.

"Beatrice!" he said.

"Hello!" exclaimed Giovanpaolo. "Can you see her face through that veil, Tizzo?"

The girl tossed back the hood and came to the bars.

"This is a strange summer house for our meeting, Tizzo," she said without emotion.

He took one of her cool, slender hands and stared, entranced, into her brown eyes.

She was above all a Baglioni in the immensity of calm with which she faced every crisis.

And now, looking past Tizzo, she exclaimed, "Is that the traitor? Is that Giovanpaolo? O that I ever thought I loved you!"

"Beatrice," said Giovanpaolo, "Tizzo is now my sworn brother. He has forgiven my sins; will you do the same?"

"How did you buy him, Giovanpaolo?" asked the girl.

"With my love," said the warrior.

"It is something that turns as quickly as a page," said the girl.

"With my faith," said Giovanpaolo.

"I could blow away a thousand faiths like yours on one breath," she declared.

"With my right hand," said Giovanpaolo.

"Has he given you his hand?" she asked suddenly of Tizzo.

"And have given him mine," said Tizzo.

Her face softened suddenly.

She said to Giovanpaolo: "You are as dangerous as a poisoned knife, or treachery by night; but I can still love you a little for the sake of Tizzo. Tell me what it means, though, when you bring Tizzo to see me here? Am I to suspect anything?"

"It means that when Messer Guido gives his consent, you two will be married, if you still love this red-headed fellow.

"But mind you, Beatrice—his brain is really on fire."

"I know it," said the girl. She looked earnestly at Tizzo "Do I love you, my dear?" she asked.

"Somewhere in your wicked heart there is something that cares for this worthless self of mine," said Tizzo.

"Yes," she answered. "But last night when I walked into the trap for your sake—when I went down over the lawns trembling like a silly fool and whispering your name—I hated you for the thing that I found! Yes, how I hated you!"

"Did you hate me, Beatrice? I came to the place honestly, as I told you I would, and before the time. And there I was!"

"Do you know what I found there?" she asked.

"Marozzo?"

"Yes. My wretched maid had sold my secrets to him; and Giovanpaolo let him use what he had learned."

"I was to blame," said Giovanpaolo.

"Some day," she said fiercely, "I shall pay you home for that, my handsome cousin!"

"Hush!" said Tizzo. "I have put my mark on Marozzo."

"Have you?" she asked, eagerly.

"With the point of my dagger I have drawn a cross on his forehead, that will make him a crusader the rest of his life. No doctor will ever rub that mark away."

"Tizzo, I love you!" said the girl.

She threw out her arms to him through the bars, but he only took her hands and kissed them.

"Why not my lips, Tizzo?" she cried.

"Never," he answered, "till I am sure that you love me—not for the shame I have done to Marozzo but for myself."

"Do you see?" said the girl to Giovanpaolo. "He makes bargains and draws up definitions. This comes from his study of Greek. God forgive me if I ever marry a scholar. Tizzo, when will you be sure that I love you for yourself?"

"Only," he answered, "when you and I have faced the devil together and plucked a few hairs from his iron beard."

Chapter VI

Wasps Begin to Hum.

THE Mulberry, orange and lemon trees flavored the airs that blew over the house of Luigi Falcone, and through the lawns of his garden great-headed plane trees gave shade and spear-headed cypresses marked the walks and circled the fountains. There was an artificial lake expensively produced by diverting the water from a creek among the hills and leading it here to fill an excavated hollow in the midst of the garden. The soil of the excavation had been used to create raised, flowering banks around the pool, and in the center of the lake there was a little island on which stood a summer house. Its form was that of a little Greek temple

with graceful Ionic columns that threw a white glimmering reflection across the water, and the principal use of the water was that it acted as a 'barrier across which the world could not step in order to invade the privacy of Luigi Falcone when he chose to sit here alone with his thoughts. A Venetian gondola with a gondolier lolling under its canopy, waited on the convenience of the master.

This fellow now started up, for his name was called.

"Olimpio! Fat-witted, lazy Olimpio!"

"Mother of heaven!" said Olimpio. "It is my master!"

And he leaped up to the deck and to the handle of his oar. As soon as he saw the flaming head of Tizzo under the shadows of the trees that crowned the bank, Olimpio began to lean his weight on the long oar and drive the little bark furiously forward.

"Wait here," said Tizzo to Elia Bigi. Before he left the town of Perugia he had said to the one-eyed servant: "Elia, I am about to leave Perugia as a proscribed man with a price on my head. You can sit here and keep my rooms, or you can ride with me and risk your neck." And the grotesque answered: "Well, if I stay here I shall lose my appetite and the only eye that's left to me will grow dull as an unused knife. But if I go with you, every day will have a salt and savor of its own." So he had ridden with Tizzo, each with a shirt of the finest Spanish mail, and a steel-lined bonnet, and the pair of them got hastily from the town.

The gondolier, bringing his boat swiftly and gracefully along the side of the little pier at the edge of the lake, held out both hands with a shout, but Tizzo leaped from the pier exactly into the center of the gondola.

"Tizzo!" cried Olimpio. "Ah, two-footed cat. You could drop from a tree-top and never break the leaves that you landed on. Welcome home! Welcome, welcome! You have been dancing with the devil in Perugia and still he has not turned your hair gray!" Tizzo shook the greeting hands warmly and laughed: "The best day is the day of the returning. Is your master on the island?"

"He is there with a Greek manuscript, and I hear him chanting the words and striking the lyre," said Olimpio. "He will make it a fiesta when he knows you have come!"

In fact, as the long, narrow gondola went swaying across the smooth water of the lake, Tizzo heard strings of music sound from the little temple, and when he stepped ashore, he recognized a chorus of Aristophanes, sung with a fine gusto to that improvised accompaniment.

A great cry greeted this singing, and from the columns of the temple, as the gondola touched the shore, there ran out a tall, bald-headed man who threw up his hands with a shout when he saw Tizzo.

FOR a moment it seemed to Tizzo that he was again the nameless waif of the village streets, standing agape as the "lord of the castle" went past him. And then, like the blurred flicker of many pictures, his memory touched the years when he had entered this house as the humblest of pages and grown at last to the position of foster son and heir.

Now he had fallen into the arms of Luigi Falcone. Now he was being swept into the little summer house where the harp stood aslant against a chair and, on a table, were scattered the yellow parchments of old manuscripts.

"What have you been doing with your Greek, Tizzo?" demanded Falcone.

"I've been using it to sharpen my sword," said Tizzo.

"I've heard that you and Giovanpaolo Baglioni are like two brothers together; and a man must have a sharp sword to be a brother to Giovanpaolo. But Perugia is a city of murder."

"I'm a proscribed man with a price on my head," said Tizzo. "Haven't you heard that?"

"Proscribed? By the Baglioni? Tizzo, what are you doing lingering here so close to Perugia? Wait! I'll call for horses! We'll send you as fast as hoofs can gallop—"

"I've fled all this distance from Perugia and I'm tired of flight," said Tizzo. "I'm going to stay here."

"They'll come in a drove and slaughter you, lad!"

"Perhaps they will. But the fact is that a man has to die some time, and it's better to be struck down from in front than shot through the back. I'll run no farther. It's as easy to die young as it is to die old."

"Of course it is," said Falcone.

"But are you really resolved to run no more from the Baglioni?"

"Not another step—today," said Tizzo, and laughed.

Falcone laughed in turn. "The same blue devil is in your eyes and the same red devil is in your hair," he said with a smile.

"We'll go into the villa. I have some French wine for you. You shall tell me everything; and I'll give orders that every man on my place shall take weapons and be prepared to fight for you!"

"Not a stroke! Not a stroke!" said Tizzo. "I've made my own fortune and whatever is in the cup I'll be ready to drink it, alone."

They went back in the gondola, and as he left the boat Tizzo gave some golden florins to Olimpio. "Turn them into silver," he said, "and scatter them among all the servants. Tell them that the Baglioni want my life and that if it is known that I am here in the Villa Falcone, I'm not better than a dead man."

"Ah, signore," said Olimpio, his eyes still startled by the sight of the gold, "we all are ready to die for you; not a whisper will come from one of us."

But as they went on towards the large house, Falcone said: "Tizzo, that is the act of a child, really! You tell them that the Baglioni are hunting you, and you ask the servants to say not a word. But how can they cease from talking? They have heard no gossip like this for many years! You have come back from Perugia with the atmosphere of a hundred duels about you."

"So how can they keep from talking about you?"

"Let them talk, then," said Tizzo. "Even mute swans have to sing when they die. Let them talk."

"In fact," said Falcone, suddenly stopping, "it is a part of your plan to have them talk?"

"Perhaps it is," agreed Tizzo. "But don't ask me what the plan may be."

"I SHALL ask nothing," said Falcone. "Even when the wasps begin to hum, I'll try to brush them away and merely go on rejoicing myself in you, Tizzo. Tell me everything! What have you learned in new sword-play? Are you content in Perugia? Why don't you decide to travel across the world? There are great new things to see,

in these days. But you hear everything in Perugia, because it is on a main road to Rome. Tell me all the news of the world, Tizzo! I hunger to learn it!"

They sat in an open loggia near the top of the large house, looking over the green rolling of the Umbrian hills; the sun-flare shimmered over all. They drank white wine of Bordeaux, cooled with packings of snow.

"I strike out at random and tell you whatever I've heard," said Tizzo. "The traitor Warbeck has been executed in England."

"I knew that," said Falcone.

"The Emperor rages because the Swiss are at last free from him. But at Dornach they beat him so thoroughly that they have a right to rule their own lives. In Spain, the great Ferdinand has broken his promise and begins to burn the Moriscoes like firewood. A certain great sailor of Portugal, one Vasco da Gama, has returned after finding a way around Africa to the Indies. The Venetians groan because the Turks beat them last year at Sapienza; they swear to have their revenge soon. But Kemal-Reis is a fighting demon by sea. The Spanish princess, Catherine of Aragon, is betrothed to Prince Arthur, of England, the son of that sour-faced money-changer, Henry Tudor. Louis XII is annexing Milan and bargaining with the Spaniards. That's an unhappy day for Italy! The Diet of Augsburg is stealing some of the Emperor's powers from him, they say. Pedro Cabral has touched the shore of a great land in the Western ocean; he has called the thing Brazil. It is south of the islands which Columbus discovered for Spain, and people begin to say that it is not the Indies which Columbus discovered. It is new land, with a new, red-skinned people living on it. There, my father, I have burst open all the latest news in one packet. I suppose you've heard most of it before."

"Not as I hear it now," said Falcone. "The world is wakening, Tizzo, and great things will come to pass. The new printing press with its moveable types will multiply books throughout the world. Gun-powder knocks down castle walls. A common man with a harquebus may stand at ease and kill with a single shot the knight in complete armor. God alone can tell where the world is tending. But you—Tizzo—how have you ever tended except to mischief?"

So they sat talking and laughing together while the day ran on towards the evening. The dusk was descending blue and soft after the hot summer day when a whistle sounded from the trees near the villa and Tizzo bounded to his feet.

"Is it danger? Wait for me, Tizzo?" exclaimed Falcone. "I catch up my sword and follow you instantly—"

But Tizzo was gone, flashing through the bright, painted rooms, leaping down the stairways and then out the door into the garden.

There he found a big, gray-headed man whose eyes shone even through the dimness of the twilight. He wore heavy riding boots; his doublet was wide open at the base of his great throat. A small round hat, plumed at one side, sat jauntily on his head, and at his side a heavy sword made a light shivering sound of steel against the scabbard as he moved to greet Tizzo. Even Luigi Falcone, even Giovanpaolo Baglioni were no greater in the eyes of Tizzo than this man who had made him the gift of one consummate trick of sword-play.

Chapter VII

A Star of Five Points.

THEY greeted each other as men who have owed their lives to one another. Then, as Baron Melrose pushed himself back to arm's length, he surveyed the younger man with care.

"You are no bigger in the bones than when I last saw you," he said. "But neither is the wasp as big as an eagle, and yet it can trouble a man more. Still, I could wish that there were twenty English pounds of extra beef on you. Then you could spend more muscle and less spirit in your wars."

"My lord," said Tizzo, "I am what I am—a starved thing compared with you, but ready to guard your back in any battle. Tell me, how do you dare to show yourself so near to Perugia? Are the Oddi rising to try to re-take the town? How did you know so quickly that I was at the Villa Falcone? Where have you been since I last saw you?"

"If I had four tongues and four separate sets of brains, I would begin to answer all those questions at once," said the big Englishman, laughing. "But as the matter stands, I have to speak them one by one. As for the Oddi, their secrets are their own. I am no nearer Perugia than I have been for a month. And I knew you were here because a whisper ran through the kills and came to my ears. Now for one question in my turn: Have you broken with Giovanpaolo, Astorre, and all the Baglioni?"

"I've crossed swords with Giovanpaolo," said Tizzo. "I've had my life attempted in the garden of Messer Astorre. And a price has been put on my head."

"Have all of these things happened?" asked Henry of Melrose. "You can pick up trouble faster than a pigeon can pick up wheat. But if the Baglioni have closed one door in your face, another opens of its own weight behind you. Tizzo, Jeronimo della Penna wishes to speak to you."

"About what?"

"He will open the subject to you himself."

"Tizzo!" called the anxious voice of Falcone.

"Say farewell to Falcone," said Melrose, "and meet me again here. That is, if you wish to face della Penna tonight."

There was nothing that Tizzo wished to see less than the long, dark face of Jeronimo della Penna, but it was for the very purpose of sounding the depths and the intentions of this man that Giovanpaolo had schemed with him. Therefore: "I return in one moment!" said Tizzo, and hurried to meet Falcone.

"I'm called away," said Tizzo.

"Into what?" demanded Falcone. "Tizzo, you shall stay this night, at least, in my house."

"I have to go. I am compelled," said Tizzo. "As surely as a swallow ever followed summer, so I have to follow the whistle that sounded for me tonight."

"It's a thing that I don't like," said Falcone. "But the devil befriends young men. Good-by again. Wait—here is a purse you may need—no, take it. God bless you; come to me again when you can!"

And Tizzo was away again to the side of Melrose.

They walked on through the gardens until they heard the ringing strokes of an axe in a hollow, followed by the crashing of a great tree. The fall of the heavy trunk seemed to shake the ground under them.

Illustration:

Elia Bigi

"There are friends of mine, yonder, working by lantern light," said Tizzo. "And I must speak a word with them. Wait here—or at least keep out of their sight."

Tizzo, hurrying on, came on three foresters who worked by a dim, shaking light which had been hung from the branch of a small sapling. Unshaven of face, ragged in their clothes, the three were preparing to attack another huge pine tree with axes.

"My friends!" called Tizzo, stepping into the faint circle of the light. "Taddeo—Riccardo—Adolfo—well met again!"

The three turned slowly towards him. Old Taddeo began to nod his bearded head.

"Here comes the Firebrand again. What forests have you been burning down, Tizzo? Is it true that the Baglioni are leaning their weight and ready to fall on your head?"

Tizzo grasped their hands. "I've had my hands filled with something besides axe shafts," he admitted. "But I'm happy enough to see you all again."

"Your hand has turned soft," said Taddeo.

"It is harder than my head, however," laughed Tizzo. "Why are you working so late?"

"Because the overseer drives us like dogs."

"I'll speak to my father. You shall not be enslaved like this!"

"NO man is a slave who has mastered an art," said Taddeo.

He waved his great axe with one hand. "And we are masters of ours!" he added. "But have you touched the haft of an axe since we last saw you?"

"An axe has helped me more than a sword," said Tizzo. "Give me a mark and let me show you that my eye is still clear."

Old Taddeo struck the trunk of the tree a slashing blow and left a broad, white face, large as the disk of the moon and shining brightly.

"There is the target. Make a mark for him, my sons," said Taddeo.

Big Riccardo, chuckling half in malice, drew out a knife, picked up a straight stick to make a ruler, and calmly drew a five-pointed star with the sharp steel edge. Where the knife cut the white of the pine wood it left a thin, glistening streak, hardly visible except to a very fine eye.

Old Taddeo ran the tips of his hard fingers over the design and laughed loudly.

"Let me see it done, then!" he said. "It has never been managed before even by the oldest woodsman in the forest. Strike at that target freely, Tizzo. There are ten strokes to make and with the tenth the star should leap out from the tree. And then see that every one of your strokes has hit exactly the ruled line. Ten strokes without a single failure—here is my own axe to use, and if you succeed—why, the axe is yours!"

Tizzo accepted the axe and looked down on it with attention. Of old, from his boyhood, he had heard about that axe, and he had seen it swung, more than once, in the hands of Taddeo. The steel had a curious look. It was blue, with a strangely intermingling pattern of lines of gray. And the story was that once a fine Damascus blade had been brought back from the Orient, and being broken it had been re-welded by the father of Taddeo, not into a new sword, but into an axe-head. That matchless steel, supple as thought, hard as crystal, had been transformed into a common woodsman's axe. The blue shining of it seemed to be reflected, at that moment, in the flame-blue of the eyes of Tizzo as he swayed the cunningly poised weight of the axe.

For two life times that axe had been in use, the handle altered, refined, reshaped, so as to give it a gently sweeping curve. The balance was perfect. It grew to the hand like an extension of the body.

Tizzo threw down on the ground the purse which he had just received from Falcone.

"I take the challenge, and if I fail, that purse is yours, my friends. Watch me now, Taddeo. Watch, Riccardo, Adolfo! There are ten enemies; if I miss one of them, the gold in that purse is your gold, and you will all be rich for ten years!"

So, measuring his distance, swinging the axe lightly once or twice to free his muscles, he suddenly attacked the dim target with no calm deliberation, but with a shower of strokes, as though he stood foot to foot with fighting antagonists. With each stroke the axe bit in deeply; and with the tenth a block of solid wood leaped out from the blazed surface of the tree and fell upon the ground—a perfect star with five points!

And in the wood of the tree, softly etched by shadow, there was another star incised.

The three foresters raised a single deep-throated shout and actually fell on their knees to examine the work that had been done. But neither on the fallen star nor on the edges of the blazed surface appeared a single one of the lines which Riccardo had drawn with his knife. True to a hair's breadth, the axe had sunk into the wood.

Old Taddeo, standing up, pulled the cap from his head and scratched the scalp in meditation.

"Wise men should teach only the wise," he stated. "I have wasted my time teaching these two louts. But when I taught you the art of the axe, I taught two hands and a brain. Take my axe, Tizzo. Take my blue axe, and God give you grace with it. If it will not shear through the heaviest helmet as though it were leather and not hard armorer's steel, call me a fool and a liar! Keep the edge keen; let it bite; and the battle will always be yours."

Tizzo picked up the purse and tossed it to the old man.

"A gift is always better than a bargain," he said. "Turn this money into happiness, and remember Tizzo when you drink wine."

So he was gone, quickly, and found Henry of Melrose chuckling in the woods not far away.

"I followed closely enough to see what you did," said the Englishman. "You understand one of the great secrets; coin is made round so that it may keep rolling. And the best of buying is a giving away!"

Chapter VIII

„Beware of Me Tomorrow”

JERONIMO DELLA PENNA had a dark, yellow skin, and a mouth which the earnest gloom of his speculations pulled down at the corners. He had large properties, but he was both penurious and absent-minded. His hose was threadbare over the knees, on this evening, but his brocaded cloak was fit for a king.

He kept striding up and down, and when he greeted Tizzo it was with a stare that strove to penetrate to his soul.

"Do you vouch for this man, my lord of Melrose?" he asked.

"I vouch for nothing," said Melrose, "except for the state of my appetite and the cleanness of my sword. Here is the man I told you about. I found him willing to come. I know he has been driven out of Perugia. Perhaps that makes him fit for your purposes. For my part, I withdraw and leave you to find out about him as much as you please. Come to me later, Tizzo. I have a room in the south tower. We can have a glass of wine together, before you sleep."

He went away in this abrupt fashion, leaving della Penna still at a gaze.

He said: "My friend, it is said that there is a price on your head?"

"That is true," said Tizzo.

"It is said that you have been wronged by Giovanpaolo. But he has a way of winding himself into the hearts of men so that they serve him more for love than for money. If he has dropped you today, can he pick you up tomorrow?"

"Perhaps," said Tizzo.

Della Penna started. "Do you think that he can take you again when he chooses?"

"How can I tell?" asked Tizzo, calmly. "I am not a man who knows the mind he will have tomorrow. The days as they come one by one are hard enough for me to decipher. Every morning, I hope to find a pot of gold before night; and how can I tell what will be in the pot? The hate of Giovanpaolo, or his friendship? It is all one to-me."

"And yet Melrose brought you to me!" pondered Jeronimo della Penna. "Tell me, Tizzo—because I have heard some rare tales of your courage and strength and wild heart—are you a man to pocket an insult?"

"I am not," said Tizzo.

"Are you a man to return wrong for wrong?"

"I am," said Tizzo.

"Are you a man I could trust?" pursued della Penna.

"I've never betrayed a friend," said Tizzo.

"Ah! You won't answer me outright?" exclaimed della Penna.

"Signore, you are a stranger to me," said Tizzo. "Why should I boast about my faith and truth? You must do as I do—take you as I find you. If you can use me for things I wish to do, I hope to shine with a very good opinion. If you try to ride me

up hill against my wishes, you can be sure you'll be sooner weary of spurring than I of following the road."

Della Penna scowled.

"You are one of these fellows," he said, "who have been praised for speaking your mind right out, like an honest man."

"Sir," said Tizzo. "I think that only a fool trusts the man who is out of his sight."

"Do you know why I have sent for you?"

"I guess that you plan something against Giovanpaolo or some others of your own family who have the control of Perugia."

"If that were the case, what do I know of you?"

"Nothing except that you think I have a grievance against the same people. I make no promises; I ask none from you. If there is mischief abroad, perhaps each of us will make his own profit."

Della Penna smiled, faintly. He had found something in the last speech that appealed to him very much. Now he said: "There is one man in the world who can tell me the truth about you. But before he is through searching you, you may wish that you had let your soul be roasted on a spit in hell. Come with me, Mr. Honest Man."

THEY went down a corridor which communicated with winding stairs and came up these to an open tower from which Tizzo could look across the dark heads of the hills to a little group of lights which, he knew, shone from the village of Falcone. On this top story of the tower there was a fat old white-headed man with a red nose and a very cheerful smile, who greeted della Penna warmly, turning from an iron kettle in which he was stewing some sort of a brew over a little corner hearth.

Tizzo was about to step forward to acknowledge the greeting when della Penna caught his arm with a hand of iron and checked him. Looking down, he saw that he had been about to put his foot inside a circle which was chalked upon the floor and which was filled with strange signs.

A chill of horror passed like a night wind through the blood of Tizzo. He remembered strange tales in the village, years before, of the wizard who lived in the tower of the della Penna castle. When a blight fell on the grapes, when oxen fell dead at the plough or weevils got into the stored grain, the peasants were apt to look up with a curse towards the distant della Penna tower.

"Messer Baldassare," said della Penna, "I have brought—"

"A good sharp blade that will be useful unless it cuts the hand which tries to use it."

Della Penna was so struck by the saying that he turned sharply about towards Tizzo, but Tizzo was too busy staring into the white circle to pay the least attention. It seemed to him that that great white sign upon the floor was as dangerous as the entrance into hell itself. It was a pit of damnation on the verge of which he stood and, covertly, he crossed himself.

"How do you know," asked della Penna, "that I wish to use this man? You have cast no horoscope for him nor even consulted your herbs on his behalf or on mine. Explain what you mean?"

This sharply inquiring tone did not upset the magician in the least, and he turned his red, jovial smile on della Penna as he answered.

"I have served your father and you for so long that when great good or evil come towards you my invisible agents are apt to whisper something in the air, indistinct words. I was about to make those words become clearer. I was about to force the spirits to speak to me in real language. I had drawn the circle on the floor and heated the broth, as you can see for yourself, when you appeared with the very man about whom I heard the whisper."

"How do you know it is the very man?" asked della Penna.

"Look!" said the magician.

He extended his hand above the steaming pot. In an instant the steam had turned crimson, and the hand of Messer Baldassare was gilded red, also.

Tizzo uttered a faint, choked exclamation. His knees grew weak. He was terribly certain that now he was beholding the handiwork of the devil.

"When I saw the red light strike my hand," said the magician, "I knew that you were near—on the very stairs about to open my door. I had barely time to put my hat on my head before you came into the tower."

He was wearing a square, yellow, high hat with certain cabalistic signs worked in black upon it; Tizzo remembered the saying that it is not safe for common men to look upon an enchanter when he is serving the devil with his arts.

"Look into this man, Baldassare," said della Penna. "Shall I have good or evil fortune from him?"

"Better than for me to speak, I can force him to speak for himself and to utter the truth."

"Force him, Baldassare?" demanded the patron.

"Give me three drops of your blood, young man," said the enchanter. "Come, and let me put them into the pot. Come without fear. In the circle, there is no harm for you!"

But Tizzo nevertheless chose to edge cautiously around the circle and so come to the caldron.

"Give me your hand!" said Messer Baldassare in a sudden, loud, and terrible voice.

HE caught the right hand of Tizzo and stared straight into his eyes. The very soul of Tizzo was shaken, but he looked back and thought that the face of the enchanter had turned into the face of a frowning lion. The eyes were sparks of fire.

Illustration:

Jeronimo della Penna

"Now," said Baldassare. And drawing the hand of Tizzo until it extended over the pot, Baldassare plucked out a bodkin and pricked a finger until the blood ran. The running of the blood he watched carefully and suddenly threw the hand from him.

Then, stepping to the circle in haste, Baldassare drew certain signs with a rapid piece of chalk. Tizzo, frozen in his place with horror, felt the hair prickle and rise on his scalp.

Baldassare, dropping on one knee, held out both hands, palm down, close to the floor. It was the gesture, Tizzo knew, of one who prayed to the infernal powers.

What would be revealed, now? In what manner would the enchanter learn of the plot which Tizzo had made with Giovanpaolo to come at the truth of any machinations which this same scoundrelly della Penna was practicing against him?

It was time to prepare for an escape with foot and hand and sword; but Tizzo found that he could not move. The spell of the enchantment—was it already working upon him?

Then out of silence in which there was only the faint bubbling of the caldron, a voice issued, faint and far away, half stifled, but seeming to proceed from the steam of the pot itself. In obscure doggerel the voice said—and it was like the voice of Tizzo himself:

I have found no greater lord
Than the brightness of a sword;
I have found no lady's grace
Sweeter than high danger's face;
I shall serve no higher power
Than the stealthy midnight hour;
Trust me in the hour of sorrow
But beware of me tomorrow...

Here the voice ended. The enchanter, faintly groaning, rose to his feet and then sank wearily into a chair where he remained with his head bowed, as though exhausted by the labor of his spirit.

"Trust you in the hour of sorrow? That is my answer!" said della Penna, triumphantly. "If I can trust you in the hour of sorrow, let the devil carry you off wherever he pleases on the adventure of tomorrow. Messer Baldassare, here is something for your hand. I am very well pleased with you and the spirit that sang from the steam. Come, Signor Tizzo; there is much that I must say to you!"

Chapter IX

Drunk with Pride.

TIZZO, his body and his face darkened by the almost indelible stain of walnut juice, a sleek, black wig on his head, and his face aged at least ten years by the introduction of certain dark shadows in the natural lines of his features, finished dressing, looked at himself in a mirror, and turned with a laugh to Henry of Melrose and della Penna.

"If I had a mother, she would never know me," he said. "If I had a father, he would deny me."

"No," said the baron. "He would see the same blue devil looking out of your eyes."

"It would take more than a father," said della Penna, critically, "to look into that face and see the blue of the eyes. He is safe, my lord. He can enter Perugia now, and walk straight through all the halls of the Baglioni, if he wishes, without drawing a second glance. This handiwork of Messer Baldassare, who is there that can see through it?"

They all agreed to this.

"There are horses ready," said della Penna. "Ride as fast as you can to the town of Camerino. Go to the lord of Camerino and show to him this signet ring of mine. He will know it well. Ask of him this question: How many? And when you have heard his answer, return to the city of Perugia as fast as you may. Go to the tavern of the Sign of the Golden Stag. There, wait until you see in one of the public rooms a man with a red band drawn around his head. When you see him, go to him privately and say: 'Camerino.' That will be enough to win his ear and he will instantly ask what news you bring. Repeat to him then the number which the lord of Camerino has given to you. And leave him at once. When this has been done, remain at the Sign of the Golden Stag until you receive word from me, directly. As for your means of entering the town of Perugia, show at any gate the same signet ring which I have given to you, and you will be admitted without question. I am not without power in that city, and before long my power shall be greater. The time may come before many days when they will have a cause to think of me—the fat rats, the citizens of Perugia!"

Here the Englishman remarked: "I shall wait for you at the Sign of the Golden Stag, my young friend. Look for me there."

"No, Henry," protested della Penna. "You are too well known. You run too great a risk if you enter that town. They would rather see you dead than have all the Oddi stretched lifeless at their feet. For, without you, they know that the Oddi would be powerless."

"I have ways of going into the city and coming from it safely enough," said the Baron Melrose. "Remember, Tizzo. I shall see you at the inn."

"Now hurry," exclaimed della Penna. "Your servant is already waiting at the head of your horse. I have fetched him from the house of Falcone. Be swift, be faithful, and your fortune is made as well as your revenge."

That was how Tizzo found himself mounted and on the road in another minute.

The one-eyed warrior, thief, and servant, Elia Bigi, merely said to him: "What am I to know, master?"

"To know nothing is to be wiser than I am," said Tizzo, frankly.

He could see that he was only faintly trusted by della Penna. The obscure warnings of the magician had not been enough to make the treacherous Baglioni give up his project of using that brilliant young swordsman in the striking of some blow. But he had not opened his mind in the least to Tizzo, who was to ask a question which could be answered in one word; and the word was then to be repeated to a chosen agent in the tavern at Perugia. This was his sole duty so far as he knew it at the present moment.

"People, when we come to Perugia," said Tizzo, "will ask you what has become of your former master. You will tell them that he left while owing you money, that you have taken new service, and only wish for a chance to bury a knife in my back. You understand?"

Elia Bigi laughed.

"Where is the pleasure of stabbing a man in the back?" he asked.

"Why not?" said his master, smiling.

"Because you cannot see his face as the steel slides home," said Elia, making a slight grimace.

They rode constantly through the night. And still there were relays of horses waiting for them at appointed places along the road, strong horses which beat the summer roads to dust as they galloped steadily on. It was a weary pair of riders who, at last, climbed into the mountain town of Camerino, dignified by the presence in it of the old university. And chance brought them straight on a procession of riders who had come back from hawking with some short-winged hawks on the wrist, and, above all, a beautiful pair of peregrine falcons.

ONE of these was on the wrist of a middle-aged man who rode with a downward smile of crafty thought on his fat face.

"That," whispered Elia Bigi, "is the lord of Camerino."

So Tizzo, hurrying his horse to meet the aristocrat, held out his hand in greeting, having turned the signet face of della Penna's ring around to the inside of his finger. He made sure that those crafty, downward eyes were fixed on the signet as he spoke.

Instantly the eyes of the lord of Camerino lifted to the face of Tizzo.

"What news of my friends?" he asked, quietly.

"How many?" questioned Tizzo, with a smile.

There was half a second of pause before the other answered: "Two hundred and fifty. If time is given." And Tizzo fell back at once from the group of riders and let them go on with their tired, sweating horses.

Camerino was half a mile high in the mountains; Tizzo and Elia Bigi dropped by looping roads through the valleys and climbed again towards Perugia. It was night when they came before the dark height of the gate of Marzia. The lights of the guard showed vaguely, the three Etruscan busts above the gateway and the heads of the two proud horses which flanked the group. To the captain of the gate, Tizzo showed the signet ring. There was no asking of questions. The gate was opened to them at once, and they entered into that narrow, winding way, so capable of defense, so sure to check the onrush of attackers, and so advanced into the narrows of Baglioni Street.

It was well-named; because to either side the lofty tops of the palaces of the Baglioni lifted towards the stars, fencing a narrow, crooked way through heaven.

Elia Bigi said at the ear of his master: "Here are the seats of the mighty, and the mighty are asleep. They are so rich, these Baglioni, that poison is beside every bed; a knife is sharpened for every throat. And yet they can sleep."

"Not all of them," answered Tizzo.

For, as he spoke, a number of retainers bearing lights rounded a bend of the narrow street with several horsemen behind them. The fellows who were on foot in advance kept calling out: "Room for the noble Semonetto! Room for his highness!"

At these calls, the crowd in the street shrank back at once into entrances.

This Semonetto, as Tizzo knew, was of all the Baglioni the fiercest blade, the greatest warrior with the single exception of Giovanpaolo and, perhaps, the great

Astorre, for whose wedding the city of Perugia was now in a tumult. He was still in the middle twenties and the expectation of the time was that he would go on to a greatness even surpassing that of the older members of the family, for already he showed the brain for war as well as the courage of a true lion.

He was now seen with two young companions on horseback behind the group of his forerunners, who kept the crowd back from his nobility. They were laughing with one another.

"Back!" said Elia Bigi, at the ear of his master. "Quickly, signore. This is the great young Semonetto himself, the wildest and strongest blade in Perugia, unless Giovanpaolo himself be counted. Give him free passage. His temper is fiercer than any fire!"

"It should have something to feed on, then," said Tizzo, laughing. "A fire that is starved of wood soon dies." And he kept his horse fairly in the middle of the street.

THE forerunners of the Baglioni were instantly about him. Two or three of them sang out for him to keep from the path; one man laid his hand on the bridle of Tizzo's tired horse.

"Keep your hand back, brother," said Tizzo. "Even if there is a helmet on your head, I have a hand heavy enough to knock a dent in it."

The man-at-arms, hearing this threat, instantly sprang into a posture of defense and snatched out his long and heavy sword.

"What's the matter there?" cried a loud voice. And young Semonetto rode up to the van on a great white horse. Of all the men Tizzo had seen, this was the most magnificent. Such shoulders, such a head and such a bearing were beyond comparison.

"Here is a fool of a stranger," said one of the servants, "who refuses to make way for your highness."

"What do you mean, fellow?" asked Semonetto. "I am Semonetto of the Baglioni. What will you have?"

"My share of the street, even if you were the lord of the sun and the moon," said Tizzo. And he looked fixedly at the other, as a hunting hound might have looked at the throat of a lion, wondering if just there a touch of the teeth might not give an ending to the battle.

"Are you drunk?" demanded Semonetto.

"Only with a little wine," said Tizzo. "But you are drunk with pride, Semonetto. You have too much blood in your body. You are swollen."

"Master, master!" groaned Elia Bigi, in terror.

"If I have too much blood, are you prepared to let some of it?" demanded Semonetto.

"My friend, I'll gladly be your doctor," said Tizzo, fingering the handle of old Taddeo's axe which hung beside his saddle.

"Have at you, then!" shouted Semonetto, in a sudden and uncontrollable rage, and he spurred his big white horse straight down the street towards Tizzo. A sword had come into Semonetto's hand as he spoke. His height, the bigness of his horse, the sharp down-slope of the street made him loom like a giant above Tizzo. And the long sword darted like a silver snake at the breast of Tizzo.

The axe of Taddeo was swiftly in the hand of Tizzo. It feathered as true and as light in his grasp as though it had been made of painted wood.

He had little time. In a flashing semi-circle the head of the axe went up and met the deadly lunge which was aimed at his heart. As he parried, Tizzo laughed, and as he laughed the axe head struck the sword away. The violence of the parry knocked the long blade high up; and then Tizzo struck in turn, with one hand, a lightning-fast circling of the axe.

Illustration:
Giovanpaolo

Semonetto might well have been cloven to the chin by that blow, but his was the instinct of the true fencer, and he turned his sword into a parry to guard his head.

THE descending weight of the axe met the long steel and snapped it. But the shock turned the blade of the axe so that it glanced flat-ling from the head of Semonetto. The shock hurled him prostrate across the bows of his saddle.

And at this, a wild yell of despair and rage and anguish came from all the followers and companions of the young noble. They drove in a flock, straight at Tizzo.

The axe, which was perfect for the dealing of a single stroke, was less valuable in such a mêlée as this. Tizzo, hooking the heavy weapon beside his saddle, instantly caught out his sword, which was blade and shield at once in his perfect hand. And here Elia Bigi proved the goodness of his fighting heart by pressing in beside his master in this hopeless quarrel against overmastering numbers.

They put aside a dozen strokes. The clashing of steel began to resound through the street when the voice of Semonetto called out, loudly: "Swords up! Hold every hand."

His order was obeyed. And Semonetto, riding weaponless through the crowd of his friends, came up to Tizzo and held out his hand.

Semonetto was pale. A thin streak of blood coursed down one side of his face, but he was smiling as he said: "My lord of the moon and sun, that was a good, swift trick of the axe. And I see that you are the master of a sword, also. My friend, come to see me tomorrow. I yearn with all my heart to cross blades with you again. In any case, I wish to call you a friend, whether living or dead. You know my name. Find your way to my house and a welcome. Now, my friends," he added to those around him, "beware of lifting a hand against this dark faced stranger. He is my companion from this moment. He is my confederate and friend."

He added, in a voice that was probably louder than he intended to make it: "Get me home, some of you. My head is broken, and I am half sick from that blow! Fool that I am to venture out with no steel to guard this thin pate of mine!"

Chapter X

„Flirt and Angel”

THE press was gone instantly from the street and Tizzo, riding on unhampered and unfollowed, at the side of Elia Bigi, said: "That was very well done, Elia. When the fellow with the halberd took that swing at my head I was sure that it was my last moment. I saw the flash of the steel from the corner of my eye, but never in time to make a parry. You were the hand that saved me then. I thank you from my heart."

"What am I to say, then," remarked Bigi, "about the man in the green and red hose who ran in with his target and sword and would have cut my throat if you had not knocked his blade aside from the true thrust which he was making with it?"

"Say nothing," said Tizzo, "except to thank God, with me, that we are both men, and true to one another."

"That's a very handsome thing to say," declared Elia, rubbing his big hands together and chuckling, "but your way of searching for trouble is something more than manly. It is more like an angel's; and an angel you are apt to become, one of these days, if you continue always as you have begun. If you keep on sowing the teeth of dragons every day of your life one of them will stick you in the heel and poison your life."

Tizzo laughed in turn. They had come now within the sight of the Sign of the Golden Stag, and now rode through the entrance into a courtyard which Tizzo could remember very well. When he had first entered Perugia, unknown, in peril of his life, he had come to that same hostelry. Now he was back again with his skin stained dark, with a black wig on his head. But, on the other hand, no matter how good his disguise might be, there were men and women of this town who knew his voice as well as they might know the faces of others. All his brawling, his battling, had not been in vain, and an intimate follower of the great Giovanpaolo, now with a price on his head, was a man so deeply marked that the mere changing of his complexion was not a sure safeguard against detection.

It seemed to Tizzo that the very man who showed him to a room looked closely and covertly at him. But, as Elia said afterwards this was a mere trick of his imagination.

"The hunted rabbit sees a wolf in every strange hare," said Elia. "Now we are as safe as any other man in Perugia to drink wine at our ease until the devil and your own weariness with life cause you to get us into more trouble."

"You shall have your wine," said Tizzo, "but now I give you the smallest part of an hour to go out and find exactly where the Lady Beatrice is now lodged. Go quickly, and return to me."

"A woman again?" groaned Elia. "There never was a day in heaven that one woman could not turn into a hell. They rob us of our sleep first and of our money afterwards. On account of women we go early to the grave and fail to rise to any reward afterwards. When the Last Judgment comes, it is women who will draw the best men downwards; because the loveliest of them will all be bound for the nether regions."

He went out still growling these words while Tizzo looked about his room and examined the windows which opened on the one side upon the paved court and

upon the other, just beneath the eaves, overlooked the outer street. There was no country in the world, at that time, which offered so many conveniences to travelers as the inns of Italy.

And Tizzo, after he had tried the softness of the bed with a back-stroke of his axe, and tasted the pitcher of red Umbrian wine which was brought to him, decided that he would have a few hours of happiness, no matter what would follow.

It was at about this time that Elia Bigi reentered the room.

"I've been stopped by a hard-faced captain of infantry," he said, "who remembers that I was once employed by a certain Tizzo, the Firebrand."

"What did you say to him? Tell me honestly," said Tizzo.

"I told him," said Elia Bigi, grinning sourly, "that although I was a male cat I had already spent eight of my lives and that I did not wish to pay down the ninth of them for the sake of a flame-headed, wild-brained fellow with an eye crazier than that of a war-horse. So I now had service with a quiet young man who did not fight with swords or axes above once a day, except on the Sabbath, when he might blood himself twice; and who never played at dice for more than five hours at a sitting, or drank more than two gallons of wine before rising from the table. The lieutenant said that I was wise to find such a quiet master and that he would pay his respects to you tomorrow.

"He asked me if I knew that there was a price of two thousand florins on the head of that same Tizzo. I swallowed twice before I was able to repeat the words after him."

"TELL me now, Elia," said Tizzo, "why you did not bargain with him at once for half the reward? I know about that cross-eyed Flemish girl you wish to marry. You could have set up with her in the sort of an inn you have always promised yourself as the better end of life."

"The face of a woman," said Elia, "should not be like the pretty sign of a popular tavern. The sternest dragon makes the truest wife. That was why I chose a woman with crossed eyes. As for not betraying you, my only reason is a certain queer devil of curiosity which continually eats me. I know that you are to die soon, but I cannot help wishing to see the manner of it."

Tizzo laughed. "But why did you come back to me without news of the Lady Beatrice? However, of course you would not have word of her at a common tavern."

"Would I not?" asked the servant. "The poor people are always the ones to talk about kings and lords and ladies. The Lady Beatrice cannot so much as crook the little finger of her left hand without the report of it going the rounds of Perugia. There is a certain French lord who swears that if he could have enjoyed the privilege of killing you he might have taken your place in her favor."

"Enough of that," said Tizzo. "But tell me the name of the frog-eater, the forked carrot, the damned *parlez-vous* who dared to handle my name and that of the lovely lady in the same breath?"

"If I told you that you would have him dead and yourself hanged before morning," said Elia. "However, it is true that the Lady Beatrice now sleeps in the house of her cousin, the rich Grifone. Her room, since she left the convent and you

left Perugia, is the third room on the south side—the room with the three little columns of white marble, banded with blue, in front of each window."

"Have you found her nest?" cried Tizzo. "Elia, by God when I look at you I understand that your one eye sees more than the ten eyes of a harem. My noble Elia, my heart of gold, I shall reward you!"

"With giving me work that will turn me bald ten years before my time," answered Elia, dryly.

"Wait till I have written a letter," said Tizzo.

And instantly he was drinking wine with his left hand and scribbling with his right:

Adored and most beautiful, queen of the world and of Tizzo, spit-fire and nightingale, flirt and angel, most exquisite Beatrice of whom waking I dream, and for whom sleeping I wake, hear me and forgive me:

I am at the Sign of the Golden Stag, come to see the wedding of my lord Astorre, and would to God that it were yours and mine.

I love you past thought. I shall see you before I leave Perugia or die attempting it.

Farewell for a moment, which to me is an age, loveliest, maddest, sweetest of women.

Thy servant that will one day be thy master by the help of God, two spurs, and a good right arm.

Tizzo.

This letter he sealed, kissed, and presented to Elia.

"Tie a pebble to it and throw it in at one of those same columned windows of which you spoke," said Tizzo. "Remember that if you are seen making the throw, your throat will be cut. If the letter falls into any hands but hers, my throat will be cut. But if you wish to make a tidy fortune of two thousand florins, you have only to take this letter to that same lieutenant of infantry and the money will be yours."

Elia looked at the letter fixedly.

"Spit-fire and nightingale, flirt and angel!" he quoted, dreamily.

"Did you dare to look over my shoulder?" exclaimed Tizzo.

"You ought to be more surprised that I'm able to read," said Elia. "But I am gaining from you more than my pay, if I learn how to talk to women, particularly to those that are cross-eyed. Adios!"

With this, he was gone quickly from the room and left his master walking up and down in an agony of impatience.

It was still the greater part of an hour before Elia returned and gave his master a letter from which a light and delicate fragrance came to the enchanted senses of Tizzo, but when he opened the letter he found written, merely:

I had forgotten that you were living; your letter reminds me that you will soon be dead if you linger in Perugia.

Farewell.

There was no signature. Over the brutal words Tizzo pored for a long time but could not extract from them any semblance of a tender meaning.

Chapter XI

Festivity in Perugia.

THE sleep that tumbled at last over the excited brain of Tizzo was a storm of nightmares. When he awakened, it was with sun in the window, a fanfare of trumpets ringing through the street outside, and a joyous voice of citizens crying through the air.

And far and near through the city there were high sounds of music.

"Hai, Elia!" cried Tizzo. "Is it the end of the world and are we all going to heaven?"

And running to the window he looked out on the most splendid sight that had ever graced his eyes, for directly beneath him he saw twenty knights riding up the street in gilded armor that shone like fire, while trumpeters paced before them, blowing their blasts in great, strident harmonies. And after the knights walked girls each as gay as a wind of spring that dances at once all the wild flowers in the field, so bright were their costumes. In between the out-roaring of the trumpets, the girls were dancing, and from their filled aprons scattering roses, roses, nothing but roses white and yellow and crimson on the pavement. Behind them, in turn, came eight horses as white as snow, each led not by a mere page or groom, but by a man of noble birth.

The eight horses drew a great carriage canopied loftily with flowing velvets fringed with gold and silver, and under that canopy sat Messer Astorre Baglioni and his bride.

It seemed to Tizzo, at that moment, that Astorre Baglioni was the most glorious man he had ever seen or dreamed of, because he was dressed from head to foot in blazing gold, and with a great golden collar oversprinkled with jewels, the gift of My Lords of Venice, whom the famous warrior had served in their time of need.

In fact, the eyes of the world were fixed, for this day, upon Perugia and on this almost royal wedding.

As for the bride, Tizzo could hardly tell whether she was beautiful or no. At least she bore the great name of the Orsini, dazzling to the mind that knew its famous history, and the pearls that covered her sleeves and her hair dazzled the eye of Tizzo.

Behind that chariot of fame rode, in advance of all the rear escort, a single figure on a great black horse, armed in chased steel completely except for the stern young head. That was Semonetto. As he went by, there was almost as great an outcry in his honor as in that of the bridegroom and the bride. For all of Perugia had been beautified by the great undertakings of this youth in honor of the marriage.

In the great Piazza and in his own ward of San Pietro he had brought in big trees and brush at a prodigious labor and expense; from the ward of San Pietro, he had removed all the tradesmen's booths.

Illustration:

Tizzo and Giovanpaolo met the second rush against the doorway

PART III

Chapter XI

Festivity in Perugia (continued).

AS young Semonetto rode by, the voice of Tizzo was among the most shrill as he leaned from his window, so Semonetto looked up. Instantly he shouted a greeting, waving his arm, and still was waving it to Tizzo as the black charger carried him from view around the next bend of the street.

Tizzo was out in the throng at once, with gaunt Elia Bigi striding behind him. The weight of the letter of Beatrice was heavy on the heart of Tizzo, but in this time of public rejoicing, he could not help but rejoice, also.

Everywhere preparations and ceremonies went forward. The wards of the city contended with one another to give the newly married couple the most sumptuous reception.

For the supper of the wedded pair, the Piazza between the house of Grifone and Santa Maria degli Servi was covered with a cloth embroidered with their cognizances and set out with tables. Every street was decorated with arches; every street turned green with pots of box and with climbing ivy.

The great Piazza was covered over with fine woolen cloth from one side to the other! What a spectacle it was!

And Tizzo laughed at the delightful extravagance, when he walked under this canopy and saw the softly filtered light that fell through the cloth.

THE members of the guild of the Ward Sole were dressed in silk and in velvet, all white; there were thirty ladies dressed in fine cloth of gold and thirty in cloth of silver. In the middle of the Piazza the Ward San Sanne had built a great pavilion covered with branches and with tapestry work. On the tables was a banquet of fruit fashioned out of sugar, confections, cooked crabs and frogs and birds of every kind. Men came with wallets and filled them from the superfluity.

Here His Highness, Semonetto, drove through the crowd in a chariot heaped full with confections, which he tossed out to the people with a spade. Sixty thousand florins, it was said, were spent on that festival.

And Tizzo, coming home in the afternoon, was weary from laughing and staring.

Elia Bigi said: "Now, master, the finest bed that I ever enjoyed was a hammock after a hard march; but will the Lady Lavinia sleep better because she is laid away under velvets?"

"They say her counterpane on the bed is made of scarlet silk and thread of gold and the silk fringes are intertangled with pearls.

"I wonder if she will sleep the better for all that?"

"Look, Elia," said Tizzo, "it is not for the sake of sleep that men do such things, but for the sake of glory; and to fill the eye with another man's greatness is the same, or better, than to fill the hand with his wealth.

"But every man who wears a sword wants, this evening, to become as great as Messer Astorre. I myself have that hunger. I could now fight giants!"

"I'd rather fight them in my sleep," said Elia.

"They have a good spiced wine at the Golden Stag that I'm thinking more about, just now, than about glory and swords. I'd rather use a sword now to carve a chicken," he continued.

They were coming into the yard of the tavern when Tizzo saw, suddenly, a tall man about whose head was tied a scarf of crimson silk with fringed tassels falling down behind his neck. In the wild riot of that day such a Turkish bit of decoration passed for nothing, but Tizzo remembered the instructions of della Penna.

He passed close to the tall fellow and, as he did so, he was startled to see the disfigured face of the most poisonous of his enemies: Marozzo.

A dagger stroke would have been a proper greeting for the scoundrel, but instead, Tizzo walked slowly past, fingering his cap so that the great signet ring of della Penna showed clearly on his hand. Marozzo could not miss it.

Instantly he was touched on the shoulder.

"How many?" demanded the voice of Marozzo, huskily.

"Two hundred and fifty," said Tizzo. "Ha!" exclaimed Marozzo, and Tizzo turned around to find his eyes blazing.

"They have drawn you in, Master Tizzo, have they?" sneered Marozzo. "A fine bargain they have made, when nameless dogs are to hunt at the sides of gentlemen!"

"Mateo," said Tizzo, calmly, "the next mark I put on you will not be a thing which a rag can cover. Go carry the news to your masters and stop snapping at my heels. There will be a time for our own private brawling, but this is not the day."

HE walked on into the tavern and went singing up the stairs, with Bigi behind him, but when he threw open the door of his room he was amazed to see a jaunty youth in a green doublet and parti-colored hose, half red and half yellow, lolling in a chair near the window and sipping wine.

"You take your ease, my friend," said Tizzo, "but you take it in the wrong room."

"A fig for you and your rooms," said a rather husky, boyish voice, that sounded on a familiar chord in the memory of Tizzo. Anger brought the old flame-blue into the eyes of Tizzo as he answered: "A fig for me and my rooms? Young lad, I give you while I count three to get from that chair through the door.—Elia, where is your whip!"

"Whip?" said the figure that still lolled in the chair. "Whip—to me?"

And a slender poniard, a mere gleam of light, came into the hand of the stranger.

The sight brought the sword of Tizzo whistling from the scabbard.

"You have a sword as well as a knife. Draw it and we'll have a little game together!" he challenged.

"Have at you!" cried the stranger, and was instantly up, and sword in hand. But at this moment the sunlight fell on the face which had been darkly shadowed and Tizzo sprang back with a cry.

"Out of the room, Elia!" he said.

"What is it? A saint or a bit of the true Cross?" asked Elia, and strode grumbling from the room, slamming the door heavily behind him.

Tizzo, throwing his sword onto the bed, ran forward with his hands stretched out. "Beatrice!" he said. "Mother of heaven, you have not come here? Beatrice, if a whisper comes to the ears of Perugia your reputation is ruined, blackened forever; so quickly—go—"

She dropped her sword back into its sheath, the poniard clanked home in the scabbard.

"Tizzo," she said, "my reputation will still be good with you, and what do I care about the rest of the world?"

"And what did you care for me," he asked, "when you wrote to me last night?"

"That was last night," she answered, "and this is a new day."

He took her in his arms.

"Don't kiss me, Tizzo," she said, her brown eyes looking straight into his.

' He released her with a great effort.

"I do as you will," said he.

"So much as a touch," she told him, "and I leave my home forever, and follow you through the world. Oh, in the name of my good father, why are there not other men like you? Not in looks, Tizzo, because I loathe red hair. Not in fortune, because I hate poverty. Not in dimensions, because you are half a head shorter than the hero I would like to have. But why are not other men, like you, compounded of equal parts of madness, laughter, extravagance, and sword-play? If I could find one, I would never look at you again, never think of you, never dream of you, but until I can find another, I have to love Tizzo until my heart aches and my head spins."

Chapter XII

Marozzo's Treachery.

HE was like a man who sees a jewel but dares not touch it. He could not move without stretching his hands towards her. He could not speak without a rush of emotion that threatened to destroy his words.

"Whatever you think of me, tell me what you have done this afternoon," he insisted.

"Put on boy's clothes and left the house of Grifone."

"You have been living there?"

"Yes. I've been living there."

"How could you leave unnoticed?"

"By a rope. I slid out of a back window."

"And left the rope hanging?"

"No, it was a double length, so when I got down, I pulled it all after me."

"How long before you'll be missed?"

"I gave word that I had gone to visit a lady who is a dear friend of mine. They won't miss me before dark."

"And then?"

"Then they'll perhaps rip the pavements off the streets of Perugia to find me."

"My dear, beautiful, insane Beatrice, go home at once."

"If I try to get inside the house before dark, I'll be seen and halted and examined—and then the truth will be known—that I've been masquerading as a man."

"As a boy, Beatrice."

"I look as much like a man as another, lacking a beard. You lack one yourself."

"Beatrice, there is no one in the world like you; and it would take a world to show such another. The slim, smooth, smiling, damned, impertinent look of you—how did you escape being slapped when you walked down the street."

"I had to draw my sword on one drunken blusterer," said she.

"Great God, you mean that you are able to fence?"

"Most fights don't get as far as fencing," she said. "The first drawn sword and high manner end the thing. See how it was when you came in. You drew your sword but you did not have the courage to use it."

"Beatrice, I love you to a madness."

"You were mad before, or you would never have loved me."

"What are we to do?"

"Giovanpaolo loves you, and with his love you can do anything. He swears that you are one of the immortals."

"Will he let me marry you, Beatrice?"

"He says it would be poor policy, but he will never oppose it too much if he can make the rest of the family agree. I've told him that if I cannot have you, I will have nothing. They have showed me a beautiful French duke with more estates than there are between Perugia and Rome, a face like a statue, and a brain like a statue's, also. They want me to choose him. But I tell them that if I marry such an ass we'll have mules for children."

"Beatrice, stop talking a moment and let me look at you."

She put back her head and assumed a proud attitude, but in a moment she was smiling at him.

"You had to keep yourself in exercise by fighting the proudest highest, harshest, sternest, wildest of the Baglioni—my cousin Semonetto. I heard that you cracked his head for him."

"How did you know, that it was I?"

"Who else would dare such a thing? Who else could do it, with an axe like a woodchopper working on a tree? Besides, I talked to Semonetto, and he told me about it; when he saw that a blue lightning came in your eyes as you fought, when he told me that you fought laughing, I knew that it was my Tizzo, the happy madman. Tizzo, when we marry we shall not have mules for children—they will all be born with a cap and bells."

"My God, my God, how happy I am! How I love you, Beatrice! I could forswear wine, or anything, for your sake. But listen to me. I have news for Giovanpaolo."

"HAVE you? Then that is my excuse for coming dressed like a boy."

"Hush. Be serious. It is hard for me to come to him because there is supposed to be a price upon my head."

"I know that. That is what has waked me at night in a cold sweat."

"Tell him that I saw della Penna."

"The long-faced, sour, discontented grumbler!"

"He is more than a grumbler. He is a traitor. Besides, he works with a wizard!"

"Do you believe in such stuff?" asked the girl, her proud lip curling a little.

"I tell you, Beatrice, that in della Penna's house I heard things and I saw things beyond credence."

"Every man is sure to see as much as his superstition enables him to believe. Tizzo, don't tell me that you are taken in by the childish tricks of juggling magicians."

"I heard my own voice speak out of the rising steam of a magic cauldron!"

"Magic fiddlesticks."

"I tell you, I heard it. And afterwards, della Penna gave part of his trust to me. He sent me to the lord of Camerino to ask him one question: How many? I went there and asked, and the lord of Camerino told me: Two hundred and fifty."

"What? Florins?"

"Armed men, or I miss my guess. Two hundred and fifty armed men, for what and when? For Perugia, I take it, and the danger of all the high and mighty Baglioni, including your sweet self."

"If I were not sauced with a little danger, I would never appeal to your palate, I know. Did Camerino speak of two hundred and fifty armed men?"

"He named the number; he did not speak of the men."

"This is horribly serious, Tizzo."

"Murder, murder, or I miss my guess. That news from Camerino I repeated today to a designated man in the court of this tavern, a man with a red scarf around his head—and that was Mateo Marozzo."

"He was never known for any good."

"I have sworn to have the killing of him—but this leads on. I shall see more of them, I'm sure. Before long, having done one mission, I shall be employed on another. When and where they mean to strike we still do not know. There must be other heads of the plot than della Penna. Tell Giovanpaolo that before long I hope to have seen the bare faces of the plotters; and then I shall be able to send him word."

"In the meantime, you go in a double danger, Tizzo. A price has been put on your head by my family; and also if the traitors of della Penna's company suspect you, you will die like a dog."

"Danger is the air I was born to breathe. Beatrice, go back with the news I give you."

"I cannot leave you, Tizzo. See—I try to walk to the door but my feet will not carry me there."

"How can even God have fashioned a thing so beautiful, a mind so noble, a spirit so high? I shall spend my life worshipping you."

"We shall spend our lives having tiffs and quarrels, I'm sure. But we love each other, and that's worth a barrel of French dukes."

Here there was a soft, quietly murmuring sound from the corridor, a thin humming noise which Tizzo, his head suddenly high in the air, seemed to recognize as the stir of swords in scabbards. The girl, too, suddenly thrust the bolt home in the lock and whirled about.

"There are armed men in the hallway, Tizzo!" she whispered, turning white.

AND at that moment the bolt of the door clanked a little; after that followed a quiet, discreet knocking. Tizzo moved slowly to make his answer, when the inner door of the chamber was thrust suddenly open and Elia Bigi appeared looking like a hungry wolf. His one eye was shrunk by fear.

"There are a hundred men come to find you!" he muttered. "Come with me quickly. There is still time to escape. The traitor Marozzo is among them to point you out. Quickly, my master. There is still time to pass through this door and down the winding stairs."

"Take the lad—the girl—and carry her along with you."

"Lad? Girl? You shall come with me!" snarled Bigi, and laid a hand on her arm.

"Do you know what you do, you fool?" she asked, savagely. Then she added in a whispering passion: "I shall not leave you, Tizzo! I know you mean to protect my good name or my life, or both. But I shall not leave you! I shall not leave you here to be a rearguard—and to die—"

Her voice broke, while Elia Bigi stared gloomily down at her and bit his lip.

Tizzo did not argue. He merely said: "Elia, it is the Lady Beatrice Baglioni. Take her; save her; and quickly."

"Hai!" muttered Elia Bigi, and instantly he had grasped her with both hands. "Come with me, my lady! There is no use in argument. You come while I have the strength to take you. You are too fine a hawk to be found in this nest. A Baglioni in a common tavern! Aha! You will struggle? This ends all struggling: Away! Away!"

Here he literally caught her up in both arms and bore her out of the room.

The door swung softly shut behind him, and now a heavier hand beat on the door. Tizzo called out: "What's there?"

"A friend to see you, signore."

"What friend?"

"A messenger from Antonio Bardi."

"How many are with you?"

"I am alone, signore."

"You are alone in your lie, only," said Tizzo. "The hall is filled with the murmur of armed men."

A distinct though faint voice now said out of the distance: "Guard the lower hallway and the winding stairs. He may try to break out through that way." Then a louder voice exclaimed: "Open the door, traitor and dog! It is I! It is Marozzo!"

Whatever the engagements of Marozzo to the friends of della Penna, he had not been able to give over this golden opportunity of mastering his great enemy. The moment he spoke, there was a distinct clinking of steel as the many men who had stolen into the hall with him gave up all pretense at secrecy.

And a moment later an axe was struck into the door with such force that the edge of it gleamed on the inner surface of the wood!

Chapter XIII

Magic Fire.

TIZZO looked swiftly around him, then sprang for the inner door of the room. He had waited long enough, now, to assure the retreat of the girl and Bigi in safety. But when he snatched the second door open, he heard, distinctly, the clanking of steel on stone as many armed feet ascended the winding stairs beyond.

He swung that door shut and thrust home the bolt. There remained the window, which offered to him the blue sky of twilight as a promise of peace. He leaped to the window and looked out, but he saw what he had known he would see—the eaves too far projecting for him to reach them, and under him the sheer, flat surface of a wall of cemented masonry. Not even a cat could have climbed to safety in this direction.

He turned again, to face the darkening room and the certainty of death. And then the rising night wind blew through the window upon him and gave to him a new inspiration.

He had noticed, glimmering around the room, a number of large oil-fed lamps. The olive oil in the big bowls must be measured in many a litre. He seized those lamps now and emptied them one after another on the clothing of the bed until the mass of cloth was soaked.

In the meantime, the wood was being hewn away in chunks. And the voice of Marozzo at the door was calling out: "Busily, axes! One moment and we bear down the door with our shoulders and get at the rat. Remember that he has teeth! Beware of him. Use the point before the edge! Remember, there is a reward of two thousand florins and that's enough to keep you all drunk for six months. I give you my half share in the reward. I put it all into your hands! Cheerily now, axes!"

Tizzo swept the bedding onto the floor of flags and with the flint and steel beside the fireplace, struck a shower of sparks onto the oil-drenched material.

The flames caught, ran lazily, cast upwards a thick smudge of black smoke that rapidly began to cloud the room.

"Tizzo!" shouted Marozzo, as a hail of blows fell upon the door thickly. "Do you hear? It is I! It is Mateo Marozzo! I have come to see you at your finish, Tizzo! Do you hear me laugh?"

In fact, the loud, long, wailing laughter of Marozzo rang mocking above the tumult.

Tizzo, the woodsman's axe in his hand, pulled the flaming mass of the bedding closer to the door. Then, with his left hand, he thrust back the bolt, hurled the door open. He saw before him a closely packed mass of steel-armored men-at-arms. On this occasion, Mateo Marozzo was taking no chances, but having cornered his quarry he was making sure that he had enough trained soldiers beside him to finish his game.

Into the faces of these men, with the hooked blade of the axe, Tizzo flung the flaming mass of the bedclothes.

Before the fire, the dense, thick, oily smoke was blown by the draught into the faces of the men-at-arms. And now the flames themselves followed. Even drawn visors were no sure protection against the spattering drops of flying, flaming oil which searched every crevice of all the armor instantly. The surcoats were flaring fires at once. And the gust from the window, pouring through the door, fanned the fire and drove all the smoke in a headlong cloud.

Through that whirling, dense mist Tizzo leaped with his axe. The edge would be swift death wherever it struck, but it was too apt to lodge in the cut it made. Therefore, with the back of the axe as with a heavy sledge hammer, Tizzo dealt blows right and left and the shock of the impacts on the heavy steel helmets dropped a man before him at every blow.

But it was not from his fighting that they turned. It was the sudden appearance of a flaring hell-mouth at the door of a common tavern room that made the men-at-arms bolt.

"Magic! Black magic!" one of them yelled.

That shout was taken up by all the rest. It was an ample excuse for flight, and the whole mass of men poured down the hall.

TIZZO, by dint of his axe-work, was ahead of the rest. He was down the stairs like a leaping wild cat. He was in the courtyard where stupid-faced grooms held the bridles of horses and stared up in wonder at the black pouring of smoke through the windows of the corridor above them.

Not the blow of the axe but the merely swinging flash of it was enough to give Tizzo a horse. He raced the animal through the gaping gate of the courtyard and out onto the street. And behind him he heard the wild cry begin to go up: "Treason! Treason! Treason to the Baglioni! Follow, in the name of God and two thousand florins!"

Down half a dozen of the swift-sloping streets of Perugia which turn and angle dizzily, like the courses of mountain torrents, he twisted and turned his way until the noise of the pursuit was dimmer behind him. Then he leaped to the ground and let the horse gallop furiously down a slope, sliding and twisting and slipping over the smoothness of the pavement.

But Tizzo had gone on straight to the house of the rich della Penna.

Compared with the country villa of the same family, this house was small. But it offered him the one point of safety he knew about, unless he chose to make his way a greater distance to the residence of his dear friend, Antonio Bardi. But to go to Bardi's place to involve Antonio in the same difficulties which faced him, and this he preferred not to do.

To the two armed porters who kept the main door of the house, he merely flashed the face of the signet ring of their master and they let him pass through at once. One of them conducted him to a hall on the second floor above the street; and then went to fetch della Penna himself who, he said, had just returned from the country that day.

Tizzo, left alone, helped himself to wine which stood on a corner table and walked slowly up and down the big apartment. Outside the window, the twilight

sky was turning a deeper, darker blue and by the uneven light of two lamps Tizzo looked on such a room as might have been seen, at that time, in the house of any rich Italian. On the walls were paintings and tapestries. The very ceiling was all one great fresco. And in the center of the hall there was a priceless old Greek bronze which had been fished up out of the bay of Naples. Not a bit of furniture except hard wood, hand-carved, graced that hall. And in the tapestry which covered the end wall, designed to show the Miraculous Draught of Fishes, there was a masterpiece worth a dozen fortunes to-day.

But Tizzo, though he had an eye for such things, had other things than luxury and art of think of. He heard a swift stride, presently, and into the hall came the tall frame of della Penna.

He was one of those men who like to stand close to any conversational partner, as though to awe the other by the keenness of his eye and the dignity of his presence. He might as well have stared into the eyes of a hawk as into the eyes of Tizzo, where the faint blue flame of battle was still dancing.

"Did I tell you to make my house your resort?" demanded della Penna.

"I was chased from the Sign of the Golden Stag," said Tizzo, "and I came here to report the thing to you."

"As for your tavern brawls," said della Penna, "they do not enter into my accounting."

"Does the honesty of your brother traitor, Marozzo—does that enter into your accounting?" demanded Tizzo.

The whole phrasing of the sentence was such an affront that della Penna fell back a stride, as though from a blow.

"Marozzo?" he said. "What has filled your mouth with language like this? In what way do you dare—"

"LISTEN to me, my friend," said Tizzo. "That you are older than I, I admit; that you are wiser, I am ready to grant; but if you try to beat me with your tongue first, you will have to beat me with your sword in real earnest afterwards. I've come to bring you news. If you want to hear it, well; if not, may you and your entire faction be damned. I leave you at once."

"Wait—wait!" panted della Penna, yellow with rage and yet hard bound with curiosity, also. "You forget that men who are deep in dangerous affairs—"

"Have dangerous tongues? Well, I'm willing to forget the first manners so long as the second ones are better. Do you wish to hear me?"

"If you please," said della Penna, still breathing hard.

"I tell you that I gave your message from Camerino to Marozzo—"

"What was it?"

"Two hundred and fifty."

"Good! Ah, that is news which men who are now in the house will be glad to hear. Two hundred and fifty?"

"That is what he said."

"You gave that to Marozzo? Why did not the madman carry me the sword at once?"

"Because he recognized my voice, if not my face in spite of walnut stain and black hair. Hatred washes the eyes very clear, Signor della Penna. And a little later he was back at the tavern, outside my room, with twenty armed men."

"Twenty? How in the name of God did you escape? Through a window?"

"I'm not a bird," answered Tizzo. "I managed to throw some fire in their faces, and then I came away. It does not particularly matter how. The important thing is that you now know what the lord of Camerino will do for you."

"Two hundred and fifty!" muttered della Penna. "Then the thing is as good as done—ah, Astorre Baglioni! May I see your face before you have ended dying!"

As he spoke, forgetting himself in a transport, he shook his clenched fist above his head. Then he took Tizzo hastily by the arm.

"You have done enough," he said. "You have done quite enough. You shall come in among the others with me and tell your news. If Camerino is with us, we shall surely win!"

Tizzo followed, his mind whirling. Whatever he had guessed before, the naked truth, as the first glimpse was revealed to him, dazzled his eyes with horror. For it was plain that an attack on Perugia was planned and that Astorre was to be murdered in the midst of his wedding festivities.

But now he was taken through a doorway into a large room, well-lighted. The first face he saw was that of Baron Henry, of Melrose.

With the sight of the second face his brain reeled and refused all thought. For the host in whose house Astorre, Beatrice, Giovanpaolo, Messer Guido, and more than half the great names of the Baglioni were gathered as guests for this night, himself the richest of all the name, young, rich, famous, beautiful Grifone Baglioni stood there among the plotters against his own blood!

Chapter XIV

Marozzo's Accusation.

AFTERWARDS, slowly, by glimpses, other faces were identified by the stunned eyes of Tizzo. Grifone was not the only traitor of the name of Baglioni. There was Carlo Barciglia, poorest and proudest and most spendthrift of the Baglioni, but a famous fighter. He was a nephew of the lord of Camerino, and instantly showed the link by which that powerful man had been drawn to the support of the conspiracy. There was Filippo de Braccio, descended from the High and Mighty family by the left hand. There was that other Jeronimo, della Staffa, young, foolish, but a devil in daring, and Bernardo da Corgnie and his brothers, Pietro Giacomo and Ottaviano hardly past twenty years of age. Others among the noblest in the city were in that hall, and hardly a one of them but had been supported and favored by the great leaders, Giovanpaolo and the great Astorre. But the face to which the eyes of Tizzo repeatedly turned was that of handsome Grifone, who still was housing in his own great palace the heads of his family.

It seemed to Tizzo that he could see the future of the thing at once. After a life of victory, in the very moment of his reward and his splendor, the blow was to fall on

the hero. And only one power in the world could prevent that stroke of evil—and that power was the life of Tizzo himself!

He trembled under the greatness of the burden.

And then he remembered, with a fresh onfalling of horror like a cold night-wind, that the Lady Beatrice also was lodged in the house of Grifone.

Henry of Melrose, whose very life was lived for the sake of danger, plot and counter-plot, came striding to Tizzo and grasped his hand.

"Well met in the hornets' nest, my fine bird," he said.

"My friends," said della Penna, "there is handsome news for you. It is brought to us by a confessed enemy of the Baglioni, by a man with a great price of two thousand florins on his head. Tizzo has ridden to the lord of Camerino. He will tell you himself how many men-at-arms Camerino will send to our help."

Tizzo, so appealed to, said in a clear voice:— "Two hundred and fifty is the number that he named, without fail."

There was a faint shout—it sounded rather like the growling of a great beast with a single throat. On all sides the number was repeated. "Two hundred and fifty!"

Not that the number was large, but for the execution of a secret plot, in the narrow streets of such a city as Perugia, a well-armed band of two or three hundred could do almost more than a large army. Besides, they would come in a unit, under a strong command. They could be even more trusted than the nearest members and originators of the plot.

Another man stepped up to Tizzo from the shadows in the corner of the room. It was young Antonio Bardi who clasped his hand in turn. The fine, intellectual face of Bardi was flushed with emotion and happiness.

"Tizzo," he said, "my hands have never felt quite clean in this enterprise before to-night. But now that I see you, I am sure that the cause is just!"

"Still I am amazed, Antonio," said Tizzo. "Because I thought that you and your family have been for generations great friends of the Baglioni."

"So the world has thought; and so I thought until my father opened his heart to me when he died. He told me of many slights and brutalities to which the Bardi had had to submit. He made me swear to use the first opportunity of striking for the lost honor of my house. But more than all else, if I had known that you were joined to this plan, I should have been happy to come into it. In fact, my dear Tizzo, when I heard you had been driven from the city with a price upon your head, at that moment I determined to join myself with della Penna and the rest."

Tizzo, hearing this speech, groaned inwardly. When he had five minutes for quiet he would show to Bardi the true nature of his connection with Giovanpaolo, and how they had become as blood brothers to one another.

But here there came an interruption that made a great stir, for the door of the big chamber opened, and Mateo Marozzo entered with a plume burned from his helmet, his cloak scorched, and half his moustaches singed from his face. Soot of the oil smoke was still streaked over him.

"SEIZE that man!" called out Grifone Baglioni.

Baron Henry of Melrose went up to Marozzo with his hand on his dagger.

"You are my prisoner, Marozzo," he said.

"Am I?" said Marozzo, and laughed cheerfully.

"I'll change that laughter; I'll widen the stretch of your mouth for you," said Melrose, in one of his quick tempers.

Jeronimo della Penna strode to Marozzo and lowered upon him.

"Mateo," he said, "you received great news for us this long time ago. Why have we not heard from you about it? What does it mean that you gratify a private spite by attaching one of the best men in our enterprise?"

"Best?" said Marozzo, still laughing scornfully. "You call him best? This fellow—this man without a name—this firebrand, this Tizzo! Bah! He is a spy in the midst of you!"

The blood congealed in the body of Tizzo and the nerves ran tingling shocks through his brain.

The Englishman, Melrose, with a sudden shout of rage raised his hand to strike Marozzo, but della Penna intervened just in time.

"Mateo has something to say. I, also, remember a voice that was not of any fleshly throat, saying ambiguous words—to trust Tizzo today but not tomorrow! Mateo, what is it you know?"

"What is 'it you guess, rather—you singed cat!" said Melrose, in such a passion that Tizzo, even with all the fear in his heart, was struck with wonder.

"I tell you," said Marozzo, "that this fine Tizzo, this stray dog in Perugia, this red head and blue eye that never came from Italian honest blood—this same Tizzo is hand in glove with the men who still own the city."

"Talk! Talk! Empty talk!" exclaimed Melrose. "We want proofs, not words."

"Shall I give them to you?" asked Marozzo.

"Or die for the lack of them!" cried Tizzo, warming himself into a pretended anger.

"I shall not die for the lack of them," said Marozzo, calmly. "But first I ask you—what sort of proof will do? How much proof do you need, my friends, to show you that you are on the brink of a precipice and about to fall? How much proof do you need? What should its nature be?"

"Any proof," said Grifone, "that Tizzo is playing false with us."

"Look first at the cunning of the trick!" said Marozzo. "A pretended quarrel between Giovanpaolo and this Tizzo sends Tizzo out of the town as a fugitive. Where does he fly? To Jeronimo della Penna. Naturally, you will say, because the world knows that della Penna for a long time has been no friend of Giovanpaolo, who thinks himself the master of the world!"

"He did not come directly to me. I sent for him," said della Penna.

"You found him conveniently in a neighbor's house. He showed himself to you as a man who hated Giovanpaolo in the hope that then you might invite him into any scheme that might be on foot."

"Do you think that Giovanpaolo dreams of our plans?" demanded della Penna. "No, we should long ago have been minus our heads if he had had the least suspicion."

"THERE has been talk for a long time, and even whispers come finally to the ears of the rulers of the city," answered Marozzo. "But it was not a certain

knowledge. That is, it was not certain before tonight. Now, however, it is sure in the mind of Giovanpaolo; or almost sure."

"We have had Tizzo watched. He has not been near Giovanpaolo since he came into the city," said della Penna.

"Are you sure that Giovanpaolo has not been near him, however?" asked Marozzo.

"How can Giovanpaolo move, in these days, without having a crowd around him?" asked Grifone Baglioni.

"Not he himself, but his own flesh and blood!" exclaimed Marozzo. "What do you say when I tell you that the Lady Beatrice herself went to the tavern to speak with Tizzo this night."

"Liar! Liar and dog!" shouted Tizzo, and drew his sword.

But della Penna held him back from running at Marozzo. The last words of that man had made a great stir through the hall. He continued now, forcefully: "She was there. She was seen to leave the Golden Stag after spending a long time in the room of Tizzo."

"I give you the lie!" panted Tizzo. "She is a lady pure as snow and higher than heaven is above your head!"

"You hear him?" said Marozzo. "This is the language he uses about a woman whose brothers we intend to put to death, and he assisting. Come, come! The thing is patent, and the man is a spy."

Della Penna exclaimed: "I begin to smell a rat, it is true. But how could the great beauty, the famous Lady Beatrice enter a tavern and visit the room of an unknown man? It is not possible, Mateo!"

"Not for her in the dress of a woman; but in the dress of a boy—what do you say to that? I tell you, the poniard she had worn was found in the room where Tizzo had stayed. It was her own weapon. An emerald which Giovanpaolo had given to her was set in its hilt.

"Not a thing from which she would be parted lightly. A delicate little dagger such as most of these ladies of Perugia have about them. And—here it is!"

He held it out suddenly in his hand. And in the silence that followed Tizzo felt his heart thundering. It was a damning proof.

"How are we to know," said Henry of Melrose, "that this Marozzo, who has been shamed by Tizzo and hates him, as all men know, has not stolen the poniard on purpose?"

"Who was the pretty boy who went to the room of Tizzo in the tavern, then?" demanded Marozzo. "Who was the boy so important to him that he sent his own servant to carry the lad away to safety while he, like a brave fool, remained behind to cover the retreat? Yes, remained there until he would surely have fallen into our hands except that a touch of the devil and black magic got him away in the midst of flames?"

"It is true!" exclaimed della Penna. "The scoundrel has betrayed us—the hand of Giovanpaolo is about to close over our throats!"

He added, with a shout: "Seize him!"

"Kill! Kill!" cried Marozzo.

The baron of Melrose was suddenly in front of Tizzo, sword in hand.

"Justice, here, and a little common sense," he roared.

The Italians in a semicircle that glittered with naked steel faced the baron; and then Antonio Bardi, throwing away his scabbard, took his place at the side of the Englishman, calling out: "I shall lose my faith in God sooner than in this man!"

These three with resolved faces confronted a score of fighters, as Melrose said: "My wild-headed friends, are you turning a boy's love affair into treason? This same Lady Beatrice—when I was serving the Oddi and taking her stealthily away through the hills—did he not steal her from me and give her liberty? Is it a wonder, then, that the silly wild hawk of a girl should come running to his arms when he shows himself in Perugia? Bah! Young blood is hot and it will have its way. But the lad has served us all, and he will serve us again. Della Penna, you are not a child. Be reasonable."

"You take a strong position with a drawn sword, Melrose," said della Penna. "But the fact is that I'm not altogether convinced that Tizzo is a traitor."

"He is, by heaven!" insisted Marozzo.

"Be quiet, young man," answered della Penna.

Melrose broke in: "There has been time. If Giovanpaolo had news of this gathering, do you not think that his men-at-arms would have surrounded the house long before this? We would all be dead men, and the house would be running blood."

This was a remark so convincing that Grifone Baglioni cried out: "That is true. Up swords and have an end of this argument."

"We need, all our weapons tonight for the work before us."

"God above us!" cried Marozzo. "Are we to turn the villain loose? Are you all mad?"

"No," said della Penna. "Let him remain here with Marozzo to guard him while we do our night's work."

"Agreed," said Grifon Baglioni. "So it must be."

Chapter XV

Marozzo's Scheme.

ANTONIO BARDI, after this scene, remained standing at the side of Tizzo, who had been tied firmly with silken cord and then bound into a chair to keep him from moving too freely. And Bardi, resting a hand on the shoulder of his friend, said over and over:—"I am your surety that you shall come to no harm. Trust in that, Tizzo."

But Tizzo, though he was much moved, kept his glance fixed on the gray head and the flame-blue eyes of the Englishman, who paid not the slightest attention to the prisoner after his life had been assured. It was very strange, to Tizzo, that Melrose should have risked his life once more to secure the safety of a man who was not of his race and who, more than once, had actually crossed him in his plans. It was a mystery which could not be explained by the dangers which they had endured together.

And how one explanation began to form, suddenly, in the mind of Tizzo, taking his breath; but before the idea could grow clear, the words that were being spoken in this room drove from his mind all else.

For he was hearing the details of the plot by which the Baglioni were to meet their death on this night.

Each was assigned his part.

Henry of Melrose, saying simply: "This damned business smells more of murder than of fighting!" promptly refused to undertake any of the midnight work, and therefore to him was assigned the guarding the gate of San Ercolano, through which the men of Camerino were to be admitted.

Balks of wood heavy enough to dash in the doors of the bed chambers were prepared and in readiness. To each of the leaders was assigned fifteen men and a definite mission.

Carlo Barciglia was to attack the room of Semonetto, that fearless blade; Filippo de Braccio and Ottaviano da Corgnie would attack Astorre; to Jeronimo della Penna, by special request, was assigned the slaughter of Gismondo; Bernardinello, son of Messer Gregorio, would slay His Highness, Guido, the old brain of the family. Grifone in person, chief traitor that he was, would attend to the murder of Giovanpaolo. And Grifone it was who would give the signal for the united attack by dropping a huge stone from his balcony into the street.

So Tizzo listened, his eyes on the floor for fear lest he might lift them and the horror be seen that worked in his mind.

Jeronimo della Penna made the last speech. He said: "My friends, we hope to give to ourselves power and wealth, to Perugia a new rule. Let us be true to one another. And remember that if either Astorre or Giovanpaolo escape, we have not killed the snake—we have only scotched it. Midnight is the hour. Be prepared. All must go well!"

So they went out from the room. Henry of Melrose, before he left, dropped a hand on the shoulder of Marozzo and said, sternly: "If harm comes to Tizzo while you are his guardian, I shall call you to an accounting afterwards, Marozzo!"

Then he strode from the room and left Tizzo alone with his enemy.

The latter sat down in a tall chair upholstered in red velvet and stared for a long time at his captive. Then he began to smile.

"What is the taste in your throat, Tizzo?" he asked at last.

"It is a little cold, Mateo," answered Tizzo. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I wish to know how death seems in its coming, what weight is on the heart, and what taste in the throat."

"It is a taste you'll enjoy in the morning," said Tizzo, "when Baron Melrose finds that you have murdered me."

"I? Murdered you?" laughed Marozzo. "Ah, Tizzo, what a simple fellow you must think I am! No, the truth is that you yourself tonight showed me exactly how the thing should be done. With fire, Tizzo. Here, do you see, I place a small table with a lamp on it. It seems that I have left the room. When I return, I find Tizzo has overturned his chair in a vain effort to escape—traitor that he is!—and not only is the chair overturned but the small table beside it has fallen. Besides, with the fall of the lamp, the flaming oil has spilled over the clothes of Tizzo, and he is burned horribly—too horribly! Death is a mercy to him. My wild cries have brought the

servants, and they carry the dead body away. They fight to put out the fire, which luckily is quite harmless on this tiled floor.

"And if Melrose won't believe that lie," said Marozzo, "a few drops of poison in his wine will do the trick perfectly well. They will put an end to his doubtings!"

"What is the hour?" said Tizzo.

"It lacks a few minutes of midnight." Tizzo groaned.

"Ah," said Marozzo, "does the fear begin to gnaw in you, Tizzo?"

He drew close, gloating.

"LET me die as you please, Mateo," I said Tizzo. "But the truth is that there is still time for you to do one great and noble thing. Burn me, stab me—that does not matter. But when you have done that, run to the house of the traitor Grifone. Fly to the room of Giovanpaolo. Rouse him. Tell him his life is in danger. Believe me, he will reward you more for the saving of his life than all the scoundrels of tonight will ever reward you for the taking of it. Think, Marozzo! Jeronimo della Penna will have all the power in Perugia in his own hands after the Great Betrayal has taken place. And you will again be one of the lesser citizens, undistinguished, as weak as ever you were. But go to the Baglioni now and you will become a giant in Perugia!"

Marozzo, who had started to sneer, finished by scowling in a serious fashion out the window towards the night.

"True," he muttered— "true—" And then he groaned: "But it is too late. If I try to give the warning, the trap which is about to close over Giovanpaolo will close over me, also. It is too late to repent. Much too late! And besides—I'd rather have these five minutes alone with my dear friend Tizzo, than to possess all the wealth in the world and be king of France besides!"

"Aye," said Tizzo, looking curiously at him. "You hate me as much as one man may hate another, I believe."

"From the moment I looked into the blue of your eyes, like the blue tremor of flame before the yellow of it begins—from that moment I have hated you, Tizzo. But to-day came the crown of thorns for me. Not that you escape from me. No, that was bitter poison to swallow, but that you should have been visited in your room by my Lady Beatrice!"

He groaned aloud.

Then, without a word, he picked up a small table and stood it close to the chair of Tizzo. On the table he set a lamp and stood for an instant enjoying the sight of Tizzo's face with almost affectionate eyes.

"What shall I do in this world when I no longer have you to hate in it, Tizzo?" he murmured.

Then he added: "But first I shall have to seal your mouth, my friend, for otherwise the screaming might make too much noise in the house and call too many servants here. They would be surprised if they saw a squealing pig being roasted alive, eh?"

He stepped to the window and began to tug at one of the long, silken cords.

And Tizzo held his bound wrists over the flame of the lamp on the table beside him.

The instant agony knocked his chin against his breast. He remembered that old tale of the Roman hero who had allowed his right hand to consume in the fire in order to prove his love of his country. But he, when his skin was barely hissing with the heat, could hardly endure the torment.

But in a moment, the pressure of his wrist caused the cord to snap. He tossed it into the fireplace and, in another instant, he would have managed to untie the other cords which fastened him into the chair. But it was too late for that. Marozzo, turning from the window, came jauntily across the room to his prisoner.

"A hai!" said Marozzo. "What's been burning? There's a stench in the air."

Tizzo kept his scorched wrists close together in his lap, in just that position in which the cords had held them.

"You smell your own idea," said Tizzo.

Marozzo paused, close to the chair.

"By heavens," he said, "there's a cloud of smoke in the air across the ceiling! What does it mean?"

He was about to draw back to pursue his inquiry when Tizzo, leaning as far forward as he could, reached out with both hands. One of them quite missed a hold; but with the left he caught the cloak of Marozzo close to the throat.

The latter, wildly starting back, pulled Tizzo after him, chair and all. The hand of Marozzo was very swift. Still striving to free himself from the hand of Tizzo, he snatched out his dagger to strike, but here the plunging forward weight of the chair drove Tizzo towards the floor. He flung his arms around the knees of Marozzo and brought him crashing down at full length.

Then, reaching upwards, he caught frantically at the dagger hand of the murderer.

But the hand was relaxed; the dagger hilt fell from inert fingers. Marozzo lay stunned from the blow which the back of his head had struck against the tiles.

Chapter XVI

Unexpected Attack.

A FEW slashes with the sharp edge of the dagger and Tizzo was free.

He caught Marozzo by the hair of the head, jerked up the loose weight of the body, and bent the neck back over his knee. There, with the knife poised, twice he tried to stab and twice his will failed him. If so much as a glimmer of open eyes had showed, the blade would have been instantly in the heart of Marozzo, but it was a limp, lifeless form that lay there, and Tizzo sprang again to his feet.

There was a flight of time like arrows past his ears. With each second of his delay, death was drawing closer in the house of Grifone Baglioni.

There in the corner stood his axe. The sword had been left belted about his hips when he was tied into the chair. He reached the axe with a bound, dashed open the doors, and fled down the stairs.

At the street door, a burly porter held up a hand.

"What is this rushing, my master?" he asked.

Tizzo, without speech, planted the heel of the axe handle between the eyes of the porter and was instantly out in the street.

He knew the way well. And, ah, for a horse to shorten the distance!

But there were only his straining legs to carry him up the steep way, through the dipping, staggered course of an alley, and so into the wider street and the piazza where the great house of Grifone stood.

It was hushed; it lay still beneath the stars; there was only a thin arc of a moon hanging in the west, blood-red, looking like the blade of a vast, burning sickle.

And Tizzo, panting a prayer of thanksgiving, raced on towards the door of the great house.

He had almost reached it when a thin shadow streaked down the face of the palace. A stone crashed on the pavement below with such force that it split into a hundred pieces, recoiling and then lying scattered.

It was the appointed signal of Grifone, and in this instant the heavy balks of wood would begin to dash against the bedroom doors. Those poor sleepers, startled by the sound of the falling stone, would perhaps rouse for a single instant with wonder in their minds. And then death would burst in upon them.

Through the open doorway of the house he leaped and heard, with one terrible, resounding crash, the sudden thundering of the battering rams against a dozen doors.

The great lower hall stretched before him, dim with the flicker of a few lights. And at the foot of the main stairway a full dozen of men-at-arms, in complete armor, barred the way.

"Halt!" called a voice that broke out above the frightful turmoil of the house. And a pair of swords crossed in the path of Tizzo.

The agony in his heart needed some outlet. With all the might of his body and the strength of his charge he swung the woodman's axe. The exquisite Damascus steel alighted full on the ridge of a heavy helmet, and the steel split like wood—steel and skull beneath it.

That tall, knightly body, falling, cleared a small gap in the crowd, and through that gap Tizzo sprang. The force of his leap wrenched the lodged blade of the axe out of the wound it had dealt; Tizzo was up the steps far before the soldiers, weighted with their armor, had moved a stride in pursuit. And, in fact, they did not rush after him; they remained at the post which had been assigned to them, merely thrusting the body of the dead man out of the way. On a night like this, with so much murder in the air, one more death here or there made very little difference. And what could a single man perform against the hands of the scores who swarmed through the upper part of the house?

Tizzo, as he reached the hall above, saw a confusion of tossing lights and men and heard the crashing of the heavy beams of wood against the doors of various rooms. For more than he could see, he could hear, and from the left the wild screams of a woman plunged like a burning dagger again and again into his brain.

GIOVAN PAOLO, sworn blood-brother, was his objective; but he could not resist that frantic screeching of terror and sprang through the open doorway.

What he saw was a female servant groveling on the floor and trying to fight off the burly man-at-arms who was tearing the jewels from her hands and neck. It

was she who screamed so terribly, but at the farther end of the room stood the slender figure of the Lady Beatrice who, with a delicate French sword in her hand, fought as valiantly as a man and with some sense of fencing against another big invader, who laughed at her efforts and made half playful gestures with his sword.

The cry of Tizzo rescued her from danger before he reached the spot. As for the brute who was plundering the serving maid, he received one of those stunning hammer-strokes with the back of the axe, and was spilled like a heap of old iron junk upon the floor.

The man-at-arms in front of the girl, whirling as he heard that cry, swung his sword with a fine strength and made a downright stroke at Tizzo. He might as well have struck at a dead leaf which is thrust aside by the mere wind of a blow. His sword actually descended with such violence that the point of it lodged in the floor; and the circling axe of Tizzo once more cleft steel as though it had been wood. The man-at-arms, struck through the brain-pan, fell forward, crashing, and the voice of Beatrice was ringing at the ears of Tizzo: "Run, Tizzo! For your life! You are unarmed, madman, among all the swords. It is murder—Tizzo—this way—through the window—"

"Save yourself if you know a way!" he panted. "Giovanpaolo—"

He had that one glimpse of her as she stood beside the table on which the scroll of an unfinished letter lay. She could not have spent the evening in that male costume. How did she happen to have it on now? He had only the millionth part of a second to give to that thought and to the picture of her beauty as she stood by the flame of the lamp. Then he wheeled from her and rushed again into the hall.

He could hear a great voice shouting: "To me, friends!—Hai! Semonetto! Semonetto! Hai!—Baglioni! Down, traitors! Ahai!"

And through the hall rolled a tangle of men whose swords flashed and fell, aimed at a tall, white figure.

It was the young Semonetto himself, of whom men said that among all the Baglioni there was not a better blade, hardly in Giovanpaolo himself. Now, clad only in his shirt, he struck such giant blows that the armored fighters broke back from him, then rushed forward to cut him down. Still with a warding buckler and with a living sword of light, he struggled against them.

"Semonetto!—Semonetto!"—shouted Tizzo, and hurled himself into that fray.

The unexpected attack from the rear, the great, ringing, hammer-strokes of the axe which stunned brains or smashed shoulders, split the crowd in two and let Semonetto leap through the gap.

Never would Tizzo forget that figure. For Semonetto had been wounded in the head so that one side of his face ran crimson; and from a rent in his shirt high on the breast another torrent of blood was flowing.

"Brother!" he gasped to Tizzo.

"Flee!" shouted Tizzo, and from the lightning circles of his axe the murderers shrank for an instant.

Semonetto, with one wild glance about him, sprang down the great staircase with Tizzo yelling: "No, no! That way is blocked! Semonetto!"

But Semonetto, crazed with his wounds or deafened by the uproar which rang through the house as through a brazen cave, fled on down the stairs, and Tizzo

turned to run upwards. He found, as he turned, that Lady Beatrice was beside him with that delicate splinter, that long dagger of a French sword in her hand.

"Beatrice, save yourself!" he groaned to her. But she was already fleeing before him to show him the way through a narrow little door which was set flush against the wall, and so to the windings of a secret stairway. As Tizzo slammed that door behind him, he heard steel clash and break against it.

He thrust the bolt home and fled upwards, pursuing the girl.

"Do you hear me? Beatrice!" he panted.

She waited for him at an upper landing, where a little narrow arched window opened over a roof.

"Here is escape, Tizzo," she said, "and yonder, in that hell—yonder is Giovanpaolo! Will you save yourself?"

Beyond the roof, beyond the rough thing, he saw the moon hanging like a red flag of murder in the west, above the city of Perugia.

There was the road to safety, and the girl pointing the way to it. He could save her and himself, perhaps, but in the meantime the man to whom he was sworn must be fighting for his life. He turned his back on the window with a shout.

"Giovanpaolo!" he cried, and raced down the hall.

Chapter XVII

Two Sparks.

WHEN the assault began, says the historian, Messer Astorre was roused, and called out to know what had happened. There was the vast crashing and shouting all through the house, as though the place were seized upon by thunder, but at the door of Astorre himself, and his wife, there was no disturbance. Only the voice of Filippo, the traitor, called out to him from the hall: "My lord! Your highness! It is your friend, Filippo! Open in the name of God! There is murder loosed through the house."

At that, Astorre took a sword in his hand and turned the key, with his own hand opening the door on his destruction. As the door yawned, Ottaviano da Corgnie struck savagely through the opening and made a great wound in the head of Astorre, striking him to his knees. While he was still down, Filippo, who had called to him like a friend, plunged a sword into the body of Astorre.

That hero, though he was dying, was not yet dead. He managed to gain his feet and struck some great stroke with his own sword, so that for a moment the press of men failed to get through the door. He might even have succeeded in driving the scoundrels out of the room, except that his poor wife, in a frenzy of screaming terror, came like the wind and threw her arms around him to save him from further blows.

Then Filippo—it was he himself—with his sword ran the poor woman through the shoulder and with the same stroke drove the blade of his weapon right through the body of the Baglioni. Then Astorre felt that he had his death. He put his bloody arms around his wife and kissed her.

"Alas that I, Astorre, should die like a coward!" he said.

Men could not tell what he meant by that saying, unless it were that he had always prayed to die on the field of battle, fighting in armor and on a horse, as a noble knight should do.

He fell, and as he fell his wife was dragged down with him because she was still pinned to his body by the sword of the traitor.

Filippo, it is said, put his foot on her back and tugged three times to drag out his weapon, and when that was done they dragged her by the hair of the head to a corner of the room, where she fell fainting. But when the rest of the murderers saw Astorre lying on the floor, they still could not believe that such a great warrior had died so quickly.

They seemed to feel that his glory must be as strong as armor about his naked body and that they would have to hew at him as at a man clad in steel plate. It is true that over fifty wounds were received by his senseless body, so that he was hewed almost to pieces, but as though by a miracle—it was in fact the work of a kind saint, said some men—the face of Astorre was not touched, so that when he lay in death with his body covered he looked like a glorious Greek hero, asleep.

When His Highness, the young Semonetto, had escaped in the upper hall by means of the battle axe of Tizzo and his own strong sword, he fled down the staircase, dripping blood as he ran, and so came to the men-at-arms at the bottom of the stairs. They tried to stop his flight, but he struck down two of them, killing one, and the force of his attack carried him straight through the armored crowd.

They followed and clung to him, however. His sword struck showers of sparks from their armor, as he raged among them, and for a moment they fell back, in awe of this man.

In that moment, he leaped into the street and, perhaps, might have escaped. But here he saw a poor serving lad, a mere page of twelve or thirteen years, who was driven by the swords above to leap from a window, and this poor boy was crushed to death on the stones of the street in front of Semonetto. He only lived long enough to gasp out: "Semonetto—my lord—avenge me!" Then he died.

This is told by three witnesses who saw the lad fall, turning over and over in the air until he struck the ground. They say that Semonetto, when he saw this death and heard those dying words, turned straight around, forgot all care for his own safety, and rushed back against the men-at-arms from whom he had just escaped.

IT is certain that there, in the corner of the house and the street, he was surrounded and, still fighting till death reached him, was at last cut down. Before he fell, he laid on the ground five armored men, and it is said that his sword was broken in two before they managed to push in close and overwhelm him with blows.

It was a second miracle that he, like Astorre, was never wounded in the face, during all this terrible medley of blows.

Men said that if this Semonetto had lived, not even Nicolo Piccininni would have accomplished such feats, because in all things, even in his cruelty, he was above other men. Of all the Baglioni who died that night, he was the strongest of hand, the tallest, the most beautiful to behold. He was a man without fear. Other men were brave, but he was fearless. He did not know the vice of cowardice, because it

was not in him. When men fled from the field of battle he never thought it could be through fear, but always attributed it to malice and treachery. That was why his hand in revenge was often so terrible and his soldiers feared him like an angel of fire.

After his death, his absence was felt like a curse, and like a blessing, in Perugia.

Berardino of Antignolle had already burst into the room of the old man, Guido Baglioni, the father of so much strength and valor and himself, men said, among the wisest of the men of his time.

When the door was burst in, the murderers found that the old man had risen from his bed and that he had taken up a sword in a corner of the room. So many blades came at him, that he had to use both his blade and his left arm to ward off the strokes. And then a soldier leaned and stabbed the old man in the breast.

The strength and the courage of this ancient hero were wonderful. Though his body was shriveled with time, his heart was still like that of a youth. He caught the soldier who had given him the death blow by the ridge of the helmet and hurled him to the floor.

Then he dealt two or three more strokes among his enemies and, like Astorre and Semonetto, before him, he made a little clearance among the slayers before his death. He was a man who believed in destiny, and when he felt the drain of blood passing from him, he leaned on the point of his sword and said: "My time has come to me!" Then he fell on his sword and died.

Some men say that of all the deaths among the Baglioni that night, that of old Guido was the most terrible and the most noble. Like the scorpion, he stung himself to death rather than submit to the hands of his enemies. There was not much mourning for him except in his family which survived, for he was a very shrewd, hard-fisted man of business as well as the father of the tyranny in Perugia.

THE chief object of all that midnight attack was the person of Giovanpaolo, the most famous of all the house. Astorre was perhaps as widely known for his commanding of mercenary armies in the service of various cities through Italy, but it was known by all that Giovanpaolo was the great brain of the house of the Baglioni.

For his destruction his treacherous host and cousin, Grifone, had taken special order.

Also Carlo Barciglia and some of the house of da Corgnie went hurrying from their other special tasks of murder to assist in the killing of that famous man, because, as Jeronimo della Penna had said, if that one brain escaped with life, all the business of the slaughter was disappointed and undone. Here are some of the chief heads of the enterprise gathered before the door of Giovanpaolo, and it was said that just as Filippo, the traitor, called out to Astorre, so Carlo Barciglia called to Giovanpaolo and wakened him.

He begged to be let into the room, because there was destruction in the house, but the wise Giovanpaolo said: "Traitor, if there is destruction in the house, you are a part of it!"

In fact, there were great suspicions in the breast of Giovanpaolo because, on the night before, his sister, Lady Beatrice, had brought him assured word from Tizzo

that in the hands of della Penna there was some murderous scheme for which the lord of Camerino was sending two hundred and fifty men-at-arms. However, Giovanpaolo made one great mistake, which was in thinking that the attack would not come for a few days, at least. He could not dream that it would be so soon.

Just after Giovanpaolo had cried out in this manner, the traitors in the hall outside his room saw that there was no way except to beat in the door of his room. As they gathered and lifted the heavy beam, they heard him cry out, inside the room: "Tizzo! I have been like a blind fool for failing to heed your warning! I have allowed murder to come into my family!"

At that time, however, he still did not know that even his very cousin, the rich and handsome Grifone, had actually taken a main part in the conspiracy, so that although the house was Baglioni in name, it was, in fact, a cruel trap for the hero.

With the heavy balk of wood, the assassins dashed against the door. At the first stroke they smashed it down. They dropped the beam of wood which they had used to crush the barrier and they were about to pour into the room to finish their black business when they were amazed by a voice crying out loudly, behind them: "Giovanpaolo! Giovanpaolo! I come!"

At this Giovanpaolo raised a great shout of joy.

At the same time a slender man with a still slighter youth beside him, the first armed with a terrible axe and the second with a light sword, sharper than a needle, rushed through the group and threw them all into a slight confusion. Here a young man of the house of Corgnie, trying to close with the newcomer, received from the axe a tremendous stroke which glanced from his helmet, clove through his shoulder armor, and almost severed the arm from his body.

Of that wound, afterwards, he bled to death.

But Tizzo and Lady Beatrice were now in the room of Giovanpaolo, who had taken time to draw on a few clothes between the first alarm and the beating down of his door.

When he saw Tizzo, he cried out: "Brother, you should have lived to revenge me; now we must die together!"

To Lady Beatrice, he merely said: "And it was I who tried to keep two sparks from flying in the same wind!"

For there was a certain touch of laughter in Giovanpaolo, even on a battle-field. But he with his lunging sword and Tizzo with the terrible, beating axe, kept the doorway clear for a moment.

Chapter XVIII

Marvels and Miracles.

IT was Lady Beatrice who exclaimed: "The way is still open to the loggia." In a pause in the fighting, Giovanpaolo said: "There is no use in that unless we all had wings!—Ha, Grifone, do I see your face, traitor and dog? Have you joined yourself with villains?"

Grifone, when he heard this, shaking his sword above his head, tried to break through the press of his soldiers, and called out: "It was you who drove me to treason. Your treachery to me, Giovanpaolo, for which you shall die. You have disgraced the honor of my house!"

In that he must have glanced at the reputation of his wife, who was beautiful as an angel, and, so far as men knew, as virtuous as an angel, also. Giovanpaolo answered: "Have you listened to villains, Grifone, and believed them, like a poor, weak-witted fool?"

Then he saw Carlo and shouted: "Carlo Barciglia, come closer. If we cannot touch hands, at least let us touch swords!"

"Pay no heed to him, Grifone," said Carlo Barciglia. "He has the tongue that will persuade honest men that red is white! Death to him!"

The whole body was about to rush again at the doorway when Tizzo said at the ear of his friend: "Giovanpaolo, I know a way from the loggia which even men can take. Follow me!" He added: "Beatrice, go first and open the doors from here to the loggia. If you see a strong cord or a rope, snatch it up. If not, take the long red cloth that lies across the table in the second room."

She obeyed those orders at once.

And Giovanpaolo and Tizzo met the second rush against the doorway. Again the sword flamed in the hands of Giovanpaolo, the axe circled in the grasp of Tizzo, and those blows, together with the narrowness of the doorway, held back the attackers for a moment.

Grifone called out that crossbows were coming, and that they should hold their hands.

But as the assailants fell back, the two inside the room fled suddenly across it and, passing through the door to the outer room, they locked and bolted it behind them, throwing some furniture against it to delay further the murderers.

In the same way they passed out onto the loggia and closed and locked that strong outer door behind them.

They could now look down through the last of the moonlight upon the piazza beneath, where loud shouts were ringing, and the hoofs of horses struck sparks out of the pavement, galloping back and forth. The continual cry was "Camerino! Camerino!" as though the men of that town had actually taken Perugia by assault.

A good number of citizens had come out from their houses towards the uproar and these made a dark, solid edging around the piazza, keeping themselves safe from the conflict, like a shore around a turbulent sea.

There was neither cord nor rope, but the girl had brought the red cloth from the table of the second room. And Tizzo, grasping this, threw it like a long scarf over his shoulder.

Then he made Giovanpaolo hold him up on the low wall at the edge of the loggia in such a fashion that with his hands he could swing out and grasp the edge of the roof just above.

With a mighty effort, he tried to pull himself up, but one hand failed to hold and left him dangling by a precarious grasp. Lady Beatrice, trying to reach out to save him, herself almost fell headlong into the street below, but her brother caught and held her.

Behind them, they heard the conspirators smashing down the door to the outer room, the furniture which had been piled against it, yielding with a groaning sound as it was pushed across the floor.

Tizzo, listening to that uproar which shook the house, made a new, great effort and swung himself up onto the edge of the roof. There he lay precariously on the steeply slanting surface, looking down into the piazza as into a deep well.

ABOVE him, the roof of the loggia rose to the higher wall of the house with a window in the midst of it. He reached that window, presently, smashed it open, and peered into an obscurity of shadow in which he could see nothing. He had no time to make sure of what was about him. Beneath him events were flowing like a wild river, and he was close to ruin with Lady Beatrice and Giovanpaolo. He merely tied the belt of his sword about a chair that could not slip through the window, and then fastened the safety catch which held sheath and blade firmly together. He had been able to trust his life once before to the strength of that catch. He would have to trust three lives to it, now.

Sliding down to the end of the scabbard, on which he took a firm hold, he found that he could actually look over the edge of the wall onto the loggia beneath. Already the battering ram was crashing against the door that led from the outer room onto the loggia, and it must have seemed to the two Baglioni that they were only a moment from death. Above all other voices, like a rising fountain above still water, came the maddened screaming of the voice of Mateo Marozzo, who was yelling:

"Down with the doors! Down with them! Oh, God, give my hands one grasp on his throat!"

Like a hunting dog, Marozzo had followed his enemy and was now on his traces. It was a foolish hand, Tizzo knew, that had spared Marozzo in the house of della Penna.

He threw down the crimson cloth which he had carried up with him. The reaching hand of Giovanpaolo caught it.

"Now, Beatrice!" called Giovanpaolo, and helped the girl upwards.

Partly from his strength to lift her, partly climbing like a cat, she swarmed up the length of the cloth and over the edge of the roof.

"Up to the window!" commanded Tizzo.

She went panting past him, and by his body and his scabbard climbed to the window above.

Giovanpaolo was already following, and the task of Tizzo was a heavier one, now. He had twisted the end of the cloth about his right arm, which swung over the edge of the room; the grip of his left hand was fastened upon the end of the scabbard, which terminated in a small knob. Even so, the smooth metal made an evil hold; he had to bow his head and grind his teeth together in the last extremity of effort as he felt the full weight of Giovanpaolo swing dangling from the cloth over the depth of the piazza.

There was one instant of that frightful strain. Then the powerful grasp of the knight was on the edge of the roof and he heaved himself onto the roof beside Tizzo.

"Marvels and miracles!" gasped Giovanpaolo. "How have you done this thing, Tizzo?"

"Swiftly! Swiftly!" urged Tizzo. "They are at our heels!"

He had snatched up the crimson cloth as he spoke, and at the same moment the doors which had held so stoutly to resist the batterings of the crowd, as though they had weakened the instant that the need of them had diminished, now were beaten down, and the pressure of men poured out instantly upon the loggia.

Tizzo, retreating through the window above, his whole body shaken and trembling from the effort which he had made, heard them shouting beneath them in despair and in wonder. It was the screeching of Mateo Marozzo that again drowned all other sound.

"He cannot have flown—three of them, they cannot have flown—but Tizzo has the wings of a devil. Look everywhere!—We shall find them—God cannot disappoint me again!"

IT was a sort of agony of virtue that strained the throat of Mateo Marozzo, and the other men made a howling like wolves. For here was all their work undone. Perugia in their hands and all the rest of the leaders of the Baglioni dead, nevertheless all was unsure once Giovanpaolo escaped to raise an army of his friends and return to the attack.

In the shadows of the room above, Giovanpaolo was saying: "You are the general, brave Tizzo. Oh, my friend, you are the leader and I am the humble follower. Tell us which way we should move now—or have we only dodged death for an instant?"

"Up with me to the highest roof. There is still a way," said Tizzo.

And he guided them from the room down that upper corridor which he had passed through before, and below them the house seemed to rock with the turmoil of shouting. They climbed the stairs and issued by the dormer window onto the top roof, leveled for a garden.

The moon was down, the stars were out in clear multitudes, seeming to tremble above all the horrors of Perugia. But the three made only an instant of pause, then Tizzo led the way across the roof to the edge which was nearest to the neighboring ledge. He cast sword and axe before him, then leaped lightly across the ten-foot gap.

The girl turned back up the roof, ran forward, bounded high, and landed light as a cat on the safer side. Giovanpaolo's foot slipped as he made his leap. His feet, striking the very edge of the roof, gave him a precarious balance and he began to fall backwards, striking wildly with his arms at the thin air. But the swift grip of Tizzo was instantly on him, and he was drawn forward into safety.

Why were not men already swarming on the roof of Grifone's house? There was no answer to that question, unless Grifone and all the rest thought that the three must have cast themselves down onto the stones of the street to escape from the murder behind them.

Through a trap door which was unlocked they passed from the roof down darkling stairs into a house of silence, into which only the vague uproar from the outside penetrated as from a distance.

"Are we safe here, Giovanpaolo?" asked Tizzo.

"This is the house of Carlo Barciglia," said Giovanpaolo. "And he is among the traitors. I saw his face. But he is at his hellish work in the house of Grifone and we may win through this place if he have fortune."

In fact, they met not a living soul. All the people, no doubt, had been drawn out into the piazza. Giovanpaolo led them straight down into the armory of the house, where they paused, not to equip themselves with armor, but to take three hooded cloaks which might cover their faces and their bodies from recognition. After that, they walked, by Tizzo's suggestion, straight out into the open street.

They were not regarded. They were not the only men who were masked on this night when few could tell who was a friend and who an enemy. Besides, there were many strange and horrible sights to occupy the eyes of the crowd, and not far from the door they came on a press of people about a body that lay naked on the pavement, gored with many wounds, the arms flung out crosswise, the face smiling and unmarred. Beatrice staggered and caught at the arm of Giovanpaolo; but Tizzo paused an instant to lean and touch the dead man.

"Semonetto, I shall remember you!" he said.

Then he rejoined the other two, and heard a faint, groaning murmur from Giovanpaolo.

"This is not the time," Beatrice kept whispering. "There will be another day, Giovanpaolo. But ah, Semonetto!"

So the two left their murdered brother lying naked and dead behind them and went on with Tizzo.

"In command at the gate of San Ercolano," said Tizzo, "there is the Baron Melrose, who is my friend. He would not have a hand in this work of murder, and for my sake he will pass us safely through, perhaps."

"Let us go there, then, in the name of God," said Giovanpaolo. "There is blood in the very air we breathe, inside Perugia."

THE turmoil of the city was not very great except actually around the house of Grifone, but the clanking hoofs of horses rushed this way and that in the distance, and now and again there were outbreaks of shouting.

When they came down to San Ercolano, they found a close group of a dozen or more men-at-arms on the ground, and others in command on the walls. The great iron chains had been drawn across the gate.

Their progress was challenged instantly by the crossing of a pair of huge halberds, those ponderous, two-handed axes with which horse and rider could be struck to the ground.

"Who goes there?" came the challenge. "A friend of Baron Melrose," said Tizzo. "I know the voice. Let them come to me," said the voice of Henry of Melrose, instantly. So they were passed into the room of the captain of the gate, where Melrose was walking up and down uneasily. He banished his soldiers from the room, as he grasped the hand of Tizzo.

"How have you escaped from the hands of Marozzo and the rest at the house of della Penna?" he demanded. "Show me your face, Tizzo. Are you hurt?"

"Not in the flesh," said Tizzo. "I am safe and sound."

And he threw back the hood to smile on the big Englishman.

"Good! Good!" said Melrose. "Tizzo, the sight of you with a whole skin lets me breathe again. I have been wondering how I could persuade them with cunning or with blows to let you escape, because you have made strong enemies in this town, my lad. Who are these with you?"

"My best of friends," said Tizzo. "And people who may be friends of yours on another day, sir."

"Will they?" said the baron. "I hear that there is wild work at the house of Grifone. I must see the faces of these two."

"It is not wise, my lord," urged Tizzo.

"Not wise? Are they a pair of bright angels who might dazzle me?" asked Melrose.

"I say, it is not wise. If there is friendship between us, for the sake of that let them pass through with me!"

"Why, my lad," said Melrose, "for all I know the king of the clan, the eagle of the sky, the lion of Perugia, Giovanpaolo himself might be one of them! My friends, unmask, if you please!"

Giovanpaolo turned his head slowly towards Tizzo. His hand made a slight motion towards his sword.

"No!" exclaimed Tizzo. "It is better to trust to him than to fight against him. Do as he commands! He has a heart greater than any in Italy!"

Giovanpaolo, slowly, raised the hood from his head; Beatrice flung back her own with a quick gesture.

But Melrose, dropping his head suddenly, stared at the floor.

"There is dust in my eyes, Tizzo," he said. "I cannot see. God and my employers forgive me—but—battle is battle and murder is murder! The key to the small outer portal is lying on that table. Take it—go, all three of you. Quickly!"

There was not time even for thanks. The heavy key was fitted into the lock on the farther side of the gate-room; in a moment more they walked freely down the slope beyond the city wall.

Chapter XIX

The Bells of Perugia.

FAR beyond Perugia, three dark figures, small on the top of a great hill, looked back to the dim tremor of the lights of the city.

They were alone; they were unaided; but one of them had a voice which in a single day could call hundreds of armored riders about him. That was why it seemed to Tizzo that already there were armed ghosts gathering behind them and facing angrily towards the many towers of the city. Beautiful Perugia, which had passed through its bath of blood on this night, would surely be washed with red again before long, unless the attack spent itself vainly against the great walls.

Giovanpaolo, dropping to his knees, began to pray, softly, aloud. He prayed for the souls of his father, his dead brother Semonetto, the warrior soul of Astorre.

And the girl and Tizzo dropped back until the voice was only a murmur in their ears.

It seemed as though all possibility of lamentation had gone from her. Her pale face, clear and cold as a stone, lifted slightly towards the dim light of the stars. And Tizzo, saying nothing, looked sometimes at the girl he loved and sometimes toward that sworn blood-brother, Giovanpaolo.

He could not tell for which of them his heart ached most.

Giovanpaolo rose and came slowly on towards them, his head bowed. But he straightened himself with a sudden effort and said: "There is no time for grief. None at all. We shall be at the house of my uncle before morning. By mid-day we shall have a hundred lances with us. By night there will be an army. There is no time for grief. But one thing first. You heard the traitor, Grifone—you heard him accuse me, Beatrice, Tizzo?"

"I heard him shout in the hall outside your door," said Tizzo.

"I swear to you both and to the God who hears the voices of all men—I solemnly swear that I am innocent of that crime."

"Grifone was mad—mad as a dog to think of such a thing!" said Lady Beatrice.

Giovanpaolo answered: "No. Jealousy will work in the noblest brains, even. The greater the man it overthrows, the greater the human ruin that is spread. And Grifone was always a noble nature and loved his wife as though she were an angel. Beatrice, when I think of this night's work, I could leave the world and spend the rest of my life in prayer!"

"When I think of this night's work," said the girl in a trembling voice, "I could turn myself into a man and spend the rest of my life in armor, with a drawn sword."

"There will be swords enough," said Giovanpaolo. "And a melancholy work for them to do, because we must strike against our own kindred, Beatrice, except for Tizzo, the house of the Baglioni would have fallen indeed and the name would have been borne by traitors only."

"It is true," said the girl, turning slowly towards Tizzo.

"Whatever ending this adventure may have," said Giovanpaolo, "we shall be too employed to give way to gratitude, even. But nothing is forgotten. Beatrice, give me your hand."

She gave it to him.

"And now to Tizzo."

She extended the other hand to Tizzo and Giovanpaolo, completing the linked circle, was grasping the free hand of Tizzo in his.

"Here we are, three unhoused mortals," said Giovanpaolo. "But love is a better refuge than walled places and I feel stronger at this moment, and captain of a greater army than ever I have led, when I hold the hands of you two. In you I can have no doubt. In you I have a perfect trust. Do you feel in the same manner?"

"In the same manner," agreed Tizzo. The girl said nothing, merely smiling upon them.

"Well," said Giovanpaolo, quietly, "our blood is one blood. Tizzo has proved that, on this night. But what proof have we given to him, Beatrice? What service have we rendered on our side? But where there is a perfect faith, there is no question of services given. There is no accounting. I foresee the day, now, when this red-

headed Tizzo will lead us to victory like a battlefield in some terrible fight. I can foresee the day when we enter Perugia again and the gutters run full with blood. And after that day you will not be forgotten, Tizzo."

He added: "Tell me, Beatrice—have I your hand to give?"

"There is no one else to give me," said the girl.

"I give you, then, to Tizzo," said Giovanpaolo. "It is an earnest of a payment to come."

"Earnest?" cried Tizzo. "It is more than all the stars of heaven poured into my arms!"

"Hush!" said Giovanpaolo.

They listened, and heard far away the rapid ringing of the bells of Perugia, all striking together to beat out the alarm.

It was easy enough to understand what the alarm bells meant. The traitors had paused in the midst of their murders to discover that Giovanpaolo had definitely escaped from the city. And therefore their work remained a headless task. It was all to be done again.

The bells were still ringing when the three turned their backs on the dim city and went steadily away across the darkness of the hills.

