THE SUNDAY TIMES' PAGE OF GOOD SELECTED FICTION.

Chronicles of Count Antonio

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CHAPTER III.

COUNT ANTONIO AND THE PRINCE OF MANTIVOGLIA.

I know of naught by which a man may better be judged than by his bearing in matters of love. What know I of love? say you, I whose head is gray and shaven, to boot. True, it is gray and it is shaven. But once it was brown, and the tonsure came not there till I had lived thirty years and borne arms for twelve. Then came death to one I loved and the tonsure to me. Therefore, oh, ye proud young men and laughing girls, old Anselm knows of love, though his knowledge be only like the memory that a man has of a glorious red-gold sunset which his eyes saw a year ago; cold are the tints, gone the richness, sober and faint the picture. Yet it is something. He sees no more, but he has seen, and sometimes still I seem to see a face that I saw last in smiling death. They tell me such thoughts are not fitting of me, but I doubt their doing a man much harm, for they make him take joy when others reap the happiness that he, forestalled by fate's sickle, could not garner. But enough. It is of Count Antonio I would write, and not of my poor self. And the story may be worth the writing, or would be, had I more skill to pen it.

Now, in the second year of Count Antonio's banishment, when the fierce anger of Duke Valentine was yet hot for the presumption shown by the count in the matter of Duke Paul's death, a messenger came privately to where the band lay hidden in the hills, bringing greeting to Antonio from the Prince of Mantivoglia, between whom and the duke there was great enmity. For in days gone by Forniola had paid tribute to Mantivoglia, and this burden had been broken off only some thirty years, and the prince, learning that Antonio was at variance with Duke Valentine, perceived an opportunity and sent to Antonio, praying him very courteously to visit Mantivoglia and be his guest.

Antonio, who knew the prince well, sent him thanks, and, having made dispositions for the safety of his company, and set Tommasino in charge of it, himself rode with the man they called Bena, and, having crossed the frontier, came on the second day to Mantivoglia. Here he was received with great state, and all in the city were eager to see him, having heard how he dealt with Duke Paul and how he renounced the authority of Valentine. And the prince lodged him in his palace, and prepared a banquet for him, and set him on the right hand of the princess, who was a very fair lady, learned, and of excellent wit; indeed, I have by me certain stories which she composed, and would read on summer evenings in the garden, and it may be that if I live I will make known certain of them; others there are that only the discreet should read; for what to one age is but mirth, turn in the mind of the next to unseemliness and ribaldry.

This princess, then, was very gracious to the count, and spared no effort to give him pleasure, and she asked him very many things concerning the Lady Lucia, saying at last: "Is she fairer than I, my lord?" And Antonio answered with a laugh, "The morn is not fairer than the sun, nor the sun than the morn; yet they are different." And the princess laughed also, saying merrily, "Well parried, my lord!" And she rose and went with the prince and Antonio into the garden. Then the prince opened to Antonio what was in his mind, saying: "Take what command you will in my service, and come with me against Forniola; and when we have brought Valentine to his knees I will take what was my father's, and should be mine, and you shall wring from him your pardon and the hand of your lady." And the princess also entreated him. But Antonio answered:

"I cannot do it. If your highness rides to Forniola, it is likely enough that I also may ride thither; but I shall ride to put my sword at the service of the duke. For although he is not my friend, yet his enemies are mine." And from this they could not turn him. Then the prince praised him, saying: "I love you more for denying me, Antonio, and when I send word of my coming to Valentine I will tell him also, of what you have done. And if we meet by the walls of Forniola, we will fight like men, and after that you shall come again to Mantivoglia," and he drank wine with Antonio, and so bade him god speed. And the princess, when her husband was gone, looked at the count and said: "Valentine will not give her to you. Why will not you take her?" But Antonio answered: "The price is too high."

"I would not have a man who thought any price too high," cried the princess.

"Then your highness would mate with a rogue?" asked Count Antonio, smiling.

"If he were one for my sake only," said she, fixing her eyes on his face and sighing lightly, as ladies sigh when they would tell something and yet not too much, nor in words that can be repeated. But Antonio kissed her hand and took leave of her, and with another sigh she watched him go.

But when the middle of the next month came the Prince of Mantivoglia gathered an army of 3,000 men, of whom 1,700 were mounted, and crossed the frontier, directing his march toward Forniola by way of the base of Mount Agnino and the road to the village of Bilano. And the duke, hearing of his approach, mustered his guards to the number of 850 men, and armed besides hard upon 2,000 of the townsmen and apprentices, taking an oath of them that they would serve him loyally, for he feared and distrusted them, and of the whole force 1,100 had horses. And Count Antonio lay still in the mountains and did not offer to come to the duke's aid.

"Will you not pray his leave to come and fight for him?" asked Tommasino.

"He will love to beat the prince without my aid, if he can," said Antonio. "Heaven forbid that I should seem to snatch at glory and make a chance for myself from his necessity."

So he abode two days where he was, and then there came a shepherd, who said:

"My lord, the duke has marched out of the city, and lay last night at Bilano, and is to-day stretched across the road that leads from the spurs of Agnino to Bilano, his right wing resting on the river. There he waits the approach of the prince, and they say that at daybreak to-morrow the prince will attack."

Then Antonio rose, saying: "What of the night?"

Now, the night was very dark, and the fog hung like a gray cloak over the plain. And Antonio collected all his men, to the number of threescore and five, all well armed and well horsed, and bade them march very silently and with great caution, and led them down into the plain. And all the night they rode softly, husbanding their strength and sparing their horses, and an hour before the break of day they passed through the outskirts of Bilano and halted a mile beyond the village, seeing the fires of the duke's bivouacs stretched across the road in front of them, and beyond these were other fires, where the Prince of Mantivoglia lay encamped. And Bena said:

"The prince will be too strong for the duke, my lord."

"If he be, we, also, shall fight to-morrow, Bena," answered Antonio.

"I trust, then, that they prove at least well matched," said Bena; for he loved to fight, and yet was ashamed to wish that the duke should be defeated.

Then Count Antonio took counsel with Tommasino, and they led the band very secretly across the rear of the duke's camp till they came to the river. Now, there was a mill on the river, and by the mill a great covered barn where the sacks of corn stood, and Antonio, having roused the miller, told him that he came to aid the duke, and not to fight against him, and posted his men in this great barn, so that they were behind the right wing of the duke's army, and were hidden from sight. Day was dawning now; the camp fires paled in the growing light, and the sounds of preparation were heard from the camp. And from the prince's quarters also came the noise of trumpets calling the men to arms.

At 4 in the morning the battle was joined, Antonio standing with Tommasino and watching it from the mill. Now, Duke Valentine had placed his own guards on either wing, and the townsmen in the center, but the prince had posted the flower of his troops in the center, and he rode there himself, surrounded by many lords and gentlemen, and with great valor and impetuosity he flung himself against the townsmen, recking little of how he fared on either wing. This careless haste did not pass unnoticed by the duke, who was a cool man and wore a good head, and he said to Lorenzo, one of his lords, who was with him: "If we win on right and left it will not hurt us to lose in the middle," and he would not strengthen the townsmen against the prince, but rather drew off more of them, and chiefly the stoutest and best mounted, whom he divided between the right wing, where he himself commanded, and the left, which Lorenzo led.

Nay, men declare that he was not ill pleased to see the brunt of the strife and the heaviest loss fall on the apprentices and the townsmen. For a while, indeed, these stood bravely; but the prince's chivalry came at them in fierce pride and gallant scorn, and bore them down with the weight of armor and horses, the prince himself leading on a white charger, and with his own hand slaying Giulka, who was head of the city bands and a great champion among them. But Duke Valentine and Lorenzo upheld the battle on the wings and pressed back the enemy there; and the duke would not send aid to the townsmen in the center, saying: "I shall be ready for the prince as soon as the prince is ready for me, and I can spare some of those turbulent apprentices." And he smiled his crafty smile, adding, "From enemies also a wise man may suck good," and he pressed forward on the right, fighting more fiercely than was his custom.

But when Antonio beheld the townsmen hard pressed and being ridden down by the Prince of Mantivoglia's knights, and saw that the duke would not aid them, he grew very hot and angry, and said to Tommasino: "These men have loved my house, Tommasino. It may be that I spoil his highness's play, but are we to stand here while they perish."

"A fig for his highness' plan!" said Tommasino, and Bena gave a cry of joy and leapt, unbidden, on his horse.

"Since you are up, Bena," said the count, "stay up, and let the others mount. The duke's plan, if I read it aright, is craftier than I love, and I do not choose to understand it."

Then, when the townsmen's line was giving way before the prince, and the apprentices, conceiving themselves to be shamefully deserted, were more of a mind to run away than to fight any more, suddenly Antonio rode forth from the mill. And he and his company came at full gallop; but he himself was ten yards ahead of Bena and Tommasino, for all that they raced after him. And he cried aloud: "To me, men of Forniola, to me, Antonio of Monte Velluto!" and they beheld him with utter astonishment and great joy. And his helmet was fallen from his head, and his fair hair gleamed in the sun, and the light of battle played on his face. And the band followed him, and though they had for the most part no armor, yet such was the fury of their rush, and such the mettle and strength of their horses, that they made light of meeting the prince's knights in full tilt. And the townsmen cried: "It is the count. To death after the count!"

And Antonio raised the great sword that he carried and rode at the marshal of the prince's palace, who was in the van of the fight, and he split helmet and head with a blow. Then he came to where the prince himself was, and the great sword was raised again, and the prince rode to meet him, saying, "If I do not die now I shall not die today." But when Antonio saw the prince he brought his sword to his side and bowed and turned aside and engaged the most skillful of the Mantivoglian knights. And he fought that day like a man mad, but he would not strike the Prince of Mantivoglia. And after a while the prince ceased to seek him and a flatterer said to the prince, "He is bold against us, but he fears you, my lord." But the prince said, "Peace, fool. Go and fight." For he knew that not fear but friendship forbade Antonio to assail him.

Yet by now the rout of the townsmen was stayed, and they were holding their own again in good heart and courage, while both on the right and on the left the duke pressed on and held the advantage. Then the Prince of Mantivoglia perceived that he was in a dangerous plight, for he was in peril of being worsted along his whole line, for his knights did no more than hold a doubtful balance against the townsmen and Antonio's company, while the duke and Lorenzo were victorious on either wing, and he knew that, if the duke got in the rear of him and lay between him and Mount Agnino, he would be sore put to it to find a means of retreat. Therefore, he left the center and rode to the left of his line and faced Duke Valentine himself. Yet slowly was he driven back, and he gave way sullenly, obstinately, and in good order, himself performing many gallant deeds and seeking to come to a conflict with the duke. But the duke, seeing that the day was likely to be his, would not meet him, and chose to expose his person to no more danger. "For," he said, "a soldier who is killed is a good soldier, but a chief who is killed, save for some great object, is a bad chief."

And he bided his time and slowly pressed the prince back, seeking rather to win the battle than the praise of bravery. But when Count Antonio saw that all went well and that the enemy was in retreat, he halted his band, and at this they murmered, Bena daring to say: "My lord, we have had dinner; may we not have supper also?" Antonio smiled at Bena, but would not listen.

"No," said he, "his highness has won the victory by his skill and cunning. I did but move to save my friends. It is enough. Shall I seek to rob him of his glory? For the ignorant folk, counting the arm more honorable than the head, will give me more glory than him if I continue in the fight." An thus, not being willing to force his aid on a man who hated to receive it, he drew off his band; a while he awaited, but when he saw that the prince was surely beaten and the duke held victory in his hand, he gave the word that they should return by the way they had come.

"Indeed," said Tommasino, laughing, "it may be wisdom as well as good manners, cousin. For I would not trust myself to Valentine if he be victorious for all the service which we have done him in saving the apprentices he loves so well."

So Antonio's band turned and rode off from the field, and they passed through Bilano. But they found the village desolate, for report had come from the field that the duke's line was broken, and that in a short space the Prince of Mantivoglia would advance in triumph, and having sacked Bilano, would go against Forniola, where there were but a few old men and boys left to guard the walls against him. And one peasant whom they found hiding in the wood by the road said there was a panic in the city, and that many were escaping from it before the enemy should appear.

"It is months since I saw Forniola," said Antonio, with a smile. "Let us ride there and reassure these timid folk. For my lord, the duke, has surely by now won the victory, and he will pursue the prince till he yields peace and abandons the tribute."

Now a great excitement arose in the band at these words, for although they had lost ten men in the battle, and five more were disabled, yet were forty stout and ready, and it was not likely that there was any force in Forniola that would oppose them. And Martolo, who rode with Tommasino, whispered to him:

"My lord, my lord, shall we carry of the lady Lucia before his highness can return?"

Tommasino glanced at Antonio. "Nay, I know not what my cousin purposes," said he.

Then Antonio bade Bena and Martolo ride on ahead, taking the best horses, and tell the people at Forniola that victory was with the duke and that his highness' servant Antonio, of Monte Velluto, was at hand to protect the city till his highness should return in triumph. And the two, going ahead, while the rest of the band took their midday meal, met many ladies and certain rich merchants and old men escaping from the city, and turned them back, saying that all was well; and the ladies would fain have gone on and met Antonio, but the merchants, hearing that he was there, made haste to get within the walls again, fearing that he would levy a toll on them for the poor, as his custom was. And at this Bena laughed mightily, and drew rein, saying: "These rabbits will run quicker back to their burrow than we could ride, Martolo; let us rest a while under a tree; I have a flask of wine in my saddlebag."

So they rested; and while they rested they saw what amazed them, for a lady rode alone toward them on a palfrey; and though the merchants met her and spoke with her, yet she rode on. And when she came to the tree where Bena and Martolo were, they sprang up and bared their heads, for she was the Lady Lucia, and her face was full of fear and eagerness, as she said:

"No guard is kept to-day, even on helpless ladies. Is it true that my lord is near?"

"Yes, he is near," said Bena, kissing her hand. "See, there is the dust of his company on the road."

"Go, one of you, and say that I wait for him," she commanded; so Mortolo rode on to carry the news further, and Bena went to Antonio and said:

"Heaven, my lord, sends fortune. The Lady Lucia has escaped from the city and waits you under yonder tree."

And when Tommasino heard this he put out his hand suddenly and caught Antonio's hand and pressed it, saying:

"Go alone and bring her here; we will wait; the duke will not be here for many hours yet."

Then Antonio rode alone to the tree where Lucia was, and because he had not seen her for many months he leaped down from his horse and came running to her, and, kneeling, kissed her hand; but she, who stood now by her palfrey's side, flung her arms about his neck and fell with tears and laughter into his arms, saing: "Antonio! Antonio! Heaven is with us, Antonio."

"Yes," said he, "for his highness has won the day."

"Have not we won the day also?" said she, reaching up and laying her hands upon his shoulders.

"Heart of my heart," said he, softly, as he looked in her eyes.

"The cage is opened, and, Antonio, the bird is free," she whispered, and her eyes danced and her cheek went red. "Lift me to my saddle, Antonio."

The count obeyed her, and himself mounted, and she said:

"We can reach the frontier in three hours, and there—there, Antonio, none fears the duke's wrath." And Antonio knew what she would say, save that she would not speak it bluntly—that there they could find a priest to marry them. And his face was pale as he smiled at her. Then he laid his hand on her bridle and turned her palfrey's head toward Forniola. Her eyes darted a swift question at him, and she cried low, "Thither, Antonio!"

Then he answered her, bending still his look on her.

"Alas, I am no learned man nor a doctor skilled in matters of casuistry and nice distinctions. I can but do what the blood that is in me tells me a gentleman should do. To-day, sweetheart—ah, will you not hide your face from me, sweetheart, that my words may not die in my mouth?—to-day our lord the duke fights against the enemies of our city, holding for us in hard battle the liberty we have won, and bearing the banner of Forniola high to heaven in victory."

She listened with strained, frightened face, and the horses moved at a walk toward Forniola. And she laid her hand on his arm, saying again:

"Antonio!"

"And I have fought with my lord to-day and I would be at his side now except that I do his pleasure by leaving him to triumph alone. But my hand has been with him to-day and my heart is with him to-day. Tell me, sweetheart, if I rode forth to war and left you alone, would you do aught against me till I returned?" She did not answer.

"A prince's city," said he, "should be like his faithful wife, and when he goes against the enemy none at home should raise a hand against him, above all may not one who has fought by his side. For to stand side by side in battle is a promise and a compact between man and man even as though man swore to man on a holy relic."

Then she understood what he would say, and she looked away from him across the plain, and a tear rolled down her cheek, as she said:

"Indeed, my lord, the error lies in my thoughts, for I fancied that your love was mine."

Antonio leaned from his saddle and lightly touched her hair.

"Was that indeed your fancy?" said he, "and I prove it untrue?"

"You carry me back to my prison," she said. "And you will ride away."

"And so I love you not?" he asked.

"No, you love me not," said she, and her voice caught in a sob.

"See," said he "we draw near to Forniola, and the city gates are open, and look, they raise a flag on the duke's palace, and there is joy for the victory that Martolo has told them of. And in all the duchy there are but two black hearts that burn with treacherous thoughts against his highness, setting their own infinite joy above the honor and faith they owe him."

"Nay, but are there two?" she asked, turning her face from him.

"In truth, I would love to think there was but one," said he, "and that one beats in me, sweetheart, and so mightily that I think it will burst the walls of my body, and I shall die."

"Yet we ride to Forniola," said she.

"Yes, by Christ's grace," said Count Antonio, "we ride to Forniola."

Then the Lady Lucia suddenly dropped her bridle on the neck of her palfrey and caught Antonio's right hand in her two hands and said to him:

"When I pray to-night I will pray for the cleansing of the black heart, Antonio, and I will make a wreath and carry it to the duke and kiss his hand for his victory. And I will set lights in my window and flags on my house, and I will give my people a feast, and I will sing and laugh for the triumph of the city and for the freedom this day has won for us. And when I have done all this, what may I do then, Antonio?"

"I am so cruel," said he, "that then I would have you weep a little, yet spoil not the loveliest eyes in all the world, for if you dim them it may be that they will not shine like stars across the plain, and even into the hut where I live among the hills."

"Do they shine bright, Antonio?"

"As the gems on the gates of heaven," he said, and he reined in his horse and gave her bridle into her hands. And then for many minutes neither spoke, and Count Antonio kissed her lips, and she his, and they promised with the eyes what they needed not promise with the tongue. And the Lady Lucia went alone on her way to Forniola. But the count sat still like a statue of marble on his horse and watched her as she rode. And there he stayed till the gates of the city received her and the walls hid her from his sight, and the old men on the walls saw him and knew him, and asked:

"Does he come against us? But it was against the Prince of Mantivoglia that he swore to fight." And they watched him till he turned and rode at a foot's pace away from the city. And now as he rode his brow was smooth and calm, and there was a smile on his lips. But when he had ridden two or three miles and came where he had left the band he could see none of them. And a peasant came running to him in great fright and said: "My lord, your men are gone again to aid the duke, for the prince has done great deeds and turned the fight, and it is again very doubtful; and my Lord Tommasino bade me say that he knew your mind and was gone to fight for Forniola." Then, Antonio, wondering greatly at the news, set his horse to a gallop and passed through Bilano at a furious speed and rode on toward Agnino, and it was now afternoon; and presently he saw the armies, but they seemed to be still over against one another. And riding on he met Bena, who was coming to see him. And Bena said:

"The prince and his knights have fought like devils, my lord, and the townsmen grew fearful again when you were gone, and we, coming back, have fought again; but now a truce has been sounded, and the prince and the duke are meeting in conference between the armies. Yet they say that no peace will be made, for the prince, taking heart from his sudden success, though he is willing to abandon the tribute, asks something in return which the duke will not grant. Yet, perhaps, he has granted it by now, for his men are weary."

"He should grant nothing," cried Antonio, and galloped on again. But Bena said to himself, with an oath: "He has sent back the lady; the saints save us!" and followed Antonio with a laugh on his face.

But Antonio, thinking nothing of his own safety, rode full into the ranks of the duke's guard, saying: "Where does my lord talk with the prince?" And they showed him where the place was, for the prince and duke sat alone under a tree between the two arrays. And the duke looked harsh and resolute, while the prince was very courteously entreating him.

"Indeed," said he, "so doubtful has the day been, my lord, that I might well refuse to abandon the tribute, and try again to-morrow the issue of the fight. But, since so many brave men have fallen on both sides, I am willing to abandon it, asking only of you such favor as would be conceded to a simple gentleman asking of his friend. And yet you will not grant it me, and thus bring peace between us and our peoples."

Duke Valentine frowned and bit his lip, and the prince rose from where he had been seated and lifted his hand to the sky, and said: "So be it, my lord. On your head lies the blame. For to-morrow I will attack again, and as God lives, I will not rest till the neck of the city of Forniola is under my foot or my head rolls from my shoulders by your sword."

Then Duke Valentine paced up and down, pondering deeply, for he was a man that hated to yield aught, and beyond all else hated what the Prince of Mantivoglia asked of him. Yet he feared greatly to refuse, for the townsmen had no taste for another fight, and had threatened to march home if he would not make peace with the prince. Therefore he turned to the prince and, frowning heavily, was about to say:

"Since it must be so, so let it be," when suddenly Count Antonio rode up and leaped from his horse, crying: "Yield nothing, my lord, yield nothing. For if you will tell me what to do and suffer me to be your hand, we will drive the enemy over our borders with great loss."

Then the Prince of Mantivoglia fell to laughing, and he came to Antonio and put his arm about his neck, saying:

"Peace! peace! thou foolish man."

And Antonio saluted him with all deference, but he answered:

"I must give good counsel to my lord, the duke." And he turned to the duke again, saying: "Yield nothing to the prince, my lord."

Duke Valentine's lips curved in his slow smile as he looked at Antonio. "Is that, indeed, your counsel? And will you swear, Antonio, to give me your aid against the prince so long as the war lasts, if I follow it?"

"Truly I swear it," cried Antonio. "Yet what need is there of an oath? Am I not your highness' servant, bound to obey without an oath?"

"Nay, but you do not tell him," began the prince, angrily.

Duke Valentine smiled again. He was ever desirous to make a show of fairness where he risked nothing by it, and he gazed a moment on Antonio's face, and he answered to the Prince of Mantivoglia:

"I know the man, my lord. I know him in his strength and in his folly. Do not we know one another, Antonio?"

"Indeed, I know not all your higness' mind," answered Antonio.

"Well, I will tell him," said Duke Valentine. "This prince, Antonio, has consented to a peace, and to abandon all claim to tribute from our city on one condition—which is, that I, the duke, shall do at his demand what of my own free and sovereign will I would not do."

"His demand is not fitting nor warranted

The Princess of Mantivoglia and Antonio in the Garden.

by his power," said Antonio; but in spite of his words the Prince of Mantivoglia passed his arm through his and laughed ruefully, whispering: "Peace, man, peace."

"And thus I, the duke, having bowed my will to his, shall return to Forniola, not beaten, indeed, yet half beaten and cowed by the power of Mantivoglia."

"It shall not be, my lord," cried Count Antonio.

"Yet, my lord duke, you do not tell him what the condition is," said the prince.

"Why, it is nothing else than that I should pardon you and suffer you to wed the Lady Lucia," said Duke Valentine.

Then Count Antonio loosed himself from the arm of the prince and bent and kissed the prince's hand; but he said:

"Is this thing to come twice on a man in one day? For it is but an hour or more that I parted from the lady of whom you speak, and if her eyes could not move me what else shall move me?" And he told them briefly of his meeting with the Lady Lucia. And Duke Valentine was wroth with the shame that a generous act rouses in a heart that knows no generosity; and the prince was yet more wroth, and he said to Duke Valentine:

"Were there any honor in you, my lord, you would not need my prayers to pardon him."

At this the duke's face grew very dark, and he cried angrily:

"Get back to your own line, my lord, or the truce shall not save you." And he turned to Antonio and said: "Three hours do I give you to get hence before I pursue."

Antonio bowed low to him and to the prince, and the three parted, the two princes in bitter wrath and set again on fighting to the end, the one because he was ashamed and yet obstinate, the other for scorn of a rancor that found no place in himself. But Count Antonio went back to his company and drew it some little way from both armies, and he said to Tommasino:

"The truce is ended, and they will fight again as soon as the men have had some rest," and he told Tommasino what had passed. Then he sat silent again, and presently he laid hold of his cousin's arm, saying:

"Look you, Tommasino, princes are sometimes fools, and hence come trouble and death to honest, humble folk. It is a sore business that they fight again to-morrow and not now, for any great matter, but because they are bitter against one another on my account. Cannot I stop them, Tommasino?"

"Aye, if you have 5,000 men and not thirty-five, for that is the sum of us now, counting Martolo, who is back from Forniola."

Antonio looked thoughtfully through the dusk of evening which now fell.

"They will not fight to-night," he said. "I am weary of this blood-letting." And Tommasino saw that there was something in his mind.

Now the night fell dark again and foggy, even as the night before; and none in either army dared to move, and even the sentries could see no more than a few yards before them. But Antonio's men, being accustomed to ride in the dark and to find their way through mists, both in plain and hill, could see more clearly; and Antonio divided them into two parties, himself leading one and giving the other into Tommasino's charge. And having very securely tethered their horses they set forth, crawling on their bellies through the grass. And Antonio, with his party, made for the camp of the prince, while Tommasino and his party directed their way toward the duke's bivouacs. And they saw the fires very dimly through the mist, and both parties passed the sentries unobserved and made their way to the center of the camps. Then, on the stroke of midnight, a strange stir arose in both camps. Nothing could be seen, by reason of the darkness and the mist; but suddenly cries arose, and men ran to and fro, and a cry went up from the duke's camp: "They are behind us! They are behind us! We are surrounded!"

And in the prince's camp, also, was great fear; for from behind them, toward where the spurs of Mt. Agnino began, there came the shout of, "At them, at them, charge!" And the prince's officers, perceiving the cries to be from men of Forniola (and thus they knew by reason of certain differences in the phrasing of words), conceived that the duke had got behind them and was lying across their way of retreat. And the duke, hearing the shouts in his own camp, ran out from his tent, and he was met by hundreds of his townsmen, who cried, "My lord, we are surrounded!" For Antonio's men had gone to the townsmen and showed them how they might escape more fighting, and the townsmen were nothing loath; and they insisted with the duke that a body of men on horseback had passed behind them.

So the duke sent out scouts, who could see nothing of the horsemen. But then the townsmen cried, some being in the secret, others not: "Then they have ridden past us, and are making for Forniola, and they will do heaven knows what there. Lead us after them my lord." And the duke was very angry, but he was also greatly afraid, for he perceived that there was a stir also in the prince's camp, and heard shouts from there, but could not distinguish what was said. And while he considered what to do, the townsmen formed their ranks and sent him word that they were for Forniola; and when he threatened them with his guard they rejoined that one death was good as another; and the duked gnawed his nails and went pale with rage. But Count Antonio's men, seeing how well the plan had sped, crept again out from the camp and returned to where they had tethered their horses, and mounted, each taking a spare horse.

And before they had been there long they heard trumpets sound in the duke's camp, and the camp was struck and the duke and all of his force began to retreat on Bilano, throwing out many scouts and moving very cautiously in the darkness and mist. Yet when they came on nobody they marched more quickly, even the duke himself now believing that the Prince of Mantivoglia had of a purpose allowed the stir in his camp to be seen and heard, in order that he might detach a column to Forniola unobserved and attack the city before the duke came up. Therefore he now pressed on, saying: "I doubt not that the prince himself is with the troop that has gone to Forniola!" And all night long they marched across the plain, covering the space of eighteen miles, and just before the break of day they came to the city.

Thus did it fall out with the army of Duke Valentine, but the Prince of Mantivoglia had been no less bewildered, for when he sent out men to see what the cries behind the camp meant he found no man, but he still heard scattered cries among the rising ground, where the hills begin, and he in his turn saw a stir in the camp opposite to him. And, being an impetuous prince, as he had shown both in evil and in good that day, he snatched up his sword, swearing that he would find the truth of the matter. And bidding his officers wait his return and not be drawn from their position before he came again to them, and taking some of his younger knights and a few more, he passed out of his camp and paused for a moment, bidding those with him spread themselves out in a thin line, in order the better to reconnoiter, and that if some fell into an ambuscade, others might survive to carry the news back to the camp. And he, having given his order, himself stood resting on his sword.

And in an instant, before he could so much as lift the point of his sword from the ground, silent blurred shapes came from the mist, and were in front and behind and around them, and they looked so strange that he raised his hand to cross himself, but then a scarf was thrown over his mouth, and he was seized by eight strong hands and held so that he could not struggle, and neither could he cry out by reason of the scarf across his mouth. And they that held him begun to run rapidly, and he was carried out of the camp without the knowledge of any of those who were with him, and who, missing their leader, fell presently into a great consternation, and ran to and fro into the gloom, crying: "The prince! Have you seen the prince? Is his highness with you? In God's name, has the prince been this way?" But they did not find him, and they grew more confounded, stumbling against one another and being much afraid. And when the prince was nowhere to be found they lost heart and began to fall back toward their own borders, skirting the base of Agnino, and their retreat grew quicker, and at last when morning came they were near the border, but the fog still wrapped all the plain in obscurity, and robbed of their leader, they dared attempt nothing.

Now the Prince of Mantivoglia, whom his army sought thus in fear and bewilderment, was carried very quickly up to the high ground, where the rocks grew steep and close and the way led to the peak of Agnino. And as he was borne along some one bound his hands and his feet, and still he was carried up till at last he found himself laid down gently on the ground. And though he knew no fear—for they of Mantivoglia have ever been most valiant princes and strangers to all fear—yet he thought that his last hour was come, and fearing God, though he feared nothing else, he said a prayer and commended his soul to the Almighty, grieving that he should not receive the last services of the church.

And having done this he lay still, until the dawning day smote on his eyes and he could see, for the fog that lay dense on the plain was not in the hills, but hung between them and the plain. And he looked round, but saw no man. So he abode another hour, and then he heard a step behind him, and a man came, but whence he could not see, and the man stooped and loosed the scarf from his mouth and cut his bonds, and he sat up, uttering a cry of wonder. For Count Antonio stood before him, his sword sheathed by his side. And he said to Prince of Mantivoglia:

"Do to me what you will, my lord. If you will strike me as I stand, strike. Or if you will do me the honor to cross swords, my sword is ready. Or, my lord, if you will depart in peace and in my great love and reverence, I will give thanks to heaven and to a noble prince."

"Antonio, what does this mean?" cried the prince, divided between anger and wonder.

Then Antonio told him all that he had done, how the duke was gone back with his army to Forniola, and how the prince's army had retreated toward the borders of Mantivoglia; for of all this his men had informed him, and he ended with saying:

"For since it seemed that I was to be the most unworthy cause of more fighting between two great princes, it came into my head that such a thing should not be. And I rejoice that now it will not, for the townsmen will not march out again this year at least, and your highness will scarce sit down before Forniola with the season now far gone."

"So I am baked!" cried the prince, and he rose to his feet. "And this trick is played me by a friend!"

"I am Forniola," said Antonio, flushing red. "And while there was war I might in all honor have played another trick and carried you not hither, but to Forniola."

"I care not," said the prince, angrily. "It was a trick and no fair fighting."

"Be it as you will, my lord," said Antonio. "A man's own conscience is his only judge. Will you draw your sword, my lord?"

But the prince was very angry, and he answered roughly:

"I will not fight with you, and I will not speak more with you. I will go."

"I will lead your highness to your horse," said Antonio.

Then he led him some hundreds of paces down the hill, and they came where a fine horse stood ready saddled.

"It is not my horse," said the prince.

"Be not afraid, my lord. It is not mine, either," said Antonio, smiling. "A rogue who serves me, and is called Bena, forgot his manners so far as to steal it from the quarters of the duke. I pray you use some opportunity of sending it back to him, or I shall be dubbed horse stealer with the rest."

"I am glad it is not yours," said the prince, and he prepared to mount, Antonio holding the stirrup for him. And when he was mounted Antonio told him how to ride so that he should come safely to his own men and avoid certain scouting parties of the duke that he had thrown out behind him as he marched back to Forniola. And having done this, Antonio stood back and bared his head and bowed.

"And where is your horse?" asked the prince, suddenly.

"I have no horse, my lord," said Antonio. "My men and all my horses have ridden back to our hiding place in the hills. I am alone here, for I thought that your highness would kill me and I should need no horse."

"How, then, will you escape the scouting parties?"

"I fear I shall not escape them, my lord," said Antonio, smiling again.

"And if they take you?"

"Of a surety I shall be hanged," said Count Antonio.

The Prince of Mantivoglia gathered his brow into a heavy frown, but the corners of his lips twitched, and he did not look at Antonio. And thus they rested a few moments till suddenly the prince, unable to hold himself longer, burst in a great and merry peal of laughter, and he raised his fist and shook it at Antonio, crying:

"A scurvy trick, Antonio! By my faith, a scurvier trick by far than that other of yours. Art thou not ashamed, man? Ah, you cast down your eyes. You dare not look at me, Antonio."

"Indeed, I have naught to say for this last trick, my lord," said Antonio, laughing also.

"Indeed, I must carry this knave with me," cried the prince. "Fauch, the traitor. Get up behind me, traitor. Clasp me by the waist, knave! Closer, knave! As, Antonio, I know not in what mood heaven was when you were made. I would I had the heart to leave you to your hanging! For what a story will my princess make of this! I shall be the best derided man in all Mantivoglia."

"I think not, my dear lord," said Count Antonio. "Unless a love that a man may reckon on as his lady's love, and a chivalry that does not fail, and a valor that has set two armies all agape in wonder, be your matters for mirth in Mantivoglia. And indeed, my lord, I would that I were riding to the lady I love best in the world, as your highness rides; for she might laugh till her sweet eyes ran tears so I were near to dry them."

The prince put back his hand toward Antonio and clasped Antonio's hand and said:

"What said she when you left her, Antonio? For with woman love is often more than honor, and their tears rust the bright edge of a man's conscience."

"Her heart is ever as our lady's; and with tears and smiles she left me," said Antonio, and he grasped the prince's hand. "Come, my lord, we must ride, or it is a prison for you and a halter for me."

So they rode together in the morning on the horse that Bena had stolen from among the choicest of Duke Valentine's and keeping cunningly among the spurs of the hills, they were sighted once only from afar off by the duke's scouts, and escaped at a canter and came safe to the prince's army, where they were received with great wonder and joy. And the prince would not turn again to besiege Forniola, for he had had a fill of fighting, and the season grew late for the siege of the walled city. So he returned with all his power to Mantivoglia, having won by his expedition much praise for his valor, and nothing else in the wide world beside; which thing indeed is so common in the wars of princes that even wise men have well nigh ceased to wonder at it.

But the Princess of Mantivoglia heard all that had passed with great mirth, and made many jests upon her husband, and again, lest the prince should take her jesting in evil part, more upon Duke Valentine. But concerning Count Antonio and the Lady Lucia she did not jest. Yet one day, chancing to be alone with Count Antonio—for he stayed many days at the court of Mantivoglia, and was treated with great honor—she said to him, with a smile and half-raised eyelids:

"Had I been a man, my Lord Antonio, I would not have returned alone from the gates of Forniola. In truth, your lady needs patience for her virtue, Count Antonio!"

"I trust, then, that heaven sends it to her, madam," said Antonio.

"And to you, also," she retorted with a laugh. "And to her, trust in you also, I pray. For an absent lover is often an absent heart, Antonio, and I hear that many ladies would fain soften your exile. And what I hear the Lady Lucia may hear also."

"She would hear it as the idle babbling of water over stones," said Antonio. "But, madam, I am glad I have some honesty in me. For if there were not honest men and true maids in this world I think more than a half of the wits would starve for lack of food."

"Mercy! mercy!" she cried. "Indeed, your wit has a keen edge, my lord."

"Yet is not whetted on truth and chastity," said he.

She answered nothing for a moment, then she drew near to him and stood before him, regarding his face, and she sighed, "Heigho!" And again, "Heigho!" and then dropped her eyes, and raised them again to his face, and at last she said:

"To some faithfulness is easy. I give no great praise to the Lady Lucia." And when she had said this she turned and left him, and was but little more in his company so long as he stayed at Mantivoglia. And she spoke no more of the Lady Lucia. But when he was mounting, after bidding her farewell, she gave him a white rose from her bosom, saying carelessly:

"Your color, my lord, and the best. Yet God made the other roses also."

"All that he made he loves, and in all there is good," said Antonio, and he bowed very low, and, having kissed her hand, took the rose, and he looked into her eyes and smiled, saying, "Heaven give peace where it has given wit and beauty," and so he rode away to join his company in the hills. And the Princess of Mantivoglia, having watched till he was out of sight, went into dinner and was merrier than ever she had shown herself before, so that they said: "She feared Antonio and is glad that he is gone." Yet that night while her husband slept she wept.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Thwarted by a Smuggler.

"Poor Ted, poor Ted! I'd give my commission to see him again."

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Capt. Richard Debney, of the British navy, commander of the man-of-war Cormorant, was entertaining some friends in the harbor of San Francisco, and the talk turned upon "Ted" Debney, his brother, who had resigned from the navy several years before, because he had chivalrously prevented a French cruiser from boring holes in a wretched opium smuggling craft. "Ted" was impulsive, brave, daring, and loved alike by his superiors and his men.

"Have you ever got on the track of Ted?"

"Once I though I had at Singapore, but nothing came of it. No doubt he changed his name. He never asked for nor got the legacy which my poor father left him."

An hour later they were aboard the Cormorant, dining with a number of men asked to come and say good-by to Mostyn, who was starting for England the second day following, after a pleasant cruise and visit with Debney.

Meanwhile, from far beyond that yellow lane of light running out from Golden Gate there came a vessel, sailing straight for harbor.

She was a large, old-fashioned cruiser, carrying guns, and when she passed another vessel, she hoisted the British ensign. She looked like a half obsolete corvette, spruced up, made modern by every possible device, and all her appointments were shapely and in order. She was clearly a British man-of-war, as shown in her trim-dressed sailors, her good handful of marines; but her second and third lieutenants seemed little like Englishmen, and, indeed, one was an American and one was a Hollander.

There was gun drill and cutlass drill every day and, what was also singular, there was boat drill twice a day, so that the crew of this man-of-war, as they saw Gol