

"Give me that letter," said Marco, seizing the man by the arm as he entered.

Not recognising the chief in the faint light, the messenger strove to disengage himself, and replied, "Hands off, my good sir! I have orders to deliver it to none but the castellan."

"Give me the letter!" repeated Marco, in an angry tone, tightening his grasp, and dragging him towards a window, where the greater light displayed to the poor fellow the lineaments of the great captain.

"Pardon me, my lord!" he replied, pale and trembling; "I knew not it was you. My master told me—; but then thou art master here.—There is the letter."

Marco tore it open and eagerly looked for a signature; but there was none, and turning to the commencement, he read as follows:

"MY TRUSTY GALLOW-BIRD,—Ere this reach thee, the matter we agreed on the other day, will doubtless be all at an end; if not, woe to thine unfortunate carcass! Marco is at Milan! he arrived tonight and will probably be upon thee tomorrow. Let these tidings put thee on thy mettle—destroy every trace of the deed—let not a single indication of it meet the eye of Marco! Perdition seize thee else!"

A cold chill ran through the veins of the Visconte as he flung the letter down, and rushing up to the courier with threatening gesture, he asked—"Who gave thee this?"

The question was put in a tone that left no encouragement for prevarication, and the messenger stammered out—"I had it from Lodrisio Visconti."

"Know'st thou," continued Marco, "know'st thou to what matter this missive refers?"

"I know nothing of it," replied the trembling courier; "I have only obeyed my master. He said to me—'Take this letter to Rosato'—and I have done so. On the faith of a Christian I know nothing more of it."

"We may speak of this again. Meantime, see that thou sett'st not a foot beyond the threshold of this chamber."

So saying, Marco left the hall, and proceeded to the quarters assigned to the castellan; where the servant, without recognising him, at once admitted him, and then went to announce to Dame Margarita, that a stranger wished to see her.

"Where is thine husband?" inquired the Visconte, as she entered a few minutes afterwards, with her child in her arms.

"He went out last night, and I know not whether he hath gone," stammered out the poor woman, stricken with surprise and consternation at finding herself so unexpectedly in the presence of her master.

"Read this letter," said Marco, presenting that

sent by Lodrisio, "and tell me at once what mystery lies in it.—Come, quick!"

The dame ran her eyes timidly over the fatal letter; then falling on her knees, she exclaimed, while a torrent of tears ran down her cheeks—"Oh! have pity on that unfortunate wretch, my husband!"

"Come, tell me! what signify these words?" said Marco, preserving his calmness with an effort.

"Yes! I will tell thee all—all that I know."

"Rise and speak!"

The terrified creature rose to her feet, and, trembling and sobbing, thus commenced—"I have warned him often of this—I have entreated him—I have besought him on my knees—as Heaven shall judge me——"

"I ask thee of Beatrice, woman!" broke out Marco, in a harsh and angry tone. "Tell me—is she here—is she still alive?"

"She is living, and hath been in the castle for more than a month," replied the dame. "Yesterday evening I saw her attendant at a window, whence she is wont to acquaint me by signs how they fare, and what her mistress hath need of. She signified to me that she was much better; for the poor lady hath been ailing for some days."

"Quick! lead me to her! I must see her at once—this instant, I say!"

The dame answered not; but placing her child in the arms of the attendant, she left the apartment without a moment's delay, followed by Marco. By many a winding staircase and dark gallery they reached a small courtyard in a distant portion of the castle, where Margarita paused, and pointing to several windows that looked into the court, said,

"She is within there, accompanied by the young maiden who was brought hither along with her."

"Let us enter!" said Marco: and his foot was already on the stair that led upwards; but arresting his steps, he stood for a moment in thought, and then continued—"No, do thou go alone! I will remain here. Tell her to be of good cheer, that her mother will soon be with her, that she will return immediately to her home. Tell her that I—But no! speak not of me, mention not my name! Tell her every thing that may comfort her—promise her every thing she may ask."

"But are you in very deed come to liberate her?" asked the wife of the castellan, with hesitation; "my heart cannot allow me to betray the poor creature."

"As Heaven will answer at my utmost need, I speak the truth!"

"The Lord bless you for it!" exclaimed Margarita, clasping her hands.

"Now enter!" said the Visconte; "and to save