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CHAPTER SEVEN—Continued

He drew out of his breast a parchment, a long narrow strip, scribbled across in irregular writing, and handed it to Gian-

was dressed in purple velvet, but his doublet was tumbled, the fine lace frills at his wrists were torn to tatters, his eyes strained wide open, and for a moment, as it was with any who encountered it, the expression gave his sister pause. But again she remembered Conrad lived, and she held out the parchment. "I thought it well to give you this," she said.



The parchment was inscribed with poetry.

out a furtive glance over his shoulder, he looked at the writing again, the parchment and the seal, then opened the packet. A roll of parchment, close writ, strangely stained in places a reddish brown, fell with a rattle on the floor. Visconti started back, he stared at it, uttered a hoarse sound, stopped and picked it up. The parchment was inscribed with poetry. Here and there among the stanzas a line was readable. Precious then would not dare to turn—

He glanced round with wild eyes. A huge, black bureau, fitted with many drawers, stood in one corner of the room. Visconti, the parchment in his shaking fingers, went to it, still with glances around, and drew out drawer after drawer till he had found the thing he sought. It was among neat piles of parchments, annotated in Giannotto's clear, good hand.

Giannotto turned over hastily till he came upon a document hung with the seals of Verona, a cartel of defiance, neatly indorsed in a clerical hand and signed in large, bold writing, "Martino della Scala." Eagerly he turned to the cover of the packet, and laid the two writings side by side. They were the same.

absurdities. I could do neither, I could do nothing! Terrible hours followed. Tomaso, terrible hours and terrible days. Still I would not own the truth, and still, as no one came, I knew I was to be true! I thought of the Lady Valentine, and wondered what her fate might be. I thought of Germany, and wept to think I should never see it more! Then one evening, as I lay in bed, I heard the key turn in the lock, and Visconti entered, followed by Giannotto: two white hounds slunk at his heels: well I remember. Dear Lord! I was fallen so low in my misery, I felt at his feet and begged for mercy, for pity, or speedy death! And he—smiled on me, and bade Giannotto bring food!

At Tomaso's words Conrad raised his arched eyebrows. "Order! To thee, maybe, thou art a boy and of humble station. I am Von Schuembourg; orders scarcely tally with that name."

CHAPTER EIGHT

FOR A LADY'S GIFT

OMASO LIGOZZI sat in a corner of the ruined hut, with enthralled face, listening to Count Conrad, who lounged against the wooden table opposite. It was five days since Conrad's rescue. He had made a recovery the more rapid that no leech had been there to meddle with him. Left to the simplest nursing, the barest needed nourishment, and the vigor of his own constitution, Conrad had rallied, till now, in almost full health, no trace was left of the hollow faced figure Francisco had carried into safety.

He has doubtless met with unexpected disaster, lord," he said with some reproach. "Horses must be found—some where—for our journey tonight. Every hour we stay here is dangerous. My heart misgives me that I did not accompany him," said Conrad as he should all four have kept together.

"Doubtless too many would have hampered him," was the reply. Tomaso did not add, as he might have done, that Francisco had his doubts of Conrad's discretion, and had left Tomaso charged to see he committed no rashness in his absence.

"Thinkest thou he will get the horses?" continued the count, twirling his curls through his fingers. "Let us hope he will try naught so mad as that attempt on the walls of Milan we made two days ago! The saints preserve us! but I thought it was all over with us! That was a fine race—tearing through

"The Lady Valentine will forgive the loss of a dagger, lord, when thou help to rescue her from Milan," he said curtly. "But what use to seek her gift? And give thyself again into the Visconti's power?"