

**A NIGHT WITH
ALESSANDRO: AN
EPISODE IN FLORENCE
UNDER HER LAST MEDICI**

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A Night with Alessandro: An Episode in Florence Under Her Last Medici by Jr. Cleveland

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JR. CLEVELAND

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A NIGHT WITH
ALESSANDRO





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By

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A Night With Alessandro

CHAPTER I.

On the Emperor's Business

WE drew rein on the banks of the Arno and breathed deep to know our long ride nearly at an end.

"Well," remarked Jacques, who from his experience gained in the sack of Rome and the siege of Florence had proved himself an invaluable guide, "this, Monsieur, is the city drain. Pugh! Methinks it has something of the town stink."

I laughed at my man's rude comment upon the stream which Italian song had lately been extolling so enthusiastically.

"Beyond that bend, Monsieur," he pursued, "we shall come in sight of Florence herself, and if the sun keep so long above

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the horizon I'll count you the principal buildings."

I glanced at the sun. It was good for another hour, though the heat had long since gone out of it, leaving a chill that crept along the ground and set the blood a-curdle. The bare trees moaned; the low round hills lay cold about us, crowned here and there with the steep masonry of some castle or religious edifice; the brown tide of the river slunk smoothly past, bearing who knows what secrets of Italian treachery to the sea.

We had not come so far or to such a city to satisfy the curiosity of the traveller, or upon private business. Had I consulted my own inclinations, my horse had borne me quite another road rather than toward Florence, where, as report reached Charles's Court, the very air was dangerous to breathe.

Such stories as had come to us of fraud

and wanton flaunt of ribaldry and vice, of poisonings, torturings, stranglings, that made the daily sport and nightly revel of the Duke! It was no wonder that Charles, who had seated Alessandro only as a figure-head for his own dominion over Florence, and had baited that bastard's allegiance with the hand of his own illegitimate daughter, was vastly disturbed at the unstable conditions, fearing popular discord and another anti-Medician gust that might blow the fickle city clean into the arms of France. And then Francis had gone so far already, there was no telling where he might not go. With his show and dash and ready lie, his outward bravery and secret rottenness, he had made himself the idol of Catholic France, while in Charles's realm he encouraged the Reformers in revolt against their lord. For in such doubling and clap-trap he loved ever to squander his superficial talents.