

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there was nothing about a common fisherman to attract his attention—his look only rested upon me for a second and was withdrawn immediately.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

had even something to say to me concerning woman and woman's love. It told me gleefully how many fair female bodies it had seen sunk in the cold embrace of the conquering sea, bodies dainty and soft as the sylphs of a poet's dream, yet which, despite their exquisite beauty, had been flung to and fro in cruel sport by the raging billows, and tossed among pebbles for the monsters of the deep to feed upon.

As I sat idly on the vessel's edge and looked down, down into the clear Mediterranean, brilliantly blue as a lake of melted sapphires, I fancied I could see *her*, the Delilah of my life, lying prone on the golden sand, her rich hair floating straightly around her like yellow weed, her hands clinched in the death agony, her laughing lips blue with the piercing chilliness of the washing tide—powerless to move or smile again. She would look well so, I thought—better to my mind than she looked in the arms of her lover last night. I fell into a train of profound meditation—a touch on my shoulder startled me. I looked up, the captain of the brig stood beside me. He smiled and held out a cigarette.

"The signor will smoke?" he said courteously.

I accepted the little roll of fragrant Havana half mechanically.

"Why do you call me *signor*?" I inquired, brusquely. "I am a coral-fisher."

The little man shrugged his shoulders and bowed deferentially, yet with the smile still dancing gayly in his eyes and dimpling his olive cheeks.

"Oh, certainly! As the signor pleases—*ma*—" And he ended with another expressive shrug and bow.

I looked at him fixedly. "What do you mean?" I asked, with some sternness.

With that bird-like lightness and swiftness which were part of his manner, the Sicilian skipper bent forward and laid a brown finger on my wrist.

"*Scusa, vi prego!* But the hands are not those of a fisher of coral."

I glanced down at them. True enough, their smoothness and pliant shape betrayed my disguise—the gay little captain was sharp-witted enough to note the contrast between them and the rough garb I wore, though no one else with whom I had come in contact had been as keen of observation as he. At first I was slightly embarrassed by his remark—but after a moment's pause I met his gaze frankly, and lighting my cigarette I said, carelessly:

"*Ebbene!* And what then, my friend?"

He made a deprecatory gesture with his hands.

"Nay, nay, nothing—but only this. The signor must understand he is perfectly safe with me. My tongue is discreet—I talk of things only that concerns myself. The signor has good reasons for what he does—of that I am sure. He has suffered; it is enough to look in his face to see that. Ah, *Dio!* there are so many sorrows in life; there is love," he enumerated rapidly on his fingers—"there is revenge—there are quarrels—there is loss of money; any of these will drive a man from place to place at all hours and in all weathers. Yes; it is so, indeed—I know it! The signor has trusted himself in my boat—I desire to assure him of my best services."

And he raised his red cap with so charming a candor that in my lonely and morose condition I was touched to the heart. Silently I extended my hand—he caught it with an air in which respect, sympathy, and entire friendliness were mingled. And yet he overcharged me for my passage, you exclaim! Ay—but he would not have made me the object of impertinent curiosity for twenty times the money! You cannot understand the existence of such conflicting elements in the Italian character? No—I daresay not. The tendency of the calculating northerner under the same circumstances would have been to make as much out of me as possible by means of various small and contemptible items, and then to go with broadly honest countenances to the nearest police-station and describe my suspicious appearance and manner, thus exposing me to fresh expense besides personal annoyance. With the rare tact that distinguishes the southern races, the captain changed the conversation by a reference to the tobacco we were both enjoying.

"It is good, is it not?" he asked.

"Excellent!" I answered, as indeed it was.

His white teeth glittered in a smile of amusement.

"It should be of the finest quality—for it is a present from one who will smoke nothing but the choice brands. Ah, *Dio!* what a fine gentleman spoiled is Carmelo Neri!"

I could not repress a slight start of surprise. What caprice of Fate associated me with this famous brigand? I was actually smoking his tobacco, and I owed all my present wealth to his stolen treasures secreted in my family vault!

"You know the man, then?" I inquired, with some curiosity.

"Know him? As well as I know myself. Let me see, it is two months—yes—two months to-day since he was with me on board this very vessel. It happened in this way—I was at Gaeta—he came to me and told me the gendarmes were

after him. He offered me more gold than I ever had in my life to take him to Termini, from whence he could get to one of his hiding-places in the Montemaggiore. He brought Teresa with him; he found me alone on the brig—my men had gone ashore. He said, 'Take us to Termini, and I will give you so much; refuse, and I will slit your throat.' Ha! ha! ha! That was good. I laughed at him; I put a chair for Teresa on deck, and gave her some big peaches. I said, 'See, my Carmelo! what use is there in threats? You will not kill me, and I shall not betray you. You are a thief, and a bad thief—by all the saints you are—but I dare say you would not be much worse than the hotel-keepers, if you could only keep your hand off your knife.' (For you know, signor, if you once enter a hotel you must pay almost a ransom before you can get out again!) Yes—and I reasoned with Carmelo in this manner: I told him, 'I do not want a large fortune for carrying you and Teresa across to Termini—pay me the just passage and we shall part friends, if only for Teresa's sake.' Well, he was surprised. He smiled that dark smile of his, which may mean gratitude or murder. He looked at Teresa. She sprung up from her seat, and let her peaches fall from her lap on the deck. She put her little hands on mine—the tears were in her pretty blue eyes. 'You are good man,' she said. 'Some woman must love you very much!' Yes—she said that. And she was right. Our Lady be praised for it!"

And his dark eyes glanced upward with a devout gesture of thanksgiving. I looked at him with a sort of jealous hunger gnawing at my heart. Here was another self-deluded fool—a fond wretch feasting on the unsubstantial food of a pleasant dream—a poor dupe who believed in the truth of woman!

"You are a happy man," I said, with a forced smile; "you have a guiding star for your life as well as for your boat—a woman who loves you and is faithful? is it so?"

He answered me directly and simply, raising his cap slightly as he did so.

"Yes, signor—my mother."

I was deeply touched by his naïve and unexpected reply—more deeply than I cared to show. A bitter regret stirred in my soul—why, oh, why had my mother died so young! Why had I never known the sacred joy that seemed to vibrate through the frame, and sparkle in the eyes of this common sailor! Why must I be forever alone, with a curse of a woman's lie on my life, weighing me down to the dust and ashes of a desolate despair! Something in my face must have spoken my thoughts, for the captain said, gently:

"The signor has no mother?"

"She died when I was but a child," I answered, briefly.

The Sicilian puffed lightly at his cigarette in silence—the silence of an evident compassion. To relieve him of his friendly embarrassment, I said:

"You spoke of *Teresa*? Who is *Teresa*?"

"Ah, you may well ask, signor! No one knows who she is; she loves Carmelo Neri, and there all is said. Such a little thing she is—so delicate! like a foam-bell on the waves; and Carmelo—You have seen Carmelo, signor?"

I shook my head in the negative.

"*Ebbene!* Carmelo is big and rough and black like a wolf of the forests, all hair and fangs; Teresa is, well! you have seen a little cloud in the sky at night, wandering past the moon all flecked with pale gold?—that is Teresa. She is small and slight as a child; she has rippling curls, and soft praying eyes, and tiny, weak, white hands, not strong enough to snap a twig in two. Yet she can do anything with Carmelo—she is the one soft spot in his life."

"I wonder if she is true to him," I muttered, half to myself and half aloud.

The captain caught up my words with an accent of surprise.

"True to him? Ah, *Dio!* but the signor does not know her. There was one of Carmelo's own band, as bold and handsome a cut-throat as ever lived—he was mad for Teresa—he followed her everywhere like a beaten cur. One day he found her alone; he tried to embrace her—she snatched a knife from his own girdle and stabbed him with it, like a little fury! She did not kill him then, but Carmelo did afterward. To think of a little woman like that with such a devil in her! It is her boast that no man, save Carmelo, has ever touched so much as a ringlet of her hair. Ay, she is true to him—more's the pity."

"Why—you would not have her false?" I asked.

"Nay, nay—for a false woman deserves death—but still it is a pity Teresa should have fixed her love on Carmelo. Such a man! One day the gendarmes will have him, then he will be in the galleys for life, and she will die. Yes—you may be sure of that! If grief does not kill her quickly enough, then she will kill herself, that is certain! She is slight and frail to look at as a flower, but her soul is strong as iron. She will have her own way in death as well as in love—some women are made so, and it is generally the weakest-looking among them who have the most courage."

Our conversation was here interrupted by one of the sailors

who came for his master's orders. The talkative skipper, with an apologetic smile and bow, placed his box of cigarettes beside me where I sat, and left me to my own reflections.

I was not sorry to be alone. I needed a little breathing time—a rest in which to think, though my thoughts, like a new solar system, revolved round the red planet of one central idea, *Vengeance*. "A false woman deserves death." Even this simple Sicilian mariner said so. "Go and kill her, go and kill her!" These words reiterated themselves over and over again in my ears till I found myself almost uttering them aloud. My soul sickened at the contemplation of the woman Teresa—the mistress of a wretched brigand whose name was fraught with horror—whose looks were terrific—she, even *she* could keep herself sacred from the profaning touch of other men's caresses—she was proud of being faithful to her wolf of the mountains, whose temper was uncertain and treacherous—she could make lawful boast of her fidelity to her blood-stained lover—while Nina, the wedded wife of a noble whose descent was lofty and unsullied, could tear off the fair crown of honorable marriage and cast it in the dust—could take the dignity of an ancient family and trample upon it—could make herself so low and vile that even this common Teresa, knowing all, might, and most probably would, refuse to touch her hand, considering it polluted. Just God! what had Carmelo Neri done to deserve the priceless jewel of a true woman's heart? what had I done to merit such foul deception as that which I was now called upon to avenge? Suddenly I thought of my child. Her memory came upon me like a ray of light—I had almost forgotten her. Poor little blossom!—the slow hot tears forced themselves between my eyelids, as I called up before my fancy the picture of the soft baby face—the young untroubled eyes—the little coaxing mouth always budding into innocent kisses! What should I do with her? When the plan of punishment I had matured in my brain was carried out to its utmost, should I take her with me far, far away into some quiet corner of the world, and devote my life to hers? Alas! alas! she, too, would be a woman and beautiful—she was a flower born of a poisoned tree: who could say that there might not be a canker-worm hidden even in her heart, which waited but for the touch of maturity to commence its work of destruction! Oh, men! you that have serpents coiled round your lives in the shape of fair false women—if God has given you children by them, the curse descends upon you doubly! Hide it as you will, under the society masks we are all forced to wear, you know there is nothing more keenly torturing than to see innocent babes

look trustingly in the deceitful eyes of an unfaithful wife, and call her by the sacred name of "*Minor*." Eat ashes and drink wormwood, you shall find them sweet in comparison to that nauseating bitterness! For the rest of the day I was very much alone. The captain of the brig spoke cheerily to me now and then, but we were met by light contrary winds that necessitated his giving most of his attention to the management of his vessel, so that he could not permit himself to yield to the love of gossip that was inherent in him. The weather was perfect, and notwithstanding our constant shifting and tacking about to catch the erratic breeze, the gay little brig made merry and rapid way over the sparkling Mediterranean, at a rate that promised our arrival at Palermo by the sunset of the following day. As the evening came on the wind freshened, and by the time the moon soared like a large bright bird into the sky, we were scudding along sideways, the edge of our vessel leaning over to kiss the waves that gleamed like silver and gold, flecked here and there with phosphorescent flame. We skimmed almost under the bows of a magnificent yacht—the English flag floated from her mast—her sails glittered purely white in the moonbeams, and she sprung over the water like a sea-gull. A man, whose tall athletic figure was shown off to advantage by the yachting costume he wore, stood on deck, his arm thrown round the waist of a girl beside him. We were but a minute or two passing the stately vessel, yet I saw plainly this loving group of two, and—I pitied the man! Why? He was English undoubtedly—the son of a country where the very soil is supposed to be odorous of virtue—therefore the woman beside him must be a perfect pearl of purity; an Englishman never makes a mistake in these things! Never? Are you sure? Ah, believe me, there is not much difference nowadays between women of opposite nations. Once there *was*—I am willing to admit that possibility. Once, from all accounts received, the English rose was the fitting emblem of the English woman, but now, since the world has grown so wise and made such progress in the art of running rapidly downhill, is even the aristocratic British peer quite easy in his mind regarding his fair peeress? Can he leave her to her own devices with safety? Are there not men, boastful too of their "blue blood," who are perhaps ready to stoop to the thief's trick of entering his house during his absence by means of private keys, and stealing away his wife's affections?—and is not she, though a mother of three or four children, ready to receive with favor the mean robber of her husband's rights and honor? Read the London news-

papers any day and you will find that once "moral" England is running a neck-and-neck race with other less hypocritical nations in pursuit of social vice. The barriers that once existed are broken down; "professional beauties" are received in circles where their presence formerly would have been the signal for all respectable women instantly to retire; ladies of title are satisfied to caper on the boards of the theatrical stage, in costumes that display their shape as undisguisedly as possible to the eyes of the grinning public, or they sing in concert halls for the pleasure of showing themselves off, and actually accept the vulgar applause of unwashed crowds with a smile and a bow of gratitude! Ye gods! what has become of the superb pride of the old *régime*—the pride which disdained all ostentation and clung to honor more closely than life! What a striking sign of the times, too, is this: let a woman taint her virtue *before* marriage, she is never forgiven—her sin is never forgotten; but let her do what she will when she has a husband's name to screen her, and society winks its eyes at her crimes. Couple this fact with the general spirit of mockery that prevails in fashionable circles—mockery of religion, mockery of sentiment, mockery of all that is best and noblest in the human heart—add to it the general spread of "free-thought," and *therefore* of conflicting and unstable opinions—let all these things together go on for a few years longer, and England will stare at her sister nations like a bold woman in a domino—her features partly concealed from a pretense at shame, but her eyes glittering coldly through the mask, betraying to all who look at her how she secretly revels in her new code of lawlessness coupled with greed. For she will always be avaricious—and the worst if it is, that her nature being prosaic, there will be no redeeming grace to cast a glamour about her. France is unvirtuous enough, God knows, yet there is a sunshiny smile on her lips that cheers the heart. Italy is also unvirtuous, yet her voice is full of bird-like melody, and her face is a dream of perfect poetry! But England unvirtuous will be like a cautiously calculating, somewhat shrewish matron, possessed of unnatural and unbecoming friskiness, without either laugh, or song, or smile—her one god, Gold, and her one commandment, the suggested eleventh, "*Thou shalt not be found out!*"

I slept that night on deck. The captain offered me the use of his little cabin, and was, in his kind-hearted manner, truly distressed at my persistent refusal to occupy it.

"It is bad to sleep in the moonlight, signor," he said, anxiously. "It makes men mad, they say."

I smiled. Had madness been my destiny, I should have gone mad last night, I thought!

"Have no fear!" I answered him gently. "The moonlight is a joy to me—it has no impression on my mind save that of peace. I shall rest well here, my friend—do not trouble yourself about me."

He hesitated and then abruptly left me, to return in the space of two or three minutes with a thick rug of sheepskin. He insisted so earnestly on my accepting this covering as a protection from the night air, that to please him, I yielded to his entreaties and lay down, wrapped in its warm folds. The good-natured fellow then wished me a "*Buon riposo, signor!*" and descended to his own resting-place, humming a gay tune as he went. From my recumbent posture on the deck I stared upward at the myriad stars that twinkled softly in the warm violet skies—stared long and fixedly till it seemed to me that our ship had also become a star, and was sailing through space with its glittering companions. What inhabitants peopled those fair planets, I wondered? Mere men and women who lived and loved and lied to one another as bravely as we do? or superior beings to whom the least falsehood is unknown? Was there one world among them where no women were born? Vague fancies—odd theories—flitted through my brain. I lived over again the agony of my imprisonment in the vaults—again I forced myself to contemplate the scene I had witnessed between my wife and her lover—again I meditated on every small detail requisite to the fulfillment of the terrible vengeance I had designed. I have often wondered how, in countries where divorce is allowed, a wronged husband can satisfy himself with so meager a compensation for his injuries as the mere getting rid of the woman who has deceived him. It is no punishment to her—it is what she wishes. There is not even any very special disgrace in it according to the present standard of social observances. Were public whipping the recognized penalty for the crime of a married woman's infidelity, there would be fewer of the like scandals—the divorce might follow the scourging. A daintily brought-up feminine creature would think twice, nay, fifty times, before she would run the risk of allowing her delicate body to be lashed by whips wielded by the merciless hands of a couple of her own sex—such a prospect of degradation, pain, shame, and outraged vanity would be more effectual to kill the brute in her than all the imposing ceremonials of courts of law and special juries. Think of it, kings, lords, and commons! Whipping at the cart's tail was once a legal punishment—if you would stop the growing immorality

and reckless vice of women you had best revive it again—only apply it to rich as well as to poor, for it is most probable that the gay duchesses and countesses of your lands will need its sharp services more frequently than the work-worn wives of your laboring men. Luxury, idleness, and love of dress are hot-beds for sin—look for it, therefore, not so much in the hovels of the starving and naked as in the rose-tinted, musk-scented boudoirs of the aristocracy—look for it, as your brave physicians would search out the seeds of a pestilence that threatens to depopulate a great city, and trample it out if you can and will—if you desire to keep the name of your countries glorious in the eyes of future history. Spare not the rod because “my lady” forsooth! with her rich hair falling around her in beautiful dishevelment and her eyes bathed in tears, implores your mercy—for by very reason of her wealth and station she deserves less pity than the painted outcast who knows not where to turn for bread. A high post demands high duty! But I talk wildly. Whipping is done away with, for women at least—we give a well-bred shudder of disgust at the thought of it. When do we shudder with equal disgust at our own social enormities? Seldom or never. Meanwhile, in cases of infidelity, husbands and wives can separate and go on their different ways in comparative peace. Yes—some can and some do; but I am not one of these. No law in all the world can mend the torn flag of *my* honor; therefore I must be a law to myself—a counsel, a jury, a judge, all in one—and from my decision there can be no appeal! Then I must act as executioner—and what torture was ever so perfectly unique as the one I had devised? So I mused, lying broadly awake, with face upturned to the heavens, watching the light of the moon pouring itself out on the ocean like a shower of gold, while the water rushed gurgling softly against the sides of the brig, and broke into the laughter of white foam as we scudded along.

CHAPTER X.

ALL the next day the wind was in our favor, and we arrived at Palermo an hour before sunset. We had scarcely run into harbor when a small party of officers and gendarmes, heavily laden with pistols and carbines, came on board and showed a document authorizing them to search the brig for Carmelo Neri. I was somewhat anxious for the safety of my good friend the captain—but he was in nowise dismayed; he smiled and welcomed the armed emissaries of the government as though they were his dearest friends.

“To give you my opinion frankly,” he said to them, as he opened a flask of fine Chianti for their behoof, “I believe the villain Carmelo is somewhere about Gaeta. I would not tell you a lie—why should I? Is there not a reward offered, and am not I poor? Look you, I would do my best to assist you!”

One of the men looked at him dubiously.

“We received information,” he said, in precise, business-like tones, “that Neri escaped from Gaeta two months since, and was aided and abetted in his escape by one Andrea Luziani, owner of the coasting brig ‘Laura,’ journeying for purposes of trade between Naples and Palermo. You are Andrea Luziani, and this is the brig ‘Laura’—we are right in this; is it not so?”

“As if you could ever be wrong, *caro!*” cried the captain with undiminished gayety, clapping him on the shoulder. “Nay, if St. Peter should have the bad taste to shut you out of heaven, you would be cunning enough to find another and better entrance! Ah, *Dio!* I believe it! Yes, you are right about my name and the name of my brig, but in the other things”—here he shook his fingers with an expressive sign of denial—“you are wrong—wrong—all wrong!” He broke into a gay laugh. “Yes, wrong—but we will not quarrel about it! Have some more Chianti! Searching for brigands is thirsty work. Fill your glasses, *amici!*—spare not the flask—there are twenty more below stairs!”

The officers smiled in spite of themselves, as they drank the proffered wine, and the youngest-looking of the party, a brisk, handsome fellow, entered into the spirit of the captain with ardor, though he evidently thought he should trap him into a confession unawares, by the apparent carelessness and *bonhomie* of his manner.

“Bravo, Andrea!” he cried, merrily. “So! let us all be friends together! Besides, what harm is there in taking a brigand for a passenger—no doubt he would pay you better than most cargoes!”

But Andrea was not to be so caught. On the contrary; he raised his hands and eyes with an admirably feigned expression of shocked alarm.

“Our Lady and the saints forgive you!” he exclaimed, piously, “for thinking that I, an honest *marinaro*, would accept one *baiocco* from an accursed brigand! Ill-luck would follow me ever after! Nay, nay—there has been a mistake; I know nothing of Carmelo Neri, and I hope the saints will grant that I may never meet him!”