

The Risen Dead

By Max Pemberton

I

The sun was setting on the second day of June, in the year 1701, when Pietro Falier, the Captain of the Police of Venice, quitted his office in the Piazzetta of St. Mark and set out, alone, for the Palace of Frà Giovanni, the Capuchin friar, who lived over on the Island of the Guidecca.

“I shall return in an hour,” he said to his subordinate as he stepped into the black gondola which every Venetian knew so well. “If any has need of me, I am at the house of Frà Giovanni.”

The subordinate saluted, and returned slowly toward the Ducal palace. He was thinking that his Captain went overmuch just then to the house of that strange friar who had come to Venice so mysteriously, and so mysteriously had won the favour of the republic.

“Saint John!” he muttered to himself, “that we should dance attendance on a shaven crown,—we, who were the masters of the city a year ago! What is the Captain thinking of? Are we all women, then, or have women plucked our brains that it should be Frà Giovanni this and Frà Giovanni that, and your tongue snapped off if you so much as put a question. To the devil with all friars, say I.”

The good fellow stopped a moment in his walk to lay the flat of his sword across the shoulders of a mountebank, who had dared to remain seated at the door of his booth while so great a person passed. Then he returned to his office, and whispered in the ear of his colleague the assurance that the Captain was gone again to the island of the Jews, and that his business was with the friar.

“And look you, Michele,” said he, “it is neither to you nor to me that he comes nowadays. Not a whisper of it, as I live, except to this friar, whom I could crush between my fingers as a glass ball out of Murano.”

His colleague shook his head.

“There have been many,” said he, “who have tried to crush Frà Giovanni. They grin between the bars of dungeons, my friend,—at least, those who have heads left to grin with. Be warned of me, and make an ally of the man who has made an ally of Venice. The Captain knows well what he is doing. If he has gone to the priest’s house now, it is that the priest may win rewards for us again, as he has won them already a hundred times.”

He spoke earnestly, though, in truth, his guess was not a good one. The Captain of the Police had not gone to the Island of the Guidecca to ask a service of the friar; he had gone, as he thought, to save the friar’s life. At the moment when his subordinates were wagging their heads together, he himself stood in the priest’s house, before the very table at which Frà Giovanni sat busy with his papers and his books.

“I implore you to listen to me, Prince!” he had just exclaimed very earnestly, as he repeated the news for the second time, and stood clamorous for the answer to his question.

The friar, who was dressed in the simple habit of the Capuchins, and who wore his cowl over his head so that only his shining black eyes could be seen, put down his pen when he heard himself addressed as “Prince.”

“Captain,” he said sharply, “who is this person you come here to warn? You speak of him as ‘Prince.’ It is some other, then, and not myself?”

The Captain bit his lip. He was one of the four in Venice who knew something of Frà Giovanni's past.

"Your Excellency's pardon," he exclaimed very humbly; "were we not alone, you would find me more discreet. I know well that the Prince of Iseo is dead,—in Venice at least. But to Frà Giovanni, his near kinsman, I say beware, for there are those here who have sworn he shall not live to say Mass again."

For an instant a strange light came into the priest's eyes. But he gave no other sign either of surprise or of alarm.

"They have sworn it—you know their names, then, Captain?"

"The police do not concern themselves with names, Excellency."

"Which means that you do not know their names, Captain?"

Pietro Falier sighed. This friar never failed to humble him, he thought. If it were not for the honours which the monk had obtained for the police since he began his work in Venice, the Captain said that he would not lift a hand to save him from the meanest bravo in Italy.

"You do not know their names, Captain—confess, confess," continued the priest, raising his hand in a bantering gesture; "you come to me with some gossip of the bed-chamber, your ears have been open in the market-place, and this tittle-tattle is your purchase—confess, confess."

The Captain flushed as he would have done before no other in all Venice.

"I do not know their names, Excellency," he stammered; "it is gossip from the *bravo's* kitchen. They say that you are to die before Mass to-morrow. I implore you not to leave this house to-night. We shall know how to do the rest if you will but remain indoors."

It was an earnest entreaty, but it fell upon deaf ears. The priest answered by taking a sheet of paper and beginning to write upon it.

"I am indebted to you, Signor Falier," said he, quietly, "and you know that I am not the man to forget my obligations. None the less, I fear that I must disregard your warning, for I have an appointment in the market to-night, and my word is not so easily broken. Let me reassure you a little. The news that you bring to me, and for which I am your debtor, was known to me three days ago. Here upon this paper I have written down the name of the woman and of her confederates who have hired the *bravo* Roeca to kill me to-night in the shadow of the church of San Salvatore. You will read that paper and the woman's name—when you have my permission."

Falier stepped back dumb with amazement. "The woman's name, Excellency," he repeated, so soon as his surprise permitted him to speak, "you know her, then?"

"Certainly, or how could I write it upon the paper?"

"But you will give that paper to me, here and now. Think, Excellency, if she is your enemy, she is the enemy also of Venice. What forbids that we arrest her at once? You may not be alive at dawn!"

"In which case," exclaimed the priest, satirically, "the Signori of the Night would be well able to answer for the safety of the city. Is it not so, Captain?"

Falier stammered an excuse.

"We have not your eyes, Excellency; we cannot work miracles—but at least we can try to protect you from the hand of the assassin. Name this woman to me, and she shall not live when midnight strikes."

Frà Giovanni rose from his chair and put his hand gently upon the other's shoulder.

"Signor Falier," said he, "if I told you this woman's name here and now as you ask, the feast of Corpus Christi might find a new Doge in Venice."

“You say, Excellency—?”

“That the city is in danger as never she was before in her history.”

“And your own life?”

“Shall be given for Venice if necessary. Listen to this: you seek to be of service to me. Have you any plan?”

“No plan but that which posts guards at your door and keeps you within these walls—“

“That the enemies of Venice may do their work. Is that your reason, Signor Falier?”

“I have no other reason, Excellency, but your own safety and that of the city.”

“I am sure of it, Captain, and being sure I am putting my life in your hands tonight—”

“To-night; we are to follow you to the Merceria, then?”

“Not at all; say rather that you are to return to the palace and to keep these things so secret that even the Council has no word of them. But, at ten o’clock, take twenty of your best men and let your boat lie in the shadow of the church of San Luca until I have need of you. You understand, Captain Falier?”

Falier nodded his head and replied vaguely. Truth to tell, he understood very little beyond this,—that the friar had been before him once more, and that he could but follow as a child trustingly. And the city was in danger! His heart beat quick when he heard the words.

“Excellency,” he stammered, “the boat shall be there—at ten o’clock—in the shadow of the church of San Luca. But first—”

“No,” said the priest, quickly, “we have done with our firstly—and your gondola waits, I think, signorè!”

II

The bells of the Chapel of St. Mark were striking the hour of eight o’clock, when Frà Giovanni stepped from his gondola, and crossed the great square towards that labyrinth of narrow streets and winding alleys they call the Merceria.

The Piazza itself was then ablaze with the light of countless lamps; dainty lanterns, coloured as the rainbow, swayed to the soft breeze between the arches of the colonnade. Nobles were seated at the doors of the splendid cafés; the music of stringed instruments mingled with the louder, sweeter music of the bells; women, whose jewels were as sprays of flame, many-hued and dazzling, hung timidly upon the arms of lovers; gallants swaggered in costly velvets and silks which were the spoil of the generous East; even cassocked priests and monks in their sombre habits passed to and fro amidst that glittering throng, come out to herald the glory of a summer’s night.

And clear and round, lifting themselves up through the blue haze to the silent world of stars above, were the domes and cupolas of the great chapel itself,—the chapel which, through seven centuries, had been the city’s witness to the God who had made her great, and who would uphold her still before the nations.

The priest passed through the crowd swiftly, seeming to look neither to the right nor to the left. The brown habit of the Capuchins was his dress, and his cowl was drawn so well over his head that only his eyes were visible,—those eyes which stand out so strangely in the many portraits which are still the proud possession of Venice. Though he knew well that an assassin waited for him in the purlieu of the church of San Salvatore, his step was quick and brisk; he walked as a man who goes willingly to a rendezvous, and anticipates its climax with pleasure. When he had left the great square with its blaze of lanterns and its babel of tongues, and had begun to thread

the narrow streets by which he would reach the bridge of the Rialto, a smile played for a moment about his determined mouth, and he drew his capuce still closer over his ears.

“So it is Rocca whom they send,—Rocca, the poltroon! Surely there is the hand of God in this.”

He raised his eyes for a moment to the starlit heaven, and then continued his brisk walk. His way lay through winding alleys; over bridges so narrow that two men could not pass abreast; through passages where rogues lurked, and repulsive faces were thrust grinning into his own. But he knew the city as one who had lived there all his life; and for the others, the thieves and scum of Venice, he had no thought. Not until he came out before the church of Santa Maria Formosa did he once halt or look behind him. The mystery of the night was a joy to him. Even in the shadow of the church, his rest was but for a moment; and, as he rested, the meaning smile hovered again upon his wan face.

“The play begins,” he muttered, while he loosened slightly the girdle of his habit and thrust his right hand inside it; “the God of Venice give me courage.”

A man was following him now,—he was sure of it. He had seen him as he turned to cross the bridge which would set him on the way to the church of San Salvatore,—a short, squat man, masked and dressed from head to foot in black. Quick as the movements of the fellow were, dexterous his dives into porches and the patches of shadow which the eaves cast, the priest’s trained eye followed his every turn, numbered, as it were, the very steps he took. And the smile upon Frà Giovanni’s face was fitful no more. He walked as a man who has a great jest for his company.

“Rocca the fool, and alone! They pay me a poor compliment, those new friends of mine; but we shall repay, and the debt will be heavy.”

He withdrew his hand from his habit, where it had rested upon the hilt of a dagger, for he knew that he had no need of any weapon. His gait was quick and careless; he stopped often to peer into some windowless shop where a sickly lamp burned before the picture of a saint; and wares, which had not tempted a dead generation, appealed unavailingly to a living one. The idea that his very merriment might cost him his life never entered his head. He played with the assassin as a cat with a mouse, now tempting him to approach, now turning suddenly, and sending him helter-skelter into the door of a shop or the shadow of a bridge. He was sure of his man, and that certainty was a delight to him.

“If it had been any other but Rocca the clown!” he said to himself, his thoughts ever upon the jest; “surely we shall know what to say to him.”

He had come almost to the church of San Salvatore by this time. His walk had carried him out to the bank of a narrow, winding canal, at whose quays once-splendid gondolas were rotting in neglect. It seemed to him that here was the place where his tactics might well be changed and the *rôle* of the hunted put aside for that of the hunter. Quick to act, he stepped suddenly behind one of the great wooden piles driven into the quay for the warping of barges. The *bravo*, who did not perceive that he had been detected, and who could not account for the sudden disappearance of his prey, came straight on, his cloak wrapped about his face, his naked sword in his hand. The wage would be earned easily that night, he was telling himself. No one would miss a beggarly monk—and he, Rocca, must live. A single blow, struck to the right side of the back, and then—and then—

This pleasant anticipation was cut short abruptly by the total disappearance of the man whose death was a preliminary to the wage he anticipated so greedily. Mystified beyond measure, he let his cloak fall back again, and began to peer into the shadows as though some miracle had been

wrought and the priest carried suddenly from earth to that heaven whither he had meant to send him so unceremoniously.

“Blood of Paul!” he exclaimed angrily, turning about and about again, “am I losing my eyes? A plague upon the place and the shadows.”

He stamped his foot impotently, and was about to run back by the way he had come when a voice spoke in the shadows; and at the sound of the voice, the sword fell from the man’s hand and he reeled back as from a blow.

“Rocca Zicani, the Prince is waiting for you.”

The assassin staggered against the door of a house, and stood there as one paralysed. He had heard those words once before in the dungeons of Naples. They had been spoken by the Inquisitors who came to Italy with one of the Spanish princes. Instantly he recalled the scene where first he had listened to them,—the dungeon draped in black; the white-hot irons which had seared his flesh; the rack which had maimed his limbs, the masked men who had tortured him.

“Great God!” he moaned, “not that—not that—”

The priest stepped from the shadows and stood in a place where the feeble light of an oil lamp could fall upon his face. The laugh hovered still about his lips. He regarded the trembling man with a contempt he would not conceal.

“Upon my word, Signor Rocca,” he exclaimed, “this is a poor welcome to an old friend.”

The *bravo*, who had fallen on his knees, for he believed that a trick had again delivered him into the hands of his enemies, looked up at the words, and stared at the monk as at an apparition.

“Holy Virgin!” he cried, “it is the Prince of Iseo.”

The priest continued in the jester’s tone:

“As you say, old comrade, the Prince of Iseo. Glory to God for the good fortune which puts you in my path to-night! Oh, you are very glad to see me, Signor Rocca, I’ll swear to that. What, the fellow whom my hands snatched from the rack in the house of the Duke of Naples—has he no word for me? And he carries his naked sword in his hand; he has the face of a woman and his knees tremble. What means this?”

He had seemed to speak in jest, but while the cowed man was still kneeling before him, he, of a sudden, struck the sword aside, and, stooping, he gripped the *bravo* by the throat and dragged him from the shelter of the porch to the water’s edge. As iron were the relentless hands; the man’s eyes started from his head, the very breath seemed to be crushed out of him in the grip of the terrible priest.

“Signor Rocca, what means this?” the friar repeated. “A naked sword in your hand and sweat upon your brow. Oh, oh! a tale, indeed! Shall I read it to you, or shall I raise my voice and fetch those who will read it for me,—those who have the irons heated, and the boot so made for your leg that no last in Italy shall better it. Speak, rascal, shall I read you the tale?”

“Mercy, Prince, for the love of God!”

The priest released the pressure of his hands and let the other sink at his feet.

“Who sent you, rogue?” he asked. “Who pays your wage?”

“I dare not tell you, Excellency.”

“Dare not! *you* dare not,—you, whom a word will put to torture greater than any you have dreamed of in your worst agonies; *you* dare not.”

“Excellency, the Countess of Treviso; I am her servant.”

“And the man who sent her to the work—his name?”

“Andrea, Count of Pisa, Excellency.” The priest stepped back as one whose curiosity was entirely satisfied.

“Ah! I thought so. And the price they paid you, knave?”

“Forty silver ducats, Excellency.”

“Ho, ho! so that is the price of a friar in Venice.”

The *bravo* sought to join in the jest. “Had they known it was the Prince of Iseo, it had been a hundred thousand, Excellency.”

Frà Giovanni did not listen to him. His quick brain was solving a strange problem,—the problem of the price that these people, in their turn, should pay to Venice. When he had solved it, he turned to the cringing figure at his feet.

“Signor Rocca,” he said, “do you know of what I am thinking?”

“Of mercy, Excellency; of mercy for one who has not deserved it.”

“But who can deserve it?”

“Excellency, hearken to me. I swear by all the saints—”

“In whose name you blaspheme, rascal. Have I not heard your oath in Naples when the irons seared your flesh? Shall I listen again when the fire is being made ready, and there is burning coal beneath the bed you will lie upon to-night, Signor Rocca?”

“Oh! for God’s sake, Excellency!”

“Not so; for the sake of Venice, rather.”

“I will be your slave—I swear it on the cross—I will give my life—”

“Your precious life, Signor Rocca!—nay, what a profligate you are!”

Frà Giovanni’s tone, perhaps, betrayed him. The trembling man began to take heart a little.

“Prove me, Excellency,” he whined; “prove me here and now.”

The friar made a pretence of debating it. After a little spell of silence he bade the other rise.

“Come,” he said, “your legs catch cold, my friend, and will burn slowly. Stretch them here upon the Campo while I ask you some questions. And remember, for every lie you tell me there shall be another wedge in the boot you are about to wear. You understand that, signorè?”

“Excellency, the man that could lie to the Prince of Iseo has yet to be born.”

It was a compliment spoken from the very heart; but the priest ignored it.

“Let us not speak of others, but of you and your friends. And, firstly, of the woman who sent you. She is now—”

“In the Palazzo Pisani waiting news of you.”

“You were to carry that news to her?”

“And to receive my wage, Excellency. But I did not know what work it was—Holy God, I would not have come for—”

Frà Giovanni cut him short with a gesture of impatience.

“Tell me,” he exclaimed, “the Count of Pisa, is he not the woman’s lover?”

“They say so, signorè.”

“And he is at her house to-night?” The man shook his head. “Before Heaven, I do not know, Excellency. An hour ago, he sat at a café in the great square.”

“And the woman—was she alone when you left her?”

There were three with her to sup.”

The priest nodded his head.

“It is good!” he said; “we shall even presume to sup with her.”

“To sup with her—but they will kill you, Excellency!”

“Ho, ho! see how this assassin is concerned for my life.”

“Certainly I am. Have you not given me mine twice? I implore you not to go to the house—”

He would have said more, but the splash of an oar in the narrow canal by which they walked cut short his entreaties. A gondola was approaching them; the cry of the gondolier, awakening echoes beneath the eaves of the old houses, gave to Era Giovanni that inspiration he had been seeking now for some minutes.

“Rocca Zicani,” he exclaimed, standing suddenly as the warning cry, “*Stalè*,” became more distinct, “I am going to put your professions to the proof.”

“Excellency, I will do anything—”

“Then, if you would wake to-morrow with a head upon your shoulders, enter that gondola, and go back to those who sent you. Demand your wage of them—”

“But, Excellency—”

“Demand your wage of them,” persisted the priest, sternly, “and say that the man who was their enemy lies dead before the church of San Salvatore. You understand me?”

A curious look came into the *bravo*'s eyes.

“Saint John!” he cried, “that I should have followed such a one as you, Excellency!”

But the priest continued warningly:

“As you obey, so hope for the mercy of Venice. You deal with those who know how to reward their friends and to punish their enemies. Betray us, and I swear that no death in all Italy shall be such a death as you will die at dawn to-morrow.”

He raised his voice, and summoned the gondolier to the steps of the quay. The *bravo* threw himself down upon the velvet cushions with the threat still ringing in his ears.

“Excellency,” he said, “I understand. They shall hear that you are dead.”

III

Frà Giovanni stepped from his gondola, and stood at the door of the Palazzo Pisani exactly at a quarter to ten o'clock. Thirty minutes had passed since he had talked with the *bravo*, Rocca, and had put him to the proof. The time was enough, he said; the tale would have been told, the glad news of his own death already enjoyed by those who would have killed him.

Other men, perhaps, standing there upon the threshold of so daring an emprise, would have known some temptation of fear or hesitation in such a fateful moment; but the great Capuchin friar neither paused nor hesitated. That strange confidence in his own mission, his belief that God had called him to the protection of Venice, perchance even a personal conceit in his own skill as a swordsman, sent him hurrying to the work. It was a draught of life to him to see men tremble at his word; the knowledge which treachery poured into his ear was a study finer than that of all the manuscripts in all the libraries of Italy. And he knew that he was going to the Palazzo Pisani to humble one of the greatest in the city,—to bring the sons of Princes on their knees before him.

There were many lights in the upper storeys of the great house, but the ground floor, with its barred windows and cell-like chambers, was unlighted. The priest saw horrid faces grinning through the bars; the faces of fugitives, fleeing the justice of Venice, outcasts of the city, murderers. But these outcasts, in their turn, were silent when they saw who came to the house, and they spoke of the strange guest in muted exclamations of surprise and wonder.

“Blood of Paul! do you see that? It is the Capuchin himself and alone. Surely there will be work to do anon.”

“Ay, but does he come alone? Saint John! I would sooner slit a hundred throats than have his shadow fall on me. Was it not he that hanged Orso and the twelve! A curse upon the day he came to Venice.

So they talked in whispers, but the priest had passed already into the great hall of the palace and was speaking to a lackey there.

“My friend,” he said, “I come in the name of the Signori. If you would not hear from them tomorrow, announce me to none.”

The lackey drew back, quailing before the threat.

“Excellency,” he exclaimed, “I am but a servant—”

“And shall find a better place as you serve Venice faithfully.”

He passed on with noiseless steps, mounting the splendid marble staircase upon which the masterpieces of Titian and of Paolo Veronese looked down. At the head of the stairs, there was a painted door, which he had but to open to find himself face to face with those who were still telling each other that he was dead.

For an instant, perhaps, a sense of the danger of his mission possessed him. He knew well that one false step, one word undeliberated, would be paid for with his own blood. But even in the face of this reckoning he did not hesitate. He was there to save Venice from her enemies; the God of Venice would protect him. And so without word or warning, he opened the door and stood, bold and unflinching, before those he had come to accuse.

There were four at table, and one was a woman. The priest knew her well. She had been called the most beautiful woman in Venice,—Catherine, Countess of Treviso. Still young, with a face which spoke of ambition and of love, her white neck glittered with the jewels it carried, her dress of blue velvet was such a dress as only a noblewoman of Venice could wear. A queenly figure, the friar said, yet one he would so humble presently that never should she hold up her head again.

As for the others, the men who had cloaked conspiracy with a woman’s smile, he would know how to deal with them. Indeed, when he scanned their faces and began to remember the circumstances under which he had met them before, his courage was strengthened, and he forgot that he had ever reasoned with it.

He stood in the shadows; but the four, close in talk, and thinking that a lackey had entered the room, did not observe him. They were laughing merrily at some jest, and filling the long goblets with the golden wine of Cyprus, when at last he strode out into the light and spoke to them. His heart beat quickly; he knew that this might be the hour of his death, yet never had his voice been more sonorous or more sure.

“Countess,” he exclaimed, as he stepped boldly to the table and confronted them, “I bring you a message from Andrea, the lord of Pisa!”

He had expected that the woman would cry out, or that the men would leap to their feet and draw their swords; but the supreme moment passed and no one spoke. A curious silence reigned in the place. From without there floated up the gay notes of a gondolier’s carol. The splash of oars was heard, and the low murmur of voices. But within the room you could have counted the tick of a watch—almost the beating of a man’s heart. And the woman was the first to find her tongue. She had looked at the friar as she would have looked at the risen dead; but, suddenly, with an effort which brought back the blood to her cheeks, she rose from her scat and began to speak.

“Who are you?” she asked; “and why do you come to this house?”

Era Giovanni advanced to the table so that they could see his face.

“Signora,” he said, “the reason of my coming to this house I have already told you. As to your other question, I am the Capuchin friar, Giovanni, whom you desired your servant Rocca to kill at the church of San Salvatore an hour ago.

The woman sank back into the chair; the blood left her face; she would have swooned had not curiosity proved stronger than her terror.

“The judgment of God!” she cried.

Again, for a spell, there was silence in the room. The priest stood at the end of the table telling himself that he must hold these four in talk until the bells of San Luca struck ten o’clock, or pay for failure with his life.

The men, in their turn, were asking themselves if he were alone.

“You are the Capuchin friar, Giovanni,” exclaimed one of them presently, taking courage of the silence, “what, then, is your message from the Count of Pisa?”

“My message, signorè, is this,—that at ten o’clock to-night, the Count of Pisa will have ceased to live.”

A strange cry, terrible in its pathos, escaped the woman’s lips. All had risen to their feet again. The swords of the three leaped from their scabbards. The instant of the priest’s death seemed at hand. But he stood, resolute, before them.

“At ten o’clock,” he repeated sternly, “the Count of Pisa will have ceased to live. That is his message, signori, to one in this house. And to you, the Marquis of Cittadella, there is another message.

He turned to one of the three who had begun to rail at him, and raised his hand as in warning. So great was the curiosity to hear his words that the swords were lowered again, and again there could be heard the ticking of a clock in the great room.

“For me—a message! Surely I am favoured, signorè.”

“Of that you shall be the judge, since, at dawn to-morrow, your head will lie on the marble slab between the columns of the Piazzetta.”

They greeted him with shouts of ridicule.

“A prophet—a prophet!”

“A prophet indeed,” he answered quietly, “who has yet a word to speak to you, Andrea Foscari.”

“To me!” exclaimed the man addressed, who was older than the others, and who wore the stola of the nobility.

“Ay, to you, who are about to become a fugitive from the justice of Venice. Midnight shall see you hunted in the hills, my lord; no house shall dare to shelter you; no hand shall give you bread. When you return to the city you would have betrayed, the very children shall mock you for a beggar.”

Foscari answered with an oath, and drew back. The third of the men, a youth who wore a suit of white velvet, and whose vest was ablaze with gold and jewels, now advanced jestingly.

“And for me, most excellent friar?”

“For you, Gian Mocenigo, a pardon in the name of that Prince of Venice whose house you have dishonoured.”

Again they replied to him with angry gibes. “A proof—a proof—we will put you to the proof, friar—here and now, or, by God, a prophet shall pay with his life.”

He saw that they were driven to the last point. While the woman stood as a figure of stone at the table, the three advanced towards him and drove him back before their threatening swords. The new silence was the silence of his death anticipated. He thought that his last word was spoken in vain. Ten o’clock would never strike, he said. Yet even as hope seemed to fail him, and he told himself that the end had come, the bells of the city began to strike the hour, and the glorious music of their echoes floated over the sleeping waters.

“A proof, you ask me for a proof, signori,” he exclaimed triumphantly. “Surely, the proof lies in yonder room, where all the world may see it.”

He pointed to a door opening in the wall of mirrors. and giving access to a smaller chamber. Curiosity drove the men thither. They threw open the door; they entered the room; they reeled back drunk with their own terror.

For the body of Andrea, lord of Pisa, lay, still warm, upon the marble pavement of the chamber, and the dagger with which he had been stabbed was yet in his heart.

“A proof—have I not given you a proof?” the priest cried again, while the woman’s terrible cry rang through the house, and the three stood close together, as men upon whom a judgment has fallen.

“Man or devil—who are you?” they asked in hushed whispers.

He answered them by letting his monk’s robe slip from his shoulders. As the robe fell, they beheld a figure clad in crimson velvet and corselet of burnished gold; the figure of a man whose superb limbs had been the envy of the swordsmen of Italy; whose face, lighted now with a sense of power and of victory, was a face for which women had given their lives.

“It is the Prince of Iseo,” they cried, and, saying it, fled from the house of doom.

At that hour, those whose gondolas were passing the Palazzo Pisani observed a strange spectacle. A priest stood upon the balcony of the house holding a silver lamp in his hand; and as he waited, a boat emerged from the shadows about the church of San Luca and came swiftly towards him.

“The Signori of the Night,” the loiterers exclaimed in hushed whispers, and went on their way quickly.

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Very early next morning, a rumour of strange events, which had happened in Venice during the hours of darkness, drew a great throng of the people to the square before the ducal palace.

“Have you not heard it,” man cried to man,—“the Palazzo Pisani lacks a mistress to-day? The police make their toilet in the boudoir of my lady. And they say that the lord of Pisa is dead.”

“Worse than that, my friends,” a gondolier protested, “Andrea Foscari crossed to Maestre last night, and the dogs are even now on his heels.”

“Your news grows stale,” croaked a hag who was passing; “go to the Piazzetta and you shall see the head of one who prayed before the altar ten minutes ago.”

They trooped off, eager for the spectacle. When they reached the Piazzetta, the hag was justified. The head of a man lay bleeding upon the marble slab between the columns. It was the head of the Marquis of Cittadella.

In the palace of the police, meanwhile, Pietro Falier, the Captain, was busy with his complaints.

“The lord of Pisa is dead,” he said; “the woman has gone to the Convent of Murano; there is a head between the columns; Andrea Foscari will die of hunger in the hills,—yet Gian Mocenigo goes free. Who is this friar that he shall have the gift of life or death in Venice?”

His subordinate answered,—“This friar, Captain, is one whom Venice, surely, will make the greatest of her nobles to-day.”