



"THUS DO I ADD ANOTHER LINK TO MY CHAIN OF REVENGE!"—See page 68.

ONE LINK IN THE CHAIN  
OF  
APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION;  
OR,  
THE CRIMES  
OF  
ALEXANDER BORGIA.

---

And upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. \* \* \*  
\* \* \* I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her. — REVELATION XVII.

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This Work,  
A  
REVELATION OF THE BORGias,  
IS DEDICATED TO  
ARCHBISHOP HUGHES,  
AS A TOKEN OF  
Eternal Enmity!  
WITH THE HOPE THAT IT WILL BE INSTRUMENTAL IN AWAKENING AMERICANS  
TO THEIR DUTY, AND IN FORMING A BULWARK OF DEFENCE AGAINST  
FOREIGN AND PAPAL AGGRESSION AROUND THE RIGHTS OF ALL  
PROTESTANT AMERICANS.

## P R E F A C E.

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I WISH every reader of this book to know my purpose in writing it. My object must not be misunderstood. I regard the church of Rome as a thousand-headed hydra, each head nurtured to its present fulness by a thousand crimes! I look upon it as a festering hell on earth, beneath whose seeming piety and sanctimoniousness are enacted scenes of blood and cruelty more revolting than any ever witnessed in the ORIGINAL Pandemonium! I regard it as a hideous reptile, that has attained its present massive proportions *through the sufferance of those who should have crushed it in the germ*, and only waits for an auspicious hour to unmask in all its deformity, yet with a vigor and power that shall shake worlds from their foundations! I look upon it as a terrible guillotine, whose blade is every moment growing wider and wider, sharper and sharper, and is now only suspended in silence and darkness, that it may grow large enough to destroy Liberty and Protestantism at one blow!

And such a damnable compound of all that is hellish, atrocious, gigantic, *and terribly significant of a bloody future*, is the CHURCH OF ROME!

The time has come when all Americans who love their country must awaken to the nature of the serpents they are nourishing in their bosoms, or see the heritage secured by the blood of their forefathers pass out of their hands forever! As time rolls on, the tide of Papal aggression sets higher and higher, and wounded Liberty flies shrieking back to the borders!

Standing thus upon the shores of the present, and looking back to what have been the achievements of Jesuitical cunning and power, the mind cannot grasp at anything that seems too bold and hazardous for the emissaries of the church of Rome to accomplish. Emerging from the gloom and desolation of the dark ages, — that period when a mental night seemed about to enclose all mankind as in one living grave, — the principles of Catholicism have gone on spreading and increasing for centuries, though always directly antagonistical to civilization, enlightenment, the elevation of the masses, and civil and political liberty. These principles find their vitality in the cunning and steady perseverance of an overwhelming priesthood, whose every action is governed by a desire to swell the resources of "*the church*," and make all means subservient to this single end. They have planted their banner upon nearly every portion of the globe, — always establishing it in blood, and sustaining it in tyranny and oppression, — and wherever their sway predominates, there will the people be found existing under a curse like that of Cain! Spain, Mexico, the greater portion of South America, and even Rome itself, are all living examples of the deadly evils that are born of Papal supremacy. Ignorance, superstition, and inertness, are the leading characteristics of a people ruled by the priesthood; and hence their value to themselves and their God is lost in the bonds of servility that strip them of their manhood, and make them but automatons that are entirely subject to their master minds — *the Jesuits*!

But by such means — the exercise of the assuming knowledge of the few over the submissive ignorance of the many — has the church of Rome built up a mine that any instant threatens to destroy all things antagonistic to itself. It has attained an influence as mighty and universal as it will one day be deadly, should circumstances ever warrant its safety and success in throwing off the mask of secretness and inertness

which has rested upon its blood-begrimmed features so long. It has woven a net around the world that is gradually securing all things, little and great, in its meshes, and slowly drawing them into the dominion and beneath the authority of the "*Mother Church*." It has caused millions and millions of beings, of all ages and sexes, in all parts of the world, to have one soul, one mind, one will, — and that one subject to the wishes of the Pope, as expressed through his bishops and priests. It has originated and established the most elaborate and extensive consolidation of mind to one object that ever was or can be originated and established, unless upon the foundation of AMERICANISM IN AMERICA; and the result is, that the Roman Catholic church is the most tremendous engine of social and political power that has been brought into existence since the world began — an engine of the greatest magnitude and of the most complex order, yet one whose every portion is so carefully and systematically managed that centuries may pass away before a single vibration can come unlooked for.

And yet Americans will sleep on, as if they knew not that their rights and liberties, and *privileges as Americans*, are being daily and hourly encroached upon at a rate that threatens to soon strip them of all!

Since the commencement of the present century, an almost total change has been wrought in the political condition of the world, which is mostly attributable to the spread of Catholicism over new grounds, and the strengthening of it in the old. The greater portion of this vast change has been wrought in the United States, during the last twenty-five years. The good old principles of republicanism and Protestantism that animated the heroes of the revolution have been gradually crushed out, and their places usurped by those of a decidedly opposite nature; until no political movement can be made without its being more or less influenced towards an evil end by the adherents of the Romish church, who have, as before observed, in substance,

gained a sure footing and an enormous influence in the United States, *through the sufferance of Americans!* Not a day nor an hour passes in which some example of the power and despotism of the Jesuitical leaders in America is not hurled in the face of the descendants of the cotemporaries and fellow-patriots of the immortal Washington! Not a day passes without beholding the shackles that now fetter American liberty closer drawn around it, and bidding fair to soon become riveted in a manner that will effectually prevent all attempts to throw them off! Not a day passes that some new insult and indignity is not offered to the noble few who dare to come out and say, "*WE ARE AMERICANS!*" Not a day passes that does not behold hundreds of emigrants, sunken in the lowest depths of poverty, ignorance and superstition, landing on our shores from the Old World, knowing but one will, and seeking the advancement of but one purpose, and that combined will and purpose that of the disciples of *Ignatius Loyola* and *Alexander Borgia!* Not a day passes that is not marked by the Papal powers in America with some new step towards the general establishment of Papal rule in the United States, and the complete demolition of patriotism, Protestantism and liberty! Not a day passes that is not polluted with plots and daring schemes against the very existence of the Union; not an hour in which some new additions are not given to the resources of the Catholic church!

Such being the case, every American who is worthy of the name cannot fail of seriously considering what is to be the ending of this peculiar state of affairs. It will be blood, sooner or later — *blood!* In every portion of the world where the Catholic church has gained a footing, it has not resigned it without bloodshed; nor will it forego its advancement by the same means. To attain by blood, and retain by the same means, is the greatest element of its success. Its power in America has arrived at a point where it will neither yield

what it has, nor be content without grasping for more; and this feeling will prepare the way for a feud between two great parties, which will lead to the subjugation of one or the other. The disciples of the church of Rome, or the descendants of the revolutionary patriots, must eventually rule the United States; and the time has come when it is a question for serious consideration whether it shall be ruled by *us* or *them*.

I am not one who has a *penchant* for prophesying evil, nor for creating an alarm when there is not any danger. I have drawn my conclusions on this subject from a critical analyzation of the motives and principles that have been the life of the Romish church since the days of the Borgias. Wherever it has acquired even a moderate degree of power, it has left a track of blood. Wherever its supremacy has been such as to warrant the experiment, it has been a harbinger of destruction, death and desolation, to all who have ventured to oppose it by word or deed. And such it will ever be, — such it will finally be in America, should its strength ever be so overwhelming as to make this end one easy of accomplishment, which God forbid!

It is believed that Americans are not sufficiently aware of the nature of the church of Rome to treat its modern developments with a proper seriousness; and hence this work is written. It is believed that its claim to be considered *the* church, and the only legitimate church of the Messiah, has not been considered in a manner that does justice to its pretensions. It is believed that the mysteries and iniquities of its secret tribunals have not been explained as elaborately as is desirable for the advancement of humanity and Protestantism. It is also believed that the character of the men who have filled the Papal chair, and are now worshipped as saints, and as the successors of St. Peter in the legitimate order of apostolic succession, has never been revealed to the world in a style as distinct and highly-colored as the subject is worthy of; and

hence I have taken one name, one career, from the list, for the material of this story,—that of the notorious and infamous *robber, assassin, seducer, incestuous libertine*, AND POPE—Alexander Borgia!

From his career of crime and infamy it is my purpose to show what corruption and pollution lies festering at the heart of the Catholic church. Alexander Borgia is boasted, by “all good Catholics,” as one of those it is their delight to consider noble leaders of their church; but never was earth polluted by the existence of a more depraved and crime-stained monster in the shape of man. His name was written imperishably on the age in which he lived, in characters of blood. History has set him down as a mark for the execration and loathing of all mankind; and yet we are told, by the most sapient disciples of the church of Rome, that this man ranks as one of the apostolic successors of St. Peter!

The chief object of this work will be to show his claims to that honor, and to reveal the general evils that were then, and are now, incorporated in the religion (??) of which he was, and is, a loudly-vaunted representative! If the reader finds him painted, not as a man, but as a fiend in human semblance, breeding vice and crime in a half-benighted world, they will remember that this feature is a matter of history!

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## BOOK FIRST.

## I.

## LUCRETIA BORGIA.

ROME! A pleasant moonlight evening. The hour—  
nine. The scene—a splendidly-furnished apartment, in  
the palace of the Borgias. The only occupant of the  
room was an almost gloriously beautiful maiden, of  
seventeen summers, with hair as dark as night, and eyes  
as bright as the peerless diadems of her own native clime!  
And she—*she* was Lucretia Borgia!

There were no shades of evil on her face—no signs of  
the seal always impressed by guilt upon its followers—  
nor had her heart become the abode of aught that was  
foul and polluting. Her eyes were bright and sparkling,  
yet full of the gentleness of love; her face was wreathed  
with a quiet expression of happiness; and, as she reclined  
upon a luxurious lounge, and gave way to the pleasing  
fancies that had come in showers over her soul, there could  
not have been a more perfect picture of female beauty and  
innocence than she presented.

"O! what a pleasure it is to live," she murmured, at  
length, in a voice of the most exquisite sweetness, "while  
life is bright and beautiful, and love is young! It is a  
glorious era in life to realize that the heart, perhaps all



lonely and desolate before, is gradually entwining around a cherished object, and drawing its purest happiness from a kindred soul — a glorious era, to have a consciousness, in waking thoughts and in the fantasies of dreams, that there is one mind, one heart, to share our joys and sorrows, and roll back the clouds from the horizon of life! And this delightful era is now mine! O, Mercado, what bliss is mine when my thoughts are on thee! What raptures fill my soul, as my fervent hopes paint the future as an endless heaven, reaching far away, through paths made lovely and fragrant by the most gorgeous flowers — all of which shall be shared with me by thee, while our days glide smoothly on, and naught but love and happiness shall preside over the weaving of a single page in our book of life!"

As the lovely woman paused in her rhapsody, a liveried servant entered.

"Donna Lucretia," he said, "there is an old woman, a fortune-teller, in the reception-room, who desires to be admitted to your presence."

"Show her in," was the reply. "A fortune-teller! She will read in my face that I am in love; she will perceive that my passion is reciprocated; and then she will promise me long years of happiness with Mercado, and crown the hopes of this hour —"

She paused, for the fortune-teller had entered. She was an old, very old woman, with wrinkled visage, and attenuated form. She was clad in a flowing mantle, that added to the wildness of her appearance. Her eyes were deeply sunken in their sockets, and gleamed out from beneath her o'er-hanging brows, like funeral lights from some dark cavern in the bowels of earth. Her dark features were

wreathed with a stern yet mournful expression, as she paused before the young beauty, leaning upon a cane.

Lucretia Borgia started, and uttered an exclamation of surprise, as she turned and beheld the countenance of her visitor.

"Mad Seta here!" she exclaimed, as a shudder crept over her form.

"Ay, mad Seta!" and the weird woman laughed, — "yet is not this very madness, that is so reviled, a glorious gift, that does away with the narrow limits in which the sane mind is confined? The mad see strange sights, and hear strange things, that are not known to the common mind. The veil is removed, and they penetrate mysteries at which the common herd cannot even grasp. Mad! Yes, yes, girl; but I have seen sights worthy of a deeper madness than mine. I've seen a living hell, disgorging fiends in showers upon a stricken world, and on a throne that's red with blood have seen the choicest of Satan's master spirits — ay, Alexander Borgia!"

"Peace, woman! This Alexander Borgia, whom thou speakest so lightly of, is my father!"

"And *such* a father! Can a serpent father doves — a devil be a kin to angels? I tell thee, girl, thou knowest not what thou art saying. *Thy father!* Thou hadst better claim relationship to Satan himself!"

"Hold! or he shall hear and resent thy words!"

"Dost thou, too, threaten me? But go and call him. Already has he warned me never to cross the threshold of this palace — but I am here, and one word from you will call those who do not hold his orders lightly. Will you call?"

"Not if thou wilt hold thy peace in reference to my father."

"Enough. Now, thy fortune!" and the old woman raised the maiden's hand. Earnestly she looked at it, for several minutes, without uttering a word; yet a strange flush appeared upon her face as she regarded it. The observation ended, she arose and turned upon her heel, and was passing from the apartment without uttering a word, when Donna Lucretia called her back.

"Stay, good Seta — you have not told me the fate you have read!"

"Nor will I!" and again the weird woman moved on. Donna Lucretia detained her.

"I see by thy looks thou hast read something of importance. Give me thy knowledge before you go."

"Thou hast told me not to speak it!"

"How?"

"I speak of Alexander Borgia, or not at all!" and again the fortune-teller essayed to move on.

"Ah, this is some idle whim — but I will humor it. Be seated, good Seta, and tell me what thou readest from my hand;" and, despite her habitual self-possession, a look of anxiety appeared on her face.

"I read a tale it were not well to speak in detail — yet, *beware of Alexander Borgia!*"

"Woman," exclaimed Donna Lucretia, sternly, "you trifle with me. You presume upon my forbearance, or my womanly weakness. If gold is thy object in visiting me, take this, and trouble me with no more of this mum-mery!"

"No, no, — I do not want thy gold. I came not here for gain, but to warn thee of evils. A cloud is hanging

over thy head — a storm will burst from it, and scatter your hopes like chaff before the wind. Again, I say, beware of Alexander Borgia!"

Donna Lucretia subdued the resentment aroused by the repetition of the disagreeable words, and listened attentively as the old woman continued:

"You love a noble young man, and are beloved by him. But there is one — ay, your father, girl, as you are pleased to call him — who looks upon you both with feelings that bode neither of you any good. When next thou seest Mercado, warn him that danger is hovering in his steps; tell him to be on his guard, sleeping and waking, if he would escape the machinations under foot against him."

"What mean you?"

"Hist! I hear the sound of voices in the street — I hear swords clashing in the air. Ah, ha! go to yon casement and gaze forth, if thou wouldst have thy answer."

Donna Lucretia instantly obeyed.

"I see a gathering of people — I see two persons fighting with drawn swords! Strangers? No! One of them is — it is Mercado!"

The weird woman laughed.

"My lover engaged in a street brawl — a duel, perhaps! Ah, what is the meaning of this?"

"It means that he has been attacked by a ruffian, in the pay of your father. But do not fear; Mercado has a brave heart, and a stout arm, and will come safely off!"

"Thou art right — he does; but see, he has stricken his enemy to the earth, and is now coming this way. I shall see him; Heaven grant that he may not have received injury in the encounter!"

"He must not come here. I will cross his path, and warn him to shun the presence of the Borgias, as he would a den of vipers! But, if thou wouldst see him, he will be in my humble home, half an hour hence. Wilt come?"

"I will."

"Tis well;" and, without another word, the old woman hastened from the apartment.

"I must know the truth of these suspicions," soliloquized Donna Lucretia, as soon as she was alone. "Heaven grant that Mercado may not be harmed — for all my hopes are centred in him; and, should they ever be crushed, eternal night will be the inheritance of Lucretia Borgia!"

## II.

### THE MASK OF ST. PETER'S.

THE steps of St. Peter's. Standing in the shadow of one of the massive pillars was a broad-shouldered, powerful-looking man, wearing a large cloak around his form, and a black mask over his countenance. There was nothing particularly repulsive in the appearance of the mask; but — and it seemed singular — all who gazed thereon shuddered, and crept noiselessly away, looking fearfully behind them, as if they had seen some horrid vision. There must have been something horrible in the character the possessor of that mask had acquired, to make him so carefully shunned by all who chanced to pass in that vicinity — and, indeed, there was.

An elderly man, clad in a humble garb, passed up the steps, at last, and paused before the mask. There was no fear expressed in his face, as his eyes met those of that

dreaded being; — to the contrary, a look of gratification appeared upon his flushed features, and he exclaimed,

"Thank God! I have found you!"

"Indeed! And what may you want with the mask?" asked that personage, in a deep voice, while his eyes roved like lightning flashes over the form before him.

"Your aid. Thou art a man whose power, for good or evil, is greater than that possessed by all Rome."

"You forget the Pope!" suggested the mask, with a slight bow.

"No, I do not forget; nor will I retract my words in favor of the Pope — God's curse be upon him!"

"Ah!" and the mask started. "Why speak so sternly of him?"

"Because he is a villain!"

Again the mask started.

"It is not well for you to speak thus boldly. Walls have ears, it is said, and Rome has spies more useful than walls. You had better curb this bold spirit, or it may lead you into difficulty."

"I care not. What is life to me? A curse, signor — a curse! I have been most foully wronged, and have come to secure thy aid for redress. Shall I have it?"

"Always, in a good cause. But tell me thy wrongs?"

"My daughter, signor, — the idol of my heart, — has been seized by the minions of Pope Alexander VI., and is confined a prisoner in his private residence, as I have learned from a note from her, written in her blood, which she bribed a troubadour to bring to me!"

The mask started more violently than before, and turned towards the old man.

"And your daughter's name is —"

"She is called La Belle Floretta!"

"And you —"

"I am Michael Delano — her father!"

The mask uttered an involuntary exclamation of surprise.

"By Heavens!" he muttered, *sotto voce*, "it is singular that he should come to me for redress — *he!* the very father of my victim!"

"What say you?"

"That I would know how I can be of service to you."

"O, signor, any movement of thine in my favor will be of invaluable service to me. In all Rome, there is not a man as dreaded as thou — not one who has the liberty and authority that is given to thee. Thou canst go everywhere, and do anything that it is your pleasure to do. Thou hast the power to restore my child to me; — O, have mercy on a poor old father, and bring her back to my arms."

"And dost thou think that I can baulk the Pope himself, in his designs on your daughter?"

"I never thought of the danger — of the greatness of the attempt to regain my child. But, canst thou not do something for me? — canst thou not make one effort for her escape from the monster who has torn her from me?"

"Perhaps the mask can do more for thee than thou thinkest. But, hist! There comes one who has business of importance with me. Stand thou aside for a moment, while I learn the object of this visit."

The old man obeyed, retiring to the shade cast by another pillar. As he did so, a man, disguised with a huge beard, and wearing a blood-red cloak, ascended the steps, bowed three times, and handed a packet of papers to the

mask — then hastened away in the direction from whence he came, without speaking a word.

"This visit bodes no good work," soliloquized old Delano, coming forward, "for that personage in the red cloak is the messenger of the cardinals!"

### III.

#### THE DEATH-WARRANT.

THE mask did not reply. He had broken the seal of the packet, and moved out of the shadow of the pillar, so that the rays of the moon fell upon the paper he held in his hand, and enabled him to read it. For a moment he was occupied in perusing the missive; then he crushed it in his hand, and muttered, as he turned toward Delano,

"Fool, fool!"

"Why lookest thou so strange at me? — and why these epithets?"

"Art thou not a fool?" asked the mask, with a fierceness of emphasis that startled his listener.

"To the best of my belief, I am not."

"Then, why hast thou been here and there, like a babbling school-boy, making known the loss of thy daughter, and publicly charging the Pope with having been concerned in her abduction?"

"Have I done so? Then is the truth made known. Alexander VI. *has* robbed me of my daughter — I have reported nothing but the truth."

"But has thy shallow brain never cautioned thee that it is not always a course of safety, or policy, to tell the truth? It seems that it has not, or else you would not

have made such a foolish outcry, but held your peace, and submitted—as is always best—to an evil that cannot be remedied.”

“But this wrong *must* be remedied,—my child must be rescued. Thou hast promised thy aid—thou wilt not withdraw it?”

“O, fool, fool! You have been the deviser of your own ruin. Know you not that your reports have been carried to the Pope; that your case has been examined by the cardinals, by him convened; that it has been decided that you are a dangerous man, a spreader of evil rumors and seditions; that sentence of death has been passed upon you; that the messenger of the cardinals has brought me your death-warrant; and that the mask of St. Peter’s is doomed to be your executioner!”

Delano staggered beneath this accumulation of horrors, and his face became deathly pale.

“I see,” he gasped. “I was a fool to brave so terrible a power as that of Alexander Borgia! But I will not complain—death will be a mercy. Do thy work when and where thou wilt.”

“And yet,” muttered the mask, “I can hardly realize that I hold the warrant for his death. The cardinals have moved in this matter with greater haste than I expected. I am sorry for it; I do not desire Delano’s death. Can the warrant be set aside? Not without making myself known; and that will not do—never, never!”

“I am ready for the sacrifice,” continued the old man,—“yet before I die let me call down a curse upon the one who has wronged me so deeply, who has destroyed my daughter. Thou, God, that seest all things, be thou the avenger of one whose power for revenge is lost! May

thy most terrible curse rest, now and forever, upon that fiend in human guise, Alexander Borgia—”

“Hold!” exclaimed the mask, with much agitation, as he seized the arm of the old man. “Thou knowest not what thou art saying. Though here I hold a warrant for thy death, thy life shall not be taken. Go with me; I will find thee a place of concealment, where thou wilt be safe. Come—I would know something of thy history. I have some choice wine; and over a bottle of it we will pass an hour together in conversation. Wilt go? I will show thee the beauties and wonders of my palace, and thou shalt sleep on down, and eat from plates of silver! Wilt go?”

“Ay, though death were lurking in the midst of such enjoyments as thou hast alluded to, I would accompany thee!”

“Come on, then, and thou shalt know more of the mask of St. Peter’s.”

#### IV.

##### THE REVEL AND DISCOVERY.

HALF an hour later. The mask of St. Peter’s and Michael Delano were seated in an apartment of luxurious magnificence, with a bottle of wine before them, from which the old man, from time to time, poured out deep potations. The mask drank but little; he was evidently in no humor for the pleasures that were so new and fascinating to his companion.

“You are a jolly ‘un,” muttered the old man. “Must be a happy fellow to have such a nice place to live in, and

such capital wine as this. I was never so happy in my life. You were really very kind to invite me here — I shall always be very grateful. But do you live alone here? I should think you would be lonesome sometimes — have a desire to see the ladies, eh?”

“O, I am never without means to make time pass agreeably,” said the mask, carelessly, “as you shall see.”

As he spoke, he pressed his foot against a knob elevated above the floor beneath the table.

The room was instantly filled with strains of delicious music, which seemed to come from an adjoining apartment. It rose higher and higher, filling every portion of the room with a thrilling melody, that seemed to enchant the old man, for he remained motionless, scarcely seeming to breathe. Anon, it rose to a low plaintive strain, that seemed like a dirge, whispering of earthly sorrows, but bearing consolation as sweet and soothing as the breath of heaven! Finally, it ceased — silence reigned as before. With a smile, the mask turned towards his guest.

“It is heavenly,” he murmured. “With such music, you cannot be lonesome.”

“Listen! you have not seen all,” was the response, and again the mask pressed upon the sacred knob.

The folding-doors that formed one side of the room were drawn apart, disclosing a brilliantly-lighted and magnificently-furnished apartment, in which were twelve or fifteen young and exceedingly beautiful girls, dressed in fairy-like garments, that revealed the peerless *contour* of their exquisitely voluptuous forms in such a fascinating manner that it would have maddened the gaze of even an anchorite. For an instant, all was hushed; then the enchanting strains of music were renewed, and those sylph-

like forms glided almost imperceptibly over the gorgeous carpet, with waving, undulating motion, with each look and gesture attuned to the emotions of love and languishing voluptuousness. Round and round in the giddy waltz sped those fairy forms, while the excited Delano watched their every movement, and passed his eyes with longing and admiration over the glowing beauties that were so bewitchingly revealed to his bewildered gaze. The wine he had imbibed, together with the music and the enchanting sight before him, rendered him half delirious with delicious intoxication. He could not move or speak; his senses seemed to be completely under the influence of the strange and startling scene; and he gazed upon it like one in a dream.

The spell was broken by the gruff voice of the mask.

“You seem to be pleased with my means of killing time,” he observed, with a singular smile.

“It is glorious. It were easy to imagine, when gazing on such a scene as this, that the portals of death were passed, and heaven revealed!”

“Like you the appearance of the ladies?”

“Very much.”

“Choose. One of them shall be subject to your wishes — any one of the number you may choose!”

The old man looked upon them with an expression of bewilderment.

“There’s the tall beauty, to the left — she is very pretty,” muttered the old man, with flushed face, and sparkling eyes. “There’s the blonde immediately in front of her — she’s also very lovely. Then there’s her companion, the graceful and pretty — Ha! my God! what do I behold?”

As the old man uttered the startling exclamation, he sprang to his feet, and stood before his companion perfectly sobered, but with features as pale as death, while his limbs trembled beneath him.

"God of mercy! what do I behold? *La Belle Floretta!* My child, O, my daughter!"

He would have rushed towards her, but the strong arm of the mask detained him, and that personage quietly remarked,

"Be seated, signor! It were not well for you to enter there, among them all; but you can have your choice!"

"Devil! The girl I would have clasped was my own child — my lost Floretta! — I will see her."

"Nay — that is impossible," replied the mask, as he again pressed the knob; and as quick as thought the folding-doors were closed upon the bewildering scene.

"Lost, lost!" gasped the old man, as he threw himself frantically against the doors. "Demon! bid them be parted again. My daughter is kept here against her will — bid the doors open, or I will break them down!"

At this moment, the reaction of the excitement overcame the old man, and he sank down in a fainting-fit. The mask rang a bell. It was instantly answered by the appearance of a servant.

"Bear the old man to the inner chambers, and see that he is well attended. Call Pireto to help you remove him."

The apartment was soon cleared — the mask was left alone.

"The old man shall die," he muttered, "but not yet. A thought has struck me — he shall be the means of my vengeance on Floretta, if she still refuses compliance to

my wishes. I have gained some knowledge of his character. He can be influenced by wine and women; and by this means shall he be moulded to my will! Ha, ha! — a noble thought — a glorious thought! Now, proud *La Belle Floretta!* beware how you trifle with me!"

The ringing of a bell suspended in the corner of the apartment announced a visitor, as the mask paused. He moved to a side-door, and opened it. A paper was handed him, which he speedily read.

"The cardinals," he muttered, — "to the meeting of the cardinals! There's more blood to be shed; I am he whose province it is to do their bidding; and yet how those proud potentates of the church would start did they but know who the man is that thus seems subject to their wishes! O, did they but know me as I know myself —"

The mask resumed his cloak and dagger, and passed from the apartment, leaving the sentence unfinished.

## V.

### THE WARNING.

THE home of mad Seta — a humble, but cleanly and well-ordered abode. The old woman was not alone. Lucretia Borgia and her lover, the gallant Mercado, were present.

"I must leave you, my children, for a while," said mad Seta, arising; "but I will soon return."

"But why need you leave us?"

"Because I have business," was the reply, — "because," she added, in a lower voice, "lovers do not desire

the presence of a third party at their interviews, especially if that party be children or old women!"

With this, the old woman hobbled from the room.

"O, Mercado, what can mad Seta's warning mean? Surely, she would not distress me with these fears, if there were no occasion for them. I cannot give her credence — cannot believe that my father meditates ill against you. Why should he?"

"I hardly know. But he is the head of the church, which my death would so much benefit. The immense property, which is mine by inheritance, was so willed that if I die before attaining my twenty-first year the whole of it will go to the revenues of the church of Rome. Now, were the Holy Fathers, and His Eminence, your father, to be unscrupulous in their designs, and meditate the possession of this wealth, I am well aware that it would be an easy matter to prevent me from reaching my twenty-first birthday. You understand?"

"But I cannot believe that my father would conspire against your life. He surely cannot desire to plunge his child into the misery such a deed would give her."

"Does he know of our love?"

"I think not. I have never talked but once with him on the subject of a connection of this nature between us, and then I did not let him know how much I think of you."

"Not by words, perhaps; but such love as thine is readable in every look and every motion! O, dearest Lucretia, if there should be a conspiracy against us, and by the all-powerful pillars of the church, we shall fall!"

The form of the lovely woman heaved with emotion at the thought.

"But not unavenged," she murmured, and her usual silvery voice was husky. "If wrong is meted out to thee, — if this love, so like that of the angels, is made the har-binger of a curse, — if these hopes are blasted, this brain seared, and the aspirations of this heart blotted out forever, — let each and all who are concerned look well to their souls; for, by the soul of a sainted mother in heaven, terrible shall be the atonement of him who thus wrongs Lucretia Borgia!"

"Hush, hush, girl!" said a voice close to her side. Mad Seta had returned, and entered noiselessly, and now stood beside her. "It is not well for thee to talk of vengeance on such men; they are too powerful!"

"Were they gods, and do this wrong, heaven itself could not shield them! As long as there are brains to plot and hands to execute, let no one cross my path and blight my hopes!"

"But they will do it. I know it; I read it in the stars, long years ago; and still I nightly read it, when the sky is not palled with clouds. They will scatter death and desolation around them, and make thy life a curse, as they have done to others."

"You speak wildly to-night, good Seta."

"Wildly? Ha, ha! Have I not had a cause for speaking so? I've seen such sights as few have seen, and live to weave their horrors in forms of speech. I saw thy mother, child, the night before she died. I knew her veins were full of poison — that she was doomed; and well I knew — but thou shalt not know it. The tale is not for ears like thine. I'll go and breathe it to the air, or howl it to the fiends! Ha, ha! 't is not for such as thee — not for such as thee!"



Donna Lucretia would have questioned her, but she was gone.

And there was a shade of sadness upon the minds of the lovers, that could not be banished. They knew that terrible deeds had been done, when there was less incentive than now; and could not help but feel that there was a dark and dangerous future before them.

Yet, even in such an hour, there was one star that shone upon them from the stormy heavens —

The star of Hope!

Who has not seen it — who has not looked to it with eagerness and fervent expectation; and who has not seen it blotted out, and mental night and desolation reigning in its stead?

“Well, if the worst is to come, we will meet it calmly,” said Mercado, with a kind of forced calmness, as they prepared to leave the room. “But if I am indeed to become the victim of these bloodhounds — if I am lost to thee, dear Lucretia, forever —”

“My soul will be changed to that of a fiend, and terrible will be the hell that fiend will prepare for those who wrong Lucretia Borgia!”

## VI.

### THE MEETING OF THE CARDINALS.

A VAULTED room in the basement of the Inquisition. A marble table in the centre, several lighted candles thereon, and half a dozen men seated around it. They were the cardinals.

In one corner of the apartment stood the messenger

who had given the mask the death-warrant of Delano when he stood upon the steps of St. Peter. His red cloak had been thrown aside; but still all of his garments were of a blood-red hue.

“Hugi, has he — the mask — arrived?” asked Cardinal Corneto,\* of the messenger.

“He has.”

“Then retire, and bid him to our presence.”

The order was obeyed. An instant later, the mask of St. Peter’s stood before the cardinals.

“Mask,” said Corneto, “there’s work for thee.”

“I await your orders.”

“There they are,” — handing a paper. “The document refers to Mercado. See that you execute its every precept. His death is desired by HIS EMINENCE; he must be numbered among those who HAVE lived, before two days have passed.”

The mask ran his eye eagerly over the paper. “Ha, ha! thus do I succeed,” he muttered, in a low tone. “The lover of Lucretia Borgia is doomed!”

And then he turned to depart.

“Stay,” commanded Corneto. “There’s another warrant for thee to serve. Its tenor, death!”

“To whose concern?”

“Signora Fortello’s!”

\* Cardinal Corneto is not a fictitious character. He was an immensely wealthy man, and — from all accounts — extremely avaricious. For the circumstances attending his death, the reader is referred to “Dowling’s History of Romanism,” a work of the most sterling character. My account of it, near the close of this work, will be found historically correct.

The mask started violently, and recoiled from the warrant extended towards him.

"Why do you start? Take the paper, and hasten to execute it."

Still the mask hesitated.

A frown overspread Corneto's brow.

"You seem surprised," he remarked. "It is possible that you may have some objections to the death of this good lady?"

"I have — but well know that I may spare myself the useless trouble of stating them, if you have decided. Yet it seems a very strange affair, — the Pope has not been informed of your intentions."

"How know you that? But no matter — I acknowledge that you speak the truth. The Pope *has not* been consulted on the subject. But think you that we cannot move in matters concerning the welfare of the church without consulting his opinions?"

The mask remained silent, but his manner of doing so plainly expressed dislike.

"Signor mask," said Corneto, sternly, "you trifle with us! Must I remind you of the terms on which you serve this council — of the fearful contract, conceived and matured in blood, that makes your life security for the fulfilment of our every order?"

Still the mask did not move or reply.

"Then I will refresh your memory," continued Corneto, with increased sternness. "At the dead of night, many years ago, you were found by two officers of this very council, in a dark and retired street, rifling the pockets of a man you had just slain. The fatal dagger was in your grasp, the blood of the murdered man was on your

clothes; and therefore you could not have escaped, had those two officers chosen to denounce you. But they did not do it — and why? Because they had that very night, in council with their fellows, been considering where they could find an executioner. The thought occurred to them that, as your life was forfeited, you would purchase it by becoming the required officer, and assuming the dagger and black mask of your predecessor. They made the proposal — you accepted — and now I ask you to remember its conditions."

"I do, your Eminence. The conditions were that my life should be spared as long as I served you faithfully, and executed your orders. I have done so, and still intend to; and therefore you can spare yourself the trouble of recalling the disagreeable nature of our bond to mind. I am not treacherous or unwilling; I was only surprised."

"Very well. You have your orders; see that they are executed; and remember that you are serving us, the church and the Pope, and you will never hesitate."

With this, the cardinals retired from the vault, one by one.

"The church and the Pope!" muttered the mask, gazing after them. "O, fools! — fools!"

## VII.

ALEXANDER BORGIA.

ALEXANDER BORGIA, Pope Alexander VI.; one link in the chain of apostolic succession — one head of the hydra called the Church of Rome.

He sat alone in an apartment of regal splendor and magnificence, in the palace of the Borgias. He was an elderly man, upon whose visage there was no look of manhood, upon whose heart there was nothing written but a damning record of crime.

"Well, let it be so," he muttered, arousing from his musings. "The cardinals have decided that Signora Fortello's life belongs to them, and let the deed be done. It is all for the good of the church; her wealth will swell our coffers greatly; ay, let her die. And yet she was the only friend I had when first I came to Rome, a poor Spanish adventurer. It was her influence that made me a cardinal, and that placed me in a position to make myself a Pope. Never mind; *her* death will add much to my riches; therefore she must die!"

For a moment he was silent; then he raised his hand, and rang a bell that stood upon the table.

A servant entered.

"If Donna Lucretia is in the palace, inform her that I desire to have her visit me at once," said the Pope. "I will discover whether she loves this Mercado or not," he soliloquized, after the man had gone. "If she does, as I suspect, both shall feel my vengeance! Poor fool! she knows not that I consider myself her lover, rather than her father. But we shall see — we shall see!"

As the Pope paused, Donna Lucretia entered. There was a slight shade of anxiety upon her face, but yet she seemed firm and composed.

"Ruffo said you had sent for me. It is very kind of you, dear father!" And she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him.

"Be seated here beside me," said the Pope, with all

the kindness he could assume. "I desire a few moments' conversation with you."

"Proceed — I listen dutifully."

"Allow me, as a first question, to ask if you love a young nobleman, who has sometimes visited the palace, and is known as Mercado?"

"I cannot inform you that I do," was the hesitatingly uttered reply.

"I am glad of that — very glad; for he is doomed to die. I have his death-warrant."

Donna Lucretia started up and stood before her father, pale as death, and quivering in every limb.

"What do I hear?" she shrieked. "Mercado doomed to death! The death-warrant of my lover! O, what means this horrid revelation?"

"Ah, he *is* your lover, then?" asked Alexander Borgia, with an involuntary expression of irony in his voice.

"Since it has come to this, I swear it! Mercado *is* my lover; I am his betrothed!"

"Your frankness wins my approbation; it does, indeed!"

"No jeering, sir, unless you forget that *I, too, am a Borgia!*" and her dark eyes flashed fearfully upon him as she spoke. "If my lover is under sentence of death, show me a way to save him, or I will kneel and curse you! O, do it! — do it, if you love earth, or fear the pangs of hell!"

"Peace, peace, my daughter! It is true that I have a warrant for Mercado's death; but the difficulty is not be so great as you imagine. I think I can point out a way by which you can save him. Now that he is in

such deadly peril, it will be noble, gracious, if you can prove his salvation, his guardian angel!"

Donna Lucretia smiled, and her features were flushed with enthusiasm.

"It will, it will," she murmured. "Show me the way!" and, again kissing her companion, she seated herself lovingly by his side.

"You will understand that this is not my work," and he drew forth the warrant. "You will not think that I have been plotting against so noble and worthy a man as Mercado? It is the work of the cardinals."

"I understand; but the way to save him—show me the way."

"Which I will do, if you will but listen to my story. Many years ago, a young Spanish nobleman,—or rather a priest,—who had then been several years in Rome, fell violently in love with a noble Italian lady, who was a widow, and the mother of one child, a daughter. He loved her with a fondness and devotion that amounted to adoration; but, strange to say, the lady did not return his passion. To the contrary, she repulsed his advances, and bade him bestow his love where it would meet with a return. Still he pressed his suit; and there is no knowing how it would have ended, had not the lady suddenly died——"

"I have heard something like this before," interrupted Donna Lucretia, much agitated; "but go on. The lady died——"

"And the child was adopted by the priest, who reared her as tenderly as father ever reared a daughter. He saw her budding into girlhood, and felt that her love and those words of endearment repaid him for all his trouble,

and made him much the debtor. He saw her lovely form ripening into womanhood, and bearing an almost exact resemblance to the form of her he had loved so well, but fatally, years before! He listened to her words, so sweet and winning, and every tone seemed but the echo of the voice of the mother, she who had so completely won his heart. Days sped on, years rolled away; and at last he found that his adopted daughter was so much like the first object of his passion, that the love which had once raged so violently in his heart was transferred to her. He loved her—adored her; and, see! that lover is kneeling at the feet of the one he loves!"

And Pope Alexander VI. sank down upon his knees before Lucretia Borgia!

### VIII.

#### FEARFUL REVELATIONS.

DONNA LUCRETIA started to her feet, and for full thirty seconds she stood before the libertine Pope, trembling, and deathly pale, without moving or uttering a word.

"Then you are the priest, and not my father," she exclaimed, at last. "My mother was the object of your love; and now I——O, God! what is the meaning of this frightful revelation?"

"It means, dear Lucretia, that I love you! For years I have cherished a hope that you would one day be mine; for years I have looked upon your expanding beauties with the longing eyes of love and admiration! Though we may not wed, yet thou canst be to me all,—wife, daughter, EVERYTHING!"

And the passionate man, still kneeling, pressed the fair, lily hand he held to his lips; but it was quickly withdrawn.

"Monster!" cried Lucretia Borgia, and her features seemed as sternly rigid as marble. "Arise, or I will call on God to curse you where you kneel! Think not to make me an easy prey, or I will teach thee that the blood in my veins is no less passionate because it is not drawn from thy veins. I know thee well! Thy story is not new to me; I had its outlines from mad Seta, long ago, but did not know that I was that child. Up, devil in human shape, or from this hour I shall be thy deadly enemy!"

"Beware, Lucretia! It were not well for thee to force me from my wonted calmness and good feeling towards thee. The love of Pope Alexander VI. is not to be lightly scorned!"

"Your love! If there were aught in hell more polluting, the fiends themselves would be incapable of enduring it, and it would drive them hence!"

"Fool! poor, beautiful fool!" muttered Borgia, with a mocking laugh. "Thou lookest on me, by my soul, just as thy mother did some seventeen years ago, — as vainly, too! She crossed my wishes — and *died*! Not the first or last who might have claimed a similar epitaph!"

"Ay, jeer on! mock me with a rehearsal of your deeds, even to the murder of my mother! O that I were a man, and thou not a coward! I'd soon rid the world of a monster, a fiend in human shape, that's already more than doubly damned!"

"Peace, girl, peace! or I shall forget myself, and forego all mercy!" and he seized her violently by the arm.

"You should remember Mercado; 't was of his salvation we were about to speak!"

"You cannot harm him; already has he been warned of your machinations against him, and will ever be on his guard!"

"Silly girl! how little do you realize the power of Alexander Borgia! Know you that you met Mercado half an hour since at mad Seta's —"

"I know this already."

"And also know that in less than five minutes after you left him he was arrested by my orders, and is now a close prisoner in the Inquisition!"

Donna Lucretia reeled, and sunk, nearly fainting, into a chair.

"Perhaps you doubt my words," continued the Pope. "You shall go with me and see him, and then you shall know the terms of his release."

"Mercado here! let us fly to him at once!" murmured the fair Italian, at last.

"As you will, dear, DEAR Lucretia!" responded Borgia, with the glance of a basilisk, as he extended his arm.

The lady took it, fearfully, shudderingly, and both passed from the room.

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## IX.

### THE OFFER AND REFUSAL.

AN underground hall in the Inquisition. It was of oblong shape, and dimly lighted by a single lamp suspended in the centre of it. Each end of it was enshrouded in darkness; both were as silent as the grave.

Silent? No. There was a dark form in one corner, and when it moved the clanking of chains was heard. 'T was there that Mercado was confined.

"My doom is sealed," he soliloquized, in a low voice. "Death is my portion; eternal misery the inheritance of her I love, the noble and gentle Lucretia! O, that we could have died together, or that I could have told thou that I was going on a far journey, so that thou wouldst have hoped and waited for my return, until I had partially faded from thy remembrance, and thou had thus been prepared for the final blow! If this is thy father's work, fearfully will he repent the wrong he is doing his child!"

A door behind the young noble was noiselessly opened; a familiar\* entered.

"Signor Mercado," he said, "I come from Alexander Borgia. One of the chief elements of my business is briefness; so I shall not trouble you long. My master has learned that you are in love with his daughter — which he dislikes. You are condemned to death, and only one course can save you. If you will leave Rome forever, and within the hour, and swear never to have any further acquaintance with Donna Lucretia, either by word or deed, you will be set at liberty. What is your reply?"

"This: Go to your master, and tell him that I scorn him and his infamous proposal!"

\* Familiars were the most detestable of all the officers of Catholicism. They were employed by the leading officers of the church to visit prisoners, worm themselves into their confidence, and, under the guise of friendship, gain all their secrets, and then betray them to the Inquisition! They have even been known to show prisoners a pretended way of escape, that they might have the pleasure of arresting them at the moment when they thought themselves free, and thus feast the Holy Fathers on their agony!

"You had better take time for reflection — not rush on certain death, which your words ——"

"Leave me! you have your answer, as briefly as even you could have desired. I am a free man, and, being free, have a right to love Donna Lucretia, which no man shall destroy, save but with my death. You are answered; go at once."

The familiar was already gone, but the mask of St. Peter's was standing in his place.

"You had better reconsider your decision," he muttered, in a sepulchral voice. "It is altogether too hasty. Perhaps you think you are not doomed. If so, read your death-warrant!" and he thrust the paper before his face, and opened a dark lantern he had brought, that the prisoner might read it.

"I see," said Mercado. "It is signed by the cardinals, and bears their seal. Death is indeed my lot!" and he threw himself moodily into one corner of the apartment.

"Is your resolution fixed?"

"As the decrees of destiny!"

The mask uttered a curse of vindictiveness, and turned to depart. The familiar was standing at the door.

"Pireto," said the mask to him, "see that my orders are executed to the letter. If the bell rings three times, behead your prisoner, in conformity to the orders already given. But should it ring but twice, you must not harm a hair of his head!"

The familiar bowed assent, and the mask departed. And here we change the scene.

## X.

## THE TERRIBLE PROMISE.

THE inner office of the Inquisition. Pope Alexander VI. and Donna Lucretia entered, wearing black cloaks.

"Now show me Mercado," said the lovely woman, in a voice that trembled with commingled tenderness and anxiety for the loved one. "Then show me a way to avert the impending doom."

"Your wishes shall be gratified. Do you observe that glass socket in the wall yonder?"

"I do. It seems to be firmly set in the solid masonry. What is its object?"

"The keepers look through it, and are thus enabled to see what is going on in the cells within. Imitate their use of it, and tell me what thou seest."

The maiden obeyed, but instantly darted back with a shudder and exclamation of surprise.

"I gazed up and down the whole length of the corridor, and saw the cells upon either hand," she exclaimed.

"Look again. The foot of the corridor opens into a large room. Look at the lower end of that room, and tell me what thou seest."

Donna Lucretia obeyed.

"A figure chained to the wall, — a prisoner. Who can it be? Ha! a door opens; a man enters with a dark lantern; he turns it toward the captive's face. Can it be? Yes; great Heavens! the prisoner is Mercado!"

The fair Italian would have fallen to the floor, had Borgia's strong arm not been thrown around her waist.

"It is Mercado," he quietly remarked. "Observe him well!"

"The bearer of the lantern is followed by two more men; they are followed by the fourth; and he — my God! the fourth bears a block and an axe!"

"The fourth *does* bear a block and an axe," chimed in Borgia. "Again observe!"

"He sets the block down; he speaks to Mercado, who has arisen; Mercado kneels, and seems resigning himself to his fate; now he rises, and now — O, heavens! he lays his neck upon the block!"

"He does, he does, *dear* Lucretia!" hissed Borgia, in the ears of the fair girl. "And now listen to what I have to say. You behold this bell-cord, at my right hand. It connects with a bell in the vicinity of your lover's dungeon. If I ring it three times, the executioner will immediately behead him; for such is the signal agreed upon, and thus is a third of it given!"

As he spoke, he jerked the bell-cord.

"Father — Pope — Alexander Borgia! What do you intend to do? Would you murder my lover in cold blood?" and again she looked through the glass socket. "Ha! the executioner has seized his bloody axe, at the sound of the bell, and approaches Mercado! O, fiend, devil! prevent this hellish work from going on, or I will strike you dead at my feet!"

Borgia laughed.

"Think you that I should not have time to ring the bell *twice more* before I die?" he asked, with an undisguised sneer. "You do not seem to realize the power of the man you are trifling with."

"I do — I do!"

"Do you not know that my word is law, — my anger, death! Have you never reflected that the terrible Black Mask, whose career of blood cannot be spoken of without a shudder, seconds my designs, and seems as intimately connected with me as if he were my shadow? Have you never paused to think that there are hosts and hosts all around us who have no desire or duty but to execute my wishes? As you have doubtless discovered, I execute many of my plans in a mystical manner, for the gratification of astonishing the every-day fools around us; but you know that I am not the less deadly when I have a deadly purpose to fulfil —"

"But, Mercado! Speak of him. Even now the executioner may be suspending the fatal axe over his head!"

"Do not be alarmed; your lover will not be beheaded until I have rung the bell twice more, — *twice* more, my dear Lucretia!"

"Demon! what would you do?"

"Spare your epithets, and listen. Time flies; this business must be settled. Now mark me, and mark well. There is only one way to save the life of Mercado: your promise to be mine is the only medium of his salvation! I love you, have loved you for years, and have sworn to make you mine. You have scorned me; you have dared to cross my wishes; but let that pass. You now understand that I have a way to gain my wishes. Decide, and at once! Swear, by your mother's soul, to be mine, or in less than sixty seconds your lover will have ceased to exist!"

"O, God! what an alternative!" cried Donna Lucretia, as pale as death, and trembling in every limb. She

leaned against the wall, and glared wildly through the socket.

"What! do you hesitate? Then I will ring again; your lover dies!" And again he jerked the bell-cord!

"Stay — stay! I will promise — I will!"

"Swear it," said Borgia, fiercely, with his hand upon the cord. "Swear to be wholly mine at an early day, or I ring for the third and last time."

"By my mother's soul, I swear it!" came, in a low whisper, from the ashy-pale lips of Donna Lucretia, and she sank backwards into his arms, in a fainting-fit.

And as the dark eyes of Alexander Borgia roved over that insensible, but strangely, wildly beautiful form, a laugh of exultation escaped him, and he cried, with the joy of a fiend rejoicing over a damned soul,

"Ha, ha! she's mine, — mine forever, body and soul!"



## BOOK SECOND.

### I.

CÆSAR BORGIA.

A WEEK later. The scene — Alexander Borgia's private apartment. The old man was seated by a table, evidently musing. His thoughts at last found utterance.

"All goes well," he soliloquized. "There's not a day that passes but that I add to the wealth and influence of the church, and consequently to my own. My private affairs are also in the most prospering and flattering state. The fair Lucretia is mine; her lover safely confined in a dungeon, where he will never see her or trouble me; and thus have I gratified my revenge on the child of the proud beauty who scorned me years ago. O, Lucretia Borgia, poor, vain fool! little are you aware of the hate, the long-meditated revenge, that instigated me to the deed!"

A door opened as the Pope paused, and his son, Cæsar Borgia, reeled into the room, in a state of intoxication.

"How are you, most respectable old Gripus?" he exclaimed; "and how are the funds?"

"Cæsar," said the Pope, in a stern voice, "do not address me in this brutal way. Where have you been, that you have lost the little sense nature endowed you with? Among a crowd of gallants, drinking and carous-

ALEXANDER BORGIA.

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ing all day, I'll be sworn. As for the funs, you have squandered them. Where are the thousand maravedis I gave you two days since?"

"Applied to *spiritual* uses; and now I want as much more, for the same laudable purpose."

"You will not have it. Your demands on my purse are beyond all forbearance, and I am heartily tired of listening to the evil reports that are in circulation concerning your shameful debauchery and dissipation. But come to me to-morrow morning, when you have recovered from the potations of to-day, and I will see what can be done for you."

"Thank you. You are quite an amiable old cut-throat, only when you are in pursuit of a jugular under difficulties. But farewell; I'm going. I shall see you in the morning. Farewell; I'm going."

"Well, why in the devil's name don't you go? I have no patience to talk with you now; but in the morning I'll attend to you, if you are sober."

"I tell you I *am* going. I have an appointment with the fair — the fair and lovely — the fair and lovely — what-do-you-call her? D——d if I can remember what her name is. But I am going. I see you are disgusted with me, as I am with you, *vesa varcy*. Farewell! I shall see you in the morning."

And Cæsar departed, going out of one door as Lucretia entered by another.

## II.

## THE PLOT DEEPENS.

A GREAT change had been wrought in the appearance of Donna Lucretia in one short week. Her cheeks were very pale. A wild, reckless light had taken the place of the gentle, loving expression that had formerly rested in her eyes, like a gem on an ocean of pearl; and there was an unusual look of resolution upon her features, as she paused before the Pope.

"I have kept my promise," she commenced, in a voice that quivered with emotion; "I now ask you to keep yours."

"Well, well; we will talk of this to-morrow. I am wearied with the business of the day, and would fain retire to rest with thee. To-morrow, dearest Lucretia, your requests shall be attended to."

"Ah, this *to-morrow*, with which we ward off the evils of the present, and banish subjects we would fain elude! But I am wearied with these repeated delays. I urge the fulfilment of your promise now, — this very hour."

"And what if I refuse?" asked Borgia, with assumed carelessness, as an evil look appeared in his dark eyes.

"Refuse! You dare not; nor is it wise in you to trifle longer with me. Mercado is still in a loathsome dungeon —"

"Where he will remain till he becomes food for worms," interrupted the Pope, with a look of infernal triumph. "Dare not! There's not a heaven I dare not defy, a hell I dare not brave, when, by so doing, I can avenge the injuries I received at the hands of your mother."

"She never injured you; or, if she did, the wrong was unintentionally given."

"Tis false!" cried Borgia, passionately. "Did she not scorn me, despise my love, and drive me from her presence? But I had a glorious revenge. Ha! ha! They who brave the vengeance of Alexander Borgia should have a myriad of lives!"

"And my mother — she, too, was fearfully wronged by this demon," said Lucretia, musingly, as her hand involuntarily sought the hilt of a dagger.

"Wronged! You can call it what you choose. She scorned, defied me, as queenly as thou hast done; but I had my pay for it. I made her life her hell; I put upon her a curse like that of Cain, and would have worn her life away by inches, had she not taken poison and died, to escape me. Do you hear, girl? Was I not fully revenged?"

"O, God! my poor, murdered mother!" exclaimed Donna Lucretia, in anguish, as she bowed her head upon her hands.

"Ay, grieve on! By my soul, I never knew what gratified hate and revenge was until this hour. Not with your mother's death, poor fool, did I feel satisfied. O, no; I had sworn to have my choicest feast in the destruction of her child. You, Lucretia Borgia, — *you*, — ha, ha! — and fearfully have I kept my oath. Listen. Know you that it was I that called the cardinal's attention to Mercado! know you that I was instrumental in getting his death-warrant, that I might terrify you into compliance with my wishes! I have done so, and am content."

"O, monster!"

"But, think you, that I would now free your lover? No. The cardinals think him already dead, agreeably to the orders they gave the mask. It would be dangerous for me were they informed to the contrary. Dead your lover is to all intents and purposes; for, by the vengeance of a Borgia, he shall never leave his dungeon alive! Dost hear?"

Donna Lucretia was wrought up to a terrible state of excitement. She saw the whole damning plot, of which she had been the victim. She saw how Mercado had been denounced and doomed, how she had been inveigled in the hope of saving him, and now she realized that Borgia was still determined on his death. Her excitement amounted to a species of madness, and, drawing a dagger, with the quickness of thought, she aimed a powerful blow at his heart.

The steel struck against a concealed corslet, and was shivered to the hilt.

"You can save yourself further trouble," said Borgia, quietly, as he rang a bell.

Two servants entered.

"Conduct Donna Lucretia to her rooms; she is faint."

They proceeded to obey the order, receiving no opposition from her. She turned but once, — once only, — as she passed from the apartment; but it was a look in which the hate and revenge of a lifetime seemed concentrated.

"Were she not *her* child, and there were few of her sex to command my admiration, I would not carry my vindictiveness so far," soliloquized Borgia. "As it is, I am determined. She has not the place in my heart that is possessed by La Belle Floretta; therefore she shall not

receive any mercy. But, speaking of La Belle Floretta, I must see how thrives my suit with her, and how Delano is passing his time. I'll away at once."

### III.

#### THE WEIRD SISTERS.

THE scene — a cave high up on one of the seven hills on which the "eternal city" is built. It was a dark, gloomy-looking spot, possessing an exterior that would have deterred a person of ordinary nerve from entering; yet we will pass in, and see what new phase of mystery is revealed.

Upon a rude couch, in the corner of that cave, lay a female form, — that of an old woman, — with thin, attenuated features, deeply-sunken eyes, which gleamed like funeral torches in their sockets, and a figure that seemed strangely wasted by age and disease. She was the sister of mad Seta; and mad Seta herself was kneeling beside her.

"I am going to my long home, Seta," said the dying woman, in a low, tremulous voice. "There is something in my heart that tells me I shall not behold another day; and, therefore, I must now reveal a secret I have cherished so long and guardedly, or see it lost forever."

"Speak on; I listen."

"Nineteen years have passed since first I made the acquaintance of Alexander Borgia, the present head of the Catholic church. He was then a young man of pleasing appearance, with a smooth tongue and agreeable man-

ners. I was a young woman, considered good-looking, and possessed all the passionate qualities that mark the daughters of Italy. I loved this young soldier and priest, — this Spanish adventurer, if it pleases you to call him so, — and was beloved by him; at least, he so professed. Under a sacredly-uttered promise, he triumphed over my weak opposition to his wishes, and I, in time, became a mother by Alexander Borgia."

"Sister, you astonish me; I never knew aught of this before."

"But, ere the child was born, I became well convinced that its father had ceased to feel for me the love he first professed, and had become smitten with the many charms of a noble Italian lady. I watched him, and saw circumstances quite sufficient to satisfy my jealous eyes and embittered heart. I also learned that the object of his love was with child; and, as token after token of his coldness and neglect was given me, strange thoughts of revenge arose in my mind. Knowing that both children would be born at about the same time, — feeling assured that I would be cast off and left to poverty and disgrace, in which to rear my babe, — I determined —"

"Hold!" exclaimed Seta, wildly, clasping her hand to her brow. "Do not say that you changed the babes! that she — the Italian mother — reared *your* child!"

The dying woman smiled grimly. The paleness of death was on her features.

"That was the very course I took to accomplish my revenge," she continued, in a low voice. "But here are the papers; my confessions relative to the affair. Read, read! they will tell you that my object was fully accomplished. Though I was cast off by the father of my child,

that child found a home where it was tenderly cared for; and when the noble Italian lady died, the little girl was adopted by a wealthy man. By whom, do you think?"

"I do not know."

"By Alexander Borgia, *her father*."

Mad Seta started wildly to her feet, and a hot flush appeared on her features, as she shrieked,

"And the *real* child of this Italian lady, — what became of her?"

"She still lives, though in humble circumstances. She, she —" The weird woman paused, gasping for breath. It was evident that she was failing fast.

"Speak!" exclaimed mad Seta, "speak, and give me the name by which she is known, and tell me where she lives."

"She — she is called La —" Again the dying woman paused, and closed her eyes, even as if life were departing. Then she rallied, making a desperate effort to reveal the secret she had sacredly guarded so long; but she was too much exhausted. Clutching Seta by the arm, and staring into her face, with a terrible expression of anxiety, she essayed once, twice, thrice, to speak; but in vain. She could only hold up the papers, motion her sister to read them, and point at three names upon one of them; then she sank back *and died*.

And, deadly pale, and trembling in every limb, the weird woman read those three names from the paper:

"Floretta Delano Lucretia Borgia."

## IV.

## THE RESOLUTION.

DONNA LUCRETIA had taken but a few steps in the hall, after leaving the Pope, when she dismissed her attendants, telling them that she had quite recovered from her sudden indisposition. Then she threw herself into a chair, and seemed musing, abstractedly uttering her thoughts.

"Hell has been masked ere now with the semblance of heaven," she murmured, "and angels have been lured within its borders, ere the deceit was discovered. And as deeply, fatally, have I been deceived and cheated. The land has disappeared, the wind is driving me far from the shore on which the beacon-light of hope was gleaming, and henceforth I wander over stormy waters. All is lost, except a wretched existence; and if I still endure *that*,—still struggle on amid the sorrows by which I am surrounded,—it is only to claim the great and terrible revenge I have bought at such a fearful price."

For a brief instant she was silent, while a deep fount of emotion seemed raging in her heart; then she continued in the low, deep voice which bespeaks a strong resolution and a deadly purpose:

"Alexander Borgia has taught me that I am not his daughter, and would now teach me that I am his slave, his mistress, *his dupe*!" and the words were hissed with the venom of a fiend. "But let him look well to himself; let him watch me, and let him guard his prisoner! Mercado, if Heaven approves the deed, and woman's wit and woman's courage can avail aught, thou shalt soon be as free as the air we breathe. I'll get a priestly cloak

and cowl, and see if I cannot gain admittance to Mercado's dungeon."

With this, she passed into her room. In a moment, she came out into the hall again, disguised as a priest. Placing an unsheathed dagger in her bosom, she murmured,

"Now for a deed that shall free Mercado, and convince even Alexander Borgia that man's power for wrong is not always equal to his will."

As she was passing from the hall, a servant placed himself on her path. "Well, sirrah, what do you want?" demanded Lucretia, angrily.

"Excuse me; but it is the Pope's order that you do not leave the palace. I dare not permit you to pass."

"Nor need you permit me," said Donna Lucretia, scornfully, "for I shall go and come without *your* permission, or that of your most worthy *master*!" and she essayed to move on.

The servant seized her by the arm.

"My orders are strict," he exclaimed; "I must answer with my life for their fulfilment."

"Ay, you must," responded Lucretia, bitterly; and, drawing her dagger, she added, "I will give your master a proof of your services, one that will convince him that you endeavored to obey his orders;" and, quick as thought, the weapon was buried in the servant's bosom, and he sank bleeding to the floor.

"Thus is my career of blood begun," shrieked the passionate Italian, laughing hysterically; "but I am absolved, nobly absolved, Mercado, for it is for thee!"

And then she passed quickly from the hall, even at the moment that Alexander Borgia entered it.

"What is this?" he exclaimed. "My faithful Prato wounded! Whose hand has dared to do this deed?"

"Donna Lucretia, your Eminence —"

"Ha! then there is some dare-devil purpose in her brain. I must see to this at once. Perhaps she means to free her lover."

"'T is the very mission on which she is gone," groaned the wounded man.

"Then I must be up and doing. Remain quiet, my faithful Prato. I will send those who will attend to thee."

And the Pope hurried from the hall, muttering, as he passed through the door,

"If, by chance, she succeeds in freeing Mercado, the mask of St. Peter's shall execute the warrant he has for his death. As a prisoner, he might live; but, the hour he becomes a free man, the self-same hour he dies."

## V.

### LUCRETIA BORGIA'S FIRST ASSASSINATION.

A CORRIDOR in the Inquisition. Donna Lucretia and a jailer entered, the former still wearing the cowl and cloak.

"You say that you are a priest, and have a message for Mercado?" asked the officer, as he eyed her suspiciously.

Donna Lucretia bowed.

"But I have very good authority for thinking otherwise," said the jailer. "Priests don't wear satin slippers, and I can swear that you had on a very elegant specimen of that style of goods as you came down stairs."

"Give me the key to Mercado's cell, and allow me to pass, or else lead the way yourself," commanded Donna Lucretia. "You can divine my purpose from my dress, and have no authority to prevent one of the 'Holy Fathers' from seeing a prisoner; therefore lead on."

"No, no, Donna Lucretia. Ha! you start at the name. I thought I was right in my conjectures. You are the daughter of the Pope!"

The fair Italian turned her face away, and a look of unutterable anguish appeared on her features, while she trembled from head to foot.

"Must I kill this man?" she murmured. "O, why is it that such opposition meets me at every step? It is the fatality that ever hovers over the victims of Alexander Borgia! Sir," she added, aloud, "you have, indeed, penetrated my disguise; but allow me to pass, and a fortune shall be yours."

"I cannot, lady. Your father bade me to prevent and forbid all admittance to Mercado; and you — you, Donna Lucretia — were specially excepted by name."

"Ay, I *must* kill him!" murmured the agonized woman, again turning away, and her hand clutched the hilt of a dagger. "He must not baulk my purpose; my lover dies unless this man is removed at once. Thou, God, who seest all things, look down upon me in this extremity, and judge of the deed by the motive!"

Then she threw herself upon her knees before the jailer, and exclaimed,

"Grant me permission to see the prisoner for a few moments only, and I will never ask a favor of you again. Do this, if you are a man. Have you no sister or mother, the memory of whom can plead for me?"

"I have a sister and a mother —"

"Then show me the favor I ask. I conjure you, by your love for them," cried Donna Lucretia, wildly. "I will make them rich, powerful; they shall have as high a position as any in the land —"

"Hold! I must not listen to these words. I tell thee, once for all, I cannot admit thee to Mercado's cell."

Donna Lucretia started to her feet, and cast her eyes wildly toward heaven.

"God forgive the deed!" she murmured, with quivering lips and deathly-pale cheeks. Then she drew her dagger, already stained with blood, and, with the quickness of electricity, drove it deep, deep into the jailer's breast, through and through his very vitals.

"You have slain me," he gasped, as he sank to the cold stone floor. "My mother — sister —"

"They shall be cared for," cried Donna Lucretia, kneeling beside him. "I'll make them rich, and do all I can to atone for this crime."

"God bless you!" was the reply.

The miserable woman stared wildly upon the face before her.

"What do I hear? A blessing on your murderess! No, no, no!"

"I do not blame you. Had I been in your place, I had done as much, or more."

"Heaven bless thee forever for the words! And you will not curse me? You will not appear against me in a future world?"

"No, no! I am glad to die for thee. Save Mercado. He too is noble and good, and has spoken kindly to poor Marco. I am dying! I feel the dews of death on my

brow, and its icy fingers at my heart. Give me your hand, dear lady! let me kiss it — thus — and —"

His voice ceased; his nerves relaxed, and he sank back upon the floor. His soul had gone to its God.

## VI.

### THE ESCAPE.

THE scene changes to Mercado's dungeon. The young noble stood by the grated door; his hands were clasped around the iron bars, that kept him from the enjoyment of liberty. His face was very pale, yet it wore a stern and resolute expression; and his eyes gleamed with the light of a noble purpose and a high resolve.

"Dear Lucretia," he murmured, "by the Heaven which alone has heard our mutual vows, I swear that they shall be kept, if not here, in that great hereafter, to which every human being, savage or civilized, looks with reverence. They may take my life, but they cannot take away the cheering consciousness of being beloved by thee; nor can they make me false to thee, a traitor to myself, an apostate to my God!"

A door leading into the corridor, a short distance from him, was opened, and the rays of a light dissevered a portion of the darkness that reigned around.

"Ha, what do I see? A priest? He comes this way, doubtless to offer me the consolation of the 'holy church.' I will not see him, or speak to him."

With this, Mercado retired to the rear of his cell, and seated himself upon a rude stool. The person he had seen enter soon paused before the door of his dungeon. He

saw the rays of the light flashing into his cell, but determined not to raise his head. He heard a key placed in the massive lock; he heard the creaking noise it made, as it was turned; and then he heard the ponderous door swing back on its rusty hinges; but still he remained with his head bowed upon his hands, even after his visitor paused before him.

"Mercado,—*dear Mercado!*" whispered Donna Lucretia, in a low tone.

The effect was instantaneous. The prisoner sprang to his feet. For a moment he stared wildly upon the pale face before him; then he murmured "*Dear Lucretia!*" and clasped her in a warm embrace.

"But how did you gain admittance?" was his first interrogation.

The fair Italian woman shuddered. "Do not ask me," she responded. "It is enough that I have the keys, and that I am here to save you. Come."

"I must not. It would be known that you were instrumental in my escape, and vengeance would fall upon you. No, dear Lucretia, I cannot go."

"Have no fears for me. Believe me, all will be well for us both, if you will only improve the opportunity now given you."

"O, noblest, best of women!" cried Mercado, enthusiastically, as he pressed her to his heart. "Thou art the light of my soul, the altar on which my offerings of love and affection are laid, the idol around which my hopes and aspirations cluster! Thou art —"

"A murderess!" and Donna Lucretia held up her bloody hand, and pointed to the stains upon her dress. "To gain admittance, I have slain the jailer."

"Then be thou —"

"Hold, Mercado! Not one word of reproach from you is needed, to make my heart and bosom the abode of living torments. My love, your life, everything called for the sacrifice; and poor Marco himself was glad that I had taken it, and blessed me for the deed. Murder, as in this case, is often committed against the wishes of those who do the deed. They may be intoxicated, or self-preservation may enjoin the blow; but is it the less regretted by them, and should they be held accountable and punished as murderers? Religion, man and God, alike say No!"

"You are right, dearest. I was wrong to think ill of you, even for one brief moment. Poor Marco was the victim,—you the executioner,—and both made so against your wishes."

"God only knows *how much* his death was against my wishes. Had I possessed a thousand lives, I would have yielded up them all to gain the end secured by the jailer's death, before I would have harmed him. But let it all pass. Only one course remains: to fly this spot; to gain security, and revenge ourselves and *him*."

"It shall be so, if we can only gain our liberty —"

"Which we can readily do, if you will trust to my guidance. The way by which I passed within these walls shall guide me back with thee to liberty. Come, let us away, silently, but with all possible despatch."



## VII.

## LA BELLE FLORETTA.

SLUMBER is never more beautiful than when it rests upon beauty and innocence.

La Belle Floretta was sleeping on a luxurious couch in a room of queenly splendor. Her beautiful features were wreathed with a sweet smile, even as if she were conversing with angels in her dreams; her hair was scattered in bewitching confusion over a neck and bosom as white and smooth as Parian marble; and never was there a more perfect picture of a sleeping beauty than could have been drawn by a skilful artist from that she presented.

Nor was her loveliness destined to be unobserved. A secret door at one side of the apartment was drawn aside, and Alexander Borgia entered. He moved forward until he stood beside the couch of the sleeping maiden, keeping his attention riveted upon the many charms that met his gaze.

"She is, indeed, a prize worth possessing," soliloquized the priestly libertine, as his gloating eyes feasted upon the exquisite outlines of that voluptuous form, rendered all the more fascinating by the slight drapery that rested o'er them. "A prize of beauty, indeed; and I will move heaven and earth but that she shall be mine."

He bent down and pressed his hot, burning lips to those of the sleeper, once, twice, again, and yet again, as if he were mad with passion.

The maiden moved uneasily; a flush appeared on her cheeks, as she murmured,

"Do not kiss me so often *now*, dear Hernaldo; wait till we are married."

The Pope started as if an adder had stung him, and a frown appeared upon his brow.

"Ah, this accounts for her refusal to hearken to my wishes, as expressed through the mask of St. Peter's. She has a lover; his name, Hernaldo. Hernaldo *what*? I must find out. Some ignorant, poverty-stricken bumpkin, I'll be sworn."

He paused; for La Belle Floretta moved, as if about to awaken from her slumbers.

"She to love one of the low herd,—the ignorant rabble! By my soul, she is worthy of being the wife of an emperor,—well worthy of being the mistress of Pope Alexander VI."

And again he bent down and kissed her. The maiden started up, with an exclamation of alarm, and stared wildly upon the form before her.

"You are not that fearful mask," she murmured; "but is he not here,—is not this his palace?"

"No, dear Floretta. A drug was administered to you, and while you were under its influence you were removed from the mask's mansion, and brought here,—here, where true love and happiness awaits thee."

"Love, happiness!" responded the maiden. "O, sir, do not speak of these; for they are like funeral pyres in my memory. But who are you, who visit me at this untimely hour; and why do you gaze so earnestly upon me?"

"Because I love you, dear Floretta. Eyes can never tire of gazing on the object loved by their possessor. I could gaze on thee till time has given all it here controls

to dark eternity. I love thee, maiden. I have brought thee here to bless me with thy charms, and cheer me with thy smiles."

"You?" cried La Belle Floretta, recoiling from him; "who dares to utter language such as this to me?"

"One who dares do all things that can add to his wealth, or promote his happiness. La Belle Floretta, you are now in the palace of the Borgias —"

A cry of alarm interrupted him.

"And in the power of one who has sworn to make you all his own, — ay, in the very arms of Alexander Borgia, Pope of Rome!"

As he spoke, he threw his arms around the maiden's waist, and drew her to his heart.

"Mine, mine!" he exclaimed; but even as he spoke three hasty raps were given on the door.

"Ha! that signal cannot be disregarded. Something of vital importance has occurred," soliloquized Borgia; and he moved hurriedly forward and opened the door, discovering a servant.

"Mercado has escaped," said the man, excitedly, "and the jailer has been slain."

The Pope did not start or look surprised, nor desire the servant to reiterate his statement. He knew that it was true, for he had taught his servants that a false report would cost the one who uttered it *his life*.

"Enough. We understand you," was all the reply he made; and the man departed.

"Farewell, Floretta," continued Borgia, with a smile, as he bestowed an admiring glance upon the maiden. "I have business of importance to attend to, but shall soon see you again. Farewell!"

And then he passed from the room.

But the smile was gone from his features the instant he found himself alone, and in its place was a fierce and vindictive look, as he muttered,

"This is the work of that she-dévil, Lucretia; but, by the Papal crown, her lover shall atone for it with his life! The mask of St. Peter's never fails in his duty."

## VIII.

### THE PARTING.

THE bridge of St. Angelo's. Near one end of it Mercado and Lucretia Borgia were standing. They had passed safely from the dungeons of the Inquisition, and were now uttering their parting adieus.

"We shall meet again, dear Lucretia," said the young noble, with the gentle accents of love, as he gazed with a look of undying affection upon the lovely woman, and pressed his lips to her pale cheeks. "For a while I must bid adieu to Rome, as the blood-hounds are on my track, but it will not always be so. The time will come when I can claim you as mine — when we shall be happy."

"Heaven grant it! God knows I should have died, had this bold effort for your freedom not been successful. But you must hasten away. Already may the minions of the church, or the officers of the Inquisition, be on your track. Take my blessing, — this farewell kiss, — and go; and may Heaven watch over thee now and forever, and grant that we may soon meet again, in peace and happiness!"

And then they parted, with what feelings we shall not attempt to describe.

Scarcely had Mercado moved away towards the opposite end of the bridge, often looking behind, when a look of agony passed over her features, and she murmured,

"O, dear, noble Mercado! If thou but knew that I have already sold myself to Alexander Borgia, to buy thy life, and failed even at that fearful price, what misery would be thine!"

The fair being was silent for a brief instant; then she continued,

"A thought strikes me. I will follow Mercado, keeping at a distance behind him, until he is out of danger; for now a chilling remembrance sweeps across my mind with prophetic earnestness. I remember how a young nobleman, who had fallen under the displeasure of the church, and been confined some time, received his liberty, only to be struck down the following night by the hand of the mask of St. Peter's. Though Mercado has escaped from his dungeon, he may be watched by that terrible being, may be doomed to be his victim! At any rate, right or wrong, I will follow him."

And Donna Lucretia moved hastily away in the direction taken by Mercado.

"Ha, ha!" laughed a hoarse voice, in tones of infernal triumph, from behind a pillar near where the lovers had been standing; and a pair of dark eyes were fixed intently upon the retreating form of the woman.

It was the exulting laugh of the mask of St. Peter's.

## IX.

## A DEED OF BLOOD.

MERCADO had crossed the bridge, and was passing along the street.

"Once more I breathe the air of liberty," he soliloquized, "and soon shall be beyond the reach of those who would, at one blow, rob me of love, life and fortune. Still I am in danger, and must be prepared to sell my life as dearly as possible, should I be discovered."

"Mercado," said a voice close to his side, "you are free; but do not linger."

He turned, and beheld mad Seta. Her thin features were wreathed with a look of terrible anxiety, and in her hand she held the papers she had received from her sister ere she died.

"I do not question how you gained your freedom," continued the old woman, "for I can readily understand that Donna Lucretia had no small share in your fortunate escape. But go—go at once. You may think that your flight is not discovered, because there is not a great hue and cry raised; but you should bear in mind that the church works secretly and silently, and its officers would not make a stir sufficient to attract the attention of the rabble, were half a dozen prisoners, instead of one, to escape. Away, at once."

"I will do so, good Seta. If you see Donna Lucretia, bear her my blessing; and so, farewell!"

Mercado moved hastily away as he spoke; but had not gone half a dozen steps before a dark figure threw itself in his path.

"The mask of St. Peter's!" cried the young noble, wildly, as he made an effort to draw the dagger Lucretia Borgia had given him; but he was too late.

For the mask's dagger was already drawn; and, before the victim could move or speak, it was driven home to the hilt in his vitals!

"They have triumphed," gasped the fated nobleman, as he sank to the ground in death. Then he murmured "*Dear Lucretia!*" and died.

"Thus do I add another link to my chain of revenge!"

A terrible cry succeeded, — a shriek of terror that seemed to freeze upon the still air of the night, — and Lucretia Borgia darted forward, and sank down insensible by the side of her murdered lover.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the assassin, exultingly. "Thus do I add another link to my chain of revenge. But the body — that must be thrown into the Tiber! He was to have been slain a week ago, — so read the orders of the cardinals, — and I do not desire to have it known to them that I have neglected their orders until now."

With this, he raised Mercado's body in his strong arms, and flung it into the river. As it fell splashing into the rushing waters beneath him, he bestowed an earnest look upon the insensible form of Donna Lucretia, then adjusted his mask, sheathed his bloody weapon, and walked rapidly away, muttering,

"Thus are fulfilled the wishes of a Borgia!"

## X.

## THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

"I FEARED he would be slain!" cried mad Seta, as the mask disappeared. She had observed the whole scene with the most agonizing emotions. She now darted forward, and bent over the form of Donna Lucretia, and applied herself to an effort to restore her exhausted faculties.

Lucretia soon recovered, and arose to her feet, with the assistance of the weird woman, and gazed wildly around. Her eyes finally rested upon her companion.

"Woman!" she cried, sternly, seizing her arm, "where is the body of Mercado?"

"Ask the Tiber, or the mask of St. Peter's; both can give ye a true account of it," was the reply. "O, Donna Lucretia, I would that I had died ere this misery was meted out to you! Ere these tears of pity —"

"Hush! do not speak of pity to me," and there was a ghastly smile of desperation upon the woman's features, and her eyes glittered fearfully as she spoke. "Ha, ha! Who shall dare to speak of pity to Lucretia Borgia? List you, mad Seta, and judge if I am not a fiend in the shape of a woman, and one already damned! Know you that I sold my honor to the Pope for his false and treacherous promise to save Mercado —"

"No, no!" shrieked the weird woman, starting back with a wild exclamation of horror.

"Tis true; and then, after finding that I had been deceived, I slew the jailer to gain admission to Mercado's dungeon —"

"'Tis false; you could not have done the fearful deed!" exclaimed mad Seta, with another cry of horror.

"I have the proof of it, as you can see," and she held her hand before the old woman's face, while the flickering rays of a neighboring lamp shone dimly on the stains of blood. "Nor is that all I've done. I tell you, Seta, I have damned myself eternally, body and soul, in the hope of saving Mercado's life; and yet he has been murdered in cold blood."

"Hush, Donna Lucretia, do not speak so wildly —"

"But I will have revenge — a vengeance dark and bloody — full and terrible as has been the measure of my wrongs. This night, this very hour, I'll hasten to the palace; and the first work of my hand, the first stroke of revenge, shall be the death of Alexander Borgia. I'll avenge my shame and infamy —"

"Ha, ha! a noble vengeance."

"I'll avenge my mother's wrongs; the miseries that have been heaped upon me; the curses woven with my destiny; the sufferings of Mercado; his death; his dying agonies! Ha, ha! I'll have a feast of blood; I'll be the mightiest monster in this sea of human gore. I'll slay, kill, destroy —"

"O, God! could I but tell thee all, — the mystery of thy father, mother —"

"All, all? I have heard already more than I can bear. My brain and heart are changed to living hells, — they burn, they burn, — and fiends are warring there. Farewell, hope, and love, and happiness, — gone, all gone forever! Come night, come desolation, — bloodshed and vengeance now are wooing thee! No more peace; no

more rest! On, on! To the palace of the Borgias! Blood, — ha, ha! Vengeance! death!"

And, with wildly-gleaming eyes, deathly-pale features, dishevelled hair, and garments disarranged, the wretched woman drew her dagger, twice stained with blood since evening came, and rushed wildly from the spot, followed by mad Seta, who wept and prayed and cursed by turns, and said, at last,

"O, God! how deeply cursed, how surely damned, are both the infamous father and his fated child!"

## XI.

### REVENGE THWARTED.

ALEXANDER BORGIA was seated in his private apartment. A bottle of wine was before him; a glass, which he had drained several times, was in his hand.

The expression that rested upon his countenance was a singular one. It spoke of gratified hate, and revenge yet to be accomplished.

"'Tis done, and well done," he observed, in a musing manner. "The whole of the immense wealth of Mercado now belongs to the church, and will soon be in its treasury, from whence no small portion of it will find its way to my hands. 'Twas I that led the cardinals to believe that Mercado was a heretic, and a dangerous man to our cause; 'twas I that made such dupes of them that they determined on his death, agreeably to my wishes and the plans I had formed; and yet none of them have discovered my hand in the affair; none of them have suspected

the truth, that I have made tools of them for the gratification of the feelings I bear my reputed daughter."

A frown appeared upon his brow as he made this allusion to Donna Lucretia, and he added:

"Speaking of Lucretia, I must be on my guard against her, or her vengeance will fall upon me."

A secret door behind him was opened at this juncture, and Lucretia Borgia entered. Her face was still pale, her appearance wild and haggard, but she had evidently striven to subdue the emotions which had been aroused in her heart.

"The girl has a dare-devil spirit," continued the Pope, "and, being conscious of her wrongs, and having seen her lover slain, she will doubtless form some plan of revenge. I must be prepared, — ever be on my guard against her."

Donna Lucretia now stood close behind the Pope's chair, deathly pale, but with resolution stamped upon every feature. She had already drawn her dagger, and her hands trembled nervously upon its hilt.

And, at this critical moment, a new feature was added to the exciting scene. A servant entered at the secret door, and stole cautiously up behind the woman, unseen by her or Borgia.

"Poor Lucretia!" added the Pope, after remaining silent a moment. "Little is she aware that I was the cause of her lover's death; that I have drawn her into a cunningly-woven web; that I have ruined, polluted her, with the intention of casting her off —"

The sentence was unfinished. There was a shout, a hasty noise behind him, a terrible cry, and the Pope started to his feet and turned. Donna Lucretia had aimed a blow at his heart, but her hand had been stayed

by the servant; and he was struggling to confine her. He finally succeeded in wresting the weapon from her frenzied grasp.

"What, another attempt to murder me!" cried Borgia.

"By Heavens, this outrage shall not pass unpunished! What, ho! my guards!"

Two or three armed servants soon entered the room.

"Seize that woman!" commanded the infuriated man, pointing to Lucretia; "seize her, and bear her to the dungeons of the Inquisition! She is a wanton and a murderess!"

The men moved forward; but, ere they laid hands upon Donna Lucretia, a dark figure darted before her, and a shrill voice exclaimed,

"Hold, as ye love life! I forbid you to approach!"

## XII.

### TERRIBLE REVELATIONS.

THE intruder was mad Seta.

"Harm not a hair of this poor girl's head," she cried, as she shook her long, bony finger menacingly at the Pope and his minions; "for she is your daughter!"

"Liar!" shouted Borgia, as he seized her fiercely by the arm. "Say those words again, and, by the demons in hell, that moment shall be your last! Hag, witch, devil! Why do you come here at this time, with your infernal croakings?"

"Bid these men leave us, and I will tell you all."

Borgia waved his hand; the servants all left the room, and the door was closed.

"O, fool, fool!" exclaimed the weird woman, as she bestowed a look of scorn, hate and detestation, upon the man before her. "Would you murder one of your own flesh? Would you slay your own daughter? Listen to me, Alexander Borgia; I have a tale to tell thee that will freeze thy soul with nameless horror. Many years ago, thou didst woo and win the love of a fair Italian girl, named Donna Zuella. She was my sister. You won her confidence, and, by means of that confidence, as swayed by her affection, effected her ruin. The fruit of your connection was a child, — a daughter —"

"True, most true," muttered Borgia.

"At about the same time, you made the acquaintance of a noble Italian lady, named Senorita Caselli, whom you professed to love, but who did not regard you with a single feeling of affection. You deserted my sister, and she swore revenge. Learning that her rival, the object of your love, the noble Lady Caselli, would become a mother at about the same time her own child was born, she determined to change the children in their cradles —"

"T is false!" cried Borgia, passionately, as a hot flush appeared upon his face, and his form fairly quivered with excitement. "False as hell!"

"I pledge my life to its truth. The children *were* changed by the nurse in the employ of my sister. The noble lady's child grew up in poverty, while my sister's child — *your* child, Alexander Borgia — was tenderly cared for by the Senorita Caselli, who deemed it her own."

"Liar! This be thy passport to hell, where you can tell the story to the fiends!" cried the madly-excited man, as he drew his dagger and plunged it to the hilt in mad

Seta's bosom, who instantly fell to the floor in the agonies of death.

"I spoke the truth," she gasped, "and here is the proof," and she drew forth the papers that had been given her by her sister. "Take these papers; they will tell you all, — how the child of which I have spoken, your child, lived with the Lady Caselli until that estimable woman died; how the girl was then adopted by you; how you reared her; how she grew up in the belief that you were her father. Ay, and that child now stands before you in the person of Lucretia Borgia!"

"T is false!" again cried Borgia, with an agony it was terrible to behold.

"They are my dying words; and, by my hope of heaven, I swear that they are true, as these papers will convince you. Pope Alexander VI., you have committed incest, — *you have seduced your own daughter!*"

They were the last words she uttered. They had scarcely left her lips when life departed.

A wild, fearful cry of horror and excitement rang throughout the room, and Lucretia Borgia sank down in a fainting-fit.

And he, the incestuous father, the priestly libertine, turned deathly pale, and raised his hands to his eyes as if to shut out a horrid vision, as he shrieked, in a husky voice:

"Damned, — doubly damned!"

## BOOK THIRD.

### I.

#### A POPE'S OPINION OF HIMSELF AND ROMANISM.

ANOTHER week had passed. It was early in the evening. The sky was radiant with the orbs of night, which made it a jewelled veil of heaven.

Pope Alexander VI. sat alone in his richly-furnished apartment, but in no pleasant mood. An evil gleam was in his eyes, a look of anger on his brow.

"This affair with my daughter Lucretia has added the finishing-stroke to 'Satan's masterpiece,' as I have been termed," he muttered. "Henceforth, no particle of manhood, no quality of mercy, shall have a place in my nature; but all that is infernal, treacherous, and infamous, shall be enacted in both my public and private life. I'll make my name and character themes for universal scorn and execration; so that those who come after me will look upon the record of my deeds with more loathing and abhorrence than ever was felt for Satan himself! I'll be a monster in every species of depravity; I'll plunge into every order of dissipation and licentiousness; I'll be the chief of assassins, the vilest of criminals, and the most infamous of priestly libertines!"

He arose to his feet, and began to walk to and fro.

"And yet," he added, with a look of scorn and mockery that would have done honor to a fiend, — "and yet, though I make the name of Alexander Borgia the synonyme of all that is infamous and abhorred, will I not still be '*His Holiness!* THE MOST HOLY POPE ALEXANDER VI.'? How the fools of the present day, the mass, the ignorant rabble, will prostrate themselves in the dust before me; kiss my toe; adore me as a God on the altar of St. Peter's; and regard me as the possessor of the keys of heaven! And how the modern Catholic church, which pretends to be so holy and infallible, will *claim* and *acknowledge* me as one of the legitimate successors of St. Peter, and as a necessary link in the boasted chain of apostolic succession, while there shall not be one of the priests of Romanism, at any period of the future, but that will know my character, and thoroughly loathe and execrate me in his heart, though he will hold me up as a *head of the Catholic church* to the poor ignorant fools he wishes to dupe!! There is not one of the '*HOLY FATHERS*' but that *knows* and *believes* that the religious mummary in which he is employed is the most infamous and pernicious of humbugs and impositions. They do not believe in the infallibility of the Pope, nor in any of the doctrines and ceremonies they preach and enact under the name of religion. They know that full one-half of the Popes have been the most notorious of villains, libertines and assassins; and would declare, if they spoke the real sentiments of their hearts, that a large portion of them as richly deserved hanging as did Judas Iscariot! Ay, the very men, who include me — *me*, Alexander Borgia — as a link in their elaborate chain of apostolic succession, know very well that I am as base, corrupt, polluted, and as infamous a monster in the semblance of



man as the world ever produced : but yet they address me as '*His Holiness!*' '*The Most Holy!!*' and rank me as a successor of St. Peter!! What inconsistency, what cant and hypocrisy, what *living infamy, is the whole system of Catholicism!*"

Borgia was alone; so it need not seem strange that he spoke his real opinions, and *spoke the truth.*

"Romanism," continued the Pope, "is founded on the ignorance of the many, and the impudent and blasphemous assumption of the few. Its gorgeous and magnificent ceremonies are not instituted to render religion solemn and impressive, for it is not religion; nor does the religion of Jesus Christ and his followers require any such *impres-siveness* as is gained from the pageants and mummeries that characterize Catholicism. *The ceremonies of Romanism are intended, not to edify and solemnize religion, but to blind and mystify the masses, and glorify the Pope, his cardinals, bishops, and priests!* And yet these fools, the people, these blind, servile masses, do not see the impositions that are put upon them, though they are as glaring as the light of day; and, if they will be such despicable fools, let them reap the reward of a fool's folly. If the people, whether in Rome, or France, or any other country, will be priest-ridden,—will be subjugated, morally and mentally, physically and politically, by an impudent priesthood,—a prison and chains are too good for such mis-used bodies and such ignoble souls!"

Such *were* the thoughts of Alexander Borgia, Pope of Rome; such *are* the thoughts of the Catholic priesthood of the nineteenth century, from Archbishop Hughes down to the lowest and most fallen specimen of manhood that exists as a priest of Romanism.

There was a knock upon the door, as Borgia concluded his soliloquy. He opened it, and beheld a servant, who passed him several letters, and retired. The Pope was soon busy in opening and reading them.

## II.

### NEW MYSTERIES AND DEEP PLOTTING.

"So, Cardinal Guillani is dead," soliloquized the Pope, after he had read the first letter. "How much richer is our treasury by his sudden departure? Let me see; the secretary must have made some allusion to it. Ah! here it is."

And, as he glanced at some figuring on the corner of the page, he added in a low tone, "Fifteen thousand maravedi; that's not so small a sum as it might have been. 'T will prove very acceptable to the funds of the church at this moment."

He now opened the second letter. A frown appeared upon his face as he read the commencement, and it deepened to a look of fierce passion as he read on.

"By Heavens!" he exclaimed, "what is this? The cardinals complaining of the mask of St. Peter's. And this charge—that the mask does not execute their decrees. Who has dared to breathe a word to that effect? Ha! what is the meaning of this statement? 'Rumor has reached us that Michael Delano is yet alive, and that the mask has abducted the daughter of the old man to further his own particular ends!' Some one has gained a little knowledge, and made a great noise about it. I must see to this at once. Delano is not dead—that is true; but I

have kept him so closely and securely confined, that none could have gained any actual information in reference to him. Yet his name is before the cardinals! There is a mystery here, which I must unravel."

The Pope remained in thought a moment; then opened the third letter. It bore the private seal of the cardinals, and was from the pen of their private secretary. Borgia read the commencement of it aloud:

"It has been brought to our notice that a certain young citizen, whose name is Hernaldo Zinna —"

The Pope sprang to his feet suddenly, and gazed long and attentively upon the name.

"Hernaldo Zinna!" he exclaimed, at length; "Hernaldo is the name of La Belle Floretta's lover! Is he the person alluded to in this note? But let me read on, and see what the Council says in reference to him."

"—has been secretly establishing an anti-Papal society, and taking other measures that tend to the injury of our most holy Catholic religion. The society is said to already number a large portion of the laboring classes, and holds its regular meetings, but where is a source of mystery. These things having been duly considered, we have deemed it our duty to lay them before your Holiness, with the hope of having your advice on the matter."

"Hernaldo!" repeated Alexander VI. again, as a significant gleam appeared in his dark eyes. "If this youth should prove to be the lover of La Belle Floretta, what a weapon I shall have placed in my hands against her, and how mercilessly I will use it to win her over to my wishes!—Ah, I must see to this. Her father is already in my power, and if I can but get her lover in my clutches,

I shall be doubly armed against her silly resistance to my wishes, and will soon force her to compliance!"

There was something in the current his thoughts had now taken that added to the fierce and vindictive look upon his features.

"Ay, she shall be mine," he continued. "I have used gentle means during the past week, but she has scorned and despised to be won by them. I'll now try something more serious. If the poor fool but knew how I have been duped,—how my own daughter became the victim of the revenge that was meant for her,—ay, if she but knew that she is the daughter of Lady Caselli, she would not care to oppose a purpose I have cherished with such deadly resolution. I'll see her once more, and learn her final decision. Once more; only once more!"

Borgia threw the letters he had received into the grate, and prepared to leave the room. A new thought seemed to rise up in his heart.

"Now that Guillani is dead," he muttered, "why should my son Cæsar not be chosen to fill his place? 'Tis a good idea; he shall be. Cardinal Cæsar Borgia! The name has a pleasing sound. He is a sadly-dissipated dog, but I will see what can be done to effect a change: firstly, in his condition; secondly, in his principles. But enough of Cæsar," he added, as he passed from the room. "Now for a final essay at fair means in conquering La Belle Floretta!"

### III.

#### THE FINAL RESOLVE.

LA BELLE FLORETTA was seated alone in her apartment. A look of the deepest anxiety was on her features.

"O, that death would decide for me!" she murmured. "The Pope has given me but one choice, — to become his mistress, or see my father slain by the tortures of the Inquisition. He told me to decide by nine o'clock, when he will return to hear my decision —"

She glanced at the horologue upon the table; she saw that the hour of nine had just arrived.

And even as she uttered an exclamation of fear and anxiety, and started to her feet, a door behind her opened, and Borgia entered.

"I have come, dear Floretta, as per agreement, to know your decision," he quietly observed, with a mocking smile. "Will you be my mistress, or not?"

The captive's face was deathly pale; but there was no fear expressed thereon, nor did her voice tremble, as she replied:

"You have already heard my answer. I have told thee that I would rather die than consent to your base purpose, though you are the Pope of Rome, and a *Borgia*!"

The form of the listener fairly quivered with passion, but he endeavored to appear calm.

"You are very brave," he muttered, with a forced smile that made him appear more fiendish and brutal than when in his stormiest mood — "as brave as you are beautiful!"

La Belle Floretta made no reply, but turned away and seated herself in a chair, while a look of scorn and contempt appeared on her features.

"I see you are in no mood for conversation," observed Borgia, and the expression of his face became still more devilish and menacing. "I will leave you, and send your father to comfort you."

"My father!" cried Floretta, starting to her feet.

"Will you indeed allow my father to come and see me?"

"I will, indeed!"

"O, thanks — thanks! Do this, and I will bless you."

"Save your thanks, dear Floretta," he added, with bitter sarcasm, "until you know my object in sending your father to your presence!"

The look that mantled Borgia's face, as he said this, would have wrung an exclamation of horror from the girl had she observed it, it was so diabolical and menacing.

"And if you are not satisfied with your father's society, I will send another, a friend of yours — I should say, your lover, whose name is Hernaldo Zinna!"

Floretta recoiled from him, uttering a shriek of terror, and sank back upon a sofa, almost in a state of insensibility.

"I thought there was a cause for your refusal to accept of my proposition," observed Borgia, as his dark eyes emitted a vengeful gleam. "You love this Hernaldo Zinna very much, I suppose!"

"Monster! is he, too, in your power?" exclaimed Floretta.

"Not exactly," was the reply, "but I presume he soon will be, if the visit I shall now allow your father to make you does not prove satisfactory to all concerned, and especially so to myself. But farewell for the present. Expect your father in the course of half an hour; and so — I have the pleasure of bidding you adieu!"

It was no common look that fitted over the features of the Pope as he passed from the apartment. It spoke of long-cherished hate, and a fearfully-planned revenge!

## IV.

## THE SECRET CONCLAVE.

A VAST hall, under ground, and near the Tiber. It was dimly lighted. In the centre a number of men were seated around a table. Their dusky features, half revealed by the rays that fell upon them, wore a calm look of determination, such as bespeak noble qualities and daring souls.

"We are all here," muttered a member of the party, who sat at the head of the table; "ten of us in all!"

"Ay," was the response of a person at one end of the hall, as he closed and barred the door by which all had gained admittance. He then came forward, and, throwing off a cloak and mask he had worn for the purpose of disguise, seated himself in the midst of the group.

There was that in his actions and appearance that would have proclaimed him the leader of the men in whose presence he was seated. We may add that he was no other than Hernaldo Zinna, the lover of La Belle Floretta. He was young — evidently not more than two-and-twenty years of age, of prepossessing appearance, and with a countenance that evinced courage and manliness.

"Brothers," he observed, in a clear, ringing tone, "I need not speak of what we are, nor dwell upon the aims of this organization. You all know that we are Italian artisans, met together for the attainment of mental and political supremacy, and for the protection of our rights. Our numbers are few, but are every day increasing. Our chief object is the redemption of our own class from the grasp of Popery, and the establishment of the true religion.

Down with Popery! — down with the Inquisition! and down with oppressors of the poor! Such are the thoughts that shall be sacredly and secretly guarded in our hearts, until we have become strong enough to wrest the chains that bind us. Is it not so?"

A murmur of approbation went round the table.

"Perhaps I have had greater cause to take the position I have," continued Zinna, "than most of you. One who was very dear to me — a young lady — has, as near as I can learn, been abducted by Alexander Borgia, and is now confined in his palace. God only knows what her fate has been, or what it may be; I should go mad were I to think upon the subject. I have made every possible exertion to learn something in reference to her, but have failed."

"If she is alive, she shall be saved, if we have to tear down the Pontifical palace!" said the secretary of the "Leaguers," in a low, resolute tone.

"In addition to this, my dearest friend, Mercado, was arrested by the officers of the Inquisition. Two long, dreary weeks have passed by since that time, and yet I have not gained any tidings relative to his fate. It is my belief that he has been slain by the accursed emissaries of the church, or been incarcerated in a loathsome dungeon."

"Your wrongs are indeed great," said the secretary; "but I do not believe that a heart now beats in this room that is not pledged to avenge you."

"Thanks, my friends, — my brothers! But while the cases I have mentioned show how insecure are the meagre rights possessed by the artisans, the laboring people, both male and female, there may be others brought personally

home to more than one of you, to urge you more surely and determinedly to vengeance! Brothers! let the good work to which we have pledged our lives go on. Years may pass away before we can attain a force sufficient to warrant us in taking a stand of open hostility to the church; thousands and thousands of the poor may be slain and tortured to death in the mean time; but let their sacred memory be cherished; let their tears and groans be registered on earth as well as in heaven, and we will eventually have a great and glorious revenge!"

Hernaldo Zinna arose to his feet as he spoke, and resumed his cloak and mask.

"Brothers," he proceeded, "let all whom you have prepared to join the league be proposed to the secret conclave to-morrow evening. Beware of traitors; and speak not of our order to any one, until you have learned that they will gladly join it, and forever remain true!"

The men all arose, and uttered their assent. Hernaldo moved forward and opened the massive door by which they had entered, and they passed out into a dark passage, one by one. When all were gone, Hernaldo followed them, closing the door securely behind him. The passage-way branched off in several directions, all of which led to the bank of the river. The commander of the Leaguers took the centre passage, and was soon by the water's edge, where a small boat was lying. Springing into it, he cast off, and was soon floating silently down the river.

## V.

## THE FEARFUL DISCOVERY.

ON the Tiber! The night was serenely beautiful. Above, the stars were shining with their greatest splendor; below, many a light gleamed o'er the rippling waters, and many a fairy-like boat was floating down the tide, freighted with brave men and lovely women, who were rapt in the enjoyment of the scene.

Zinna did not labor at the oars, but gave himself up to the thoughts that arose in his heart, and allowed the boat to float wherever the current chose to carry it. More than once did he come into collision with the boats of others, and many a curse did he receive for his negligence; but all were unheeded.

"There is a great and glorious project within my soul," he murmured; "one to enchain my waking thoughts and rule my dreams. God only knows whether I shall live to execute it; but there is a secret consciousness in my heart of my having been born for greatness. Men might call me wild or boyish, if they knew what great enterprises have sprung up in my heart; if they but knew how sternly I have determined to leave a name upon the scroll of fame that time nor change can ever efface!"

He paused, and relapsed into a sullen revery.

The boat floated silently on for the space of half an hour, when Zinna roused himself up, and saw that he was near the lower part of the city, and nearly opposite his own residence. He therefore seized the oars and rowed the boat towards its usual landing-place, which he soon reached.

Springing ashore, the young man proceeded to secure his boat to the rude wharf, and then turned to walk towards the cottage where he resided; but ere he had taken two steps in that direction, he recoiled with an exclamation of horror.

For there, upon the edge of the wharf, where it had been cast by the waters of the Tiber, lay a ghastly corpse!

It was the body of Mercado!

The ghastly features of the dead were rendered still more white and unearthly in appearance by the pale rays of the moon and stars that shone upon them!

"O, God, it is Mercado!" cried Zinna, as he knelt beside the body. "Dead! — stabbed to the heart; and many days ago, if I may judge from appearances. Who has done this work —?"

"The mask of St. Peter's!" was the reply, in a sharp, clear voice, that seemed to come from close beside him.

Zinna started, and looked carefully around.

"It might have been my over-excited fancy," he soliloquized. "Ha, what is here? A paper, written upon and tucked beneath his belt. What can it be?"

Hernaldo drew forth the paper he had discovered, handling it very carefully, for it was still wet, and the writing was almost blotted out. Enough was left, however, to convince him of the nature of the document, and a groan escaped him as he realized the truth.

For he held the death-warrant of Mercado, signed by the secretary of the cardinals, and addressed to the mask of St. Peter's!

The youth spoke not — uttered no sound. His tongue seemed to have lost its power of speech; his heart seemed

like a weight of iron within his bosom. But he knelt beside the body of his murdered friend, and, raising his pale and rigid face towards heaven, he clasped his hands and breathed a silent oath of vengeance! Then he arose; cast a single look upon the form of Mercado, and rushed wildly from the spot.

A wild laugh followed him, and ere he had vanished from view a dusky form came forth from the little cabin in the bow of the boat — the very boat that belonged to Hernaldo!

"Ha, ha!" laughed this personage, in a voice of devilish exultation, as he drew up his form and gazed towards Zinna's house.

The laugh was echoed in hell; for the one who uttered it was a familiar of the Inquisition!

## VI.

### BORGIA'S CRUELTY.

A ROOM in the palace occupied by the mask of St. Peter's. Enter the mask, and an Inquisitor.

The face of the latter, though thin and emaciated, wore an expression that characterizes a wily, cunning Jesuit of modern times. His small gray eyes seemed formed to read all things that were transpiring around him. He wore the black cloak and cowl that is always worn by those of his profession.

"Father Janzen," said the mask, "I have sent for you that I might make arrangements for the admission of an old man and his daughter into the Inquisition, within the hour."

"Tis well," replied the Inquisitor, in a sepulchral tone.

"Who they are, and what they are, is immaterial to you. I hold the seal of the Pope for what I do, and pledge my life to the honor and justness of my actions."

"Your word is law," was all the reply the Inquisitor made.

The mask seized his companion by the arm.

"Dare you receive a secret," he said, "that it would cost you your life to betray?"

The Inquisitor nodded assent.

"Then know you that this young lady is one whom the Pope wishes to become his mistress. He will put her to the torture to obtain her consent to his wishes. That beauteous form will be stretched upon the rack; those exquisitely-moulded limbs will be bound with heavy cords; that fair skin will be marred with many an instrument of torture. Ha, ha! I'll feast upon her sufferings; I'll gloat over her agony! But, list you; not one word to others from your lips on this subject, if you value your life!" and he laid his hand significantly upon his dagger.

"I understand," muttered the Inquisitor, with professional calmness.

"This lady," continued the mask, "is now in the palace of the Borgias. She will be freed, as will her father; and both will be at liberty to depart for their homes, as soon as they can meet and get ready—say an hour hence."

"Then what have I to do with torturing either of them?" asked the Inquisitor.

"Do you not see the refinement of my cruelty? They will hasten home; they will congratulate themselves that

they have been mercifully released from the surveillance of the church; then, the very moment when they seem at the height of their freedom and happiness, you—*you*, Father Janzen, and a party of your officers, shall wake them from their momentary dream, and drag them to the Inquisition, where I will meet you, and then shall they know what it is to defy a Borgia!"

"I understand your plan. Have you any further orders?"

"None at present. I will send a messenger when you are required."

The Inquisitor bowed assent, and retired from the apartment, while the mask rang a bell, and threw himself into a chair.

## VII.

### DELANO.

THE ring was answered by the appearance of a servant.

"Go to Delano," commanded the mask, "and inform him that I wish to see him here immediately. Tell him that I have pleasant news, and show him the way."

The man bowed and retired.

"I will send him to La Belle Floretta," soliloquized the mask, "and may she reap much joy from the visit!"

There was a sinister look upon his face, and a sullen gleam of anticipated triumph in his eyes, as he uttered the words.

The door opened, and Delano entered. The face of the

old man was somewhat paler than when we last saw him ; but he endeavored to appear calm and assume a smile.

"The servant said that you had pleasant news for me," he observed, as he seated himself in the chair placed for him. "If you have, you will speak in reference to my daughter, and tell me —"

"That she is well, and that it is decided that you pay her a visit at once."

"O, thanks! — thanks for this most unexpected kindness!"

"You have doubtless suspected what the intentions were that I entertained in reference to your daughter at the time you first beheld her in my palace. I had been smitten by her beauty, and had formed a resolve to make her mine, by fair means or foul ; but it is a source of pleasure for me to give you the gratifying assurance that I have concluded to forego that evil design —"

"O, noble man ! how shall I ever repay you for this generous act ?"

"The cause of this somewhat strange proceeding was a desire to add to your daughter's happiness. Listen to me, Delano. Your daughter has been seen by the Pope. He has offered to make her his mistress —"

The old man groaned aloud, and covered his face with his hands.

"Nay, he has resolved that she shall be his mistress," continued the mask. "Think of this, Delano. Smile and be happy at the honor that is conferred on you and her. Your daughter the mistress of a Pope ! Think of that, and let us hear no more of those silly harpings on virtue and womanly purity, and kindred shallow subjects. Drink, fill up your glass ; be as merry as the merriest. There are

glorious times in store for you. Floretta has touched the right chord in the Pope's heart. He will make her noble, wealthy. She will live in the midst of every luxury and splendor, and time shall pass on in a continual round of gayety and enjoyment. A palace will open its portals to her ; troops of servants will be in readiness to obey her slightest wish ; and you, Delano, shall live like a lord and feast like a king ; ay, even with the Pope himself !"

"I ?" muttered Delano, confused and bewildered by the words of his companion.

"Ay, *you* ! As the father of the beauteous Floretta, you will be treated with every respect and attention by the Pope, if you but use your influence towards gaining her consent to his wishes."

"I would ! — I would !" responded Delano, dazzled by the picture that had been presented ; "but she is engaged to be married to a poor but worthy young man, Hernaldo Zinna."

"Never mind *him*," and the mask frowned at this allusion. "Would you see your daughter wedded to a beggar ? Fie, fie, Delano ! Have you no more regard for her happiness than to think of such a thing ? She is a queen in beauty, in heart, in *everything* that makes a queen, save rank and wealth ; and neither of these qualifications will be long wanting, if she will but consent to Borgia's wishes. He will make you and her respected and happy ; he will be the sincere friend of both. Then why will you hesitate ? Go to her at once ; tell her to accept the offer that is made her —"

"I will do so !" cried Delano, starting to his feet.

The mask took hold of his arm, and bent his dark eye sternly upon his face.



"Let there be no treachery in this business," he remarked, in a significant tone. "The Pope has set his heart upon this design; and if you refuse to second him by interceding with Floretta, or if she will not consent, death and torture are before you both! Do you understand?"

"I do, but ——"

"No hesitation," said the mask, sternly. "Away at once. In the next saloon you will find those who are to attend you to the palace. They will first blindfold you, as a precautionary measure; but do not be alarmed; they will conduct you in safety."

"But——"

"You have your *final orders*. See that they are executed!" and he conducted him almost fainting from the apartment.

## VIII.

### RELEASE OF THE CAPTIVES.

THE meeting between La Belle Floretta and her father was most affecting. The old man clasped her to his heart, and she wept like a child upon his bosom.

But Delano was sad and gloomy. The first delight of reünion having passed away, a look of terrible anxiety appeared on his features.

"We have met, my child, but for a terrible purpose has this meeting been designed;" and then he went on to tell her all that had passed between the mask and himself, — even to the pledging of his influence for her consent to the wishes of the Pope. At this point, Floretta's excitement,

which had been gradually increasing as he proceeded in his revelations, became so great that she could remain silent no longer.

"What!" she exclaimed, as she recoiled from her father with an exclamation of horror, "have *you* been won over to the infamous designs of the Pope? Has he indeed influenced you to counsel me to this most inhuman deed?"

"Forgive me, my child," cried the old man, sinking into a chair. "I was weak, and he painted a picture of luxury and happiness that dazzled me for the moment."

"Happiness!" repeated Floretta, with a vehemence that startled her listener. "Would you sell your child to such a monster as Alexander Borgia for gold? If so, know you that I will never consent to his wishes. He may kill, but he cannot enslave me. Do you not know that I am betrothed to Hernaldo Zinna?"

"I do — I do!"

"Then you should have more respect for him than to counsel me to such a course, — a course I would not adopt were the penalty of my refusal ten thousand deaths!"

"Nor need you, fair Floretta!" said the voice of Borgia. He had entered unperceived, and now stood beside them.

"I see that you are surprised," he continued, "as you may well be, at this sudden change in my demeanor. But you have yet to learn that there is no man, however bad, but that has his moments of calm and rational reflection, when he sees the deformity of his nature in its true light. I have thought of the relative position in which we stand to each other, and sincerely regret that I have been urged to such an evil course by my impulsive nature. Floretta

— Delano — I have wronged you both; but as far as I can make reparation, I am determined to do so. You are both free — this moment free, to return to your home!"

The listeners could scarcely credit their senses, but stared vacantly from one to the other.

"I repeat," continued Borgia, "the doors of the palace are open before you; you are as free as air to depart; all I ask is that, when you hear curses and execrations showered upon my name, you will remember me as one whose heart was not entirely dead to the qualities and attributes of manhood!"

Delano reeled and staggered back into a chair, while Floretta sank down before the Pope. Both were entirely overcome by this unexpected conduct.

"Nay, not a word," said Borgia, with a smile. "Your thanks are not needed; I have only done that which it was my duty as a man to do. Hasten home, and be happy!"

He turned suddenly as he spoke, and retired from the apartment, while Floretta clasped her father in a fond embrace, and exclaimed,

"Saved — saved, my father!"

"Yes, thank Heaven! But let us hasten from this gilded abode of crime and infamy!" responded Delano, as they arose and passed from the room.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Borgia, entering the apartment as they departed, and there was satanic joy in every look, and word, and action, as he gazed after them. "Thus have I planned my revenge, and now for the Inquisition!"

## IX.

## FEARS AND HOPES.

AN hour had elapsed. The scene — a room in Delano's cottage. It stood in an obscure portion of the city, but was neat in appearance, and comfortable.

Delano, his daughter, and Hernaldo Zinna, were seated therein. The old man had just been revealing the particulars of the release of himself and daughter from the pontifical palace. Hernaldo pondered over the information several moments before he made any reply.

"There's a deep mystery in this affair," he observed, at last. "After Borgia had taken so much trouble to obtain possession of Floretta, and given her proof of his dishonorable intentions in such base proposals as he has made, it is really strange that he should have released you both in this unexpected manner."

"It is, indeed."

"So strange, and so much at variance with his known character," continued Zinna, "that I cannot help but think that he is influenced by some questionable motive. I fear that the danger now escaped will overtake you in a more deadly form at some future time. Did you not say that the mask of St. Peter's holds a warrant from the cardinals for your death?"

"I did."

"Are you sure that he has such a document in his possession?"

"Quite sure, for I have seen it."

"The mystery deepens," muttered Zinna, with a still more serious look. "If the mask has indeed a warrant

for your death, he should be aware that it will cost him his life, must the cardinals be informed that he has thus spared and freed one whom they have condemned. Ha! A terrible thought takes possession of me: it is possible that the cardinals have doomed us all to death, and that the mask of St. Peter's intends to perform his dread task this very night. Good or evil is most certainly intended to grow out of this strange affair; but I cannot — *cannot* believe that Borgia intends any good."

"There is cause for fear, — that is undeniable; but let us all hope for the best," said Delano, as he arose, took a light from the table, and retired, adding, as he reached the door, "Good-night, my children; I am fatigued somewhat more than usual, and must to bed."

"Good-night," responded each of the lovers, and the old man left them alone.

"Thank Heaven, that you are both restored to me," said Zinna. "You do not know what terrible anxiety I have endured during the last two weeks. I had almost given you up for dead!"

"Do not speak of it; the remembrance of what I have undergone makes me shudder, even now!"

The youth gazed still more earnestly upon her. A slight blush heightened the color of her cheeks.

"I understand your thought, dear Hernaldo," she murmured; "but I assure you that Borgia did not execute his most foul and unholy intention."

Zinna clasped her to his heart, and pressed his lips to her own with all the fondness of ardent love and admiration. And she returned his caresses, not with the bashfulness of untold love, not with the freedom of guilty passion, but with the gentle and modest trust and devotion that

ever characterizes the affection of a true woman. She did not blush as she reclined in his arms, and rested upon his manly breast, looking up into his eyes with a look of unutterable love, — did not start as he drew her close to his warmly-beating heart, kissed her again and again, and whispered, in the low tones of love, "Mine — all mine own!" Why should she blush or tremble? Were they not united in heart, and by the bonds of an affection so sacred that no sin could have passed between them?

And they were happy, the loving and the beloved, — happy in the treasures of a pure, fervent *first* affection, whose holy blessings were scattered over their hearts like pearls over seas of gold! In that glad hour, life seemed like a heaven, in which no storms could arise, above which no clouds could arise, and beneath which no hell could exist: yet fatality was at work!

They thought not of the dangers yet to come, nor of those that were passed. Their senses seemed absorbed in a heavenly delight; they were under the influence of the blissful spell that accompanies the first waking hours of "young love's dream." What to them was hate, envy, or even death, as they thus held each other in that fond embrace?

O, love, love! Why does the soul of the stern and cold misanthrope fly back to the joys that have been, — to those heavenly delights? The gentle touch — the fond embrace — protracted kiss — the sweetly sensuous smile of consummated bliss — the glowing form — the swelling bosom — the love-lit eyes, now timidly cast down, then more timidly raised! O, what a picture could that same misanthrope paint from memory! But how such pleasures fade — how quickly do they pass; and then, in after

years, how like a hollow mockery of present woe does the remembrance of them come up to mental view, and make us curse the changes that have robbed us of such happiness!

O, as I sit here in the loneliness and silence of this midnight hour, and remember how the fairest flower that ever sprung from heaven grew up beside me and blessed me with its riches, then was gathered by the icy hand of Death, a sense of sickening desolation sweeps over my every thought and feeling, and I realize that on the portals of my cold and reckless heart the demon hands of change and disappointment have written, "Accursed—accursed forevermore!" \* \*

## X.

### THE ARREST.

"It is getting late, dearest," observed Zinna, at last. "I must bid you adieu for the present, but with the assurance that we shall soon meet again."

"And may the day hasten when we are to wed, for I would be with thee always. These partings are the bane of our happiness,—the time that intervenes, its death!"

And then they parted, as lovers always part—with lingering regrets, fond kisses, and assurances of fidelity. Zinna was finally gone. Floretta threw herself into a chair, and gave herself up to the emotions of sadness that swept over her soul.

"O, noble, good Hernaldo," she murmured. "No blessing earth can afford can be compared with thy love, it is so pure and holy!"

Then she knelt and prayed, not as one who feels despair, not as one who feels the need of heavenly consolation, but as one whose gentle spirit feels the sweet assurance of its own innocence and purity, and the consciousness of having a treasure laid up in heaven. When such an one can thus pray, prayer is sublimely beautiful.

A few moments were thus passed; then the maiden arose, with a look of radiant happiness on her features, and slowly moved towards her room. As she did so, a noise was heard without that caused her to pause and listen.

"It is nothing but the sound of footsteps," she murmured; "yet why should it have such a strange effect upon me, even as if they conveyed a warning of some menacing danger?"

Delano came out of the adjoining room at this moment. His face was paler than usual, and a look of deep anxiety rested thereon.

"Ah, it's you, father," said Floretta, starting. "I thought you were asleep."

"I have been abed, but found it impossible to compose myself to slumber. Do you not hear the sound of footsteps?"

"It was that that startled me. Who can it be?"

The steps had been gradually approaching nearer and nearer, and as Floretta asked the question there was a knock upon the door. The listeners both started, became a shade paler, and looked inquiringly at each other.

"Who can it be that seeks admittance here at this late hour?" said Delano, in a low voice.

The knock was repeated.

"And there are a number of them," continued the old

man, as their footsteps plainly intimate. A foreboding of evil takes possession of me; I fear that this visit bodes us no good; I have hardly courage enough to open the door!"

Again the knock was repeated.

And then the old man became deathly pale, and his limbs trembled beneath him, for the truth flashed upon his mind with almost stunning power and quickness, banishing every joy from his heart, and filling it with the most chilling fear. "O, my daughter," he gasped, as he sank into a chair, "we are lost! Our visitors are officers of the Inquisition!"

"Open — open, Delano!" said a gruff voice without.

"O, God! why are we thus pursued?" cried Floretta, as she tottered towards the door with the intention of opening it, then recoiled, and sank into a chair.

"Who is there?" asked Delano, rousing himself up.

"*The Holy Inquisition!*" was the reply, and the door was noiselessly opened.

Delano and Floretta both uttered a cry of horror.

And well they might; for it was a chilling sight to see those dark-featured, scowling men, four in number, including Father Janzen, habited in black cloaks, and wearing cowls, enter the room, one after the other, as noiselessly as so many phantoms.

"Michael Delano," said Father Janzen, in a sepulchral voice, "you are summoned before the Inquisition, as is your daughter Floretta. We have come to conduct you thither."

"I?" gasped Delano. "Myself and daughter?"

There was no reply, nor any movement in the party,

save on the part of two of the officers, who moved silently forward, and assisted Delano to rise.

"What is our crime?" he demanded. "Of what do we stand accused?"

No reply was given. Father Janzen only waved his hand towards the door, and the two officers assisted Delano towards it.

"Speak, if you are men, and tell me the cause of this arrest."

Still there was no reply. The spectre-like figures did not seem to be conscious of a word that had been spoken. Father Janzen and the third official now approached Floretta, one on each side, and took hold of her arms, as if to lead her away.

"Hold!" exclaimed Delano, who had now neared the door; and he checked his progress as if determined to make a desperate resistance. "I will not obey these summons until I have seen your authority, written and sealed!"

"Here it is," cried a stern voice at the door, as some papers were thrust before the face of the unhappy man. "Come along, Delano; you are wanted by the Inquisition, and also by the mask of St. Peter's. Come — come!"

And father and daughter both started back with a cry of terror, for it was the mask of St. Peter's that stood before them!

## XI.

### HORRORS OF THE INQUISITION.

THE infamous scheme of Pope Alexander VI. against La Belle Floretta and her father having been thus far

executed, his minions proceeded to the final stroke of their damning work. The victims were before them, and powerless; and the executors of Papal infamy had the authority and power, no less than the determination, to fulfil their orders.

Delano and his daughter were dragged from their cottage, despite their protestations of innocence. They were hurried through the streets to the Inquisition, by the officers of that tribunal of blood and agony. They were not allowed to call for help, supplicate pity, or lament their fate. The repetition of a question on the part of Delano caused one of the Inquisitors to produce a gag, as an intimation that he would soon be silenced in a manner far from agreeable, if he did not hold his peace. Those grim and silent men appeared to know no mercy. Manhood seemed to have left them forever. They stalked sternly forward, in darkness and silence, like demons conducting damned humanity to the shades of hell.

And thus they passed to the Inquisition. The walls that contained and concealed so much misery were at length before them. They passed up the steps to the massive door. It was opened by unseen hands at a signal from Father Janzen, and the party passed in. The door swung back to its place with a dull and heavy sound, and it seemed to the wretched captives as if they had bidden adieu to the world forever. Dim lights were hanging here and there, but they were not sufficient to banish the darkness, though strong enough to show how ghastly was the color and expression of the faces of the victims, and how cold and pitiless was the expression that rested upon the countenance of each of the officers. They passed along the hall, their footsteps echoing through the lofty vaults with

a hollow sound. Down broad stone steps, through damp passage-ways, along damp corridors, were the victims conducted, until they were far beneath the surface of the earth,—down where the glorious light of heaven had never cast a single ray! A massive iron door was then before them; upon it was inscribed, in letters of blood, "*Confess, or die!*" Above it was inscribed, in the same ominous colors, "*The gate to Death!*" and on the threshold stone was engraven, "*Death for heretics, but salvation for those who repent and confess!*" The captives shuddered as they beheld these inscriptions, and started back, but strong hands urged them forward. Father Janzen turned the key in the door; it flew open with a sullen clank, that reverberated far and near in those vaults of misery and death. Delano was forced through, followed by his daughter. He gazed around quickly and fearfully, then a wild cry of despair welled up to his lips, though he was no coward. He could have braved sudden death in any form,—could have met the fell destroyer on the ocean, on a field of battle, where shot were glancing, and swords gleaming in the air; could have met death in all these forms without betraying a fear; but the sight that was now before him was more terrible; it froze his very soul with horror; it seemed to clog up the channels of his blood, blind his eyes, sear his brain, and freeze his every thought and feeling. And this terrible sight, this living evil, this waking incubus, was revealed in the ocular assurance that he stood in

#### THE HALL OF TORTURE!

It was far down in the shadows of earth, where gnomes alone should have dwelt, vampires feasted and fattened, and ghouls held their horrid revels! Down amidst chains

and dungeons, groans and shrieks, despairing prayers and frenzied curses! Down amidst the grave-like dampness, the death-like coldness, and vaporish air, where tortured men were cursing, women dying, and glassy eyes were glaring on the massive walls!

Delano gazed fearfully around, upon being introduced into this frightful place. His face was deathly pale; his limbs tottered beneath him. His daughter was no less pale and agitated; but she endeavored to appear calm.

The mask of St. Peter's touched her arm. She started as if a poisonous viper had bitten her.

"Come," said he, with a cold and mocking smile, "let me call your attention to the various modes of torture, and to the instruments employed!"

Floretta appeared to be fainting; but the mask passed his arm around her waist and sustained her, and assisted her to move towards the other side of the hall.

"The Pope loves you," he whispered. "Will you consent to be his mistress?"

"Never, never!" gasped Floretta, firmly; but she leaned more heavily upon her companion's arm as she spoke. He suddenly checked her progress.

"Here we are," he observed, "before one of our instruments of torture, *the rack*. It was formerly much used, but we are now becoming more refined in our proceedings, and know how to inflict greater anguish without as much seeming brutality. You probably know how it is used. The victim is bound between those pulleys,—a rope is fastened to each of his limbs, and each rope is drawn tighter and tighter, until he confesses, faints, or is drawn asunder!"

"O, horror!" murmured Floretta.

"But the Pope loves you, and would spare you these cruelties, if you would consent to his wishes!" said the mask, as they moved on a few steps. Then they paused again. A wooden horse or bench was before them.

"This," continued the mask, "is called the torture of tightened ropes and suffocation by water, and is generally used for the benefit of females. The victim is placed in this groove, which is made in the proper shape to receive her form, and then she is bound firmly in that position, from head to foot, by ropes that are drawn over pulleys, and tightened to such an extent that she cannot even writhe. Then a tunnel above her head is filled with water, which drips slowly on a cloth that is drawn through the funnel, and falls into the victim's mouth, which is kept forced open; and thus it keeps dropping and dropping, sometimes many hours in succession, until she is nearly or quite drowned!"

"O, agony!" groaned the maiden.

"But the Pope loves you," said the mask, with a hellish leer, "and would fain spare you these recitals!"

They had now moved forward until they stood before a set of stocks.

"Here is where we execute what is called the *torture of the stocks*. The feet of one who is condemned to this punishment are placed in these stocks, and covered with grease and combustible liquids; after which a fire is kindled under them, which, being fed by such materials, burns and sears the flesh and muscles, and causes the most agonizing torments!"

"Just Heaven," cried Floretta, "I shall go mad at these revelations!"

"Remember that the Pope bears you great affection,

and would not have you suffer such agonies as these instruments cause."

They now stood in front of some ropes and pulleys that were suspended from a huge staple fastened in the solid masonry of the arch above them.

"Here is executed," proceeded the mask, "what is called *the torture of ropes and weights*. The victim is stripped, then ropes are fastened to her wrists, by which she is drawn up to the ceiling, and left suspended for some time. Then she is lowered, and heavy weights fastened to her feet, when she is again drawn up. After remaining thus an hour, if she still refuses to repent and confess, she is quickly lowered several feet, and suddenly checked in her descent, by which means her wrists, elbows, shoulders, thighs, knees and ankles, are often dislocated in an instant, causing the most excruciating pain!"

"O, God of mercy," gasped Floretta, "am I indeed deserted?"

"Whether you are or not, you are beloved by the Pope, who would be very much pained to see you endure these tortures!" and the eyes of the mask grew more devilish and malignant in their expression of anticipated revenge and triumph.

He had now conducted his almost fainting companion to the most distant corner of the hall, where the tapers were faint and flickering, and the darkness scarcely half dissipated. Floretta started at an object that met her view.

"What!" she shrieked, "a woman! Do I indeed behold one of my own sex here?"

"Only a semblance of one," replied the mask. "You are now gazing on '*the Skeleton Venus*.' As you perceive, it looks like a beautiful woman, with a fascinating

countenance, voluptuous form, and elegant apparel; but it is but a mockery,—a hollow semblance.' The instant a victim is pressed into her arms, secret springs are touched,—the painted semblance of a Venus is hurled aside, and he is clasped in the arms of a ghastly skeleton! He may shriek in terror; but his cries and frantic struggles can avail him nothing. Those bony arms will press closer and closer around him,—closer and closer,—until the life is completely crushed out of his body, and he is finally released, but to fall a corpse at the feet of the Skeleton Venus!"

"Horror! horror!"

"But the Pope loves you, and hopes you will not ever lay yourself liable to such a doom!" remarked the mask of St. Peter's, in sneering tones, and with a mocking smile.

Both had now reached a figure that was similar in appearance to the one they had last gazed upon.

"Here," said the mask, "is *the Virgin* which the condemned criminals of the Inquisition are sometimes forced to embrace. You see that it looks like a woman, with arms extended as if for an embrace; but to venture within reach of those arms is sure death. Once within the radius of the circle they cover, and the victim is firmly clasped, while an almost countless myriad of knives are revealed, which immediately cut him to pieces!"

"I shall go mad if I observe more!" came from the pale lips of Floretta.

"There is no occasion for alarm, if you take proper cognizance of the fact that *the Pope loves you*," was the reply. "But, behold,—you have not yet seen all. Observe the well\* before you!"

\* "The well or pit beneath had been built in the ordinary cylin-



Floretta started back, for a black pit was before her. It was about five feet in diameter, and built in the usual form of a well. Prompted by a horrible curiosity, the maiden moved forward until she stood close beside it, still leaning on the arm of the mask, when she peered down into its black and silent depths. It appeared to descend full a hundred feet. Far, far below, there was a number of arches, on which the foundations of this singular well appeared to be laid; and through these arches a few faint rays of light stole in. The maiden recoiled from the fearful sight, and covered her face with her hands.

"Look again," whispered the mask; "you have not yet seen all the horrors of this well. Do you not see that sharp knives, gleaming swords, and huge sabres, are fastened, here and there, in the masonry, upon which any person who is condemned to be hurled into this well must fall, and be thus cut in pieces? Many and many a victim of the Inquisition has been plunged into this pit, and, before reaching the bottom, been mangled so horribly that not a single feature, or even the outlines of his form, could have been recognized by his most intimate friend!"

A wild wail of agony escaped the lips of Floretta, and she sunk down at the feet of the mask. Her senses seemed to be leaving her.

"Show me no more," she gasped, faintly, "or I shall die!"

An infernal gleam of triumph appeared in the eyes of the mask, as he raised her to her feet.

dricul form, and was at least eighty feet deep, and so ingeniously provided with projecting knives and cutlasses, that the bodies of the victims must have been dreadfully mangled in the descent."—*Dowling's History of Romanism*, p. 693.

"I am glad you are satisfied," he muttered. "Now, Floretta, listen to me. I have shown you these sights, that you might feel well assured of the punishment that will be yours if you persist in your non-compliance with the wishes of the Pope. He has doomed you to the torture unless you promise me, at once, to be his mistress, now and forever! What is your answer?"

But the question was not heeded. Floretta had again sunk down at his feet, and was insensible. Strong as was her nature, the accumulation of horrors\* she had witnessed had overpowered her. The mask gazed triumphantly upon her pale and haggard features,—they seemed like the features of the dead!

"Father Janzen," said the mask, after a momentary pause, "you may retire, with your men, all save two."

The order was obeyed,—only two of the Inquisitors remained.

"Bring Delano here," was the next order of the mask.

The trembling wretch was brought forward, and, as the officers released their hold of him, he sunk down almost insensible beside the well.

Floretta now began to give tokens of recovery. A groan of anguish escaped her, a shudder swept over her form; and then she opened her eyes.

"Remember, Floretta, what I have told you," said the mask, in a tone that expressed the most terrible vindictiveness and determination. "The Pope loves you,—he

\* The different modes of torture alluded to in this chapter are, with many more, described at length in Dowling's celebrated "*History of Romanism*," to which I would especially refer the reader, as authority for the truthfulness and FIDELITY TO REALITY with which I have drawn the horrors of "The Hall of Torture!"

will make you rich and happy, if you will consent to his wishes. Consider his proposal well, and spurn it not, for the tortures of the Inquisition are before you!"

"I cannot consent, — I am bound to another. I will not be his mistress, — never, never!" was all Floretta had strength to utter.

"Then, take the reward of your obstinacy!" exclaimed the mask. "Men, seize this woman; put her to the torture! The torture of the ropes and weights!"

## XII.

### PUT TO THE TORTURE.

THE fearful order was obeyed. Like fiends incarnate, those grim and silent men commenced their hellish work. Vain were the struggles of Delano; unheeded were his cries for mercy. The strong arm of the mask thrust him aside, and Floretta was seized by the officers. She struggled, — but what could she do? She implored mercy, — but of whom? Not men, but of devils! She shrieked for help, — but who could hear her? All availed nothing. The officers overpowered her; she was helpless in their grasp. They tore the garments from her trembling body,\* — her snow-white neck, whiter bosom and beauteous form, were all exposed to the polluting gaze of the unfeeling minions of the Inquisition. What to them was her

\* See DOWLING'S "History of Romanism," page 571, or the "Inquisition Unmasked," translated from the Spanish of D. Antonio Puigblanch, London edition, published in 1816. It was a general practice of the Inquisitors to disrobe their victims before putting them to the torture, revolting as it may seem.

anguish, her outraged modesty, her delicacy of mind and body? They heeded it not. Their only office was to execute their orders. The maiden was soon stripped entirely naked; and her shrieks now became so piercing that the Inquisitors deemed it expedient to gag her. The rope that descended from the pulley was then fastened tightly to her wrists. Two iron weights, each weighing a hundred pounds, were tied to her ankles. The mask then waved his hand, and the men drew her up to the arched ceiling. She was suspended by the wrists, thus sustaining her own weight, and that of those masses of iron! The muscles of her arms and limbs seemed drawn to their utmost tension; her joints cracked as if parting asunder; her flesh quivered as if she were in convulsions; and yet those hardened men gazed coolly on.

"Will you consent to the Pope's wishes?" asked the mask, who had quietly seated himself in a chair, as if indifferently awaiting an indifferent event.

Floretta shook her head. A gleam of infernal ferocity appeared in the eyes of the mask, as he realized that she was still obstinate. He sprang to his feet, uttering a curse, and made a significant motion to his two instruments, the officers. It was understood. They drew their victim up as near to the wall as possible, then let her drop suddenly to within a few inches of the floor, checking her descent by means of a stout staple around which the rope was coiled. The shock was such that the shoulders and thighs and wrists of the sufferer were dislocated! Her agony was so great, and her struggles so fearful, that she removed the gag from her mouth. She essayed to speak, but could only utter a low moan of suffering. A look of more than mortal anguish flitted over her deathly-pale

features; then her brain reeled, her head sunk forward on her breast: she had fainted!

Again the mask moved his hand. The Inquisitors instantly lowered their victim, and untied the ropes — then bore her to a bed of straw in the corner of the hall, and applied themselves to her restoration.

"Will she bear the torture again?" asked the mask, as he glanced towards them, and struck down Delano, who had darted towards his daughter.

"She might, but I would not advise it at present. Her limbs are much dislocated!"

"O, let me go to her!" cried Delano. "She will die without my attendance!"

"Peace, fool! We do not let our patients die — we save their lives, that we may mould their minds to our will! Your daughter will yet repent of her refusal; indeed, she will!"

Then he turned towards the officers, and inquired,

"Gives she any token of recovery yet?"

"Ay, her usual consciousness will soon return," was the reply.

"You hear," said the mask to Delano, — "there is no danger of her dying!"

The maiden opened her eyes, and stared wildly around. For a moment she seemed incapable of realizing where she was, or what she had undergone; then a flush appeared upon her pale cheeks, and she drew a cloak which one of the Inquisitors had thrown off over her form, in every portion of which the sharpest pains were now rankling.

"Raise me up," she whispered; "let me behold my father."

The men complied with her request. She gazed tear-

fully upon him. The eyes of the doting old man could not gaze upon the fearful picture his daughter presented; he turned his face away and groaned aloud, while scalding tears coursed down his wrinkled cheeks.

"Do not weep for your child, dear father; you have nothing to reproach yourself for," murmured Floretta, "nor have I. Firm in the consciousness of duty, I can endure all the tortures these men can wreak upon my frail body, while the spirit defies them still!"

"Not yet conquered," muttered the mask, in a voice fairly husky with rage; "then I will make Delano an example!"

He seized him by the arm as he spoke, and dragged him close to the side of the Well, or — as it was called — *the pit of death*, when he turned towards Floretta, who had started up at this ominous movement with a cry of horror.

"Now, proud Floretta, hear my last proposal," said the mask, in the low, calm tone of determination that betrays a deadly purpose. "You see this weak old man — he is your father. As such, he should be worthy of any sacrifice from you. You may make the required sacrifice or not, consulting your own views on the subject; but I swear by everything holy and sacred, that if you do not instantly give your consent to the proposal I have made, you will see your father hurled down upon the deadly blades within this well!"

"Hold — hold! Do not doom him to such a terrible death — he is my father!"

"Your promise, then — your promise!" cried the mask, fiercely. "Give it to me at once, or I swear —"

"What do you swear?" exclaimed a stern voice, as a

door swung back on its creaking hinges, and Cardinal Corneto appeared upon the threshold.

The mask started, and pressed his hand to his brow, as if appalled by the appearance of his visitor. It flashed like lightning upon his brain that the cardinal would recognize Delano, whom he and the other cardinals in council had condemned to death, and that his non-compliance with their orders would be thus discovered; but the danger was not great enough to appal and unman him; only sufficient to call forth his greatest powers of decision and action. As quick as thought, he seized Delano in his vice-like grasp, and dragged him towards the pit, from which he had retired a few steps at the interruption.

"Mercy — mercy!" he gasped.

"Stop, villain!" shouted the cardinal, with great excitement; "'t is Cardinal Corneto commands you!"

Nearer and nearer drew the mask to the fatal pit, and more evident became his determination.

"Hold!" cried La Belle Floretta, making a superhuman effort to seize upon the mask. "Save — save him! Spare my father, and I will become the mistress of the Pope!"

The mask did not seem to heed the words. He saw only the danger of discovery, and that Corneto was near. He neared the pit, his victim still pleading for mercy; the cardinal ordering him to desist; and Floretta repeating her promise, her consent. All were alike unheeded. Closer to the pit — closer, closer! so that he could look down into its black and yawning depths, in which, here and there, sharp blades were glistening in the rays from lamps below; and then, with one single effort, while a

terrible cry of horror rang through the hall, he hurled the shrieking Delano into the frightful abyss!

"Monster!" cried Corneto, vehemently, as he drew his sword, "you shall die for this. That man was Delano, whom I came to seek!"

"Seek him in hell, then!" replied the mask, now terribly excited, and he stamped his foot angrily upon the floor, while his form quivered with passion. "Know you, Cardinal Corneto, that my word is law here, and any interference will cost you your life! Men! bear that woman to a dungeon, and give her the attendance of a surgeon!"

"Stir not, on your lives; he has no authority to command you!" exclaimed Corneto.

"Liar!" hissed the mask, as he struck him to the floor, and exhibited a massive seal-ring upon his finger; "I have authority! Behold the signet-ring of Alexander Borgia!"

The cardinal bowed his head in token of submission; the men proceeded to remove the insensible Floretta; the mask uttered a scornful laugh of triumph; and here ends the horrors of half an hour in the "*Hall of Torture*!"

## BOOK FOURTH.

## I.

## DARK PLOTTINGS.

It was two weeks later. Among the events of this period, Cæsar Borgia had become a cardinal. He was seated alone in his room, engaged in earnest thoughts.

"Some means must be employed, and speedily, to replenish the treasury of the church and the pockets of the Borgias," he observed, in a musing manner. "My troops are clamorous for money, and many of the late expenses they have incurred remain unliquidated. From whence is this money to come? This is the question to be seriously asked and quickly answered; from whence is the required amount to come?"

He rested his elbows upon his knees, and his chin upon his hands, and gave himself up to reflection. He was soon disturbed, however; for a door of the apartment was opened, and Alexander Borgia entered.

"Ah," said Cæsar, as he beheld his father, "I am devilish glad to see you."

The Pope did not reply. He was evidently in no pleasant mood. A sullen, half-angry look was upon his features. He threw himself dejectedly into a chair, and

gave himself up to the stormy emotions that raged in his heart.

"Bah," exclaimed Cæsar, contemptuously, as he observed these signs of the old man's moodiness. "You are in one of your ill humors again. Don't make such a fool of yourself! Be a little more the Pope, and a little less the man! Drive your cares and troubles to the devil, as I do. Here is some excellent wine, which will expedite the departure of all such gloomy feelings most wonderfully. Won't you try a glass with me? Do, and banish this cursed ill-nature, if you have any pity for me, or regard for yourself. But I suppose you are still meditating on that affair with Lucretia."

"Cæsar," said the Pope, sternly, starting to his feet, and giving his companion a most commanding look, "don't you ever allude to that circumstance again. Let the past be forgotten, all save that portion of it which can be remembered with pleasurable emotions. It is worse than the mouthings of a fool, or the ravings of a madman, to call up such reminiscences. Speak of the present, if at all; you will find that subject quite disagreeable enough."

"Ay, too much so," said Cæsar, with a moody look. "The present is not a very agreeable subject to either of us. The treasury is empty — the church is impoverished; and both of us have urgent need for money. Under these circumstances, it becomes an urgent, a serious question for us to decide, where the money is to come from. Have you any plans or prospects on the subject?"

"None," was the brief and gloomily-uttered reply.

"Then allow me to advance mine. I have plans on that subject — plans that have just been decided upon in my mind. Listen, and you shall know what they are.

You are aware that Cardinal Corneto is a very rich man, and you are quite as well aware that the whole of his property, in the event of his decease, comes to the treasury of the Catholic church. Such being the case, I propose that Cardinal Corneto obliges us by departing from mundane affairs at a very short notice."

"What, would you have him assassinated?"

"I did not say that; I simply insinuated that I should be happy to hear that he was happy and doing well in a better world than ours happens to be. If this man, this wealthy cardinal, were to die suddenly about this time, he would do us both a great favor, as a portion of his money would come into our possession."

"You are right," said the Pope, with emphasis. "How do you propose to assassinate him?"

"Assassinate? That is a hard word. Did I say assassinate? I merely intended to suggest that it is possible for him to drink a glass of poisoned wine."

"I understand; you would have him die by poison. It is a good idea; we will act upon it. Come to my private apartment, and we will have some further consideration on this subject. Poison! It will be our salvation—it shall be used; and Cardinal Corneto shall make us his heirs, *volens volens*—heirs by circumstances! Come on—the thought is right; it has only to be matured!"

Each hastily drank a glass of wine, and then both retired from the room.

## II.

## THE APPROACHING MARRIAGE.

LUCRETIA BORGIA was seated alone in her room. Change—terrible change—was written in every glance of her eyes, and in every expression that mantled her face. She appeared but a shadow of the beautiful and gay-hearted being she had been but a few short months previous. Her face was very pale and haggard; her eyes gleamed restlessly in their sockets; and her whole appearance proclaimed the misery that was rankling in her heart, and wasting her life away. Yet, despite all this change, despite all she had suffered, Lucretia Borgia was strangely fascinating—gloriously beautiful!

"It is hard to live thus," she murmured, as she clasped her hands to her feverish brow; "to live under the conviction that I am cursed for this life, and damned for that to come. No mortal knows the agony that is given me by this thought; none can comprehend the terrible nature of my sufferings. It is a terrible thing—a thousand times more terrible than death—for one to live until all his hopes have been destroyed, brain seared, heart blighted, name disgraced, and life's pleasures all wasted away, and naught is left but the sickening consciousness, the dread realization, that grief and despair are his heritage for all coming time! A terrible thing to feel that everything that made life desirable has been buried in the events of the past, and nothing left to cheer the present save the mocking memories of long, long ago! A terrible thing to stand upon the shores of time, and gaze forth upon the dreary sea, that stretches far away into eternity, and realize that demon hands are driving one's frail bark of life

over its billows, hurrying it on and on, in darkness and gloom! A terrible thing to feel that the heart has become a sepulchre; a yawning grave of bright hopes, noble aspirations, lofty resolves, and waking dreams of glory and renown; a living tomb, in which is buried everything that is good, and in which everything that is bad, polluting and unholy, shall live and live forever.

"But I will be avenged," continued the woman, after pausing a brief instant; and her face wore a look of determination that could not have been mistaken. "Those who have embittered my happiness, and made me the miserable object I am, shall feel the deadliest revenge that woman's brain can plan or her hand execute!"

A door opened as Donna Lucretia ceased speaking, and a portly, commanding-looking gentleman, whose age could not have varied much from forty-five, entered hastily, threw himself at the woman's feet, took her hand, and exclaimed:

"Still sad and desponding, dear Lucretia! I feared as much, and have come to cheer up your spirits and make you happy."

"You are very kind, Count Lunaza," responded Lucretia, with a faint smile. "I am glad you have come, for I have been gloomy all the afternoon."

"What, gloomy so near your wedding-day! This is not in character. To-morrow evening we are to be united in the bonds of matrimony; and the thought of this should bring joy to your heart, and a glow of enthusiasm and expected happiness to your cheeks."

"So it should, my lord, but I am a strange and perverse being, you know. Sometimes I think I am not worthy of becoming the wife of one so kind and attentive

as you have proved yourself since our acquaintance begun; and if you ever have such a thought, I shall not hesitate to release you from the promises made —"

"Do not speak of it, dear Lucretia. Were I a hundred times more wealthy, respected and influential, I should deem you well worthy of being my wife. I am impatient for the hour to arrive that is to unite us in marriage. With thee I shall be happy. With thee the world will be a heaven, and life a continual round of the deepest joys and pleasures the soul can feel."

"Heaven grant it!" was the response of Lucretia, as a look of agony flitted over her face, tears dimmed her eyes, a tremor of emotion swept over her form, and her head sunk forward upon the count's bosom.

### III.

#### THE ASSASSINATION.

It was an hour later. The mask of St. Peter's was standing in the shadow cast by one of the mighty arches of the bridge of St. Angelo's, and gazing forth upon the turbid waters of the Tiber. Near him, behind a pillar of the bridge, stood a man that presented a similar appearance, as he wore a mask and a black cloak.

The stranger was observing the mask very attentively, and signified by his actions a desire to address him. Their eyes met at last, and the stranger beckoned the man of crime and mystery to the shade in which he stood concealed.

"You are the mask of St. Peter's," was the first salu-

tation of the unknown, after that personage had crossed over to him.

"I am, as you very well know, without my assurance. The black cloak, my blacker mask, and the good dagger I wear at my belt, have long since rendered it needless for any dweller in Rome to question who I am."

"True; but we must have our preliminaries, in conversing with strangers, you know," rejoined the unknown, with a smile. "I am very well aware that you *are* the mask of St. Peter's, and it is this knowledge that has led me to call upon you at the present time. I have some urgent business with you —"

"Excuse me, sir, but no man has any business with me who comes with his face disguised. You cannot command my attention until you have removed that mask from your countenance."

"But, consider that there are certain circumstances under which a man does not care to become known to the agents he employs."

"O, very well; I do not intend to exchange any words on the subject. I have only to say that I meant what I said, and bid you a very good-evening;" and the mask turned upon his heel, as if about to depart.

"Stay," said the other, seizing his arm. "I will unmask, if you pledge your word of honor that you will never make use against me of whatever knowledge you may gain by the transaction. Do you promise?"

"Señor, I do not promise anything. Were there any occasion for such a pledge on my part, it should be given; but you very well know it is not required. I do as I please. If I have a motive sufficient to warrant me in denouncing a man, I do it. If I choose to do a good

deed, I do it; and if I choose to do a bad one, it is needless for any one to offer opposition. If I have cause to be a man's friend, I am so; if I have a motive and a reason for being his enemy, I am generally a deadly one. Neither love or hate can ever sour in my breast. You now know a few of my views; and if you choose to trust me, you can do so. If not, you are at liberty to keep your secrets in your own heart."

"I *must* trust you — *must* have your aid; and therefore I will not offer any further objections to your desire," was the reply of the unknown, as he removed the mask from his visage.

The mask of St. Peter's started at the face that met his view, and there was a significant gleam in his eye as he observed,

"I know you very well. You are Cardinal Montelli. You have sought the mask of St. Peter's. Thus far I understand you. Now, sir, your business."

"Is of a peculiar nature. You already know that I am rich and powerful, and that I have a desire to become Pope. All I have now to do is, to secure your aid, and inform you that I have thought of a method for placing myself in the pontifical chair!"

"Indeed!" and the mask started. "I shall be pleased to hear your plans for the execution of such a project."

"But I can trust you?"

"Certainly. If you feel even the shadow of a suspicion on the subject, reflect for a moment upon the feelings I must necessarily bear those who made me the odious monster I am, — a thing for general abhorrence. Does it seem likely that one who has been forced, under penalty of death, to fill the position I have done for the last fif-



teen years or more, would be capable of betraying any one to those who forced him to such a revolting step,— the Pope and the cardinals?"

"Say no more. I am convinced that I can confide in you; and so, to the business that called me hither. As I before observed, I have matured a plan for becoming Pope. I have contrived to make myself the most powerful man in Rome, not excepting Pope Alexander VI. —"

"True—most true!" muttered the mask, with a slight intonation of bitterness.

"I have made myself alike popular with the cardinals, the priests and the people. Were Borgia to die, I should undoubtedly be called to fill his place. Such being the state of affairs, you can readily understand that I do not pray that his life may be unusually lengthy."

"I understand you; the project bears the evidence of a master mind on its front. But how do you propose to remove the Pope?"

Cardinal Montelli gazed upon the form before him for a moment, as if he would fain read his thoughts; then he replied, laconically,

"By employing your dagger!"

Again the mask started, in a manner that would have struck an observer as being somewhat peculiar.

"What reward have you concluded to offer as an equivalent for my friendly offices in this matter?" he asked, at length.

"Enough to make it an object for you to aid me. What do you say to five thousand maravedi?"

"Just half enough," was the decisive response.

"I see you are determined to name the price, and make no words about it. Well, I will not complain. Levers

must rest upon a substantial fulcrum. Do the deed, slay Alexander Borgia, and you shall have the ten thousand maravedi!"

"You are generous!" observed the mask, as his dark eyes flashed vengefully, his form trembled, and his hand toyed nervously with the hilt of his dagger. "Most generous! I shall accept your offer. But when must the deed be done, and the money be paid?"

"The sooner your part of the contract is fulfilled, the better. As for mine, you can have the money now, if you choose, as I brought it with me;" and he produced a heavy bag of gold.

"You are quite thoughtful and considerate!" said the mask, as he received it; and the expression of his eyes grew more malignant as he spoke. His excitement had now become so evident that his companion noticed it.

"What means this agitation?" he demanded. "Has any one been witnessing what we have done, or listening to our words? You tremble; you clutch your weapon nervously. Are you ill?"

The mask did not reply in words,— his answer was a terrible deed. He turned with the quickness of thought, and buried his dagger in Montelli's bosom!

"Treachery! Help!" exclaimed the fated man, as he sank down in the agonies of death.

The mask uttered a hoarse laugh, as he dragged him where the shade lay deeper on the bridge, and knelt beside him.

"Treachery! — help!" he repeated, mockingly. "It ill becomes a traitor of your stamp to use such words. List you, Cardinal Montelli; I would have you understand the cause of this conduct, which to you appears so

singular. Know you that I am a friend of Alexander Borgia — his particular friend ; ay, one so much bound up in his interest that, had passion not got the better of reason, and caused me to take summary justice, I would have hung you on a gallows higher than Haman's ! It is well that you came to me ; I thank you for this judicious selection of a tool for this purpose."

The mask ceased speaking, for he saw that his victim was dead. A moment he gazed upon the pale, distorted features that were upturned to his view ; then he clutched the bag of gold with a tighter grasp, and a low chuckle of satisfaction escaped him.

"All goes well," he muttered. "The most dangerous enemy the Pope has had for years is dead. I have taken his life, and now possess a portion of his money, which comes, just at this time, as a godsend. Ten thousand maravedi ! There's quite enough to celebrate Donna Lucretia's wedding in grand style, and it shall be applied for that purpose. As for this self-deluded fool, he is justly punished. I knew he was ambitious, but did not suspect him of such boldness. He may have had backers ; indeed, I am led to believe that he did, as he alluded to his popularity with his fellow-cardinals. I must see to this at once. There may be many concerned in this conspiracy. But let them beware ! Those who offend Alexander Borgia, or plot against him, are treading on a volcano that may destroy them at any moment. I will pay the council of cardinals a visit at their next sitting, and see if I can gain any new insight into their sentiments."

The mask now wiped the blade of his weapon on the garments of the murdered man ; replaced it in its sheath, and walked musingly away in the direction of the palace of the Borgias.

## IV.

## THE COUNCIL.

THE scene was a room in the Inquisition. A number of cardinals were seated therein, among them Corneto.

"Where is Cæsar Borgia and Cardinal Montelli ?" he asked. "It appears that they have absented themselves from this meeting. Well, so much the better. Fasten the door, Hugi, and admit no one without my orders."

The messenger obeyed. Corneto then turned to his companions, and thus addressed them :

"Probably you are all anxious to know why I have called you together to-night. I will tell you. Dangers unseen and deadly are menacing us, especially myself. The Pope and his son have been plotting against my life, perhaps against the life of each of you !"

"How learned you this ?" asked one of the cardinals.

"By accident on the part of Hugi, our messenger. I sent him to Borgia's palace last evening, on business. The Pope was not in his room, but the servants said he was doubtless in the palace. The messenger went in search of him, and soon found him in his son's room. They two were conversing together ; and there was something so peculiar in their manners, at the moment Hugi pushed the door ajar and looked in upon them, that he could not resist his inclination to listen. Listen he did, and heard them decide upon poisoning me ; which knowledge had so much influence upon him, that he hastened to me, without waiting to make known his business."

"But are you sure that this twain have thus plotted against you ? Can you depend upon Hugi's word ?"

"Most implicitly, and could not be more firmly convinced of the plot against me had I heard it with my own ears. I have long been suspicious of the Pope, — have long thought that there is no crime too revolting for him to execute; and you can all rest assured that I shall be on my guard against him."

A door at the further end of the apartment opened at this juncture, and the mask of St. Peter's entered, unseen and unheard by any person in the group.

"And there's the mask," continued Corneto. "He seems to have changed for the worse of late. It may be that he has not really turned traitor to us, but he is most wofully careless lately in the execution of his orders. I told you at our last meeting of his affair with Delano, — how he allowed him to live more than two weeks after we condemned him, and finally slew him in the most barbarous manner. Such things are far from being satisfactory to me, as a member of this council; and I motion that we establish a secret espionage over Borgia, and take measures to punish the mask!"

"Agreed; the proposition is a good one, and should be acted upon at once," said the cardinal on the immediate left of Corneto. "For my part, I am satisfied that there is an urgent necessity for us to be on our guard against both of the persons to whom you have alluded, — the Pope and the mask. They both work together; both seem to have a terrible understanding between themselves, and both may be even now plotting against the life of every one of us!"

"Ay, and it is more than likely that they are," added another of the group. "You may all think what you please, but I am convinced that the mask has plotted

against others, and may against us. To speak more plainly, I am satisfied that the mask could explain the absence of Montelli from this meeting. It has been rumored to-day that a man, who might have been Montelli, was assassinated on the bridge of St. Anglos last evening, and his body sunk by two servants in the Tiber. The story may be but a rumor, and the object of our suspicion may have had nothing to do with the deed, if it has really been committed; but still, I second the words of Corneto — let Borgia be watched, and the mask punished for his past neglect of our orders!"

"Agreed!" was the response, coming from an unexpected quarter; and, as the cardinals started to their feet, the mask of St. Peter's moved forward and stood before them.

## V.

### THE MYSTERY OF THE MASK.

For the space of a minute the cardinals all gazed upon the mask without moving or speaking, while anger and confusion were written upon their features.

"You here!" cried Corneto, at length. "Devil! how dare you thus intrude upon us?"

"Cardinal Corneto forgets the character of the mask when he insinuates that there is anything evil the mask dare not do," was the sneering response. "When I have been painted in as black and revolting colors as certain persons now present have used in speaking of me, there is no occasion to wonder at anything I may do, — at least, I should so judge," and again the mocking sneer curled his lips, though it was unseen.

"You have heard no good of yourself by listening," continued Corneto. "To the contrary, you have heard, as listeners always do of themselves, much that is ill; and I, for one, am glad that you have presented yourself thus, unmasked and unexpected, in our midst. We now have an opportunity of questioning you,—perhaps a chance to learn whether you are as guilty as report bespeaks you, or not."

"Very well, sir; question me, if such is your desire," was the reply, indifferently uttered.

"In the first place, I would ask you why you came here without a summons from our Council?"

"Because it pleased me to do so."

"And so you have become so self-willed, and a person of such importance in your own estimation, that you consult no one's will but your own, eh? Matters have reached a pretty crisis, indeed, when a mere hireling of the Council ventures to assume the privileges you are taking to yourself. If we submit to such insults as these from a man whose very life is not his own, but held through our clemency, then are we the most despicable of men. For one, I will not longer brook your insolent conduct and your neglect of our orders; and I now summons you, in the name of the Council, to lay aside your cloak, mask, and dagger, and surrender yourself a prisoner."

The mask received the words with a sneering laugh.

"Indeed, my lord," was the calm reply, "you are quite moderate in your requests; but I beg leave to inform you that I cannot comply with your wishes at present."

"But you shall comply with them, even if force has to be used to effect that purpose. You are a traitor, a spy,

and a renegade. The pledges under which you held your life have all been broken; and I shall be much mistaken if the death you have merited by your late deportment is not speedily yours. Do you understand me? Surrender at once, or we shall resort to force."

"Try it, if you dare!" said the mask, coolly, though it was evident that strong excitement was raging in his breast. "The first man that lays hands upon me will be the first to die. If any one of your number is ambitious of such distinction, let him come on!"

There was no reply. The very audacity of the mask's words, no less than his position, seemed sufficient to keep them silent.

"Now, senors," said the mask, quietly, after a short pause, "if you are ready to hear an explanation, I am ready to give it; but I wish you to distinctly understand that I do not come here to be bullied or frightened. You, Cardinal Corneto, have alluded to the circumstances under which I hold my life, as you flatter yourself, from your august body; but allow me to observe that you are all mistaken."

"That is not possible. Were you not found guilty of assassinating a man in one of the streets of Rome, and condemned to death, and only released on your promise of becoming the executioner of our victims, which character you assumed something like fifteen years ago——"

"Fifteen years ago," interrupted the mask, "a man was discovered standing beside the body of a person he had slain,—discovered by members of this Council. The assassin was condemned, as you have just stated, but was spared on the conditions you have mentioned, and of which

you have often taken occasion to remind me, under the belief that I am that assassin."

"Under the belief? What do you mean? Do you intend to say that you are *not* the man whose life was thus spared?"

"That is just what I wish you to understand, for I am not that person. It matters not who or what I was at that time; it is sufficient for me to say that I envied the security, and coveted the power, the assumption of this cloak and mask gave the possessor. My mind was determined on a deed that should win me both; my hand was strong to execute that determination. I laid in wait for this assassin, on the bridge of St. Angelo, and was eminently successful in the design. The assassin was in his turn assassinated; and I—I, my lord cardinals, became the executioner of your wishes, the mask of St. Peter's!"

All started back in the greatest surprise at this announcement.

"And who are you?" asked Corneto, as soon as his astonishment would permit him.

The mask moved forward, and laid his hand impressively upon the questioner's arm; and when he spoke his voice was sterner than ever.

"Who am I? Listen, and you shall know. I am one who knows each and every one of you better than you know yourselves. I know your thoughts, your motives, and your intentions; and when they are of an order it is not my pleasure to countenance, I know very well how to thwart them. Some one of your number has intimated his belief that I know something in reference to the disappearance of Cardinal Montelli. He is right; I have that knowledge. 'T was my dagger, my hand, that let out

the miscreant's traitorous blood; and," he added, with a fierce look, "there are more than one of this assemblage who will be similarly dealt with, if there is not a speedy change in their deportment!"

"Ha! do you threaten us?" exclaimed Corneto, drawing his sword. "What, ho! Hugi! call the guard!"

"Call away till doomsday, if it please you!" said the mask, with a sneer. "No one hears you save my friends,—your enemies. Would you know who they are? Behold them!" and he stamped his foot heavily upon the floor.

A door opened, and admitted half a dozen masked men, wearing black cloaks, and each carrying a blood-stained dagger in his right hand. They gazed silently upon the cardinals for a moment; then the mask waved his hand, and they retired as they came.

"In Heaven's name, what means this mystery, and who are you?" cried Corneto, excitedly.

"I am simply the mask of St. Peter's," was the reply. "If you have become convinced that I am not so much the *tool* but that I can, if necessary, be the *master*, my business is settled, and I will take my leave. But allow me to caution you all against plotting to injure me, for such attempts will be very likely to recoil on your own heads. Remember this, and govern yourselves accordingly. Farewell, and a pleasant night to each of you!"

And turning, with an air of contempt, the mask strode from the room, leaving the cardinals in a state of stupefaction.

## VI.

## FURTHER PLOTTINGS.

THE surprise of the cardinals kept them silent for several moments. Corneto was the first to speak.

"Cardinals," said he, "there goes a dangerous man! One whom we must crush, or who will crush us; a man of mystery, whom none of us understand. He has been the most humble of servants; you see that he can be the most stern and powerful of masters. He must be removed, or from this hour we hold our lives only by his permission. But, how can we dispose of him? Send priests among the people, to incite them to vengeance against the mask, for the many assassinations from which they have suffered at his hands? No, that will not do; he would hear of the plot, and thwart it. We must contrive something that will prove speedily sure. But what shall it be? Let me think. What shall it be?"

"A summary arrest and instant execution," was the reply of an old, gray-headed cardinal, who sat opposite Corneto. "The emergency is one that will admit of no child's play; we must strike boldly and at once. My advice is to send a strong detachment of officers from the Inquisition to arrest the mask at his residence, the palace that was built for him by the church, in consideration of his services as public executioner. Let us drag him forth to a dungeon, try him by our right as the secret council of cardinals, condemn him by our authority, and gibbet him by our power. This is the only way in which he can be placed beyond the power to do us harm."

"You have spoken very sensibly, and to the point,"

said Corneto. "I most strongly advocate the course you have advanced. We have all been insulted, again and again, by the mask. He has neglected our orders, and despised all our intimations of punishment. Even in our very presence, within the hour, he has dared to boast that it was his hand that assassinated Montelli, one of the most worthy and respected members of our Council. In view of such outrages as these, there is but one course to adopt towards him, — *death!*"

The cardinals severally expressed their approval of the plan, and the result of a few moments' deliberation was, that a body of Inquisitorial officers should arrest the mask as soon as arrangements could be made for that purpose. The council then adjourned.

## VII.

## FATHER JANZEN.

It was later still. The Count Luanza stood in a lonely hall, gazing forth upon the sullen waters of the Tiber.

"The lady does not confess; never visits a confessional, or receives the visits of a priest. Why is it? There is a mystery here which I must unravel. She has secrets which I must gain. Only one person has power to draw them forth, — Father Janzen. I will see him at once!"

He had only to ring a bell, give his orders to a servant, and wait a few moments, at the end of which time Father Janzen was ushered into his presence.

"Leave us," commanded the count, and the servant obeyed.

"Now to business. Be seated, Father Janzen, and join me in a glass of wine."

The priest obeyed, drinking it with an apparent relish that proclaimed he was not a total stranger to its good qualities.

"So much for the wine. Now, good Father Janzen, I'll proceed to make known the purpose of this interview. You know that I am engaged to be married to Donna Lucretia. Indeed, the ceremony was to have taken place this evening, but she has desired me to postpone it a day or two, as she was this morning taken suddenly and seriously ill. She is now in her room at the palace."

"Well," muttered the priest, who seemed to have an intuitive perception of what was required of him.

"I wish you to see Donna Lucretia, and make an attempt to gain possession of the secrets that weigh so heavily upon her mind and body. You have doubtless marked the change that has lately taken place in her appearance. I hardly know what to attribute it to; but I have come to the conclusion that there has been a terrible cause, which she conceals in her own breast. You must see her, and learn whether my suspicions are true or not."

"I will gladly do so," was the reply.

"Then do so at once. She will probably be at home to-night. I have an engagement with her; but you shall bear my apologies for not keeping it, and do the service I require of you."

Again the priest muttered his acquiescence.

"And while she is revealing her secrets, should she favor us by doing so, you need not be surprised if you should see me enter your presence, — by a secret door, a

hidden panel, or an open window. I have a peculiar method for making calls when I desire to be invisible; and I possess a sufficient knowledge of the mysteries of the Borgia palace to make it the scene of an exploit of this kind. To sum up all, — bring about this interview, to which I shall make it an especial point of my conduct to listen."

"I understand you, and will do all I can to execute your wishes. If it is possible for me to wring the secret from her, I will do so."

"Thanks. This is not the first time you have made me your debtor."

A few words more passed between them relative to preliminary arrangements, and then Father Janzen departed.

## VIII.

### THE SURPRISE.

STERN, pale, and trembling with excitement, Hernaldo Zinna stood in the midst of the "Leaguers," the body of men that looked up to him as their leader. They were in the underground hall, where they had met on previous occasions. The young man had been addressing them, — he had spoken of their own wrongs, and of those that he feared had befallen La Belle Floretta.

"If not dead," were his concluding remarks, "she is confined in the palace of the Borgias, or in the dungeon of the Inquisition. How many are there in this assemblage that will go with me to the rescue?"

"All, — all!" came up from the lips of each, like a mighty echo of his will.

"And you will go with me now, — this very hour?"

"Ay, the sooner the better for our purpose, — the better for the gratification of our own wishes. Death to the Borgias! death to the cardinals! death to the mask of St. Peter's! death to the church of Rome!"

A mocking laugh succeeded, coming from the man who guarded the door. It was not loud, nor hoarse; but it came so unexpectedly, and under such circumstances, that it seemed truly infernal, — a demoniac laugh of exultation.

And it was not one laugh alone that fell upon their ears; it was caught up, — it was echoed by many voices, until the very walls around them rang with a chorus of infernal laughter.

"In the name of Heaven, what mean these sounds? Have fiends taken possession of our hall?"

"Ha, ha!" laughed those malignant and exultant voices in reply. "Ha, ha!"

And then those strong men cowered down, and trembled with horror, while their faces became deathly pale; for it flashed upon their minds that they were beset by the Inquisition.

"Fiend!" cried Zinna, darting toward the door-keeper, who had commenced the mocking laughter that now assailed his ears. "Why this laugh? Art thou a demon in the guise of man? Speak, and tell me who thou art!"

Then he recoiled with a terrible cry, for the cloak had fallen from the form of the man before him, a mask that concealed a mask was torn from his face, and Zinna saw that the mask of St. Peter's stood before him.

"Ha, ha!" he laughed, in tones of hellish glee.

And those mocking voices echoed it, — echoed it

throughout the hall, until the sense of hearing on the part of the "Leaguers" seemed benumbed.

Zinna drew his weapon, as did one of his followers; but the mask stepped calmly towards them, as calmly spoke.

"Gentlemen, you are all the prisoners of the mask of St. Peter's. If you doubt my words, behold the proof!"

The door by which all had entered opened as he ceased speaking. Then another was discovered, — another, the fourth, the fifth; and now they were thrown open in such numbers around them, that the walls seemed full of them.

In breathless silence the Leaguers waited the denouement. Nor waited long. A host of silent men, wearing the cowl and cloak that characterized them as officers of the Inquisition, made their appearance, entering quietly one after the other, and all well armed. Their numbers soon exceeded those of the "Leaguers;" and still they continued coming. The hall was crowded with them, the doorways were guarded by them, and every avenue of escape cut off.

"Lost, lost!" cried Zinna. "Hell is reigning on earth; its demons all before me!"

In the course of two minutes every one of the "Leaguers" were seized and ironed by the Inquisitors. They made no resistance; they knew it was useless to contend against such odds. Zinna alone remained free. He noticed the omission, and thought he had been reserved for some additional insult. With a sneer upon his lips, a look of defiance on his face, he held out his hands to be bound.

"No, no!" and the mask shook his head. "We do not want you; we give you your liberty; you are free to go."



"But I will not stir one step. I desire to die with my comrades!"

"Then, if you are so obstinate, we will depart with your friends here, and you may remain alone in these vaults," was the reply, and the intimation was acted upon as soon as possible. The hall was soon cleared, — Zinna was left alone.

"Alone!" He uttered the word, and it rang throughout the hall like a knell. "Alone!" Again he repeated it, as he thought of La Belle Floretta; and he threw himself upon his knees beside the table, weeping and praying.

It was midnight ere he arose and went forth, and when he finally sought the open air he was still frenziedly muttering that word, "Alone, alone!"

For the light of reason had left his soul forever. Hernando Zinna was a maniac!

And not the first or the last that has been driven insane by the horrors of the church of Rome!

## BOOK FIFTH.

### I.

#### THE POISONED WINE.

"Yes, the Cardinal Corneto shall die by poisoned wine!"

The speaker was Alexander Borgia. He was pacing to and fro in his apartment, in the centre of which, by a table, Caesar, his son, was seated.

"Yes, that is the way to remove him, and secure his money; the only way," replied Caesar. "You see that I am prepared to follow it. Here's the wine, well mixed with our most deadly poison," and he drew forth a black earthen bottle from a secret drawer in the table, and held it up to the light.

The liquid sparkled strangely, — not more strangely, not more brightly, than the dark eyes of the Pope, as he muttered,

"A few drops of that will remove Corneto from my path. That he must die is certain, even if we did not desire to use his wealth. He is too dangerous to be tolerated. Already has he sown the seeds of sedition against me. But let him look well to himself. This night Lucretia is to wed the Count Luanza; this night Corneto will be at the palace; and I mistake myself very

much, if he leaves it until he has poured a goodly portion of the poisoned wine down his throat."

A secret door at one side of the room had opened and closed while the Pope had been speaking. A head had been thrust in, and a pair of dark eyes marked the bottle of wine, while quick ears had listened to every word that was uttered. And this spy was Lucretia Borgia.

"But how do you propose to fill his glass from this bottle, and avoid doing the same by any of the others?" asked Cæsar.

"That's easily enough managed. I shall have a servant in my confidence, who will watch for and improve the opportunity when the cardinal is deeply interested in something that is being done or said."

"The plan is then decided upon. Let us make the final arrangements, for the hour appointed for the marriage ceremony and the poisoning of Corneto will soon arrive."

"Agreed! We will see about it at once. This business settled, I must visit the Inquisition, and see how fares my captive, La Belle Floretta." And the Pope, with his son, departed from the room.

It was entered a moment later by Donna Lucretia. Her face was flushed; her eyes glittering in their expression; and her features wore a look of deadly resolution. She proceeded at once to the drawer in which the wine had been left. She took the bottle and secreted it in the folds of her dress.

"If there is a heaven," she murmured, "let it ever be praised for the occurrences of this hour! They have shown me a method of revenge; they have placed a terrible avengement at my disposal, and it shall be mine. I will take this bottle, and leave one that does not contain

poison in its place. O, Alexander Borgia! you may plot against the cardinal, but I will show you how fatally your machinations will be meted out to yourself. You will meet Corneto, eat, drink, and make merry with him, and order your servant to bring this poisoned wine for him; but he shall receive another, and this shall be poured into your own glass."

And thus were the plottings of the Pope likely to be counterplotted.

## II.

### THE MASK IN PERIL.

We will now enter the office of the Inquisition. Two persons were seated therein, conversing in a low tone. The entrance of Hugi, the messenger of the cardinals, interrupted them.

"I bear you a message from the council," said he, as he placed a paper in the hand of the eldest keeper, who was evidently one of the head officers of the Inquisition.

The messenger then departed without a reply. He well knew that none was needed, save in the instant fulfilment of the orders he had brought.

"What is this?" muttered the officer, as he cast his eye over the paper. "The council here orders us to send a strong force to arrest the mask of St. Peter's."

"That's just what I have all along thought it would come to," responded his companion, endeavoring to look philosophical. "Villains are as likely to fall out between themselves as with their pious neighbors; and I have long felt convinced that the mask was doing that which would,

sooner or later, render him obnoxious to the council he has served so many years."

"The order speaks very explicitly," continued the other. "We are to arrest him and commit him to a dungeon of the Inquisition; after which we are to await further orders. What will those further orders be? If I am not much mistaken, he will soon enjoy the death he has meted out to so many others."

"Things do look rather ominous, that's certain," was the reply. "But the arrest—that's what we are ordered to consider. Now let me give you a few ideas on the subject. The order tells us to arrest the man at his house. But there is a better way,—we can arrest him here. You know that he intends to visit one of the prisoners this evening—La Belle Floretta, whom he was the chief instrument of bringing before the Inquisition. He will enter her cell; he will be alone; one man against a hundred we can bring against him. In this way, as desperate a man as he is, we can secure him without much danger of difficulty. How do you like my plan?"

"It is excellent. We will act upon it."

### III.

#### ONLY ANOTHER VICTIM.

O, CHURCH of Rome! Hell of religious bloodhounds! Of thee might Byron have written, "There have been tears and breaking hearts for thee!"

The scene!—the scene! O, I am weary of this monster of cruelty, this "Mother of Harlots," this Babel of human gore, this record of human agony! Weary,—

O, how weary! But a new phase must be added to its horrors.

Go with me. The scene is a dungeon, down deep in the shadows of the Inquisition. There was darkness, and chains, and iron grates, and massive stone walls. And there, too, like an angel in the lowest depths of hell, was a woman—was La Belle Floretta! Gaze not upon her with indifference; it would peril a man's eternal salvation to see her, and realize her wrongs, her agony, and not swear an oath of vengeance! O, is it not a sight to chill the hardest heart? You see how deathly pale she is; you behold the long, bony fingers that are clutching at the bars of the cell-door; you mark the wildly dishevelled hair, the glittering eyes, the look of hopeless misery that shrouds her features; and shudder as you think how much she is changed.

In the dungeon to which she had been remanded from the hall of torture sat the poor girl; not weeping, not praying, yet perchance her thoughts were of heaven! A pearly drop had trickled from each eye, and now stood upon her cheeks, like frozen drops of rain upon a marble image; but those once glorious orbs were tearless now. The time for tears had been,—the time for tears was past! Their fountain was dried up forever! A feverish heat was in her brain, and agony was in her heart. She saw not the bars she had grasped so frenziedly,—felt not her chains!

O, come, darkest night! blow, fiercest wind; there is one who will heed ye not! The "*Holy Catholic Church*" has nearly done its hellish work. It is only one more victim; one more added to the list of millions; one more gentle, trusting, almost angelic soul, added to the numbers

they have sent home as witnesses against them to an outraged God!

A dark form appears at the entrance of the maiden's cell; the door is opened, and the mask of St. Peter's enters. Their eyes meet, — his all burning with hate and with vindictive passion; but she does not start, does not shudder, does not tremble. Once she would have done so, but that hour is past. She does not even express a consciousness of his presence. A moment she stares vacantly upon him; then she looks towards heaven, clasps her thin hands, and, while her lips move in prayer, a faint smile breaks over her features, like sunshine over a waste of stormy waters.

O, what a picture! — what a scene! and what eyes to behold it! A fiend of hell is gazing on an *angel-victim*.

The mask moves forward and touches her snow-white shoulder. She looks up into his face and smiles, — so sweetly, so trustingly; yet it is the smile of a maniac.

The eyes of the maiden are then cast down; they rest upon a dagger in her visitor's belt; and strangely do they sparkle at the sight.

"It is very beautiful!" she murmurs. "Why should its power not be employed? It can clear away these clouds; it can open the way to heaven."

Emboldened by his reception, and not realizing its cause, the mask seats himself beside Floretta, and passes his arm around her waist. Again she looks up into his face and smiles. Her head is resting upon his bosom; her features are upturned to his own, and the smile that rests upon her lips seems — such is the delusion of his passion — to invite his kisses. He bends forward, — is about to bestow these unholy evidences of the feelings that are

reigning in his heart, when he feels the dagger drawn with a quick but steady hand from his belt.

"Woman! — Floretta!" he cries, starting back, with terror depicted upon his countenance, and fearing some personal violence.

But he need not start, — need not fear for his safety. Floretta has indeed secured the weapon; but not to injure or even menace its owner. She smiles again, as she presses the bright blade to her lips, and looks more trustingly, more hopefully, towards heaven. There's not a flush upon her cheeks, — not a breath of excitement in her looks or movements; an expression of unwavering resolution, strange, unnatural calmness, and the placing of the dagger's point against her breast, are all the signs that evince her deadly purpose. Again she kisses the dagger, smiles and looks prayerfully upwards, then murmurs, "Father, Hernaldo, I come!" and drives the weapon home to the hilt in her snow-white bosom.

The warm life-blood of his victim spirts freely forth, drenching the garments of the mask, and almost blinding him; then he shudders, then utters a cry of terror, for he is gazing upon the ghastly features of the dead.

But it is not long that he gives way to these emotions; his stern nature soon resumes its sway; and, as he proceeds to wipe the stains from his cloak, he spurns the body with his foot, and mutters,

"It's only another victim!"

## IV.

## THE MASK ARRESTED.

THE mask then stooped down and picked up the dagger that had consummated the fatal deed — wiped off the blood that had dimmed its lustre, and placed it in its sheath. As he turned away, a number of armed soldiers, under the command of one of the Inquisitor-generals, appeared before the door of the dungeon. They gazed in upon him, and he, in turn, looked to them for an explanation of their sudden appearance. It was soon given.

"Mask of St. Peter's," said the Inquisitor, in a stern and commanding voice, "I arrest you in the name of the Holy Inquisition!"

The mask could scarcely credit his senses, but the truth soon burst upon him in all its vivid reality. He saw that he was caught in a trap from which there was but little possibility of escape. He glanced hastily around, and darted this way and that, in the hope of discovering some outlet by which he could fly; but he soon saw that his efforts were all fruitless. As a last resort, he drew his bloody weapon, placed himself upon the defensive, and replied:

"I know not your authority, nor your means for executing it; but this I *do* know, — the first man that approaches me, or attempts to use violence, shall die!"

The Inquisitor seemed to have expected such a reply, and to have prepared for it; for he simply waved his hand to his followers, and they filed into the cell, holding their drawn swords guardedly before them. The mask was completely surrounded — hemmed in on all sides.

"You see how vain resistance will be," said the Inquisitor, with a quiet smile. "We have come prepared! You know who I am, and from whence my orders come; and you very well know that I have but to say the word, and these men will cut you to pieces in a moment. That word will be given, and quickly, too, unless you surrender at once!"

The mask knew that the resolution of the officer could not be shaken or disregarded. With a curse upon his lips, he dashed his dagger to the floor, and gave himself up to the hands that were ready to pinion him, and bear him before the council of cardinals.

## V.

## THE DENOUEMENT.

HALF an hour later. The mask of St. Peter's was standing in the midst of the council of cardinals. Corneto was there, stern, and determined on the death of the man who had shown how dangerous he was — how deadly he might be. Each and all were unanimous; the mask was condemned to be broken alive on the wheel.

After receiving his sentence, he was asked if he had anything to say in reference to his crimes or his fate.

"A few words; a few words only," and the expression of his dark eyes became more malignant as he spoke. "I have listened to your deliberations; not with fear, for I tell you plainly, my lord cardinals, that the time has not come, *never will* come, when either of you will have authority for harming a hair of my head!"

A sullen gleam was in his eyes, as he folded his arms

upon his breast and gazed calmly around him, to mark the effect of his words.

"I see you are surprised," he continued, "but you need not long remain in doubt as to whether my words are true or not. I stand here condemned, and it now becomes me to speak. You shall know what I know; that ye have been dupes, fools, slaves of an indomitable will, that none of you possess or can understand. I will show you how you have been ruled; how you have been made mere tools in the hands of your master!"

"We will not listen to your vain boastings," said Corneto, sternly. "You have been found guilty and condemned, and shall die within the hour. If you have any last requests to make, now is your time to speak!"

The mask uttered a hoarse laugh, that expressed the most insulting contempt.

"It is strange," observed Corneto, with a puzzled expression of countenance, and speaking to a companion — "very strange that a man who knows certain death is to soon be his lot can be so indifferent to it. How deeply sunken in crime must this man be, how dead to all the common feelings of humanity, when he can stand here, in the presence of our august council, and laugh at us as we pronounce his doom!"

"But you should not wonder at his conduct," was the reply. "He has become perfectly hardened. There is scarce a particle of human feeling in his heart. Think how many assassinations he has committed — how long he has gone on in his career of crime and bloodshed. Think of those he has murdered, — Delano, La Belle Floretta, Montelli —"

"Yes, think of Montelli!" interrupted the mask, as he

darted forward and seized the speaker by the arm, and bent his flashing eyes upon his features. "Think of Montelli, the doom of the traitor, and tremble! I slew him; I have slain others who have plotted against me; and you may each and all have an example of my power before we have parted company. Bethink ye, my lord cardinals, how long is it since you were plotting in secret conclave against the Pope? How long since you determined to establish a system of espionage over him? Ha, ha!" and the mask laughed gleefully. "Ye should all be careful what you do, for you are as open books to Alexander Borgia!"

"Away with him!" shouted Corneto, fiercely. "Listen no longer to his ravings. Away to the wheel!"

The officers darted towards their intended victim. Swords gleamed around him; again he seemed about to be taken prisoner, when he stamped his foot heavily upon the floor; many a door around him was opened, and many an armed soldier entered and rallied before and behind him!

"Back, every one of ye!" exclaimed the mask, to the cardinals and their followers; "back, if you value your lives! Mark me well; behold my men; and know that I am master still!"

"And who, in the name of Heaven," cried the astonished Corneto — "who is the mask of St. Peter's?"

The black mask was torn from the features it had so long concealed; the cloak dropped from his form; and as every eye was fixed upon the face revealed, the lips of each exclaimed:

"'Tis Alexander Borgia!"

## VI.

## A CATHOLIC PRIEST ON CELIBACY AND AURICULAR CONFESSION.

FATHER JANZEN again stood in the presence of Count Luanza.

"Well," said the latter, moodily, "I do not see as we are likely to gain possession of Donna Lucretia's secret. Twice have you called upon her at her residence — twice have I secreted myself to listen to the expected revelations; but not a word has she uttered towards the elucidation of the mystery. How unfortunate it is that she does not have a father-confessor!"

"Do you, then, look upon auricular confession as a blessing?" asked Father Janzen, quietly.

"Most certainly."

The priest shrugged his shoulders, and uttered a dry, mocking laugh.

"Count Luanza," said, he, in reply, "you have made me a particular friend of yours, and I shall so far presume upon this fact as to have a little plain conversation with you on the system of auricular confession; premising, at the start, that I believe it to be one of the greatest social and moral evils there is in existence!"

"What do I hear?" cried the astonished count. "You — *you*, a father-confessor, speaking ill of the confessional!"

"I can do no less, after having had such opportunities of witnessing its effects. My very position has given me cause for hating and detesting it. If you would know a

few of the peculiarities of this institution, allow me the pleasure of pointing them out to you.

"1st. *The Father-confessor*. — He is forbidden to marry, under the pain of excommunication. As a general thing, he is a robust, passionate man, with an eye to admire beauty, and is possessed of all the desires that are inherent to man's nature. He has taken a solemn vow of celibacy; but is he less a man — less susceptible to the influences of beautiful women? For my part, I can imagine no greater hell than the life of a man doomed to perpetual celibacy, if he must still endure the temptations that arouse the desires, the longings, the feelings of admiration, which the sexes are forced to bear each other by the first, the fundamental principle of human nature. Such a life must be to the possessor like the existence of the sinner in the flames of hell, who lifted up his eyes and saw Lazarus afar off, in Abraham's bosom. He is daily tempted to pluck forbidden fruit. Many of those who confess to him are young, lovely, and fascinating. He sees them kneeling before him; he hears them pour forth their little weaknesses, their hopes, their fears, their desires, or the foibles of which they have been guilty; and all this is often told to a young priest, who is not more than five-and-twenty. He beholds their voluptuous forms, their swelling bosoms, their half-inviting blushes, their gentle smiles, and looks of trusting innocence. He feels the soft breath of a lovely young being of seventeen summers on his cheek; he gazes into her eyes; he reads her very soul; and can he withstand all these appeals and invitations for nature to assume its sway? Never, never! I tell you that there is no man living who could be subjected to the temptations of the confessional, for a period of

years, and not yield. Any priest who should attempt fidelity to his vow of celibacy would be in the same position mentally that a man is bodily on the rack. The more beautiful his penitents, the greater would be his proclivity to sin. His mind would be in a continual war between a temptation to partake of the pleasures that invited him and a resolution to abstain. He would be tortured by both in concert. He would become restless and nervous; and in time, if this inhuman war was persisted in, he would become a monomaniac or a madman. No less results could be expected from such an outrage on nature as a life of celibacy. Such a life is antagonistical to the very commands of the Bible; and if you question the morality of this principle, you question alike the wisdom and morality of God!

"2nd. *The Penitent*. — As is very often the case, the penitent is a young and beautiful woman. Accustomed from childhood to the occasional society of the confessor, and taught to believe him the holiest and most worthy of men, her feelings cling to him as naturally as the young ivy to the oak that has sheltered it from the blasts. She does not believe it possible for him to sin, but has implicit faith in his power to pardon every sin she may commit. When she first seeks him in the confessional, she looks up to him as something more than man. She has no secrets that are not revealed to him. He knows her heart, her nature, better than she knows it herself. He has her complete confidence, and often no small share of her love. Insensibly to herself, she is moulded to his wishes. The very questions he asks her in the confessional are such as most readily poison the mind of a young lady. Under the pretence of satisfying himself that she is innocent, he

makes inquiries that are of themselves enough to lead her into guilt. Her heart is filled with new and exciting emotions; and though her womanly pride and self-command may prevent her from giving way to her own inclination, she is readily won by a request from her confessor, and the assurance that compliance with his wishes is not a sin.

"3. *The Security of the Confessional*. — No believer in the Catholic faith would cross a threshold, knowing that a priest was confessing a lady within. Such a proceeding would be deemed sacrilege, or something worse. If a woman is sick, and the priest calls upon her to receive her confession, he has but to leave his sandals before the door of her chamber, and even her husband dare not open it while the holy padre is engaged with the wife. In the confessional there is the utmost security, — not for female purity, but for its destruction. Everything there is made subservient to the wishes of the confessor; and when you have viewed the subject in its true light, you will be convinced that confessionals might justly be designated as a species of houses of ill-fame, for the special accommodation of saintly libertines, ye!pt Catholic priests!

"Such are a few of the facts in reference to celibacy and auricular confessions!"

"Perhaps it is better, then, that Donna Lucretia does not attend the confessional," muttered the count, musingly.

"Far better, I assure you. If you would know what influence a priest possesses over a penitent, listen to me. Not long since, a young lady, who had always been gay and sprightly, became subject to strange fits of melancholy, by which she was so much affected that all of her friends were seriously alarmed for her health and happiness —"



"From your description, one might readily imagine that the lady was Donna Lucretia! But go on!"

"The lady was engaged to be married to a wealthy count, who was rendered very sensitive by the peculiarities of his betrothed. He could not believe her really guilty; but he felt as if he would give half of his fortune to know *who* and *what* he was about to marry."

"Exactly my case in reference to Lucretia!" muttered Count Luanza.

"Under the influences of these feelings, the count determined to gain possession of the fair one's secret, if there was any possibility of doing so. With this intention, he employed a father-confessor to visit the lady, hoping that he would be instrumental in wringing the desired information from her—"

"By heavens! those parties were Donna Lucretia and yourself!—that is, they *might* have been. But proceed."

"There were some secret motives, however, in the conduct of the priest, which the jealous lover did not understand. It so happened that the confessor who was employed to gain possession of the lady's secret had long looked upon this same lady with feelings of the most intense and burning passion! He had seen so much of her beauty and grace, that his admiration ripened into love. He loved her as devotedly, my lord count, as ever you could have done. Loved—but how vainly, hopelessly, despairingly! His very profession prevented him from revealing the thoughts that were consuming him. What could he do? Where could he look for relief? The more he beheld the object of his passion, the stronger did it become. He felt that he was treading on the verge of a frightful abyss; but he could not pause. He was driven

on by all that could drive a man to perdition,—unrequited love. He knew that the lady would scorn him from her presence, if he dared to reveal his passion; he felt assured that the count would deem him traitorous, and a betrayer of the trust reposed in him; but he was in a position where death itself could not have forced him to pause. All barriers were broken down, all reserve was thrown aside, and that gray-haired priest sank down upon his knees before the one he loved so hopelessly, and confessed the passion that had made his life a hell!"

The Count Luanza sprang to his feet, and seized the confessor fiercely by the throat, while he exclaimed,

"And you—*you* were that dog of a confessor, traitor and renegade; and she, the object of your unholy passion, was Lucretia Borgia!"

"You mistake my meaning," gasped Father Janzen. "I was only speaking of a circumstance that had come to my knowledge."

"Forgive me," said the count, releasing his hold. "This jealousy has set me beside myself. I hardly know where I am, or what I am about. My brain grows dizzy,—I am sick at heart. I will seek the open air, until I have recovered from this sudden indisposition!" and, as he spoke, he quickly passed from the apartment.

The priest gazed after him with a look of almost infernal subtlety and exultation, as he muttered,

"How easy it is for one who is master of his own mind to play upon the feelings of others! A few words of mine have brought the count under the influence of feelings he will not be able to banish to-night. But, let me see; the hour has arrived in which I am to meet Donna Lucretia. I must away to the confessional!"

## VII.

## THE TEMPTATION AND FALL.

STILL stranger than the concluding words of the priest was the fact that in ten minutes from the moment of their utterance he stood in the confessional of the church of San Benito.

"It is strange how deeply I love that woman," he soliloquized, as he threw himself into a chair. "The feelings I bear her have been so restricted, so influenced by circumstances, that they rule me with all the power of a monomania. But, hist! Agreeably to her promise, the lady is here!"

As he ceased speaking, Lucretia Borgia crossed the threshold of the confessional. There was an anxious look upon her features, — one that gave them an almost stern expression.

"Father Janzen," said she, as she seated herself beside him, "you doubtless know that the purpose of this visit is to speak of your love."

"Then I shall be so happy!" murmured Father Janzen, as a flush swept over his features. The dark eyes of his visitor were instantly bent upon him.

"Father Janzen," she observed, with a strange sternness of manner, "have I not told you that these expressions of your passion are disagreeable to me?"

"I know it, I know it," replied the wretched man, with a look of hopeless despair and misery; "but how can I command myself when in your presence? How can I gaze upon your beauteous features, your sparkling eyes, your lovely form, and not feel swayed by the power of the passion that has taken complete possession of my heart?"

"Are you sure that you love me so deeply, so devotedly?" asked Donna Lucretia, as a singular smile passed over her face.

"Love? Lady, priest though I am, anchorite though I should be, I love you better than I do my God! There is nothing I would not do to prove my affection —"

The hand of the lady was on his arm; her eyes were bent sternly on his own, as she repeated, inquiringly,

"Nothing?"

"Again I affirm it! For thee I would forego the joys of the brightest heaven mortal ever dreamed of, — for thee I would consign myself to an eternal hell! O, lady, you do not know how deeply every thought and faculty of my soul is swayed by the love I bear you!"

"And you will obey my greatest request; you will fulfil the most difficult conditions I can propose to you, as the price of the love and the pleasures you would enjoy with me?"

"I will!"

"Dare you swear it?"

"By the sacredness of all things pure and holy, I swear to do your bidding! But let the pledge be mutual. Swear to me that if I obey you in all things you will be wholly mine!"

And quickly, sternly came the reply,

"By all I have lost, and by all the revenge I hope for, I swear to be yours, yours alone, and wholly yours, body and soul, now and forever!"

The priest clasped her in his arms as she spoke, his eyes meeting her own with a look of burning passion.

"A kiss," he cried, "a kiss to seal our agreement!"

"Here it is, — another, — ay, a dozen," was the reply

of the woman, as she kissed him with a strange fervency of manner, again and again.

"There is nothing I will not do for thee, if you will only do my bidding!"

"Speak, command me as you will. I am ready to obey!"

"Then, attend my wedding at the palace of the Borgias!" exclaimed the excited woman, as a gleam of infernal exultation appeared in her eyes. "Go at once! You have said that you would obey my commands, — I have but one command to give; and that is, attend this wedding, join in the revelry, drink and make merry with the other guests, *and poison Alexander Borgia!*"

The priest started as if he had trodden on a deadly reptile.

"Poison the Pope!" he gasped. "It is asking too much of me!"

"But think of your love, — your promise. You have sworn to obey my orders. Break not that oath, as you hope for happiness here or hereafter!"

"It is too fearful, too dangerous a deed —"

"Think of her whom you will serve; think of the arms that are now thrown around your neck; think of the kisses that are now rained in showers on your cheeks; think of the joys unutterable that await you in my warm embrace, and *dare and do!*"

"No more, no more!" cried the passion-tortured confessor, as he strained the temptress to his heart. "My word is pledged, — it shall not be broken. Show me the means, — point out the course I am to take; *I'll do the deed!*"

## VIII.

## THE MARRIAGE.

FROM the arms of Father Janzen to the bridal altar, — it was a fitting change for Lucretia Borgia!

The palace of the Borgias was brilliantly lighted. Thrilling strains of music, merry voices, silvery laughter, and sparkling jests, were all commingled in the richly-perfumed halls. The gorgeous parlors were thronged with guests, — among them Corneto and the cardinals, and many of the other dignitaries of the church.

The hour for the performance of the marriage ceremony had arrived. All present were eager to witness it, for they knew it was no common occurrence that had thus called them together, and as well knew that it would be succeeded by no common revel.

The Pope was there, clad in his richest robes, and surrounded by his friends. He had given orders for the most extensive preparations for the supper. Most of the delicacies of the land and the sea were to be served up in the choicest style of the culinary art, and with an accompaniment of the richest wines and liquors the Old World could produce. As was usual on such occasions, it was Borgia's intention, and the entertainment was so understood by most of the guests, that the proceedings of the evening should be concluded by a perfect pandemonium of the most reckless licentiousness and beastly debauchery; and hence they were not surprised to see that a large number of the most beautiful courtesans of Rome had been invited, and were present, freely mingling with the richest and most respectable ladies in the land, — for such was one of the characteristics of the age of the Borgias. They were

dressed in a manner that was calculated to heighten the fascinations of their persons, and many an admiring glance and many a whisper of commendation was bestowed upon them by the saintly fathers of the church who had honored the occasion with their presence.

We shall not speak at length of the marriage ceremony, — how Donna Lucretia stood before the priest, pale and anxious, while he pronounced the words that made her the wife of Count Luanza. We shall not pause upon her appearance, or the thoughts that reigned in her heart, — nor shall we dwell upon the hopes and fears of the count himself, as he uttered the vows that made him the husband of Lucretia Borgia. We leave all this to the imagination of the reader, — pass over the greetings and congratulations that succeeded the announcement of their being man and wife, and change the scene to the supper-table of the bridal party.

## IX.

### THE POISON.

"FILL up, fill to the brim!" cried Alexander Borgia, in his happiest voice, from the head of the table that stood in the centre of the magnificent dining-hall. "Let pleasure reign in every heart, and the sparkling wine go round."

"Ay, ay," responded Corneto, who was seated by the side of the Pope, and whose glass had already been several times filled and drained. "Behold the rich color of our wine, the beauty of our many charmers, and let the sight be as an exorcist for every ill the human mind can feel."

"Right, Cardinal Corneto," rejoined Borgia, as he filled his glass. "I'll pledge you for that sentiment;" and, after touching glasses, both drank.

"It is nearly time to administer the poison," added the Pope, *sotto voce*, as he observed the flush upon the cardinal's features. "But, first — more wine — more excitement! What, ho! Prato, bring more wine — *the wine!*"

The servant understood the significant look with which the words were accompanied. In a moment, the bottle of wine which was supposed by Borgia to contain poison was placed in his hand.

"Here, Corneto; here is wine of a glorious brand," said the Pope, "the quality of which we will discuss together. Fill the cardinal's glass, Prato; fill to the brim."

The order was obeyed. The servant filled Corneto's glass from the wine that was supposed to be poisoned, then dexterously set the bottle aside, and filled his master's glass from one that resembled it.

"Your health," cried the Pope, and the glasses were drained.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Borgia, as he started to his feet, "I have him in my toils."

"What! does your eminence leave us so suddenly?" asked Father Janzen. "Will you not pledge me in a single glass before you go?"

"Willingly!" was the reply, as the Pope again took his seat at the table. "Name the wine you will drink; I will join you."

The priest nodded to a servant whom he had employed and instructed to wait upon him on this occasion. That

personage immediately produced a bottle of wine bearing an antique seal, drew the cork, and poured out two glasses.

"You are sure that it does not contain poison?" observed Borgia, with a careless laugh.

"So sure, that I am not afraid of it myself," replied the priest, as he glanced a short distance down the table, and exchanged a significant look with Donna Lucretia.

"Then, here goes!" The parties touched glasses, and the Pope drained the one he held at a single draught; but Father Janzen shuddered as the wine touched his lips. And well he might; he knew that it contained a deadly poison.

"Why do you wait?" muttered the Pope, suspiciously. "You start as if it were a potion of poison instead of rich and rosy wine."

"Do I?" said the priest. A glance from Donna Lucretia assured him. He saw her clutch a small vial between her fingers, beheld her lips move, and fancied that he heard them whisper, in a voice that seemed unearthly, it was so low and ominous,

"*The antidote!*"

"Ay, the antidote; that will save me," was the thought that took possession of his heart; and he drained his glass.

At this moment sounds of confusion were heard at the door of the hall. A person was endeavoring to effect his entrance; the servants were endeavoring to oppose him. But the intruder was not to be stayed; his strong arms hurled all aside who ventured to stand in his path; and, a moment later, Borgia started to his feet, uttering a cry of alarm, and unsheathing a sword he wore.

For Hernaldo Zinna stood before him!

## X.

## THE MADMAN'S MYSTERY.

HERNALDO ZINNA, the madman!

Well might the Pope shudder at beholding his victim, for he presented a terrible appearance. His features were pale and haggard, and rendered still more wild in their expression by the long, dark hair that was matted around them in repulsive disorder. His eyes gleamed restlessly in their sockets, like beacon-lights swinging to and fro in gloomy caverns; and they were now fixed earnestly upon the face of Borgia, while a smile of exultation flitted over the countenance of their possessor.

"Pope of Rome," said Zinna, "I have come to tell ye that I am fearfully avenged! I have come to tell ye that ye are standing on the verge of a mighty cataract, from the brow of which the waters of life are stretching away to eternal darkness and oblivion! I have looked beyond this hour to the future, and seen such sights as mortal eyes have seldom seen. This fearful gift of madness has lifted the sable veil that is drawn across the borders that separate the things of the present from those that are to come; and I have read a tale that none of earth shall read without a shudder. I have seen a father laying plans to ruin his own daughter; I have seen as lovely a being as ever was shone upon by the sunlight of heaven made the victim of a father's unholy passion; and I have seen that woman achieve a terrible revenge, by poisoning her sire."

There were three persons in the group who were rendered terribly excited by the words of the madman,—

Borgia, Count Luanza, and Lucretia Borgia. They all surrounded him.

The madman turned to the count.

"To you," said he, as he laid his hand upon his arm, "I can only express my regrets that you have been so fearfully deceived. The woman you have married has been the mistress of her own father."

"Liar!" and the count struck him to the floor as he spoke. "One word more against my wife, and you shall die!"

"My words are true. Nor have I told thee all her crimes. Even now, this very hour, she has administered poisoned wine to Alexander Borgia."

The Pope turned deathly pale at this announcement, and his limbs trembled beneath him. It was no ordinary fear that now took possession of his mind. He felt assured, by the almost devilish look of triumph that rested upon the features of Zinna, that he had told the truth; but yet he did not know how he had become cognizant of it; it was a madman's mystery.

"Fiend — devil in the guise of woman!" he cried, "has this man spoken the truth?"

"Ay, as truly as that you are now alive! Alexander Borgia, Pope of Rome, you have taken the most deadly poison of the Borgias — ay, the very wine you so carefully prepared for Cardinal Corneto!"

## XI.

## CONCLUSION.

THE madman had gone as suddenly as he came — no one knew when or where; but it was evident that the words he had uttered were words of truth, terrible truth.

It was a singular tableau, that formed by the principal characters he left behind him, — the Pope, on whose mind was just beginning to flash, like lightning over a stormy waste of waters, the terrible consciousness that he had been poisoned; Count Luanza, upon whose jealous mind was just dawning the conviction that the woman he had wed, and the one he loved so devotedly, was entirely unworthy of his affection; Donna Lucretia, whose pale face was wreathed with a smile of triumph; and Father Janzen, who had arisen from the table, and came forward to her side, and was secretly endeavoring to remind her, by means of glances and pantomimical gestures, that he desired the antidote to the poison he had taken.

"Beautiful devil! She has spoken the truth. I am indeed poisoned; I can feel it in every vein. But the antidote — the antidote —"

"Is here!" cried Donna Lucretia, as she drew a vial from her bosom and held it up to the light. "Here it is; but it is not for thee. There is only enough for *one*!"

"Give it to me!" cried Father Janzen, as he darted towards her. "You said that you would save my life, — that you would not let me die!"

"Nor will I. Lucretia Borgia never will forget a wrong, or break a promise. Here — drink and be saved!"

Borgia darted hastily forward to secure the antidote for

himself; but he was too late. Lucretia drew her dagger, and placed herself before him, while Father Janzen drained the vial of its contents.

"I see how it is!" cried Borgia, furiously. "Both of you have plotted against me, and it was through Father Janzen that the poison was given me. Dog! you shall die for this!"

The infuriated man was endowed with an almost superhuman strength by the desperation of the moment. He hurled Donna Lucretia from his path as if she had been a mere child, and, an instant later, stood face to face with Father Janzen, with his dagger in his grasp.

The struggle that ensued was short, but terrible. The priest had seen his antagonist approaching, and saw that there was no resource for him but to draw and defend himself. He drew a heavy knife, one he had carried for many years, and warded off the furious blow that was aimed at his heart; and then the struggle of life and death was fairly begun.

And finished almost as soon as begun, — and fatally!

For each had sheathed his weapon in the other's bosom!

"I die," cried Borgia, as he sank back in death, with the warm blood gushing in torrents from the wound, "I die, but not alone. The traitor is with me, and I am content!"

They were the last words of Alexander Borgia; for even as they were finished his spirit left its earthly tenement forever.

"Dead?" gasped Father Janzen, inquiringly, as he turned over on his side, and gazed towards his late enemy with a look that seemed to have lost none of its philosoph-

ical calmness. "Dead? Then I have no cause to complain of fate, even if I do not survive this wound!"

"Your hand," cried Donna Lucretia to her husband, who now stood beside her. "You now know what my crimes are and have been; and if you are ready to accept me as I am, I swear to be to you all you could ask a wife to be! Your hand! and even here, while I can gaze upon the features of the dead, and say that I am avenged. Your hand — shall I have it here, alike for the present moment and all coming time?"

Slowly, moodily, and with an evident effort of his mind, the count extended his hand.

"O, thanks," cried the woman, as she seized it, and covered it with her kisses. "Now that you have received me as your wife, I shall indeed be happy, for here are ended 'THE CRIMES OF ALEXANDER BORGIA.'"

THE END.

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