

I laughed and tossed him a franc. He pocketed it at once and his eyes twinkled.

"Though you have not taken half a franc's worth," he admitted, with an honesty very unusual in a Neapolitan—"but the saints will make up it to you, never fear!"

"I am sure of that!" I said, gayly. "*Addio*, my friend! Prosperity to you and our Lady's favor!"

This salutation, which I knew to be a common one with Sicilian mariners, the good Pietro responded to with amiable heartiness, wishing me luck on my next voyage. He then betook himself anew to the polishing of his glasses—and I passed the rest of the day in strolling about the least frequented streets of the city, and longing impatiently for the crimson glory of the sunset, which, like a wide flag of triumph, was to be the signal of my safe return to love and happiness.

CHAPTER VIII.

It came at last, the blessed, the longed-for evening. A soft breeze sprung up, cooling the burning air after the heat of the day, and bringing with it the odors of a thousand flowers. A regal glory of shifting colors blazed on the breast of heaven—the bay, motionless as a mirror, reflected all the splendid tints with a sheeny luster that redoubled their magnificence. Pricked in every vein by the stinging of my own desires, I yet restrained myself; I waited till the sun sunk below the glassy waters—till the pomp and glow attending its departure had paled into those dim, ethereal hues which are like delicate draperies fallen from the flying forms of angels—till the yellow rim of the round full moon rose languidly on the edge of the horizon—and then keeping back my eagerness no longer, I took the well-known road ascending to the Villa Romani. My heart beat high—my limbs trembled with excitement—my steps were impatient and precipitate—never had the way seemed so long. At last I reached the great gate-way—it was locked fast—its sculptured lions looked upon me frowningly. I heard the splash and tinkle of the fountains within, the scents of the roses and myrtle were wafted toward me with every breath I drew. Home at last! I smiled—my whole frame quivered with expectancy and delight. It was not my intention to seek admission by the principal entrance—I contented myself with one long, loving look, and turned to the left, where there was a small private gate leading into an avenue of ilex and pine, interspersed with orange-trees. This was a favorite walk of mine, partly on account of its pleasant

shade even in the hottest noon—partly because it was seldom frequented by any member of the household save myself. Guido occasionally took a turn with me there, but I was more often alone, and I was fond of pacing up and down in the shadow of the trees, reading some favorite book, or giving myself up to the *dolce far niente* of my own imaginings. The avenue led round to the back of the villa, and as I now entered it, I thought I would approach the house cautiously by this means and get private speech with Assuntà, the nurse who had charge of little Stella, and who was moreover an old and tried family servant, in whose arms my mother had breathed her last.

The dark trees rustled solemnly as I stepped quickly yet softly along the familiar moss-grown path. The place was very still—sometimes the nightingales broke into a bubbling torrent of melody, and then were suddenly silent, as though overawed by the shadows of the heavy interlacing boughs, through which the moonlight flickered, casting strange and fantastic patterns on the ground. A cloud of *luciole* broke from a thicket of laurel, and sparkled in the air like gems loosened from a queen's crown. Faint odors floated about me, shaken from orange boughs and trailing branches of white jasmine. I hastened on, my spirits rising higher the nearer I approached my destination. I was full of sweet anticipation and passionate longing—I yearned to clasp my beloved Nina in my arms—to see her lovely lustrous eyes looking fondly into mine—I was eager to shake Guido by the hand—and as for Stella, I knew the child would be in bed at that hour, but still, I thought, I must have her wakened to see me; I felt that my happiness would not be complete till I had kissed her little cherub face, and caressed those clustering curls of hers that were like spun gold. Hush—hush! What was that? I stopped in my rapid progress as though suddenly checked by an invisible hand. I listened with strained ears. That sound—was it not a rippling peal of gay sweet laughter? A shiver shook me from head to foot. It was my wife's laugh—I knew the silvery chime of it well! My heart sunk coldly—I paused irresolute. She could laugh then like that, while she thought me lying dead—dead and out of her reach forever! All at once I perceived the glimmer of a white robe through the trees; obeying my own impulse, I stepped softly aside—I hid behind a dense screen of foliage through which I could see without being seen. The clear laugh rang out once again on the stillness—its brightness pierced my brain like a sharp sword! She was happy—she was even merry—she wandered here in the moonlight joyous-hearted, while I—I had expected

to find her close shut within her room, or else kneeling before the Mater Dolorosa in the little chapel, praying for my soul's rest, and mingling her prayers with her tears! Yes—I had expected this—we men are such fools when we love women! Suddenly a terrible thought struck me. Had she gone mad? Had the shock and grief of my so unexpected death turned her delicate brain? Was she roaming about, poor child, like Ophelia, knowing not whither she went, and was her apparent gayety the fantastic mirth of a disordered brain? I shuddered at the idea—and bending slightly apart the boughs behind which I was secreted, I looked out anxiously. Two figures were slowly approaching—my wife and my friend, Guido Ferrari. Well—there was nothing in that—it was as it should be—was not Guido as my brother? It was almost his duty to console and cheer Nina as much as lay in his power. But stay! stay! did I see aright—was she simply leaning on his arm for support—or—a fierce oath, that was almost a cry of torture, broke from my lips! Oh, would to God I had died! Would to God I had never broken open the coffin in which I lay at peace! What was death—what were the horrors of the vault—what was anything I had suffered to the anguish that racked me now? The memory of it to this day burns in my brain like inextinguishable fire, and my hand involuntarily clinches itself in an effort to beat back the furious bitterness of that moment! I know not how I restrained the murderous ferocity that awoke within me—how I forced myself to remain motionless and silent in my hiding-place. But I did. I watched the miserable comedy out to its end! I looked dumbly on at my own betrayal! I saw my honor stabbed to the death by those whom I most trusted, and yet I gave no sign! They—Guido Ferrari and my wife—came so close to my hiding-place that I could note every gesture and hear every word they uttered. They paused within three steps of me—his arm incircled her waist—hers was thrown carelessly around his neck—her head rested on his shoulder. Even so had she walked with me a thousand times! She was dressed in pure white save for one spot of deep color near her heart—a red rose, as red as—blood. It was pinned there with a diamond pin that flashed in the moonlight. I thought wildly, that instead of that rose there should be blood indeed—instead of a diamond pin there should be the good steel of a straight dagger! But I had no weapon—I stared at her, dry-eyed and mute. She looked lovely—exquisitely lovely! No trace of grief marred the fairness of her face—her eyes were as languidly limpid and tender as ever—her lips were parted in the child-like smile that was so sweet—

so innocently trustful! She spoke—ah, Heaven! the old bewitching music of her low voice made my heart leap and my brain reel.

“You foolish Guido!” she said, in dreamily amused accents. “What would have happened, I wonder, if Fabio had not died so opportunely?”

I waited eagerly for the answer. Guido laughed lightly.

“He would never have discovered anything. You were too clever for him, *piccinina!* Besides, his conceit saved him—he had so good an opinion of himself that he would not have deemed it possible for you to care for any other man.”

My wife—flawless diamond—pearl of pure womanhood!—sighed half restlessly.

“I am glad he is dead!” she murmured; “but, Guido *mio*, you are imprudent. You cannot visit me now so often—the servants will talk! Then I must go into mourning for at least six months—and there are many other things to consider.”

Guido's hand played with the jeweled necklace she wore—he bent and kissed the place where its central pendant rested.—Again—again, good sir, I pray you! Let no faint scruples interfere with your rightful enjoyment! Cover the white flesh with caresses—it is public property! a dozen kisses more or less will not signify! So I madly thought as I crouched among the trees—the tigerish wrath within me making the blood beat in my head like a hundred hammer-strokes.

“Nay, then, my love,” he replied to her, “it is almost a pity Fabio is dead! While he lived he played an excellent part as a screen—he was an unconscious, but veritable duenna of propriety for both of us, as no one else could be!”

The boughs that covered me creaked and rustled. My wife started, and looked uneasily round her.

“Hush!” she said, nervously. “He was buried only yesterday—and they say there are ghosts sometimes. This avenue, too—I wish we had not come here—it was his favorite walk. Besides,” she added, with a slight accent of regret, “after all he was the father of my child—you must think of that.”

“By Heaven!” exclaimed Guido, fiercely, “do I *not* think of it? Ay—and I curse him for every kiss he stole from your lips!”

I listened, half stupefied. Here was a new phase of the marriage law! Husbands were thieves then—they “*stole*” kisses; only lovers were honest in their embraces! Oh, my dear friend—my more than brother—how near you were to

death at that moment! Had you but seen my face peering pallidly through the dusky leaves—could you have known the force of the fury pent up within me—you would not have valued your life at one *baiocco*!

"Why did you marry him?" he asked, after a little pause, during which he toyed with the fair curls that floated against his breast.

She looked up with a little mutinous pout, and shrugged her shoulders.

"Why? Because I was tired of the convent, and all the stupid, solemn ways of the nuns; also because he was rich, and I was horribly poor. I cannot bear to be poor! Then he loved me"—here her eyes glimmered with malicious triumph—"yes—he was mad for me—and——"

"You loved him?" demanded Guido, almost fiercely.

"*Ma che!*" she answered, with an expressive gesture. "I suppose I did—for a week or two. As much as one ever loves a husband! What does one marry for at all? For convenience—money—position—he gave me these things, as you know."

"You will gain nothing by marrying me, then," he said, jealously.

She laughed, and laid her little white hand, glittering with rings, lightly against his lips.

"Of course not! Besides—have I said I will marry you? You are very agreeable as a lover—but otherwise—I am not sure! And I am free now—I can do as I like; I want to enjoy my liberty, and——"

She was not allowed to complete her sentence, for Ferrari snatched her close to his breast and held her there as in a vise. His face was aflame with passion.

"Look you, Nina," he said, hoarsely, "you shall not fool me, by Heaven! you shall not! I have endured enough at your hands, God knows! When I saw you for the first time on the day of your marriage with that poor fool, Fabio—I loved you, madly—ay, wickedly as I then thought, but not for the sin of it did I repent. I knew you were woman, not angel, and I waited my time. It came—I sought you—I told you my story of love ere three months of wedded life had passed over your head. I found you willing—ready—nay, eager to hear me! You led me on; you know you did! You tempted me by touch, word, and look; you gave me all I sought! Why try to excuse it now? You are as much my wife as ever you were Fabio's—nay—you are more so, for you love me—at least you say so—and though you lied to your husband, you dare not lie to me. I tell you, you *dare not!* I never pitied Fabio, never—he was

too easily duped, and a married man has no right to be otherwise than suspicious and ever on his guard; if he relaxes in his vigilance he has only himself to blame when his honor is flung like a ball from hand to hand, as one plays with a child's toy. I repeat to you, Nina, you are *mine*, and I swear you shall never escape me!"

The impetuous words coursed rapidly from his lips, and his deep musical voice had a defiant ring as it fell on the stillness of the evening air. I smiled bitterly as I heard! She struggled in his arms half angrily.

"Let me go," she said. "You are rough, you hurt me!"

He released her instantly. The violence of his embrace had crushed the rose she wore, and its crimson leaves fluttered slowly down one by one on the ground at her feet. Her eyes flashed resentfully, and an impatient frown contracted her fair level brows. She looked away from him in silence, the silence of a cold disdain. Something in her attitude pained him, for he sprang forward and caught her hand, covering it with kisses.

"Forgive me, *carina mia*," he cried, repentantly. "I did not mean to reproach you. You cannot help being beautiful—it is the fault of God or the devil that you are so, and that your beauty maddens me! You are the heart of my heart, the soul of my soul! Oh, Nina *mia*, let us not waste words in useless anger. Think of it, we are free—free! Free to make life a long dream of delight—delight more perfect than angels can know! The greatest blessing that could have befallen us is the death of Fabio, and now that we are all in all to each other, do not harden yourself against me! Nina, be gentle with me—of all things in the world, surely love is best!"

She smiled, with the pretty superior smile of a young empress pardoning a recreant subject, and suffered him to draw her again, but with more gentleness, into his embrace. She put up her lips to meet his—I looked on like a man in a dream! I saw them cling together—each kiss they exchanged was a fresh stab to my tortured soul.

"You are so foolish, Guido *mio*," she pouted, passing her little jeweled fingers through his clustering hair with a light caress—"so impetuous—so jealous! I have told you over and over again that I love you!—Do you not remember that night when Fabio sat out on the balcony reading his Plato, poor fellow!"—here she laughed musically—"and we were trying over some songs in the drawing-room—did I not say then that I loved you best of any one in the world? You know I did! You ought to be satisfied!"

Guido smiled, and stroked her shining golden curls.

"I *am* satisfied," he said, without any trace of his former created impatience—"perfectly satisfied. But do not expect to find love without jealousy. Fabio was never jealous—I know—he trusted you too implicitly—he was nothing of a lover, believe me! He thought more of himself than of you. A man who will go away for days at a time on solitary yachting and rambling excursions, leaving his wife to her own devices—a man who reads Plato in preference to looking after *her*, decides his own fate, and deserves to be ranked with those so-called wise but most ignorant philosophers to whom Woman has always remained an unguessed riddle. As for me—I am jealous of the ground you tread upon—of the air that touches you—I was jealous of Fabio while he lived—and—by Heaven!"—his eyes darkened with a somber wrath—"if any other man dared *now* to dispute your love with me, I would not rest till his body had served my sword as a sheath!"

Nina raised her head from his breast with an air of petulant weariness.

"Again!" she murmured, reproachfully, "you are going to be angry *again*!"

He kissed her.

"Not I, sweet one! I will be as gentle as you wish, so long as you love me and only me. Come—this avenue is damp and chilly for you—shall we go in?"

My wife—nay, I should say *our* wife, as we had both shared her impartial favors—assented. With arms interlaced and walking slowly, they began to retrace their steps toward the house. Once they paused.

"Do you hear the nightingales?" asked Guido.

Hear them? Who could not hear them? A shower of melody rained from the trees on every side—the pure, sweet, passionate tones pierced the ear like the repeated chime of little golden bells—the beautiful, the tender, the God-inspired birds sung their love stories simply and with perfect rapture—love stories untainted by hypocrisy—unsullied by crime—different, ah! so very different from the love stories of selfish humanity! The exquisite poetic idyl of a bird's life and love—is it not a thing to put us inferior creatures to shame,—for are we ever as true to our vows as the lark to his mate;—are we as sincere in our thanksgivings for the sunlight as the merry robin who sings as blithely in the winter snow as in the flower-filled mornings of spring? Nay—not we! Our existence is but one long impotent protest against God, combined

with an insatiate desire to get the better of one another in the struggle for base coin!

Nina listened—and shivered, drawing her light scarf more closely about her shoulders.

"I hate them!" she said, pettishly; "their noise is enough to pierce one's ears. And *he* used to be so fond of them; he used to sing—what was it?"

*"Ti saluto, Rosignuolo,
Nel tuo duolo, ti saluto!
Sei l'amante della rosa
Che morendo si fa sposa!"*

Her rich voice rippled out on the air, rivaling the songs of the nightingales themselves. She broke off with a little laugh—

"Poor Fabio! there was always a false note somewhere when he sung. Come, Guido!"

And they paced on quietly, as though their consciences were clean—as though no just retribution dogged their steps—as though no shadow of a terrible vengeance loomed in the heaven of their pilfered happiness! I watched them steadily as they disappeared in the distance—I stretched my head eagerly from between the dark boughs and gazed after their retreating figures till the last glimmer of my wife's white robe had vanished behind the thick foliage. They were gone—they would return no more that night.

I sprung out from my hiding-place. I stood on the spot where they had stood. I tried to bring home to myself the actual truth of what I had witnessed. My brain whirled—circles of light swam giddily before me in the air—the moon looked blood-red. The solid earth seemed unsteady beneath my feet—almost I doubted whether I was indeed alive, or whether I was not rather the wretched ghost of my past self doomed to return from the grave to look helplessly upon the loss and ruin of all the fair, once precious things of by-gone days. The splendid universe around me seemed no more upheld by the hand of God—no more a majestic marvel; it was to me but an inflated bubble of emptiness—a mere ball for devils to kick and spurn through space! Of what avail these twinkling stars—these stately leaf-laden trees—these cups of fragrance we know as flowers—this round wonder of the eyes called Nature? of what avail was God himself, I wildly mused, since even He could not keep one woman true? She whom I loved—she as delicate of form, as angel-like in face, as the child-bride of Christ, St. Agnes—she, even she, was—what? A thing lower than the beasts, a thing as vile as the vilest wretch in female form that sells herself for a gold piece—a

thing—great Heaven!—for all men to despise and make light of—for the finger of Scorn to point out—for the foul hissing tongue of Scandal to mock at! This creature was my wife—the mother of my child—she had cast mud on her soul by her own free will and choice—she had selected evil as her good—she had crowned herself with shame willingly, nay—joyfully; she had preferred it to honor. *What should be done?* I tortured myself unceasingly with this question. I stared blankly on the ground—would some demon spring from it and give me the answer I sought? What should be done with *her*—with *him*, my treacherous friend, my smiling betrayer? Suddenly my eyes lightened on the fallen rose-leaves—those that had dropped when Guido's embrace had crushed the flower she wore. There they lay on the path, curled softly at the edges like little crimson shells. I stooped and picked them up—I place them all in the hollow of my hand and looked at them. They had a sweet odor—almost I kissed them—nay, nay, I could not—they had too recently lain on the breast of an embodied Lie! Yes; she was that, a Lie, a living, lovely, but accursed Lie! “*Go and kill her!*” Stay! where had I heard that? Painfully I considered, and at last remembered—and then I thought moodily that the starved and miserable rag-picker was more of a man than I. He had taken his revenge at once; while I, like a fool, had let occasion slip. Yes, but not forever! There were different ways of vengeance; one must decide the best, the keenest way—and, above all, the way that shall inflict the longest, the cruellest agony upon those by whom honor is wronged. True—it would be sweet to slay sin in the act of sinning, but then—must a Romani brand himself as a murderer in the sight of men? Not so; there were other means—other roads leading to the same end if the tired brain could only plan them out. Slowly I dragged my aching limbs to the fallen trunk of a tree and sat down, still holding the dying rose-leaves in my clinched palm. There was a surging noise in my ears—my mouth tasted of blood, my lips were parched and burning as with fever. “*A white-haired fisherman.*” That was me! The king had said so. Mechanically I looked down at the clothes I wore—the former property of a suicide. “He was a fool,” the vender of them had said, “he killed himself.”

Yes, there was no doubt of it—he was a fool. I would not follow his example, or at least not yet. I had something to do first—something that must be done if I could only see my way clear to it. Yes—if I could only see my way and follow it straightly, resolutely, remorselessly! My thoughts were con-

fused, like the thoughts of a fever-stricken man in delirium—the scent of the rose-leaves I held sickened me strangely—yet I would not throw them from me; no, I would keep them to remind me of the embraces I had witnessed! I felt for my purse! I found and opened it, and placed the withering red petals carefully within it. As I slipped it again in my pocket I remembered the two leathern pouches I carried—the one filled with gold, the other with the jewels I had intended for—*her*. My adventures in the vault recurred to me; I smiled as I recollected the dire struggle I had made for life and liberty. Life and liberty!—of what use were they to me now, save for one thing—revenge? I was not wanted; I was not expected back to refill my former place on earth—the large fortune I had possessed was now my wife's by the decree of my own last will and testament, which she would have no difficulty in proving. But still, wealth was mine—the hidden stores of the brigands were sufficient to make any man more than rich for the term of his natural life. As I considered this, a sort of dull pleasure throbbed in my veins. Money! Anything could be done for money—gold would purchase even vengeance. But what sort of vengeance? Such a one as I sought must be unique—refined, relentless, and complete. I pondered deeply. The evening wind blew freshly up from the sea; the leaves of the swaying trees whispered mysteriously together; the nightingales warbled on with untired sweetness; and the moon, like the round shield of an angel warrior, shone brightly against the dense blue background of the sky. Heedless of the passing of hours, I sat still, lost in a bewildered reverie. “*There was always a false note somewhere when he sung!*” So she had said, laughing that little laugh of hers as cold and sharp as the clash of steel. True, true; by all the majesty of Heaven, most true! There was indeed a false note—jarring, not so much the voice as the music of life itself. There is stuff in all of us that will weave, as we desire it, into a web of stately or simple harmony; but let the meteor-like brilliancy of a woman's smile—a woman's touch—a woman's *lie*—intermingle itself with the strain, and lo! the false note is struck, discord declares itself, and God himself, the great Composer, can do nothing in this life to restore the old calm tune of peaceful, unspoiled days! So I have found; so all of you must find, long before you and sorrow grow old together.

“*A white-haired fisherman!*”

The words of the king repeated themselves over and over again in my tortured brain. Yes—I was greatly changed, I looked worn and old—no one would recognize me for my

former self. All at once, with this thought, an idea occurred to me—a plan of vengeance, so bold, so new, and withal so terrible, that I started from my seat as though stung by an adder. I paced up and down restlessly, with this lurid light of fearful revenge pouring in on every nook and cranny of my darkened mind. From whence had come this daring scheme? What devil, or rather what angel of retribution, had whispered it to my soul? Dimly I wondered—but amid all my wonder I began practically to arrange the details of my plot. I calculated every small circumstance that was likely to occur in the process of carrying it out. My stupefied senses became aroused from the lethargy of despair, and stood up like soldiers on the alert, armed to the teeth. Past love, pity, pardon, patience—pooh! what were all these resources of the world's weaknesses to *me*? What was it to me that the bleeding Christ forgave His enemies in death? He never loved a woman! Strength and resolution returned to me. Let common sailors and rag-pickers resort to murder and suicide as fit outlets for their unreasoning brute wrath when wronged; but as for me, why should I blot my family scutcheon with a merely vulgar crime? Nay, the vengeance of a Romani must be taken with assured calmness and easy deliberation—no haste, no plebeian fury, no effeminate fuss, no excitement. I walked up and down slowly, meditating on every point of the bitter drama in which I had resolved to enact the chief part, from the rise to the fall of the black curtain. The mists cleared from my brain—I breathed more easily—my nerves steadied themselves by degrees—the prospect of what I purposed doing satisfied me and calmed the fever in my blood. I became perfectly cool and collected. I indulged in no more futile regrets for the past—why should I mourn the loss of a love I never possessed? It was not as if they had waited till my supposed sudden death—no! within three months of my marriage they had fooled me; for three whole years they had indulged in their criminal *amour*, while I, blind dreamer, had suspected nothing. *Now* I knew the extent of my injury; I was a man bitterly wronged, vilely duped. Justice, reason, and self-respect demanded that I should punish to the utmost the miserable tricksters who had played me false. The passionate tenderness I had felt for my wife was gone—I plucked it from my heart as I would have torn a thorn from my flesh—I flung it from me with disgust as I had flung away the unseen reptile that had fastened on my neck in the vault. The deep warm friendship of years I had felt for Guido Ferrari froze to its very foundations—and in its place there rose up, not hate, but pitiless, immeasurable

contempt. A stern disdain of myself also awoke in me, as I remembered the unreasoning joy with which I had hastened—as I thought—*home*, full of eager anticipation and Romeo-like ardor. An idiot leaping merrily to his death over a mountain chasm was not more fool than I! But the dream was over—the delusion of my life was passed. I was strong to avenge—I would be swift to accomplish. So, darkly musing for an hour or more, I decided on the course I had to pursue, and to make the decision final I drew from my breast the crucifix that the dead monk Cipriano had laid with me in my coffin, and kissing it, I raised it aloft, and swore by that sacred symbol never to relent, never to relax, never to rest, till I had brought my vow of just vengeance to its utmost fulfillment. The stars, calm witnesses of my oath, eyed me earnestly from their judgment thrones in the quiet sky—there was a brief pause in the singing of the nightingales, as though they too listened—the wind sighed plaintively, and scattered a shower of jasmine blossoms like snow at my feet. Even so, I thought, fall the last leaves of my white days—days of pleasure, days of sweet illusion, days of dear remembrance; even so let them wither and perish utterly forever! For from henceforth my life must be something other than a mere garland of flowers—it must be a chain of finely tempered steel, hard, cold, and unbreakable—formed into links strong enough to wind round and round two false lives and imprison them so closely as to leave no means of escape. This was what must be done—and I resolved to do it. With a firm, quiet step I turned to leave the avenue. I opened the little private wicket, and passed into the dusty road. A clanging noise caused me to look up as I went by the principal entrance of the Villa Romani. A servant—my own manservant by the by—was barring the great gates for the night. I listened as he slid the bolts into their places, and turned the key. I remembered that those gates had been thoroughly fastened before, when I came up the road from Naples—why, then, had they been opened since? To let out a visitor? Of course! I smiled grimly at my wife's cunning! She evidently knew what she was about. Appearances must be kept up—the Signor Ferrari must be decorously shown out by a servant at the chief entrance of the house. Naturally!—all very un-suspicious-looking and quite in keeping with the proprieties! Guido had just left her, then? I walked steadily, without hurrying my pace, down the hill toward the city, and on the way I overtook him. He was strolling lazily along, smoking as usual, and he held a spray of stephanotis in his hand—well I knew who had given it to him! I passed him—he glanced up

carelessly, his handsome face clearly visible in the bright moonlight—but there was nothing about a common fisherman to attract his attention—his look only rested upon me for a second and was withdrawn immediately. An insane desire possessed me to turn upon him—to spring at his throat—to wrestle with him and throw him in the dust at my feet—to spit at him and trample upon him—but I repressed those fierce and dangerous emotions. I had a better game to play—I had an exquisite torture in store for him, compared to which a hand-to-hand fight was mere vulgar fooling. Vengeance ought to ripen slowly in the strong heat of intense wrath, till of itself it falls—hastily snatched before its time it is like unripened fruit, sour and ungrateful to the palate. So I let my dear friend—my wife's consoler—saunter on his heedless way without interference—I passed, leaving him to indulge in amorous musings to his false heart's content. I entered Naples, and found a night's lodging at one of the usual resorts for men of my supposed craft, and, strange to say, I slept soundly and dreamlessly. Recent illness, fatigue, fear, and sorrow, all aided to throw me like an exhausted child upon the quiet bosom of slumber, but perhaps the most powerfully soothing opiate to my brain was the consciousness I had of a practical plan of retribution—more terrible perhaps than any human creature had yet devised, so far as I knew. Unchristian you call me? I tell you again, Christ never loved a woman! Had He done so, He would have left us some special code of justice.

CHAPTER IX.

I ROSE very early the next morning—I was more than ever strengthened in my resolutions of the past night—my projects were entirely formed, and nothing remained now but for me to carry them out. Unobserved of any one I took my way again to the vault. I carried with me a small lantern, a hammer, and some strong nails. Arrived at the cemetery I looked carefully everywhere about me, lest some stray mourner or curious stranger might possibly be in the neighborhood. Not a soul was in sight. Making use of the secret passage, I soon found myself on the scene of my recent terrors and sufferings, all of which seemed now so slight in comparison with the mental torture of my present condition. I went straight to the spot where I had left the confined treasure—I possessed myself of all the rolls of paper money, and disposed them in various small packages about my person and in the lining of my clothes, till, as I stood, I was worth many thousands of francs. Then,

with the help of the tools I had brought, I mended the huge chest in the split places where I had forced it open, and nailed it up fast, so that it looked as if it had never been touched. I lost no time over my task, for I was in haste. It was my intention to leave Naples for a fortnight or more, and I purposed taking my departure that very day. Before leaving the vault I glanced at the coffin I myself had occupied. Should I mend that and nail it up as though my body were still inside? No—better leave it as it was—roughly broken open—it would serve my purpose better so. As soon as I had finished all I had to do, I clambered through the private passage, closing it after me with extra care and caution, and then I betook myself directly to the Molo. On making inquiries among the sailors who were gathered there, I heard that a small coasting brig was on the point of leaving for Palermo. Palermo would suit me as well as any other place; I sought out the captain of the vessel. He was a brown-faced, merry-eyed mariner—he showed his glittering white teeth in the most amiable of smiles when I expressed my desire to take passage with him, and consented to the arrangement at once for a sum which I thought extremely moderate, but which I afterward discovered to be about treble his rightful due. But the handsome rogue cheated me with such grace and exquisite courtesy, that I would scarcely have had him act otherwise than he did. I hear a good deal of the “plain blunt honesty” of the English. I dare say there is some truth in it, but for my own part I would rather be cheated by a friendly fellow who gives you a cheery word and a bright look than receive exact value for my money from the “plain blunt” boor who seldom has the common politeness to wish you a good-day.

We got under way at about nine o'clock—the morning was bright, and the air, for Naples, was almost cool. The water rippling against the sides of our little vessel had a gurgling, chatty murmur, as though it were talking vivaciously of all the pleasant things it experienced between the rising and the setting of the sun; of the corals and trailing sea-weed that grew in its blue depths, of the lithe glittering fish that darted hither and thither between its little waves, of the delicate shells in which dwelt still more delicate inhabitants, fantastic small creatures as fine as filmy lace, that peeped from the white and pink doors of their transparent habitations, and looked as enjoyingly on the shimmering blue-green of their ever-moving element as we look on the vast dome of our sky, bespangled thickly with stars. Of all these things, and many more as strange and sweet, the gossiping water babbled unceasingly; it