

# A Miracle of Bells

By Max Pemberton

## I

Lay-brother Nicolo watched the last of the beggars quit the aisles of the great church, and then bestirred himself to close it for the night. One by one he put out the tapers, which still cast their wan light upon the marble pavements. East and west he went to lock the gates of the porches. Silently and swiftly he drew the heavy leathern curtains which shut his brethren, the Servite fathers, from the merry life of the world upon the waters; swiftly, too, he covered the altars, and carried the great golden crucifix to the sacristy. For supper, hot and savoury and steaming, was already filling the refectory with delicious odours, and lay-brother Nicolo was very hungry.

One last look round, a moment's pause to light the lantern which showed him the way to the door of the sacristy, completed his uncongenial task. Clear as his conscience was, he did not wish to linger in the darkened church when the people had left it and the outer gate was closed. By and by he would live with the saints; but until that day came he preferred the chatter of his brethren in refectory and in cloister.

And there were such queer sights and sounds in that lonely fane when all the tapers were out and the dim red lamps cast shadows before the altars, and the very effigies of dead martyrs seemed reanimated and living.

On this particular evening of March old Nicolo could have sworn that he heard a sound, as of the pattering of little feet, at the very moment when he was about to close the last of the doors and to hurry to the odorous stew awaiting him. Truth to tell, he held his lantern high, and listened intently while some seconds passed; but the sound was not repeated, and, eager to be reassured, the trembling monk turned the heavy key in the lock and fled that holy place of spirits and of shadows.

“What a thing to imagine!” he said to himself, as he crossed the cloister and drew his hood about his ears, for the wind blew cold upon Venice from the mountains. “Surely I am growing old and will be the better for a cup of wine. A child at night-fall in the church of the Servites! As well seek an honest man in the booths of Rialto.”

Now, this surmise was well enough in an ordinary way, but it chanced to be ill chosen on that memorable evening. Indeed, at the very moment when the good friar laughed at his delusions, and helped himself plentifully to the savoury dish, little Nina, the daughter of old Barbarino, the clown, was smiling through her tears in the church he had left.

She told herself that there, at any rate, none would molest her until day came. She it was who had watched the lay-brother as he put out those tapers one by one; she who had prayed to all the saints and angels that she might lie the night in the warm church, and that none might discover her. No home was hers in all that glittering city of waters; no hand stretched out to give her aught but blows. Her father, Barbarino, the fool, begrudged her the very shelter of the booth he clowned in,—over there on the Piazza by the great church of St. Mark.

She had no memory nor name of the mother whose child she was. Nina, the people called her as she capered in the dress of Columbine,—Nina, the fairy; Nina of the black eyes; Nina, the dancing girl.

She would repeat the words to herself, as she lay, hungry and alone, in whatever shelter the unbefriending night might give her; she would ask if the years to come had nothing but such empty praise for her reward. She had lived through sixteen summers; yet a summer of life was unknown to her. Nina of the black eyes, the people said, for the people did not see the tears upon the cheek nor know the loneliness in the heart of the child.

Frà Nicolo closed the church, and Nina dried up her tears. She had no fear of the shadows. The twinkling lamps before the altars were for her lanterns to guide the feet of angels. In the darkness the Christ came down to her from the Cross; the saints from the pictures. Or she would love to tell herself that this great building was a palace of which she was the mistress.

She would people it in her imagination with the nobles of Venice; with princes in habits of silver; with fair women, whose jewels shone as the jewels upon the altar of the Virgin; with young girls, whose beauty her own should surpass. Music she heard in fancy and the words of lovers; but always the words of one whose image was before her day and night, Christoforo, Count of Carmagnola, that reckless lord of the city, whose wealth was the envy of Venice, whose beauty was her admiration.

Little Nina had touched his cloak once as he passed to his gondola from the Palace. His image had been with her sleeping or waking since that day; there was a world of happiness in the foolish dreams which brought him to her side. She told herself, girlishly, that she would love him to her life's end, though never might she speak to him nor hear his voice.

Nina slept a young girl's sleep; a sleep of sweet dreams and of troubles forgotten. Cold as the great church was, nevertheless she could rest therein and forget the booth where her father downed to please the people, and she was beaten when the money bag was empty. Usually, her dreams would last until day came and old Frà Nicolo lit the candles for the first Mass; but on this night of March, in the year 1701, the voice of the storm and the moaning of the wind broke in upon her slumbers so that eleven o'clock had hardly been struck by the great bell above her head when she opened her eyes and began to ask herself where she was. For the first time in all her life a terrible fear of the darkness took possession of her. She started to her feet, with her dreams still clinging to her eyes, and peered into the shadows of the church. A sense of loneliness and of dread, in no way to be explained, made her limbs tremble. She fell upon her knees before the great altar, and prayed as she had never prayed before.

"Lord God, I know that I am not alone."

The strange prayer was as a salve to her fears. She rose up from the steps of the altar, and began to laugh at herself.

"Who is there that would harm the clown's daughter?" she asked herself. "Who is there that would come to the church of the Servites when Venice sleeps? Olà, I am a ninny to be frightened by my dreams."

The argument was good, but not altogether satisfying. It suggested, after all, that some other outcast might have done as she had done, and found a sanctuary from the bitter wind in the aisles of the Servite church. The mere contemplation of such a possibility quickened her heart and muted her tongue. She stood listening intently for any strange sound in the building. She feared to raise a hand, almost to breathe. Yet no sound, such as she listened for, was to be heard. Only the wind sighing beneath the eaves; only the waters lapping the marble steps before the porch of the monastery.

She said, for the second time, that she was a baby to think of such things; and so returned to the dark chapel, and tried to sleep once more. The visions began to come again, the dreams to weave the smiles about her lips, when a sound within the church once more brought her to her feet and

sent the blood rushing to her head. It was the sound of a key grating in the lock of the sacristy door.

Nina started to her feet and ran from the chapel to the great nave of the church. She was not quite sure yet that she had not dreamed the thing. She began to argue with herself again, asking who would come to the monastery when Venice slept. A repetition of the sound froze the argument upon her lips. No longer was there any opportunity to doubt.

She heard the door of the sacristy creak upon its hinges. She heard the whisper of voices, the muted tread of men who crossed the marble pavement of the ambulatory, and were coming to the nave of the church. She knew that she was no longer alone, and, stricken by a terror which surpassed any terror she had imagined, she ran back to the chapel and lay, all huddled up and shivering, in the shadow of the oaken screen that divided the transept from the church.

“Who is it? Who can come at such an hour?” she asked herself helplessly, and bewildered. The idea that the monks themselves had heard of her hiding-place, and were there to punish her, was her first thought; but it ceased to help her when she remembered that they would not come in darkness with muted steps. And if not the monks, who then? She dared not to think out an answer to her own question.

Child that she was, she had heard of those dangers of plot and counterplot, which then threatened her own city and the prince of her own city. She had heard of men who were awake to conspiracies when others slept; who hid themselves in the vaults and the cellars by night, yet were the ornaments of Venice by day.

Instinctively she guessed that such men as these had invaded her hiding-place. They had obtained possession of the keys of the church, she thought, and were there to speak of things which, whispered even in the shadows outside, might set the heads of those who whispered them between the pillars of St. Mark. And if her guess was right, what hope or chance of life had she? They would kill her, she said, kill her and cast her body into the lagoon. Her crime would be that she had seen their faces, had known their meeting-place.

This affrighting thought sent her back still farther into the great patch of shadow which the screen cast upon the pavement of the chapel. She feared even that the men would hear the beating of her heart. The creak of the sacristy door as it shut gently upon its hinges was like ice upon her limbs. She counted the muted footsteps, and saw that they were very near to her. She could distinguish the whisper of voices and hear the question of one and the answer of another.

The men were searching the church, then, they would find her presently, they would drag her out, they would—but she had not the courage to imagine more, and a heavy sob broke from her, though she knew that discovery was but a little removed from death. Then she heard the sound of voices.

“Is it you, Count?”

“It is I, Orso.”

“You heard nothing?”

“I heard the wind under the eaves.”

“Is Paolo there?”

“He is at my side.”

“Then it was not he—holy God, what a thought!”

“You said, Orso?”

“That I heard a sound as of someone sobbing.”

“Pah! it was the wine you drank. Thrust your sword in that confessional, and then tell me who sobs.”

Nina heard the man obey. She could picture him thrusting his shining blade into the dark recesses about the pillars of the nave. He would come, by and by, to the chapel where she lay, and that sword would tell her story.

“Well, do you find anything?”

“Dust—I find that, Count, and the books of the priest. Saint John, what a fright I had!”

The man thus called Count laughed softly.

“Who would be in the church of the Servites at this hour?” he asked.

“The police, perhaps; they are everywhere.”

The other made a gesture of impatience.

“It is time to end this nonsense,” said he. “Uncover your lantern, and let us see what that can show us. Paolo will stand at the door of the sacristy meanwhile. If there is any friar out of bed at this hour, we shall know how to talk to him. And I will trouble you to take off my shoes, my friend; they groan like a sick man!”

With these words, the men left their place by the pulpit, and began to walk very silently and quickly towards the great western door. Nina counted their footsteps, and as the sounds died away, she took courage, and peered over the low screen of the chapel wherein she had slept. There was moonlight at this time, for the wind had lifted the low clouds of evening, and the painted windows took shape again, showing glorious visions of saints and angels.

The child could see two of the men quite clearly as they passed in and out of the side chapels; but the apparition was fitful, for the shadows were deep and many, and she was too fearful to leave her hiding-place for long. Rather, she drew back into the darkness again, and prayed with all her heart that someone would come to the church.

“They will kill me,” she thought, “and no one will know. I shall never see the stars again.” The footsteps were very near just then. She could hear the low voices of the men again.

“Where are your friars now, my friend?”

“There is yet the chapel, Count.”

“Ha! You have the knees of a woman. Cast a light again.”

Nina was crouching then almost under the bench built into the screen. Though her face was hidden in her ragged black cloak, nevertheless she saw the flashing rays of the lantern, and expected every moment that a hand would touch her shoulder. She did not know that her rags, black and sombre, matched the shadows so well that even the lantern did not betray her. When, at last, she heard the receding footsteps, and began to believe that she was undiscovered, it seemed to her that a miracle had been wrought. God had saved her, then—and for what? The answer came as some voice of the night. That she, in her turn, might save Venice.

The voice made her tremble, but it was no longer with an emotion of fear. Her naturally quick brain, trained to readiness by her vagrant life, grasped in an instant the truth of that which she saw. These men, what were they doing in the church of the Servites, why did they speak in whispers, why did they bare their feet? There could be but one reason,—they were the enemies of Venice.

Nina had heard the strange tales then told in the city, of discontent among the nobles, of an appointed day when there would be a new Doge and a new Venice. She had heard that there were spies everywhere, that every man was watched, that no man was discovered. What the police had been unable to do, she, the child, had done,—she had tracked the enemies of the city to their hiding-place. The assurance thrilled her as with a thrill of new pleasure. She, Nina, the waif, must save Venice.

All fear for herself was gone now. Quickly she drew off her torn shoes and stood up, forgetting the cold of the flags and the bare feet which trod them. She must alarm the monastery, she said to herself. She remembered that the police were accustomed to guard the narrow water-way by which the church stood. Their boats, perchance, would even at that moment be near the bridge which the men must cross when their strange work was done. If she could but whisper a word which would bring the police to her side!

Shivering with the cold, nevertheless with brain burning, she crept a little way from her hiding-place. The three men, masked, and wearing black cloaks of prodigious length, stood at that moment in a little chapel on the opposite side of the nave. Taking courage of the fact that the chapel had no windows, they had kindled the tapers set before a picture of St. Augustine, and were kneeling there in an effort, as the girl saw, to raise a great slab of marble which covered one of the altar tombs. When they had lifted it, they took a parchment from the tomb and began to scrutinize it closely, one of them holding up a taper that they might decipher the writing more readily.

Nina said to herself, as she watched them, that this must be the instant of her flight. Swiftly, as a shadow in the moonlight, she darted across the nave and sought a new hiding-place in the ambulatory. Panting for breath, with hands pressed upon her beating heart, she listened as a deer that is hunted. But the men were still absorbed in the paper. She could see that one of them held an ink-horn, and that another was writing. She took courage and ran on to the door of the sacristy. The moment of deliverance was at hand.

The door had been closed, but the key was still in the lock. The girl's hand was already upon the door when she remembered that its creaking, when the others opened it, had awakened her earlier in the night. She perceived that it would not be possible again to turn the key without discovery. The danger was one she had not anticipated. She knew that the moments were precious, as never moments had been in all her life. She must save Venice,—she, Nina, the daughter of Barbarino, the clown, They would kill her if they knew—and yet she must save Venice.

Hours seemed to pass while she stood trembling at the door in a fear of indecision and of anxiety. Once, the man who held the inkhorn for the other to write, let the scabbard of his sword jar upon the marble pavement, and she started back at the sound and could scarcely forbear to cry out. For quite a long time after that, she leant against a pillar of the chancel, afraid to raise a hand, or even to turn her head.

When her courage came, and she made a movement as though to reach the door again, the miracle of the night happened. A bell, the sanctus bell above the chancel arch, rang out clearly in the silence—one sweet, lingering note which echoed over the sleeping waters, and brought the three men to their feet as at the voice of a judgment of Heaven.

“Ha !—do you hear that Count?”

“Have I no ears? Put out the light.”

“You have the paper, Count?”

“I have my sword. To the door, and every man for himself.”

Nina heard the threat, but cared not at all now. She had found a way. Crouching against the pillar of the chancel, she had trodden unwittingly upon the rope of the sanctus bell, and thus alarmed the monastery. And, once the way was shown to her, she followed it readily. Falling upon her knees, for she thought that death was very near to her, she took the rope in her hands, and clanged the bell incessantly. The noise of it was no longer that of a note sweet and sonorous. It jarred upon the ear as a dirge. It brought lights to the windows of the neighbouring houses.

Men cried out to men that the church was on fire. Other bells began to ring,—above all, the voices of the guard were heard. Venice was saved, she said. The work was for others now. The men would kill her, but Venice would remember.

There was a great noise outside the church at this time; the patter of steps, the flash of lanterns, cries, and answering cries. The three men stood all together in a great circle of moonlight cast upon the pavement of the nave. Their swords were drawn, they turned about and again about as though the danger lurked in every shadow. But their irresolution was not enduring. Two of them, stricken by terror of the unseen, ran boldly to the sacristy door and passed through it. The third followed with slower steps; and when he came to the chancel arch, he stood an instant with the moonbeams falling full upon his face.

Nina, who saw him thus for the first time, knew in that moment why they had called him Count. She looked upon the lord of Carmagnola himself,—upon him of whom she had dreamed through many a weary night of cold and hunger. Her lover, as she, the dancing girl, had called him, stood before her,—on the threshold of death, she said. And she had killed him! In five minutes, in ten, the police would come! Anguish beyond any of fear or of physical suffering almost stilled her heart. She knelt upon the pavement, and no longer were her tears held back.

The man heard her cry and strode to the place where she lay with the moonlight giving golden threads to her hair. He thought that he had found the spy who betrayed him. He drew his dagger, telling himself that one other at least should die that night. But when the white beams showed him a young girl's face looking up pitifully into his own, he thrust the weapon in its sheath again, and stood regarding her with silent astonishment.

“Child,” he asked sternly, “who are you, and why are you here?”

“I am Nina, the daughter of Barbarino,” she said, between her sobs.

“What does Nina, the daughter of Barbarino, do alone in a church at midnight?”

“Oh, Excellency, the cold and the hunger drove me—”

“A beggar's tale,” was his answer as he stooped and seized her by the hands, dragging her out that the soft light might show him her face clearly. “Who sent you to this place?”

She thought that he was about to kill her, and she cringed before the blow she feared.

“God sent me,” she answered at last, “to save Venice.”

He laughed scornfully.

“What did they pay you, girl? Tell the truth—do you hear? Whose servant are you?”

“The servant of poverty, Excellency,—the servant of hunger. Oh, believe me, I have not eaten bread since yesterday at dawn. And I came here because the wind is bitter, and my feet are bare. Then I saw the light, and I heard your voice. God help me! I did not know that it was you.”

She buried her face in her hands while the Count of Carmagnola stood regarding her with a new amazement. He had hardly seen a more beautiful face in all Venice. The girl, he thought, was like one of the children in the picture above the high altar. He asked himself how he could have lived in the city for three years, and have passed her by. And a pretty face could always win upon his generosity.

“Come,” he said, as if in an inspiration, “you say that you did not know. Prove your words to me. The police are at the gate, as you hear. Show me a door by which I may escape them, and I will believe your story.”

The appeal awakened her from the trance of fear and grief. All her love for Venice was forgotten in a moment. She would save the man her dreams had given to her for a lover. Yet how? She could hear the cries without; she could see the flash of lanterns; she knew that the

police would come to the church before many minutes had passed; she feared that all the gates were already watched. What hope was there, then?

“Lord Count,” she cried in the second inspiration of the night, “there was a way, but I know not if it be a way still. Yet, if you will follow—”

She stood up and faced him. He listened and heard voices in the sacristy; he could see the flickering rays of a lantern; he knew that the police were at the very gates.

“Child,” he said very quietly, “show me your way, for it is the only one.”

Nina waited for no other command, but stretched out her hand and thrust it into that of the man.

“Come, Excellency,” she said eagerly, “the door is behind the great organ.”

With this she crossed the nave and mounted the winding staircase by which the organ loft was reached. She remembered that her nights in the church had shown to her a wicket-gate in the wall behind the organ, and once she had unbarred that gate and passed out, to find herself upon the leads of the monastery. From these she had gone on until she came to an old stone staircase, at the foot of which flowed one of the narrowest water-ways in all Venice. That staircase should save the man’s life, she said.

“The door is here, Excellency. Let your hands feel for the bolt; we are safe if we can but lift it.”

The man stopped to reckon with his chances no more. One backward glance showed him the floor of the church below,—the dancing lanterns and the figures of those who held them. He unbarred the door swiftly, and followed the girl through it to the broad leads of the monastery. Venice lay beneath; Venice awakened. The bells of many churches were ringing. A panic of night become day had begun to seize upon the city. The fugitives could see the boats of the police at the steps of the southern porch. A great crowd had gathered from all the neighbouring houses; men shouted to men that an enemy was in the palace, and that the Doge was killed. Women stood at the windows of the lighted houses.

Carmagnola watched the scene while he could have counted ten. For the first time he began to believe in the possibility of ultimate escape. This waif of Venice with the black eyes and the little soft hand; this dancing girl, who had stumbled so fatefully upon the nest of his schemes, would enable him, after all, to pursue these schemes.

That the others had been taken he did not believe. And if they had, with what could the police charge them? This child, who now held his hand so timidly, would not betray him. He read her face truly. She was not the first woman in Venice who had trembled at his touch. A kiss upon her lips, he argued, would silence her for ever. There was no other that he feared or thought of in all the city.

“Your way is a good one, little Nina,” he said lightly, turning from the scene about the church door to her who had saved him; “we will cheat them yet. Show me your staircase, and I will say that I have no better friend in all the city.”

Her face flushed with pride and pleasure. The touch of his hand had made her heart leap. She walked as one in sleep,—she, Nina, the dancing girl, side by side with him of whom she had dreamed through many a long night of hunger and of cold.

“My lord,” she said, “I am not worthy to be your friend. Here is the water, and my work is done.”

She had brought him, as she promised, to the bank of a little canal which wound its dark way amid gaunt and gloomy houses and the homes of the poor. Here the silence of the night was unbroken,—no sound but that of bells ringing musically in the distance came to them over the

lapping waters. The Count told himself that the peril was passed. To-morrow would find him in his own house again.

“My little guide,” he said, standing a moment irresolute as at the parting of the ways, “where shall I look at dawn for Nina, the daughter of Barbarino, the clown?”

The question tempted her; but her wits were keener than his in that hour of peril.

“Excellency,” she said, drawing back, “you will not look for me in Venice. God forbid—have you forgotten the paper?”

A cry burst from his lips; he caught her by the wrist almost fiercely.

“The paper—what do you know of that; why do you speak of it?”

“Because those who now read it will not be your friends, my lord.”

Carmagnola loosed her hands. She could see the diamond button, which clasped the lace about his throat, rise and fall quickly with his heavy breathing. The house of cards he had built was scattered by her words as by a great wind. The paper—the parchment which could send a hundred in Venice to the scaffold,—in whose hands was that now?

“Great God!” he cried aloud; “it lies upon the altar tomb.”

Nina drew back trembling before his anger.

My lord,” she stammered, “the others—”

He stopped her with a bitter laugh. “The others—the others! Paolo, the fool, and Orso, the woman—what have I to do with them, when to-morrow there will be no house in Venice so large that I may find a home in it, no cellar so dark that it will hide me.”

She took courage of his distress.

“Lord Count,” she pleaded, “there is one who could yet save you from your enemies.”

He answered her with a sneer.

“A new Christ—here in Venice, child. One who works miracles?”

“I speak of a priest, my lord.”

“Of a priest?”

“Of Frà Giovanni,—of him they call the soldier monk.”

He looked at her and ceased to laugh. “Take me to your priest,” he said.

## II

It wanted an hour to dawn on the second day of March, in the year 1703, when little Nina, followed quickly by the Count of Carmagnola, stepped from a gondola which had carried them from Rialto to the island of the Jews, and rang at the great bell before Frà Giovanni’s gloomy palace.

“Frà Giovanni will save you, my lord,” she had said again and again during those anxious moments of flight; “there is none so powerful as he. I shall ask him and he will help you. He is my friend.”

Carmagnola listened to her indifferently. He had no coherent thought. The work he had planned so diligently for weary months, the house of conspiracy he had built so laboriously, had been cast down, not by Doge or Senate, or by any spy—but by this dancing girl, sent, God knew whence, to the church of the Servites to save the city and its people. Never was there a destiny so ironic. He could have laughed aloud to think that he and those with him had turned like frightened women from the voice of a child. And yet, he said, that child had sent a hundred brave men to the scaffold. His own life—what would it be worth to him henceforth? At dawn every

gate must be shut against him; every cellar would be searched. What house would harbour him—what hand befriend him?

“Your priest lives here, little Nina?” he asked, as she rang the bell, and stood shivering with the cold of morning.

“He is coming now, Excellency; I hear his footsteps. He will listen to me, because he is my friend.”

Carmagnola shrugged his shoulders. It was grotesque, he said to himself, that he should have followed this dancing girl at all. The homage that she paid to her friar galled his pride.

“Pah!” he said; “what can a friar do when the police are not your friends? Nevertheless—”

She would have answered him, but the door of the palace opened as he spoke, and the friar himself stood before them. He held a taper in his hand; his capuce was drawn about his ears. The meagre face, seen in that wan light, was such a face as the old painters gave to their saints. The keen, black eyes seemed to cut with their glance. Neither pity nor love could be read in the deep lines of that strange countenance.

“What does the lord of Carmagnola seek of me?” he asked, holding the taper up that the light might fall on the other’s face.

Carmagnola suppressed an exclamation.

His name, then, despite his mask, was known to the other.

“I seek sanctuary,” he said curtly.

Nina knelt upon the flags and took the friar’s hand.

“Father,” she cried, “you are my friend; you will save the Lord Count from his enemies.”

The priest answered her sternly.

“What have you to do with such things?” he asked.

She had no word for him, but continued to kneel at his feet. When he had looked at them both again, he turned to the Count.

“I will save you from Venice,” he said in a low voice. “Enter.”

“And this child?”

“Let her go to her home.”

“But she has saved my life.”

“Venice will reward her.”

Carmagnola hesitated during a moment of irresolution. Then, with deft fingers, he unclasped the great brooch of diamonds from his pourpoint, and pinned it upon the ragged cloak of the kneeling girl.

“Little Nina,” he said, as he bent and kissed her, “I shall remember.”

The priest, who watched the scene with some contempt, did not hide his impatience.

“Signorè,” he exclaimed, “the night grows old, and at dawn—”

He turned and entered the house with Carmagnola at his heels. In a great bare room upon the first floor he lit a second taper and set it on a bureau. Then he finished the sentence he had begun on the steps without.

“At dawn, my lord, Venice will reckon with her enemies.”

Carmagnola laughed.

“What does a priest know of the enemies of Venice?”

“If he should know their names?”

“The name of one—?”

“Of all, signorè.”

The friar stood like an avenging figure, holding the taper in his hand, and searching the other's face with eyes of steel.

"Of all, signorè," he repeated, in a voice which struck terror to him who heard it.

Carmagnola put up a hand, upon which many jewels glistened, to the clasp of his toga. His cloak was loosed to show a dress of crimson velvet beneath, and the long stola, the emblem of his nobility. He breathed quickly as a baited animal in a moment of respite.

"I am come to the house of a spy, then!" he cried fiercely.

"Say rather to the house of one sent for the salvation of this city, as he was sent ten years ago to save Florence from you and your dupes, my lord."

The Count took a step forward and peered into the face of the other.

"In God's name, who are you?" he asked.

"I am he whom they call the soldier monk," replied the priest, quietly, "and I was in the church of the Servites two hours ago."

"You—in the church!"

The priest did not notice the interruption.

"I was in the church, signorè. Shall I tell you the names of those who were there with me? Shall I tell you that one of them, a man walking blindly in his own conceit, thinking that he and his unhappy creatures can prevail above the good of Venice, wrote down the names of those creatures upon a parchment? Shall I show you that parchment, my lord—it is here in my breast, for I picked it up when it fell from your hands? Shall I tell you that to-day at dawn the Councillors will read it as I have read it? Is that what you have come here to learn,—you whom they call the lord of Carmagnola?"

Carmagnola reeled back before the damning accusation.

"Who are you, in God's name?" he asked again.

The priest held up the taper and loosed his friar's habit.

"Look at me again, Lord Count," he whispered.

The Count recovered himself, and peered into the face so close to his own.

"I do not know you," he stammered.

"Again, again, Lord Count—the swordsman of Iseo; you have forgotten him who gave you your life, and is here to-night to give it you again."

He stood awaiting his answer; but Carmagnola's memory had gone back ten years to a day when in a garden of Florence he had stood face to face with the first swordsman in all Italy, and, his weapon being struck from his hand, that swordsman had given him his life.

"I know you, he cried at last in a hoarse voice, "you are the Prince of Iseo."

"As you say, the Prince of Iseo."

"And once more you offer me my life?"

"It is the reward of her who would have saved Venice to-night."

"There are conditions, of course?"

The priest smiled.

"When Venice forgives, there are always conditions, Lord Count."

"And you are able to speak in the name of Venice."

"I am able to speak in the name of Venice."

"Then what do you ask of me?"

The priest raised his hand and pointed to the jewels upon the breast of the other.

"That you strip those jewels from you, and give them to the poor; that you leave Venice at dawn and never look upon her spires again; that neither you nor your children's children shall

dwell in the house you have built; that Italy shall know you no more,—that as a beggar you shall go out, and as a beggar you shall live. Those are the conditions, Lord Count.”

Carmagnola heard him as one who hears sentence of death.

“And if I do not accept them?”

The priest answered him by leading him to the balcony of the house, and pointing across the water to the great Piazza of St. Mark. Dawn was breaking, and the domes of the church were already capped with the golden light of the new day.

“Look yonder, my lord,” he said grimly; “listen to those cries. They are the shouts of the people, who tell each other that two of the enemies of Venice are enemies no more.”

The Count trembled.

“You mean—That the two who were with you in the church of the Servites last night hang head downwards between the columns of the Piazza.”

Carmagnola staggered back into the room.

“I will save the honour of my name,” he cried.

There was a great procession around the Piazza of St. Mark after sundown that day. The bells of the city rang joyously; bright fires were lit on all the open places; candles were set in the windows of every house. In the great church itself the priests sang a Te Deum, and countless lights burned before the altars, and thanksgiving was offered for the safety of Venice and the death of her enemies. Outside in the square a vast throng swarmed about one whom stalwart arms held up, about a dancing girl whom they had crowned with flowers and carried, as often they carried images, high above the people on a golden throne.

“Viva Nina, the daughter of Barbarino!”

“Viva! Viva! the Queen of Venice!”

“She has saved our city. A miracle of the bells was sent. Viva! Viva!”

But little Nina, thus snatched in a moment from want and penury and cold and hunger, did not heed the cries nor the gifts which were poured upon her.

“She weeps,” a woman said.

“It is for joy,” they answered her.

But one in Venice knew that she wept for the man.

She had saved him as she promised; but she would see him no more.