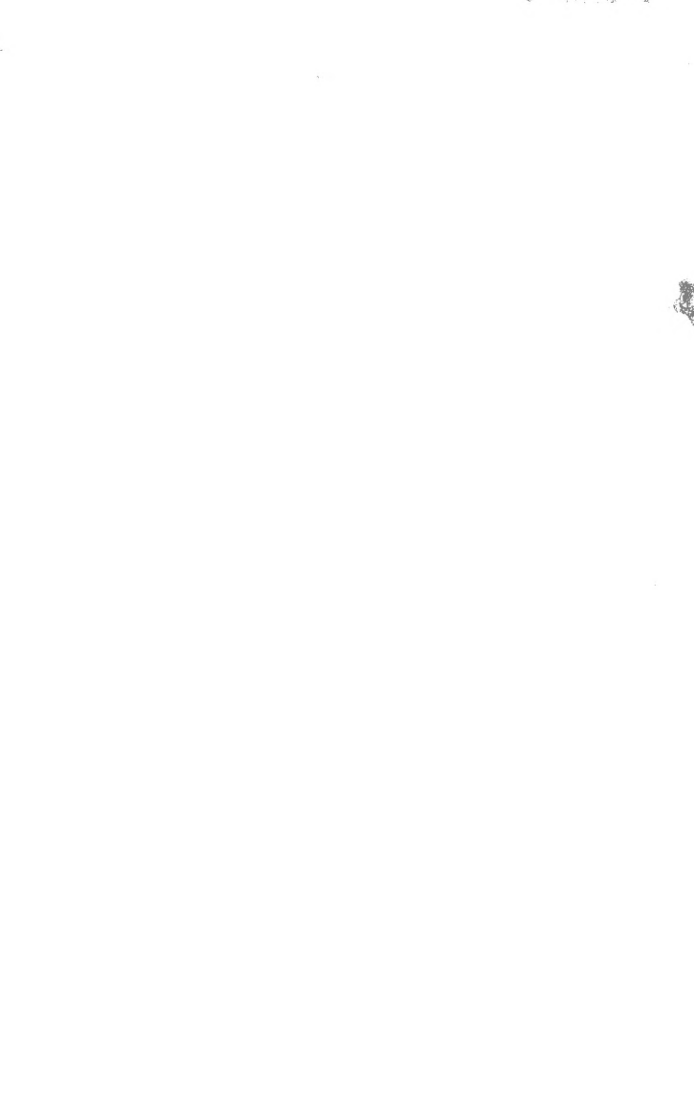


THE SPIRIT
OF
THE MOIST HAND.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.



(Fiction)

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Miss Lisa Constance Waugh
From her Friend

July 28, 1874. - The Author

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THE
SPIRIT OF THE MOIST HAND.

VOLUME I.

CHAPTER I.

The night breeze whistled along the corridor overlooking the Great Hall. The moon shed a feeble light through the dusty panes of the gloomy arched windows, and Villana stole from her chamber which entered from the corridor. Fearfully she darted a timid glance into the deepening gloom. Suddenly a sound fell upon her ear, like the rasping of a nail upon metal. Villana shuddered. But no time was given her for reflection, for a door opened at the further end of the corridor, and immediately shut again with a crash like thunder.

Villana, faint with terror, sat down on a damp stone bench. The darkness was now total. Sable clouds had veiled the moon.

At this moment a low but distinct footstep approached the unhappy Villana, and a cold, moist hand was laid on her arm.

* * * * *

CHAPTER II.

Villana was a captive in the hands of the ferocious Condè di Bruto. For thirty days and nights she had been immured in an apartment of the gloomy Castello Zollero, seeing no one but a haggard beldame, whom her cruel gaoler employed to convey to her her scanty provisions. On one of these visits Canidia, after having deposited the unpalatable fare on the worm-eaten table before Villana, neglected to secure the door behind her. A ray of hope shot through the desolate heart of the heiress of Restruggi. She paused till the last footstep of Canidia died away in silence, and then entered the corridor, as related in the previous chapter.

CHAPTER III.

Oh! that moist, grave-like hand. The memory of it still haunts the soul of Villana of Restruggi.

CHAPTER IV.

Ferrand, Condè di Bruto, strode through his chamber with disordered steps.

“Villana! thou hast escaped me, but only for a time.”

The stillness was broken only by the clang of the mail-clad foot of the Condè on the stone floor of his chamber.

CHAPTER V.

“Fear nothing,” whispered a sweet-toned voice close to the ear of Villana, and the breath that accompanied it was reassuring. “Fear nothing! heiress of Restruggi, the hand is moist but friendly; rise and follow.”

“Follow what?” asked the gasping Villana, “I feel, but see not.”

There was a slight rustling as of withered leaves, and then a flickering light surrounded Villana, but no appearance was visible.

“Follow the light,” said the sweet-toned voice.

Villana hesitated, for nameless terrors enveloped her soul. On a sudden the rustling ceased, the light was extinguished, but Villana

felt herself led noiselessly and irresistibly along by the moist vault-like hand.

CHAPTER VI.

“Urbo!” shouted Ferrand, Condè di Bruto. Urbo, his confidential servant, hastened to his master’s call.

Ferrand was standing in the midst of his hall, pale as the grave, his teeth clenched, his brow wet with drops of terror.

“Eccellenza!” exclaimed Urbo, “what has happened?”

“I have seen her! it is over,” slowly and fearfully gasped his master.

“The Signora Villana?” asked Urbo.

“Villain,” shouted the Condè, “No—*her* I have lost. I have seen—oh! oh! oh!”

* * * * *

CHAPTER VII.

It was true. The Condè di Bruto had seen on the night of Villana’s disappearance the Spirit of the Moist Hand. He had seen at least the flicker of the lurid light that indi-

cated her presence, and had heard the rustle of the withered leaves.

The Condè di Bruto was an altered man. The guests were requested to withdraw from the Castello. Huge as it was, it was only inhabited by the Condè, Urbo, and the hag Canidia. But where was Villana?

* * * * *

CHAPTER VIII.

Somewhat rapidly, but not unpleasantly, Villana was urged along to the part of the corridor most remote from the chamber in which she had been imprisoned. Here a door flew open on her approach, through which she was conducted by her invisible attendant, and the door was immediately afterwards, and violently, shut again. Villana now conjectured that the previous shutting of the door had been caused by the entrance of the Spirit of the Moist Hand.

She now found herself in a semi-circular chamber. She shuddered under the influence of the damp, chill air she was breathing. And what she saw was not fitted to encourage her. A low flickering lamp was placed on a moul-

dering table in the centre of the chamber. Beside the lamp was a scull set on a pewter platter; and this memento of mortality, being continually pecked at by a raven on one side, and an owl on the other, gave occasion to the rasping which Villana heard at the outset of her adventures. But Villana was not indulged with long opportunity of contemplation. She was still urged onward, and through another door heavily stanchioned. Without this door all was darkness.

Then the sweet-toned voice spoke, and again the breath played on the ivory neck of the heiress of Restruggi—

“Haste! speed! fly! The Moist Hand guides you no farther.”

Suddenly Villana felt the grasp on her arm released, and she felt herself alone!

CHAPTER IX.

ALONE! and IN DARKNESS! Villana cautiously groped for the dimensions of the position in which she found herself. A sickening shudder ran through her veins, as her hand came in contact with walls dripping with green damp, and she seemed in a narrow passage.

Ready to sink, she faintly articulated for help. But her voice was too feeble to awake even one of the slumbering echoes of this cavern of horrors.

CHAPTER X.

Recovering herself a little, Villana groped her way forward with cautious steps. She had turned round a sharp rocky angle of the passage when a light, apparently a little in advance, arrested her attention.

Was it moon-light or lamp-light?

* * * * *

CHAPTER XI.

The light seen by our heroine, as related in the foregoing chapter, was partly the reflection of a ray of moonlight which had struggled a passage through some chink or crevice of the vault, and was partly occasioned by a lamp or taper protected by a small glass globe. The light was thus a combination of moon and lamp light. But Villana was not left long in suspense as to the cause of the

movement of the lamp, for what was her astonishment to discover that it was held in the hand of a knight sheathed from top to toe in dark green armour. The visor of the helmet was partly closed, the under part alone being open to admit of air, and to give facilities for respiration. The knight carried a sheathed sword in his right hand, his left supporting the lamp. Villana's first idea on this unexpected apparition was hastily to retreat; but this she dismissed on remembering that the stanchioned door behind her was closed. Taking courage therefore from despair, Villana sprang forward, and throwing herself in the way of the Green Knight, begged his assistance and protection. The latter, who did not seem so startled by the appearance and request of Villana as might have been expected, inquired in what he might aid her, and against what evils she sought his protection.

“Another time,” replied Villana, “you may learn all. But oh! meanwhile save me from this horrible den, and from the power of the Condè di Bruto.”

“Signora!” replied the stranger Knight, “you must turn then with me, and I will see to guide you to a place of safety.”

So saying, the Green Knight turned on his footsteps, and, followed by Villana, strode forward in silence on the same path which Villana had been pursuing.

The heiress of Restruggi trembled violently as she followed her conductor, for the tones of his voice bore a strangely close resemblance to those of the invisible owner of the moist hand.

In a few minutes the knight arrived at a mouldering archway, almost blocked up with rubbish and bushes. These the knight put aside, and in assisting Villana through the aperture she fancied that his hand was of the same texture though less moist than that of her previous invisible guide.

CHAPTER XII.

Having passed through the arch, Villana found herself in the open air. Then the Green Knight spoke—

“Can the Signora Villana di Restruggi manage a high-mettled steed at a crisis like this?”

“I am not unfamiliar with battle chargers,” was the reply of the high-spirited maiden.

Presently the knight whistled low. There was a rustle in the neighbouring wood and a richly caparisoned steed stood beside them. The knight having assisted the heiress of Restruggi into the saddle, said to her—

“Let the steed now be your guide. He will carry you to the Castello Capellino, the abode of my mother, the Baroness Capellino. Present her with this signet ring; it is the sign to her to protect all who are charged with it. Farewell.”

* * * * *

CHAPTER XIII.

It was Christmas-tide, and the Baroness Capellino knelt at the altar of Leonora di Palermo, her patron saint.

She was roused by the galloping of her son's high-mettled steed within the court-yard of the stately Castello.

Presently Villana was in her presence. The heiress of Restruggi having presented the signet, the Baroness graciously bowed her head.

“Fair damsel” she said, “the will of the mother and the son are one. Welcome to our

ancestral halls. Safe art thou here from whatever thou fearest."

Months glided past. The Baroness was kind and considerate. But Villana saw not her deliverer, the gallant Condè Enrico Capellino. One day she ventured to enquire for him. "Where was he? Might he soon be expected?"

The Baroness frowned, and then became pale as the marble of Carrara.

"My daughter," she said, "be content, thou art safe. Pry not into mysteries forbidden thee to know."

END OF VOL. I.



VOLUME II.

CHAPTER I.

When the zephyrs of the following spring were extracting the odours from the violet beds of Capellino, the Baroness addressed Villana,—

“How chanceth it, maiden, that you do not reside at Restruggi, when your father is dead, and you its proprietor?”

Villana replied, “My father, the late Duca di Restruggi, determined by his last will that I must not do so until I was twenty-seven, unless I should wed beforehand.”

“A singular disposition,” observed the Baroness. “But where, then, have you resided since your father’s death?”

“On that sad event,” replied the youthful and beautiful Duchessa di Restruggi, for so by her rank she was, “I removed to a neighbouring cottage occupied by my foster-mother, Apollonica, and her husband, a woodman.”

“And how,” continued the Baroness, “did you excite the wrath, or fall into the power of Condè Ferrand di Bruto?”

“Knowing my father’s last will, and coveting my possessions,” answered Villana, “the Condè wooed me after a savage sort; and on my refusal surprised me when rambling at a short distance from the abode of my good Apollonica, at the head of a band of his vassals, and carried me captive to his dismal Castello.”

“Dismal, indeed,” the Baroness observed, and she added, “Dark, treacherous Ferrand, thy doom lingers, but is sure.”

And the zephyrs continued to wander over the violet beds, but still the young Condè di Capellino, the heroic Enrico, returned not.

CHAPTER II.

About the same time, Ferrand, Condè di Bruto had somewhat recovered from the moody lethargy into which the disappearance of the young Duchessa and the vision of the Spirit of the Moist Hand had thrown him.

The guests were invited to return to the Castello di Bruto, and their former number was now considerably augmented. Among the new comers was a young Baron of Provence, Hersunge by name. He had numbered some five-and-twenty summers, and his port was free and martial. He brought

with him a suit of splendid armour of Provence, which he offered to erect in a niche of the Condè di Bruto's hall. The Condè, who delighted in costly harness, eagerly accepted the offer, and the suit of mail was erected as proposed, surmounted by a helmet of the same rich material, and with the vizor down.

And high revelry was held in the Castello di Bruto.

CHAPTER III.

The Condè di Bruto was one day donning his robes for the banquet at noon, when Urbo rushed into the room pale as the grave, and his teeth clattering like castanets.

"Oh! *eccellenza!* *eccellenza!*" exclaimed the terrified menial; "the armour! the armour!"

"What of the armour, thou thrice-dyed fool?" angrily asked the Condè.

"The vizor is up, *eccellenza!* and it was down last night," exclaimed Urbo.

"Idiot that thou art," rejoined his master, "some one must have lifted the vizor."

The Condè strode into his hall, and looked at the rich harness of Provence, with which

the young Baron of Hersunge had presented him.

The Condè started, for not only was the visor raised, but it seemed as though defiant eyes glared on him from the head-piece; and, moreover, the sword, which had previously been sheathed, was now drawn, and raised menacingly by the gauntleted hand.

“Send hither the Lord of Hersunge,” the startled Condè commanded.

But that youthful Lord was reported to have suddenly left the Castello on the previous evening.

The Condè ventured another look at the armour. The visor was still lifted, and the sword unsheathed and menacing, but the appearance of eyes had vanished.

* * * * *

CHAPTER IV.

The guest hall of the Castello di Bruto was locked and double-locked. The Condè vowed that his revels should be held in another quarter of his Castello. But again the gloom fell on his soul. The guests were again requested to withdraw. And Condè Ferrand,

Urbo, and Canidia were once more left to the hauntings of memory and the forebodings of the future.

CHAPTER V.

Daily had Ferrand occasion to pass the double-locked door of his guest hall, wishing yet fearing to enter, and more narrowly to inspect the mysterious harness. Sometimes it seemed to his straining ear as though there strode on the stone floor within a heavy foot of mail. Sometimes he seemed to hear a musical voice, but without detecting articulate sounds. But this might be horrid fancy filling his soul with spectres. At length he shouted frantically—

“Urbo! Canidia! I will enter though death be the punishment of my temerity.”

CHAPTER VI.

Startled by the vehement voice of their master, Urbo and the beldame rushed to his side. The Condè had unlocked the door before their arrival and entered. They followed him fearfully into the vaulted apart-

ment ; and there, stretched on the pavement, the blood gushing from his mouth and nostrils, his teeth clenched, and his eye-balls prominent, lay the huge form of the Condè di Bruto.

The fatal present of the Provençal Baron occupied its usual niche. The sword was again sheathed, and the vizor of the head-piece down. But across the breast-plate a paper had been fastened, bearing the words in red letters on a sable ground—

“The murdered Capellino demands revenge.”

* * * * *

CHAPTER VII.

Urbo and Canidia applied such coarse restoratives as occurred to them. Slowly the Condè recovered his senses. He spoke—

“Urbo ! it is not *I* that did it.”

“He,” said the menial sullenly—“*He* did it that paid for it.”

The Condè started up with looks of darkness.

“Villain ! thou wouldst not betray me ?”

“Betray thee, excellenza !” said Urbo with a slight laugh ; “no ! it were more profitable to keep the secret.”

“Thou art right,” said the Condè. “Good Urbo! thou art right,” and he slipt two gold moidores into his servant’s hand.

“And now,” said the Condè, “will I serve that wretched armour as I served—no not *I*” he added, hastily interrupting himself—“as thou Urbo didst serve him who wore it.”

So saying the Condè snatched a battle-axe from the wall, and smiting with it with all his might he splintered into fragments the costly harness of the Baron Hersunge.

Scarcely had he done so when a low scornful laugh was heard to issue from behind the niche in which the armour had stood.

The Condè rushed from the hall, the sweat starting from his body in globules,—closely followed by Urbo and the hag Canidia.

CHAPTER VIII.

“Wine! bring more wine,” shouted the Condè di Bruto, when he had reached the western wing of his Castello. “Urbo! I must drown that busy fiend Memory with draughts ⁿ of strong Falerian.”

“Wouldst thou not,” asked Urbo, “desire the presence and converse of company?”

“Right, Urbo! right,” replied Ferrand, “send with haste for the guests.”

And the guests returned to the Castello. But not this time did the handsome Provençal, the Baron Hersunge, accompany them!

* * * * *

CHAPTER IX.

“Why art thou sad, my lady Baroness?” one day inquired the fair Duchessa di Restruggi.

The Baroness Capellino replied not.

“Art thou sad, lady mine,” inquired Villana, “because the violets are faded and past? because the summer birds have flown where there is no winter? because there is snow again on Soracte? because it is again,—no it cannot be because the blessed Christmas-tide has come round again?”

Then the Baroness spoke.

“Yes! I am sad, Duchessa di Restruggi; but it is not because the zephyrs no longer wander over the violet beds, and it is not because the notes of the summer birds are low, and it is not because the snow lies deep on Soracte, and it cannot be, as thou sayest, because it is Christmas-tide once more.”

“Then wherefore art thou sad, my second mother?” gently urged Villana.

“Can I but be sad,” slowly murmured the Baroness, “when again the day has returned, marked with so dark a mark in the calendar of my being? On this day seven years ago my husband, my friend, the Baron Alonzo di Capellino fell a victim to the ambition, treachery, and cruelty of my base half-brother!”

Villana started with horror, but she asked—
“Your half-brother, and who was he?”

“The Baroness shut her eyes as though desiring to close them on the wicked earth, and replied—

“My foe and yours Villana di Restruggi, Ferrand, Condè di Bruto.”

END OF VOL. II.



VOLUME III.



CHAPTER I.

In the dim times of old, when fairies slept on silk mattresses filled with flowers of the dandelion, the Castello di Bruto was owned in her own right by the Contessa Una.

Suitors of high degree paid their addresses to her, but it was not only for her broad domains, but also for her surpassing charms.

Her hair was like the clouds in the west in a summer sunset. Her form was stately like the cedar. Her tones were musical like those of the nightingale. Her hand was moist like the grass from which the dews of morning are drying up. But the Contessa Una scornfully shook her golden tresses at her suitors, and waved them off with her fair moist hand.

One of her most urgent suitors was her near kinsman, the heir of her estates, the dark-browed Ruffano di Bruto.

One day the beautiful Contessa Una was found murdered in a wood. Men said nothing, but few doubted that Ruffano was the mur-

derer. Soon conscience re-asserted her supremacy, and Ruffano bent in horror at the feet of a holy shaveling.

The monk easily forgave the crime in consideration of what holy shavelings dearly love. But it was imposed on Ruffano as a penance that the skull of the murdered Contessa Una should be preserved on a pewter platter in one of the chambers of the Castello through generations yet to come. And it was inscribed in the archives of the House of di Bruto that never should the ghastly *memento mori* be removed on pain of the forfeiture of all its possessions. Moreover, it was not within the power even of Holy Church to prevent the spirit of Contessa Una from wandering up and down the Castello,—sometimes invisible, and anon visible.

Nor, — it was further inscribed in the archives,—nor might the skull be removed and interred, nor would the haunting of the Spirit of the Moist Hand cease, till another race than the race of di Bruto should reign in its lofty halls.

So ran tradition at the time of our tale.

CHAPTER II.

Condè Ferrand di Bruto and the guests held high revel for many days and nights.

“Knowest thou,” the Condè asked one day at a noon-tide banquet,—“Knowest thou where the Baron Hersunge of Provence may be at present?”

The guests professed ignorance on the subject. Some of them had never seen him, others had not since he suddenly quitted the Castello, after presenting the Condè with the rich suit of mail. There were one or two who had never heard of him.

“I would he were here,” said the Condè, “that I might deal with him in respect of his nefarious gift.”

He was interrupted by a low scornful laugh, that seemed to issue from the wainscot. The Condè and the guests rose to their feet. While some laid their hands on their swords, others muttered their “Ave Marias.”

The Condè set down his untasted liquor, and hastily quitted the apartment.

The next morning Urbo announced to the guests that his master was laid down with a sweating sickness, and requested them to withdraw from the Castello.

CHAPTER III.

The sweating sickness with which the Condè had been affected was now abating.

The visits of the leech were less frequent.

Urbo kept watch and ward in the Condè's sleeping chamber.

"Urbo!" growled the Condè one day from within the curtains.

"Eccellenza!"

"Didst say, didst thou not, that that deed of the Christmas-tide was a secret, buried in thy breast and in mine?"

"Yes, excellenza," Urbo replied; "I crept stealthily behind him as he walked, and struck the stiletto into his back between the joints of his harness."

"And he was slain outright, did'st not thou tell me?" growled the Condè.

"Eccellenza, yes."

"Ha! ha!" muttered the Condè. "Then dead men tell no tales, Urbo—eh?"

"Eccellenza, they do not; but stilettoes may."

The Condè raised himself on his elbow.

"What mean you, varlet?" he asked.

"Eccellenza," said Urbo, "in the hurry I

threw away the stiletto, and when I returned the next day it was gone."

The Condè sprang upright in the bed, and put his huge bare leg from under the coverlet. Urbo drew nearer to the door, for the Condè's eye was glaring, and the Condè's foot was strong.

"Eccellenza, spare me," said Urbo, "and I will tell you all."

"Fool," said the Condè, "speak, and I will not harm thee."

"Eccellenza," said Urbo, "the stiletto, as you know, was engraved with your name."

The Condè groaned, but said nothing.

"The stiletto," continued Urbo, "had disappeared ; but I have seen it, or else I never saw anything, in the girdle of the young Count Enrico of Capellino."

The Condè fell back in the bed with a shriek of agony.

And again the low, scornful laugh circulated round the bed, and seemed to die away through the half-open casement.

CHAPTER IV.

It was the second spring after the Duchessa Villana had taken refuge with the Baroness

Capellino. The Duchessa was pursuing a solitary walk beneath the thickening shade of the chestnut boughs, when the never-forgotten sweet-toned voice spake close to her ear.

There was the usual accompaniment of the rustling leaves and the glancing light—

“Ave! Signora Villana.”

The maiden fired with unexpected courage demanded—

“Who greets the Signora Villana?”

Then the sweet-toned voice replied—

“Ave! Duchessa di Restruggi.”

And Villana drew herself up with the stateliness of her ancient race.

“Ave! Contessa di Bruto!” whispered the sweet-toned voice.

Then the eyes of Villana glanced fire, and she haughtily asked—

“Who dares to couple the names of Villana di Restruggi and Ferrand, Condè di Bruto?”

Whereupon a low laugh, more jestful than scornful, passed among the chestnut boughs, and the leaves rustled and the light twinkled merrily. The sweet-toned voice went on—

“Ave! Contessa di Capellino!”

Then the maiden forgot her dignity, and put her hands on her face that was crimson as the rosy morn.

CHAPTER V.

In a country hostelry, not large, but commodious, and situated about midway between the Castellos di Bruto, Restruggi, and Capellino, in the principal apartment thereof, and in the beginning of December, 16—, there sat two men of nearly equal age. The olive brow of the one was shaded with a profusion of raven black locks. The other was of fair complexion with light blue eyes.

Both were between the twentieth and thirtieth milestones of the journey of life.

The exact whereabouts we cannot more accurately ascertain.

Both were accoutred in half- armour, such as in these times knights of highest degree seldom laid aside even over their viands.

The fair knight thus addressed his companion—

“But dost thou love this maiden, Hersunge?”

“May the saints forgive me if I don't,” said the other shaking back from his brow the raven locks.

“And saw her but once, too?” observed the fair knight.

“Nay,” replied the other, “there was speech

between us,—but once,—but I've often seen her since, though unseen myself."

"Well," rejoined the fair cavalier, "may your wooing speed, *camerado mio*. But now, to another matter. How long am I, your sworn brother in arms, to call you by this Gallic alias—Hersunge? By the wolf that suckled Romulus, I long to greet thee by thy true Cis-Alpine title in thine own ancestral halls."

The olive knight smiled, and replied—

"The time of disguise is nearly passed, and that of retribution comes on apace, and truly Giuseppe, when there are no listeners, I care not though thou givest me what thou callest my Cis-Alpine name."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Giuseppe, "I may do my devoirs then to Condè Enrico di Capellino."

Hersunge, or Capellino, nodded assent.

"But," resumed his companion, "when is your great act of retribution or revenge to come off? You have sought by a succession of ghost-like tricks to frighten the monster into a frank confession of his atrocious crime, and though the fright has been complete enough, the confession has not been wrung from him yet."

The young Count of Capellino spake—

“By my father’s dagger, he deserves to die,” and as he spake Enrico half drew it from its sheath, but shuddering as his eye fell on one or two spots on its blade, hastily returned and replaced it in his girdle. He added—

“But I seek not to slay him, unconfessed and unanealed. I would have him to confess, that justice may pronounce his doom.”

“Why not challenge him to open *duello*?” demanded the impetuous Giuseppe.

Enrico shook his head.

“Would that the craven would meet me, and the moist hand would strike him to the dust.”

END OF VOL. III.



VOLUME IV.

CHAPTER I.

The Condè Ferrand and Urbo were alone in the semicircular chamber of the Castello di Bruto.

The skull of the hapless Contessa Una stood on the pewter platter, where it had stood since the dim times when fairies slept on silk mattresses filled with flowers of the dandelion.

The platter rested on the ancient worm-eaten table, and the owl and the raven prosecuted their unceasing pecking.

“Urbo!” said the Condè Ferrand.

“Eccellenza, yes.”

“Can’st thou not purloin the fatal stiletto marked with my name from Enrico di Capellino.”

“Eccellenza,” replied Urbo, “the Count is young and brave, and I fear to grapple with him.”

“Nay, Urbo,” rejoined Ferrand, gloomily, “I meant thee not to assail him point to

point; for *he*, as thou sayest, is young and brave, and *thou* art but a white-livered slave, Urbo. But thou knowest how to strike home behind between the joints of the harness. Ha! Urbo!"

Urbo frowned as much as he dared, as he replied—

"Eccellenza! I slew his father to do thy bidding, but I may not slay the son!"

"And why not, if thy lord and master bid thee?" demanded the Condè.

"Eccellenza! I will not."

Condè Ferrand di Bruto could not bear to have his wishes crossed. Fiercely he turned upon Urbo, grasped him by the throat with his steel-gloved hand, and dashed him with prodigious violence against the ancient worm-eaten table, which supported the skull of the Countess Una.

The table gave way with a dismal crash. The skull was driven to the further side of the apartment. The raven flapped its wings, and the owl emitted an unearthly hoot, and both these birds of darkness flew upon Condè Ferrand, and fastened claws and beaks in his grim and foaming visage. At the same minute a peal of thunder shook the Castello to its foundations. All the doors from battle-

ment to base flew open at once, while a low, scornful laugh, twice repeated, swept from chamber to chamber.

CHAPTER II.

Encouraged by the unexpected diversion made in his favour by the owl and the raven, as narrated in the previous chapter, Urbo arose from amid the debris of the splintered table; and skulking up to the Condè, who, by this time, had disengaged himself from the attentions of his winged assailants, said to him—

“If you have no fear of earth, have you none of heaven, excellenza?”

The Condè, for a moment, was panic-struck. His knees knocked against each other, his eyes wandered round the apartment, the rubicund colour with which his deep potations had painted his cheeks had given place to an ashy paleness, and his rising hair was stirring the black oil-skin cap which surmounted his head.

“Urbo!” he said with difficulty, as though his large tongue was scarcely equal to its office; “Urbo! I used thee roughly. But thou partly did’st deserve it.” (For the Condè

Ferrand always liked to admit another to a share of the blame attaching to his actions.) “Thou did'st partly deserve it, Urbo. Nevertheless, we are necessary to each other,—you to me, and I to you. We have a dreadful secret to keep.” (Here another thunder peal crashed over the Castello.) “Yes,” continued the dark Condè, venturing somewhat to elevate his voice, by way of showing his indifference to the elemental war that raged without, and seemed rocking the Castello di Bruto like a tempest-driven ship,—“Yes! Urbo, servant of mine, we two have defied man; methinks we may even defy—”

(Here a terrific flash of lightning tore through the semicircular room, and prevented the blasphemer finishing his sentence.)

The Condè paused for a moment to wipe the cold sweat from his brow with the sleeve of his gaberdine, and then he resumed—

“Urbo!”

“Eccellenza! yes.”

“We *have* the secret; *we* two and none others—on earth, *at least*,” he added hastily, as another blinding flash succeeded by another crashing peal fearfully lighted up the semicircular chamber.

Then the Condè spoke again—

“Urbo! ’tis dark and dreary. Urbo! art thou here?”

“Eccellenza! yes,” replied the trembling menial, from the other side of the splintered table.

“Urbo! none on earth but *we* two know the deed.”

Ere Urbo could reply, the low, scornful laugh swept again around the two guilty confederates.

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CHAPTER III.

We left Enrico and his friend Giuseppe seated in the hostelry. An additional scrap or two of their conversation may be interesting to our readers, fair and dark.

“But why, Enrico,” asked his companion, “did it enter into thy subtle brain to convey the armour of thy noble sire into Ferrand’s Castello?”

“A whim, perhaps, Giuseppe, with this intent, however, that I might wound the villain’s conscience, and bring him to confession.”

“A poor idea, enough, let me crave your pardon for saying so, friend Enrico. And was

it thou, then, who didst glare defiance at the Condè from the head-piece, and affixed the legend to the breast-plate?"

"Truly it was I, Giuseppe," answered Capellino. "But let the past be past. It is the future that now concerns us. I have lain in concealment too long. I must meet this Ferrand, and tax him to his face with his hellish crime."

"What a night is this," he added, as the lightning and thunder flamed and stormed without.

He arose and walked to the casement. Giuseppe accompanied him.

"Hearken in thy ear, Giuseppe," said Enrico, in that low, sweet tone of voice which, along with the moist hand, had come down to him through his lady mother from the far remote Contessa Una, and he whispered to Giuseppe certain matters, the knowledge of which is no wise necessary to the right understanding of the present history.

CHAPTER IV.

We return to the Condè Ferrand and Urbo. They were still standing in the semicircular

chamber in which had stood the skull of the Contessa Una since the old times when the fairies slept on silk mattresses filled with the flowers of the dandelion.

“Urbo!” said the Condè Ferrand.

“Eccellenza! yes.”

“We two alone know of the deed.”

“Eccellenza! thou hast said it.”

The Condè drew closer to his myrmidon, and his eyes glared wildly and his teeth were clenched.

“Urbo,” said the Condè, “methinks it is not safe for one when he shares a dark secret with another.”

Urbo started, and retreated before his advancing master.

“Urbo,” shouted the Condè Ferrand, “*thou must die!*”

And then with a yell of rage which the fiends might have envied, Di Bruto struck at Urbo with his dagger. The latter by a sudden movement avoided the thrust, and then closed with the ferocious Condè.

His menial habits had rendered Urbo somewhat irresolute, but when brought to bay he was savage as the mountain cat.

Then, right through the door which opened from the corridor on which Villana first

showed herself to the reader,—right through this door, which like all the doors in the Castello had opened of their own accord as previously related,—right through this door into the corridor struggled the Condè Ferrand and Urbo, grappling, tearing, kicking, and raving.

Our readers may remember that the corridor overlooked the great hall, above which it was elevated at a height of some forty feet.

Along the outer edge of the corridor ran a frail worm-eaten balustrade.

“Die villain,” shouted Ferrand with fury, dashing him with violence against the frail balustrade which yielded in a moment.

“Eccellenza! yes! but NOT ALONE!” So saying, he made a sudden spring at the Condè’s throat, grasped it like a vice, and down—down—down from the corridor into the hall fell whirling and shrieking the Condè Ferrand di Bruto and Urbo.

They fell with deadly force on the head of the hag Canidia, who chanced to be crossing the hall, carrying a dish of swine’s liver and toad’s backs, which she had roasted for her evening repast, a species of viands which she dearly loved.

And there, in the great hall of the Castello

di Bruto, in one black and bloody heap lay the three,—Ferrand, Urbo, and Canidia,—mangled and dead.

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CHAPTER V.

By the death of Ferrand, Enrico was now by right of his mother, Condè di Bruto, as well as Condè di Capellino.

It was Christmas-tide again.

The nuptials of Enrico and Villana were celebrated by a holy shaveling.

The dance succeeded, and then the banquet.

High revel was held by the guests in the Castello di Bruto, for here they were assembled.

At the head of the crowded board sat the Lady Baroness di Capellino, forgetting her miseries in this hour of delight.

On her right hand sat the Condè di Capellino and di Bruto, the gallant and handsome Enrico; on her left the lovely Villana, Duchessa di Restruggi and Contessa di Capellino and di Bruto.

The salutation under the chestnut boughs was fulfilled!

The guests were about to withdraw when a

low laugh circulated around the chamber. But it was a gleesome and mirthful laugh, like that of children when they get what they want. It was followed by a strain of ethereal music, and then there was sung by a sweet-toned voice the following lines :—

“ Her vigil long has Una kept,
 And she has waked while others slept,
 While others smiled has Una wept ;
 But now she rests, and dries the tear,
 Nor ever through the circling year
 Again shall Una’s sprite appear.
Ave ! Villana, rule her land,
 With him thou lov’st exert command,
 Thy joys be countless as the sand,
 Heirs of the moist but friendly hand.”





