

divorced persons are really satisfied when they have got their divorce—whether the amount of red tape and parchment expended in their interest has done them good and really relieved their feelings. Whether, for instance, the betrayed husband is glad to have got rid of his unfaithful wife by throwing her (with the full authority and permission of the law) into his rival's arms? I almost doubt it! I heard of a strange case in England once. A man, moving in good society, having more than suspicions of his wife's fidelity, divorced her—the law pronounced her guilty. Some years afterward, he, being free, met her again, fell in love with her for the second time and remarried her. She was (naturally!) delighted at his making such a fool of himself—for henceforth, whatever she chose to do, he could not reasonably complain without running the risk of being laughed at. So now the number and variety of her lovers is notorious in the particular social circle where she moves—while he, poor wretch, is perforce tongue-tied, and dare not consider himself wronged. There is no more pitiable object in the world than such a man—secretly derided and jeered at by his fellows, he occupies an almost worse position than that of a galley slave, while in his own esteem he has sunk so low that he dare not, even in secret, try to fathom the depth to which he has fallen. Some may assert that to be divorced is a social stigma. It used to be so perhaps, but society has grown very lenient nowadays. Divorced women hold their own in the best and most brilliant circles, and what is strange is that they are very generally petted and pitied.

"Poor thing!" says society, putting up its eyeglass to scan admiringly the beautiful heroine of the latest aristocratic scandal—"she had such a brute of a husband! No wonder she liked that *dear* Lord So-and-So! Very wrong of her, of course, but she is so young! She was married at sixteen—quite a child!—could not have known her own mind!"

The husband alluded to might have been the best and most chivalrous of men—anything but a "brute"—yet he always figures as such somehow, and gets no sympathy. And, by the way, it is rather a notable fact that all the beautiful, famous, or notorious women were "*married at sixteen.*" How is this managed? I can account for it in southern climates, where girls are full-grown at sixteen and old at thirty—but I can not understand its being the case in England, where a "miss" of sixteen is a most objectionable and awkward *ingénue*, without any of the "charms wherewith to charm," and whose conversation is always vapid and silly to the point of absolute exhaustion on the part of those who are forced to listen to it. These

sixteen-year-old marriages are, however, the only explanation frisky English matrons can give for having such alarmingly prolific families of tall sons and daughters, and it is a happy and convenient excuse—one that provides a satisfactory reason for the excessive painting of their faces and dyeing of their hair. Being young (as they so nobly assert), they wish to look even younger. *A la bonne heure!* If men cannot see through the delicate fiction, they have only themselves to blame. As for me, I believe in the old, old, apparently foolish legend of Adam and Eve's sin and the curse which followed it—the curse on man which is inevitably carried out to this day. God said; "*Because*" (mark that *because!*) "thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife" (or thy *woman*, whoever she be), "and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it" (the tree or fruit being the evil suggested *first* to man by woman), "cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life!"

True enough! The curse is upon all who trust woman too far—the sorrow upon all who are beguiled by her witching flatteries. Of what avail her poor excuse in the ancient story—"The serpent beguiled me and I did eat!" Had she never listened she could not have been beguiled. The weakness, the treachery, was in herself, and is there still. Through everything the bitterness of it runs. The woman tempts—the man yields—and the gate of Eden—the Eden of a clear conscience and an untrammelled soul, is shut upon them. Forever and ever the Divine denunciation re-echoes like muttering thunder through the clouds of passing generations; forever and ever we unconsciously carry it out in our own lives to its full extent till the heart grows sick and the brain weary, and we long for the end of it all, which is death—death, that mysterious silence and darkness at which we sometimes shudder, wondering vaguely—Can it be worse than life?

CHAPTER XIX.

MORE than ten days had passed since Stella's death. Her mother had asked me to see to the arrangements for the child's funeral, declaring herself too ill to attend to anything. I was glad enough to accede to her request, for I was thus able to avoid the Romani vault as a place of interment. I could not bear to think of the little cherished body being laid to molder in that terrific place where I had endured such frantic horrors. Therefore, informing all whom it concerned that I acted under the countess's orders, I chose a pretty spot in the open ground

of the cemetery, close to the tree where I had heard the nightingale singing in my hour of supreme misery and suffering. Here my little one was laid tenderly to rest in warm mother-earth, and I had sweet violets and primroses planted thickly all about the place, while on the simple white marble cross that marked the spot I had the words engraved—

“Una Stella svanità,”*

adding the names of her parents and the date of her birth and death. Since all this had been done I had visited my wife several times. She was always at home to me, though of course, for decency's sake, in consequence of the child's death, she denied herself to everybody else. She looked lovelier than ever; the air of delicate languor she assumed suited her as perfectly as its fragile whiteness suits a hot-house lily. She knew the power of her own beauty most thoroughly, and employed it in arduous effort to fascinate me. But I had changed my tactics; I paid very little heed to her, and never went to see her unless she asked me very pressingly to do so. All compliments and attentions from me to her had ceased. *She* courted me, and I accepted her courtship in unresponsive silence. I played the part of a taciturn and reserved man, who preferred reading some ancient and abstruse treatise on metaphysics to even the charms of her society—and often, when she urgently desired my company, I would sit in her drawing-room, turning over the leaves of a book and feigning to be absorbed in it, while she, from her velvet *fauteuil*, would look at me with a pretty pensiveness made up half of respect, half of gentle admiration—a capitably acted facial expression, by the by, and one that would do credit to Sarah Bernhardt. We had both heard from Guido Ferrari; his letter to my wife I of course did not see; she had, however, told me he was “much shocked and distressed to hear of Stella's death.” The epistle he addressed to me had a different tale to tell. In it he wrote—“*You* can understand, my dear conte, that I am not much grieved to hear of the death of Fabio's child. Had she lived, I confess her presence would have been a perpetual reminder to me of things I prefer to forget. She never liked me—she might have been a great source of trouble and inconvenience; so, on the whole, I am glad she is out of the way.”

Further on in the letter he informed me:

“My uncle is at death's door, but though that door stands wide open for him, he cannot make up his mind to go in.

* A vanished star.

His hesitation will not be allowed to last, so the doctors tell me—at any rate I fervently hope I shall not be kept waiting too long, otherwise I shall return to Naples and sacrifice my heritage, for I am restless and unhappy away from Nina, though I know she is safely guarded by your protecting care.”

I read this particular paragraph to my wife, watching her closely as I slowly enunciated the words contained in it. She listened, and a vivid blush crimsoned her cheeks—a blush of indignation—and her brows contracted in the vexed frown I knew so well. Her lips parted in a half-sweet, half-chilly smile as she said, quietly:

“I owe you my thanks, conte, for showing me to what extent Signor Ferrari's impertinence may reach. I am surprised at his writing to you in such a manner! The fact is, my late husband's attachment for him was so extreme that he now presumes upon a supposed right that he has over me—he fancies I am really his sister, and that he can tyrannize, as brothers sometimes do! I really regret I have been so patient with him—I have allowed him too much liberty.”

True enough! I thought, and smiled bitterly. I was now in the heat of the game—the moves must be played quickly—there was no more time for hesitation or reflection.

“I think, madame,” I said, deliberately, as I folded Guido's letter and replaced it in my pocket-book, “Signor Ferrari ardently aspires to be something more than a brother to you at no very distant date.”

Oh, the splendid hypocrisy of women! No wonder they make such excellent puppets on the theatrical stage—acting is their natural existence, sham their breath of life! This creature showed no sign of embarrassment—she raised her eyes frankly to mine in apparent surprise—then she gave a little low laugh of disdain.

“Indeed!” she said. “Then I fear Signor Ferrari is doomed to have his aspirations disappointed! My dear conte,” and here she rose and swept softly across the room toward me with that graceful, gliding step that somehow always reminded me of the approach of a panther, “do you really mean to tell me that his audacity has reached such a height that—really it is *too* absurd!—that he hopes to marry me?” And sinking into a chair near mine she looked at me in calm inquiry. Lost in amazement at the duplicity of the woman, I answered, briefly:

“I believe so! He intimated as much to me.”

She smiled scornfully.

“I am too much honored! And did you, conte, think for

a moment that such an arrangement would meet with my approval?"

I was silent. My brain was confused—I found it difficult to meet with and confront such treachery as this. What! Had she no conscience? Were all the passionate embraces, the lingering kisses, the vows of fidelity, and words of caressing endearment as naught? Were they all blotted from her memory as the writing on a slate is wiped out by a sponge! Almost I pitied Guido! His fate, in her hands, was evidently to be the same as mine had been; yet after all, why should I be surprised? why should I pity? Had I not calculated it all? and was it not part of my vengeance?

"Tell me!" pursued my wife's dulcet voice, breaking in upon my reflections, "did you really imagine Signor Ferrari's suit might meet with favor at my hands?"

I must speak—the comedy had to be played out. So I answered, bluntly:

"Madame, I certainly did think so. It seemed a natural conclusion to draw from the course of events. He is young, undeniably handsome, and on his uncle's death will be fairly wealthy—what more could you desire? Besides, he was your husband's friend——"

"And for that reason I would never marry him!" she interrupted me with a decided gesture. "Even if I liked him sufficiently, which I do not" (oh, miserable traitress), "I would not run the risk of what the world would say of such a marriage."

"How, madame? Pardon me if I fail to comprehend you."

"Do you not see, conte?" she went on in a coaxing voice as of one that begged to be believed, "if I were to marry one that was known to have been my husband's most intimate friend, society is so wicked—people would be sure to say that there had been something between us before my husband's death—I *know* they would, and I could not endure such slander!"

"Murder will out," they say! Here was guilt partially declaring itself. A perfectly innocent woman could not foresee so readily the condemnation of society. Not having the knowledge of evil she would be unable to calculate the consequences. The overprudish woman betrays herself; the fine lady who virtuously shudders at the sight of a nude statue or picture, announces at once to all whom it may concern that there is something far coarser in the suggestions of her own mind than the work of art she condemns. Absolute purity has no fear of social slander; it knows its own value, and that it must con-

quer in the end. My wife—alas! that I should call her so—was innately vicious and false; yet how particular she was in her efforts to secure the blind world's good opinion! Poor old world! how exquisitely it is fooled, and how good-naturedly it accepts its fooling! But I had to answer the fair liar, whose net of graceful deceptions was now spread to entrap me; therefore I said with an effort at courtesy:

"No one would dare to slander you, contessa, in *my* presence." She bowed and smiled prettily. "But," I went on, "if it is true that you have no liking for Signor Ferrari——"

"It *is* true!" she exclaimed with sudden emphasis. "He is rough and ill-mannered; I have seen him the worse for wine; sometimes he is insufferable! I am afraid of him!"

I glanced at her quietly. Her face had paled, and her hands, which were busied with some silken embroidery, trembled a little.

"In that case," I continued, slowly, "though I am sorry for Ferrari, poor fellow! he will be immensely disappointed! I confess I am glad in other respects, because——"

"Because what?" she demanded, eagerly.

"Why," I answered, feigning a little embarrassment, "because there will be more chance for other men who may seek to possess the hand of the accomplished and beautiful Contessa Romani."

She shook her fair head slightly. A transient expression of disappointment passed over her features.

"The 'other men' you speak of, conte, are not likely to indulge in such an ambition," she said, with a faint sigh; "more especially," and her eyes flashed indignantly, "since Signor Ferrari thinks it his duty to mount guard over me. I suppose he wishes to keep me for himself—a most impertinent and foolish notion! There is only one thing to do—I shall leave Naples before he returns."

"Why?" I asked.

She flushed deeply. "I wish to avoid him," she said, after a little pause; "I tell you frankly, he has lately given me much cause for annoyance. I will not be persecuted by his attentions; and as I before said to you, I am often afraid of him. Under *your* protection I know I am quite safe, but I cannot always enjoy that——"

The moment had come. I advanced a step or two.

"Why not?" I said. "It rests entirely with yourself."

She started and half rose from her chair—her work dropped her hands,

"What do you mean, conte?" she faltered, half timidly, yet anxiously; "I do not understand!"

"I mean what I say," I continued in cool hard tones, and stooping, I picked up her work and restored it to her; "but pray do not excite yourself! You say you cannot always enjoy my protection; it seems to me that you can—by becoming my wife."

"Conte!" she stammered. I held up my hand as a sign to her to be silent.

"I am perfectly aware," I went on in business-like accents—"of the disparity in years that exists between us. I have neither youth, health, or good looks to recommend me to you. Trouble and bitter disappointment have made me what I am. But I have wealth which is almost inexhaustible—I have position and influence—and besides these things"—and here I looked at her steadily, "I have an ardent desire to do justice to your admirable qualities, and to give you all you deserve. If you think you could be happy with me, speak frankly—I cannot offer you the passionate adoration of a young man—my blood is cold and my pulse is slow—but what I *can* do, I will!"

Having spoken thus, I was silent—gazing at her intently. She paled and flushed alternately, and seemed for a moment lost in thought—then a sudden smile of triumph curved her mouth—she raised her large lovely eyes to mine, with a look of melting and wistful tenderness. She laid her needle-work gently down, and came close up to me—her fragrant breath fell warm on my cheek—her strange gaze fascinated me, and a sort of tremor shook my nerves.

"You mean," she said, with a tender pathos in her voice—"that you are willing to marry me, but that you do not really *love* me?"

And almost appealingly she laid her white hand on my shoulder—her musical accents were low and thrilling—she sighed faintly. I was silent—battling violently with the foolish desire that had sprung up within me, the desire to draw this witching fragile thing to my heart, to cover her lips with kisses—to startle her with the passion of my embraces! But I forced the mad impulse down and stood mute. She watched me—slowly she lifted her hand from where it had rested, and passed it with a caressing touch through my hair.

"No—you do not really *love* me," she whispered—"but I will tell you the truth—*I love you!*"

And she drew herself up to her full height and smiled again as she uttered the lie. I knew it was a lie—but I seized the

hand whose caresses stung me, and held it hard, as I answered:

"You love *me*? No, no—I cannot believe it—it is impossible!"

She laughed softly. "It is true though," she said, emphatically, "the very first time I saw you I knew I should love you! I never even liked my husband, and though in some things you resemble him, you are quite different in others—and superior to him in every way. Believe it or not as you like, *you are the only man in all the world I have ever loved!*"

And she made the assertion unblushingly, with an air of conscious pride and virtue. Half stupefied at her manner, I asked:

"Then you will be my wife?"

"I will!" she answered—"and tell me—your name is Cesare, is it not?"

"Yes," I said, mechanically.

"Then *Cesare*," she murmured tenderly, "I will *make* you love me very much!"

And with a quick lithe movement of her supple figure, she nestled softly against me, and turned up her radiant glowing face.

"Kiss me!" she said, and waited. As one in a whirling dream, I stooped and kissed those false sweet lips! I would have more readily placed my mouth upon that of a poisonous serpent! Yet that kiss roused a sort of fury in me. I slipped my arms round her half-reclining figure, drew her gently backward to the couch she had left, and sat down beside her, still embracing her. "You really love me?" I asked almost fiercely.

"Yes!"

"And I am the first man whom you have really cared for?"

"You are!"

"You never liked Ferrari?"

"Never!"

"Did he ever kiss you as I have done?"

"Not once!"

God! how the lies poured forth! a very cascade of them! and they were all told with such an air of truth! I marveled at the ease and rapidity with which they glided off this fair woman's tongue, feeling somewhat the same sense of stupid astonishment a rustic exhibits when he sees for the first time a conjurer drawing yards and yards of many-colored ribbon out of his mouth. I took up the little hand on which the wedding-ring I had placed there was still worn, and quietly slipped

upon the slim finger a circlet of magnificent rose-brilliant. I had long carried this trinket about with me in expectation of the moment that had now come. She started from my arms with an exclamation of delight.

"Oh, Cesare! how lovely! How good you are to me!"

And leaning toward me, she kissed me, then resting against my shoulder, she held up her hand to admire the flash of the diamonds in the light. Suddenly she said, with some anxiety in her tone:

"You will not tell Guido? not yet?"

"No," I answered; "I certainly will not tell him till he returns. Otherwise he would leave Rome at once, and we do not want him back just immediately, do we?" And I toyed with her rippling gold tresses half mechanically, while I wondered within myself at the rapid success of my scheme. She, in the meantime, grew pensive and abstracted, and for a few moments we were both silent. If she had known! I thought, if she could have imagined that she was encircled by the arm of *her own husband*, the man whom she had duped and wronged, the poor fool she had mocked at and despised, whose life had been an obstruction in her path, whose death she had been glad of! Would she have smiled so sweetly? Would she have kissed me *then*?

* * * * *

She remained leaning against me in a reposeful attitude for some moments, ever and anon turning the ring I had given her round and round upon her finger. By and by she looked up.

"Will you do me one favor?" she asked, coaxingly; "such a little thing—a trifle! but it would give me such pleasure!"

"What is it?" I asked; "it is you to command and I to obey!"

"Well, take off those dark-glasses just for a minute! I want to see your eyes."

I rose from the sofa quickly, and answered her with some coldness.

"Ask anything you like but that, *mia bella*. The least light on my eyes gives me the most acute pain—pain that irritates my nerves for hours afterward. Be satisfied with me as I am for the present, though I promise you your wish shall be gratified—"

"When?" she interrupted me eagerly. I stooped and kissed her hand.

"On the evening of our marriage day," I answered.

She blushed and turned away her head coquettishly.

"Ah! that is so long to wait!" she said, half pettishly.

"Not very long, I *hope*," I observed, with meaning emphasis. "We are now in November. May I ask you to make my suspense brief? to allow me to fix our wedding for the second month of the new year?"

"But my recent widowhood!—Stella's death!"—she objected faintly, pressing a perfumed handkerchief gently to her eyes.

"In February your husband will have been dead nearly six months," I said, decisively; "it is quite a sufficient period of mourning for one so young as yourself. And the loss of your child so increases the loneliness of your situation, that it is natural, even necessary, that you should secure a protector as soon as possible. Society will not censure you, you may be sure—besides, I shall know how to silence any gossip that savors of impertinence."

A smile of conscious triumph parted her lips.

"It shall be as you wish," she said, demurely; "if you, who are known in Naples as one who is perfectly indifferent to women, like now to figure as an impatient lover, I shall not object!"

And she gave me a quick glance of mischievous amusement from under the languid lids of her dreamy dark eyes. I saw it, but answered, stiffly:

"You are aware, contessa, and I am also aware that I am not a 'lover' according to the accepted type, but that I am impatient I readily admit."

"And why?" she asked.

"Because," I replied, speaking slowly and emphatically; "I desire you to be mine and mine only, to have you absolutely in my possession, and to feel that no one can come between us, or interfere with my wishes concerning you."

She laughed gayly. "*A la bonne heure!* You are a lover without knowing it! Your dignity will not allow you to believe that you are actually in love with me, but in spite of yourself you *are*—you know you are!"

I stood before her in almost somber silence. At last I said: "if you say so, contessa, then it must be so. I have had no experience in affairs of the heart, as they are called, and I find it difficult to give a name to the feelings which possess me; I am only conscious of a very strong wish to become the absolute master of your destiny." And involuntarily I clinched my hand as I spoke. She did not observe the action, but she answered the words with a graceful bend of the head and a smile.

"I could not have a better fortune," she said, "for I am sure my destiny will be all brightness and beauty with *you* to control and guide it!"

"It will be what you desire," I half muttered; then with an abrupt change of manner I said: "I will wish you good-night, *contessa*. It grows late, and my state of health compels me to retire to rest early."

She rose from her seat and gave me a compassionate look.

"You are really a great sufferer then?" she inquired tenderly. "I am sorry! But perhaps careful nursing will quite restore you. I shall be so proud if I can help you to secure better health."

"Rest and happiness will no doubt do much for me," I answered, "still I warn you, *cara mia*, that in accepting me as your husband you take a broken-down man, one whose whims are legion and whose chronic state of invalidism may in time prove to be a burden on your young life. Are you sure your decision is a wise one?"

"Quite sure!" she replied firmly. Do I not *love* you! And you will not always be ailing—you look so strong."

"I *am* strong to a certain extent," I said, unconsciously straightening myself as I stood. "I have plenty of muscle as far as that goes, but my nervous system is completely disorganized. I—why, what is the matter? Are you ill?"

For she had turned deathly pale, and her eyes looked startled and terrified. Thinking she would faint, I extended my arms to save her from falling, but she put them aside with an alarmed yet appealing gesture.

"It is nothing," she murmured feebly, "a sudden giddiness—I thought—no matter what! Tell me, are you not related to the Romani family? When you drew yourself up just now you were so like—like *Fabio*! I fancied," and she shuddered, "that I saw his ghost!"

I supported her to a chair near the window, which I threw open for air, though the evening was cold.

"You are fatigued and overexcited," I said, calmly, "your nature is too imaginative. No; I am not related to the Romani, though possibly I may have some of their mannerisms. Many men are alike in these things. But you must not give way to such fancies. Rest perfectly quiet, you will soon recover."

And pouring out a glass of water I handed it to her. She sipped it slowly, leaning back in the *fauteuil* where I had placed her, and in silence we both looked out on the November night. There was a moon, but she was veiled by driving clouds, which ever and anon swept asunder to show her gleaming pallidly white, like the restless spirit of a deceived and murdered lady. A rising wind moaned dismally among the fading

creepers and rustled the heavy branches of a giant cypress that stood on the lawn like a huge spectral mourner draped in black, apparently waiting for a forest funeral. Now and then a few big drops of rain fell—sudden tears wrung as though by force from the black heart of the sky. My wife shivered.

"Shut the window!" she said, glancing back at me where I stood behind her chair. "I am much better now. I was very silly. I do not know what came over me, but for the moment I felt afraid—horribly afraid!—of *you*!"

"That was not complimentary to your future husband," I remarked, quietly, as I closed and fastened the window in obedience to her request. "Should I not insist upon an apology?"

She laughed nervously, and played with the ring of rose-brilliant.

"It is not yet too late," I resumed, "if on second thoughts you would rather not marry me, you have only to say so. I shall accept my fate with equanimity and shall not blame you."

At this she seemed quite alarmed, and rising, laid her hand pleadingly on my arm.

"Surely you are not offended?" she said. "I was not really afraid of you, you know—it was a stupid fancy—I cannot explain it. But I am quite well now, and I am only *too* happy. Why, I would not lose your love for all the world—you *must* believe me!"

And she touched my hand caressingly with her lips. I withdrew it gently, and stroked her hair with an almost parental tenderness; then I said, quietly:

"If so, we are agreed, and all is well. Let me advise you to take a long night's rest; your nerves are weak and somewhat shaken. You wish me to keep our engagement secret?"

She thought for a moment, then answered musingly:

"For the present perhaps it would be best. Though," and she laughed, "it would be delightful to see all the other women jealous and envious of my good fortune! Still, if the news were told to any of our friends—who knows?—it might accidentally reach Guido, and——"

"I understand! You may rely upon my discretion. Good-night, *contessa*!"

"You may call me Nina," she murmured, softly.

"Nina then," I said, with some effort, as I lightly kissed her. "Good-night!—may your dreams be of me!" She responded to this with a gratified smile, and as I left the room she waved her hand in a parting salute. My diamonds flashed

on it like a small circlet of fire; the light shed through the rose-colored lamps that hung from the painted ceiling fell full on her exquisite loveliness, softening it into ethereal radiance and delicacy, and when I strode forth from the house into the night air heavy with the threatening gloom of coming tempest, the picture of that fair face and form flitted before me like a mirage—the glitter of her hair flashed on my vision like little snakes of fire—her lithe hands seemed to beckon me—her lips had left a scorching heat on mine. Distracted with the thoughts that tortured me, I walked on and on for hours. The storm broke at last; the rain poured in torrents, but heedless of wind and weather, I wandered on like a forsaken fugitive. I seemed to be the only human being left alive in a world of wrath and darkness. The rush and roar of the blast, the angry noise of waves breaking hurriedly on the shore, the swirling showers that fell on my defenseless head—all these things were unfelt, unheard by me. There are times in a man's life when mere physical feeling grows numb under the pressure of intense mental agony—when the indignant soul, smarting with the experience of some vile injustice, forgets for a little its narrow and poor house of clay. Some such mood was upon me then, I suppose, for in the very act of walking I was almost unconscious of movement. An awful solitude seemed to encompass me—a silence of my own creating. I fancied that even the angry elements avoided me as I passed; that there was nothing, nothing in all the wide universe but myself and a dark brooding horror called Vengeance. All suddenly, the mists of my mind cleared; I moved no longer in a deaf, blind stupor. A flash of lightning danced vividly before my eyes, followed by a crashing peal of thunder; I saw to what end of a wild journey I had come! Those heavy gates—that undefined stretch of land—those ghostly glimmers of motionless white like spectral mile-stones emerging from the gloom—I knew it all too well—it was the cemetery! I looked through the iron palisades with the feverish interest of one who watches the stage curtain rise on the last scene of a tragedy. The lightning sprang once more across the sky, and showed me for a brief second the distant marble outline of the Romani vault. There the drama began—where would it end? Slowly, slowly there flitted into my thoughts the face of my lost child—the young, serious face as it had looked when the calm, preternaturally wise smile of death had rested upon it; and then a curious feeling of pity possessed me—pity that her little body should be lying stiffly out there, not in the vault, but under the wet sod, in such a relentless storm of rain. I wanted to take

her up from that cold couch—to carry her to some home where there should be light and heat and laughter—to warm her to life again within my arms; and as my brain played with these foolish fancies, slow hot tears forced themselves into my eyes and scalded my cheeks as they fell. These tears relieved me—gradually the tightly strung tension of my nerves relaxed, and I recovered my usual composure by degrees. Turning deliberately away from the beckoning grave-stones, I walked back to the city through the thick of the storm, this time with an assured step and a knowledge of where I was going. I did not reach my hotel till past midnight; but this was not late for Naples, and the curiosity of the fat French hall-porter was not so much excited by the lateness of my arrival as by the disorder of my apparel.

“Ah, heaven!” he cried; “that monsieur the distinguished should have been in such a storm all unprotected! Why did not monsieur send for his carriage?” I cut short his exclamations by dropping five francs into his ever-ready hand, assuring him that I had thoroughly enjoyed the novelty of a walk in bad weather, whereat he smiled and congratulated me as much as he had just commiserated me. On reaching my own rooms, my valet Vincenzo stared at my dripping and disheveled condition, but was discreetly mute. He quickly assisted me to change my wet clothes for a warm dressing-gown, and then brought a glass of mulled port wine, but performed these duties with such an air of unbroken gravity that I was inwardly amused while I admired the fellow's reticence. When I was about to retire for the night, I tossed him a napoleon. He eyed it musingly and inquiringly; then he asked:

“Your excellency desires to purchase something?”

“Your silence, my friend, that is all!” I replied, with a laugh. “Understand me, Vincenzo, you will serve yourself and me best by obeying implicitly, and asking no questions. Fortunate is the servant who, accustomed to see his master drunk every night, swears to all outsiders that he has never served so sober and discreet a gentleman! That is your character, Vincenzo—keep to it, and we shall not quarrel.” He smiled gravely, and pocketed my piece of gold without a word—like a true Tuscan as he was. The sentimental servant, whose fine feelings will not allow him to accept an extra “tip,” is, you may be sure, a humbug. I never believed in such a one. Labor can always command its price, and what so laborious in this age as to be honest? What so difficult as to keep silence on other people's affairs? Such herculean tasks deserve payment! A valet who is generously bribed, in addition

to his wages, can be relied on; if underpaid, all heaven and earth will not persuade him to hold his tongue. Left alone at last in my sleeping chamber, I remained for some time before actually going to bed. I took off the black spectacles which served me so well, and looked at myself in the mirror with some curiosity. I never permitted Vincenzo to enter my bedroom at night, or before I was dressed in the morning, lest he should surprise me without these appendages which were my chief disguise, for in such a case I fancy even his studied composure would have given way. For, disburdened of my smoke-colored glasses, I appeared what I was, young and vigorous in spite of my white beard and hair. My face, which had been worn and haggard at first, had filled up and was healthily colored; while my eyes, the spokesmen of my thoughts, were bright with the clearness and fire of constitutional strength and physical well-being. I wondered, as I stared moodily at my own reflection, how it was that I did not look ill. The mental suffering I continually underwent, mingled though it was with a certain gloomy satisfaction, should surely have left more indelible traces on my countenance. Yet it has been proved that it is not always the hollow-eyed, sallow and despairing-looking persons who are really in sharp trouble—these are more often bilious or dyspeptic, and know no more serious grief than the incapacity to gratify their appetites for the high-flavored delicacies of the table. A man may be endowed with superb physique, and a constitution that is in perfect working order—his face and outward appearance may denote the most harmonious action of the life principle within him—and yet his nerves may be so finely strung that he may be capable of suffering acuter agony in his mind than if his body were to be hacked slowly to pieces by jagged knives, and it will leave no mark on his features while *youth* still has hold on his flesh and blood.

So it was with me; and I wondered that *she*—Nina—would say, could she behold me, unmasked as it were, in the solitude of my own room. This thought roused another in my mind—another at which I smiled grimly. *I was an engaged man!* Engaged to marry my own wife; betrothed for the second time to the same woman! What a difference between this and my first courtship of her! *Then*, who so great a fool as I—who so adoring, passionate and devoted! *Now*, who so darkly instructed, who so cold, so absolutely pitiless! The climax to my revenge was nearly reached. I looked through the coming days as one looks through a telescope out to sea, and I could watch the end approaching like a phantom ship—neither slow

nor fast, but steadily and silently. I was able to calculate each event in its due order, and I knew there was no fear of failure in the final result. Nature itself—the sun, moon and stars, the sweeping circle of the seasons—all seem to aid in the cause of rightful justice. Man's duplicity may succeed in withholding a truth for a time, but in the end it must win its way. Once *resolve*, and then determine to carry out that resolve, and it is astonishing to note with what marvelous ease everything makes way for you, provided there be no innate weakness in yourself which causes you to hesitate. I had formerly been weak, I knew, very weak—else I had never been fooled by wife and friend; but now, now my strength was as the strength of a demon working within me. My hand had already closed with an iron grip on two false unworthy lives, and had I not sworn "*never to relax, never to relent*," till my vengeance was accomplished? I had! Heaven and earth had borne witness to my vow, and now held me to its stern fulfillment.

 CHAPTER XX.

WINTER, or what the Neapolitans accept as winter, came on apace. For some time past the air had been full of that mild chill and vaporous murkiness, which, not cold enough to be bracing, sensibly lowered the system and depressed the spirits. The careless and jovial temperament of the people, however, was never much affected by the change of seasons—they drank more hot coffee than usual, and kept their feet warm by dancing from midnight up to the small hours of the morning. The cholera was a thing of the past—the cleansing of the city, the sanitary precautions, which had been so much talked about and recommended in order to prevent another outbreak in the coming year, were all forgotten and neglected, and the laughing populace tripped lightly over the graves of its dead hundreds as though they were odorous banks of flowers. "*Oggi! Oggi!*" is their cry—to-day, to-day! Never mind what happened yesterday, or what will happen to-morrow—leave that to *i signori Santi* and *la Signora Madonna!* And after all there is a grain of reason in their folly, for many of the bitterest miseries of man grow out of a fatal habit of looking back or looking forward, and of never living actually in the full-faced present. Then, too, Carnival was approaching; Carnival, which, though denuded of many of its best and brightest features, still reels through the streets of Naples with something of the picturesque madness that in old times used to accompany its prototype, the Feast of Bacchus. I was reminded