

"Thus it stands," continued the marquis, affably—"the hour of six—the weapons pistols—the paces to be decided hereafter when the other seconds arrive."

I professed myself entirely satisfied with these arrangements, and shook hands with my amiable coadjutor. I then looked round at the rest of the assembled company with a smile at their troubled faces.

"Gentlemen," I said, "our feast has broken up in a rather disagreeable manner—and I am sorry for it, the more especially as it compels me to part from you. Receive my thanks for your company, and for the friendship you have displayed toward me! I do not believe that this is the last time I shall have the honor of entertaining you—but if it should be so, I shall at any rate carry a pleasant remembrance of you into the next world! If on the contrary I should survive the combat of the morning, I hope to see you all again on my marriage-day, when nothing shall occur to mar our merriment. In the meantime—good-night!"

They closed round me, pressing my hands warmly and assuring me of their entire sympathy with me in the quarrel that had occurred. The duke was especially cordial, giving me to understand that had the others failed in their services, he himself, in spite of his dignity and peace-loving disposition, would have volunteered as my second. I escaped from them all at last and reached the quiet of my own apartments. There I sat alone for more than an hour, waiting for the return of Vincenzo, whom I had sent to track Ferrari. I heard the departing footsteps of my guests as they left the hotel by twos and threes—I heard the equable voices of the marquis and Captain Freccia ordering hot coffee to be served to them in a private room where they were to await the other seconds—now and then I caught a few words of the excited language of the waiters who were volubly discussing the affair as they cleared away the remains of the superb feast at which, though none knew it save myself, death had been seated. Thirteen at table! One was a traitor and one must die. I knew which one. No presentiment lurked in my mind as to the doubtful result of the coming combat. It was not my lot to fall—my time had not come yet—I felt certain of that! No! All the fateful forces of the universe would help me to keep alive till my vengeance was fulfilled. Oh, what bitter shafts of agony Ferrari carried in his heart at that moment, I thought. *How* he had looked when I said she never cared for him! Poor wretch! I pitied him even while I rejoiced at his torture. He suffered now as I had suffered—he was duped as I had been duped—and each

quiver of his convulsed face and tormented frame had been fraught with satisfaction to me! Each moment of his life was now a pang to him. Well! it would soon be over—thus far at least I was merciful. I drew out pens and paper and commenced to write a few last instructions, in case the result of the fight should be fatal to me. I made them very concise and brief—I knew, while writing, that they would not be needed. Still—for the sake of form I wrote—and sealing the document I directed it to the Duke di Marina. I looked at my watch—it was past one o'clock and Vincenzo had not yet returned. I went to the window, and drawing back the curtains, surveyed the exquisitely peaceful scene that lay before me. The moon was still high and bright—and her reflection made the waters of the bay appear like a warrior's coat of mail woven from a thousand glittering links of polished steel. Here and there, from the masts of anchored brigs and fishing-boats, gleamed a few red and green lights burning dimly like fallen and expiring stars. There was a heavy, unnatural silence everywhere—it oppressed me, and I threw the window wide open for air. Then came the sound of bells chiming softly. People passed to and fro with quiet footsteps—some paused to exchange friendly greetings. I remembered the day with a sort of pang at my heart. The night was over, though as yet there was no sign of dawn—and—it was Christmas morning!

CHAPTER XXV.

THE opening of the room door aroused me from my meditations. I turned—to find Vincenzo standing near me, hat in hand—he had just entered.

"*Ebbene!*" I said, with a cheerful air—"what news?"

"Eccellenza, you have been obeyed. The young Signor Ferrari is now at his studio."

"You left him there?"

"Yes, eccellenza,"—and Vincenzo proceeded to give me a graphic account of his adventures. On leaving the banquetting-room, Ferrari had taken a carriage and driven straight to the Villa Romani—Vincenzo, unperceived, had swung himself on to the back of the vehicle and had gone also.

"Arriving there," continued my valet, "he dismissed the fiacre—and rang the gate-bell furiously six or seven times. No one answered. I hid myself among the trees and watched. There were no lights in the villa windows—all was darkness. He rang it again—he even shook the gate as though he would break it open. At last the poor Giacomo came, half undressed

and holding a lantern in his hand—he seemed terrified, and trembled so much that the lantern joggled up and down like a corpse-candle on a tomb.

“‘I must see the contessa,’ said the young signor. Giacomo blinked like an owl, and coughed as though the devil scratched in his throat.

“‘The contessa!’ he said. ‘She is gone!’

“The signor then threw himself upon Giacomo and shook him to and fro as though he were a bag of loose wheat.

“‘Gone!’ and he screamed like a madman! ‘Where? Tell me where, dolt! idiot! driveler! before I twist your neck for you!’

“Truly, eccellenza, I would have gone to the rescue of the poor Giacomo, but respect for your commands kept me silent. ‘A thousand pardons, signor!’ he whispered, out of breath with his shaking. ‘I will tell you instantly—most instantly. She is at the Convento dell’ Annunziata—ten miles from here—the saints know I speak the truth—she left two days since.’

“The Signor Ferrari then flung away the unfortunate Giacomo with so much force that he fell in a heap on the pavement and broke his lantern to pieces. The old man set up a most pitiful groaning, but the signor cared nothing for that. He was mad, I think. ‘Get to bed!’ he cried, ‘and sleep—sleep till you die! Tell your mistress when you see her that I came to kill her! My curse upon this house and all who dwell in it!’ And with that he ran so quickly through the garden into the high-road that I had some trouble to follow him. There, after walking, unsteadily for a few paces, he suddenly fell down, senseless.”

Vincenzo paused. “Well,” I said, “what happened next?”

“Eccellenza, I could not leave him there without aid. I drew my cloak well up to my mouth and pulled my hat down over my eyes so that he could not recognize me. Then I took water from the fountain close by and dashed it on his face. He soon came to himself, and, taking me for a stranger, thanked me for my assistance, saying that he had a sudden shock. He then drank greedily from the fountain and went on his way.”

“You followed?”

“Yes, eccellenza—at a little distance. He next visited a common tavern in one of the back streets of the city and came out with two men. They were well dressed—they had the air of gentlemen spoiled by bad fortune. The signor talked with them for some time—he seemed much excited. I could not hear what they said except at the end, when these two stran-

gers consented to appear as seconds for Signor Ferrari, and they at once left him, to come straight to this hotel. And they are arrived, for I saw them through a half-opened door as I came in, talking with the Marquis D’Avenecourt.”

“Well!” I said, “and what of Signor Ferrari when he was left alone by his two friends?”

“There is not much more to tell, eccellenza. He went up the little hill to his own studio, and I noticed that he walked like a very old man with his head bent. Once he stopped and shook his fist in the air as though threatening some one. He let himself in at his door with a private key—and I saw him no more. I felt that he would not come out again for some time. And as I moved away to return here, I heard a sound as of terrible weeping.”

“And that is all, Vincenzo?”

“That is all, eccellenza.”

I was silent. There was something in the simple narration that touched me, though I remained as determinately relentless as ever. After a few moments I said:

“You have done well, Vincenzo. You are aware how grossly this young man has insulted me—and that his injurious treatment can only be wiped out in one way. That way is already arranged. You can set out those pistols you cleaned.”

Vincenzo obeyed—but as he lifted the heavy case of weapons and set them on the table, he ventured to remark, timidly:

“The eccellenza knows it is now Christmas-day?”

“I am quite aware of the fact,” I said, somewhat frigidly.

In nowise daunted he went on. “Coming back just now I saw the big Nicolo—the eccellenza has doubtless seen him often?—he is a vine-grower, and they say he is the largest man in Naples—three months since he nearly killed his brother—*ebbene!* To-night that same big Nicolo is drinking Chianti with that same brother, and both shouted after me as I passed, ‘Holà! Vincenzo Flamma! all is well between us because it is the blessed Christ’s birthday.’” Vincenzo stopped and regarded me wistfully.

“Well!” I said, calmly, “what has the big Nicolo or his brother to do with me?”

My valet hesitated—looked up—then down—finally he said, simply, “May the saints preserve the eccellenza from all harm!”

I smiled gravely. “Thank you, my friend! I understand what you mean. Have no fear for me. I am now going to lie down and rest till five o’clock or thereabouts—and I advise

you to do the same. At that time you can bring me some coffee."

And I nodded kindly to him as I left him and entered my sleeping apartment, where I threw myself on the bed, dressed as I was. I had no intention of sleeping—my mind was too deeply engrossed by all I had gone through. I could enter into Guido's feelings—had I not suffered as he was now suffering?—nay! more than he—for *he*, at any rate, would not be buried alive! I should take care of that! *He* would not have to endure the agony of breaking loose from the cold grasp of the grave to come back to life and find his name slandered, and his vacant place filled up by a usurper. Do what I would, I could not torture him as much as I myself had been tortured. That was a pity—death, sudden and almost painless, seemed too good for him. I held up my hand in the half light and watched it closely to see if it trembled ever so slightly. No! it was steady as a rock—I felt I was sure of my aim. I would not fire at his heart, I thought—but just above it—for I had to remember one thing—he must live long enough to recognize me before he died. *That* was the sting I reserved for his last moments! The sick dreams that had bewildered my brain when I was taken ill at the auberge recurred to me. I remembered the lithe figure, so like Guido, that had glided in the Indian canoe toward me and had plunged a dagger three times in my heart! Had it not been realized? Had not Guido stabbed me thrice?—in his theft of my wife's affections—in his contempt for my little dead child—in his slanders on my name! Then why such foolish notions of pity—of forgiveness, that were beginning to steal into my mind? It was too late now for forgiveness—the very idea of it only rose out of a silly sentimentalism awakened by Ferrari's allusion to our young days—days for which, after all, he really cared nothing. Meditating on all these things, I suppose I must have fallen by imperceptible degrees into a doze which gradually deepened till it became a profound and refreshing sleep. From this I was awakened by a knocking at the door. I arose and admitted Vincenzo, who entered bearing a tray of steaming coffee.

"Is it already so late?" I asked him.

"It wants a quarter to five," replied Vincenzo—then looking at me in some surprise, he added, "Will not the *eccellenza* change his evening-dress?"

I nodded in the affirmative—and while I drank my coffee my valet set out a suit of rough tweed, such as I was accustomed to wear every day. He then left me, and I quickly changed my attire, and while I did so I considered carefully

the position of affairs. Neither the Marquis D'Avencourt nor Captain Freccia had ever known me personally when I was Fabio Romani—nor was it at all probable that the two tavern companions of Ferrari had ever seen me. A surgeon would be on the field—most probably a stranger. Thinking over these points, I resolved on a bold stroke—it was this—that when I turned to face Ferrari in the combat, I would do so with uncovered eyes—I would abjure my spectacles altogether for the occasion. Vaguely I wondered what the effect would be upon him. I was very much changed even without these disguising glasses—my white beard and hair had seemingly altered my aspect—yet I knew there was something familiar in the expression of my eyes that could not fail to startle one who had known me well. My seconds would consider it very natural that I should remove the smoke-colored spectacles in order to see my aim unencumbered—the only person likely to be disconcerted by my action was Ferrari himself. The more I thought of it the more determined I was to do it. I had scarcely finished dressing when Vincenzo entered with my overcoat, and informed me that the marquis waited for me, and that a close carriage was in attendance at the private door of the hotel.

"Permit me to accompany you, *eccellenza!*" pleaded the faithful fellow, with anxiety in the tone of his voice.

"Come then, *amico!*" I said, cheerily. "If the marquis makes no objection I shall not. But you must promise not to interrupt any of the proceedings by so much as an exclamation."

He promised readily, and when I joined the marquis he followed, carrying my case of pistols.

"He can be trusted, I suppose?" asked D'Avencourt, glancing keenly at him while shaking hands cordially with me.

"To the death!" I replied, laughingly. "He will break his heart if he is not allowed to bind up my wounds!"

"I see you are in good spirits, *conte,*" remarked Captain Freccia, as we took our seats in the carriage. "It is always the way with the man who is in the right. Ferrari, I fear, is not quite so comfortable."

And he proffered me a cigar, which I accepted. Just as we were about to start, the fat landlord of the hotel rushed toward us, and laying hold of the carriage door—"Eccellenza," he observed in a confidential whisper, "of course this is only a matter of coffee and *glorias?* They will be ready for you all on your return. I know—I understand!" And he smiled and nodded a great many times, and laid his finger knowingly on the side of his nose. We laughed heartily, assuring him that

his perspicuity was wonderful, and he stood on the broad steps in high good humor, watching us as our vehicle rumbled heavily away.

"Evidently," I remarked, "he does not consider a duel as a serious affair."

"Not he!" replied Freccia. "He has known of too many sham fights to be able to understand a real one. D'Avencourt knows something about that too, though he always kills his man. But very often it is sufficient to scratch one another with the sword-point so as to draw a quarter of a drop of blood, and honor is satisfied! Then the coffee and *glorias* are brought, as suggested by our friend the landlord."

"It is a ridiculous age," said the marquis, taking his cigar from his mouth, and complacently surveying his small, supple white hand, "thoroughly ridiculous, but I determined it should never make a fool of *me*. You see, my dear conte, nowadays a duel is very frequently decided with swords rather than pistols, and why? Because cowards fancy it is much more difficult to kill with the sword. But not at all. Long ago I made up my mind that no man should continue to live who dared to insult me. I therefore studied sword-play as an art. And I assure you it is a simple matter to kill with the sword—remarkably simple. My opponents are astonished at the ease with which I dispatch them!"

Freccia laughed. "De Hamal is a pupil of yours, marquis, is he not?"

"I regret to say yes! He is marvelously clumsy. I have often earnestly requested him to eat his sword rather than handle it so boorishly. Yet he kills his men, too, but in a butcher-like manner—totally without grace or refinement. I should say he was about on a par with our two associates, Ferrari's seconds."

I roused myself from a reverie into which I had fallen.

"What men are they?" I inquired.

"One calls himself the Capitano Ciabatti, the other Cavaliere Dursi, at your service," answered Freccia, indifferently. "Good swearers both and hard drinkers—filled with stock phrases, such as 'our distinguished dear friend, Ferrari,' 'wrongs which can only be wiped out by blood'—all bombast and braggadocio! These fellows would as soon be on one side as the other."

He resumed his smoking, and we all three lapsed into silence. The drive seemed very long, though in reality the distance was not great. At last we passed the Casa Ghirlande, a superb *château* belonging to a distinguished nobleman who

in former days had been a friendly neighbor to me, and then our vehicle jolted down a gentle declivity which sloped into a small valley, where there was a good-sized piece of smooth flat greensward. From this spot could be faintly discerned the castellated turrets of my own house, the Villa Romani. Here we came to a standstill. Vincenza jumped briskly down from his seat beside the coachman, and assisted us to alight. The carriage then drove off to a retired corner behind some trees. We surveyed the ground, and saw that as yet only one person beside ourselves had arrived. This was the surgeon, a dapper good-humored little German who spoke bad French and worse Italian, and who shook hands cordially with us all. On learning who I was he bowed low and smiled very amiably. "The best wish I can offer to you, signor," he said, "is that you may have no occasion for my services. You have reposed yourself? That is well—sleep steadies the nerves. Ach! you shiver! True it is, the morning is cold."

I did indeed experience a passing shudder, but not because the air was chilly. It was because I felt certain—so terribly certain, of killing the man I had once loved well. Almost I wished I could also feel that there was the slightest possibility of his killing me; but no!—all my instincts told me there was no chance of this. I had a sort of sick pain at my heart, and as I thought of *her*, the jewel-eyed snake who had wrought all the evil, my wrath against her increased tenfold. I wondered scornfully what she was doing away in the quiet convent where the sacred Host unveiled, glittered on the altar like a star of the morning. No doubt she slept; it was yet too early for her to practice her sham sanctity. She slept, in all probability most peacefully, while her husband and her lover called upon death to come and decide between them. The slow clear strokes of a bell chiming from the city tolled six, and as its last echo trembled mournfully on the wind there was a slight stir among my companions. I looked and saw Ferrari approaching with his two associates. He walked slowly, and was muffled in a thick cloak; his hat was pulled over his brows, and I could not see the expression of his face, as he did not turn his head once in my direction, but stood apart leaning against the trunk of a leafless-tree. The seconds on both sides now commenced measuring the ground.

"We are agreed as to the distance, gentlemen," said the marquis. "Twenty paces, I think?"

"Twenty paces," stiffly returned one of Ferrari's friends—a battered-looking middle-aged *roué* with ferocious mustachios, whom I presumed was Captain Ciabatti.

They went on measuring carefully and in silence. During the pause I turned my back on the whole party, slipped off my spectacles and put them in my pocket. Then I lowered the brim of my hat slightly so that the change might not be observed too suddenly—and resuming my first position, I waited. It was daylight though not full morning—the sun had not yet risen, but there was an opaline luster in the sky, and one pale pink streak in the east like the floating pennon from the lance of a hero, which heralded his approach. There was a gentle twittering of awakening birds—the grass sparkled with a million tiny drops of frosty dew. A curious calmness possessed me. I felt for the time as though I were a mechanical automaton moved by some other will than my own. I had no passion left.

The weapons were now loaded—and the marquis, looking about him with a cheerful, business-like air, remarked:

“I think we may now place our men?”

This suggestion agreed to, Ferrari left his place near the tree against which he had in part reclined as though fatigued, and advanced to the spot his seconds pointed out to him. He threw off his hat and overcoat, thereby showing that he was still in his evening-dress. His face was haggard and of a sickly paleness—his eyes had dark rings of pain round them, and were full of a keen and bitter anguish. He eagerly grasped the pistol they handed to him, and examined it closely with vengeful interest. I meanwhile also threw off my hat and coat—the marquis glanced at me with careless approval.

“You look a much younger man without your spectacles, conte,” he remarked as he handed me my weapon. I smiled indifferently, and took up my position at the distance indicated, exactly opposite Ferrari. He was still occupied in the examination of his pistol, and did not at once look up.

“Are we ready, gentlemen?” demanded Freccia, with courteous coldness.

“Quite ready,” was the response. The Marquis D’Aven-court took out his handkerchief. Then Ferrari raised his head and faced me fully for the first time. Great Heaven! shall I ever forget the awful change that came over his pallid countenance—the confused mad look of his eyes—the startled horror of his expression! His lips moved as though he were about to utter an exclamation—he staggered.

“One!” cried D’Aven-court.

We raised our weapons.

“Two!”

The scared and bewildered expression of Ferrari’s face deep-

ened visibly as he eyed me steadily in taking aim. I smiled proudly—I gave him back glance for glance—I saw him waver—his hand shook.

“Three!” and the white handkerchief fluttered to the ground. Instantly, and together, we fired. Ferrari’s bullet whizzed past me, merely tearing my coat and grazing my shoulder. The smoke cleared—Ferrari still stood erect, opposite to me, staring straight forward with the same frantic far-off look—the pistol had dropped from his hand. Suddenly he threw up his arms—shuddered—and with a smothered groan fell, face forward, prone on the sward. The surgeon hurried to his side and turned him so that he lay on his back. He was unconscious—though his dark eyes were wide open, and turned blindly upward to the sky. The front of his shirt was already soaked with blood. We all gathered round him.

“A good shot!” inquired the marquis, with the indifference of a practiced duelist.

“Ach! a good shot indeed!” replied the little German doctor, shaking his head as he rose from his examination of the wound. “Excellent! He will be dead in ten minutes. The bullet has passed through the lungs close to the heart. Honor is satisfied certainly!”

At that moment a deep, anguished sigh parted the lips of the dying man. Sense and speculation returned to those glaring eyes so awfully upturned. He looked upon us all doubtfully one after the other—till finally his gaze rested upon me. Then he grew strangely excited—his lips moved—he eagerly tried to speak. The doctor, watchful of his movements, poured brandy between his teeth. The cordial gave him momentary strength—he raised himself by a supreme effort.

“Let me speak,” he gasped faintly, “to him!” And he pointed to me—then he continued to mutter like a man in a dream—“to him—alone—alone!—to him alone!”

The others, slightly awed by his manner, drew aside out of ear-shot, and I advanced and knelt beside him, stooping my face between his and the morning sky. His wild eyes met mine with a piteous, beseeching terror.

“In God’s name,” he whispered, thickly, “*who are you?*”

“You know me, Guido!” I answered, steadily. “I am Fabio Romani, whom you once called friend! I am he whose wife you stole!—whose name you slandered!—whose honor you despised! Ah! look at me well! your own heart tells you who I am!”

He uttered a low moan and raised his hand with a feeble gesture.

"Fabio? Fabio?" he gasped. "He died—I saw him in his coffin——"

I leaned more closely over him. "I was *buried alive*," I said with thrilling distinctness. "Understand me, Guido—buried alive! I escaped—no matter how. I came home—to learn your treachery and my own dishonor! Shall I tell you more?"

A terrible shudder shook his frame—his head moved restlessly to and fro, the sweat stood in large drops upon his forehead. With my own handkerchief I wiped his lips and brow tenderly—my nerves were strung up to an almost brittle tension—I smiled as a woman smiles when on the verge of hysterical weeping.

"You know the avenue," I said, "the dear old avenue, where the nightingales sing? I saw you there, Guido—with *her*!—on the very night of my return from death—*she* was in your arms—you kissed her—you spoke of me—you toyed with the necklace on her white breast!"

He writhed under my gaze with a strong convulsive movement.

"Tell me—quick!" he gasped. "Does—*she*—know you?"

"Not yet!" I answered, slowly. "But soon she will—when I have married her!"

A look of bitter anguish filled his straining eyes. "Oh, God, God!" he exclaimed, with a groan like that of a wild beast in pain. "This is horrible, too horrible! Spare me—spare——" A rush of blood choked his utterance. His breathing grew fainter and fainter; the livid hue of approaching dissolution spread itself gradually over his countenance. Staring wildly at me, he groped with his hands as though he searched for some lost thing. I took one of those feebly wandering hands within my own, and held it closely clasped.

"You know the rest," I said, gently; "you understand my vengeance! But it is all over, Guido—all over, now! She has played us both false. May God forgive you as I do!"

He smiled—a soft look brightened his fast-glazing eyes—the old boyish look that had won my love in former days.

"All over!" he repeated, in a sort of plaintive babble. "All over now! God—Fabio—forgive!——" A terrible convulsion wrenched and contorted his limbs and features, his throat rattled, and stretching himself out with a long shivering sigh—he died! The first beams of the rising sun, piercing through the dark, moss-covered branches of the pine-trees, fell on his clustering hair, and lent a mocking brilliancy to his wide-open sightless eyes; there was a smile on the closed lips! A burning, suffocating sensation rose in my throat, as of reb

tears trying to force a passage. I still held the hand of my friend and enemy—it had grown cold in my clasp. Upon it sparkled my family diamond—the ring *she* had given him. I drew the jewel off; then I kissed that poor passive hand as I laid it gently down—kissed it tenderly, reverently. Hearing footsteps approaching, I rose from my kneeling posture and stood erect with folded arms, looking tearlessly down on the stiffening clay before me. The rest of the party came up; no one spoke for a minute; all surveyed the dead body in silence. At last Captain Freccia said, softly, in half-inquiring accents:

"He is gone, I suppose?"

I bowed. I could not trust myself to speak.

"He made you his apology?" asked the marquis.

I bowed again. There was another pause of heavy silence. The rigid smiling face of the corpse seemed to mock all speech. The doctor stooped and skillfully closed those glazed appealing eyes—and then it seemed to me as though Guido merely slept and that a touch would waken him. The Marquis D'Aven-court took me by the arm and whispered, "Get back to the city, *amico*, and take some wine—you look positively ill! Your evident regret does you credit, considering the circumstances—but what would you?—it was a fair fight. Consider the provocation you had! I should advise you to leave Naples for a couple of weeks—by that time the affair will be forgotten. I know how these things are managed—leave it all to me."

I thanked him and shook his hand cordially and turned to depart. Vincenzo was in waiting with the carriage. Once I looked back, as with slow steps I left the field; a golden radiance illumed the sky just above the stark figure stretched so straightly on the sward; while almost from the very side of that pulseless heart a little bird rose from its nest among the grasses and soared into the heavens, singing rapturously as it flew into the warmth and glory of the living, breathing day.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ENTERING the *fiacre*, I drove in it a very little way toward the city. I bade the driver stop at the corner of the winding road that led to the Villa Romani, and there I alighted. I ordered Vincenzo to go on to the hotel and send from thence my own carriage and horses up to the villa gates, where I would wait for it. I also bade him pack my portmanteau in readiness for my departure that evening, as I proposed going to Avellino, among the mountains, for a few days. He heard