

"Leave the doors open, but set a guard beyond, lest these wastrels return, though I think they are not such fools. Draw the curtains across this end to shut out the stairway from the womenfolk, then have the wounded into the guard-room—those, at least, who cannot keep their feet—and let the priests be sent for. They will have no white confessions to hear to-night if the whole truth be told them, and 'tis a terrible thing that a man should wait for such an hour as this to make his peace with God."

Thus it came that it was to a strange and sorrowful Christmas gathering that Denise and Caterina presently entered, to play hostess after an unwonted fashion. Lamps and flambeaux lit the gaunt room to its furthest limits, so that the very corners were as light by day. Ranged side by side down one length of the room were the uninvited and now unwilling guests, with here and there mixed through them a man of Meluzza. As yet nothing was hidden, and the staring glare laid pitilessly bare the stark horror of the night's work, a horror heightened by the groans and curses which no will of manhood could repress. Already at the further end there lay two who in spirit had gone to join their silent fellows of the hall, and by the bending of the friars—crucifix and holy oil in hand—above two more it was clear the tale was yet incomplete. Nay, it might not close even with them, for yet others lay as calm as death itself, but with life still staggering on the border-line that divides two worlds.