

OUTCAST OF MILAN

broad, heavy frame, the same bull-like neck, the same lowering brow, and the same sensual mouth and eye. He was Ludovico, Manfred's son and only child. If physical strength and mere brute force could make a man, then the prince might lay some claims to manhood, for he possessed coarse muscle enough, and was, moreover, a noted bravo.

"Now, Ludovico, how goes the play?

"Have you made a passage to-day?"

"Aye—that have I," returned the prince, rubbing his hands with evident satisfaction.

"Ah—and I can see that you have come off the victor."

"Surely I have."

"But who were the contestants against thee?"

"There were three of them."

"Not all together?"

"No, but Hugh de Castro was the third one."

"What! And have you met and overcame my captain?"

"Verily have I."

"Then by Saint Ambrose, you need not fear, for I have held Hugh de Castro to be the best lance in Lombardy, and I know that he is accounted the stoutest knight. But was the just a fair one? Did you meet him openly?"

"Aye—I met him upon an even footing, lance to lance and sword to sword—two separate bouts—and I overcame him in both. He acknowledged the defeat."

"Then, my son, to-morrow's day is yours. If you have worsted Hugh de Castro, you may safely challenge any knight who may make his appearance at our tournament. I shall expect great deeds on the morrow. We must make it a brilliant time. Something must be done to entertain the people, for they are growing restive. I must stop their grumbling."

"At what do they grumble?"

"O, they find a matter in their own fancies for complaint. They think that the interests of the city are not properly looked after, and that the marts of trade are not sufficiently protected."

"In short," added Ludovico, with a dark scowl, "they say that Manfred oppresses them."

"Yes, my son," replied the duke, biting his lips.

"I have heard the complaints," continued the prince, "and some of the rascals are open in their noisy clamor. They say you tax them too much; and that in return you do not afford them the protection to which they are entitled. I have heard these things until my ears have heard enough; and the sooner we put a stop to it the better."

"Ah, my son, that is not so easily done."

"Give the power into my hands, and I'll soon stop it. I'll hang every man that dares to complain. Serve a few of the snarling dogs thus, and the rest would soon keep quiet."

"I would like to do it, Ludovico—but 'twould not be safe now. We'll give the rascals some entertainment, and thus encourage the hucksters; and, my son, if you bear away the prize to-morrow, it will help wonderfully to bring the masses to our feet; for these villains have some pride in the success of their own princes, and if you beat down all foreign champions, you will command the praises of these discontented ones."

"Sir, if that will help you with our subjects, be sure you shall be helped," cried Ludovico, with a self-assured clasp of his hands. "I am resolved to succeed. My arm is strong, and my heart is firm; and a stronger knight than any in Milan must come if any opposition is to bear me down."

"I am glad to hear you say so, my son; and, what is more, I feel assured that you will succeed."

"And now," pursued the prince, speaking in a lower tone, "what of Rosabel? How much longer is she to toy and trifl with us?"

"Not much," replied the duke with energy. "She has recovered from her illness; and when this tournament is over, we will turn our attention to the nuptials."

"By the spirts of night," exclaimed the prince, stamping his foot upon the floor, "I am not to be put off longer by the whinings of a sick girl. I know her disposition, and I know with what feelings she regards myself; but it is all to me. The castle of Bergamo goes with Rosabel's hand, and that castle I am bound to have."

"And that castle you shall have!" added Manfred. "As soon as the tournament is over, and the settlements made, you shall have Rosabel of Bergamo for your wife, even though she be sick in her bed. So rest assured touching that matter."

"Have you heard from the young armor since he left Milan?"

"I heard from him once, and he was then pursuing his way to the northward, begging as he went. We will have no more trouble from him."

"I hope not," said Ludovico, musingly. "Should he ever make his appearance here again he would have many friends. He was popular with the rabble. He was the leader in all their sports, and their teacher in athletic exercises; and I have heard that there was much indignation among them when he was banished. However, his crime was so flagrant that they could not excuse him."

At this juncture, some of the officers who had charge of preparing for the approaching tournament made their appearance, and Ludovico with them.

On the following morning the city of Milan was all astir. From the ducal palace, and from the lowest hovel, came the note of preparation. There had been no grand exhibition of the kind for several years, and the people were anticipating a rare entertainment. It was known that knights were to be present from all the great cities, and the thing had been planned on a grand scale. At early dawn the peasants began to flock in; and by the time the sun was two hours high the city was full.

The ground where the tournament was to be held was in the eastern part of the town, close by the banks of the Saveno, and spacious enough to accommodate all who might wish to attend. The enclosure for the lists was a quadrangle, some two hundred yards long, by fifty in width, and upon one of the longest sides was a raised platform, or dais, spread with a carpet, and covered by a silk canopy, with seats for quite a number of persons. Only one of these seats was peculiar—it was a chair of velvet and gold, near the edge of the platform, with a crown of roses upon the centre post of the back. By nine o'clock the whole vast space about the enclosure was filled with eager spectators; and, to occupy the time until the hour for the jousting, a few prizes were offered for the athletes.

The wrestlers were gazed upon with the most interest, and the prize was borne off by a stout artisan named Michael Totilla. He was a handsome fellow, not more than five-and-twenty, and in his bearing a gentleman. He hurled strong men to the ground as though they had been children: and

when it came to a bout at fistcuffs he was soon without a competitor.

"Ah," said the visitor, as he walked away with the prize, "I never knew but one man who could throw me."

"Did you ever know one?" asked a bystander.

"Yes," replied Michael. "My young master was stronger than I. He could throw me as easily as I threw yonder lousy butcher. Ah, my good, kind friend—I wish I knew where he was at this moment!"

"When he was banished from Milan, why didn't you follow him?"

"I would have done so joyfully,

but he would not permit it. He said I must stay and take the shop. You remember his property was all confiscated, and I managed to get possession of the old shop where his father had worked before him. No—he would not listen to my going with him. O, I wish he were a spurred and belted knight, and in these lists to-day! There's not a buckler in Lombardy could withstand his blows. But, alack! he is not here—and he never will again!"

Hark! The trumpets sound, and the great gate at the upper end of the enclosure is thrown open; and while the guard keep back the crowd, the duke and his train ride in, and approach the dais; and when they had dismounted, their horses are led away. Rosabel of Bergamo occupies the golden chair, and over her shoulder is thrown a scarf of crimson silk richly wrought with silver, and bearing the device, within a wreath of silver laurel leaves—"To the Conqueror." The princess is very beautiful, and she acknowledges the admiration of the multitude by a graceful bow; but it is plain to be seen that she is not happy. She has no heart in the grand pageant, and it is with an effort that she sustains herself under the gaze of so many eyes.

"Have the athletes contended for the prize?" asked the duke of one of the heralds who stood near him.

"Yes, my lord."

"Who won at wrestling?"

"Michael Totilla."

"And who bore off the palm at boxing?"

"The same, my lord."

"What—Michael Totilla again?"

"Yes."

"Do you mean the artisan who has taken Orlando Vendome's shop?"

"Yes, my lord."

"I think he was a workman with Vendome!"

"He was, my lord. He learned his trade with the elder Vendome."

"By the mass!" muttered Manfred to himself, "this stout armor may need looking after. His success may make him a hero; and if he begins to prate of his outcast master, his words may have some weight with the people."

The trumpets sound again; and now a score of knights enter the enclosure and approach the dais; and as they pass the canonized seats, they salute the duke, and make a low obeisance to the fair Princess of Bergamo. They are a noble train, and right bravely do they bear themselves in their saddles. The Prince Ludovico takes the lead. He is known by his crest. And Hugh de Castro comes next. He is known by the captain's baton, which he has retained in his hand. But who is that knight near the end of the train—he with the silver cross upon his breast-plate? The duke is eager to know him out; but no one can inform him. A herald is sent for, and Manfred asks who is the knight of the Silver Cross.

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"Look," said the duke, speaking to one of his heralds, and pointing to where a strange party had taken position near the northeast angle of the enclosure. There were four knights fully armed, a servant, and a fair-haired boy, and this was the first time the duke had seen them. "Go and find out who those knights are. If they would enter the lists, they shall have opportunity, and if they may only look on to see others sport, they may have room upon the dais."

The herald went upon his mission, and when he returned, he reported:

"The knights thanked you very graciously, my lord, but they will not leave their saddles, as they may not remain long. It is a party of Sir Alfonso of Modena, who will not surely allow the brave champion to be worried down thence. Let some others take the list while he has time to breathe."

"No," cried Manfred, smiting his fist upon his knee. "He had thrown down his challenge, and he must meet the result."

"But," urged the count, "this is not knightly. He will meet the result, but he should not be forced beyond human endurance."

"It shall be as I have said," exclaimed the duke, impatiently. "I am the judge, and the rule is mine. Let the trumpets sound!"

Alfonso of Modena was not the only man of note who found fault with the course of the judge. Frederic Von Brunt swore a fearful oath when he saw it, and Theodore of Hartburg quivered with indignation.

"By my knighthood," the boy uttered, "this is most foul! Will it be allowed?"

"Yes," replied Von Brunt. "I saw Alfonso laboring with the duke, but it affected nothing. See—they are preparing for the joust. Now may our Blessed Lady assist the brave champion!"

"Amen!" said Theodore fervently.

The knight of the Silver Cross had taken a new lance, and he was advised to take a fresh horse, but he did not choose to do so. He had become used to the manner of his steed, and he felt confidence in the animal's power. He took his place at the end of the tilting-ground, and awaited the sound of the trumpets.

Ludovico was mounted upon a powerful stallion well trained to the joust, and as he took his place he bowed himself with profound assurance. He was a formidable leading opponent, and those who had seen him overcome Hugh de Castro looked to see the stranger knight bite the dust. It was not fair, they said, to call upon the gallant champion in such haste. It was a thing unusual. Manfred heard the murmurs arising from all hands and he determined to quiet the tumult as quickly as possible; but he did not mean to quiet it by doing a generous deed. No—he feared to give the stranger rest, lest his son should be overcome, so he gave orders for the heralds to sound the charge, which was done as soon as the prince was ready.

It was plain to be seen that the knight of the silver cross grasped the lance with more than his usual resolution, and that he was more careful in fixing his shield. And then, too, he braced himself in his saddle more firmly, with his feet fixed to best advantage in the stirrups.

At the sound of the trumpets the combatants started forward, and when the shock came the spectators looked to see horses and riders rolled in the dust; but not so. Both riders reeled in their saddles, and the lance of the knight of Modena was broken.

"By Saint Paul!" cried Michael Totilla, "the foul play is in this. The prince had the stronger lance!"

And so others believed; but there was little time for speech. He of the silver cross rode to the marshal's stand, and demanded a new lance. One was handed to him, and when he had balanced it a moment in his hand, he raised it above his head and snapped it in twain.

"Give me a weapon fit for work," he cried, as he cast the fragments at the marshal's feet.

"Yes."

"I was sure it could be no other. By our Lady, he is a valiant knight, and he honors the Silver Cross."

"Aye, my lord."

"A little more care, Alfonso. If I am lord of Hartburg, it need not be known here. Remember! See! the knights are ready for the tilt. I will see you, Sir Count, after the sports are over."

When Sir Hugh de Castro came forth and picked up the gauntlet, another shortly went up from the multitude but not such as went up on the former occasion. De Castro was known to be a powerful knight, but he was not loved by the people, and it was easy to see that the great sympathy on the present occasion was not with him. While the preliminaries were being arranged, the Count of Modena returned to the dais, and as he passed the golden chair, he thought that the Princess Rosabel looked very pale. He stopped, and rested his hand upon her arm. He had been a warm friend of her father's, and he felt a deep interest in herself.

"He came, my lord, and he is here to-day."

"Ha—I thought so. That is he whose gauntlet Sir Hugh de Castro has just picked up."

"Yes."

"I am told he is from your city."

"He may be."

"Do you know his name?"

"Do you observe that royal-looking knight of the Silver Cross—the fourth from the rear?"

"Yes."

"I am told he is from your city."

"He may be."

"Do you know his name?"

"You forget yourself, my lord duke," returned the count, with a smile. "The knight wears his vizor down, which is a sign that he would remain incognito; so, even if I knew him, I should violate one of the most sacred rules of our order were I to reveal his name for I, too, am a knight of the Silver Cross."

Alfonso hastened away, and when he reached the place where the Saxon knights rested in their saddles, he bowed to Von Brunt, and then made his way straight to the boy.

"Ah, my lord of Modena," said the latter, speaking hastily, as though he would prevent the count's salutation, "did you think it worth your while to seek Theodore of Hartburg?"

"My—"

"Hugh! Sir Frederic Von Brunt is leader of this party. If you have any obeisance to make, make it to him. But I am afraid he will not come."

"Aye, my lord," replied Manfred.

"Some of them, I think, are from Modena."

"Yes."

"Do you observe that royal-looking knight of the Silver Cross—the fourth from the rear?"

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"He may be."

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Manfred bit his lip with vexation; but he dared not push the matter further, for knew too well what the laws of chivalry were.

Hark! The heralds' trumpets sound again, and ere long eight knights are separated from their companions, and remain in the centre of the list. They divide into two parties, of four each, and retire to opposite sides of the paling. In one party is the stranger knight of the silver cross; but the chief knights of the tournament are not in this joust. The word is given by the duke, and the heralds sound the blast of onset. The knights start, with their lances poised, and the shock of the encounter seems to shake the very ground. Five of the knights go down—three upon one side and two upon the other. He of the silver cross has one companion, and together they set upon the other three. Two more are unhorsed, and not a whole lance is left. The stranger knight is alone against two, and as he draws his battle-axe the others do the same. The blows fall thick and fast, and very soon the combatants fall to the ground. The prince returned to the dais, and as he passed the golden chair, he thought that the Princess Rosabel looked very pale. He stopped, and rested his