

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

of this coming festivity on the morning of the 21st of December, when I noted some unusual attempts on the part of Vincenzo to control his countenance, that often, in spite of his efforts, broadened into a sunny smile as though some humorous thought had flitted across his mind. He betrayed himself at last by asking me demurely whether I purposed taking any part in the carnival? I smiled and shook my head. Vincenzo looked dubious, but finally summoned up courage to say:

"Will the eccellenza permit——"

"You to make a fool of yourself?" I interrupted, "by all means! Take your own time, enjoy the fun as much as you please; I promise you I will ask no account of your actions."

He was much gratified, and attended to me with even more punctiliousness than usual. As he prepared my breakfast I asked him:

"By the way, when does the carnival begin?"

"On the 26th," he answered, with a slight air of surprise.

"Surely the eccellenza knows."

"Yes, yes," I said, impatiently. "I know, but I had forgotten. I am not young enough to keep the dates of these follies in my memory. What letters have you there?"

He handed me a small tray full of different shaped missives, some from fair ladies who "desired the honor of my company," others from tradesmen, "praying the honor of my custom," all from male and female toadies as usual, I thought contemptuously, as I turned them over, when my glance was suddenly arrested by one special envelope, square in form and heavily bordered with black, on which the postmark "Roma" stood out distinctly. "At last," I thought, and breathed heavily. I turned to my valet, who was giving the final polish to my breakfast cup and saucer:

"You may leave the room, Vincenzo," I said, briefly. He bowed, the door opened and shut noiselessly—he was gone.

Slowly I broke the seal of that fateful letter; a letter from Guido Ferrari, a warrant self-signed, for his own execution!

"MY BEST FRIEND," so it ran, "you will guess by the 'black flag' on my envelope the good news I have to give you. My uncle is dead *at last*, thank God! and I am left his sole heir unconditionally. I am free, and shall of course return to Naples immediately, that is, as soon as some trifling law business has been got through with the executors. I believe I can arrange my return for the 23d or 24th instant, but will telegraph to you the exact day, and, if possible, the exact hour. Will you oblige me by *not* announcing this to the count-

ess, as I wish to take her by surprise. Poor girl! she will have often felt lonely, I am sure, and I want to see the first beautiful look of rapture and astonishment in her eyes! You can understand this, can you not, *amico*, or does it seem to you a folly? At any rate, I should consider it very churlish were I to keep *you* in ignorance of my coming home, and I know you will humor me in my desire that the news should be withheld from Nina. How delighted she will be, and what a joyous carnival we will have this winter! I do not think I ever felt more light of heart; perhaps it is because I am so much heavier in pocket. I am glad of the money, as it places me on a more equal footing with *her*, and though all her letters to me have been full of the utmost tenderness, still I feel she will think even better of me, now I am in a position somewhat nearer to her own. As for you, my good conte, on my return I shall make it my first duty to pay back with interest the rather large debt I owe to you—thus my honor will be satisfied, and you, I am sure, will have a better opinion of

"Yours to command,

"GUIDO FERRARI."

This was the letter, and I read it over and over again. Some of the words burned themselves into my memory as though they were living flame. "*All her letters to me have been full of the utmost tenderness!*" Oh, miserable dupe! fooled, fooled to the acme of folly even as I had been! *She*, the arch-traitress, to prevent his entertaining the slightest possible suspicion or jealousy of her actions during his absence, had written him, no doubt, epistles sweet as honey, brimming over with endearing epithets and vows of constancy, even while she knew she had accepted *me* as her husband—*me*—good God! What a devil's dance of death it was!

"*On my return I shall make it my first duty to pay back with interest the rather large debt I owe you*" (rather large indeed, Guido, so large that you have no idea of its extent!), "*thus my honor will be satisfied*" (and so will mine in part), "*and you, I am sure, will have a better opinion of yours to command.*" Perhaps I shall, Guido—mine to command as you are—perhaps when all my commands are fulfilled to the bitter end, I *may* think more kindly of you. But not till then! In the meantime—I thought earnestly for a few minutes, and then sitting down, I penned the following note:

"Caro amico! Delighted to hear of your good fortune, and still more enchanted to know you will soon enliven us all with your presence! I admire your little plan of surprising the

countess, and will respect your wishes in the matter. But you, on your part, must do me a trifling favor: we have been very dull since you left, and I propose to start the gayeties afresh by giving a dinner on the 24th (Christmas Eve), in honor of your return—an epicurean repast for gentlemen only. Therefore, I ask you to oblige me by fixing your return for that day, and on arrival at Naples, come straight to me at this hotel, that I may have the satisfaction of being the first to welcome you as you deserve. Telegraph your answer, and the hour of your train; and my carriage shall meet you at the station. The dinner-hour can be fixed to suit your convenience of course; what say you to eight o'clock? After dinner you can betake yourself to the Villa Romani when you please—your enjoyment of the lady's surprise and rapture will be the more keen for having been slightly delayed. Trusting you will not refuse to gratify an old man's whim, I am

“Yours for the time being,
“CESARE OLIVA.”

This epistle finished and written in the crabbed disguised penmanship it was part of my business to affect, I folded, sealed and addressed it, and summoning Vincenzo, bade him post it immediately. As soon as he had gone on this errand, I sat down to my as yet untasted breakfast and made some effort to eat as usual. But my thoughts were too active for appetite—I counted on my fingers the days—there were four, only four, between me—and what? One thing was certain—I must see my wife, or rather I should say my *betrothed*—I must see her that very day. I then began to consider how my courtship had progressed since that evening when she declared she loved me. I had seen her frequently, though not daily—her behavior had been by turns affectionate, adoring, timid, gracious and once or twice passionately loving, though the latter impulse in her I had always coldly checked. For though I could bear a great deal, any outburst of sham sentiment on her part sickened and filled me with such utter loathing that often when she was more than usually tender I dreaded lest my pent-up wrath should break loose and impel me to kill her swiftly and suddenly as one crushes the head of a poisonous adder—an all-too-merciful death for such as she. I preferred to woo her by gifts alone—and her hands were always ready to take whatever I or others chose to offer her. From a rare jewel to a common flower she never refused anything—her strongest passions were vanity and avarice. Sparkling gems from the pilfered store of Carmelo Neri—trinkets which I had especially

designed for her—lace, rich embroideries, bouquets of hot-house blossoms, gilded boxes of costly sweets—nothing came amiss to her—she accepted all with a certain covetous glee which she was at no pains to hide from me—nay, she made it rather evident that she expected such things as her right.

And after all, what did it matter to me—I thought—of what value was anything I possessed save to assist me in carrying out the punishment I had destined for her? I studied her nature with critical coldness—I saw its inbred vice artfully concealed beneath the affectation of virtue—every day she sunk lower in my eyes, and I wondered vaguely how I could ever have loved so coarse and common a thing! Lovely she certainly was—lovely, too, are many of the wretched outcasts who sell themselves in the streets for gold, and who in spite of their criminal trade are less vile than such a woman as the one I had wedded. Mere beauty of face and form can be bought as easily as one buys a flower—but the loyal heart, the pure soul, the lofty intelligence which can make of woman an angel—these are unpurchasable ware, and seldom fall to the lot of man. For beauty, though so perishable, is a snare to us all—it maddens our blood in spite of ourselves—we men are made so. How was it that I—even I, who now loathed the creature I had once loved—could not look upon her physical loveliness without a foolish thrill of passion awaking within me—passion that had something of the murderous in it—admiration that was almost brutal—feelings which I could not control though I despised myself for them while they lasted! There is a weak point in the strongest of us, and wicked women know well where we are most vulnerable. One dainty pin-prick well-aimed—and all the barriers of caution and reserve are broken down—we are ready to fling away our souls for a smile or a kiss. Surely at the last day when we are judged—and may be condemned—we can make our last excuse to the Creator in the words of the first misguided man:

“The woman whom thou gavest to be with me—she tempted me, and I did eat!”

I lost no time that day in going to the Villa Romani. I drove there in my carriage, taking with me the usual love-offering in the shape of a large gilded osier-basket full of white violets. Their delicious odor reminded me of that May morning when Stella was born—and then quickly there flashed into my mind the words spoken by Guido Ferrari at the time. How mysterious they had seemed to me then—how clear their meaning now! On arriving at the villa I found my *fiancée* in her own boudoir, attired in morning *deshabille*, in a trailing robe

of white cashmere trimmed with Mechlin lace and swan's-down can be considered *déshabille*. Her rich hair hung loosely on her shoulders, and she was seated in a velvet easy-chair before a small sparkling wood fire, reading. Her attitude was one of luxurious ease and grace, but she sprung up as soon as her maid announced me, and came forward with her usual charming air of welcome, in which there was something imperial, as of a sovereign who receives a subject. I presented the flowers I had brought, with a few words of studied and formal compliment, uttered for the benefit of the servant who lingered in the room—then I added in a lower tone:

"I have news of importance—can I speak to you privately?"

She smiled assent, and motioning me by a graceful gesture of her hand to take a seat, she at once dismissed her maid. As soon as the door had closed behind the girl I spoke at once and to the point, scarcely waiting till my wife resumed her easy-chair before the fire.

"I have had a letter from Signor Ferrari."

She started slightly, but said nothing, she merely bowed her head and raised her delicately arched eyebrows with a look of inquiry as of one who should say, "Indeed! in what way does this concern me?" I watched her narrowly, and then continued: "He is coming back in two or three days—he says he is sure," and here I smiled, "that you will be delighted to see him."

This time she half rose from her seat, her lips moved as though she would speak, but she remained silent, and sinking back again among her violet velvet cushions, she grew very pale.

"If," I went on, "you have any reason to think that he may make himself disagreeable to you when he knows of your engagement to me, out of disappointed ambition, conceit, or self-interest (for of course *you* never encouraged him), I should advise you to go on a visit to some friends for a few days till his irritation shall have somewhat passed. What say you to such a plan?"

She appeared to meditate for a few moments—then raising her lovely eyes with a wistful and submissive look, she replied:

"It shall be as you wish, Cesare! Signor Ferrari is certainly rash and hot-tempered, he might be presumptuous enough to— But you do not think of yourself in the matter! Surely *you* also are in danger of being insulted by him when he knows all?"

"I shall be on my guard!" I said, quietly. "Besides, I can easily pardon any outburst of temper on his part—it will

be perfectly natural, I think! To lose all hope of ever winning such a love as yours must needs be a sore trial to one of his hot blood and fiery impulses. Poor fellow!" and I sighed and shook my head with benevolent gentleness. "By the way, he tells me he has had letters from you?"

I put this question carelessly, but it took her by surprise. She caught her breath hard and looked at me sharply, with an alarmed expression. Seeing that my face was perfectly impassive, she recovered her composure instantly, and answered:

"Oh, yes! I have been compelled to write to him once or twice on matters of business connected with my late husband's affairs. Most unfortunately, Fabio made him one of the trustees of his fortune in case of his death—it is exceedingly awkward for me that he should occupy that position—it appears to give him some authority over my actions. In reality he has none. He has no doubt exaggerated the number of times I have written to him? it would be like his impertinence to do so."

Though this last remark was addressed to me almost as a question, I let it pass without response. I reverted to my original theme.

"What think you, then?" I said. "Will you remain here or will you absent yourself for a few days?"

She rose from her chair and approaching me, knelt down at my side, clasping her two little hands round my arm. "With your permission," she returned, softly, "I will go to the convent where I was educated. It is some eight or ten miles distant from here; and I think" (here she counterfeited the most wonderful expression of ingenuous sweetness and piety)—"I think I should like to make a '*retreat*'—that is, devote some time solely to the duties of religion before I enter upon a second marriage. The dear nuns would be so glad to see me—and I am sure you will not object? It will be a good preparation for my future."

I seized her caressing hands and held them hard, while I looked upon her kneeling there like the white-robed figure of a praying saint.

"It will indeed!" I said, in a harsh voice. "The best of all possible preparations! We none of us know what may happen—we cannot tell whether life or death awaits us—it is wise to prepare for either by words of penitence and devotion! I admire this beautiful spirit in you, *carina*! Go to the convent by all means! I shall find you there and will visit you when the wrath and bitterness of our friend Ferrari have been

smoothed into silence and resignation. Yes—go to the convent, among the good and pious nuns—and when you pray for yourself, pray for the peace of your dead husband's soul—and—for me! Such prayers, unselfish and earnest, uttered by pure lips like yours, fly swiftly to heaven! And as for young Guido—have no fear—I promise you he shall offend you no more!”

“Ah, you do not know him!” she murmured, lightly kissing my hands that still held hers; “I fear he will give you a great deal of trouble.”

“I shall at any rate know how to silence him,” I said, releasing her as I spoke, and watching her as she rose from her kneeling position and stood before me, supple and delicate as a white iris swaying in the wind. “*You* never gave him reason to hope—therefore he has no cause of complaint.”

“True!” she replied, readily, with an untroubled smile. “But I am such a nervous creature! I am always imagining evils that never happen. And now, Cesare, when do you wish me to go to the convent?”

I shrugged my shoulders with an air of indifference.

“Your submission to my will, *mia bella*,” I said, coldly, “is altogether charming, and flatters me much, but I am not your master—not yet! Pray choose your own time, and suit your departure to your own pleasure.”

“Then,” she replied, with an air of decision, “I will go to-day. The sooner the better—for some instinct tells me that Guido will play us a trick and return before we expect him. Yes—I will go to-day.”

I rose to take my leave. “Then you will require leisure to make your preparations,” I said, with ceremonious politeness. “I assure you I approve your resolve. If you inform the superioress of the convent that I am your betrothed husband, I suppose I shall be permitted to see you when I call?”

“Oh, certainly!” she replied. “The dear nuns will do anything for me. Their order is one of perpetual adoration, and their rules are very strict, but they do not apply them to their old pupils, and I am one of their great favorites.”

“Naturally!” I observed. “And will you also join in the service of perpetual adoration?”

“Oh, yes!”

“It needs an untainted soul like yours,” I said, with a satirical smile, which she did not see, “to pray before the unveiled Host without being conscious-smitten! I envy you your privilege. *I* could not do it—but *you* are probably nearer to the angels than we know. And so you will pray for me?”

She raised her eyes with devout gentleness. “I will indeed!”

“I thank you!”—and I choked back the bitter contempt and disgust I had for her hypocrisy as I spoke—“I thank you heartily—most heartily! Addio!”

She came or rather floated to my side, her white garments trailing about her and the gold of her hair glittering in the mingled glow of the firelight and the wintery sunbeams that shone through the window. She looked up—a witch-like languor lay in her eyes—her red lips pouted.

“Not one kiss before you go?” she said.

CHAPTER XXI.

FOR a moment I lost my self-possession. I scarcely remember now what I did. I know I clasped her almost roughly in my arms—I know that I kissed her passionately on lips, throat and brow—and that in the fervor of my embraces, the thought of what manner of vile thing she was came swiftly upon me, causing me to release her with such suddenness that she caught at the back of a chair to save herself from falling. Her breath came and went in little quick gasps of excitement, her face was flushed—she looked astonished, yet certainly not displeased. No, *she* was not angry, but *I* was—thoroughly annoyed—bitterly vexed with myself, for being such a fool.

“Forgive me,” I muttered. “I forgot—I——”

A little smile stole round the corners of her mouth. “You are fully pardoned!” she said, in a low voice, “you need not apologize.”

Her smile deepened; suddenly she broke into a rippling laugh, sweet and silvery as a bell—a laugh that went through me like a knife. Was it not the self-same laughter that had pierced my brain the night I witnessed her amorous interview with Guido in the avenue? Had not the cruel mockery of it nearly driven me mad? I could not endure it—I sprang to her side—she ceased laughing and looked at me in wide-eyed wonderment.

“Listen!” I said, in an impatient, almost fierce tone. “Do not laugh like that! It jars my nerves—it—hurts me! I will tell you why. Once—long ago—in my youth—I loved a woman. She was *not* like you—no—for she was false! False to the very heart's core—false in every word she uttered. You understand me? she resembled you in nothing—nothing! But she used to laugh at me—she trampled on my life and spoiled it—she broke my heart! It is all past now. I never think of her, only your laughter reminded me—there!” And I took

her hands and kissed them. "I have told you the story of my early folly—forget it and forgive me! It is time you prepared for your journey, is it not? If I can be of service to you, command me—you know where to send for me. Good-bye! and the peace of a pure conscience be with you!"

And I laid my burning hand on her head weighted with its clustering curls of gold. *She* thought this gesture was one of blessing. *I* thought—God only knows what *I* thought—yet surely if curses can be so bestowed, my curse crowned her at the moment! I dared not trust myself longer in her presence, and without another word or look I left her and hurried from the house. I knew she was startled and at the same time gratified to think she could thus have moved me to any display of emotion—but I would not even turn my head to catch her parting glance. I could not—I was sick of myself and of her. I was literally torn asunder between love and hatred—love born basely of material feeling alone—hatred, the offspring of a deeply injured spirit for whose wrong there could scarce be found sufficient remedy. Once out of the influence of her bewildering beauty, my mind grew calmer—and the drive back to the hotel in my carriage through the sweet chillness of the December air quieted the feverish excitement of my blood and restored me to myself. It was a most lovely day—bright and fresh, with the savor of the sea in the wind. The waters of the bay were of a steel-like blue shading into deep olive-green, and a soft haze lingered about the shores of Amalfi like a veil of gray, shot through with silver and gold. Down the streets went women in picturesque garb carrying on their heads baskets full to the brim of purple violets that scented the air as they passed—children ragged and dirty ran along, pushing the luxuriant tangle of their dark locks away from their beautiful wild antelope eyes, and holding up bunches of roses and narcissi with smiles as brilliant as the very sunshine, implored the passengers to buy "for the sake of the little Gesu who was soon coming!"

Bells clashed and clanged from the churches in honor of San Tommaso, whose festival it was, and the city had that aspect of gala gayety about it, which is in truth common enough to all continental towns, but which seems strange to the solemn Londoner who sees so much apparently reasonless merriment for the first time. He, accustomed to have his reluctant laughter pumped out of him by an occasional visit to the theater where he can witness the "original" English translation of a French farce, cannot understand *why* these foolish Nea-

politans should laugh and sing and shout in the manner they do, merely because they are glad to be alive. And after much dubious consideration, he decides within himself that they are all rascals—the scum of the earth—and that he and he only is the true representative of man at his best—the model of civilized respectability. And a mournful spectacle he thus seems to the eyes of us "base" foreigners—in our hearts we are sorry for him and believe that if he could manage to shake off the fetters of his insular customs and prejudices, he might almost succeed in enjoying life as much as we do!

As I drove along I saw a small crowd at one of the street corners—a gesticulating, laughing crowd, listening to an "improvisatore" or wandering poet—a plump-looking fellow who had all the rhymes of Italy at his fingers' ends, and who could make a poem on any subject or an acrostic on any name, with perfect facility. I stopped my carriage to listen to his extemporized verses, many of which were really admirable, and tossed him three francs. He threw them up in the air, one after the other, and caught them, as they fell in his mouth, appearing to have swallowed them all—then with an inimitable grimace, he pulled off his tattered cap and said:

"*Ancora affamato, eccellenza!*" (I am still hungry!) amid the renewed laughter of his easily amused audience. A merry poet he was and without conceit—and his good humor merited the extra silver pieces I gave him, which caused him to wish me—"Buon appetito e un sorriso della Madonna!"—(a good appetite to you and a smile of the Madonna!) Imagine the Lord Laureate of England standing at the corner of Regent Street swallowing half-pence for his rhymes! Yet some of the quaint conceits strung together by such a fellow as this improvisatore might furnish material for many of the so-called "poets" whose names are mysteriously honored in Britain.

Further on I came upon a group of red-capped coral fishers assembled round a portable stove whereon roasting chestnuts cracked their glossy sides and emitted savory odors. The men were singing gayly to the thrumming of an old guitar, and the song he sung was familiar to me. Stay! where had I heard it?—let me listen!

"Sciore limone *
Le voglio far mori de passione
Zompa llari llirà!"

Ha! I remember now. When I had crawled out of the vault through the brigand's hole of entrance—when my heart had

* Neapolitan dialect.

bounded with glad anticipations never to be realized—when I had believed in the worth of love and friendship—when I had seen the morning sun glittering on the sea, and had thought—poor fool!—that his long beams were like so many golden flags of joy hung up in heaven to symbolize the happiness of my release from death and my restoration to liberty—then—then I had heard a sailor's voice in the distance singing that "ritornello," and I had fondly imagined its impassioned lines were all for me! Hateful music—most bitter sweetness! I could have put my hands up to my ears to shut out the sound of it now that I thought of the time when I had heard it last! For then I had possessed a heart—a throbbing, passionate, sensitive thing—alive to every emotion of tenderness and affection—now that heart was dead and cold as a stone. Only its corpse went with me everywhere, weighing me down with itself to the strange grave it occupied, a grave wherein were also buried so many dear delusions—such plaintive regrets, such pleading memories, that surely it was no wonder their small ghosts arose and haunted me, saying, "*Wilt thou not weep for this lost sweetness?*" "*Wilt thou not relent before such a remembrance?*" or "*Hast thou no desire for that past delight?*" But to all such inward temptations my soul was deaf and inexorable; justice—stern, immutable justice was what I sought and what I meant to have.

May be you find it hard to understand the possibility of scheming and carrying out so prolonged a vengeance as mine? If you that read these pages are English, I know it will seem to you well-nigh incomprehensible. The temperate blood of the northerner, combined with his open, unsuspecting nature, has, I admit, the advantage over us in matters of personal injury. An Englishman, so I hear, is incapable of nourishing a long and deadly resentment, even against an unfaithful wife—he is too indifferent, he thinks it not worth his while. But we Neapolitans, we can carry a "*vendetta*" through a life-time—ay, through generation after generation! This is bad, you say—immoral, unchristian. No doubt! We are more than half pagans at heart; we are as our country and our traditions have made us. It will need another visitation of Christ before we shall learn how to forgive those that spitefully use us. Such a doctrine seems to us a mere play upon words—a weak maxim only fit for children and priests. Besides, did Christ himself forgive Judas? The gospel does not say so!

When I reached my own apartments at the hotel I felt worn out and fagged. I resolved to rest and receive no visitors that day. While giving my orders to Vincenzo a thought occurred

to me. I went to a cabinet in the room and unlocked a secret drawer. In it lay a strong leathern case. I lifted this, and bade Vincenzo unstrap and open it. He did so, nor showed the least sign of surprise when a pair of richly ornamented pistols was displayed to his view.

"Good weapons?" I remarked, in a casual manner.

My valet took each one out of the case, and examined them both critically.

"They need cleaning, eccellenza."

"Good!" I said, briefly. "Then clean them and put them in good order. I may require to use them."

The imperturbable Vincenzo bowed, and, taking the weapons, prepared to leave the room.

"Stay!"

He turned. I looked at him steadily.

"I believe you are a faithful fellow, Vincenzo," I said.

He met my glance frankly.

"The day may come," I went on, quietly, "when I shall perhaps put your fidelity to the proof."

The dark Tuscan eyes, keen and clear a moment before, flashed brightly and then grew humid.

"Eccellenza, you have only to command! I was a soldier once—I know what duty means. But there is a better service—gratitude. I am your poor servant, but you have won my heart. I would give my life for you, should you desire it!"

He paused, half ashamed of the emotion that threatened to break through his mask of impassibility, bowed again and would have left me, but that I called him back and held out my hand.

"Shake hands, *amio*," I said, simply.

He caught it with an astonished yet pleased look—and stooping, kissed it before I could prevent him, and this time literally scrambled out of my presence with an entire oblivion of his usual dignity. Left alone, I considered this behavior of his with half-pained surprise. This poor fellow loved me it was evident—why, I knew not. I had done no more for him than any other master might have done for a good servant. I had often spoken to him with impatience, even harshness; and yet I had "won his heart"—so he said. Why should he care for me? why should my poor old butler Giacomo cherish me so devotedly in his memory; why should my very dog still love and obey me, when my nearest and dearest, my wife and my friend, had so gladly forsaken me, and were so eager to forget me! Perhaps fidelity was not the fashion now among educated persons? Perhaps it was a worn-out virtue, left to the *bas-peuple*

—to the vulgar—and to animals? Progress might have attained this result—no doubt it had.

I sighed wearily, and threw myself down in an arm-chair near the window, and watched the white-sailed boats skimming like flecks of silver across the blue-green water. The tinkling of a tambourine by and by attracted my wandering attention, and looking into the street just below my balcony I saw a young girl dancing. She was lovely to look at, and she danced with exquisite grace as well as modesty, but the beauty of her face was not so much caused by perfection of feature or outline as by a certain wistful expression that had in it something of nobility and pride. I watched her; at the conclusion of her dance she held up her tambourine with a bright yet appealing smile. Silver and copper were freely flung to her, I contributing my quota to the amount; but all she received she at once emptied into a leathern bag which was carried by a young and handsome man who accompanied her, and who, alas! was totally blind. I knew the couple well, and had often seen them; their history was pathetic enough. The girl had been betrothed to the young fellow when he had occupied a fairly good position as a worker in silver filigree jewelry. His eyesight, long painfully strained over his delicate labors, suddenly failed him—he lost his place, of course, and was utterly without resources. He offered to release his *fiancée* from her engagement, but she would not take her freedom—she insisted on marrying him at once. She had her way, and devoted herself to him soul and body—danced in the streets and sung to gain a living for herself and him; taught him to weave baskets so that he might not feel himself entirely dependent on her, and she sold these baskets for him so successfully that he was gradually making quite a little trade of them. Poor child! for she was not much more than a child—what a bright face she had!—glorified by the self-denial and courage of her every-day life. No wonder she had won the sympathy of the warm-hearted and impulsive Neapolitans—they looked upon her as a heroine of romance; and as she passed through the streets, leading her blind husband tenderly by the hand, there was not a creature in the city, even among the most abandoned and vile characters, who would have dared to offer her the least insult, or who would have ventured to address her otherwise than respectfully. She was good, innocent, and true; how was it, I wondered dreamily, that *I* could not have won a woman's heart like hers? Were the poor alone to possess all the old world virtues—honor and faith, love and loyalty? Was there something in a life of luxury that sapped virtue at its root?

Evidently early training had little to do with after results, for had not my wife been brought up among an order of nuns renowned for simplicity and sanctity; had not her own father declared her to be “as pure as a flower on the altar of the Madonna;” and yet the evil had been in her, and nothing had eradicated it; for even religion, with her, was a mere graceful sham, a kind of theatrical effect used to tone down her natural hypocrisy. My own thoughts began to harass and weary me. I took up a volume of philosophic essays and began to read, in an endeavor to distract my mind from dwelling on the one perpetual theme. The day wore on slowly enough; and I was glad when the evening closed in, and when Vincenzo, remarking that the night was chilly, kindled a pleasant wood-fire in my room, and lighted the lamps. A little while before my dinner was served he handed me a letter stating that it had just been brought by the Countess Romani's coachman. It bore my own seal and motto. I opened it; it was dated, “*La Santissima Annunziata*,” and ran as follows:

“Beloved! I arrived here safely; the nuns are delighted to see me, and you will be made heartily welcome when you come. I think of you constantly—how happy I felt this morning! You seemed to love me so much; why are you not always so fond of your faithful
NINA?”

I crumpled this note fiercely in my hand and flung it into the leaping flames of the newly-lighted fire. There was a faint perfume about it that sickened me—a subtle odor like that of a civet cat when it moves stealthily after its prey through a tangle of tropical herbage. I always detested scented note-paper—I am not the only man who does so. One is led to fancy that the fingers of the woman who writes upon it must have some poisonous or offensive taint about them, which she endeavors to cover by the aid of a chemical concoction. I would not permit myself to think of this so “faithful Nina” as she styled herself. I resumed my reading, and continued it even at dinner, during which meal Vincenzo waited upon me with his usual silent gravity and decorum, though I could feel that he watched me with a certain solicitude. I suppose I looked weary—I certainly felt so, and retired to rest unusually early. The time seemed to me so long—would the end *never* come? The next day dawned and trailed its tiresome hours after it, as a prisoner might trail his chain of iron fetters, until sunset, and then—then, when the gray of the wintery sky flashed for a brief space into glowing red—then, while the water looked like blood and the clouds like flame—then a few