

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,



that looked like a shower of blossoms fallen from some far invisible flower-land. The waters of the bay were slightly ruffled by the wind, and curled into tender little dark-blue waves tipped with light fringes of foam. After my dinner I went out and took my way to a well-known and popular *café* which used to be a favorite haunt of mine in the days when I was known as Fabio Romani. Guido Ferrari was a constant *habitué* of the place, and I felt that I should find him there. The brilliant rose-white and gold saloons were crowded, and owing to the pleasant coolness of the air there were hundreds of little tables pushed far out into the street, at which groups of persons were seated, enjoying ices, wine, or coffee, and congratulating each other on the agreeable news of the steady decrease of the pestilence that had ravaged the city. I glanced covertly yet quickly round. Yes! I was not mistaken—there was my quondam friend, my traitorous foe, sitting at his ease, leaning comfortably back in one chair, his feet put up on another. He was smoking, and glancing, now and then, through the columns of the Paris "Figaro." He was dressed entirely in black—a hypocritical livery, the somber hue of which suited his fine complexion and perfectly handsome features to admiration. On the little finger of the shapely hand that every now and then was raised to adjust his cigar, sparkled a diamond that gave out a myriad scintillations as it flashed in the evening light—it was of exceptional size and brilliancy, and even at a distance I recognized it as my own property!

So!—a love-gift, signor, or an *in memoriam* of the dear and valued friend you have lost? I wondered—watching him in dark scorn the while—then recollecting myself, I sauntered slowly toward him, and perceiving a disengaged table next to his, I drew a chair to it and sat down. He looked at me indifferently over the top of his newspaper—but there was nothing specially attractive in the sight of a white-haired man wearing smoke-colored spectacles, and he resumed his perusal of the "Figaro" immediately. I rapped the end of my walking-cane on the table and summoned a waiter from whom I ordered coffee. I then lighted a cigar, and imitating Ferrari's easy posture, smoked also. Something in my attitude then appeared to strike him, for he laid down his paper and again looked at me, this time with more interest and something of uneasiness. "*Ca commence, mon ami!*" I thought, but I turned my head slightly aside and feigned to be absorbed in the view. My coffee was brought—I paid for it and tossed the waiter an unusually large gratuity—he naturally found it incumbent upon him to polish my table with extra zeal, and to

secure all the newspapers, pictorial or otherwise, that were lying about, for the purpose of obsequiously depositing them in a heap at my right hand. I addressed this amiable *garçon* in the harsh and deliberate accents of my carefully disguised voice.

"By the way, I suppose you know Naples well?"

"*Oh, si, signor!*"

"*Ebbene*, can you tell me the way to the house of one Count Fabio Romani, a wealthy nobleman of this city?"

Ha! a good hit this time! Though apparently not looking at him I saw Ferrari start as though he had been stung, and then compose himself in his seat with an air of attention. The waiter meanwhile, in answer to my question, raised his hands, eyes, and shoulders all together with a shrug expressive of resigned melancholy.

"*Ah, gran Dio! è morto!*"

"Dead!" I exclaimed, with a pretended start of shocked surprise. "So young? Impossible!"

"Eh! what will you, signor? It was *la pesta*; there was no remedy. *La pesta* cares nothing for youth or age, and spares neither rich nor poor."

For a moment I leaned my head on my hand, affecting to be overcome by the suddenness of the news. Then looking up, I said, regretfully:

"Alas! I am too late! I was a friend of his father's. I have been away for many years, and I had a great wish to meet the young Romani, whom I last saw as a child. Are there any relations of his living—was he married?"

The waiter, whose countenance had assumed a fitting lugubriousness in accordance with what he imagined were my feelings, brightened up immediately as he replied eagerly:

"*Oh, si, signor!* The Contessa Romani lives up at the villa, though I believe she receives no one since her husband's death. She is young and beautiful as an angel. There is a little child too."

A hasty movement on the part of Ferrari caused me to turn my eyes, or rather my spectacles, in his direction. He leaned forward, and raising his hat with the old courteous grace I knew so well, said politely:

"Pardon me, signor, for interrupting you! I knew the late young Count Romani well—perhaps better than any man in Naples. I shall be delighted to afford you any information you may seek concerning him."

Oh, the old mellow music of his voice—how it struck on my heart and pierced it like the refrain of a familiar song loved in



the days of our youth. For an instant I could not speak—wrath and sorrow choked my utterance. Fortunately this feeling was but momentary—slowly I raised my hat in response to his salutation, and answered stiffly:

"I am your servant, signor. You will oblige me indeed if you can place me in communication with the relatives of this unfortunate young nobleman. The elder Count Romani was dearer to me than a brother—men have such attachments occasionally. Permit me to introduce myself," and I handed him my visiting-card with a slight and formal bow. He accepted it, and as he read the name it bore he gave me a quick glance of respect mingled with pleased surprise.

"The Conte Cesare Oliva!" he exclaimed. "I esteem myself most fortunate to have met you! Your arrival has already been notified to us by the *avant-courier* of the fashionable intelligence, so that we are well aware," here laughing lightly, "of the distinctive right you have to a hearty welcome in Naples. I am only sorry that any distressing news should have darkened the occasion of your return here after so long an absence. Permit me to express the hope that it may at least be the only cloud for you on our southern sunshine!"

And he extended his hand with that ready frankness and *bonhomie* which are always a part of the Italian temperament, and were especially so of his. A cold shudder ran through my veins. God! could I take his hand in mine? I must—if I would act my part thoroughly—for should I refuse he would think it strange—even rude—I should lose the game by one false move. With a forced smile I hesitatingly held out my hand also—it was gloved, yet as he clasped it heartily in his own the warm pressure burned through the glove like fire. I could have cried out in agony, so excruciating was the mental torture which I endured at that moment. But it passed, the ordeal was over, and I knew that from henceforth I should be able to shake hands with him as often and as indifferently as with any other man. It was only this *first* time that it galled me to the quick. Ferrari noticed nothing of my emotion—he was in excellent spirits, and turning to the waiter, who had lingered to watch us make each other's acquaintance, he exclaimed:

"More coffee, *garçon*, and a couple of *glorias*." Then looking toward me, "You do not object to a *gloria*, conte? No? That is well. And here is *my* card," taking one from his pocket and laying it on the table. "Guido Ferrari, at your service, an artist, and a very poor one. We shall celebrate our meeting by drinking each other's health!"

I bowed. The waiter vanished to execute his orders, and Ferrari drew his chair close to mine.

"I see you smoke," he said, gayly. "Can I offer you one of my cigars? They are unusually choice. Permit me," and he proffered me a richly embossed and emblazoned silver cigar-case, with the Romani arms and coronet and *my own initials* engraved thereon. It was mine, of course—I took it with a sensation of grim amusement—I had not seen it since the day I died!

"A fine antique," I remarked, carelessly, turning it over and over in my hand, "curious and valuable. A gift or an heir-loom?"

"It belonged to my late friend, Count Fabio," he answered, puffing a light cloud of smoke in the air as he drew his cigar from his lips to speak. "It was found in his pocket by the priest who saw him die. That and other trifles which he wore on his person were delivered to his wife, and——"

"She naturally gave *you* the cigar-case as a memento of your friend," I said, interrupting him.

"Just so. You have guessed it exactly. Thanks," and he took the case from me as I returned it to him with a frank smile.

"Is the Countess Romani young?" I forced myself to inquire.

"Young and beautiful as a midsummer morning!" replied Ferrari, with enthusiasm. "I doubt if sunlight ever fell on a more enchanting woman! If you were a young man, conte, I should be silent regarding her charms—but your white hairs inspire one with confidence. I assure you solemnly, though Fabio was my friend, and an excellent fellow in his way, he was never worthy of the woman he married!"

"Indeed!" I said, coldly, as this dagger-thrust struck home to my heart. "I only knew him when he was quite a boy. He seemed to me then of a warm and loving temperament, generous to a fault, perhaps over-credulous; yet he promised well. His father thought so; I confess I thought so too. Reports have reached me from time to time of the care with which he managed the immense fortune left to him. He gave large sums away in charity, did he not? and was he not a lover of books and simple pleasures?"

"Oh, I grant you all that!" returned Ferrari, with some impatience. "He was the most moral man in immoral Naples, if you care for that sort of thing. Studious—philosophic—*parfait gentilhomme*—proud as the devil, virtuous, unsuspecting, and—withal—a fool!"



My temper rose dangerously—but I controlled it, and remembering my part in the drama I had constructed, I broke into violent, harsh laughter.

"Bravo!" I exclaimed. "One can easily see what a first-rate young fellow *you* are! You have no liking for moral men—ha, ha! excellent! I agree with you. A virtuous man and a fool are synonyms nowadays. Yes—I have lived long enough to know that! And here is our coffee—behold also the *glorias*! I drink your health with pleasure, Signor Ferrari—you and I must be friends!"

For one moment he seemed startled by my sudden outburst of mirth—the next, he laughed heartily himself, and as the waiter appeared with the coffee and cognac, inspired by the occasion, he made an equivocal, slightly indelicate joke concerning the personal charms of a certain Antoinetta whom the *garçon* was supposed to favor with an eye to matrimony. The fellow grinned, in nowise offended—and pocketing fresh gratuities from both Ferrari and myself, departed on new errands for other customers, apparently in high good humor with himself, Antoinetta, and the world in general. Resuming the interrupted conversation, I said:

"And this poor weak-minded Romani—was his death sudden?"

"Remarkably so," answered Ferrari, leaning back in his chair, and turning his handsome flushed face up to the sky where the stars were beginning to twinkle out one by one. "It appears from all accounts that he rose early and went out for a walk on one of those insufferably hot August mornings, and at the furthest limit of the villa grounds he came upon a fruit-seller dying of cholera. Of course, with his quixotic ideas, he must needs stay and talk to the boy, and then run like a madman through the heat into Naples, to find a doctor for him. Instead of a physician he met a priest, and he was taking this priest to the assistance of the fruit-seller (who by the by died in the meantime and was past all caring for) when he himself was struck down by the plague. He was carried then and there to a common inn, where in about five hours he died—all the time shrieking curses on any one who should dare to take him alive or dead inside his own house. He showed good sense in that at least—naturally he was anxious not to bring the contagion to his wife and child."

"Is the child a boy or a girl?" I asked, carelessly.

"A girl. A mere baby—an uninteresting, old-fashioned little thing, very like her father."

My poor little Stella!

Every pulse of my being thrilled with indignation at the indifferently chill way in which he, the man who had fondled her and pretended to love her, now spoke of the child. She was, as far as he knew, fatherless; he, no doubt, had good reason to suspect that her mother cared little for her, and I saw plainly that she was, or soon would be, a slighted and friendless thing in the household. But I made no remark—I sipped my cognac with an abstracted air for a few seconds—then I asked:

"How was the count buried? Your narrative interests me greatly."

"Oh, the priest who was with him saw to his burial, and, I believe, was able to administer the last sacraments. At any rate, he had him laid with all proper respect in his family vault—I myself was present at the funeral."

I started involuntarily, but quickly repressed myself.

"*You* were present—*you—you—*" and my voice almost failed me.

Ferrari raised his eyebrows with a look of surprised inquiry.

"Of course! You are astonished at that? But perhaps you do not understand. I was the count's very closest friend, closer than a brother, I may say. It was natural, even necessary, that I should attend his body to its last resting place."

By this time I had recovered myself.

"I see—I see!" I muttered, hastily. "Pray excuse me—my age renders me nervous of disease in any form, and I should have thought the fear of contagion might have weighed with you."

"With *me*!" and he laughed lightly. "I was never ill in my life, and I have no dread whatever of cholera. I suppose I ran some risk, though I never thought about it at the time—but the priest—one of the Benedictine order—died the very next day."

"Shocking!" I murmured over my coffee-cup. "Very shocking. And you actually entertained no alarm for yourself?"

"None in the least. To tell you the truth, I am armed against contagious illnesses, by a conviction I have that I am not doomed to die of any disease. A prophecy"—and here a cloud crossed his features—"an odd prophecy was made about me when I was born, which, whether it comes true or not, prevents me from panic in days of plague."

"Indeed!" I said, with interest, for this was news to me. "And may one ask what this prophecy is?"

"Oh, certainly. It is to the effect that I shall die a violent death by the hand of a once familiar friend. It was always an



absurd statement—an old nurse's tale—but it is now more absurd than ever, considering that the only friend of the kind I ever had or am likely to have is dead and buried—namely, Fabio Romani."

And he sighed slightly. I raised my head and looked at him steadily.

## CHAPTER XII.

THE sheltering darkness of the spectacles I wore prevented him from noticing the searching scrutiny of my fixed gaze. His face was shadowed by a faint tinge of melancholy; his eyes were thoughtful and almost sad.

"You loved him well then, in spite of his foolishness?" I said.

He roused himself from the pensive mood into which he had fallen, and smiled.

"Loved him? No! Certainly not—nothing so strong as that! I liked him fairly—he bought several pictures of me—a poor artist has always some sort of regard for the man who buys his work. Yes, I liked him well enough—till he married."

"Ha! I suppose his wife came between you?" He flushed slightly, and drank off the remainder of his cognac in haste.

"Yes," he replied, briefly, "she came between us. A man is never quite the same after marriage. But we have been sitting a long time here—shall we walk?"

He was evidently anxious to change the subject. I rose slowly as though my joints were stiff with age, and drew out my watch, a finely jeweled one, to see the time. It was past nine o'clock.

"Perhaps," I said, addressing him, "you will accompany me as far as my hotel. I am compelled to retire early as a rule—I suffer much from a chronic complaint of the eyes as you perceive," here touching my spectacles, "and I cannot endure much artificial light. We can talk further on our way. Will you give me a chance of seeing your pictures? I shall esteem myself happy to be one of your patrons."

"A thousand thanks!" he answered, gayly, "I will show you my poor attempts with pleasure. Should you find anything among them to gratify your taste, I shall of course be honored. But, thank Heaven! I am not as greedy of patronage as I used to be—in fact, I intend resigning the profession altogether in about six months or so."

"Indeed! Are you coming into a fortune?" I asked, carelessly.

"Well—not exactly," he answered, lightly. "I am going to marry one—that is almost the same thing, is it not?"

"Precisely! I congratulate you!" I said, in a studiously indifferent and slightly bored tone, though my heart pulsed fiercely with the torrent of wrath pent up within it. I understood his meaning well. In six months he proposed marrying my wife. Six months was the shortest possible interval that could be observed, according to social etiquette, between the death of one husband and the wedding of another, and even that was so short as to be barely decent. Six months—yet in that space of time much might happen—things undreamed of and undesired—slow tortures carefully measured out, punishment sudden and heavy? Wrapped in these somber musings I walked beside him in profound silence. The moon shone brilliantly; groups of girls danced on the shore with their lovers, to the sound of a flute and mandolin!—far off across the bay the sound of sweet and plaintive singing floated, from some boat in the distance, to our ears—the evening breathed of beauty, peace, and love. But I—my fingers quivered with restrained longing to be at the throat of the graceful liar who sauntered so easily and confidently beside me. Ah, Heaven, if he only knew! If he could have realized the truth, would his face have worn quite so careless a smile—would his manner have been quite so free and dauntless? Stealthily I glanced at him; he was humming a tune softly under his breath, but feeling instinctively, I suppose, that my eyes were upon him, he interrupted the melody and turned to me, with the question:

"You have traveled far and seen much, conte?"

"I have."

"And in what country have you found the most beautiful women?"

"Pardon me, young sir," I answered, coldly, "the business of life has separated me almost entirely from feminine society. I have devoted myself exclusively to the amassing of wealth, understanding thoroughly that gold is the key to all things, even to woman's love; if I desired that latter commodity, which I do not. I fear that I scarcely know a fair face from a plain one—I never was attracted by women, and now at my age, with my settled habits, I am not likely to alter my opinion concerning them—and I frankly confess those opinions are the reverse of favorable."

Ferrari laughed. "You remind me of Fabio!" he said.



"He used to talk in that strain before he was married—though he was young and had none of the experiences which may have made you cynical, conte! But he altered his ideas very rapidly—and no wonder!"

"Is his wife so very lovely then?" I asked.

"Very! Delicately, daintily beautiful. But no doubt you will see her for yourself—as a friend of her late husband's father, you will call upon her, will you not?"

"Why should I?" I said, gruffly—"I have no wish to meet her! Besides, an inconsolable widow seldom cares to receive visitors—I shall not intrude upon her sorrows!"

Never was there a better move than this show of utter indifference I affected. The less I appeared to care about seeing the Countess Romani, the more anxious Ferrari was to introduce me—(introduce me!—to my wife!)—and he set to work preparing his own doom with assiduous ardor.

"Oh, but you must see her!" he exclaimed, eagerly. "She will receive you, I am sure, as a special guest. Your age and your former acquaintance with her late husband's family will win from her the utmost courtesy, believe me! Besides, she is not really inconsolable——" He paused suddenly. We had arrived at the entrance of my hotel. I looked at him steadily.

"Not really inconsolable?" I repeated, in a tone of inquiry. Ferrari broke into a forced laugh.

"Why, no!" he said. "What would you? She is young and light-hearted—perfectly lovely and in the fullness of youth and health. One cannot expect her to weep long, especially for a man she did not care for."

I ascended the hotel steps. "Pray come in!" I said, with an inviting movement of my hand. "You must take a glass of wine before you leave. And so—she did not care for him, you say?"

Encouraged by my friendly invitation and manner, Ferrari became more at his ease than ever, and hooking his arm through mine as we crossed the broad passage of the hotel together, he replied, in a confidential tone:

"My dear conte, how *can* a woman love a man who is forced upon her by her father for the sake of the money he gives her? As I told you before, my late friend was utterly insensible to the beauty of his wife—he was cold as a stone, and preferred his books. Then naturally she had no love for him!"

By this time we had reached my apartments, and as I threw open the door, I saw that Ferrari was taking in with a critical eye the costly fittings and luxurious furniture. In answer to this last remark, I said, with a chilly smile:

"And as I told you before, my dear Signor Ferrari, I know nothing whatever about women, and care less than nothing for their loves or hatreds! I have always thought of them more or less as playful kittens, who purr when they are stroked the right way, and scream and scratch when their tails are trodden on. Try this Montepulciano!"

He accepted the glass I proffered him, and tasted the wine with the air of a connoisseur.

"Exquisite!" he murmured, sipping it lazily. "You are lodged *en prince* here, conte! I envy you!"

"You need not," I answered. "You have youth and health, and—as you have hinted to me—love; all these things are better than wealth, so people say. At any rate, youth and health are good things—love I have no belief in. As for me, I am a mere luxurious animal, loving comfort and ease beyond anything. I have had many trials—I now take my rest in my own fashion."

"A very excellent and sensible fashion!" smiled Ferrari, leaning his head easily back on the satin cushions of the easy-chair into which he had thrown himself.

"Do you know, conte, now I look at you well, I think you must have been very handsome when you were young! You have a superb figure!"

I bowed stiffly. "You flatter me, signor! I believe I never was especially hideous—but looks in a man always rank second to strength, and of strength I have plenty yet remaining."

"I do not doubt it," he returned, still regarding me attentively with an expression in which there was the faintest shadow of uneasiness.

"It is an odd coincidence, you will say, but I find a most extraordinary resemblance in the height and carriage of your figure to that of my late friend Romani."

I poured some wine out for myself with a steady hand, and drank it.

"Really?" "I answered. I am glad that I remind you of him—if the reminder is agreeable! But all tall men are much alike so far as figure goes, providing they are well made."

Ferrari's brow was contracted in a musing frown, and he answered not. He still looked at me, and I returned his look without embarrassment. Finally he roused himself, smiled, and finished drinking his glass of Montepulciano. Then he rose to go.

"You will permit me to mention your name to the Countess Romani, I hope?" he said, cordially. "I am certain she will receive you, should you desire it."



I feigned a sort of vexation, and made an abrupt movement of impatience.

"The fact is," I said, at last, "I very much dislike talking to women. They are always illogical, and their frivolity wearies me. But you have been so friendly that I will give you a message for the countess—if you have no objection to deliver it. I should be sorry to trouble you unnecessarily—and you perhaps will not have an opportunity of seeing her for some days?"

He colored slightly and moved uneasily. Then with a kind of effort, he replied:

"On the contrary, I am going to see her this very evening. I assure you it will be a pleasure to me to convey to her any greeting you may desire to send."

"Oh, it is no greeting," I continued, calmly, noting the various signs of embarrassment in his manner with a careful eye. "It is a mere message, which, however, may enable you to understand why I was anxious to see the young man who is dead. In my very early manhood the elder Count Romani did me an inestimable service. I never forgot his kindness—my memory is extraordinarily tenacious of both benefits and injuries—and I have always desired to repay it in some suitable manner. I have with me a few jewels of almost priceless value—I have myself collected them, and I reserved them as a present to the son of my old friend, simply as a trifling souvenir or expression of gratitude for past favors received from his family. His sudden death has deprived me of the pleasure of fulfilling this intention—but as the jewels are quite useless to me, I am perfectly willing to hand them over to the Countess Romani, should she care to have them. They would have been hers had her husband lived—they should be hers now. If you, signor, will report these facts to her and learn her wishes with respect to the matter, I shall be much indebted to you."

"I shall be delighted to obey you," replied Ferrari, courteously, rising at the same time to take his leave. "I am proud to be the bearer of so pleasing an errand. Beautiful women love jewels, and who shall blame them? Bright eyes and diamonds go well together! *A rivederci*, Signor Conte! I trust we shall meet often."

"I have no doubt we shall," I answered, quietly.

He shook hands cordially—I responded to his farewell salutations with the brief coldness which was now my habitual manner, and we parted. From the window of my saloon I could see him sauntering easily down the hotel steps and from thence

along the street. How I cursed him as he stepped jauntily on—how I hated his debonair grace and easy manner! I watched the even poise of his handsome head and shoulders, I noted the assured tread, the air of conscious vanity—the whole demeanor of the man bespoke his perfect self-satisfaction and his absolute confidence in the brightness of the future that awaited him when that stipulated six months of pretended mourning for my untimely death should have expired. Once, as he walked on his way, he turned and paused—looking back—he raised his hat to enjoy the coolness of the breeze on his forehead and hair. The light of the moon fell full on his features and showed them in profile, like a finely cut cameo against the dense dark-blue background of the evening sky. I gazed at him with a sort of grim fascination—the fascination of a hunter for the stag when it stands at bay, just before he draws his knife across its throat. He was in my power—he had deliberately thrown himself in the trap I had set for him. He lay at the mercy of one in whom there was no mercy. He had said and done nothing to deter me from my settled plans. Had he shown the least tenderness of recollection for me as Fabio Romani, his friend and benefactor—had he hallowed my memory by one generous word—had he expressed one regret for my loss—I might have hesitated, I might have somewhat changed my course of action so that punishment should have fallen more lightly on him than on her. For I knew well enough that she, my wife, was the worse sinner of the two. Had *she* chosen to respect herself, not all the forbidden love in the world could have touched her honor. Therefore, the least sign of compunction or affection from Ferrari for me, his supposed dead friend, would have turned the scale in his favor, and in spite of his treachery, remembering how *she* must have encouraged him, I would at least have spared him torture. But no sign had been given, no word had been spoken, there was no need for hesitation or pity, and I was glad of it! All this I thought as I watched him standing bare-headed in the moonlight, on his way to—whom? To my wife, of course. I knew that well enough. He was going to console her widow's tears—to soothe her aching heart—a good Samaritan in very earnest! He moved, he passed slowly out of my sight. I waited till I had seen the last glimpse of his retreating figure, and then I left the window, satisfied with my day's work. Vengeance had begun.