

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!”

He spoke with so much apparent sincerity that the officers in command were evidently puzzled, though the fact of their being so did not deter them from searching the brig thoroughly. Disappointed in their expectations, they questioned all on board, including myself, but were of course unable to obtain any satisfactory replies. Fortunately they accepted my costume as a sign of my trade, and though they glanced curiously at my white hair, they seemed to think there was nothing suspicious about me. After a few more effusive compliments and civilities on the part of the captain, they took their departure, completely baffled, and quite convinced that the information they had received had been somehow incorrect. As soon as they were out of sight, the merry Andrea capered on his deck like a child in a play-ground, and snapped his fingers defiantly.

"*Per Bacco!*" he cried, ecstatically, "they should as soon make a priest tell confessional secrets, as force me, honest Andrea Luziani, to betray a man who has given me good cigars! Let them run back to Gaeta and hunt in every hole and corner! Carmelo may rest comfortably in the *Montemaggiore* without the shadow of a gendarme to disturb him! Ah, signor!" for I had advanced to bid him farewell—"I am truly sorry to part company with you! You do not blame me for helping away a poor devil who trusts me?"

"Not I!" I answered him heartily. "On the contrary, I would there were more like you. *Addio!* and with this," here I gave him the passage-money we had agreed upon, "accept my thanks. I shall not forget your kindness; if you ever need a friend, send to me."

"But," he said, with a naïve mingling of curiosity and timidity, "how can I do that if the signor does not tell me his name?"

I had thought of this during the past night. I knew it would be necessary to take a different name, and I had resolved on adopting that of a school-friend, a boy to whom I had been profoundly attached in my earliest youth, and who had been drowned before my eyes while bathing in the Venetian Lido. So I answered Andrea's question at once and without effort.

"Ask for the Count Cesare Oliva," I said. "I shall return to Naples shortly, and should you seek me, you will find me there."

The Sicilian doffed his cap and saluted me profoundly.

"I guessed well," he remarked, smilingly, "that the Signor Conte's hands were not those of a coral-fisher. Oh, yes! I know a gentleman when I see him—though we Sicilians say we are all gentlemen. It is a good boast, but alas! not always

true! *A rivederci*, signor! Command me when you will—I am your servant!"

Pressing his hand, I sprung lightly from the brig on to the quay.

"*A rivederci!*" I called to him. "Again, and yet again, a thousand thanks!"

"Oh! *tropp' onore*, signor—*tropp' onore!*" and thus I left him, standing still bare-headed on the deck of his little vessel, with a kindly light on his brown face like the reflection of a fadeless sunbeam. Good-hearted, merry rogue! His ideas of right and wrong were oddly mixed—yet his lies were better than many truths told us by our candid friends—and you may be certain the great Recording Angel knows the difference between a lie that saves and a truth that kills, and metes out Heaven's reward or punishment accordingly.

My first care, when I found myself in the streets of Palermo, was to purchase clothes of the best material and make adapted to a gentleman's wear. I explained to the tailor whose shop I entered for this purpose that I had joined a party of coral-fishers for mere amusement, and had for the time adopted their costume. He believed my story the more readily as I ordered him to make several more suits for me immediately, giving him the name of Count Cesare Oliva, and the address of the best hotel in the city. He served me with obsequious humility, and allowed me the use of his private back-room, where I discarded my fisher garb for the dress of a gentleman—a ready-made suit that happened to fit me passably well. Thus arrayed as became my station, I engaged rooms at the chief hotel of Palermo for some weeks—weeks that were for me full of careful preparation for the task of vengeful retribution that lay before me. One of my principal objects was to place the money I had with me in safe hands. I sought out the leading banker in Palermo, and introducing myself under my adopted name, I stated that I had newly returned to Sicily after some years' absence. He received me well, and though he appeared astonished at the large amount of wealth I had brought, he was eager and willing enough to make satisfactory arrangements with me for its safe keeping, including the bag of jewels, some of which, from their unusual size and luster, excited his genuine admiration. Seeing this, I pressed on his acceptance a fine emerald and two large brilliants, all unset, and requested him to have a ring made of them for his own wear. Surprised at my generosity, he at first refused—but his natural wish to possess such rare gems finally prevailed, and he took them, overpowering me with thanks—while I was perfectly satisfied to

see that I had secured his services so thoroughly by my jeweled bribe, that he either forgot, or else saw no necessity to ask me for personal references, which in my position would have been exceeding difficult, if not impossible, to obtain. When this business transaction was entirely completed, I devoted myself to my next consideration—which was to disguise myself so utterly that no one should possibly be able to recognize the smallest resemblance in me to the late Fabio Romani, either by look, voice, or trick of manner. I had always worn a mustache—’ had turned white in company with my hair. I now allowed my beard to grow—it came out white also. But in contrast with these contemporary signs of age, my face began to fill up and look young again; my eyes, always large and dark, resumed their old flashing, half-defiant look—a look, which, it seemed to me, would make some familiar suggestion to those who had once known me as I was before I died. Yes—they spoke of things that must be forgotten and unuttered; what should I do with these tell-tale eyes of mine?

I thought and soon decided. Nothing was easier than to feign weak sight—sight that was dazzled by the heat and brilliancy of the southern sunshine; I would wear smoke-colored glasses. I bought them as soon as the idea occurred to me, and alone in my room before the mirror I tried their effect. I was satisfied; they perfectly completed the disguise of my face. With them and my white hair and beard, I looked like a well-preserved man of fifty-five or so, whose only physical ailment was a slight affection of the eyes.

The next thing to alter was my voice. I had, naturally, a peculiarly soft voice and a rapid, yet clear, enunciation, and it was my habit, as it is the habit of almost every Italian, to accompany my words with the expressive pantomime of gesture. I took myself in training as an actor studies for a particular part. I cultivated a harsh accent, and spoke with deliberation and coldness—occasionally with a sort of sarcastic *brusquerie*, carefully avoiding the least movement of hands or head during converse. This was exceedingly difficult of attainment to me, and took me an infinite deal of time and trouble; but I had for my model a middle-aged Englishman who was staying in the same hotel as myself, and whose starchy stolidity never relaxed for a single instant. He was a human iceberg—perfectly respectable, with that air of decent gloom about him which is generally worn by all the sons of Britain while sojourning in a foreign clime. I copied his manners as closely as possible; I kept my mouth shut with the same precise air of not-to-be-enlightened obstinacy—I walked with the same upright drill

demeanor—and I surveyed the scenery with the same superior contempt. I knew I had succeeded at last, for I overheard a waiter speaking of me to his companion as “the white bear!”

One other thing I did. I wrote a courteous note to the editor of the principal newspaper published in Naples—a newspaper that I knew always found its way to the Villa Romani—and inclosing fifty francs, I requested him to insert a paragraph for me in his next issue. This paragraph was worded somewhat as follows:

“The Signor Conte Cesare Oliva, a nobleman who has been for many years absent from his native country, has, we understand, just returned, possessed of almost fabulous wealth, and is about to arrive in Naples, where he purposes making his home for the future. The leaders of society here will no doubt welcome with enthusiasm so distinguished an addition to the brilliant circles commanded by their influence.”

The editor obeyed my wishes, and inserted what I sent him, word for word as it was written. He sent me the paper containing it “with a million compliments,” but was discreetly silent concerning the fifty francs, though I am certain he pocketed them with unaffected joy. Had I sent him double the money, he might have been induced to announce me as a king or emperor in disguise. Editors of newspapers lay claim to be honorable men; they may be so in England, but in Italy most of them would do anything for money. Poor devils! who can blame them, considering how little they get by their limited dealings in pen and ink! In fact, I am not at all certain but that a few English newspaper editors might be found capable of accepting a bribe, if large enough, and if offered with due delicacy. There are surely one or two magazines, for instance, in London, that would not altogether refuse to insert an indifferently, even badly written article, if paid a thousand pounds down for doing it!

On the last day but one of my sojourn in Palermo I was reclining in an easy-chair at the window of the hotel smoking-room, looking out on the shimmering waters of the gulf. It was nearly eight o’clock, and though the gorgeous colors of the sunset still lingered in the sky, the breeze blew in from the sea somewhat coldly, giving warning of an approaching chilly night. The character I had adopted, namely, that of a somewhat harsh and cynical man who had seen life and did not like it, had by constant hourly practice become with me almost second nature—indeed, I should have had some difficulty in returning to the easy and thoughtless *abandon* of my former self. I had studied the art of being churlish till I really *was*

churlish; I had to act the chief character in a drama, and I knew my part thoroughly well. I sat quietly puffing at my cigar and thinking of nothing in particular—for, as far as my plans went, I had done with thought, and all my energies were strung up to action—when I was startled by a loud and increasing clamor, as of the shouting of a large crowd coming onward like an overflowing tide. I leaned out of the window, but could see nothing, and I was wondering what the noise could mean, when an excited waiter threw open the door of the smoking-room and cried, breathlessly:

“Carmelo Neri, signor! Carmelo Neri! They have him, *peverino!* they have him at last!”

Though almost as strongly interested in this news as the waiter himself, I did not permit my interest to become manifest. I never forgot for a second the character I had assumed, and drawing the cigar slowly from my lips, I merely said:

“Then they have caught a great rascal. I congratulate the Government! Where is the fellow?”

“In the great square,” returned the *garçon*, eagerly. “If the signor would walk round the corner he would see Carmelo, bound and fettered. The saints have mercy upon him! The crowds there are thick as flies round a honeycomb! I must go thither myself—I would not miss the sight for a thousand francs!”

And he ran off, as full of the anticipated delight of looking at a brigand as a child going to its first fair. I put on my hat and strolled leisurely round to the scene of excitement. It was a picturesque sight enough; the square was black with a sea of eager heads, and restless, gesticulating figures, and the center of this swaying, muttering crowd was occupied by a compact band of mounted gendarmes with drawn swords flashing in the pale evening light—both horses and men nearly as motionless as though cast in bronze. They were stationed opposite the head-quarters of the *Carabinieri*, where the chief officer of the party had dismounted to make his formal report respecting the details of the capture before proceeding further. Between these armed and watchful guards, with his legs strapped to a sturdy mule, his arms tied fast behind him, and his hands heavily manacled, was the notorious Neri, as dark and fierce as a mountain thunder-storm. His head was uncovered—his thick hair, long and unkempt, hung in matted locks upon his shoulders—his heavy mustachios and beard were so black and bushy that they almost concealed his coarse and forbidding features—though I could see the tiger-like glitter of his sharp white teeth as he bit and gnawed his under lip in

impotent fury and despair—and his eyes, like leaping flames, blazed with a wrathful ferocity from under his shaggy brows. He was a huge, heavy man, broad and muscular; his two great hands clinched, tied and manacled behind him, looked like formidable hammers capable of striking a man down dead at one blow; his whole aspect was repulsive and terrible—there was no redeeming point about him—for even the apparent fortitude he assumed was mere bravado—meretricious courage—which the first week of the galleys would crush out of him as easily as one crushes the juice out of a ripe grape. He wore a nondescript costume of vari-colored linen, arranged in folds that would have been the admiration of an artist. It was gathered about him by means of a brilliant scarlet sash negligently tied. His brawny arms were bare to the shoulder—his vest was open, and displayed his strong brown throat and chest heaving with the pent-up anger and fear that raged within him. His dark grim figure was set off by a curious effect of color in the sky—a long wide band of crimson cloud, as though the sun-god had thrown down a goblet of ruby wine and left it to trickle along the smooth blue fairness of his palace floor—a deep after-glow, which burned redly on the olive-tinted eager faces of the multitude that were everywhere upturned in wonder and ill-judged admiration to the brutal black face of the notorious murderer and thief, whose name had for years been the terror of Sicily. I pressed through the crowd to obtain a nearer view, and as I did so a sudden savage movement of Neri's bound body caused the gendarmes to cross their swords in front of his eyes with a warning clash. The brigand laughed hoarsely.

“*Corpo di Cristo!*” he muttered—“think you a man tied hand and foot can run like a deer? I am trapped—I know it! But tell *him*,” and he indicated some person in the throng by a nod of his head, “tell him to come hither—I have a message for him.”

The gendarmes looked at one another, and then at the swaying crowd about them in perplexity—they did not understand.

Carmelo, without wasting more words upon them, raised himself as uprightly as he could in his strained and bound position, and called aloud:

“Luigi Biscardi! *Capitano!* Oh hè—you thought I could not see you! *Dio!* I should know you in hell! Come near—I have a parting word for you.”

At the sound of his strong harsh voice, a silence half of terror, half of awe, fell upon the chattering multitude. There was a sudden stir as the people made way for a young man to

pass through their ranks—a slight, tall, rather handsome fellow, with a pale face and cold, sneering eyes. He was dressed with fastidious care and neatness in the uniform of the *Bersagliere*—and he elbowed his way along with the easy audacity of a privileged dandy. He came close up to the brigand and spoke carelessly, with a slightly mocking smile playing round the corners of his mouth.

“*Ebbene!*” he said, “you are caught at last, Carmelo! You called me—here I am. What do you want with me, rascal?”

Neri uttered a ferocious curse between his teeth, and looked for an instant like a wild beast ready to spring.

“*You betrayed me,*” he said, in fierce yet smothered accents—“*you followed me—you hunted me down!* Teresa told me all. Yes—she belongs to you now—you have got your wish. Go and take her—she waits for you—make her speak and tell you how she loves you—*if you can!*”

Something jeering and withal threatening in the ruffian’s look evidently startled the young officer, for he exclaimed hastily:

“What do you mean, wretch? You have not—my God! you have not *killed* her?”

Carmelo broke into a loud savage laugh.

“She has killed herself!” he cried, exultingly. “Ha, ha! I thought you would wince at that! She snatched my knife and stabbed herself with it! Yes—rather than see your lying white face again—rather than feel your accursed touch! Find her—she lies dead and smiling up there in the mountains—and her last kiss was for *me*—for *me*—you understand! Now go! and may the devil curse you!”

Again the gendarmes clashed their swords suggestively—and the brigand resumed his sullen attitude of suppressed wrath and feigned indifference. But the man to whom he had spoken staggered and seemed about to fall—his pale face grew paler—he moved away through the curious open-eyed by-standers with the mechanical air of one who knows not whether he be alive or dead. He had evidently received an unexpected shock—a wound that pierced deeply and would be a long time healing.

I approached the nearest gendarme and slipped a five-franc piece into his hand.

“May one speak?” I asked, carelessly. The man hesitated.

“For one instant, signor. But be brief.”

I addressed the brigand in a low clear tone.

“Have you any message for one Andrea Luziani? I am a friend of his.”

He looked at me and a dark smile crossed his features.

“Andrea is a good soul. Tell him if you will that Teresa is dead. I am worse than dead. He will know that I did not kill Teresa. I could not! She had the knife in her breast before I could prevent her. It is better so.”

“She did that rather than become the property of another man?” I queried.

Carmelo Neri nodded in acquiescence. Either my sight deceived me, or else this abandoned villain had tears glittering in the depth of his wicked eyes.

The gendarme made me a sign, and I withdrew. Almost at the same moment the officer in command of the little detachment appeared, his spurs clinking with measured metallic music on the hard stones of the pavement—he sprung into his saddle and gave the word—the crowd dispersed to the right and left—the horses were put to a quick trot, and in a few moments the whole party with the bulky frowning form of the brigand in their midst had disappeared. The people broke up into little groups, talking excitedly of what had occurred, and scattered here and there, returning to their homes and occupations—and more swiftly than one could have imagined possible, the great square was left almost empty. I paced up and down for awhile thinking deeply; I had before my mind’s eye the picture of the slight fair Teresa as described by the Sicilian captain, lying dead in the solitudes of the Montemaggiore with that self-inflicted wound in her breast which had set her free of all men’s love and persecution. There *were* some women then who preferred death to infidelity? Strange! very strange! Common women of course they must be—such as this brigand’s mistress; your daintily-fed, silk-robed duchess would find a dagger somewhat a vulgar consoler—she would rather choose a lover, or, better still, a score of lovers. It is only brute ignorance that selects a grave instead of dishonor—modern education instructs us more wisely, and teaches us not to be over-squeamish about such a trifle as breaking a given word or promise. Blessed age of progress! Age of steady advancement when the apple of vice is so cunningly disguised and so prettily painted that we can actually set it on a porcelain dish and hand it about among our friends as a valuable and choice fruit of virtue—and no one finds out the fraud we are practicing, nay, we scarcely perceive it ourselves, it is such an excellent counterfeit!

As I walked to and fro, I found myself continually passing the head office of the Carabinieri, and, acting on a sudden impulse of curiosity, I at last entered the building, determined to

ask for a few particulars concerning the brigand's capture. I was received by a handsome and intelligent-looking man, who glanced at the card with which I presented myself, and saluted me with courteous affability.

"Oh, yes!" he said, in answer to my inquiries, "Neri has given us a great deal of trouble. But we had our suspicions that he had left Gaeta, where he was for a time in hiding. A few stray bits of information gleaned here and there put us on the right track."

"Was he caught easily, or did he show fight?"

"He gave himself up like a lamb, signor! It happened in this way. One of our men followed the woman who lived with Neri, one Teresa, and traced her up to a certain point, the corner of a narrow mountain pass—where she disappeared. He reported this, and thereupon we sent out an armed party. These crept at midnight two by two, till they were formed in a close ring round the place where Neri was judged to be. With the first beam of morning they rushed in upon him and took him prisoner. It appears that he showed no surprise—he merely said, 'I expected you!' He was found sitting by the dead body of his mistress; she was stabbed and newly bleeding. No doubt he killed her, though he swears the contrary—lies are as easy to him as breathing."

"But where were his comrades? I thought he commanded a large band?"

"So he did, signor; and we caught three of the principals only a fortnight ago, but of the others no trace can be found. I suppose Carmelo himself dismissed them and sent them far and wide through the country. At any rate, they are disbanded, and with these sort of fellows, where there is no union there is no danger."

"And Neri's sentence?" I asked.

"Oh, the galleys for life of course; there is no possible alternative."

I thanked my informant, and left the office. I was glad to have learned these few particulars, for the treasure I had discovered in my own family vault was now more mine than ever. There was not the remotest chance of any one of the Neri band venturing so close to Naples in search of it, and I thought with a grim smile that had the brigand chief himself known the story of my wrongs, he would most probably have rejoiced to think that his buried wealth was destined to aid me in carrying out so elaborate a plan of vengeance. All difficulties smoothed themselves before me—obstacles were taken out of my path—my way was made perfectly clear—each trifling in-

cident was a new finger-post pointing out the direct road that led me to the one desired end. God himself seemed on my side, as He is surely ever on the side of justice! Let not the unfaithful think that because they say long prayers or go regularly and devoutly to church with meek faces and piously folded hands, that the Eternal Wisdom is deceived thereby. My wife could pray—she could kneel like a lovely saint in the dim religious light of the sacred altars, her deep eyes upturned to the blameless, infinitely reproachful Christ—and look you! each word she uttered was a blasphemy, destined to come back upon herself as a curse. Prayer is dangerous for liars—it is like falling willfully on an upright naked sword. Used as an honorable weapon the sword defends—snatched up as the last resource of a coward it kills.

CHAPTER XI.

THE third week of September was drawing to its close when I returned to Naples. The weather had grown cooler, and favorable reports of the gradual decrease of the cholera began to gain ground with the suffering and terrified population. Business was resumed as usual, pleasure had again her votaries, and society whirled round once more in its giddy waltz as though it had never left off dancing. I arrived in the city somewhat early in the day, and had time to make some preliminary arrangements for my plan of action. I secured the most splendid suite of apartments in the best hotel, impressing the whole establishment with a vast idea of my wealth and importance. I casually mentioned to the landlord that I desired to purchase a carriage and horses—that I needed a first-class valet, and a few other trifles of the like sort, and added that I relied on his good advice and recommendation as to the places where I should best obtain all that I sought. Needless to say, he became my slave—never was monarch better served than I—the very waiters hustled each other in a race to attend upon me, and reports of my princely fortune, generosity, and lavish expenditure began to flit from mouth to mouth—which was the result I desired to obtain.

And now the evening of my first day in Naples came, and I, the supposed Conte Cesare Oliva, the envied and flattered noble, took the first step toward my vengeance. It was one of the loveliest evenings possible, even in that lovely land—a soft breeze blew in from the sea—the sky was pearl-like and pure as an opal, yet bright with delicate shifting clouds of crimson and pale mauve—small, fleecy flecks of radiance,