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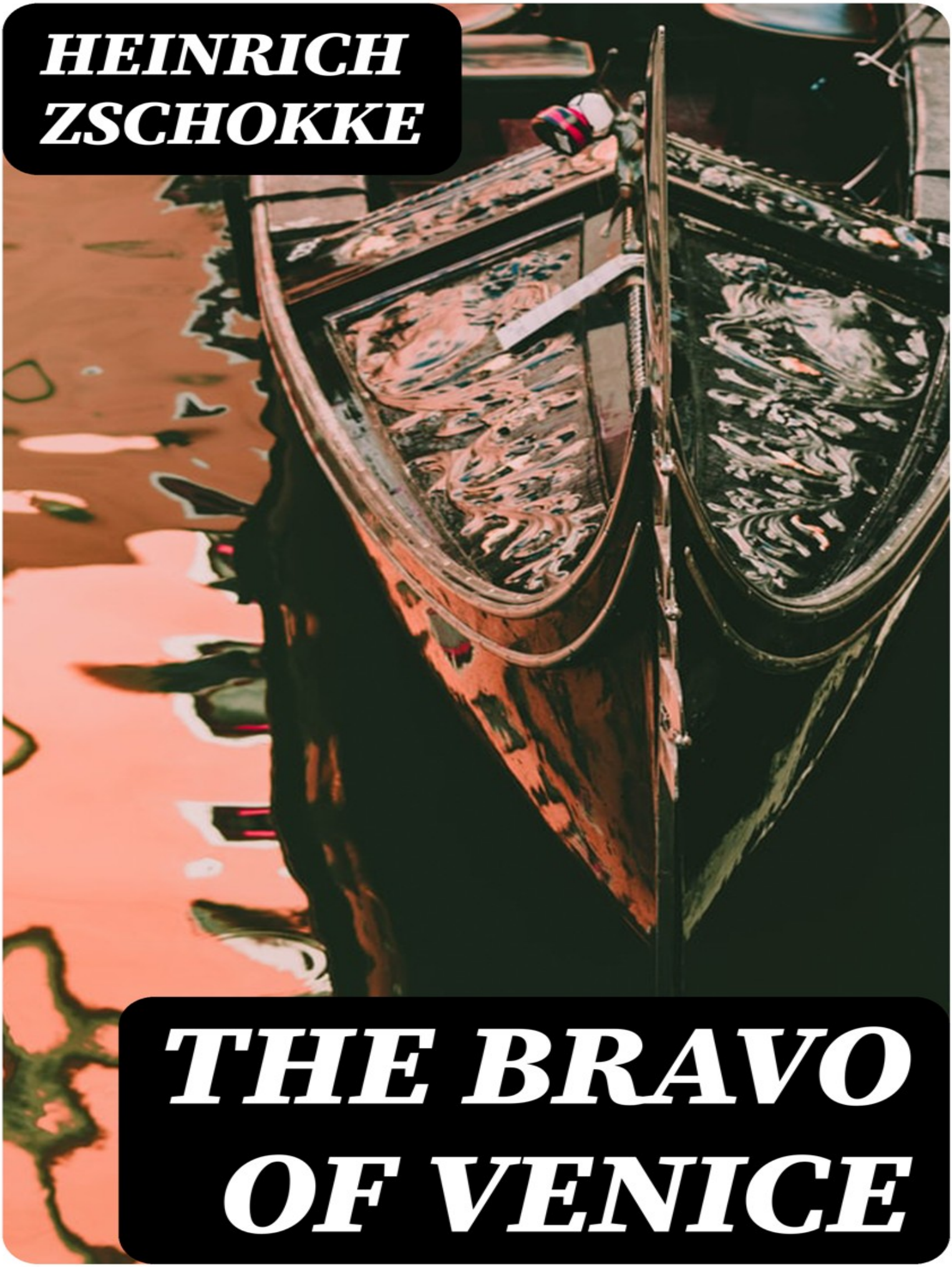

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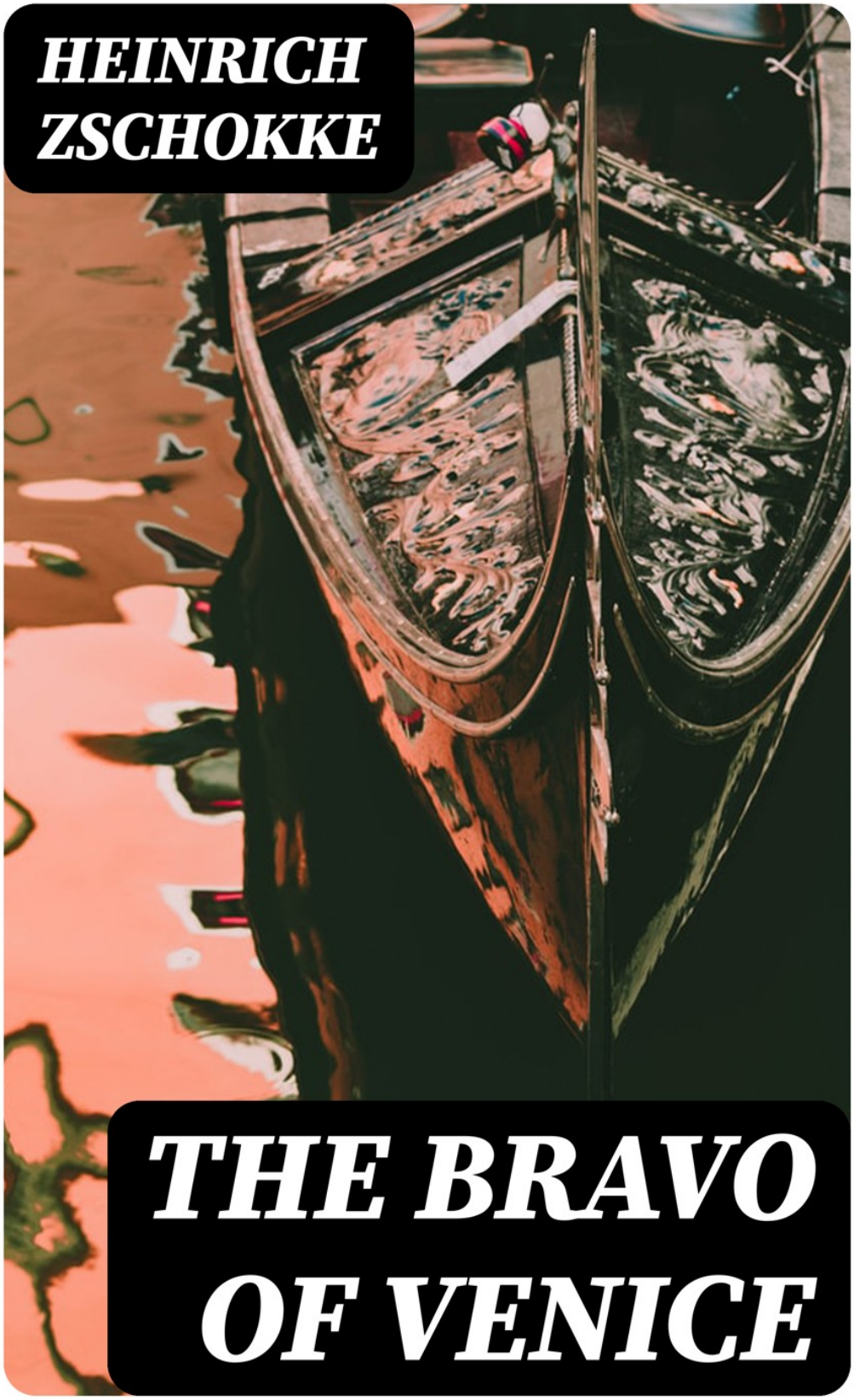

THE BRAVO OF VENICE

Heinrich Zschokke

The Bravo of Venice

A Romance

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INTRODUCTION.

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MATTHEW GREGORY LEWIS, who professed to have translated this romance out of the German, very much, I believe, as Horace Walpole professed to have taken *The Castle of Otranto* from an old Italian manuscript, was born in 1775 of a wealthy family. His father had an estate in India and a post in a Government office. His mother was daughter to Sir Thomas Sewell, Master of the Rolls in the reign of George III. She was a young mother; her son Matthew was devoted to her from the first. As a child he called her “Fanny,” and as a man held firmly by her when she was deserted by her husband. From Westminster School, M. G. Lewis passed to Christ Church, Oxford. Already he was busy over tales and plays, and wrote at college a farce, never acted, a comedy, written at the age of sixteen, *The East Indian*, afterwards played for Mrs. Jordan’s benefit and repeated with great success, and also a novel, never published, called *The Effusions of Sensibility*, which was a burlesque upon the sentimental school. He wrote also what he called “a romance in the style of *The Castle of Otranto*,” which appeared afterwards as the play of *The Castle Spectre*.

With his mind thus interested in literature of the romantic form, young Lewis, aged seventeen, after a summer in Paris, went to Germany, settled for a time at Weimar, and, as he told his mother, knocked his brains against German as hard as ever he could. “I have been introduced,” he wrote, in July, 1792, “to M. de Goethe, the celebrated author of *Werter*, so you must not be surprised if I should shoot myself one of

these fine mornings." In the spring of 1793 the youth returned to England, very full of German romantic tale and song, and with more paper covered with wild fancies of his own. After the next Christmas he returned to Oxford. There was a visit to Lord Douglas at Bothwell Castle; there was not much academic work done at Oxford. His father's desire was to train him for the diplomatic service, and in the summer of 1794 he went to the Hague as attaché to the British Embassy. He had begun to write his novel of *The Monk*, had flagged, but was spurred on at the Hague by a reading of Mrs. Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, a book after his own heart, and he wrote to his mother at this time, "You see I am horribly bit by the rage of writing."

The Monk was written in ten weeks, and published in the summer of 1795, before its author's age was twenty. It was praised, attacked, said by one review to have neither originality, morals, nor probability to recommend it, yet to have excited and to be continuing to excite the curiosity of the public: a result set down to the "irresistible energy of genius." Certainly, Lewis did not trouble himself to keep probability in view; he amused himself with wild play of a fancy that delighted in the wonderful. The controversy over *The Monk* caused the young author to be known as Monk Lewis, and the word Monk has to this day taken the place of the words Matthew Gregory so generally, that many catalogue-makers must innocently suppose him to have been so named at the font. The author of *The Monk* came back from the Hague to be received as a young lion in London society. When he came of age he entered Parliament for Hindon, in Wiltshire, but seldom went to the House,

never spoke in it, and retired after a few sessions. His delight was in the use of the pen; his father, although disappointed by his failure as a statesman, allowed him a thousand a year, and he took a cottage at Barnes, that he might there escape from the world to his ink-bottle. He was a frequent visitor at Inverary Castle, and was fascinated by his host's daughter, Lady Charlotte Campbell. Still he wrote on. The musical drama of *The Castle Spectre* was produced in the year after *The Monk*, and it ran sixty nights. He translated next Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe* as *The Minister*, but it was not acted till it appeared, with little success, some years afterwards at Covent Garden as *The Harper's Daughter*. He translated from Kotzebue, under the name of *Rolla*, the drama superseded by Sheridan's version of the same work as *Pizarro*. Then came the acting, in 1799, of his comedy written in boyhood, *The East Indian*. Then came, in the same year, his first opera, *Adelmorn the Outlaw*; then a tragedy, *Alfonso, King of Castile*. Of the origin of this tragedy Lewis gave a characteristic account. "Hearing one day," he said, "my introduction of negroes into a feudal baron's castle" (in *The Castle Spectre*) "exclaimed against with as much vehemence as if a dramatic anachronism had been an offence undeserving of benefit of clergy, I said in a moment of petulance, that to prove of how little consequence I esteemed such errors, I would make a play upon the Gunpowder Plot, and make Guy Faux in love with the Emperor Charlemagne's daughter. By some chance or other, this idea fastened itself upon me, and by dint of turning it in my mind, I at length formed the plot of *Alfonso*."

To that time in Lewis’s life belongs this book, *The Bravo of Venice*; which was published in 1804, when the writer’s age was twenty-nine. It was written at Inverary Castle, dedicated to the Earl of Moira, and received as one of the most perfect little romances of its kind, “highly characteristic of the exquisite contrivance, bold colouring, and profound mystery of the German school.” In 1805 Lewis recast it into a melodrama, which he called *Rugantino*.

H.M.

Book the First.

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CHAPTER I.
VENICE.

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It was evening. Multitudes of light clouds, partially illumined by the moonbeams, overspread the horizon, and through them floated the full moon in tranquil majesty, while her splendour was reflected by every wave of the Adriatic Sea. All was hushed around; gently was the water rippled by the night wind; gently did the night wind sigh through the Colonnades of Venice.

It was midnight; and still sat a stranger, solitary and sad, on the border of the great canal. Now with a glance he measured the battlements and proud towers of the city; and now he fixed his melancholy eyes upon the waters with a vacant stare. At length he spoke—

“Wretch that I am, whither shall I go? Here sit I in Venice, and what would it avail to wander further? What will become of me? All now slumber, save myself! the Doge rests on his couch of down; the beggar’s head presses his straw pillow; but for *me* there is no bed except the cold, damp earth! There is no gondolier so wretched but he knows where to find work by day and shelter by night—while *I*—while *I*—Oh! dreadful is the destiny of which I am made the sport!”

He began to examine for the twentieth time the pockets of his tattered garments.

“No! not one paolo, by heavens!—and I hunger almost to death.”

He unsheathed his sword; he waved it in the moonshine, and sighed, as he marked the glittering of the steel.

“No, no, my old true companion, thou and I must never part. Mine thou shalt remain, though I starve for it. Oh, was not that a golden time when Valeria gave thee to me, and when she threw the belt over my shoulder, I kissed thee and Valeria? She has deserted us for another world, but thou and I will never part in this.”

He wiped away a drop which hung upon his eyelid.

“Pshaw! ’twas not a tear; the night wind is sharp and bitter, and makes the eyes water; but as for *tears*—Absurd! my weeping days are over.”

And as he spoke, the unfortunate (for such by his discourse and situation he appeared to be) dashed his forehead against the earth, and his lips were already unclosed to curse the hour which gave him being, when he seemed suddenly to recollect himself. He rested his head on his elbow, and sang mournfully the burthen of a song which had often delighted his childhood in the castle of his ancestors.

“Right,” he said to himself; “were I to sink under the weight of my destiny, I should be myself no longer.”

At that moment he heard a rustling at no great distance. He looked around, and in an adjacent street, which the moon faintly enlightened, he perceived a tall figure, wrapped in a cloak, pacing slowly backwards and forwards.

“’Tis the hand of God which hath guided him hither—yes—I’ll—I’ll *beg*—better to play the beggar in Venice than the

villain in Naples; for the beggar’s heart may beat nobly, though covered with rags.”

He then sprang from the ground, and hastened towards the adjoining street. Just as he entered it at one end, he perceived another person advancing through the other, of whose approach the first was no sooner aware than he hastily retired into the shadow of a piazza, anxious to conceal himself.

“What can this mean?” thought our mendicant. “Is yon eavesdropper one of death’s unlicensed ministers? Has he received the retaining fee of some impatient heir, who pants to possess the wealth of the unlucky knave who comes strolling along yonder, so careless and unconscious? Be not so confident, honest friend! I’m at your elbow.”

He retired further into the shade, and silently and slowly drew near the lurker, who stirred not from his place. The stranger had already passed them by, when the concealed villain sprang suddenly upon him, raised his right hand in which a poniard was gleaming, and before he could give the blow, was felled to the earth by the arm of the mendicant.

The stranger turned hastily towards them; the bravo started up and fled; the beggar smiled.

“How now?” cried the stranger; “what does all this mean?”

“Oh, ’tis a mere jest, signor, which has only preserved your life.”

“What? my life? How so?”

“The honest gentleman who has just taken to his heels stole behind you with true cat-like caution, and had already raised his dagger, when I saw him. You owe your life to me,

and the service is richly worth one little piece of money! Give me some alms, signor, for on my soul I am hungry, thirsty, cold."

"Hence, scurvy companion! I know you and your tricks too well. This is all a concerted scheme between you, a design upon my purse, an attempt to procure both money and thanks, and under the lame pretence of having saved me from an assassin. Go, fellow, go! practise these dainty devices on the Doge's credulity if you will; but with Buonarotti you stand no chance, believe me."

The wretched starving beggar stood like one petrified, and gazed on the taunting stranger.

"No, as I have a soul to save, signor, 'tis no lie I tell you! —'tis the plain truth; have compassion, or I die this night of hunger."

"Begone this instant, I say, or by Heaven—"

The unfeeling man here drew out a concealed pistol, and pointed it at his preserver.

"Merciful Heaven! and is it thus that services are acknowledged in Venice?"

"The watch is at no great distance, I need only raise my voice and—"

"Hell and confusion! do you take me for a robber, then?"

"Make no noise, I tell you. Be quiet—you had better."

"Hark you, signor. Buonarotti is your name, I think? I will write it down as belonging to the second scoundrel with whom I have met in Venice."

He paused for a moment, then continuing in a dreadful voice, "And when," said he, "thou, Buonarotti, shalt hereafter hear the name of *Abellino—tremble*!"

Abellino turned away, and left the hard-hearted Venetian.

CHAPTER II.
THE BANDITTI.

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And now rushed the unfortunate wildly through the streets of Venice. He railed at fortune; he laughed and cursed by turns; yet sometimes he suddenly stood still, seemed as pondering on some great and wondrous enterprise, and then again rushed onwards, as if hastening to its execution.

Propped against a column of the Signoria, he counted over the whole sum of his misfortunes. His wandering eyeballs appeared to seek comfort, but they found it not.

“Fate,” he at length exclaimed in a paroxysm of despair, “Fate has condemned me to be either the wildest of adventurers, or one at the relation of whose crimes the world must shudder. To astonish is my destiny. Rosalvo can know no medium; Rosalvo can never act like common men. Is it not the hand of fate which has led me hither? Who could ever have dreamt that the son of the richest lord in Naples should have depended for a beggar’s alms on Venetian charity? I—I, who feel myself possessed of strength of body and energy of soul fit for executing the most daring deeds, behold me creeping in rags through the streets of this inhospitable city, and torturing my wits in vain to discover some means by which I may rescue life from the jaws of famine! Those men whom my munificence nourished, who at my table bathed their worthless souls in the choicest wines of Cyprus, and glutted themselves with

every delicacy which the globe’s four quarters could supply, these very men now deny to my necessity even a miserable crust of mouldy bread. Oh, that is dreadful, cruel—cruel of men—cruel of Heaven!”

He paused, folded his arms, and sighed.

“Yet will I bear it—I will submit to my destiny. I will traverse every path and go through every degree of human wretchedness; and whate’er may be my fate, I will still be myself; and whate’er may be my fate, I will still act greatly! Away, then, with the Count Rosalvo, whom all Naples idolised; now—now, I am the beggar Abellino. A beggar—that name stands last in the scale of worldly rank, but first in the list of the famishing, the outcast, and the unworthy.”

Something rustled near him. Abellino gazed around. He was aware of the bravo, whom he struck to the ground that night, and whom two companions of a similar stamp had now joined. As they advanced, they cast inquiring glances around them. They were in search of some one.

“It is of me that they are in search,” said Abellino; then advanced a few steps, and whistled.

The ruffians stood still; they whispered together, and seemed to be undecided.

Abellino whistled a second time.

“’Tis he,” he could hear one of them say distinctly, and in a moment after they advanced slowly towards him.

Abellino kept his place, but unsheathed his sword. The three unknown (they were masked) stopped a few paces from him.

“How now, fellow!” quoth one of them; “what is the matter? Why stand you on your guard?”