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Title: Andrea Delfin

Author: Paul Heyse

Translator: Gunther Olesch

Release date: April 1, 2002 [EBook #3156]

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Language: English

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Andrea Delfin (1859)

by Paul Heyse (1830-1914)

Translated by Gunther Olesch in 2000 from the HTML files available at <http://gutenberg.aol.de/heyse/delfin/delfin.htm>

Translator's Comments

Paul Johann Ludwig Heyse was born on March 15, 1830, in Berlin. His father was a professor of philology and his mother was a relative of Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, the composer. Thus, Paul Heyse grew up in an atmosphere of appreciation for the fine arts. He studied classical philology, art history, and Romance philology, obtaining his doctorate in 1852, and became a widely respected authority on literature.

In 1910, Paul Heyse was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature and was ennobled as Paul von Heyse. He died on April 4, 1914, in Munich.

Trying to find out whether English translations of Paul Heyse's work were already available, I turned to the online catalog of the Library of Congress. Aside from many German editions, I found the following books, which seem to contain English translations:

1867-68 Good stories ... [various authors: N.Hawthorne, F.J.O'Brien, H.Zschokke, P.J.L.Heyse, W.M.Thackeray.] 1867 L'Arrabiata and other tales. Tr. by Mary Wilson. 1870 The solitaires. A Tale. 1878 In paradise; a novel. 1879 Tales from the German of Paul Heyse. 1881 Doomed. 1881 Fortnight at the dead lake, and Beatrice. 1882 Barbarossa, and other tales. 1882 L'Arrabiata, and other tales. 1882 The witch of the Corso. Tr. by George W. Ingraham. 1883 Children of the world. 1886 Selected stories. 1888 Words never to be forgotten and The donkey. Tr. by Abbie E. Fordyce. 1890 Masterpieces of German fiction. [various authors: R.Lindau, F.Lewald-Stahr, E.Eckstein, A.v.Wilbrandt, P.J.L.Heyse, H.Hopfen.] 1894 The children of the world. New ed., rev. 1894 At the ghost hour. The forest laugh. 1894 At the ghost hour. Mid-day magic. Tr. by Frances A. Van Santford. 1894 At the ghost hour. The fair Abigail. Tr. by Frances A. Van Santford. 1894 At the ghost hour. The house of the unbelieving Thomas. Tr. by Frances A. Van Santford. 1894 Children of the world. 1894 A divided heart, and other stories. [A divided heart.— Minka.—Rothenburg on the Tauber.] Translated into English with an introduction by Constance Stewart Copeland. 1900 Mary of Magdala: a drama in five acts. Tr. by Alexis Irénée du Pont Coleman. 1902 Heyse's L'Arrabiata in English, ed. Warren Washburn Florer. 1902 Mary of Magdala; an historical and romantic drama in five acts, adapted in English by Lionel Vale. 1903 Mary of Magdala; an historical and romantic drama in five acts, the translation freely adapted and written in English verse by William Winter. 1916 L'Arrabiata, literally tr. by Vivian Elsie Lyon.

The most striking aspect of this list is that it ends in 1916. It seems as if for the larger part of the 20th century no English translations of Paul Heyse's stories have been published. Perhaps, my translation of "Andrea Delfin", contained in this file, might inspire someone to dig up some of those older translations and to prepare them as etexts for the Project Gutenberg.

According to www.nobel.se/literature/laureates/1910/press.html, Andrea Delfin, written in 1859, is part of a series of novellas, which Paul Heyse had published between 1855 and 1862 in four volumes.

The story of "Andrea Delfin" is set in 18th century Venice and contains a few, mostly Italian, expressions which might require an explanation. I have looked up the most important ones and compiled a very short list here:

bora: A strong, cold wind, blowing from the mountains to the Adriatic Sea.

Bridge of Sighs: The bridge on the east side of the Doges' Palace, leading across a narrow canal to the prisons.

doge: Duke, the head of state in Venice from 697 to 1797.

felucca: A small ship with two masts, equipped with sails as well as oars, a smaller type of galley.

faro: A game of cards, also spelled "pharaoh" in English.

lido: A sandbank, which separates the lagoon of Venice from the sea. There are several settlements on these sandbanks (but the one called Lido did not exist yet at the time of this story).

Piazzetta: A small square near the Piazza San Marco. The administration of the Venetian republic resided in the buildings surrounding these squares. The entrance to the Piazzetta was the ceremonial landing spot for high officials and is marked by two massive granite columns.

procurator: One of the nine highest ranking officials in Venice, among which the doge was elected.

Procurators' Offices: These buildings are on the northern and southern sides of the Piazza San Marco.

Angelo Querini: This is not a fictional character, but an actual historic person.

Rialto: A corruption of "Rivo Alto", this is the oldest and most central part of Venice.

sbirro: A member of the secret police.

signoria: The highest public authority in Venice.

tarock: A game of cards, usually played by three people with a deck of 78 cards.

Terraferma: The land under the control of Venice, outside of the city itself. It stretched from the borders of Milan in the west to the Istrian Peninsula in the east and from the Alps in the north to the Po River in the south.

zecchino: A gold coin (ducat), produced in Venice since 1284, until the beginning of the 19th century.

Andrea Delfin

A Venetian novella

by Paul Heyse

Original title: Andrea Delfin, eine venezianische Novelle

[Translated by Gunther Olesch in 2000]

In that Venetian alley which bears the friendly name of "Bella Cortesia", there was, in the middle of the past century, the simple, one-story house of a common family; over its low portal, framed by two wooden spiral columns and a baroque ledge, resided an image of the Madonna in a niche, and an eternal flame flickered humbly behind its red glass. Entering the lower corridor, one would have found oneself at the foot of a broad, steep staircase, which, without any bents, went straight up to the rooms upstairs. Here also, a lamp burnt day and night, which hang by shiny, delicate chains from the ceiling, since daylight could only enter inside, whenever the front door happened to be opened. But in spite of this everlasting gloom, the staircase was the place where Signora Giovanna Danieli, the owner of the house, liked to sit the most. Since the death of her husband, she inhabited the inherited house together with Marietta, her only daughter, and let a few unneeded rooms to quiet lodgers. She maintained that the tears she had cried for her dear husband had weakened her eyes too much to be still able to withstand direct sunlight. But the neighbours said about her that the only reason for her continued presence at the top of the stairs, from morning until nightfall, was to enable her to start a conversation with everyone leaving or entering the house and not to let him pass, before he had payed his dues to her curiosity and her talkative nature. At the time when we are now about to make her acquaintance, this could hardly have been the reason for her preferring the hard seat of the stairs over a comfortable armchair. It was in August of the year 1762. For half a year, the rooms she used to let were empty, and she had only little contact with her neighbours. Furthermore, night had already fallen, and a visit at this time of day would have been quite unusual. Nevertheless, the little woman sat persistently at her post and thoughtfully looked down the empty corridor. She had sent her child to bed and had placed a few pumpkins by her side, to take out the seeds before she would go to sleep. But all kinds of thoughts and ideas had made her forget her task. Her hands rested in her lap, her head was leaning against the banister; it had not been the first time that she had fallen asleep in this position.

Today, it had almost happened to her again, when three slow, but forceful, thumps to the front door suddenly made her start. "Misericordia!" said the woman, as she was getting up, but remained standing there motionlessly, "what's this? Have I dreamt? Could it really be him?"

She listened. The thumps of the knocker were repeated. "No," she said, "it isn't Orso. His knocks sounded differently. It aren't the sbirri either. Let's see what heaven sends." - With these words, she sluggishly walked down the stairs and asked without opening the door who would wish to enter.

A voice answered that there was a stranger outside, looking for lodgings here. The house had been highly recommended to him; he hoped to stay for a long time and the landlady would probably be satisfied with him. All of this had been said politely and in good Venetian, so that Signora Giovanna, in spite of the late hour, did not think twice before opening the door. The appearance of her guest justified her confidence. He wore, as far as she could make out in the gloom, the decent, black garments of the lower middle class, carried a leather portmanteau under his arm, and held the hat modestly in his hand. Only his face made the woman wonder. It was not young, not old, the beard was still dark brown, the forehead without wrinkles, the eyes lively, but the expression of his mouth and the way he talked was tired and worn out, and the short hair was, in a strange contrast with his still youthful features, completely gray.

"Kind woman," he said, "I've disturbed you in your sleep, and perhaps even in vain. For, let me say it right away, if you have no room with a window above the canal, I won't be your lodger. I've come from Brescia, my physician has recommended the damp air of Venice to me for my weak chest; I've been told to live above the water."

"Well, thank God!" said the widow, "so here, for a change, comes someone who'll respect our canal. Last summer, I've had a Spaniard, who moved out, because, as he said, the water had a smell as if rats

and melons had been cooked in it! And it has been recommended to you? We do say here in Venice:

"The channel's water will harshly cure what's ill.

"But this has a hidden meaning, sir, an evil meaning, considering how often, at the command of the rulers, a gondola has set out to the lagoon with three persons on board and returned with only two. Let's not talk about this any more, sir - God save us all! But is your passport in order? Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to let you stay."

"I have already shown it three times, kind woman, in Mestre, out on the lagoon at the guard's gondola, and at the Traghetto. My name is Andrea Delfin, my profession is that of a notary's legal clerk, as which I've worked in Brescia. I'm a calm person and never liked having any business with the police."

"Just the better," said the woman, walking up the stairs again, ahead of her guest. "It's better to be unharmed than to be mourned, one eye on the cat, the other on the pan, and it's more useful to be afraid than to suffer the loss. Oh, those times we live in, Signore Andrea! One shouldn't think about it. Thinking shortens one's life, but worry unlocks the heart. There, look," and she opened a large room, "isn't it pretty in here, isn't it homely? There, the bed, I've sown it with my own hands, when I was young, but in the morning one wouldn't know the day. And there's the window going out to the canal, which isn't wide as you can see, but runs just the more deeply, and the other window over there is going out to the little alley, but you'll have to keep it shut, for the bats are getting more and more of a pest. Look there, on the other side of the canal, you can almost reach it with your hand, it's the palace of Countess Amidei, who's as blond as gold, and is just as frequently handed from one man to another. But here I'm standing and chatting, and you've neither any light nor water, and you'd also be hungry."

The stranger had inspected the room thoroughly with one swift look, as soon as he had entered; he had gone from one window to the other, and then, he threw his portmanteau onto an armchair. "Everything's perfect," he said. "We'll surely agree on the price. Just bring me a bite to eat and, if you should have any, a small glass of wine. Afterwards, I want to sleep."

There was something strangely commanding about his gesture, in spite of the mild sound of his words. Hastily, the woman obeyed and left him alone for a short time. Now, he instantly stepped back up to the window, leant out, and looked down at the very narrow canal, which showed no movement of its black waters, and thus by no means revealed that it had its share in liveliness of the great sea, in the breaking waves of the ancient Adriatic Sea. The palace on the other side rose before him as a heavy mass, all windows were dark, since the front was not facing the canal; only a narrow door opened to this side, down below, closely above the face of the waters, and a black gondola had been chained to a pole before its threshold.

All of this seemed to conform very well to the wishes of the new arrival, who also did not seem less pleased with the fact that through the other window, facing the blind alley, nobody would be able to look into his room. For on the other side ran a windowless wall without any other interruptions than a few ledges, cracks, and cellar-holes, and only cats, martens, and owls would have regarded these gloomy nooks as pleasant and habitable.

A ray of light shone into his chamber from the corridor, the door was opened and, holding a candle in her hand, the small widow entered again, followed by her daughter, who hurriedly had to get out of bed again, to assist her in welcoming the guest. The girl's stature was almost even smaller than her mother's, but nevertheless seemed, due to her most extreme daintiness and the hardly matured slenderness of all shapes, taller and as if she was gliding along on the tips of her toes, while in her face the resemblance, except for the differences accounted for by her age, was recognisable at the first sight. Only the expression on both faces seemed to be incapable of ever taking on any similarity. Between the dense eyebrows of Signora Giovanna, there was a tense trait, as if she was sorrowfully waiting for something, which even all experiences of growing older would not be able to place permanently on Marietta's clear brow. These eyes always had to be smiling, this mouth always had to be a bit open, to release any humorous remark without delay. It was infinitely cute to see how now, in this pretty face, cunningness, surprise, curiosity, and wantonness fought with one another. Upon entering, she tilted her head, the loose braids of which were wrapped in a scarf, to the side, to see the new fellow inhabitant of their house. Even his serious demeanour and his gray hair did not reduce her high spirits. "Mother," she whispered, while putting a large plate with ham, bread, and fresh figs onto the table, "he has a strange face, like a new house in winter, when the snow has fallen onto the roof."

"Be quiet, you evil witch!" the mother said swiftly. "White hair gives false testimony. He's ill, you know, and you ought to be respectful, because illness arrives on horseback, but leaves on foot, and may God protect you and me, for the ill eat little, but the illness devours everything. Just get a little bit of water, as much as we've still got. Tomorrow, we'll have to get up early and buy more. Look, there he's

sitting, as if he was asleep. He's tired from his journey, and you're tired from sitting still. This is how different things are in this world."

During this quiet conversation, the stranger had been sitting by the window, holding his head in his hand. Even after he had looked up, he hardly seemed to notice the presence of the dainty girl, who was bowing to him.

"Come on, and eat something, Signore Andrea," said the widow. "He who doesn't eat his supper will suffer hunger in his dreams. Look, the figs are fresh, and the ham is tender, and this is wine from Cyprus, just as good as what the doge would drink. His cellarer has sold it to us himself, an old acquaintance of my husband. You've travelled, sir. Didn't you happen to meet him some time, my Orso, Orso Danieli?"

"Kind woman," said the stranger, pouring a few drops of wine into the glass and cracking open one of the figs, "I have never travelled beyond Brescia and don't know anyone by this name."

Marietta left the room, and she could be heard singing a song to herself in her clear voice, while rushing down the stairs.

"Do you hear the child?" asked Signora Giovanna. "One might think that she wasn't my daughter, though even a black hen might lay a white egg. Always singing and jumping about, as if this wasn't Venice, where it's a good thing that the fish can't talk, for otherwise they'd tell things, which would make your hair stand on end. But her father was just the same, Orso Danieli, the foreman of Murano, where they make these colourful glasses, like nowhere else in the entire world. 'A joyful heart gives red cheeks,' this was what he always used to say. And therefore, he said to me one day, 'Giovannina,' he said, 'I can't stand it here any more, the air of Venice is choking me, just yesterday, another one has been strangled and hung up on the gallows by his feet, because he's been speaking out freely against the inquisition and the Council of Ten. Everyone knows where he's been born, but not where he'll die, and there are many who think they'd be riding high on their horses, though they're sitting on the ground. So, Giovannina,' he said, 'I want to go to France, my craft will win me favours, and petty cash chases the big money. I know my trade, and once I'll have made it out there, you'll join me with our child.' - She was eight years old then, Signore Andrea. She laughed, when she kissed her father for the last time; this made him laugh, too. But I cried, so he had to cry along, though he left quite happily in the gondola, I even still heard him whistling, after he had already turned around the corner. One year passed. And what happened? The signoria asked where he was; nobody from Murano was allowed to practice his craft abroad, so that the tricks of the trade wouldn't be copied; I was told to write him, that he should return or face the death penalty. He laughed about the letter; but the gentlemen of the tribunal didn't think that this was funny. One morning, when we were still in bed, they came for me, and the child as well, they've dragged us up to the cells under the lead roofs, and I had to write him again where I was, I and our child, and that I would stay there, until he came personally to Venice to get me out. It didn't take long, until I received his answer, he didn't feel like laughing any more, and he'd follow the letter as fast as his feet would carry him. Well, I hoped daily that he'd make it true. But weeks and months passed, and the pain in my heart as well as the sickness in my head grew more and more, for it's hell up there, Signore Andrea, my only comfort was the child I had with me, who didn't comprehend any part of this misery, except that she ate little, and felt hot during the day; but nevertheless, she sang, to cheer me up, so that I was utterly overwhelmed to hold back the tears. Only after three months, we were released; they said the glass-blower Orso Danieli had died in Milan from a fever, and we could go home. I've heard others say so, too - but he who'd believe this, doesn't know the signoria. Dead? Would a man die when he has a wife and a child sitting under the lead roofs and is supposed to get them out?"

"And what do you think, happened to your husband?" asked the stranger.

She gave him a look, which reminded him that the poor woman had lived under the lead roofs for several long weeks. "It isn't right," she said. "There are many who are alive and still don't return, and many are dead, but do return. But let's not talk about that. Indeed, if I'd tell you, who'd give me the guarantee that you wouldn't go ahead and tell the tribunal all about it? You look like a galantuomo; but who's still trustworthy, nowadays? One in a thousand, none in a hundred. No offence, Signore Andrea, but you might know what we say here in Venice:

"With lies and tricks you will not die,
With tricks and lies you will get by."

There was a pause in the conversation. A while ago, the stranger had already pushed the plate aside and had eagerly listened to the widow.

"I can understand," he said, "that you don't want to confide your secrets in me. Furthermore, they are

none of my business, and I wouldn't know how to help you anyhow. But why, good woman, do you nevertheless put up with this tribunal, under which you have suffered so much, you and the entire people of Venice? For I do know little about the local situation - I never took a deep interest in political matters - but still I've heard that much that just last year, there was an rebellion in this town, which sought to abolish the secret tribunal, that even one of the aristocrats spoke out against it, and that the Great Council elected a commission to deliberate the matter, and that everyone was very excitedly arguing for and against it. Even in my office in Brescia, I've heard about it. And when, in the end, everything remained the same and the power of the secret tribunal came out stronger than ever, why did the people light bonfires then in all of the squares and mocked those aristocrats, who had voted against the tribunal and now had to fear its revenge? Why was there no one to prevent the inquisition from banishing its bold enemy to Verona? And who can tell whether they'll let him stay alive there, or whether the daggers have already been sharpened to silence him forever? I - as I've already said - know only little about this; I also don't know this man, and I feel very indifferent about everything which happens here, because I'm ill and probably won't stay in this colourful world for much longer. But I'm nevertheless astonished to see these fickle people, which one day call those three men their tyrants and rejoice the next day, when those perish who wanted to put an end to this tyranny."

"The way you talk, sir!" said the widow and shook her head. "You've never seen him, that Signore Avogadore Angelo Querini, who has been banished for declaring war against the secret justice? Well so, sir, but I've seen him, and the other poor people have so, too, and they all say that he was an honest gentleman and a very learned man, who has studied the old stories of Venice, day and night, and knows the law like a fox knows the pigeonry. But whoever had seen him cross the street or standing in the Broglio with his friends, leaning against a column with his eyes half closed, knew that he was a nobile from the feather on his hat down to the buckles on his shoes, and whatever he said and did against the tribunal, he didn't do for the people, but for the high and mighty gentlemen. But the sheep don't care, Signore Delfin, whether they are slaughtered or devoured by the wolf, and

"When the hawk fights with the kite,
The chickens can be free tonight.

"You see, my dear, that's why there was so much joy at their failure, when all of the tribunal's rights were confirmed and it wouldn't have to answer to anybody, just as before, except for God Almighty on judgement day and their own conscience every day of their lives. In Canale Orfano, there lie, out of the hundreds who have prayed their last Ave there, ten poor men next to ninety noble gentlemen. But supposed, aristocratic criminals and common ones would be sentenced and executed in public by the Great Council - misericordia! - we'd have eight hundred hangmen instead of three, and the big thief would hang the little one."

It seemed as if he wanted to reply, but uttered nothing more than a short laugh, which the landlady interpreted as an affirmation. At this moment, Marietta entered again, carrying a pitcher of water and a fumigating pan, on which pungently smelling herbs were smoldering and blowing their fumes into her face, so that, as she coughed, cursed, and rubbed her eyes, she made the cutest gestures. With small steps, she carried the fumigant closely by all four walls, which were covered by a huge number of flies and gnats.

"Get yourself away from there, you scoundrels," she said, "you bloodsuckers, worse than lawyers and doctors! Would you also like to eat figs before bedtime and enjoy a sip of Cypriot wine? You might as well laugh if you did and afterwards show your gratitude by stinging this gentleman all over his face, when he's asleep, you sneaky murderers! Just wait, I'll feed you with something which shall put you to sleep without supper."

"Do you always have to babble on, you godless creature?" said the mother, who was following every movement of her darling with overjoyed looks. "Don't you know that an empty barrel makes the loudest sound, and that she who talks much, says little?" - "Mother," the girl said laughingly, "I have to sing a lullaby for the gnats, and look how it works! Here, they are already dropping off the wall. Good night, you loafers, you worst of all company, not paying any rent and yet peeking into all pots. I'll take care of you tomorrow again, if you didn't get enough today."

She once again swung the almost burnt out herbs over her head as if she was casting a spell and poured the ashes into the canal; then, she made a quick bow towards the stranger and rushed out of the room as swiftly as the wind.

"Isn't she a witch, an ugly, naughty creature?" said Signora Giovanna, while getting up and starting to leave as well. "And yet, every female monkey likes her little monkey. And besides, however little and useless she may be, to the same extent she's also eager to help out, and it has also been said about her:

"Before the mother bends her back,

The herb is plucked, in the girl's sack.

"If I hadn't the child, Signore Andrea! But you want to sleep, and I'm still standing here, chatting away like a soup, cooking noisily over a hot fire. Sleep well, and welcome to Venice!"

Unemotionally, he returned her greeting and did not seem to notice that she was obviously still expecting him to make a kind remark about her daughter. When he was finally alone, he continued sitting at the table for some time, and his face grew more and more gloomy and pain-stricken. The light burnt on a long wick, those flies which had managed to evade Marietta's witchcraft, besieged the overripe figs in black clusters; outside, in the blind alley, the bats were flying against the window and collided with the bars - the lonely stranger seemed to be dead to everything around him, and only his eyes were alive.

Only after the clock in the tower of a nearby church had struck eleven, he rose mechanically and looked around. The pungent fumes of the fumigating herbs moved along the ceiling of his low chamber in gray strands and the smoke from the candle joined the cloud above. Andrea opened the window going out to the canal, to cleanse the air. In doing so, he saw a light on the other side, coming from a window, which was only half covered by a white curtain, and through the gap, he could clearly observe a girl, sitting at a table with a bowl and hastily devouring the remains of a large pie, putting the pieces into her mouth with her fingers, and drinking once and again from a small crystal bottle. Her face had a frivolous, but not enticing expression, being no longer in her earliest youth. Her negligent clothing and partially undone hair had something calculating and intentional about it, which was nevertheless not an unpleasant sight. She must have noticed already a while ago that the room on the other side had got a new inhabitant; but though she now saw him at the window, she calmly continued her feast, and only when she drank, she first swung the little bottle in front of herself, as if she was greeting someone who would drink with her. When she was finished, she put the empty bowl aside, pushed the table with the lamp on it against the wall, so that all of the light now fell on a wide mirror in the back of the room, and began to try on one costume after another from a colourful pile of clothes for a masquerade, which lay on an armchair, standing in front of the mirror, so that the stranger, to whom she had turned her back, had to see her reflection just the more clearly. She seemed to like herself rather much, wearing those disguises. At least, she most approvingly nodded to her reflection, smiling at herself, showing her brightly gleaming teeth and lips, frowning to act out a tragic or longing expression of her face, and secretly looking sideways towards her observer during all of this, also keeping an eye on him in the mirror. When the dark figure remained motionless and kept her waiting for the desired signs of applause, she became irritated and prepared her main assault. She tied a large, red turban around her temples, from which, attached to a shiny brooch, a heron's feather stuck out. The red colour actually complemented her yellow taint very well, and she gave herself a deep bow of appreciation. But when, even now, everything continued to remain quiet on the other side, she could not keep her patience any longer, and hastily, still wearing the turban on her head, she stepped to the window, pushing the curtain all the way back.

"Good day, Monsù," she said politely. "You're my neighbour now, as I can see. I only hope that you don't play the flute like your predecessor, who kept me awake half of the night."

"Beautiful neighbour," said the stranger, "I won't bother you with any kind of music. I'm an ill man, who also prefers not to be disturbed in his sleep."

"So!" - the girl replied in a stretched out tone of voice.
"You're ill? But are you at least rich?"

"No! Why do you ask?"

"Because it's so terrible to be ill and poor at the same time.
Who are you, anyway?"

"Andrea Delfin is my name. I used to be a clerk at the court in Brescia and am looking for a quiet job with a notary, here."

This answer seemed to completely disappoint all of her hopes for the new acquaintance. Lost in thought, she played with a golden necklace, she wore around her neck.

"And who are you, beautiful neighbour?" asked Andrea in a tender tone, which completely contradicted the motionless expression of his face. "To have your charming sight so close to me, will comfort me in my sufferings."

She apparently felt satisfied, since he now turned to that tone which she had a right to expect.

"To you," she said, "I'm Princess Smeraldina, who is granting you the permission to long for her

favour from afar. Whenever you'll see me putting on this turban, this shall be a sign for you that I'm inclined to chat with you. For I'm more bored than I could bear, considering my youth and my charms. You must know," she continued, suddenly dropping out of character, "that my mistress, the countess, won't permit me at all to have even the slightest love affair, though she herself changes her lovers more frequently than her shirts. She says that she had always thrown her confidante and chamber-maid out of her services as soon as she would have attempted to serve two masters, her and the little winged god. I now have to suffer under her prejudice, and if I wouldn't find some other satisfaction here, and if there wasn't, from time to time, a kind stranger living over there in your room, who'd fall just a little bit in love with me..."

"Who's the current lover of your mistress?" Andrea interrupted her in an unemotional tone. "Does she receive the high aristocracy of Venice? Are the foreign ambassadors among her regular guests?"

"They usually come wearing masks," Smeraldina replied. "But I know that much that young Gritti is her favourite, she likes him more than any other before for as long as I've been in her service; even more than the Austrian ambassador, who courts her so ridiculously much. Do you know my countess, too? She's beautiful."

"I'm a stranger here, dear girl. I don't know her."

"You should know," the girl said with a clever face, "she wears a lot of make-up, though she isn't even thirty, yet. If you'd like to see her some time, nothing's easier than that. A board can bridge the distance between your window and mine. You'll climb across, and I'll lead you to a place where you'll be able to observe her quite clandestinely. The things I'd do for a neighbour! - But for now, it's good night. I'm being summoned."

"Good night, Smeraldina!"

She closed the window. "Poor - and ill," she said to herself, while pulling the curtains completely shut. "Oh well, still good enough to kill the boredom."

He had also closed the window and was now pacing up and down his room in slow strides. "It's good," he said, "it fits well into my plans. If it should come to the worst, I'll be able to use it to my advantage as well."

The expression of his face proved that a love-affair was the furthest thing from his mind.

Now, he unpacked the portmanteau, which contained only little laundry and a few prayer-books, and put everything into the cupboard, standing by the wall. One of the books fell to the floor, and the stone plate made a hollow sound. Instantly, he put out the light, locked the door, and started to examine the floor more closely in the dusk created by the distant shimmer of Smeraldina's lamp. After some work, he succeeded in lifting the stone plate, which had been lodged into place to fit precisely, but without the use of any mortar, and he discovered a rather spacious hole underneath, as deep as the size of a hand and one foot wide in both directions. Swiftly, he threw off his outer garments and removed a heavy belt with several pockets, which he had worn around his waist. He had already placed it inside the hole, when he suddenly stopped to think. "No," he said, "it could be a trap. It wouldn't be the first time for the police to have such hiding places in rented apartments, to know later on, when searching the premises, where they'd have to poke at. This is just too enticingly arranged to be trustworthy."

He lowered the stone plate back into its place and searched for a safe container for his secrets. The window to the blind alley had bars in front of it, wide enough for an arm to fit through. He opened it, reached outside, and groped along the wall. Directly under the ledge, he found a small hole in the wall, which bats seemed to have inhabited in the past. It could not be noticed from below, and from above, it was covered by the ledge. Without making a noise, he widened the opening with his dagger, breaking out mortar and bricks, and soon, his work had progressed so far that he could easily fit the wide belt inside. When he was finished, his brow was covered with cold sweat. Once again, he tried to feel, whether there was no strap or buckle hanging out of the hole, and then he closed the window. One hour later, he lay, still fully dressed, on the bed and slept. The gnats were buzzing over his face, the birds of the night were curiously flapping about the hole outside, in which his treasure lay hidden. But the sleeping man's lips were closed too tightly, to betray any word of his secrets, even in his dreams.

The same night, a man was sitting in Verona by his lonely lamp and was unfolding, after having carefully locked the shutters and the door, a letter, which had been secretly handed to him today in the dusk by a Capuchin begging for alms, while he had been promenading near the amphitheatre. The letter bore no external inscription. But being asked how the messenger would know that he was putting the letter into the right hands, the monk had answered: "Every child in Verona knows the noble Angelo Querini like his own father." Having said this, the messenger had left. But the banished man, whose

exile had been eased by the respect which had followed him into his misfortune, had managed to bring the letter back to his lodgings, unnoticed by the spies watching him, and he now read, while the steps of the guard in front of the house echoed menacingly through the silence, the following lines:

"To Angelo Querini.

"I have no reason to hope that you will remember the fleeting hour, when I met you in person. Many years have passed since then. I had grown up with my sister and my brother in the rural peace of our estate in Friaul; only after I had lost both of my parents, I left my sister and my younger brother. After just a few days, the seductive maelstrom of Venice had swallowed me whole.

"Then, one day, I was introduced to you in Morosini Palace. I still feel your glance, examining us young folks, one after another. Your eyes said: 'and this is supposed to be the generation on whose shoulders the future of Venice shall rest?' - You were told my name. Unnoticed by the others, you turned the conversation with me to the great history of the state, to which my ancestors had devoted their services. Kindly, you failed to mention the present and the services which I still owed this state.

"Since that conversation, I read day and night in a book, which in the past I had not even regarded worthy of a single glance, the history of my native country. The result of these studies was that I, driven by horror and disgust, left this city forever, which used to rule over foreign countries and seas, but was now the slave of a deplorable tyranny, being as powerless in external affairs as it is internally miserable and violent.

"I returned to my siblings. I succeeded in warning my brother, in revealing the corruption of life to him, which seemed to be shining so brightly when seen from afar. But I never thought that everything I did to save him and us was to destroy us just the more surely.

"You know the jealousy with which the rulers of the city have always looked upon the aristocracy of the Terraferma. Even in times when it was regarded as an honour to serve the republic, they had never stopped fearing that the Terraferma might sever its ties with the city. Now, after self-made and unavoidable evils had brought about a change in the position of Venice in the world, this fear became the source of the most outrageous intrigues and misdeeds.

"Let me keep silent about what I have witnessed of the fate of those living in the neighbourhood of my province, about the cunning means by which they had sought to crush the sovereignty and independence of the aristocracy of Friaul, about the army of bravi, which had been sent against those who refused to comply, and which had been relieved even from the torments of their own conscience by numerous decrees of amnesty. How they sought to bring disagreement into the families, to poison friendships, to buy treason and betrayal even among those who were most closely tied by kinship, all of this you found out even earlier than I.

"And not for long, the fact that my frivolous habits were remembered in Venice even after I had left could protect me from the suspicion that I also might, one day, pose a threat. When I asked on my sister's behalf for the permission for her to marry a noble, German gentleman, the government categorically refused to give its consent. I and my brother were thought to be in agreement with the Kaiser's politics, and they decided to punish us for this.

"A complaint of the province against its governor, which I and my brother had signed among others, provided the inquisition with the pretext they needed to cast out their nets to catch us.

"My brother was summoned to Venice, to answer for himself. As soon as he had arrived, he was imprisoned under the lead roofs, and for many months, they sought, at times with threats and at times with seductive offers, to get a confession out of him. He had no reason to represent that one act we had committed in a more favourable light; it had been legal. There was nothing else for him to confess, since we had not committed any actions against the state. Thus, he finally had to be released. But they did not even consider to pardon him.

"I myself had asked him in a letter not to depart right away, to avoid raising new suspicions. We would rather be willing to miss his company for another few months. When he finally came, we were to lose him for ever after just a few days. He fell victim to a slow acting poison, which had been mixed into his food in one of these illustrious houses he used to visit.

"The stone over his grave had not even been set up yet, when the governor of the province proposed marriage to my sister. She rejected him, feeling deeply offended by the proposal; her pain made her utter certain words, the echos of which were then to be heard in the courtroom of the inquisition's tribunal.

"A new effort by the aristocracy of Friaul to improve the conditions in the country was discussed. I

remained absent from their secret endeavours, since I was convinced of their fruitlessness. But the guilty conscience of the rulers of the republic made them think of me first, being the one who had been affected the most, the one who had to avenge a brother. At night, a gang of hired bravi attacked our remote estate in the mountains. I had only my servants for our defence. When this scum found us well armed and determined not to surrender thus easily, they set fire to the house in all four corners. Together with my people, I carried out a desperate counter-attack with my sister, also carrying a pistol, among us. Then suddenly, a blow to the forehead struck me down and rendered me unconscious.

"Only the next morning, I woke up. The place was an abandoned pile of ruins, my sister had perished in the blaze, some of my faithful servants had been slain, some were driven back into the burning house.

"For many hours, I just lay beside the smoking rubble and stared into the empty void, as which my future appeared before me. Only when I saw peasants in the valley, coming up towards mountain, I picked myself up. One thing I knew: For as long as I was believed to be alive, I would be regarded as an enemy and would be pursued to wherever I might go. The burning tomb was spacious enough; if I was to disappear, nobody would doubt that I also rested in there with those who had been close to me. Wandering aimlessly about the rocky mountainside, I found a wallet belonging to one of my servants, who had been born in Brescia and had travelled to all kinds of places. His papers were in it; I took them, just in case, and fled through the dense, craggy forest. I met no one, who would have been able to betray me. When I knelt, parched with thirst, by a murky lake in the forest, I saw that my appearance could not betray me either. My hair had turned gray during the night; my features had aged by many years.

"Arriving in Brescia, I could pass for my servant without any problems, since he had left the town when he was still a boy and no longer had any relatives there. For five years, I lived like a criminal who would shun the light of day and avoided the company of other men. My spirit had been clouded by a feeling of powerlessness, as if that blow which had struck me down had shattered whatever organ had been in charge of my willpower.

"That it had not been destroyed, but only paralysed, I felt when the news of you speaking out against the tribunal arrived. With a feverish excitement, which rejuvenated me and let me become aware of the energy of my living soul again, I followed the reports from Venice. When I heard about the failure of your high-minded venture, I fell back into the old, mind-numbing depression for just a short moment. In the next moment, something like a fire-storm penetrated all of my senses. My decision had been made, to carry out the work, which you had been unable to perform by the open means of justice and the law, by means of violence and a horrifying kind of self-defence, with the arm of the invisible judge and avenger for the salvation my precious native country.

"Since then, I have incessantly examined this decision and found that my intentions could not be condemned. I am solemnly aware of the fact that it is not hatred against those persons, not revenge for the pain I have suffered, not even the just sorrow for the woe which has come over my loved ones, which arms my hand against the tyrants. What moves me to take on the task of saving an entire enslaved people and to execute the sentence by myself, which in other times the collective will of a free nation used to pronounce over unjust rulers, who are out of the reach of the arm of a judge, - this is neither selfishness nor the vain lust for fame; it is merely a debt I owe for having spent my youth in idleness, and which your look, when we were in Morosini Palace, admonished me to pay.

"May God, whom I beseech to protect my cause, mercifully grant me, as the only replacement for all He has taken from me, that in a liberated Venice I shall once more be able to shake your hand. You will not reject my blood-stained hand, which will thereafter rest in no friend's hand any more; for he who has performed an executioner's duties has been consecrated to a lonely life and has to shun the sight of his fellow men. But if I should perish by my deeds, he whose respect I care for the most will know that the younger generation is also not entirely without men who know how to die for Venice.

"This letter will be delivered to you by a reliable man, who has exchanged the garments of a secretary of the inquisition for a monk's cowl, to atone by means of fasting and prayer for the sins of the republic, for which his pen had to serve. Burn this page. Farewell! Candiano."

After the banished man had finished reading the letter, he sat there for about one hour, regarding the fateful pages in deep grief. Then, he held them over the flame, scattered the ashes into the fireplace, and restlessly paced up and down the room until the early morning, while the unfortunate man, whose confession he had read, had long since fallen asleep like someone whose cause is just and who has heaven on his side. - -

The next day, the late arrival of the street della Cortesia, left the house early. Marietta's happy singing outside in the corridor might have let him sleep a while longer, but her mother's loud scolding,

rebuking her for making a racket which could raise a dead man and would end up driving all guests out of the house, encouraged him fully. He tarried at the stairs, where his landlady was already sitting at her usual post, just long enough to inquire where a few notaries and advocates would live, whose names a friend had written down for him in Brescia. Once he had got this information, neither the widow's affectionate worries concerning his health, nor the red bow Marietta had put into her hair, could move him to stay any longer, and though the good woman at other times used to do her best to avoid any social contact of the lodgers with her daughter, it now gave her an almost dreadful feeling that the stranger was so persistently overlooking the dear creature, the apple of her eye. To her, his gray hair was only an insufficient explanation of this strange blindness. He had to have a secret sorrow or feel thus ill that the sight of freshly blossoming life would hurt him. Nevertheless, he walked firmly and swiftly, and his chest was broad and strong, so that the illness, he had talked about, had to reside deeply within his body. The colour of his face also gave no rise to suspicion. Striding through the streets of Venice, he attracted pleased looks from many a woman's eyes, and Marietta also, watching him as he left from one of the upper windows, was not without any feelings for him.

But he tended to his business in a self-absorbed manner, and though he had at length asked Signoria Giovanna for directions and was finally comforted by her, concerning his ignorance of the city, with the saying "Asking will get a person all the way to Rome", he nevertheless now seemed to be able to find his way through the network of alleys and canals without any help at all. He spent several hours visiting advocates, but with them his recommendation by a colleague from Brescia carried little weight, and he seemed to strike them as suspicious on account of his modest appearance. For there was actually a certain pride in the wrinkles of his forehead, telling anyone of the keener observers that he, under other circumstances, would have regarded the work he sought to be beneath his dignity. Finally, he reached a notary who lived in a side-alley of the Merceria and seemed to engage in all kinds of shifty business on the side. Here, he found a place as a clerk at a very modest salary, just on a trial basis, and the hasty manner in which he accepted gave the man the suspicion that he was facing an impoverished noble, many of which would be willing to do any kind of work, without haggling over the price, just to be able to make a living.

But Andrea was evidently very content with the result of his efforts and entered, since it was already noon, the next inn, where he saw people from the lower classes sitting at long tables without linen, who were spicing up their very simple meals with a glass of turbid wine. He took his seat in a corner near the door and ate the slightly rancid fish without any complaint, while, on the other hand, he left the wine untouched after having taken a sip. He was already about to ask for the bill, when he found himself being politely addressed by his neighbour. The man, whom he had overlooked entirely until now, had already been sitting there for a long time with his half bottle of wine, eating nothing, only taking a sip once in a while, making a slightly wry face every time; but while he gave the impression of being so tired that his eyes had to be half closed, his keen looks wandered all across the large, gloomy room and stuck with particular interest to our Brescian, who, on his part, had noticed nothing remarkable about his observer. He was a man in his thirties with blond, curly hair, whose Jewish descent was not instantly recognisable since he wore black Venetian garments. In his ears, he wore heavy, golden rings, on his shoes, buckles with large topazes, while his collar was wrinkled and unclean, and his coat of fine wool had not been brushed for weeks.

"The gentleman doesn't like the wine," he said in a low voice, dexterously leaning over towards Andrea. "The gentleman seems to have wandered in here only by mistake, where they aren't accustomed to waiting on guests of a better class."

"I beg your pardon, sir," Andrea replied calmly, though he had to force himself to answer at all, "what would you know about my class?"

"I can see it by the way you eat that you're accustomed to a different kind of company than the one you would find here," said the Jew.

Andrea examined him with a firm look, from which the other lowered his spying eyes. Then, a thought seemed to rise in him, which suddenly caused him to approach this obtrusive man with some kind of openness.

"You are a keen observer of your fellow men," he said. "The fact didn't escape you that I had once seen better days and drank an undiluted wine. I also had entered into the better circles of society, though my family is from the lower middle class, and I have only studied a tiny part of the law, without obtaining a degree. This has changed. My father went bankrupt, I became poor, and a poor law-clerk and assistant of an advocate has no right to demand anything more than what he would find in this tavern."

"A learned gentleman has always a right to demand respect," the other one said with a very obliging smile. "It would make me happy, if I could do a favour for Your Grace; for I've always sought the

company of learned men, and in my many business transactions, I've rather often had an opportunity to get close to them. With Your Grace's permission, I would like to suggest that we should drink a better glass of wine than what we would be able to get here..."

"I can't pay for any better wine," the other one said indifferently.

"I would feel honoured to demonstrate Venetian hospitality to you, sir, who seems to be a stranger in this city. If there's any other way I could also be of assistance to you, sir, with my properties and my knowledge of the city..."

Andrea was just about to give him an evasive answer, when he noticed the inn-keeper, who stood in the back of the room at the bar, motioning him vivaciously with his bold head to come over to him. Among the other guests, consisting of craftsmen, market women, and bums, there were also several who made clandestine signs at him, as if they would have liked to tell him something, which they could not have dared to say aloud. Under the pretext that he would want to pay his bill first, before he would respond to this polite invitation, he left his seat and approached the inn-keeper, asking loudly how much he would owe him.

"Sir," whispered the kind-hearted old man, "be on your guard against that fellow. You're dealing with a very bad character. The inquisitors are paying him to spy out the secrets of all strangers who might come in here. Don't you see that nobody else would want to sit in his corner? They all know him, and the day will come when he'll be thrown out the door, the God of Abraham would give His blessing to that! But I, though I have to tolerate his presence or else I'd be in trouble, still feel obliged to tell you the truth." "I thank you, my friend," said Andrea aloud. "Your wine is a bit turbid, but healthy. Good day."

With these words, he returned to his seat, took his hat, and said to his obliging neighbour: "Come, sir, if you please. They don't like you here," he added more quietly. "They think you're a spy, as I've been able to notice. Let's continue our acquaintance elsewhere."

The Jew's thin face turned pale. "By God," he said, "they misjudge me! But I can understand why these people are so watchful, for Venice is swarming with the bloodhounds of the signoria. My business affairs," he continued, when they were already in the street, "all of my many connections lead me to so many houses, so that it might appear as if I would pry into other people's secrets. May God let me live for a hundred years, but what do all these strangers concern me? As long as they pay what they owe me, I'd be a dog if I'd talk badly about them."

"But I'd think, Signore - what is your name?"

"Samuele."

"But I'd think, Signore Samuele, that you're thinking too badly about those who spy out the plots and assassinations of the citizens for the benefit of the state and who uncover conspiracies against the republic before they can do any harm." The Jew stopped walking, grabbed the other one's sleeve, and looked at him. "Why didn't I recognise you right away?" he said. "I should have known that you couldn't have come to this miserable tavern by accident, that I should have welcomed you as a colleague. Since when are you in office?"

"Me? Since the day after tomorrow."

"What do you mean, sir? Do you want to play a joke on me?"

"Truly not," Andrea replied. "For I'm perfectly serious in my plans to be accepted into your order as soon as possible. I'm badly-off, as I've told you, and I've come to Venice to improve my conditions. The salary I'm receiving since today as a clerk from a notary is not what I had hoped to obtain here with a bit of good luck and whatever little wits I've got. Venice is a beautiful city, a fun-loving city; but there is a golden sound in the laughter of the beautiful women which always reminds me of my poverty. I think, this can't go on like this forever."

"Your trust honours me very much," said the Jew with a thoughtful expression. "But I have to tell you that these gentlemen don't like accepting strangers, who have just recently arrived in the city, into their service, before they haven't passed a trial period and haven't looked around a bit. If I could help you out with my purse until then - I take low interests from my friends."

"I thank you, Signore Samuele," Andrea replied indifferently. "Your protection is more valuable to me, for which I'd like to ask you hereby in the most sincere manner. But this here is my house; I won't intrude upon you by asking you inside, because I've still more than enough work to do for my new employer. Andrea Delfin is my name. When the time has come for me to be of any use, think of me:

Andrea Delfin, Calle della Cortesia."

He shook the strange friend's hand, who kept standing outside for a while longer, taking a close look at the house and the area around it, while mumbling to himself with a face full of doubt and cunning ideas, which revealed that he would not so quickly vouch for the Brescian before he had not passed his trial period.

When Andrea ascended the stairs, he could not get past Signoria Giovanna without answering to her. She was not content with the fact that he had only found such inferior employment. She said she would not rest until he had abandoned it and found a more profitable and more honourable position. He shook his head. "It will do, good woman," he said gravely, "for the little time I've still left."

"What's this talk!" the woman scolded him. "To approach the good and to let the bad come by itself, that's the thing to do for a man, and for honey you are licking, while the vermouth has you spitting. Look at the pretty sun outside, and be ashamed for coming home thus early, while there's music on the Piazzetta and those who are handsome, rich, and noble are strolling up and down the Piazza San Marco. Your place is among them, Signore Andrea, not in this room."

"I'm neither handsome, nor rich, nor noble, Signoria Giovanna."

"Doesn't it give you any joy, to see the beautiful part of the world?" she asked eagerly, looking around to see, whether Marietta might, by any chance, be nearby. "You wouldn't be lovesick?"

"No, Signoria Giovanna."

"Or might you even regard it as a sin to enjoy life? There are those little books, you've got lying on your table; I'm just saying this, because you're the first guest who has brought a religious book into my house, let God hear how I lament this! But nowadays, the young people think: Live audaciously and die piously, this is the way to spoil the devil's fun, and around Christmas time, even the sparrows on the roof are fasting."

"Kind woman," he said with a smile, "you're very worried about me, but nobody would be able to help me. When I'm sitting quietly at my work, I'm feeling most comfortable, and you could do me a favour by getting me an inkstand and a few sheets of paper."

Soon afterwards, Marietta brought what he had asked for to his room, where he was sitting silently by the window, staring into the empty space. She found him in the same position, when she brought him the light in the evening, and being asked by her what he wanted to eat, he only ordered bread and wine. She did not have the courage to ask him, whether the gnats were bothering him and whether he wanted to have the room fumigated again. "Mother," she said, sitting down on the stairs next to the old woman, "I won't go into the room again while he's there. He has such eyes, like the martyr in the small chapel of San Stefano. I can't smile, when he looks at me."

Whatever would she have said, if she had entered the room a few hours later? While the nightly winds were blowing across the canal, he stood at the window, talking to the maid on the other side, eagerly trying to give his eyes a worldly look.

"Beautiful Smeraldina," he said, "I couldn't bear waiting for the time when I was to see you again. Passing by a goldsmith's store, I've thought of you and bought you a pin, a filigree, which is certainly too inferior for you, and is still more genuine than the brooch on your turban. Open the window, then I'll throw it to you, hoping that I'll soon take the same course through the air and fall at your feet."

"You're very courteous," the girl said with a smile and caught the gift, which he had wrapped in a piece of paper, with both of her hands. "Hey, what a good taste you've got! And still you've said you were poor? Do you know that today I'm particularly in need of some joy? We had to bear a lot during the day, the countess is in a bad mood. Her lover, young Gritti, the senator's son, has shunned her for a full twenty-four hours. She has sent servants to his house; and there he had also gone missing, and they believe that the tribunal had secretly picked him up and taken him prisoner. My countess is beside herself, she's receiving no callers, she's lying on her sofa and weeping like an insane woman, and she has hit me when I tried to comfort her."

"You've no idea what the young man has been accused of?"

"Not in the least, sir. I'd furthermore vow to remain a virgin forever, if he had even the slightest plot against the state on his mind. Good heavens, he was just barely twenty-three, and he had his heart set on nothing else but my countess and perhaps also gambling. But those gentlemen of the inquisition know how to turn cobweb into a rope, strong enough to strangle the strongest throat, and who'd know whether it isn't, this time, only directed against his father, the senator!"

"Speak more carefully of the highest authorities of this city," Andrea said quietly. "They've been appointed by the wisdom of the forefathers, and the foolishness of the grand-children shall not touch them."

The girl looked at him to find out whether he had spoken in earnest; it was not easy to solve the enigma of his features. "Stop it," she said, "you're getting serious, and I won't have it. You haven't been here for a long time yet; therefore, you're respecting the old dignitaries, pronouncing and executing their death sentences, who might seem very dignified when viewed from a distance or as a painting. But I've already seen them several times at close range, at the faro table, when my countess was keeping bank, and I can tell you, they are also just as human as Adam was."

"This may be so, dear girl," he answered, "but they have the power, and it is not a smart thing for a poor citizen like myself to do, to have such an incriminating conversation here through an open window. If the news should be spread to bad houses that the two of us regarded the justice incarnate of Venice as nothing better than a handful of mortal human beings, you, my dear Smeraldina, will be protected by the magic of your beauty; but I'll go the well-known path into a watery grave or will at least exchange my quarters in the Calle della Cortesia for a much more modest chamber in the wells [1] or under the lead roofs."

[1] The prisons under the bottom of the sea.

"Here, you can talk as you please," said the chamber-maid; "there are only a few windows opening onto the canal, and nobody has any business there at this time of day. Over on your side, there is now nothing but the bare wall; because whoever can afford a better place wouldn't choose our murky sewage down there for a mirror. But do you know what I'm thinking? You should come over here for an hour or so; this would surely make our chat more comfortable, and a glass of wine, good muscatel from Samos, and a game of tarock would very much sooth my nerves after the countess having slapped me."

"I'd like to come," he said, "but it would be noticed, and my landlady would hardly let me back in after midnight."

"Not like this," the maid laughed. "Such a roundabout way isn't necessary. I've got a board here, which we can, without much trouble, use to build a bridge. After all, we could reach out for each other's hands across the canal; why shouldn't our feet do the same? Or do you get dizzy?"

"No, beautiful friend. Just wait a moment, and I'll be ready."

Andrea put out the light, bolted the door of his room, listened whether they were all asleep in the house, and then he went back to the window. Smeraldina seemed to be experienced in building these kinds of bridges, for the board was at hand and, in a few moments, the firm path was bridging the chasm, resting evenly and safely on the ledge on both sides, being just barely wide enough to support a man. She stood on the other side, happily waving at him. Swiftly, he climbed onto the ledge, stepped onto the board, assessing the depth with firm eyes, and with a single, calm step, he had reached the window on the other side. She caught him in her arms as he jumped down, and her lips touched his cheek. But he preferred to put on a shy face and to pretend as if the closeness of his girl-friend gave him the feeling of being confined into the bounds of reverence, to which she reacted with some astonishment. The board was pulled back in, the cards and the wine were taken from the cupboard, and a table was pushed in front of the opened window, by which the strange couple took their seats, conversing in confidence. During all of this, the girl kept on wearing the red turban, which had, while she was building the bridge, slanted a bit to the back of her head, and she had pinned Andrea's present, the filigree, daintily to her breast.

She was just helping herself to her second glass of wine and was scolding her guest for drinking so slowly and not really getting into the spirit of it at all, when a bell was forcefully rung inside the house.

"Look," said the girl, getting up and throwing the cards away in anger, "that's my life; I never have a quiet hour! First, she sends me away, saying that she'd want to undress alone tonight, and now she's disturbing me at such a late time. But be patient for just ten minutes, my friend; I'll be back with you right away."

She slipped out, and he seemed to try to get over his loneliness. He stepped to the window and took a keen look at the wall on the other side between his window and the canal. It was not more than about twenty feet high; almost everywhere, the limestone was weathered due to the dampness, and the bare stones were rough enough to enable him to climb up at them, if needs be. Under the maid's room, as he had already noticed on the first evening, some stairs extended down to the water, and there was a small gondola chained to the high pole on the side, so that a second gondola would only barely be able to pass by. All of this visibly satisfied him.

"I wouldn't have been able to arrange it better for my purposes," he mumbled to himself.

Lost in thought, he looked down the canal, flowing between its steep, windowless banks of houses in perfect darkness. Then, he saw a faint shimmer of light at its very end downstream, moving closer, and, after a while, he heard the sound of oars striking the water. A gondola slowly came closer and stopped down below at the stairs. Carefully, the observer above leaned back, to avoid being noticed, but was still able to see with half a glance that a man rose from his seat and stepped onto the stairs. The knocker below sounded with three heavy blows, and soon afterwards, he heard a voice inside the house, asking from behind the door who would wish to enter.

"In the name of the exalted Council of Ten," was the answer, "open up!"

The servant below instantly obeyed, and the waterfront entrance closed again, after the nightly visitor had passed through.

Shortly afterwards, Smeraldina returned to her chamber, excited, without her turban, and with blushed cheeks. "Did you hear this?" she whispered. "Oh God, they'll take our countess away, they'll strangle her, or drown her, and who'll then pay me the six months' wages she owes me?"

"Rest assured," tender-hearted girl, he said swiftly. "As long as you've good friends, you won't be left on your own. But you'd be doing me a favour, if you'd want to hide me somewhere, where I could hear what the high council wants with your mistress. I confess, that I'm curious, as a stranger may very well be. Furthermore, I might be able to help you and the countess, since I'm working for an advocate and, if things are turning towards a public indictment, I'd like to offer my humble services."

She thought about it. "I'd know an easy way to do it," she said. "The place is safe, and I've been sitting there myself several times, not trusting my ears. But if it would nevertheless be discovered?"

"Then, I'll take all the blame on myself, my love, and no one will find out by which way I had gained entrance into the house. Look," he continued, "here are three zecchini, just in case I won't be able to thank you afterwards. But if all goes well, you shall see that I'll be happy to share what little possessions I've got left with such a clever friend."

Without any ado, she put the gold into her pocket, swiftly opened the door, and listened out into the dark corridor. "Take your shoes off," she whispered, "give me your hand and don't hesitate to follow me to wherever I'll go. Inside the house, they are all asleep, except for the porter."

She put out her light and scurried ahead, through the corridor, pulling him along by his hand. They stepped through several large, dark chambers; then, the girl opened the door of a ball-room, which was faintly lit by the dusky light coming in through three high windows in the front side of the palace. On one side, a narrow staircase went up to the estrade where the musicians would play. "Walk softly!" the girl warned, "the stairs creak a little. I'm leaving you alone here. Up there, you'll find a crack between the panels, through which you'll be able to see and hear sufficiently well. For the reception-room of the countess is right behind this wall. When the visitor will be gone, I'll come back to get you. But don't you stir from this spot, before I'll come."

Thus, she left him alone, and without hesitation, he climbed up the few steps and softly groped his way along the wall, heading for the strip of light, which came through the narrow crack. The large room was separated from the next chamber only by a wooden wall, since, in times of greater splendour, both rooms had formed a single, large festive hall. The shimmering light came from a silver chandelier, which stood below on the table in front of the countess's couch, and cast the portraits on the wall only in a flickering light. Andrea had to get down on his knees, to be able to look down into the room. But however uncomfortable this position was, many would surely have liked to take his place, though they would have cared less for what he got to hear than for what there was to see.

Even though the chamber-maid was right, saying that her mistress was in the habit of using a lot of make-up, she probably did so more for the sake of fashion, than because she would have had to be regarded as beautiful. She sat on the couch, dressed as if she had not expected such a late caller, the extremely ample hair, with a slight touch of red in its colour, was loosened and unstyled; since she had wept, her eyes were glistening wonderfully, with traces of her tears still being visible on her full, pale cheeks. The man, sitting opposite to her in an armchair and turning his back to Andrea, seemed to observe her keenly; at least, he moved his head not very often and listened to even the harshest words of the beautiful woman, without interrupting her with a single gesture.

"Indeed," the countess said, and her features expressed the same painful bitterness as the tone of her voice, "I'm truly astonished that you still dare to show your face in here, after having violated your most solemn promises in such a shameful manner. Did I perform so many a service for you, just to have you treat me with such cruelty, such hostility, now? Where have you put him, my poor friend, the only one I

cared about, and whom you've promised to spare under all circumstances? Was there no one but him, to satisfy your desire to fill the void in your prisons? And what incriminating evidence have you found against him, what sin has he committed against the mighty republic, for which there was no lesser punishment than exile, and none other which would have been less hard on me? For I had openly admitted to you that I had set my heart on him, and that whoever would but hurt a hair on his head would be my enemy. Return him to me, or I'll cut off all ties with you, once and for all, and I'll leave Venice, to seek my friend in exile, and make you feel how much you've lost by this betrayal, this shameful act. Oh, how could I ever allow myself to become the instrument of your schemes!"

"You're forgetting, countess," said the man, "that we've got means to prevent your escape, and that, even if it would be successful, our arm is long and strong enough to be your ruin, wherever you might have thought you had found a refuge. Young Gritti has deserved his punishment. In spite of the warning we had given him, he has kept in steady contact with the secretary of the Austrian ambassador, a young man with knowledge of very confidential matters. The laws of Venice prohibit such a contact most strictly, as you know well enough. Furthermore, a letter by Angelo Querini has been intercepted, in which the careless young man is mentioned with some praise. It was a fatherly disciplinary measure to send him into exile, before he became even more guilty. But at the same time, we know what we owe you, Leonora. And therefore, I've been sent to you, to give you this information and some advice, how you, if you're reasonable, could repair the damage."

"I'm tired," she said harshly, "of listening to your orders. This day has shown me that it'll be my ruin, sooner or later, if I should put my trust in you and delude myself into believing that for all of my sacrifices for your interests, I would ever get any thanks, or even be protected from but the basest of insults and humiliations. I don't need you; I don't want anything from you; it's all over between me and the high government, who casts friends as well as enemies aside with equally little consideration."

"Too bad," he interjected, "that you're still needed, that you're still supposed to do something, and that, therefore, it can't be over between us for now. You'll understand, Leonora, that there would be some objections against letting you, knowing about so many secrets of the republic, travel into foreign countries, where you might soon succumb to the wide-spread fad of our time to write your memoirs. Venice and you are inseparably connected, and you have sufficiently proven that you possess a high intelligence, taming your female whims, so that it won't take elaborate persuasion to reconcile you once again with Venice."

"I don't want to hear anything about a reconciliation!" she exclaimed passionately, and, once again, tears came to her eyes. "And what good would it do, if I wanted to? I'm good for nothing, I'm unable to grasp even the simplest thought, as long as I don't have my poor Gritti."

"You shall have him, Leonora. But not right away, since his sudden return would foil our plan."

"And for how long shall I be patient?" she asked, regarding him with a deploring look.

"This depends on you," he replied. "How long will it take for you to make a young man lie at your feet, who previously enjoyed the reputation of a paragon of virtue?"

A hint of curiosity and interest became noticeable in her features, which, just a moment ago, had expressed nothing but pain and desperation. "Whom are you talking about?" she asked.

"That German, who was a friend of Gritti, the secretary of the minister from Vienna. You know him?"

"I've seen him at the last regatta. Gritti pointed him out to me."

"His master is a zero and he's the number one in front of it. We have reason to believe that he's secretly recruiting a large following among our opponents and is seeking to exploit, for the benefit of his sovereign, the discontent which the actions of Querini have left behind. He's unusually cunning. Out of the four observers, which we have taken on our pay-roll from among the ambassador's own men, not a single one has delivered even the smallest evidence into our hands yet. The inquisitors are placing all of their confidence in you, Leonora, that you'll find the key to this well locked mind, as you have already successfully done several times before. There was no hope for this, as long as Gritti was in the way. His exile smoothens the path and, at the same time, provides the pretext for you to approach this inaccessible man, who will now surely be moved to greater compassion towards his friend's girl-friend than before, since you're both mourning the same loss. The rest, I'll leave up to the power of your charms, which were never more irresistible than when they met with resistance."

She thought about it for a while. Her face became brighter, her eyes gained a daring, proud expression, her beautiful, full mouth opened a bit, and an absent-minded smile wandered across her lips. "You'll promise," she finally said, "that Gritti will be called back right away, as soon as I've surrendered the other one to you?"

"We promise."

"If that's so, it shall not be long, until I'll demand the fulfilment of your promise." She got up and threw away the handkerchief, which had become wet from the tears she had cried in the course of the day. From his hiding-place, Andrea could only observe her pacing up and down the room for a stretch of the way, since the crack was too narrow to get a full view of the room. He admired her royal posture, while she, as if contemplating new victories, walked slowly across the carpet of the chamber, her eyes wide open, her hair thrown back from her white temples. A strange feeling startled him, when her gaze, aimlessly looking about the upper part of the wall, brushed past him. Involuntarily, he shrunk back, as if it had been possible for her to discover him.

The man sitting in the armchair below got up, but seemed to be immune to her charms, for he continued in the most calm and business-like tone: "The nuncio has frequented your house less often in recent times. You've been too candid about your worldly tendencies, gambling in particular has taken too much room here. We would appreciate it, if you'd, once again, feel some spiritual needs and renew your once so busy acquaintance with his Eminence. For some time, the close relations of the papalists with France have become alarming."

"You can count on me," she replied.

"One more thing, Leonora. The money we still owe you for the supper with Candiano..."

She was petrified, as if she had been bitten by a snake, and suddenly turned pale. "By all saints," she said, "not a word about this, never mention it again, and donate the rest of the money to the church, they shall say Mass for his soul and - for mine. Whenever this name is mentioned, I always feel like hearing a trumpet of judgement day."

"You're a child," said the man. "The responsibility for this supper is ours, not yours. He was a criminal, and only his connections and the respect he got obliged us to execute the sentence in secret. He has died quietly in his bed, and no one was ever able to say that he had brought death with him, when he left your house. Or have you heard anything of the kind?"

She shivered and looked to the ground. "No," she said. "But at night, I'm awakened by a voice, whispering it to me. Oh! If I only hadn't done this one thing, not this one thing!"

"This is a passing delusion, Leonora; you'll get over it. I just wanted to tell you this one thing: the money is waiting for you at Marchesi's. Good night, countess. I see that I've already used too much of your time. Sleep tight, and tomorrow, don't cloud the sun of your beauty, but let it rise on the just as well as the unjust. Good night, Leonora!"

He made a little bow towards her and walked towards the door. Just briefly, Andrea was able to see his face while he left. His features were cold, but not hard, a face without a soul, without passions, only the expression of a powerful will governed the forehead and his eyebrows. He put on a mask and threw the black cloak, which he had left at the entrance, around his shoulders. Then, he left the chamber, without waiting for her goodbye.

In this very moment, Andrea heard the girl's voice down below in the large room, quietly calling him to come down. He obeyed, after having had one last glance at the beautiful woman, who was still standing motionlessly in the middle of the chamber and was staring pensively at the door, through which the man had left. Unsteadily, like a man who had suffered a stroke, he descended from the estrade and followed, without speaking a single word, the girl who was leading the way with swift, but quiet, steps. In her chamber, the light had been lit again, the wine was still on the small table by the window, and nothing seemed to prevent them from continuing their interrupted game. But a frightening shadow had come across the man's face, which even intimidated Smeraldina's levity and quenched all of her hopes for this night.

"You're looking," she said, "as if you had seen ghosts. Come on, have a glass of wine and tell me what has happened. After all, they talked much more calmly than we had feared."

"Oh, certainly," he said, forcing himself to seem unemotional. "Your mistress is very much in their favour, and there is even a chance that you'll soon be paid the wages she still owes you. Otherwise, they were talking so quietly that I understood only a little, and now, I'm more than anything else very tired from kneeling on those hard boards. Next time, I'll appreciate your wine more, my dear girl. But tonight, I must sleep."

"You haven't even told me, whether you're thinking that she's just as beautiful as all the other people say she is," said the girl and tried to pout at her ungrateful, uncommunicative friend.

"As beautiful as an angel or a devil," he mumbled through his teeth. "I thank you, Madamigella, for enabling me to see her. Another time, I'll be good and stay with you, since I've suffered plenty tonight for my curiosity. Good night!"

He leaped up onto the ledge and stepped onto the board, which she had reluctantly put back over the chasm. Standing up there, he looked downstream along the canal, where in the distance, the gondola's light was just now disappearing. "Good night!" he called out to her once more, before carefully descending from the board into his room, while Smeraldina dismantled the bridge and endeavoured in vain to explain how the strangers unusual behaviour, his poverty, his generosity, his gray hair, and his lust for adventure would fit together.

One week passed, without Smeraldina seeing any particular consolidation in her relationship with her neighbour, whom she had thought she had conquered. Only once, after having got the porter on her side, she let him in through the door at night and, wearing a mask, conducted him to the small door on the waterside and entered the gondola with him, which he personally propelled through the dark labyrinth with slow strokes of the oar, in order to finally float along openly on a Great Canal for an entire hour. In spite of the good opportunity, he was not in a loving mood this time either, while she was constantly chatting and was trying to amuse him with tales from the world of the high society, in which the countess played her part. He was told that for the last few days, the secretary of the Austrian embassy had been paying long visits to her mistress, at which, undoubtedly, they were both discussing how they could go about affecting a withdrawal of young Gritti's exile. She said that the countess was in a better mood than ever and had given her generous gifts. Andrea seemed to listen to this only with half an ear and to concentrate solely on steering the gondola. Thus, even the girl had no objections when her taciturn companion turned the boat around and, on the most direct course, directed it back home. Without making a sound, he pushed the narrow vessel close to the pole, attached the chain after they had disembarked, and asked for the key, in order to lock it. She gave it to him and had already gone through the door when he called out to her that, in this haste, the small key had slipped out of his hand and had fallen into the canal. She was actually upset about this, but in her usual, light-hearted manner she comforted her friend, saying that a second key would be likely to be found in the house, and this time, he could not help but bid his farewell to her by giving her a casual kiss on the cheek, when she let him out at midnight through the main portal of the palace.

To his landlady, Signoria Giovanna, he said the next morning that there had been a lot of work to be done for his employer, so that they had to make use of the night. This was the only time he needed the key for the front door. Usually, he was already back at nightfall, only had some bread and wine, and put out his light early, so that the good woman praised him all over the neighbourhood as a paragon of hard labour and decent living. Only one thing she complained about: that he would not conserve his strength and that he, at his age, would not take part in any permissible entertainment, which would cheer him up and prolong his life. Whenever she talked like this, Marietta was quiet and look down into her lap. As soon as the stranger was in his room, she stopped singing, and quite generally gave the impression as if, since the stranger's arrival, she had spend more time pondering than she would previously have done in a year.

In the morning of the second Sunday which Andrea had spent in the widow's house, the woman entered his room in a hurry with a disturbed look on her face, dressed in her best clothes, just as she had returned from church. He sat at the table, was not fully dressed yet, and read in one of his prayer-books. His face was paler than usually, but his eyes were calm, and it seemed as if he disliked being disturbed in his meditation.

"What are you still sitting quietly in your room, Signore Andrea," she called out to him, "while all of Venice is up and about? Hurry up and get dressed and go out into the street for yourself, where you'll be able to see as many horror-stricken faces as there are pieces of grain in a mill. Holy Jesus! That I've got to live to see the day, and I've thought there was nothing else that could happen in Venice to surprise me!"

"What are you talking about, good woman?" he asked in an indifferent tone and put the book down.

She threw herself onto a chair and seemed to be very exhausted. "All the way to the Piazzetta, the crowd has been pushing me," she started again, "and there I saw the gentlemen of the Great Council climbing in droves up the huge staircase in the court of the Doges' Palace and the flags of mourning waving in the windows of the Procurators' Offices. Will you believe it? Tonight, between eleven and midnight, the most noble one of the three inquisitors of the state, the venerable lord Lorenzo Venier, has been murdered on the threshold of his own house."

"Has he lived to an old age?" Andrea asked calmly.

"Misericordia! The way you talk! As if he had merely died in his bed. But of course, you're no

Venetian and can't understand what this means: a member of the inquisition has been murdered, one of the tribunal. This is worse than if it had been a doge, of whom many have come to an unnatural death, for the tribunal has the power, and the doge has the robe. But the most horrible part of it is this: engraved in the dagger they've found in the wound it reads: `Death to all inquisitors'; all of them! Do you understand, Signore Andrea? This isn't just some scoundrel being payed by a bravo to do away with a single man, because he's keeping him from a love affair, a powerful position, or something else. `This is a political murder,' my neighbour the spicer told me, `and there is a conspiracy behind it and henchmen and that Angelo Querini with his followers.' He was rubbing his hands while saying this, but I felt my heart shivering in my body, for I don't want to say what I'm thinking, but I know: an evil deed is like a cherry, once one of them has been shook off a tree, twenty more will come after the first, and this blood will cost much more blood."

"Don't they have any lead pointing to the murderer, Signoria Giovanna? What good are those hundreds of spies, they are paying, for the tribunal?"

"Not even the shadow of a lead," answered the widow. "It was a dark night, the bora was blowing, and on the Grand Canal, which runs by his palace, there were no gondolas at all. Then, all by himself, he came home through one of the small alleys, and then, that invisible hand struck him down, and he only lived long enough to scare up the porter with his last sighs. Then, there was a deadly silence throughout the alley, and nobody was in sight. But I know what I know, Signore Andrea. Do you want me to tell you? You're decent and good and won't pass it on to anybody else and won't bring new hardship upon me: I know the hand which has spilled this blood."

He looked at her firmly. "Talk," he said, "if you've got to get it off your chest. I won't give you away."

"Don't you suspect anything?" she said, rising from her seat and stepping up close to him: "Haven't I told you that there are many who are alive and don't return and many who are dead and still return? Do you know it now? He hasn't forgotten about them who've dragged his wife and his child under the lead roofs and tortured them. But, for God's sake, don't say a word about this! If his spirit should have done it, the living would have to suffer for it."

"And what reason do have to believe in this?"

She took a frightened look around the room. "You should know," she whispered, "this house was haunted tonight. I've heard something rushing up and down the walls, like the footsteps of ghosts, I lay in bed and listened, and there was a noise, secretly buzzing along the canal down below, and a rattling at your window, and scared beasts scurried through the adjoining alley until long past midnight. Only after the the bell had struck one o'clock, it was quiet; I know just too well, who had disturbed them. He came, after he had done it, to greet us, since we hadn't been able to say farewell."

His head had dropped to his chest. Now, he got up and said that he wanted to go out personally, in order to inquire what had happened. He had, as she would know, gone to bed early and had been particularly fast asleep, so that all of this fuss had not disturbed him. And besides, she should keep it to herself, for it was indeed dangerous to have received but a ghostly knowledge of such a crime. - Having said this, he got dressed in a hurry and went out into the city.

Agitated and busy crowds had gathered in the alleys, in a way which was even unusual for important holidays of the republic. Quietly, coming from the centre of the city, hasty groups of curious people moved through the narrow streets towards the Piazza San Marco, and whoever did not join them was at least standing by the door of his house, exchanging meaningful gestures and looks with acquaintances who were rushing by. It was plain to see that something outrageous and horrible had both upset and stunned these people, so that they were all following the general march without an individual plan, most of all being eager to see the event with their own eyes and to touch it with their hands. Nobody talked aloud, nobody laughed, whistled, or sighed even audibly; it was as if those honourable citizens felt the pile-work quaking, on which the city of the lagoon had been built.

In a seemingly careless fashion, Andrea walked among the crowd, his hat pulled deeply over his eyes, the hands placed on his back. Now, he stepped out into the Piazza San Marco, where, in numerous groups, all classes, intermingled with one another, had gathered under the clear summer sky, while at the halls of the Procurators' Offices the crowd streamed on, towards the Piazzetta, extending out to the wide basin of the canal, which is dominated by the two columns. The old Doges' Palace rose majestically above the agitated crowd. Behind the arched windows and in the arcades, weapons could be seen flashing in the sun, and a troop of soldiers had taken their post by the entrance, forming a cordon and presenting their arms to everyone who sought to enter the palace without being a member of the Great Council. For upstairs, in the wide hall, the walls of which are painted with the heroic deeds of the republic, the highest ranks of the nobility sat together in a secret meeting, and the people, shyly crowding down below past the heavy pillars of the old building, seemed to wait impatiently for the

result of the meeting; whenever a nobile could be seen at a window, they were all murmuring and pointing and staring up, as if any moment, the verdict on the undiscovered perpetrator of this sacrilegious crime would be pronounced from the balcony. Andrea, who had crossed the long rectangle of this public place all by himself, was now also approaching the Doges' Palace, and in passing, he had a look inside the church of San Marco, where he saw the people standing tightly packed, even outside the portal, and listening to the sermon. Then, he managed to push his way through the crowd, towards the two columns, and stood by the quay of the Piazzetta, lost in gloomy thoughts, facing the busy multitude of black gondolas, the jagged steel bows of which reflected flashes of sunlight across the waves whenever they turned about. The Riva degli Schiavoni, which was to his left, was also densely crowded with people full of expectation. Behind a Turk's turban appeared a red Greek fez, the picturesque cap of a mariner from Chioggia, a triangular hat, or a powdered wig, and likewise the various tongues could be heard chattering all together, while the monotonous calls of the gondoliers, echoing from the waterside, told even the blind that the Great Canal of Venice flowed at their feet.

An open gondola, rowed by two servant wearing liveries with rich golden embroidery, sped by; a lady lay casually on the wide upholstery, her head resting on her hand. The fire of a large diamond ring, flashed among the red shimmer of her hair; her eyes were fixed on the face of a young man, sitting opposite to her, who was eagerly talking to her. Now, she lifted her head up and, with a proud look, examined the seething crowd on the Piazzetta above. "This is the blond countess," Andrea heard some of the people say; he had already recognised her from the start. Shrinking back, as if her mere sight would incur doom, he turned away and found himself looking at a familiar face, nodding at him like an old friend. Samuele stood behind him.

"Did you also go out for a change, Signore Delfin?" the Jew whispered to him in his thin voice. "In vain, I've sought to meet Your Grace again in all those days since. Your live is more secluded than that of a pregnant woman. If you'd like to come with me to where my business is calling me, I could tell you something which you might like to hear. Come! What are you standing here for, like all those other fools, who believe the Great Council would give birth to the salvation of the republic? The rats in the ship won't make it afloat again, once it has run aground. The real pilots have better things to do, now, than to chat. But let's go away from here, I'm in a hurry, and we'll be able to talk more comfortably in the gondola."

He hailed one of the taxi gondolas and pulled Andrea by the arm along with him. They embarked and sat under the black roof, having a full view of the canal to the left and the right through the windows of the narrow cabin. "What do you have to tell me, sir?" Andrea started. "And where are you taking me to?" "Don't go to your notary tomorrow," said the Jew. "It might be possible that someone might come for you, to send you on an errand which would be more profitable for you."

"What are you talking about, Samuele?"

"You know what has happened last night," the other man continued. "It's an outrage, that twelve hours have past since a murder in Venice, and no lead has been found, yet, pointing to the perpetrator. We have lost our credit with the signoria, with the people, with the visitors from out of town, who used to believe that the local police would perform miracles and have been expecting some signs. The Council of Ten thinks that they are getting a bad service. They'll look around for new eyes, which would do a better job peering into all corners. Your eyes, Signore Delfin, shall, if you're still thinking as you did ten days ago, soon get to read a finer hand than your notary's. Therefore, stay at home tomorrow morning. If there'll be something and I'll be able to put a word in on your behalf, I'd be glad."

"My mind is still unchanged; but I almost doubt in my abilities."

"Hush, hush!" said the other one and shook his index finger. "I'd have to be a poor judge of a person's face, or you've got yours under control, and he who's able to conceal what he's thinking has already half guessed what kinds of thoughts others seek to conceal."

"And who'll decide whether they'll be able to use me or not?"

"You must pass an examination by the tribunal; I can't do anything more than tell them that I know you and that I regard you as talented. Until tomorrow, I think, the tribunal will be complete again; right now, the ten are sitting together and are electing the third man. I can tell you, they could give me a lot of money to become an inquisitor of the state - I would still reject the honour. For the inscription on the dagger was not just engraved to pass the boredom, and a soldier sitting on a mine would eat his beard more calmly than one of the three rulers of Venice since last night."

"Nevertheless, there's probably no doubt that the elected man will take the office? Or is he allowed to refuse?"

"Refuse! Don't you know that the republic severely punishes everyone who evades serving it?"

Andrea said nothing and watched the surface of the canal through the hatch with a glum look. Many black gondolas, too numerous to see them all, went into the same direction between the palaces, and there were quite a few which came towards them from the Rialto. Now, both groups met and crowded towards a wide flight of stairs by the waterside, where they landed as quickly as they could and put their passengers ashore. It was Venier Palace and the dead man lay upstairs.

One look and Andrea knew where they were. Using all of his willpower, he kept his emotions under control and said: "Do you have any business here, Samuele, or are you just curious to see a murdered inquisitor lain out on his bed of state?"

"I'm on duty," replied the Jew. "But it could be useful for you as well to come along. I'll introduce you to some of my friends, for one out of ten here knows what he's looking for. But let's pretend we wouldn't know each other. You know, I'd bet, that there are probably quite a few of the conspirators among these mournful faces. Who knows, perhaps the killer is just now stepping out of one of these gondolas! He wouldn't be stupid in believing that he was safer here than anywhere else. For I can tell you: In this very moment, the police are searching those houses which ever struck them as suspicious, while everyone has gone out, and the proverb is true: The devil teaches to do it, but not to conceal it."

With these words, he jumped out of gondola and was ready to assist Andrea in getting out. "Do you feel uncomfortable seeing a dead man?" he asked. "You aren't in very high spirits."

"You're mistaken, Samuele," Andrea answered quickly and looked into his face, as if he could not care less. "It is rather that I'm grateful to you for helping me to overcome my indolence. If it wasn't for you, I would hardly be here. Let's go upstairs, to call on this important gentleman, who would hardly have received us while he was still alive. A stately domicile, which he has to exchange for so very narrow quarters in such an untimely fashion! I pity him indeed, though I've never laid eyes on him."

Walking side by side among the large crowd, they ascended the staircase, shrouded in black, and looking down from its top, there was the coat of arms of the house of Venier, dressed in crape, commanding the crowd to silence in the absence of a porter. Inside, in the largest hall, the catafalque had been set up under a canopy, tall cypress-trees touched the ceiling high above, candles on silver candelabra flickered as the air blew from the water across the open balcony through the hall, and four servants of the house of Venier, dressed in black velvet, with crapes wrapped around their shiny halberds, were standing on guard like statues at the four corners of the catafalque. The corpse had been covered with a velvet blanket; the silver fringes touched the floor. The first thing the people saw of the dead man as they entered the hall was his sharp profile with an angry and sad expression, his closed eye turned towards the canopy. Andrea recognised these features. In that night in Leonora's room, he had firmly committed them to memory. But no twitch of his mouth nor of his eyes, which were keenly fixed on the dead man, revealed that the avenger was facing his victim. -

One hour later, Andrea came home. Signora Giovanna received him at the top of the stairs with an almost motherly concern, and Marietta also seemed to have been anxiously expecting him. They told him that the sbirri had been searching his room in his absence, but had found everything to be all right, matching the favourable testimony which she, the landlady, had personally given concerning her lodger. The calm manner in which Andrea listened to her report assured her completely that her fear had been unnecessary and that the visit from the police had been a formality rather than anything else. The good woman impressed numerous warnings and precautions on him, how he had to talk and act to stay clear of any suspicion in these evil times. "They'll even tighten their control," the old woman sighed, "for they know very well: A gloved cat won't catch any mice, and that's also a true saying, that the dead shall make the living see. Therefore, be careful, dear sir, and trust no one who'd approach you. You don't know the worst kinds of people yet, how kind-hearted they can pretend to be, but believe in me: For someone to double-cross you, you've got to trust him first. You'd better not eat at an inn, but let us prepare for you at home whatever we can. You're looking exhausted. Rest on the bed for a while; you aren't accustomed to walking around."

During all of this speech, Marietta gave him imploring looks and, standing next to her mother, stared in his pale, serious face. He assured them that he was well, asked for bread and wine, and, after it had been brought to him, was not seen for the rest of the day.

Early in the next morning, when he was still lying in bed, Samuele entered his room. "If you're interested," he said, "to pocket at least fourteen ducats a month, so come with me; all has been arranged, and I think you won't go there in vain."

"Has the new inquisitor of the state been elected yet?" asked Andrea.

"So it seems."

"And no lead on the conspiracy yet?"

"No lead yet. The shock among the aristocracy is great. They lock themselves into their houses and suspect every visitor to be a spy of the Ten or of the tribunal. One after another of the foreign ambassadors has called on the doge, made the most solemn assurances of his outrage about the crime, and offered his help in the discovery of the perpetrator. From now on, the three men of the tribunal will be even more secretive about their identities than before, and, as I believe, a price shall be put on the murderer's head, which would put a poor devil in the money for quite a number of years. Keep your eyes open, Signore Andrea! Perhaps, we'll both soon drink a better wine together, than at that time in that tavern!"

Without a word, Andrea had dressed, and was now following his benefactor, who was incessantly chatting, to the Doges' Palace. Samuele was well known here. He knocked at an inconspicuous door in the yard, whispered a word into the ear of the servant who opened it, and politely let Andrea walk ahead of him up a small staircase. After they had walked through a long, almost dark passage upstairs, and had answered to several men bearing halberds, they were shown into a not so big chamber with a window, which opened onto the yard and was half covered by a dark curtain. In the back of the room, three men paced up and down, whispering to one another, their faces covered by masks, under which only the tips of their beards stuck out. A fourth man, without a mask, sat at a table and wrote by the light of a single candle.

He looked up, when Samuele appeared with Andrea on the threshold. It seemed as if the three others were not paying any attention to the visitors, but were rather busy in continuing their conversation.

"You're bringing the stranger, you told us about?" the secretary asked.

"Yes, Your Grace."

"You may leave, Samuele."

The Jew bowed obediently and left the room.

After a pause, during which the secretary of the tribunal had looked through some papers, which were lying in front of him, and then had checked out the appearance of the stranger with a long look, he said: "Your name is Andrea Delfin; are you related to the Venetian nobili of the same name?"

"Not that I know of. My family resided in Brescia for as long as anybody can remember."

"You're living at the Calle della Cortesia with Giovanna Danieli; you're wishing to enter the service of the exalted Council of Ten."

"I wish to devote my services to the republic."

"Your papers from Brescia are in order. The advocate, for whom you've worked for five years, recommends you as an intelligent and reliable man. Only concerning the six or seven years before you came to him, there is no document whatsoever. What have you been up to in that long time, after your parents had died? You haven't spent it in Brescia?"

"No, Your Grace," Andrea replied calmly. "I was in foreign countries, in France, Holland, and Spain. After I had spent my small inheritance, I reluctantly had to become a servant."

"Your references?"

"They've been stolen from me, having been in a suitcase which contained all of my possessions. After this, I was tired of the unsafe life of a traveller and went back to Brescia. My employers had found me suited for all kinds of secretarial work. I tried my luck with an advocate, and you can see the reference for yourself, Your Grace, attesting that I've learned to work."

While he was saying this, in a quiet, submissive posture, his head slightly bent forward and holding the hat in both hands, suddenly one of the three masked gentlemen stepped closer to the table, and Andrea felt a piercing look directed at him.

"What's your name?" asked the inquisitor with a voice revealing his old age.

"Andrea Delfin. My papers prove it."

"Consider that it means your death if you betray the exalted tribunal. Think about the answer once again. What if I'd now say that your name was Candiano?"

A short pause followed this word, the larvae of the deathwatch-beetle could be heard digging through the timber-work of the room. Eight scrutinising eyes were fixed on the stranger.

"Candiano?" he said slowly, but with a firm voice. "Why should I be called Candiano? I'd truly wish for it myself; because, as far as I know, the Candiano family is rich and noble, and whoever bears this name doesn't need to earn his bread laboriously with the pen."

"You've got a Candiano's face. Furthermore, your manners point to a better upbringing than what these papers attest."

"My face is not my fault, exalted gentlemen," replied Andrea with decent openness. As far as my manners are concerned, I have seen all kinds of customs on my travels and improved my own as much as I could; I also haven't wasted any time in Brescia, but rather used books to catch up on what I had missed in my youth."

By now, the two other inquisitors had stepped closer to that first one, and one of them, whose red beard stuck out widely from under the mask, said in a low voice: "A resemblance, which I would not want to deny, might deceive you. But you know for yourself: The branch of the family which used to reside near Marano has died out; the old man has been buried in Rome, the sons did not outlive him for long."

"This may be," replied the first one. "But look at him and say, whether it isn't just as if old Luigi Candiano had risen from his grave, only being rejuvenated. I've known him well enough; we've been elected to the senate on the same day."

He took the papers from the table and examined them carefully. "You may be right," he finally said. "The age wouldn't be match up. He's too old to be one of Luigi's sons. If he had fathered him before his marriage - we would be able to ignore it."

He threw the papers back on the table, gave the secretary a sign, and stepped back to the window's niche with the others, quietly continuing the interrupted conversation. Nobody could read from Andrea's eyes what a burden had, in this moment, fallen off his soul. The secretary started again. "You understand foreign languages?" he asked.

"I speak French and a little German, Your Grace."

"German? Where have you learned this?"

"A German painter in Brescia has been a good friend of mine."

"Have you ever been to Triest?"

"For two months, Your Grace, doing business for my employer, the advocate."

The secretary got up and walked over to the three men by the window. After a while, he returned to the table and said: "You'll be given the passport of an Austrian subject, who was born in Triest. With this, you'll go to the house of the Austrian ambassador and ask for his protection, because the republic was threatening to deport you. You'll say that you had left Triest at a young age and had gone to Brescia. Whatever answer you may receive, with some cleverness, this visit will be all you need to get acquainted with the ambassador's secretary. It is your task to continue this relationship and to observe the secret contacts of the court of Vienna with the aristocracy of Venice as much as you can. If you should discover the slightest thing which would arouse your suspicion, you have to report it immediately."

"Does the high tribunal wish me to abandon my present position with the notary Fanfani?"

"You won't change anything about the routine of your life. For the first month, your salary is only twelve ducats. It is up to your cleverness and caution to double the amount."

Andrea bowed to signalise that he agreed with everything.

"Here is your German passport," said the secretary. "Your lodgings are next to the palace of Countess Amidei. It'll be easy for you to start a relationship with her chamber-maid, the expenses of which shall be refunded to you. Whatever you'll find out by these means about relationships the countess has with noble Venetians, you'll report right here. The republic expects you to fulfil your task faithfully and conscientiously. It will not bind you by means of an oath, because you wouldn't have human blood in your veins and would also laugh at heavenly justice, if the fear of the earthly punishments we inflict wouldn't confine you to your duty. You are dismissed."

Andrea bowed once again and turned to the door. The secretary called him back.

"One more thing," he said, while unlocking a small box, which stood on the table. "Step closer, and take a look at the dagger in this box. There are large factories for weapons in Brescia. Do you remember having seen any work resembling this one there?"

Controlling his emotions with his last bit of strength, Andrea looked into the container, which the secretary held out to him. He recognised the weapon just too well. It was a double-bladed knife, the handle, also made of steel, in the shape of a cross. On the blade, which had not been cleansed from the blood yet, these words were engraved: "Death to all inquisitors of the state".

After a lengthy examination, he pushed the box back with a firm hand. "I do not recall," he said, "having seen a similar dagger in the shops of Brescia."

"It's good."

The secretary locked the small box again and motioned him with his hand to leave. With slow steps, Andrea left the room. The men with the halberds let him pass; like in a dream, he went along the echoing corridor, and only when he had reached the dark staircase, he allowed himself to sit down on the marble steps for a moment. His knees were close to failing him; cold sweat covered his forehead, the tongue stuck to his palate.

When he stepped out of the building, he took a deep breath, bravely he held his head high, and returned to his decisive posture. Outside by the portal opening to the Piazzetta, he saw a crowd standing closely together, eagerly reading a large poster, which had been attached to one of the columns. He also joined them and read that by the Council of Ten, with the high permission of the doge, a reward of a thousand zecchini as well a pardon from exile or other punishment was promised to him who would be able to inform on the murderer of Venier. People were rushing from and to the column, and only a few lurking faces persistently reappeared again and again under the arcades, observing the faces of the readers. Andrea also did not escape their attention. But with the indifference of a completely uninvolved stranger, he left to make room for other curious people, after quickly glancing over the paper, and then, he calmly stepped into a gondola at the Grand Canal, which was to get him to the hotel of the Austrian ambassador.

When, after a lengthy ride, he got off in front of the palace, situated in a rather remote part of the city, bearing the two-headed eagle above the entrance, a tall, young man was just using the knocker of the gate. He looked around for the gondola, and his serious features suddenly became cheerful. "Ser Delfin," he said and extended his hand to Andrea, "to meet you here? Don't you remember me? Have you already forgotten that night at the Lago di Garda?"

"It's you, Baron Rosenberg!" replied Andrea and heartily shook the right hand which had been extended to him. "Are you going to stay for a long time in Venice, or are you already getting your passport here, to continue your travels?"

"Heaven knows," said the other one, "when my star will ever lead me away from here, and whether I will welcome or curse it then. But for my passport, I don't need to bother anybody, since I can endorse it for myself. For you ought to know, dear friend, that you're talking to the secretary of His Excellency the Austrian ambassador, which I'm truly not saying for the purpose of pushing a wall of diplomacy between me and my dear travel-companion of Riva, but in your own interest, good fellow, since not every Venetian would wish to be regarded as an old acquaintance of mine."

"I've nothing to fear," said Andrea. "If I'm not bothering you, I'll step inside with you for a moment."

"You wanted to see me, without knowing about me. Whatever favour the secretary of the embassy was supposed to do for you, your friend will now perform for you just the more willingly, if it's in his power."

Andrea blushed. For the first time, he now felt all the humiliation of the mask he wore in the company of a free man, who, after a brief encounter several years ago, was approaching him with so much friendship now again. The passport of the man from Triest, which he had in his pocket, burdened him like a weight of lead. But the practise he had in controlling his inner struggle did not fail him this time either. "I only wanted to make an inquiry concerning a German commercial house," he said, "for here in Venice, I hold the very modest position of a clerk, who has to put up with having to perform all kinds of petty services for his employer, the notary. But since I wasn't much better of in Brescia, and you nevertheless didn't regard me as too low to grant me the company of yourself and your mother, I will, here as well, boldly enter in your company; most of all, you must tell me: How is this outstanding woman, whose venerable image, her moving love for you, her great kindness for me, are still most vivid

in my memory."

The young man became serious and sighed. "Come to my room," he said. "There, we can chat more confidentially."

Andrea followed him upstairs, and with the first look he had into the cozy chamber, he caught sight of a large pastel painting, which was hanging above the desk. He recognised the shining eyes and the rich hair of Leonora. All seductive softness of youth and of wantonness lay on these smiling lips.

The young man pushed two armchairs to the window, through which the rather wide canal, the picturesque bridge, and, between the houses on the other side, that wall of an old church behind which the choir-stalls would be were all in view. "Come," he said, "make yourself comfortable. Shall I send for wine or sorbet? But you aren't listening. You're captivated by this unfortunate painting. Do you know whom it represents? Do you know the original, of which it is only a pale shadow? But who in Venice wouldn't know her? Don't tell me anything about this woman. I know everything which is being said about her, and I believe everything, and nevertheless I assure you in all earnestness that even you, if you were standing in front of her, would think of nothing out of all this, but rather you would thank God for not entirely losing your five senses."

"Is this painting your property?" Andrea asked after a pause.

"No; it used to belong to a more fortunate man, a handsome, young Venetian, who, as she has personally confessed to me, had been her idol. This careless man dared to offer his friendship to me. He is paying for this crime in exile, and my punishment is now that he has left me with this painting, and that I've seen the eyes of the original crying for him."

While he was saying this, he stood in front of the painting and regarded it with a doting, sad look. Andrea observed him with the deepest compassion. His face was not handsome, he only seemed attractive by means of the combination of the youthful softness of his physique and the male sincerity and fire of the expressions of his features. The movements of his tall body also revealed nobility and energy. Andrea could not help but exclaim: "How can you, you too, love this woman, who is so unworthy of you!"

"Love?" replied the German in a strangely gloomy tone. "Who told you that I would love her as I used to love in Germany and which is the only love worthy of that name? Say that I'm obsessed by her, that I'm wearing her shackles while gnashing my teeth and moaning, and accept my confession that I'm ashamed of this weakness and yet savour it. Never before, I've felt how meaningless all earthly bliss is compared to the feeling of having one's back burdened by a yoke of one's own choosing, until it bleeds, and to cast all male pride into the dust for a smile of such eyes."

His face had turned red; only now, he noticed that Andrea had, for some time, turned away from the painting and was listening to him with deep concern.

"I'm boring you," said Rosenberg. "Let's talk about something else. What has happened to you in the meantime? Why have you left Brescia?"

"You haven't told me about your mother yet," Andrea changed the subject. "What a woman! The most complete stranger would feel the desire to venerate her like a mother."

"Go on," said the other man. "Perhaps, your words will free me from the evil spell, I have succumbed to. It's not so that you would tell me anything new. But hearing from you what a mother she is, and what an ungrateful child she has brought up in me, will perhaps make me turn back to my duty. Would you believe me that I have already received the third letter from her in which she implores me to leave Venice and to come to her to Vienna? She's dreaming that a tragic fate was awaiting me here. She doesn't even suspect the worst fate to which I'm doomed; and yet, there is nothing else keeping me here but that woman, which I do not dare, for anything in the world, to bring close to her untarnished presence. - But no," he continued, "I shouldn't be too hard on myself: It would indeed be difficult for me to obtain a leave at this time. My superior, the count, has persuaded himself that I was indispensable for him, and especially now, there's a lot of work to be done with which he wouldn't want to burden himself. It's not unknown to you that we're unwanted guests here. They don't want to open their eyes to that side which might pose a real danger and foster the prejudice that the power we represent had its hands in everything hostile which happens in Venice. They've even gone so far to blame us for the murder of Venier, a crime which I despise from the bottom of my heart just as much as I regard its instigators as shortsighted politicians. - After all, wouldn't you say so too, dear friend," he continued with untempered enthusiasm, perhaps also with the intention to persuade one more person in Venice to speak out in his favour, "wouldn't you say so too, that there's not even the slightest prospect of achieving the goal, the overthrow of the tribunal, by these criminal means? Let's forget about the moral

aspects for a moment: Is it in any way conceivable that such an extensive conspiracy to commit these assassinations will remain a secret here in Venice for as long as it would take for it to achieve the goal of intimidating their enemies?"

"It is inconceivable," replied Andrea calmly. "Whatever three Venetians know, the Council of Ten knows. It's just the more astonishing that, this time, they are thus badly supplied with information."

"And now, let's suppose that the conspirators would succeed in committing one murder after another as they please, which does seem to be what they are up to, suppose they would get to the inquisitors in spite of the secrecy surrounding them, and there would finally be no one left who would dare to risk his life for such a dangerous honour - what would be achieved by this? An aristocracy which is organised on such a monstrous scale as the one of Venice requires, in order to prevail, in order to secure itself against the tempestuous waves of the will of the people, the firm dam of an everlasting dictatorship, which would have to be reestablished again and again in milder or tougher forms. After all, where are those elements from which a genuine republic with free institutions could be formed? You've got a ruling class and a ruled class, sovereigns by the hundreds and mob by the thousands. Where are the citizens, without which a free administration of a city is an impossibility? Your nobili have made sure that the common man has never matured enough to develop a citizen's way of thinking, the feeling of being responsible, and of having to make true, conscious sacrifices for great purposes. They've never allowed the plebeians to get involved in matters of the state. But because the rule of eight hundred tyrants is too sluggish, too much in disagreement, and wastes too much time with idle banter to have a powerful effect on the outside world or on internal matters, those gentlemen rather enslaved themselves and put up with the yoke of an irresponsible triumvirate, which has at least originated from among their midst. They preferred seeing their own peers falling victim to this triple-headed idol, without any laws and legal rights, to a life under the protection of laws and rights, which would render them equal to the people."

"You're saying these things as they are," Andrea interjected.
"But do they have to stay like this?"

"Stay - or get worse. Because, look, my dearest friend, how terribly the blade of their weapon has turned against themselves. As long as the republic had its role among the peoples of Europe, the pressure of this constant dictatorship in internal affairs had been compensated by the successes in external matters. Without bundling all of its strength in the hands of merciless tyrants, Venice would never have flourished to this height of political power and immeasurable wealth, which we still found growing up until the past century. As soon as these purposes were gone, which could only justify such violent means, the bare tyranny in all of its monstrosity remained and began, lest it should be idle and realise that it had outlived its time, to direct its frenzy towards its insides. A dictatorship in peace, may it be ruled by one or by three, it always a mortal danger for every large or small state. But here, the disease has become too old to be still curable. The germs of a genuine middle class of citizens, out of which now a new life would have to grow for the republic, have rotted by means of a system of terror, which had lasted for centuries, by means of a network of the most skilful spies, all confidence, all honesty, safety, and love for freedom has been suffocated, and the building, which seemed to have been constructed so skilfully and durably, would collapse, as soon as the cement of fear would disappear from its joints."

"Your reasons may be good," replied Andrea after a pause, "but they are the reasons of a stranger, who doesn't stand to lose anything by declaring that this republic had outlived its time and was doomed to fall. You would hardly convince a Venetian that the disease of his old native town doesn't at least deserve a final attempt to cure it."

"But you are no Venetian."

"You're right, I'm only from Brescia, and my town has bled heavily under the scourge of Venice. Nevertheless, I can't help but feel a deep compassion for these desperate men, who are attempting to cut out the cancerous growth of the secret rule of terror with a knife. Whether they'll reach their goal, is written in the stars. My eyes are weak, I'll forgo reading this inscription."

Both men became silent and looked through the window at the canal for a while. Their armchairs were standing closely together. The burning sun shone into the room, but they did not try to avoid the unpleasant heat.

"You see," the younger one finally started again with a smile, "that I've learned far too little caution, though being a diplomat, especially being one who is starting his career in Venice. We've only met once; and today, I'm telling you straight forward what I think about the local state of affairs. But of course, I regard myself as a good enough judge of character to know that a mind like yours couldn't seek to get on the payroll of that signoria."

Without a word, Andrea extended his hand to him. In the same moment, he turned his face around and saw his colleague Samuele standing a few steps behind them with a demure posture in the middle of the room. He had quietly opened the door and had stepped closer on the carpets of the room, without being heard, making many obeisances. "Your Grace," he now said turning to Rosenberg, while pretending not to know Andrea, "please forgive me for having entered unannounced. The valet wasn't in the anteroom. I'm bringing the jewels you had send for; things, your Grace, like those the most beautiful Esther could have worn."

He pulled boxes and cases out of his pockets and carefully spread out his merchandise on the table, and in doing so, he visibly sought to bring out the Jewish merchant in him, whose existence he otherwise did all he could to conceal. While the German inspected the jewelry, Samuele gave an approving look to Andrea, who had his back turned against him and was stepping over to the window. He understood the purpose of the Jew's visit at this time. The spy was supposed to keep an eye on the spy, the old fox was supposed to watch over the new recruit on his trial job.

In the meantime, Rosenberg had chosen a necklace with a ruby lock and payed the price the Jew had been asking without haggling. He threw the gold coins on the table for him, nodded at him to signalise that he was dismissed, without bothering to answer to his banter, and stepped back to the window. "I'm seeing it in your face," he said, "that you're pitying me and regarding me as a madman. Indeed, the wiser thing for me to do would be to throw this shiny jewelry into the canal, instead of putting it around Leonora's white neck. But what does all wisdom help me against this daemon?"

"I'm convinced," Andrea answered, "that you won't have to wait long for reality to free you from this enchantment. But I owe you another warning. Are you more closely acquainted with the Jew, who has just left us?"

"I know him. He's one of the spies in our house, who are on the payroll of the Council of Ten. He eats his daily bread in sin, for all of our secret is that we are honest. And because they think that this would be entirely impossible, we are regarded by them as the most dangerous and most secretive ones. Only for your sake, I dislike the fact that the sneak had entered here just now out of all times. He has seen that you shook hands with me. I can guarantee you that you, before one hour is up, will be listed in the black book of the tribunal."

Andrea smiled bitterly. "I don't fear them, my friend," he said. "I'm a peaceful man and my conscience is calm." - -

Four days had passed since that conversation. Andrea had continued his usual life, had gone to the notary every morning, and had stayed at home at night, though now, having established a close relationship with the high police, he did not need to care about having a good reputation in the street della Cortesia any more.

Saturday evening, he asked Signora Giovanna for the key to the house. She praised him for making an exception to his rule. Today, she said, it was also worth the effort; to be among those watching the obsequies for the noble Signore Venier in San Rocco, could even tempt her. But she disliked being in a crowd, and then - he would know why this case gave her a particular feeling of dread.

He also preferred avoiding the nightly crowd, Andrea said. It suffocated him. He wanted to take a gondola and go out to the lido.

Thus, he left the old woman and turned to the direction opposite to San Rocco. It was already eight o'clock, a thin rain made the air hazy, but did not prevent the people from flocking to the church on the other side of the canal, where the exequies for the murdered inquisitor of the state were supposed to be held at this hour. Dark figures, some of them wearing masks, some of them protecting their faces against the drizzling rain by means of the brims of their hats, rushed past him to the ferries or to the Rialto Bridge, and the low ringing of bells buzzed through the air. In a side alley, Andrea stood still, pulled a mask out of his jacket, and tied it to his face. Then, he went to the nearest canal, jumped into a gondola, and exclaimed: "To San Rocco!"

The majestic, old church was already lit as bright as day by innumerable candles, and an immense crowd flooded around the empty catafalque, rising darkly in the middle of the nave without flowers and wreaths. Only a large silver cross stood at its top, and the black blanket showed on both sides the coat of arms of the house of Venier. On seats draped in black, filling the entire choir, each row rising above the one in front like in an amphitheatre, the aristocracy of Venice had taken their seats, assembled in a completeness which was even at important meetings of the Great Council rarely achieved. Nobody dared to be absent, because everyone had an interest in not allowing even the slightest doubt to be cast on his sincerity in mourning the deceased. On a special tribune, sat the foreign ambassadors. Their ranks were also complete.

From above, the trombones were playing the solemn introduction to a requiem, and a full-voiced choir, accompanied by the organ, intoned the elegy, which rolled heart-stirringly through the church and was heard outside in the square as well as far off in the neighbouring streets by people crowding to the church. The slight rain, which still continued, the darkness of the night, through which the bright windows of the church in the shape of roses of stone glowed wondrously even from a distance, the shy bustling and buzzing of the thousands impressed everyone in the area all around the church with a frightful, creepy feeling, which only a few might have been able to fend off. The closer they got to the entrance of the sacred room, which contained everything which was great and powerful in Venice, the more devoutly all lips fell silent. From behind the black masks, which according to the old custom appeared in a large number among the crowd at mournful and joyous celebrations alike, rather many frightful looks peered in through the bright portal for the catafalque, which was an even more perceivable warning to consider the end of all things and the meaninglessness of earthy power than the words of the song.

In a side alley, which in those days led through dark arcades and ended on the square of San Rocco, two men walked hastily, talking to one another. They did not see that in the darkness of the houses, a third man was following them closely, carefully hidden by a cloak and a mask, who at times came closer, at times stayed behind and let them increase their distance from him again. Those others did not wear the mask. One of them was a gentleman with a gray beard and a noble appearance, his companion seemed to be younger and of a lower class. He listened attentively to every word of the old man and only occasionally made a humble remark.

Now, they were reaching the spot where, from a lit house, a bright light fell across the alley. Swiftly, the masked one had passed them by, and as they were now walking closely past him, he peered with a keen look at both of their faces from behind a pillar. The features of the secretary of the inquisition emerged clearly for a moment out of the darkness. The voice of the old man had also been heard in the chamber of the secret tribunal. He had told Andrea Delfin to his face that he was a Candiano.

"Now, go back," the old man concluded the conversation, "and take care of this matter without delay. The Grand Captain is busy at San Rocco, as you know; but a small detachment of his men will be enough to arrest both of them. You'll impress upon them that it has to be done without any noise. You'll have to conduct the first interrogation right away, for I'll hardly be back before midnight. If you'll have something urgent to report, you'll find me at my brother-in-law's place, as soon as the mass is over."

They parted, and the old man walked through the lonely passage between the pillars towards the square of San Rocco. Just now, the music in the church fell silent, and everybody's eyes were turned to the pulpit, to which an old man with hair as white as snow, the papal nuncio, with the help of two younger priests, ascended with some difficulties, in order to talk to the assembled aristocracy and common people of Venice. No sound was uttered any more; the feeble voice of the old man began, widely audible, to pray that the Lord would look down in His grace and grant, from the treasure of his eternal wisdom and mercy, comfort and enlightenment to the saddened spirits, that He would bring light to the darkness, which is shielding the guilty and insidious ones from the eyes of worldly justice, and foil the work of darkness.

The echo of the "amen" had hardly faded, when from the portal the noise of a low murmur rose up and proceeded lightning-fast through the nave of the church and reached the seats of the nobili, to make the huge gathering instantly waver and surge like a lake in a storm. In the first instant, they all peered helplessly to the threshold, over which the horror had entered. Torches could now be seen through the main portal, wandering hastily across the dark square, and while they were all holding their breath and listening to what was happening outside, suddenly, many voices shouted into the church: "Murderer! Murderer! Save yourself, if you can!"

An unparalleled turmoil, a confusion, as if the arches of the church were in immediate danger of collapsing, followed this exclamation. Commoners and patricians, clerics and laymen, the singers up in the choir, the guards of the catafalque, men and women crowded blindly towards the exits, and only the old man up in the pulpit looked down on the frightened bustle with unwavering dignity and only left his seat when there was nothing but the black catafalque left in the middle of the empty church, to remind him of his sermon, which had been cut short thus abruptly.

But outside, the horrified crowd pushed towards that spot, where a few torches had difficulties in fighting against the wind and the rain. The sbirri who had rushed to that spot, lead by the Grand Captain, as soon as the first indications of the event had started to stir, had found a motionless body in the darkness of the side alley, who had still blood gushing out of his side. When the torches came, a dagger with a cross-shaped handle of steel was seen in the wound, and the engraved words were read: "Death to all inquisitors of the state!", which were passed on through the stunned crowd in low voices from one mouth to the next.

The first jolt of an earthquake, though constituting a terrible warning that one would be standing on volcanic ground, does not stir up people's minds in their depths, yet. The horror is too vividly intermixed with surprise and indignation; indeed, wherever the effects do not persist in a too tangible manner, people, swiftly striving back to their usual routine, prefer to believe that their senses had been deceived for the sake of their peace of mind. Only the repetition of the destructive, inescapable, and merciless event disproves any kind of belief in a misinterpretation, any hope that only random coincidences could have brought on the event. The return of the danger brings on everlasting fear and points to a series of horrifying events with no end in sight, against which neither courage nor cowardice can provide even the slightest protection.

The news of the second murderous assault against an inquisitor of the state had a similar effect in Venice. For that the wounded man had been nothing less, the insiders had not been able to keep a secret. Nobody could deny that the boldness, with which this second blow had been struck, was surely just incited once again and encouraged to proceed on the course of violence by the successful execution of the crime. Though the dagger had not struck a deadly blow this time, deflected by a silken undergarment, the wound was nevertheless life-threatening and caused, at any rate, a standstill in the activities of the secret tribunal, which was not allowed to proclaim a sentence without the unanimous consent of its three members. Thus, its rule was paralysed for the moment, and, what was more important, the unpenetrated secret surrounding the hostile power destroyed the belief in the omniscience and omnipotence of the triumvirate and finally had to undermine the self-confidence and the unscrupulous energy of its members.

After all, what precautions were still left, and which means of secret investigations had not been exhausted yet? Had they not, in the Council of Ten, vowed to each other with a solemn oath to keep most silent about the election of the new, third inquisitor? And nevertheless, a few days afterwards, the blow had been struck as surely as if it had come from heaven against no one but the newly elected one. With distrustful looks, they all looked at each other. The thought was forcing itself upon them that among the rulers themselves, treason was building its nest, that the tyrants had, in a suicidal way, assaulted their own power. The secretary of the inquisition was arrested, who had been the last to talk to the wounded man shortly before the attack. He was questioned thoroughly and threatened with a cruel death. This was also, of course, unsuccessful.

And what had been the benefit of increasing the numbers of the secret police, the massive recruiting of new spies from among the servants of the nobili and the foreign ambassadors, in the inns, in the arsenal, even in the barracks and monasteries? One half of Venice was payed to spy on the other half. A sizable amount of money was supposed to be the reward for even the slightest news, which would help them to get on the trail of the conspiracy. Now, it was tripled. But, since the conspiracy was presumed to be among the aristocracy, they had little hopes to get results from these measures, which were only targeted at the poorer people. Quite generally, they did a lot of things to preserve the appearance that they were not idle, though what they did was idle. Strict orders were issued that the inns and taverns had to be closed at nightfall; wearing masks and weapons of any kind was banned with a severe punishment; all night long, the steps of the patrols echoed through the allies, and they were heard calling out to the gondolas, which were passing by the guard-posts on the canals. Nobody who wanted to leave Venice received a passport, and at the entrance to the harbour, there was a large guard-ship, stopping every vessel, and even the officials of the republic were asked for the password, before they were allowed to pass.

Far across the Terraferma, the rumour of these frightening conditions was spreading, as usual increasing with the distance. Whoever was planning to travel to the city, postponed it. Whoever had been planning to engage into a business connection with a Venetian house, preferred to wait until the confusion was over, which was threatening to revolutionise the structure of the republic in its foundations. The resulting effect was soon evident in a desolation of the city, where everything seemed to have come to a standstill. The nobili only left their palaces in cases of extreme emergency, locking themselves in against any visitor, to avoid getting unknowingly in contact with one of the conspirators. Nobody knew precisely what was going on outside, and the most outrageous rumours of arrests, torture, and inflicted punishments reached the closed doors, entered into the frightened families. Even the common people, though they felt clearly that they were not the ones who were primarily suffering under these conditions, and though they watched gloatingly how the noble men gave each other squinting looks in panic and fear, could still not fight off an uneasy feeling in the long run. It was definitely a nuisance to abandon cards and wine at nightfall, to be searched for concealed weapons by every guard who felt like it, and not to be save for a single moment from the treachery of false accusations, in spite of having the best conscience in the world.

Among the few whose lives and activities seemed to be unaffected by the stifling atmosphere, which depressed all spirits, was also Andrea Delfin. The morning after the crime, he had, like all the other secret spies, been interrogated by the successor of that unfortunate secretary who had put him on the

payroll, concerning his observations at the hour of the crime, and had presented him the fairy-tale of a trip to the lido, on which he had the intention to investigate how the fisherman thought about all this. What he could tell them about what was going on in the hotel of the Austrian ambassador and the palace of the countess - meaningless facts, which the tribunal already knew for a long time - at least proved his zeal to familiarise himself with his new task. His friend Samuele did not fail to inform against the striking familiarity he had found between the man from Brescia and the secretary of the embassy. Calmly, Andrea explained himself, and the old acquaintance from Riva could only be advantageous for the intentions of the tribunal.

Thus, almost no day passed by, when he would not, after he was done with his work for the notary, call on his German friend, to whom, being cut off from other company, the conversations with the grave man, clouded by secret grief, became, by and by, a necessity. He had developed an unlimited trust in Andrea, and when he avoided political topics with him, it was more because he could not hope that they would understand each other on account of their different nationalities, than for a concern that Andrea might abuse his openness. He even told him with a laughing face that he had been warned against him being a spy of the tribunal. The carelessness with which he crossed the shunned threshold of the foreign ambassador every day would, of course, catch people's attention.

"I'm no nobile," replied Andrea with a calm face. "The ten men will realise that I don't seek any diplomatic connections here; they didn't even think me worthy of a warning up to now. But I've come to like you, and it would pain me to forgo forcing my unpleasant company on you from time to time, for I'm a perfectly lonely man. Even my kind landlady, who in the past used to shorten the time for me with her proverbs for an hour or so, doesn't enter my room any more. She's ill, and what made her ill is Venice and pale shadows haunting this city."

This was indeed true. After the second assault against the inquisition of the state, Signora Giovanna had been walking around in deep thoughts for one day, and as the night fell, an ever growing excitement had come upon her. She was now firmly convinced that her Orso's spirit had been the perpetrator; for only a bodiless shadow would be able to escape for a second time the thousand spying eyes which were guarding Venice. She put on her best clothes and decided, since she was expecting nothing less than a visit of her departed husband, to be ready to receive him, spending the entire night at the top of the stairs. In a touching confusion of these concepts, she had prepared a favourite dish of her husband, laid the table with three armchairs by its side, and could not be persuaded to eat a bite of it herself. In this state, she sat awake for the larger part of the night. Only after the small lamp in the corridor had gone out, Marietta, calling Andrea to her aid, succeeded in bringing the poor woman back to her room and to bed. A fever broke out, not dangerous, but strong enough to render her unconscious for several hours a day. Andrea watched all of this with deep sympathy, and the moving words the ill woman uttered in her delusions tormented him a lot. He had to admit to himself that he was to blame for the confusion of this good soul, and Marietta's sad looks depressed him more heavily than all the bloody secrets he carried around with him.

With this burden, Andrea strolled past the Doges' Palace one afternoon and, for a long time, stood by the narrow canal which flows along under the high arch of the Bridge of Sighs. Whenever he started to waver in his decisions and he began to doubt in the moral justification of the office of a judge which he had taken on, he fled to this place and confirmed his determination by looking at these ancient walls, behind which thousands of victims of an irresponsible power had sighed and gnashed their teeth, believing in the righteousness and the necessity of his mission.

The sun shone with blinding rays through the mists of September, rising up from the water. This quay, which had at other times been swarming with people, was unsettlingly quiet. The gloomy looks of the soldiers, marching noisily up and down under the arcades of the palace, were liable to scare away the loud cheerfulness of the people passing by. Andrea could hear clearly that from a gondola, which was just arriving at the Piazzetta, his name had been called. He recognised his friend, the secretary of the ambassador from Vienna.

"Do you've got time?" the young man called out at him, "If so, come on board for a while, and join me for a stretch of my way. I'm in a hurry, but would still like to talk to you once more."

Andrea entered the gondola, and the other man shook his hand particularly cordially. "I'm very happy, my dear Andrea that I happened to meet you here. I would have disliked leaving you without a farewell, and yet, I didn't dare to visit you or to sent for you, since this would undoubtedly have caught someone's attention."

"You're taking a journey?" Andrea asked almost perplexed.

"I guess. I'll have to. Here, read this letter from my dear mother, and tell me whether I'm still allowed to hesitate after this."

He pulled the letter out of his pocket and gave it to his friend. The old lady implored her son that, if he wanted her to ever be able to get but one hour of sleep again, he should travel to her without delay. The rumours from Venice, the position he held there and which put him into more danger than others, the fact that less than a third of all of his letters would reach her, - she would not know who was to blame for this, - all of this was eating away at her peace of mind, and her physician would not vouch for anything, unless she would be comforted and calmed down by a visit of her son. There was a tone of unlimited motherly devotion and deep grief in all of these line, so that Andrea could not read them without being moved.

"And yet," he said, returning the letter, "and yet, I almost wish you wouldn't leave now out of all times, though I know that your mother is counting the hours. Not because, once you'll be gone, I'll be left behind here, completely abandoned and like a walking corpse, but rather because it is not advisable to leave Venice at this time, since the suspicion will follow you on your heels that you were leaving as a precaution. Didn't they give you any trouble, when you were asking for a leave?"

"None at all. How could they, since I'm working for the embassy?"

"If that's so, be twice as cautious. Many a door has already been opened accommodatingly in Venice, because stepping over the threshold meant plunging into an abyss. If you'd follow me in this, you wouldn't show yourself thus openly and without a disguise here in the city during the last hours before your departure. You wouldn't be able to know what measures they might take to prevent it." - "But what shall I do?" asked the young man. "You know that masks are illegal."

"Then stay at home, and rather let the dignitaries of the republic wait for your farewell visit in vain. - And when will you leave?"

"Early tomorrow at five o'clock. I'm planning to stay away for a month, and hope that by then my mother will have calmed down, so that I'll be able to leave her. Now that it has been irreversibly decided that I shall sever my ties, I'm almost at ease with this violent cure, though it cuts into my life rather deeply. Perhaps, once I'll have broken out of the circles of my enchantress, I'll succeed in shaking off her spell for ever more. But will you believe it, my friend, that the separation makes me shiver, as if I wouldn't be able to survive it?"

"If that's so, the best remedy is to part with her right away."

"You mean, not to see her again before the journey? What you're asking is inhuman."

Andrea seized his hand. "My dear friend," he said with a heartfelt emotion, which at other times he had always been able to control, "I have no right to ask you for even the slightest sacrifice. The feeling of cordial affection, which has brought me together with you from the start, is ample thanks by itself, and I do not dare to ask you for anything in the name of this friendship of mine. But by the image of that noble woman, whose loving words you've just let me read, I implore you: Don't enter the house of the countess any more. More than anything I know of her, what even you don't deny, my premonition is warning you, that it will be your doom, if you don't avoid her in these last hours. Promise it to me, my dearest friend!"

He extended his hand to him. But Rosenberg did not take it. "Don't demand an unbreakable promise," he said, gravely shaking his head, "be content with my firm intention to follow your advice. But if the daemon would be stronger than I and would run down everything I've put in his path, then I would have the double grief to have become unfaithful to both me and you. But you don't know what this woman can achieve, when she puts her mind to it."

After this, they were silent and cruised for a while, lost in thought, together through the lifeless waters, receding listlessly like a swamp as the gondola's keel ploughed through them. Near the Rialto, Andrea wished to get out. He asked the young man to give his regards to his mother and inscrutably shrugged his shoulders when being asked whether he could still be found in Venice one month from now. They held each others hand for a long time, and when the gondola landed, they parted with a cordial embrace. Once more, the intelligent and trusting face of the young man looked through the hatch of the black canopy and nodded to his friend, who had stopped on the stairs leading down to the water, lost in his thoughts. For both, the farewell felt more painful than they could explain.

Especially Andrea, who had thought for a long time that he was free from all those ties with which one person would tie himself to another, who seemed to be dead to all those small reasons for living due to that one, fearful goal which he had set out for himself, was astonished at how much the thought of having to make do without that young man for several weeks did pain him. But soon, the wish forced itself upon him that he would never meet him here again, before he had not succeeded in his work. He was resolved to write a letter to the mother and to urge her with mysterious warnings not to consent to

her son's return to Venice. Once he had made this decision, he was relieved of a great burden. He instantly went home, in order to carry out his plan.

But in his gray room, where no ray of sunlight ever entered and the barren wall of the alley inhospitably stared at him through the iron bars, he was seized by such a violent restlessness and uneasiness that he, whenever sat down to write, threw away the pen and paced to and fro like a predator in its cage. He felt perfectly certain that this feeling did not rise from the depth of his conscience, that not the fear of being found out and being the subject of vengeance was partially disturbing his soul. Just this very morning, he had again come face to face with the secretary of the tribunal and could see for himself how completely at a loss the tyrants were. The wounded inquisitor of the state was still between life and death. The longer this state of uncertainty lasted, the more the existence of the triumvirate itself was questioned. Another successful strike against the shaky building, and it would be in ruins for ever. Andrea did not doubt for a moment that providence, having guided his hand up to now, would also allow him to succeed in his final effort. At no time, he had doubted in his mission. And when today, the indistinct premonition of a great tragedy made him restless, his own actions and plans had no part in it.

It was already getting dark, when he heard a quiet cough on the other side by Smeraldina's window, the agreed sign that the girl wished to talk to him. Lately, he had neglected her pretty much and was rather inclined to continue the acquaintance today, partially to escape his own thoughts, partially to keep his access to the tribunal by means of news from the palace of the countess, and perhaps even to get to one of the inquisitors. Swiftly, he stepped to the window and greeted her. The chamber-maid received him with cold condescension.

"You've been avoiding me," she said; "it seems as if you had made other acquaintances in the meantime, whom you prefer to your neighbour."

He assured her that his feelings for her were unchanged.

"If it's true," she said, "then, I'm willing to put you back in my grace. Today, there's a particularly good opportunity to have another undisturbed chat. My countess is gambling with several guests tonight, half a dozen young gentlemen. They would hardly leave before midnight, and until then, the two of us can also be together, and I'll get all we need from the kitchen and from the wine table."

"Has the German been invited, about whom you've told me that the countess is seeing him so often at her place?"

"Him? What are you thinking! He's so jealous that he wouldn't cross the threshold when he senses that he would have company here. And besides, he's leaving. We wouldn't be mortally sad for that."

Andrea sighed in relief. "At ten o'clock, I'll be here by the window," he said; "or shall I come to the portal?"

She thought about it. "You'd better do the latter," she said. "After all, you're well acquainted with the porter, and your landlady would surely give you the key. Or are you playing the role of a virtuous man before little Marietta? Do you know that I seriously started to get jealous of that insignificant creature?"

"Of Marietta?"

"She has a crush on you, or else I'd have no eyes in my head. Just look at her. Doesn't she walk about like a changed person and doesn't sing any more, while at other times I had to cover my ears? And how many times have I seen her, while you were gone, sneaking to your room and searching through your things!"

"She's reading my books; I've permitted her to do so. The reason for her not singing any more is that her mother has fallen ill."

"You only want to make excuses for her, but I know enough, and if I should find out that she had been talking badly about me, in order to get you away from me, I'll scratch her eyes out, that envious witch."

Vigorously, she slammed the window shut, and he could not help thinking about her words for a long time. In the old days, the idea that the charming girl cared for him would have made his blood throb faster. Now, the only thing occupying his mind was which way he would have to take in order to avoid crossing the calm paths of this innocent soul in the future. Thinking back, he became aware of many small things which supported Smeraldina's opinion. Individually, he had ignored them. But he had to accept their sum. "I must leave this place," he said to himself. "And yet, where am I as safe and as sheltered as in this house?"

At night, at the appointed time, he arrived at the portal of the palace, the brightly lit windows of which were facing the unevenly shaped square. There was no moon in the cloudy sky, presaging an early autumn, and the few people who were still in the streets, wrapped themselves in their short coats. Andrea, as he was standing there and waiting to be admitted, thought of that night when another Candiano had crossed this threshold to come to his death. His mind shivered with horror. His hand, which was soon afterwards seized in an intimate way by the chamber-maid opening the door, was cold.

She showed him to her room, but, no matter how much she urged him, it was impossible for him to eat and drink, though she had ransacked the kitchen of her mistress and put aside some of the most exquisite delicacies for her friend. He excused this by blaming his sickness, and she accepted it, since he did not refuse losing a few ducats to her in a game of tarock. Furthermore, he had brought her a present, so that she could get over the fact that tonight she again found him to be a lover who was so little talkative and forthcoming. She ate and drank just the more eagerly, played all kinds of jokes, and gave him the names of the young Venetians who had come to the countess to gamble.

"There, things are done so very differently than with us," she said; "the gold isn't counted, but a full fistful of coins is betted on one card. Would you like to have a look at them? After all, you already know the secret path."

"You're referring to the crack in the wall? But aren't they in the large hall?"

"No, in the room of the countess. The hall is only used for the big galas during the carnival."

He briefly thought about it. It could only be desirable for him to expand his knowledge of the persons belonging to the aristocracy. "Show me there," he said. "I'll soon have enough of it and not be disloyal to you for a long time."

"Just don't fall in love with my countess," she threatened. "Concerning jealousy, I'm dead serious, and unfortunately, there are some who think that my mistress was more beautiful than me."

He tried to reply in the same tone; and making jokes, they left the room. Outside, they came across several footmen wearing liveries, who did not seem to object against the man who was with the girl. They carried silver bowls and plates and did not use the path to the large hall. This path was unlit just as the first time; but the mood next door was more cheerful and animated, and Andrea hardly recognised the chamber, after having taken his uncomfortable post as a spy on the platform above. The mirrors at the walls reflected the light from the candles about a hundred times over and over, and their golden frames caught sidelights and hurled their reflections high up to the ceiling. But amidst all of this, the jewels of beautiful Leonora were sparkling, and Andrea clearly recognised around her neck the necklace with the ruby lock, which his German friend had bought from Samuele. The gem lay like a stain of blood on her white breast. But her eyes looked tiredly and indifferently at the cards, and whenever she glanced at the faces of the young men, it was plain to see that no one of them could capture her interest. And yet, the guests did their best to be courteous. They made the most humorous remarks when placing their bets and lost their gold more swiftly than their high spirits. One of them, who seemed to have lost everything already, sat in an armchair between two mirrors and sang sad barcaroles while playing the lute. Another one, who was taking a break from winning, threw his golden coins at the carpet, trying to hit certain parts of the pattern, and forgot to pick the zecchini, which were rolling away, back up. Among them, servants were walking in and out with ice-cream and fruits, and a small Bolognese dog had a friendly conversation with a large, green parrot, which, sitting on its golden perch, occasionally called out funny swear-words in good Venetian to the company. The spy on the the musicians' platform already wanted to retreat again, because the sight he looked down on aroused the most uncomfortable feelings in him, when suddenly, a tall figure was stepping through the folding-door into the gambling room, who was greeted by everyone present with astonishment. It was a rather aged gentleman, who nevertheless still carried his white head high on his shoulders and also had nothing of an old man in the way he walked. With a swift glance, he inspected the young men, bowed slightly to the countess, and asked them not to let his presence disturb them.

"You're asking too much, Ser Malapiero," replied the countess. "The respect these young men have for the services which you have performed for the republic by sea and by land doesn't permit us to proceed in your presence to kill time in such a sinful fashion."

"You're mistaken, beautiful Leonora," the old man responded. "I have retired from the public service and not even attended the meetings of the Great Council for years, just because the respect of the young people was a nuisance to me and I longed for carefree, cheerful company. But who would nowadays want to open his heart under the influence of wine, when there is a member of the Council of Ten or even an inquisitor of the state sitting with him at the table? In such an office, a man ages more swiftly, and I'm planning to continue belying my white hair for quite a while and to be at least young when I'm having my wine, though I'm feeling my years in the presence of beauty."

"As far as your courtesy is concerned, you can surely still compete with these young gentlemen," said Leonora, "who would think that it only took a daintily curled blond or black beard to obtain the right to kiss every beautiful, female mouth. But I want to have the wine table carried in, to welcome my rare guest by drinking to his health."

"Forgive me, my charming friend. I haven't come to impose on your hospitality. I was only driven here by the wish to bring you the news of your brother without delay, which have reached me tonight by means of a courier from Genua. They are of such a happy nature that I don't fear that they might diminish the cheerfulness of our beautiful hostess and that I'm sure of your forgiveness when I'm depriving these noble gentlemen for a few moments of your company. May I enter this room with you?" he said, pointing to the door to the dark hall, towards which he had taken a few steps.

Andrea startled. He realised that he could not leave his place swiftly and noiselessly enough to sneak away unnoticed. And the door to the hall was already opening, and he heard the dress of the countess rustling in. He quickly decided to lay down flat on the floor of the high estrade, the balustrade of which, though it was very low, still covered him completely in this position. He heard the steps of the old man following Leonora and him answering "No" to the question whether a candlestick should be brought in.

"I've got only two words to say to her," Malapiero exclaimed turning back to the gambling room. "No one of you young gentlemen will find the time to get jealous of me."

The door closed behind them, and they walked to and fro under the platform.

"What brings you here?" the countess asked hastily. "Are you finally bringing me the news that Gritti is going to be called back?"

"You haven't fulfilled the condition yet, Leonora. What have you told the tribunal of the secrets from Vienna?"

"Was it my fault? Didn't I do everything a woman might be capable of, and didn't I make this stubborn German squirm in my web like a fish on dry land? But never, a word about his occupation had come across his lips. And today, he's departing, as you would know. The annoyance of having spent so much time on him in vain is making me ill."

"It would be preferred if he was ill."

"How come?"

"He wants to leave, his path couldn't be blocked. But we're certain that it would cause the greatest harm to the republic if he should actually reach Vienna. The pretext for his vacation is meaningless. The true reason is that he has things to report in Vienna, which he doesn't even dare to entrust a secret courier with. And therefore, it is imperative to prevent this journey."

"So, prevent it. Whether he's leaving or staying is completely indifferent to me."

"You've got the easiest means in your hands, Leonora, to keep him here."

"These would be?"

"You'll send him a message right away that he should come, to find you less cruel than before. Then, when he'll call on you this very night, as he undoubtedly will, you'll make sure that he'll soon fall ill."

She swiftly interrupted him. "I've made an oath," she said, "never to agree to such impositions again."

"You'll be relieved of your oath, and your conscience will be calmed down, Leonora. We're also not of the opinion that the drug should be lethal; this should even be most carefully avoided."

"Do whatever you want," she said. "But leave me out of it."

"Your final word, countess?"

"I've said it."

"Well, so we'll have to arrange it so that the traveller will have an accident on the way. This always makes things more complicated and causes more suspicion."

"And Gritti?"

"I'll tell you about him another time. Permit me to escort you back to your guests."

The door of the hall opened and closed again. Andrea could stand up without putting himself into

danger. But the words he had heard were still paralysing his mind and his body. Muffled by the wall, he heard the wanton laughs and jokes of the young men; his hair was made to stand on end by the realisation how terribly close death and life, crime and levity came to one another in here. When he straightened up with some difficulties and groped his way down the stairs, his hand was feverishly searching the dagger, which he always carried with him, hidden in his clothes. His lips were bloody, thus hard he had bit on them with his teeth.

But he could still think straight enough to go back to Smeraldina and to tell her in calm words that this company had been rather amusing to look at; but he would never look through the crack again, since he had just barely escaped discovery by the countess and an older guest. He hoped that they had not heard him slipping out the other door as they had entered the dark hall. - After this, he emptied his purse completely and insisted on leaving her at once. The safest thing would be if she let him leave on the board through the window, in order to avoid any suspicion of the countess. She did not suspect anything bad in it, the bridge was built in an instance, and he crossed it with firm steps, though he was already firmly resolved to commit a serious act. But this time, it was not only for the great cause, he had consecrated his life to. This time, a friend's life had to be protected from hostile treachery, a son had to be sent to his mother's arms unharmed, a vile violation of hospitality had to be prevented by executing a swift sentence.

Quietly, he stepped out into the corridor of his house and listened into the gloomy passage. His landlady's door was closed; but he nevertheless heard her voice, talking to Orso's shadow in her feverish dreams. He reached the stairs and carefully opened the door downstairs. The street was empty; the light of the small eternal flame did not extend far into the windy night; but he knew the paths and walked with hasty steps through the next side alleys over the narrow bridge of the canal, which got him to the small square in front of Leonora's palace. He had not seen a gondola anywhere and had to assume that the old man would go the way to his house on foot. He chose a place where he had to pass by. A deep, dark, salient pillar by a door he regarded as suitable for an ambush. Here, he pushed himself into the corner and kept a keen eye on the portal of the palace.

But the hand holding the dagger ready to strike was shivering a lot, and the blood was gushing thus violently through his heart that he had to make the greatest effort to gather all of his courage. What was this, which was rebelling in him this time against an act which he regarded as a holy duty, as something commanded by a higher necessity? He fought hard against the dark voices, which seemed to lure him away from his post. His shoulder was firmly pressed against the pillar; with his left hand, he wiped his brow, which was covered by cold drops of sweat. "Stay strong!" he could not help saying to himself. "Perhaps, if heaven's providence is gracious, this is the last time."

Then occurred to him that the old Malapiero would undoubtedly have servants to escort him, and instantly, he comprehended the impossibility of carrying out the assault in this case. He almost liked finding a pretext forcing him to go home today, without having done the deed. But as he was already putting one foot forward out of the door's niche, the portal of the palace opened on the other side of the square, and in the gray night, he saw a tall figure, wrapped in a cloak, crossing the threshold all by himself and coming towards him. The white hair was sticking out clearly enough from under the hat; the swift steps echoed over the slabs of stone; and carefully, the man kept close to the houses on his late walk. Now, he approached the house in the shadow of which the avenger stood; as if he sensed the immediate danger, he held the cloak before his face and firmly clenched, with his left hand, the handle of his sword, which he carried by his side in spite of the ban on weapons. He passed by his enemy without noticing him; for another ten, twenty steps, the latter let him walk ahead of him. The lonely man was already approaching the bridge. Suddenly, he heard steps behind him, he turned around, his hand dropped the cloak, but in the same moment, his tall figure collapsed; the steel had struck a deep blow against his life.

"My mother, my poor mother!" sighed the murdered man. Then, his head fell onto the pavement. The eyes closed forever.

Several minutes of silence followed these words of farewell. The dead man lay stretched out across the street, with his arms spread out, as if he wanted to eagerly embrace the life which had so disloyally abandoned him. The hat had fallen off his brow; under the disguise of the white curls, the natural, brown hair flowed forth, the youthful face seemed like being asleep in the pale twilight of the night. And one step away from him, by the wall of the next house, petrified like a statue leaning against the wall, stood the murderer, and his eyes were staring into the motionless features of the young man, trying in vain, filled with desperate fear, to deny this horrible certainty, to persuade himself that some ghost was deceiving him, that the features of that old man, who had just before, in Leonora's hall, arranged an ambush for Andrea's friend, were hidden under this young mask, which hell presented to him. Had it not been on account of this friend that he had hurried to strike this blow? Did he not intend to send a son back to his mother unharmed? And what had this man, lying there on the ground, been

babbling about his poor mother? Why was the judge and avenger now standing there like a condemned man and was unable to move a single limb, though his teeth were rattling like in mortal fear, and extreme cold made all of his body shiver?

The blood, which had been raging towards his eyes, flowed back and was gushing towards his heart. His eyes clearly recognised the dagger in the dead man's chest. In the gloomy twilight, he read the words on the handle which he had painstakingly engraved with his own hand: "Death to all inquisitors of the state". He could not help but speak them aloud and let his eyes wander to and fro between the fatal weapon and the face of the poor victim, until his mind was filled with the condemning contradiction between these words and these features. In a frightful haste, thoughts chased past his mind. Suddenly, he saw everything clearly which had happened here and could never be atoned for. No miracle had any part in turning this atrocity into reality. Everything was so perfectly natural, so probable, a child had to comprehend it. During the day, the young man had kept his distance from his ruinous, beautiful enemy. He wanted to leave without farewell. He had sent someone to tell her, and she felt indifferently enough about it to invite guests for the same night. When the night had come, he could not resist the powerful urge of the daemon and walked the accustomed path. At the portal, he had been told that he would not find the countess alone. Momentarily, he was resolved to turn back. And this very moment was enough for his only friend to position himself into his hiding place, in order to become his murderer.

Only after Andrea had clearly thought about all of this, with the cold clairvoyance which comes upon people in all decisive hours when all comfort disappears, the petrification of his body receded. He fell towards the silent sleeper, dropped to his knees onto the pavement, and closely looked at his face. A mad laugh, which sounded like choking, he now involuntarily uttered, as he was pushing the white curls off his head, which had so tragically deceived him. He remembered that he himself had warned the friend against showing himself openly in the streets of Venice. He himself had set up the trap for himself and the one who was so dear to him. Then, he ripped his clothes open and felt whether there was still a trace of life throbbing in his heart. He bent his mouth closely over the young man's lips, to find out whether he could still feel his breath. Everything was quiet and cold and hopeless.

In this moment, the door of the palace was opened again, and a tall figure, wearing a cloak, stepped out. The light from the corridor fell on the white hair of old Malapiero, returning to his house. Andrea looked up; the piercing irony of his situation became evident to his soul. There walked the man from whom he wanted to protect Venice, the defenceless flock of aristocrats and commoners, and, last but not least, his German friend. There he came, lonely enough, along his way, only shrouded by a secret which his enemy had found out; nothing prevented him from attacking him, the dagger was right there -; but this dagger had been desecrated by innocent blood, there was nothing any more to set the judge and avenger apart from the one against whom he wanted to execute the verdict, except that here a treacherous, blind coincidence had struck the blow, while those irresponsible executioners had their goals safely and infallibly in their sights.

All of this was raging through Andrea's mind. He picked himself up, pulled the dagger out of the wound, and fled, still being unnoticed by the aged triumvir, keeping in the shadows, across the narrow bridge over the canal, towards his house. When it occurred to him that the old Malapiero had to find the corpse and would be grateful to his unknown murderer, that he had spared him the trouble he would otherwise have gone through, he had to bite on his teeth in order to avoid uttering a savage scream.

Thus, he reached the front door of his house and found it open. Looking up the staircase, he saw at its top, where the old woman usually sat, her daughter, standing by the uppermost step and looking down, leaning far over the banister, holding on to it with both of her arms. "Are you finally coming!" she whispered at him. "Where have you been at this late time of day? I heard you leaving and couldn't sleep."

He did not reply a single word; with difficulties, he ascended the staircase and wanted to get past her. Then, she saw the dagger, which he did not care to conceal at all, and suddenly, she fell right before his feet, uttering a choked exclamation. He left her lying there and walked to his room. There was not any room left inside of him for sympathy with small human pains. He saw nothing but the mother, impatiently awaiting her son to return from abroad, but being destined to receive his coffin instead.

But as soon as he had locked himself in his room, he perceived Marietta knocking and her quiet voice asking to be let in.

"Go to bed," he said. "There is nothing left for me to share with people of the world. Early tomorrow, go to the Doges' Palace. There are three thousand zecchini for you to receive. You'll be able to report that one of the conspirators had been rendered harmless. Don't fear that they might apprehend me

alive. Good night!"

Persistently, she remained at the door. "Let me in," she said. "I know, you'll do something to yourself, if you'll stay alone. You're thinking that I could betray you, because I've seen you coming in with the dagger. Oh, you're safe from me putting you into danger. Let me in, look into my face, and then tell me whether you'd think that I would do anything bad to you. Haven't I already suspected for a long time that you were the one they've been looking for? In my dreams, I've seen you stained with blood. But still, I don't hate you. I knew that you were unhappy; I could give my life, if you asked me to."

She put her ear against the door, but there was no answer. Instead, she heard him stepping to the window opening onto the canal and busying himself there with something. A mortal fear came over her, she rattled at the door, she shouted again, she deplored him in the most moving words not to perform any desperate act - all in vain. When finally, everything had become quiet inside, she pushed, in terrible agony, hard against the door with her shoulders and tried to break the lock, employing all of her strength. The old woodwork broke, only the frame held. The hole, which she had broken into the door, allowed her slender figure to just barely slip through.

The room was empty; she searched him in all niches in vain. When she stepped to the open window, not doubting any longer that he had jumped into the canal, she hardly dared to peer down over the ledge into the depth. But what she saw restored her lost hope. A rope was hanging down the wall, being attached to a firm hook underneath the ledge. It extended down to the surface of the water. If someone would push himself off the wall with his feet, after having reached the lower end of the rope, he should easily be able to swing to the stairs on the other side by the palace of the countess and into the gondola, which was usually chained to the pole there. Today, it had disappeared, and the lonely girl, looking down the dark gorge of the canal in vain, trying to discover a trace of the fugitive, was at least left with the comforting belief that he could not have chosen a safer course, if he wanted to save himself.

It had been his intention to make her believe that. He did not want to burden the soul of this innocent creature, whom he had already given enough grief, with the entire, harsh truth that there was nothing left which could save him, since he was unable to flee from himself.

The poor girl was still looking out of the window, and her tears fell bitterly into the black waters below, when Andrea was already steering his gondola out into the Grand Canal. The palaces on both sides towered darkly over the face of the water. He passed by the house of Morosini, he saw the palace of Venier, and a sense of horror made his hair stand on ends. Here, his life lay before him like being encircled by a ring; what a beginning and what an end! -

When he rowed past the Giudecca and was now seeing the broad front of the Doges' Palace in the twilight of the moon's murky crescent, the thought was briefly flashing through his mind that this was the place where crimes would be punished. But for his crime, he would not find any judges here; for who may pass judgement on his own case? And was not still the hope with him that, nevertheless, out of his atrocious deed, salvation and liberation could flourish for his fellow citizens, that perhaps even the murder of an innocent man, for which popular opinion would surely blame the tribunal, would complete the work he had begun and push the measure of tyranny beyond its limits?

He himself would have destroyed this hope, if he had given himself up to the judges, if he had dispersed their fear of the invisible enemies, and if he had diverted the foreign powers' complaints away from them.

With strong strokes of the oar, he propelled the gondola towards the lido and crossed the basin of the harbour, where only the ships' lanterns were still standing guard. By the harbour's entrance, lay the large felucca, which had prevented even the smallest vessel from reaching the sea for the last week, unless the challenge of the guard was answered by the password of the inquisition. Like all other secret servants of the tribunal, Andrea had been told the word this morning. Unhindered, he was allowed to row out into the open sea.

The sea was calm. It were not the waves he had to struggle with as he rowed along the coast for several hours. But in this calm, lukewarm night, he only felt his agony even more harshly, and, from time to time, he beat the sea with the oar like a madman, just to hear a different sound than his friend's last words: "My mother, my poor mother."

It was already well past midnight, when he pushed the gondola ashore, jumped out, and walked towards a lonely monastery, which stood on a spit of land and was well known by the poor mariners. Capuchins dwelled here, who lived of the kindness of the people of Chioggia and of begging on the mainland and gave them spiritual comfort in return and have been a support for the people in many a time of need. Andrea pulled the bell-rope by the gate. Soon afterwards, he heard the porter's voice,

asking who was out there.

"A dying man," Andrea answered. "Call Brother Pietro Maria, if he's in the monastery."

The porter left the door. In the meantime, Andrea sat on the bench of stone, pulled a piece of paper out of his wallet and wrote by the light of a lantern, which was shining on him from the porter's lodge, the following lines:

"To Angelo Querini.

"I have played the judge and have become a murderer. I have wrongfully executed the justice which God has reserved for Himself, and God has entangled me in my own blasphemous madness and has let me spill innocent blood. The offering I intended to make has been rejected. The time had not come yet, the sacred office of liberating Venice has been destined for other hands. Or is there no salvation at all?

"I am going to face God, the highest judge, who will justly weigh on His eternal scales my guilt and my suffering. There is nothing I could still hope to get from the people of this world; from you, I expect only generous sympathy for my error and my misfortune. Candiano."

The door of the monastery was opening, and a venerable monk with a bold head stepped outside towards him while he was still writing. Andrea stood up. "Pietro Maria," he said, "I thank you for coming. Have you brought my letter to the exiled man in Verona?"

The old man nodded.

"If you care for the last thanks of an wretched man, deliver this piece of paper also safely into the same hands. Will you promise me this?"

"I promise."

"It's good. God shall reward you for this! Farewell!"

He did not take the hand which the monk extended to him for the farewell. Without delay, he again boarded the gondola and rowed out to the open sea. When the old man, after quickly reading the lines, was calling out for him in dismay, deploring him to return once more, he did not answer. Being extremely agitated, the old servant of the republic saw the last member of an old family drifting out on the dreary waves, which now, being moved by an early morning wind, formed a few lively ripples. He pondered whether it was a good act, whether it was at all possible, to stand against the firm wish of a dying man. Then, the dark figure rose in the distant gondola, being clearly visible against the gray horizon; he who was about to quit his life seemed to have one final glance over the land and the sea and to gaze back at the city, the outline of which swam on the mists of the lagoons like on an island of clouds. Then, he jumped into the depth.

The monk, watching his end, folded his hands and prayed quietly and fervently. Then, he also boarded a boat and rowed out to sea, where the empty gondola was dancing on the surf. He did not find a trace of the wretched man who had steered it.

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End of Andrea Delfin, by Paul Heyse (1830-1914)

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