

What? Is this wolfish Seigneur so nice a man that you must handle him with scented gloves? Believe me I have done that these ten days past which but for—— Bah! that is past, and we have enough on hand without adding ancient history! Is all ready?"

"What? are they hard behind you?"

"No, no, no; we have a full hour, or maybe more."

"Then a little ancient history may do no harm," said Perego. "We had your two messages; but how did you gain an entrance to the wolf's hold?"

"By leaving Meluzza by the south and reaching Casa Foscotti by the north with six as consummate scoundrels as ever robbed for hire. They were my vouchers, and passed me in without a question, for why should the seventh not be as the six? No pigeon would mate with such kites."

"What?" cried Roger Patcham, "you have given him six that we may have one? Strange strategy that, Monsieur de Casera!"

"Six that he would have had without me, for they were drawn to Foscotti as a whirlpool draws flotsam. But if I brought him six I took away ten, so he owes me four, Captain Patcham."

"Ten? How?"

"Why, he gave me ten to—— But all this is beside the mark. What of the defence?"

"Not so beside the mark as you think. Does di Gadola still look for a surprise?"

"Why not?"