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by the Duke Valentino when
murdering Vitellozzo Vitelli, Oliverotto
da Fermo, the Signor Pagolo, and the
Duke di Gravina Orsini

Niccolo Machiavelli

Translated by W. K. Marriott

**A DESCRIPTION OF THE METHODS ADOPTED BY THE DUKE
VALENTINO WHEN MURDERING VITELLOZZO VITELLI,
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The Duke Valentino had returned from Lombardy, where he had been to clear himself with the King of France from the calumnies which had been raised against him by the Florentines concerning the rebellion of Arezzo and other towns in the Val di Chiana, and had arrived at Imola, whence he intended with his army to enter upon the campaign against Giovanni Bentivogli, the tyrant of Bologna: for he intended to bring that city under his domination, and to make it the head of his Romagnian duchy.

These matters coming to the knowledge of the Vitelli and Orsini and their following, it appeared to them that the duke would become too powerful, and it was feared that, having seized Bologna, he would seek to destroy them in order that he might become supreme in Italy. Upon this a meeting was called at Magione in the district of Perugia, to which came the cardinal, Pagolo, and the Duke di Gravina Orsini, Vitellozzo Vitelli, Oliverotto da Fermo, Gianpagolo Baglioni, the tyrant of Perugia, and Messer Antonio da Venafro, sent by Pandolfo Petrucci, the Prince of Siena. Here were discussed the power and courage of the duke and the necessity of curbing his ambitions, which might otherwise bring danger to the rest of being ruined. And they decided not to abandon the Bentivogli, but to strive to win over the Florentines; and they send their men to one place and another, promising to one party assistance and to another encouragement to unite with them against the common enemy. This meeting was at once reported throughout all Italy, and those who were discontented under the duke, among whom were the people of Urbino, took hope of effecting a revolution.

Thus it arose that, men's minds being thus unsettled, it was decided by certain men of Urbino to seize the fortress of San Leo, which was held for the duke, and which they captured by the following means. The castellan was fortifying the rock and causing timber to be taken there; so the conspirators watched, and when certain beams which were being carried to the rock were upon the bridge, so that it was prevented from being drawn up by those inside,

they took the opportunity of leaping upon the bridge and thence into the fortress. Upon this capture being effected, the whole state rebelled and recalled the old duke, being encouraged in this, not so much by the capture of the fort, as by the Diet at Magione, from whom they expected to get assistance.

Those who heard of the rebellion at Urbino thought they would not lose the opportunity, and at once assembled their men so as to take any town, should any remain in the hands of the duke in that state; and they sent again to Florence to beg that republic to join with them in destroying the common firebrand, showing that the risk was lessened and that they ought not to wait for another opportunity.

But the Florentines, from hatred, for sundry reasons, of the Vitelli and Orsini, not only would not ally themselves, but sent Nicolo Machiavelli, their secretary, to offer shelter and assistance to the duke against his enemies. The duke was found full of fear at Imola, because, against everybody's expectation, his soldiers had at once gone over to the enemy and he found himself disarmed and war at his door. But recovering courage from the offers of the Florentines, he decided to temporize before fighting with the few soldiers that remained to him, and to negotiate for a reconciliation, and also to get assistance. This latter he obtained in two ways, by sending to the King of France for men and by enlisting men-at-arms and others whom he turned into cavalry of a sort: to all he gave money.

Notwithstanding this, his enemies drew near to him, and approached Fossombrone, where they encountered some men of the duke and, with the aid of the Orsini and Vitelli, routed them. When this happened, the duke resolved at once to see if he could not close the trouble with offers of reconciliation, and being a most perfect dissembler he did not fail in any practices to make the insurgents understand that he wished every man who had acquired anything to keep it, as it was enough for him to have the title of prince, whilst others might have the principality.

And the duke succeeded so well in this that they sent Signor Pagolo to him to negotiate for a reconciliation, and they brought their army to a standstill. But the duke did not stop his preparations, and took every care to provide himself with cavalry and infantry, and that such preparations might not be apparent to the others, he sent his troops in separate parties to every part of the Romagna. In the meanwhile there came also to him five hundred French

lancers, and although he found himself sufficiently strong to take vengeance on his enemies in open war, he considered that it would be safer and more advantageous to outwit them, and for this reason he did not stop the work of reconciliation.

And that this might be effected the duke concluded a peace with them in which he confirmed their former covenants; he gave them four thousand ducats at once; he promised not to injure the Bentivogli; and he formed an alliance with Giovanni; and moreover he would not force them to come personally into his presence unless it pleased them to do so. On the other hand, they promised to restore to him the duchy of Urbino and other places seized by them, to serve him in all his expeditions, and not to make war against or ally themselves with any one without his permission.

This reconciliation being completed, Guido Ubaldo, the Duke of Urbino, again fled to Venice, having first destroyed all the fortresses in his state; because, trusting in the people, he did not wish that the fortresses, which he did not think he could defend, should be held by the enemy, since by these means a check would be kept upon his friends. But the Duke Valentino, having completed this convention, and dispersed his men throughout the Romagna, set out for Imola at the end of November together with his French men-at-arms: thence he went to Cesena, where he stayed some time to negotiate with the envoys of the Vitelli and Orsini, who had assembled with their men in the duchy of Urbino, as to the enterprise in which they should now take part; but nothing being concluded, Oliverotto da Fermo was sent to propose that if the duke wished to undertake an expedition against Tuscany they were ready; if he did not wish it, then they would besiege Sinigalia. To this the duke replied that he did not wish to enter into war with Tuscany, and thus become hostile to the Florentines, but that he was very willing to proceed against Sinigalia.

It happened that not long afterwards the town surrendered, but the fortress would not yield to them because the castellan would not give it up to any one but the duke in person; therefore they exhorted him to come there. This appeared a good opportunity to the duke, as, being invited by them, and not going of his own will, he would awaken no suspicions. And the more to reassure them, he allowed all the French men-at-arms who were with him in Lombardy to depart, except the hundred lancers under Mons. di Candales, his brother-in-law. He left Cesena about the middle of December, and went to

Fano, and with the utmost cunning and cleverness he persuaded the Vitelli and Orsini to wait for him at Sinigalia, pointing out to them that any lack of compliance would cast a doubt upon the sincerity and permanency of the reconciliation, and that he was a man who wished to make use of the arms and councils of his friends. But Vitellozzo remained very stubborn, for the death of his brother warned him that he should not offend a prince and afterwards trust him; nevertheless, persuaded by Pagolo Orsini, whom the duke had corrupted with gifts and promises, he agreed to wait.

Upon this the duke, before his departure from Fano, which was to be on 30th December 1502, communicated his designs to eight of his most trusted followers, among whom were Don Michele and the Monsignor d'Euna, who was afterwards cardinal; and he ordered that, as soon as Vitellozzo, Pagolo Orsini, the Duke di Gravina, and Oliverotto should arrive, his followers in pairs should take them one by one, entrusting certain men to certain pairs, who should entertain them until they reached Sinigalia; nor should they be permitted to leave until they came to the duke's quarters, where they should be seized.

The duke afterwards ordered all his horsemen and infantry, of which there were more than two thousand cavalry and ten thousand footmen, to assemble by daybreak at the Metauro, a river five miles distant from Fano, and await him there. He found himself, therefore, on the last day of December at the Metauro with his men, and having sent a cavalcade of about two hundred horsemen before him, he then moved forward the infantry, whom he accompanied with the rest of the men-at-arms.

Fano and Sinigalia are two cities of La Marca situate on the shore of the Adriatic Sea, fifteen miles distant from each other, so that he who goes towards Sinigalia has the mountains on his right hand, the bases of which are touched by the sea in some places. The city of Sinigalia is distant from the foot of the mountains a little more than a bow-shot and from the shore about a mile. On the side opposite to the city runs a little river which bathes that part of the walls looking towards Fano, facing the high road. Thus he who draws near to Sinigalia comes for a good space by road along the mountains, and reaches the river which passes by Sinigalia. If he turns to his left hand along the bank of it, and goes for the distance of a bow-shot, he arrives at a bridge which crosses the river; he is then almost abreast of the gate that leads into

Sinigalia, not by a straight line, but transversely. Before this gate there stands a collection of houses with a square to which the bank of the river forms one side.

The Vitelli and Orsini having received orders to wait for the duke, and to honour him in person, sent away their men to several castles distant from Sinigalia about six miles, so that room could be made for the men of the duke; and they left in Sinigalia only Oliverotto and his band, which consisted of one thousand infantry and one hundred and fifty horsemen, who were quartered in the suburb mentioned above. Matters having been thus arranged, the Duke Valentino left for Sinigalia, and when the leaders of the cavalry reached the bridge they did not pass over, but having opened it, one portion wheeled towards the river and the other towards the country, and a way was left in the middle through which the infantry passed, without stopping, into the town.

Vitellozzo, Pagolo, and the Duke di Gravina on mules, accompanied by a few horsemen, went towards the duke; Vitellozzo, unarmed and wearing a cape lined with green, appeared very dejected, as if conscious of his approaching death — a circumstance which, in view of the ability of the man and his former fortune, caused some amazement. And it is said that when he parted from his men before setting out for Sinigalia to meet the duke he acted as if it were his last parting from them. He recommended his house and its fortunes to his captains, and advised his nephews that it was not the fortune of their house, but the virtues of their fathers that should be kept in mind. These three, therefore, came before the duke and saluted him respectfully, and were received by him with goodwill; they were at once placed between those who were commissioned to look after them.

But the duke noticing that Oliverotto, who had remained with his band in Sinigalia, was missing — for Oliverotto was waiting in the square before his quarters near the river, keeping his men in order and drilling them — signalled with his eye to Don Michele, to whom the care of Oliverotto had been committed, that he should take measures that Oliverotto should not escape. Therefore Don Michele rode off and joined Oliverotto, telling him that it was not right to keep his men out of their quarters, because these might be taken up by the men of the duke; and he advised him to send them at once to their quarters and to come himself to meet the duke. And Oliverotto, having taken

this advice, came before the duke, who, when he saw him, called to him; and Oliverotto, having made his obeisance, joined the others.

So the whole party entered Sinigalia, dismounted at the duke's quarters, and went with him into a secret chamber, where the duke made them prisoners; he then mounted on horseback, and issued orders that the men of Oliverotto and the Orsini should be stripped of their arms. Those of Oliverotto, being at hand, were quickly settled, but those of the Orsini and Vitelli, being at a distance, and having a presentiment of the destruction of their masters, had time to prepare themselves, and bearing in mind the valour and discipline of the Orsinian and Vitellian houses, they stood together against the hostile forces of the country and saved themselves.

But the duke's soldiers, not being content with having pillaged the men of Oliverotto, began to sack Sinigalia, and if the duke had not repressed this outrage by killing some of them they would have completely sacked it. Night having come and the tumult being silenced, the duke prepared to kill Vitellozzo and Oliverotto; he led them into a room and caused them to be strangled. Neither of them used words in keeping with their past lives: Vitellozzo prayed that he might ask of the pope full pardon for his sins; Oliverotto cringed and laid the blame for all injuries against the duke on Vitellozzo. Pagolo and the Duke di Gravina Orsini were kept alive until the duke heard from Rome that the pope had taken the Cardinal Orsino, the Archbishop of Florence, and Messer Jacopo da Santa Croce. After which news, on 18th January 1502, in the castle of Pieve, they also were strangled in the same way.