

not do! It will bring the proud to their knees, it will force the obstinate to servile compliance, it will conquer aversion and prejudice. The world is a slave to its yellow glitter, and the love of woman, that perishable article of commerce, is ever at its command. Would you obtain a kiss from a pair of ripened lips that seem the very abode of honeyed sweetness? Pay for it then with a lustrous diamond; the larger the gem the longer the kiss! The more diamonds you give, the more caresses you will get. The *jeunesse dorée* who ruin themselves and their ancestral homes for the sake of the newest and prettiest female puppet on the stage know this well enough. I smiled bitterly as I thought of the languid, witching look my wife had given me when she said, "You do not seem to be old!" I knew the meaning of her eyes; I had not studied their liquid lights and shadows so long for nothing. My road to revenge was a straight and perfectly smooth line—almost too smooth. I could have wished for some difficulty, some obstruction; but there was none—absolutely none. The traitors walked deliberately into the trap set for them. Over and over again I asked myself quietly and in cold blood—was there any reason why I should have pity on them? Had they shown one redeeming point in their characters? Was there any nobleness, any honesty, any real sterling good quality, in either of them to justify my consideration? And always the answer came, *No!* Hollow to the heart's core, hypocrites both, liars both—even the guilty passion they cherished for one another had no real earnestness in it save the pursuit of present pleasure; for *she*, Nina, in that fatal interview in the avenue where I had been a tortured listener, had hinted at the possibility of tiring of her lover, and *he* had frankly declared to me that very day that it was absurd to suppose a man could be true to one woman all his life. In brief, they deserved their approaching fate. Such men as Guido and such women as my wife are, I know, common enough in all classes of society, but they are not the less pernicious animals, meriting extermination as much, if not more, than the less harmful beasts of prey. The poor beasts at any rate tell no lies, and after death their skins are of some value; but who shall measure the mischief done by a false tongue—and of what use is the corpse of a liar save to infect the air with pestilence? I used to wonder at the superiority of men over the rest of the animal creation, but I see now that it is chiefly gained by excess of selfish cunning. The bulky, good-natured, ignorant lion who has only one honest way of defending himself, namely, with tooth and claw, is no match for the jumping two-legged little rascal who hides him-

self behind a bush and fires a gun aimed direct at the bigger brute's heart. Yet the lion's mode of battle is the braver of the two, and the cannons, torpedoes, and other implements of modern warfare are proofs of man's cowardice and cruelty as much as they are of his diabolical ingenuity. Calmly comparing the ordinary lives of men and beasts—judging them by their abstract virtues merely—I am inclined to think the beasts the more respectable of the two!

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 CHAPTER XV.

"WELCOME to Villa Romani!"

The words fell strangely on my ears. Was I dreaming, or was I actually standing on the smooth green lawn of my own garden, mechanically saluting my own wife, who, smiling sweetly, uttered this cordial greeting? For a moment or two my brain became confused; the familiar veranda with its clustering roses and jasmine swayed unsteadily before my eyes; the stately house, the home of my childhood, the scene of my past happiness, rocked in the air as though it were about to fall. A choking sensation affected my throat. Even the sternest men shed tears sometimes. Such tears too! wrung like drops of blood from the heart. And I—I could have wept thus. Oh, the dear old home! and how fair and yet how sad it seemed to my anguished gaze! It should have been in ruins surely—broken and cast down in the dust like its master's peace and honor. Its master, did I say? Who was its master? Involuntarily I glanced at Ferrari, who stood beside me. Not he—not he; by Heaven he should never be master! But where was *my* authority? I came to the place as a stranger and an alien. The starving beggar who knows not where to lay his head has no emptier or more desolate heart than I had as I looked wistfully on the home which was mine before I died! I noticed some slight changes here and there; for instance, my deep easy-chair that had always occupied one particular corner of the veranda was gone; a little tame bird that I had loved, whose cage used to hang up among the white roses on the wall, was also gone. My old butler, the servant who admitted Ferrari and myself within the gates, had an expression of weariness and injury on his aged features which he had not worn in my time, and which I was sorry to see. And my dog, the noble black Scotch colly, what had become of him, I wondered? He had been presented to me by a young Highlander who had passed one winter with me in Rome, and who, on returning to

his native mountains, had sent me the dog, a perfect specimen of its kind, as a souvenir of our friendly intercourse. Poor Wyvis! I thought. Had they made away with him? Formerly he had always been visible about the house or garden; his favorite place was on the lowest veranda step, where he loved to bask in the heat of the sun. And now he was nowhere visible. I was mutely indignant at his disappearance, but I kept strict watch over my feelings and remembered in time the part I had to play.

"Welcome to Villa Romani!" so said my wife. Then, remarking my silence as I looked about me, she added, with a pretty coaxing air:

"I am afraid after all you are sorry you have come to see me!"

I smiled. It served my purpose now to be as gallant and agreeable as I could; therefore I answered:

"Sorry, madame? If I were, then should I be the most ungrateful of all men! Was Dante sorry, think you, when he was permitted to behold Paradise?"

She blushed; her eyes drooped softly under their long curling lashes. Ferrari frowned impatiently—but was silent. She led the way into the house—into the lofty cool drawing-room, whose wide windows opened out to the garden. Here all was the same as ever with the exception of one thing—a marble bust of myself as a boy had been removed. The grand piano was open, the mandolin lay on a side-table, looking as though it had been recently used; there were fresh flowers and ferns in all the tall Venetian glass vases. I seated myself and remarked on the beauty of the house and its surroundings.

"I remember it very well," I added, quietly.

"You remember it!" exclaimed Ferrari, quickly, as though surprised.

"Certainly. I omitted to tell you, my friend, that I used to visit this spot often when a boy. The elder Conte Romani and myself played about these grounds together. The scene is quite familiar to me."

Nina listened with an appearance of interest.

"Did you ever see my late husband?" she asked.

"Once," I answered her, gravely. "He was a mere child at the time, and, as far as I could discern, a very promising one. His father seemed greatly attached to him. I knew his mother also."

"Indeed," she exclaimed, settling herself on a low ottoman and fixing her eyes upon me; "what was she like?"

I paused a moment before replying. Could I speak of that

unsustained sacred life of wifehood and motherhood to this polluted though lovely creature?

"She was a beautiful woman unconscious of her beauty," I answered at last. "There, all is said. Her sole aim seemed to be to forget herself in making others happy, and to surround her home with an atmosphere of goodness and virtue. She died young."

Ferrari glanced at me with an evil sneer in his eyes.

"That was fortunate," he said. "She had no time to tire of her husband, else—who knows?"

My blood rose rapidly to an astonishing heat, but I controlled myself.

"I do not understand you," I said, with marked frigidity. "The lady I speak of lived and died under the old *régime* of *noblesse oblige*. I am not so well versed in modern social forms of morality as yourself."

Nina hastily interposed. "Oh, my dear conte," she said, laughingly, "pay no attention to Signor Ferrari! He is rash sometimes, and says very foolish things, but he really does not mean them. It is only his way! My poor dear husband used to be quite vexed with him sometimes, though he *was* so fond of him. But, conte, as you know so much about the family, I am sure you will like to see my little Stella. Shall I send for her, or are you bored by children?"

"On the contrary, madame, I am fond of them," I answered, with forced composure, though my heart throbbled with mingled delight and agony at the thought of seeing my little one again. "And the child of my old friend's son must needs have a double interest for me."

My wife rang the bell, and gave orders to the maid who answered it to send her little girl to her at once. Ferrari meanwhile engaged me in conversation, and strove, I could see, by entire deference to my opinions, to make up for any offense his previous remark might have given. A few moments passed—and then the handle of the drawing-room door was timidly turned by an evidently faltering and unpracticed hand. Nina called out impatiently—"Come in, baby! Do not be afraid—come in!" With that the door slowly opened and my little daughter entered. Though I had been so short a time absent from her it was easy to see the child had changed very much. Her face looked pinched and woe-begone, its expression was one of fear and distrust. The laughter had faded out of her young eyes, and was replaced by a serious look of pained resignation that was pitiful to see in one of her tender years. Her mouth drooped plaintively at the corners—her whole demeanor

had an appealing anxiety in it that spoke plainly to my soul and enlightened me as to the way she had evidently been forgotten and neglected. She approached us hesitatingly, but stopped half-way and looked doubtfully at Ferrari. He met her alarmed gaze with a mocking smile.

"Come along, Stella!" he said. "You need not be frightened! I will not scold you unless you are naughty. Silly child! you look as if I were the giant in the fairy tale, going to eat you up for dinner. Come and speak to this gentleman—he knew your papa."

At this word her eyes brightened, her small steps grew more assured and steady—she advanced and put her tiny hand in mine. The touch of the soft, uncertain little fingers almost unmanned me. I drew her toward me and lifted her on my knee. Under pretense of kissing her I hid my face for a second or two in her clustering fair curls, while I forced back the womanish tears that involuntarily filled my eyes. My poor little darling! I wonder now how I maintained my set composure before the innocent thoughtfulness of her gravely questioning gaze! I had fancied she might possibly be scared by the black spectacles I wore—children are frightened by such things sometimes—but *she* was not. No; she sat on my knee with an air of perfect satisfaction, though she looked at me so earnestly as almost to disturb my self-possession. Nina and Ferrari watched her with some amusement, but she paid no heed to them—she persisted in staring at me. Suddenly a slow sweet smile—the tranquil smile of a contented baby, dawned all over her face; she extended her little arms, and, of her own accord, put up her lips to kiss me! Half startled at this manifestation of affection, I hurriedly caught her to my heart and returned her caress, then I looked furtively at my wife and Guido. Had they any suspicion? No! why should they have any? Had not Ferrari himself seen me *buried*? Reassured by this thought I addressed myself to Stella, making my voice as gratingly harsh as I could, for I dreaded the child's quick instinct.

"You are a very charming little lady!" I said, playfully. "And so your name is Stella? That is because you are a little star, I suppose?"

She became meditative. "Papa said I was," she answered, softly and shyly.

"Papa spoiled you!" interposed Nina, pressing a filmy black-bordered handkerchief to her eyes. "Poor papa! You were not so naughty to him as you are to me."

The child's lip quivered, but she was silent.

"Oh, fy!" I murmured, half chidingly. "Are you ever naughty? Surely not! All little stars are good—they never cry—they are always bright and calm."

Still she remained mute—a sigh, deep enough for an older sufferer, heaved her tiny breast. She leaned her head against my arm and raised her eyes appealingly.

"Have you seen my papa?" she asked, timidly. "Will he come back soon?"

For a moment I did not answer her. Ferrari took it upon himself to reply roughly.

"Don't talk nonsense, baby! You know your papa has gone away—you were too naughty for him, and he will never come back again. He has gone to a place where there are no tiresome little girls to tease him."

Thoughtless and cruel words! I at once understood the secret grief that weighed on the child's mind. Whenever she was fretful or petulant, they evidently impressed it upon her that her father had left her because of her naughtiness. She had taken this deeply to heart; no doubt she had brooded upon it in her own vague childish fashion, and had puzzled her little brain as to what she could possibly have done to displease her father so greatly that he had actually gone away never to return. Whatever her thoughts were, she did not on this occasion give vent to them by tears or words. She only turned her eyes on Ferrari with a look of intense pride and scorn, strange to see in so little a creature—a true Romani look, such as I had often noticed in my father's eyes, and such as I knew must be frequently visible in my own. Ferrari saw it, and burst out laughing loudly.

"There!" he exclaimed. "Like that she exactly resembles her father! It is positively ludicrous! Fabio, all over! She only wants one thing to make the portrait perfect." And approaching her, he snatched one of her long curls and endeavored to twist it over her mouth in the form of a moustache. The child struggled angrily, and hid her face against my coat. The more she tried to defend herself the greater the malice with which Ferrari tormented her. Her mother did not interfere—she only laughed. I held the little thing closely sheltered in my embrace, and steadying down the quiver of indignation in my voice, I said with quiet firmness:

"Fair play, signor! Fair play! Strength becomes mere bullying when it is employed against absolute weakness."

Ferrari laughed again, but this time uneasily, and ceasing his monkeyish pranks, walked to the window. Smoothing Stella's tumbled hair, I added with a sarcastic smile:

"This little *donzella* will have her revenge when she grows up. Recollecting how one man teased her in childhood, she, in return, will consider herself justified in teasing all men. Do you not agree with me, madame?" I said, turning to my wife, who gave me a sweetly coquettish look as she answered:

"Well, really, conte, I do not know! For with the remembrance of one man who teased her, must come also the thought of another who was kind to her—yourself—she will find it difficult to decide the *juste milieu*."

A subtle compliment was meant to be conveyed in these words. I acknowledged it by a silent gesture of admiration, which she quickly understood and accepted. Was ever a man in the position of being delicately flattered by his own wife before? I think not! Generally married persons are like candid friends—fond of telling each other very unpleasant truths, and altogether avoiding the least *souçon* of flattery. Though I was not so much flattered as amused—considering the position of affairs! Just then a servant threw open the door and announced dinner. I set my child very gently down from my knee and whisperingly told her that I would come and see her soon again. She smiled trustfully, and then in obedience to her mother's imperative gesture, slipped quietly out of the room. As soon as she had gone I praised her beauty warmly, for she was really a lovely little thing—but I could see my admiration of her was not very acceptable to either my wife or her lover. We all went in to dinner—I, as guest, having the privilege of escorting my fair and spotless spouse! On our reaching the dining-room Nina said—

"You are such an old friend of the family, conte, that perhaps you will not mind sitting at the head of the table?"

"*Tropp' onore, signora!*" I answered, bowing gallantly, as I at once resumed my rightful place at my own table, Ferrari placing himself on my right hand, Nina on my left. The butler, my father's servant and mine, stood as of old behind my chair, and I noticed that each time he supplied me with wine he eyed me with a certain timid curiosity—but I knew I had a singular and conspicuous appearance, which easily accounted for his inquisitiveness. Opposite to where I sat, hung my father's portrait—the character I personated permitted me to look at it fixedly and give full vent to the deep sigh which in very earnest broke from my heart. The eyes of the picture seemed to gaze into mine with a sorrowful compassion—almost I fancied the firm-set lips trembled and moved to echo my sigh.

"Is that a good likeness?" Ferrari asked, suddenly.

I started, and recollecting myself, answered:

"Excellent! So true a resemblance that it arouses a long train of memories in my mind—memories both bitter and sweet. Ah! what a proud fellow he was!"

"Fabio was also very proud," chimed in my wife's sweet voice. "Very cold and haughty."

Little liar! How dared she utter this libel on my memory! Haughty, I might have been to others, but never to her—and coldness was no part of my nature. Would that it were! Would that I had been a pillar of ice, incapable of thawing in the sunlight of her witching smile! Had she forgotten what a slave I was to her? what a poor, adoring, passionate fool I became under the influence of her hypocritical caresses I thought this to myself, but I answered aloud:

"Indeed! I am surprised to hear that. The Romani hauteur had ever to my mind something genial and yielding about it—I know my friend was always most gentle to his dependents."

The butler here coughed apologetically behind his hand—an old trick of his, and one which signified his intense desire to speak.

Ferrari laughed, as he held out his glass for more wine.

"Here is old Giacomo," he said, nodding to him lightly. "He remembers both the Romanis—ask him *his* opinion of Fabio—he worshiped his master."

I turned to my servant, and with a benignant air addressed him:

"Your face is not familiar to me, my friend," I said. "Perhaps you were not here when I visited the elder Count Romani?"

"No, *eccellenza*," replied Giacomo, rubbing his withered hands nervously together, and speaking with a sort of suppressed eagerness, "I came into my lord's service only a year before the countess died—I mean the mother of the young count."

"Ah! then I missed making your acquaintance," I said, kindly, pitying the poor old fellow, as I noticed how his lips trembled, and how altogether broken he looked. "You knew the last count from childhood, then?"

"I did, *eccellenza!*" And his bleared eyes roved over me with a sort of alarmed inquiry.

"You loved him well?" I said, composedly, observing him with embarrassment.

"*Eccellenza*, I never wish to serve a better master. He was goodness itself—a fine, handsome, generous lad—the saints

have his soul in their keeping! Though sometimes I cannot believe he is dead—my old heart almost broke when I heard it. I have never been the same since—my lady will tell you so—she is often displeased with me.”

And he looked wistfully at her; there was a note of pleading in his hesitating accents. My wife's delicate brows drew together in a frown; a frown that I had once thought came from mere petulance, but which I was now inclined to accept as a sign of temper.

“Yes, indeed, Giacomo,” she said, in hard tones altogether unlike her usual musical voice. “You are growing so forgetful that it is positively annoying. You know I have often to tell you the same thing several times. One command ought to be sufficient for you.”

Giacomo passed his hand over his forehead in a troubled way, sighed, and was silent. Then, as if suddenly recollecting his duty, he refilled my glass, and shrinking aside, resumed his former position behind my chair.

The conversation now turned on desultory and indifferent matters. I knew my wife was an excellent talker, but on that particular evening I think she surpassed herself. She had resolved to fascinate me, *that* I saw at once, and she spared no pains to succeed in her ambition. Graceful sallies, witty *bon-mots* tipped with the pungent sparkle of satire, gay stories well and briskly told, all came easily from her lips, so that though I knew her so well, she almost surprised me by her variety and fluency. Yet this gift of good conversation in a woman is apt to mislead the judgment of those who listen, for it is seldom the result of thought, and still more seldom is it a proof of intellectual capacity. A woman talks as a brook babbles; pleasantly, but without depth. Her information is generally of the most surface kind—she skims the cream off each item of news, and serves it up to you in her own fashion, caring little whether it be correct or the reverse. And the more vivaciously she talks, the more likely she is to be dangerously insincere and cold-hearted, for the very sharpness of her wit is apt to spoil the more delicate perceptions of her nature. Show me a brilliant woman noted for turning an epigram or pointing a satire, and I will show you a creature whose life is a masquerade, full of vanity, sensuality and pride. The man who marries such a one must be content to take the second place in his household, and play the character of the hen-pecked husband with what meekness he best may. Answer me, ye long suffering spouses of “*society women*,” how much would you give to win back your freedom and self-re-

spect? to be able to hold your head up unabashed before your own servants? to feel that you can actually give an order without its being instantly countermanded? Ah, my poor friends! millions will not purchase you such joy; as long as your fascinating fair ones are like Cæsar's wife, “*above suspicion*,” (and they are generally prudent managers), so long must you dance in their chains like the good-natured clumsy bears that you are, only giving vent to a growl now and then; a growl which at best only excites ridicule. My wife was of the true world worldly; never had I seen her real character so plainly as now, when she exerted herself to entertain and charm me. I had thought her *spirituelle*, ethereal, angelic! never was there less of an angel than she! While she talked, I was quick to observe the changes on Ferrari's countenance. He became more silent and sullen as her brightness and cordiality increased. I would not appear aware of the growing stiffness in his demeanor; I continued to draw him into the conversation, forcing him to give opinions on various subjects connected with the art of which he was professedly a follower. He was very reluctant to speak at all; and when compelled to do so, his remarks were curt and almost snappish, so much so that my wife made a laughing comment on his behavior.

“You are positively ill-tempered, Guido!” she exclaimed, then remembering she had addressed him by his Christian name, she turned to me and added—“I always call him Guido, *en famille*; you know he is just like a brother to me.”

He looked at her and his eyes flashed dangerously, but he was mute. Nina was evidently pleased to see him in such a vexed mood; she delighted to pique his pride, and as he steadily gazed at her in a sort of reproachful wonder, she laughed joyously. Then rising from the table, she made us a coquettish courtesy.

“I will leave you two gentlemen to finish your wine together,” she said, “I know all men love to talk a little scandal, and they must be alone to enjoy it. Afterwards, will you join me in the veranda? You will find coffee ready.”

I hastened to open the door for her as she passed out smiling; then, returning to the table, I poured out more wine for myself and Ferrari, who sat gloomily eying his own reflection in the broad polished rim of a silver fruit-dish that stood near him. Giacomo, the butler, had long ago left the room; we were entirely alone. I thought over my plans for a moment or two; the game was as interesting as a problem in chess. With the deliberation of a prudent player I made my next move.

"A lovely woman!" I murmured, meditatively, sipping my wine, "and intelligent also. I admire your taste, signor!"

He started violently. "What—what do you mean?" he demanded, half fiercely. I stroked my mustache and smiled at him benevolently.

"Ah, young blood! young blood!" I sighed, shaking my head, "it will have its way! My good sir, why be ashamed of your feelings? I heartily sympathize with you; if the lady does not appreciate the affection of so ardent and gallant an admirer, then she is foolish indeed! It is not every woman who has such a chance of happiness."

"You think—you imagine that—that—I——"

"That you are in love with her?" I said, composedly. "*Ma—certamente!* And why not? It is as it should be. Even the late conte could wish no fairer fate for his beautiful widow than that she should become the wife of his chosen friend. Permit me to drink your health! Success to your love!" And I drained my glass as I finished speaking. Unfortunate fool! He was completely disarmed; his suspicions of me melted away like mist before the morning light. His face cleared—he seized my hand and pressed it warmly.

"Forgive me, conte," he said, with remorseful fervor; "I fear I have been rude and unsociable. Your kind words have put me right again. You will think me a jealous madman, but I really fancied that you were beginning to feel an attraction for her yourself, and actually—(pardon me, I entreat of you!) actually I was making up my mind to—to kill you!"

I laughed quietly. "*Veramente!* How very amiable of you! It was a good intention, but you know what place is paved with similar designs?"

"Ah, conte, it is like your generosity to take my confession so lightly; but I assure you, for the last hour I have been absolutely wretched!"

"After the fashion of all lovers, I suppose," I answered—"torturing yourself without necessity! Well, well, it is very amusing! My young friend, when you come to my time of life, you will prefer the chink of gold to the laughter and kisses of women. How often must I repeat to you that I am a man absolutely indifferent to the tender passion? Believe it or not, it is true."

He drank off his wine at one gulp and spoke with some excitement.

"Then I will frankly confide in you. I *do* love the contessa. Love! it is too weak a word to describe what I feel. The touch of her hand thrills me, her very voice seems to shake

my soul, her eyes burn through me! Ah! *you* cannot know—you could not understand the joy, the pain——"

"Calm yourself," I said, in a cold tone, watching my victim as his pent-up emotion betrayed itself. "The great thing is to keep the head cool when the blood burns. You think she loves you?"

"Think! *Gran Dio!* She has——" here he paused and his face flushed deeply—"nay! I have no right to say anything on that score. I know she never cared for her husband."

"I know that too!" I answered, steadily. "The most casual observer cannot fail to notice it."

"Well, and no wonder!" he exclaimed, warmly. "He was such an undemonstrative fool! What business had such a fellow as that to marry so exquisite a creature!"

My heart leaped with a sudden impulse of fury, but I controlled my voice and answered calmly:

"*Requiescat in pace!* He is dead—let him rest. Whatever his faults, his wife of course was true to him while he lived; she considered him worthy of fidelity—is it not so?"

He lowered his eyes as he replied in an indistinct tone:

"Oh, certainly!"

"And you—you were a most loyal and faithful friend to him, in spite of the tempting bright eyes of his lady?"

Again he answered huskily, "Why, of course!" But the shapely hand that rested on the table so near to mine trembled.

"Well, then," I continued, quietly, "the love you bear now to his fair widow is, I imagine, precisely what he would approve. Being, as you say, perfectly pure and blameless, what can I wish otherwise than this—*may it meet with the reward it deserves!*"

While I spoke he moved uneasily in his chair, and his eyes roved to my father's picture with restless annoyance. I suppose he saw in it the likeness to his dead friend. After a moment or two of silence he turned to me with a forced smile—

"And so you really entertain no admiration for the contessa?"

"Oh, pardon me, I *do* entertain a very strong admiration for her, but not of the kind you seem to suspect. If it will please you, I can guarantee that I shall never make love to the lady unless——"

"Unless what?" he asked, eagerly.

"Unless she happens to make love to me, in which case it would be ungentlemanly not to reciprocate!"

And I laughed harshly. He stared at me in blank surprise.

"*She* make love to *you!*" he exclaimed. "You jest. She would never do such a thing."

"Of course not!" I answered, rising and clapping him heavily on the shoulder. "Women never court men, it is quite unheard of; a reverse of the order of nature! You are perfectly safe, my friend; you will certainly win the recompense you so richly merit. Come, let us go and drink coffee with the fair one."

And arm-in-arm we sauntered out to the veranda in the most friendly way possible. Ferrari was completely restored to good humor, and Nina, I thought, was rather relieved to see it. She was evidently afraid of Ferrari—a good point for me to remember. She smiled a welcome to us as we approached, and began to pour out the fragrant coffee. It was a glorious evening; the moon was already high in the heavens, and the nightingales' voices echoed softly from the distant woods. As I seated myself in a low chair that was placed invitingly near that of my hostess, my ears were startled by a long melancholy howl, which changed every now and then to an impatient whine.

"What is that?" I asked, though the question was needless, for I knew the sound.

"Oh, it is that tiresome dog Wyvis," answered Nina, in a vexed tone. "He belonged to Fabio. He makes the evening quite miserable with his moaning."

"Where is he?"

"Well, after my husband's death he became so troublesome, roaming all over the house and wailing; and then he would insist on sleeping in Stella's room close to her bedside. He really worried me both day and night, so I was compelled to chain him up."

Poor Wyvis! He was sorely punished for his fidelity.

"I am very fond of dogs," I said, slowly, "and they generally take to me with extraordinary devotion. May I see this one of yours?"

"Oh, certainly! Guido, will you go and unfasten him?"

Guido did not move; he leaned easily back in his chair sipping his coffee.

"Many thanks," he answered, with a half laugh, "perhaps you forget that the last time I did so he nearly tore me to pieces. If you do not object, I would rather Giacomo undertook the task."

"After such an account of the animal's conduct, perhaps the conte will not care to see him. It is true enough," turning to me as she spoke, "Wyvis has taken a great dislike to

Signor Ferrari—and yet he is a good-natured dog, and plays with my little girl all day if she goes to him. Do you feel inclined to see him? Yes?" And, as I bowed in the affirmative, she rang a little bell twice, and the butler appeared.

"Giacomo," she continued, "unloose Wyvis and send him here."

Giacomo gave me another of those timid questioning glances and departed to execute his order. In another five minutes, the howling having suddenly ceased, a long, lithe, black, shadowy creature came leaping wildly across the moonlighted lawn—Wyvis was racing at full speed. He paid no heed to his mistress or Ferrari; he rushed straight to me with a yelp of joy. His huge tail wagged incessantly, he panted thirstily with excitement, he frisked round and round my chair, he abased himself and kissed my feet and hands, he rubbed his stately head fondly against my knee. His frantic demonstrations of delight were watched by my wife and Ferrari with utter astonishment. I observed their surprise, and said lightly:

"I told you how it would be! It is nothing remarkable, I assure you. All dogs treat me in the same way."

And I laid my hand on the animal's neck with a commanding pressure; he lay down at once, only now and then raising his large wistful brown eyes to my face as though he wondered what had changed it so greatly. But no disguise could deceive his intelligence—the faithful creature knew his master. Meantime I thought Nina looked pale; certainly the little jeweled white hand nearest to me shook slightly.

"Are you afraid of this noble animal, madame?" I asked, watching her closely. She laughed, a little forcedly.

"Oh, no! But Wyvis is usually so shy with strangers, and I never saw him greet any one so rapturously except my late husband. It is really very odd!"

Ferrari, by his looks, agreed with her, and appeared to be uneasily considering the circumstance.

"Strange to say," he remarked, "Wyvis has for once forgotten *me*. He never fails to give me a passing snarl."

Hearing his voice, the dog did indeed commence growling discontentedly; but a touch from me silenced him. The animal's declared enmity toward Ferrari surprised me—it was quite a new thing, as before my burial his behavior to him had been perfectly friendly.

"I have had a great deal to do with dogs in my time," I said, speaking in a deliberately composed voice. "I have found their instinct marvelous; they generally seem to recog-

nize at once the persons who are fond of their society. This Wyvis of yours, contessa, has no doubt discovered that I have had many friends among his brethren, so that there is nothing strange in his making so much of me."

The air of studied indifference with which I spoke, and the fact of my taking the exuberant delight of Wyvis as a matter of course, gradually reassured the plainly disturbed feelings of my two betrayers, for after a little pause the incident was passed over, and our conversation went on with pleasant and satisfactory smoothness. Before my departure that evening, however, I offered to chain up the dog—"as, if I do this," I added, "I guarantee he will not disturb your night's rest by his howling."

This suggestion met with approval, and Ferrari walked with me to show me where the kennel stood. I chained Wyvis, and stroked him tenderly; he appeared to understand, and he accepted his fate with perfect resignation, lying down upon his bed of straw without a sign of opposition, save for one imploring look out of his intelligent eyes as I turned away and left him.

On making my adieus to Nina, I firmly refused Ferrari's offered companionship in the walk back to my hotel.

"I am fond of a solitary moonlight stroll," I said. "Permit me to have my own way in the matter."

After some friendly argument they yielded to my wishes. I bade them both a civil "good-night," bending low over my wife's hand and kissing it, coldly enough, God knows, and yet the action was sufficient to make her flush and sparkle with pleasure. Then I left them, Ferrari himself escorting me to the villa gates, and watching me pass out on the open road. As long as he stood there, I walked with a slow and meditative pace toward the city, but the instant I heard the gate clang heavily as it closed, I hurried back with a cautious and noiseless step. Avoiding the great entrance, I slipped round to the western side of the grounds, where there was a close thicket of laurel that extended almost up to the veranda I had just left. Entering this, and bending the boughs softly aside as I pushed my way through, I gradually reached a position from whence I could see the veranda plainly, and also hear anything that passed. Guido was sitting on the low chair I had just vacated leaning his head back against my wife's breast; he had reached up one arm so that it encircled her neck, and drew her head down toward his. In this half embrace they rested absolutely silent for some moments. Suddenly Ferrari spoke:

"You are very cruel, Nina! You actually made me think you admired that rich old conte."

She laughed. "So I do! He would be really handsome if he did not wear those ugly spectacles. And his jewels are lovely. I wish he would give me some more!"

"And supposing he were to do so, would you care for him, Nina?" he demanded, jealously. "Surely not. Besides, you have no idea how conceited he is. He says he will never make love to a woman unless she first makes love to him; what do you think of that?"

She laughed again, more merrily than before.

"Think! Why, that he is very original—charmingly so! Are you coming in, Guido?"

He rose, and standing erect, almost lifted her from her chair and folded her in his arms.

"Yes, I *am* coming in," he answered; "and I will have a hundred kisses for every look and smile you bestowed on the conte! You little coquette! You would flirt with your grandfather!"

She rested against him with apparent tenderness, one hand playing with the flower in his button-hole, and then she said, with a slight accent of fear in her voice—

"Tell me, Guido, do you not think he is a little like—like *Fabio*? Is there not a something in his manner that seems familiar?"

"I confess I have fancied so once or twice," he returned, musingly; "there is rather a disagreeable resemblance. But what of that? many men are almost counterparts of each other. But I tell you what I think. I am almost positive he is some long-lost relation of the family—*Fabio's* uncle for all we know, who does not wish to declare his actual relationship. He is a good old fellow enough, I believe, and is certainly rich as *Cræsus*; he will be a valuable friend to us both. Come, *sposina mia*, it is time to go to rest."

And they disappeared within the house, and shut the windows after them. I immediately left my hiding-place, and resumed my way toward Naples. I was satisfied they had no suspicion of the truth. After all, it was absurd of me to fancy they might have, for people in general do not imagine it possible for a buried man to come back to life again. The game was in my own hands, and I now resolved to play it out with as little delay as possible.