

# *The Last Crime*

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BY NED BUNTLINE  
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## CHAPTER I

In a deep cellar, so far below the street that the rumbling of heavy drays, and carriages, and street cars above, sounded like the low muttering of distant thunder, they were at work—four dark, [swarthy] men whose coal black eyes, jetty beards, and bronzed faces, told of birth in a foreign clime. The ground beneath, the ceiling above, and the walls around the subterranean room, were coated with water proof cement, which now was hard and dry, and the work these men were engaged upon could not have been done in a better place.

They had presses at work, and were printing off, signing, numbering, and cutting from the sheets vast numbers of counterfeit United States notes of various denominations, from fifty cent currency stamps up to Treasury notes of large amounts.

Silently, steadily they worked on, those four dark and desperate looking men, each at a different process, but all working together, for hours.

At last one who had been scrutinizing each bill carefully, putting the signatures on all which passed his critical eye, and destroying those which he deemed imperfect, gave a signal, and the other three at once ceased their work, and came to the table where he was seated.

“We have done enough for today. If we get half that we have got ready for distribution, safely out, we are all men of fortune.”

He spoke in Italian, as he said this to the other workmen.

One of them, in the the same language, said, addressing the first speaker:

“Signor Cocio, when, with your planning, we first entered this business, we made a solemn compact, binding ourselves thereto with a terrible oath, which is death to break.”

“Yes, Campesta,” replied Cocio; “but what do you mean by this preamble, and that serious look upon your face?”

“I fear that we are in danger of betrayal, Signor?” replied Campesta.

“Betrayal?—betrayal?” cried the latter in a loud tone, while his black eyes flashed like orbs of fire.

“Betrayal? Who dares betray us?” asked the other two in a lower tone, while their dark eyes also flashed with a wild, fierce light.

“I am not sure that we are betrayed. But Antonio Diodati knows too much for our safety, and this morning I saw him drinking wine with a man that I know to be a police detective. While I have been at work, I have been thinking it all over, and some curious actions of his of late; and deemed it my duty to let you all know of the matter. He wanted to borrow money of me yesterday, and when I told him I had none to spare he sneeringly said that I made enough for my own use and that of my friends too, and I would regret my refusal before I was a week older.”

“A week? He must not see the end of this week. Our course is plain; our safety demands his life. Who will be the one to take it?” said Cocio.

There was a dead silence among the men, each looking at the other, and each waiting for another to speak.

“He does not belong to us!” at last said one who had so far made no remark.

“No, Bartolo,” replied Campesta. “But he is in our way, and it makes no difference where he belongs; he must be removed.”

“Then let it not be the deed of one, but of us all?” said Cocio. “If he could be induced to take a visit to the country on some pleasure trip, by one, the rest could meet him in some secluded spot and put an end to our danger at once.”

“The very idea,” said Campesta. “Some weeks ago he went with me on one Sunday to Fort Hamilton, and on that trip he fell in love with a young lady to whom he could not get introduced. He found out her name, and has raved about her ever since. He addressed one or two notes to her but got no answer. Were I to tell him that I had got acquainted with her, he would go with me in a moment, for he seems half crazed about her.

“Good; he will be easily led into a trap. Be friendly with him; lend him money if he wants it—our money. You can soon collect it. Tomorrow is Friday. I will go select a place for you to take him to, and on the next day we will finish the job. That is decided and now we will close our crib, and go to scattering ‘the queer’ while it is fresh.”

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## CHAPTER II

It was a lovely afternoon in the latter part of May when the Italian Campesta, accompanied by Antonio Diodati, took passage in a Greenwood car for a point near the southern extremity of Long Island. The beautiful villas on either hand with their shade trees, gardens, hedges, lawns all clad in spring’s brightest green—the flowers just blossoming into beauty, were enough to charm any eye long sickened by gazing on brick walls and city streets.

But Campesta did not seem to notice these beauties; and his friend, Diodati, looked more at the beauties in crinoline whom they passed on their way than he did at the beauties of nature. As the car moved on, Campesta and Diodati conversed in their native language, the latter speaking in

great glee of an introduction which he was to receive to some angel with a blonde face and golden ringlets.

Singular, is it not, how love chooses its opposite in looks, for a passion, as a general thing! A blue eyed girl goes raving over a black eyed, black haired, and black whiskered beau; a black eyed one thinks that blue eyes and light, or auburn hair is ever the most beautiful.

“Do you see the grove over there?” asked Campesta, of his companion, as the car approached a piece of woods near the terminus of the railroad; “the lady resides in a cottage just beyond it. We will get out in a few minutes and take a path across the fields; it is much nearer than to go around by the carriage road.”

The other called to the conductor to stop the car, and in a moment the two men were out and walking rapidly along a narrow path which led to the thick grove which Campesta had pointed out.

“This path is not traveled much,” said Diodati as he pushed aside the bushes and briars which obstructed the way.

“No; and that is strange, for it is half a mile nearer than it is to go to the cottage around by the carriage road. I went that way and returned this, when I came down here last.”

Diodati said no more, but followed the rapid steps of his companion, whose face, in spite of the exercise, was as pale as if he had been taken with a fit of sickness.

They were soon in the grove, not one of those stately little forest of oak, with a grassy lawn beneath which so beautifies some of our country estates, but a dense and tangled thicket, upon which no care had been expended, and uncombed and neglected nature had their own way in the matters in general. The path became more and more difficult as they went on, and they proceeded slowly, now that Diodati said, with impatience:

“If this road is the shortest, it is so bad that we would have saved time by going further around where the carriages could travel.”

“You have but a few steps further to go,” said Campesta, in a low tone.

And at that moment they emerged into a little cleared spot, where some picnic party seemed to have been held; for all of the dense undergrowth had been pulled up or cut away in a circle of a few yards, leaving a smooth, grassy spot, densely shaded by the tall trees which branched out overhead.

As they entered this clear space Campesta, put his hand in his pocket, and said:

“You wanted to borrow some money of me, Diodati, a day or two ago.”

“Yes—but we will not speak of that today. All I ask is to see that angel as soon as I can. Her love is worth more than money to me.”

“If you are a good Catholic you will see angels enough before sunset,” replied Campesta with a cold and singular smile upon his face.

“What do you mean? Why do you not go on? I am in a hurry!” said Diodati uneasily.

“Your time for hurry is over! traitor,” said a sharp, harsh voice behind, and the Italian turned to find himself confronted by Cocio and two other Italians, who had stepped out from behind trees close to him.

Each held a pistol in his hand.

The wretched man saw the fate before him, and raising his hands, sunk upon his knees with a prayer for mercy upon his quivering lips.

But in the dark and flashing eyes which here bent so fiercely upon him, he saw no signs of mercy. Rising to his feet, with a desperate look, he thrust his hand in his pocket and cried:

“I, too, am armed—if I must die, I will not die alone!”

His words were his own death warrant.

As with one report three pistols were discharged and each carried a death to the poor wretch.

Without a word, and without even a groan, he sunk forward on the grass, and Campesta, who had not fired, drew his long knife, and gashed the body, already quivering in the death agony. For it was necessary that all should share in the crime—that the blood of the victim should stain each hand of the dark brotherhood of crime.

Was this the end? No—for murder will out, and the murderers now languish in the darkness of their dungeon cells, awaiting the fate which slow justice meets out to the guilty.

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