

far as anything can be known, her husband to be dead and fast buried, is likely to accept even the idea of his possible escape from the tomb! Not one!"—else the inconsolate widows would indeed have reason to be more inconsolable than they appear!

When I left her that morning I found Andrea Luziani waiting for me at my hotel. He was seated in the outer entrance hall; I bade him follow me into my private salon. He did so. Abashed at the magnificence of the apartment, he paused at the doorway, and stood, red cap in hand, hesitating, though with an amiable smile on his sunburned merry countenance.

"Come in, *amico*," I said, with an inviting gesture, "and sit down. All this tawdry show of velvet and gilding must seem common to your eyes, that have rested so long on the sparkling pomp of the foaming waves, the glorious blue curtain of the sky, and the sheeny white of the sails of the 'Laura' gleaming in the gold of the sun. Would I could live such a life as yours, Andrea!—there is nothing better under the width of heaven."

The poetical temperament of the Sicilian was caught and fired by my words. He at once forgot the splendid appurtenances of wealth and the costly luxuries that surrounded him; he advanced without embarrassment, and seated himself on a velvet and gold chair with as much ease as though it were a coil of rough rope on board the "Laura."

"You say truly, *eccellenza*," he said, with a gleam of his white teeth through his jet-black mustache, while his warm southern eyes flashed fire, "there is nothing sweeter than the life of the *marinaro*. And truly there are many who say to me, 'Ah, ah! Andrea! *buon amico*, the time comes when you will wed, and the home where the wife and children sit will seem a better thing to you than the caprice of the wind and waves.' But I—see you!—I know otherwise. The woman I wed must love the sea; she must have the fearless eyes that can look God's storms in the face—her tender words must ring out all the more clearly for the sound of the bubbling waves leaping against the 'Laura' when the wind is high! And as for our children;" he paused and laughed, "*per la Santissima Madonna!* if the salt and iron of the ocean be not in their blood, they will be no children of mine!"

I smiled at his enthusiasm, and pouring out some choice Montepulcian, bade him taste it. He did so with a keen appreciation of its flavor, such as many a so-called connoisseur of wines does not possess.

"To your health, *eccellenza!*" he said; "and may you long enjoy your life!"

I thanked him; but in my heart I was far from echoing the kindly wish.

"And are you going to fulfill the prophecy of your friends, Andrea?" I asked. "Are you about to marry?"

He set down his glass only partly emptied, and smiled with an air of mystery.

"*Ebbene! chi sa!*" he replied, with a gay little shrug of his shoulders, yet with a sudden tenderness in his keen eyes that did not escape me. "There is a maiden—my mother loves her well—she is little and fair as Carmelo Neri's Teresa—so high," and he laid his brown hand lightly on his breast, "her head touches just here," and he laughed. "She looks as frail as a lily, but she is hardy as a seagull, and no one loves the wild waves more than she. Perhaps, in the month of the Madonna, when the white lilies bloom—perhaps!—one can never tell—the old song may be sung for us—

*"Chi sa fervente amar
Solo è felice!"*

And humming the tune of the well-known love-ditty under his breath, he raised his glass of wine to his lips and drained it off with a relish, while his honest face beamed with gayety and pleasure. Always the same story, I thought, moodily. Love, the tempter—Love, the destroyer—Love, the curse! Was there *no* escape possible from this bewildering snare that thus caught and slew the souls of men?

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HE soon roused himself from his pleasant reverie, and drawing his chair closer to mine, assumed an air of mystery.

"And for your friend who is in trouble," he said, in a confidential tone, then paused and looked at me as though waiting permission to proceed.

I nodded.

"Go on, *amico*. What have you arranged?"

"Everything!" he announced, with an air of triumph. "All is smooth sailing. At six o'clock on Friday morning the 'Rondinella,' that is the brig I told you of, *eccellenza*, will weigh anchor for Civita Vecchia. Her captain, old Antonio Bardi, will wait ten minutes or even a quarter of an hour if necessary for the—the——"

"Passenger," I supplemented. "Very amiable of him, but

he will not need to delay his departure for a single instant beyond the appointed hour. Is he satisfied with the passage money?"

"Satisfied!" and Andrea swore a good-natured oath and laughed aloud. "By San Pietro! if he were not, he would deserve to drown like a dog on the voyage! Though truly, it is always difficult to please him, he being old and cross and crusty. Yes; he is one of those men who have seen so much of life that they are tired of it. Believe it! even the stormiest sea is a tame fish-pond to old Bardì. But he is satisfied this time, *eccellenza*, and his tongue and eyes are so tied up that I should not wonder if your friend found him to be both dumb and blind when he steps on board."

"That is well," I said, smiling. "I owe you many thanks, Andrea. And yet there is one more favor I would ask of you."

He saluted me with a light yet graceful gesture.

"*Eccellenza*, anything I can do—command me."

"It is a mere trifle," I returned. "It is merely to take a small valise belonging to my friend, and to place it on board the 'Rondinella' under the care of the captain. Will you do this?"

"Most willingly. I will take it now if it so please you."

"That is what I desire. Wait here and I will bring it to you."

And leaving him for a minute or two, I went into my bedroom and took from a cupboard I always kept locked a common rough leather bag, which I had secretly packed myself, unknown to Vincenzo, with such things as I judged to be useful and necessary. Chief among them was a bulky roll of bank-notes. These amounted to nearly the whole of the remainder of the money I had placed in the bank at Palermo. I had withdrawn it by gradual degrees, leaving behind only a couple of thousand francs, for which I had no special need. I locked and strapped the valise; there was no name on it, and it was scarcely any weight to carry. I took it to Andrea, who swung it easily in his right hand and said, smilingly:

"Your friend is not wealthy, *eccellenza*, if this is all his luggage!"

"You are right," I answered, with a slight sigh; "he is truly very poor—beggared of everything that should be his through the treachery of those whom he has benefited." I paused; Andrea was listening sympathetically. "That is why I have paid his passage-money, and have done my best to aid him."

"Ah! you have the good heart, *eccellenza*," murmured the

Sicilian, thoughtfully. "Would there were more like you! Often when fortune gives a kick to a man, nothing will suit but that all who see him must kick him also. And thus the *povero diavolo* dies of so many kicks, often! This friend of yours is young, *senza dubbio*?"

"Yes, quite young, not yet thirty."

"It is as if you were a father to him!" exclaimed Andrea, enthusiastically. "I hope he may be truly grateful to you, *eccellenza*."

"I hope so too," I said, unable to resist a smile. "And now, *amico*, take this," and I pressed a small sealed packet into his hand. "It is for yourself. Do not open it till you are at home with the mother you love so well, and the little maiden you spoke of by your side. If its contents please you, as I believe they will, think that I am also rendered happier by your happiness."

His dark eyes sparkled with gratitude as I spoke, and setting the valise he held down on the ground, he stretched out his hand half timidly, half frankly. I shook it warmly and bade him farewell.

"*Per Bacco!*" he said, with a sort of shamefaced eagerness "the very devil must have caught my tongue in his fingers! There is something I ought to say to you, *eccellenza*, but for my life I cannot find the right words. I must thank you better when I see you next."

"Yes," I answered, dreamily and somewhat wearily, "when you see me next, Andrea, you shall thank me if you will; but, believe me, I need no thanks."

And thus we parted, never to meet again—he to the strong glad life that is born of the wind and sea, and I to— But let me not anticipate. Step by step through the labyrinths of memory let me go over the old ground watered with blood and tears, not missing one sharp stone of detail on the drear pathway leading to the bitter end.

That same evening I had an interview with Vincenzo. He was melancholy and taciturn—a mood which was the result of an announcement I had previously made to him—namely, that his services would not be required during my wedding-trip. He had hoped to accompany me and to occupy the position of courier, valet, major-domo, and generally confidential attendant—a hope which had partially soothed the vexation he had evidently felt at the notion of my marrying at all.

His plans were now frustrated, and if ever the good-natured fellow could be ill-tempered, he was assuredly so on this occasion. He stood before me with his usual respectful air, but

he avoided my glance, and kept his eyes studiously fixed on the pattern of the carpet. I addressed him with an air of gaiety.

"Ebbene, Vincenzo! Joy comes at last, you see, even to me! To-morrow I shall wed the Countess Romani—the loveliest and perhaps the richest woman in Naples!"

"I know it, eccellenza."

This with the same obstinately fixed countenance and downward look.

"You are not very pleased, I think, at the prospect of my happiness?" I asked, bantering.

He glanced up for an instant, then as quickly down again.

"If one could be sure that the *illustrissimo* eccellenza was indeed happy, that would be a good thing," he answered, dubiously.

"And are you not sure?"

He paused, then replied firmly:

"No; the eccellenza does not look happy. No, no, *davvero!* He has the air of being sorrowful and ill, both together."

I shrugged my shoulders indifferently.

"You mistake me, Vincenzo. I am well—very well—and happy! *Gran Dio!* who could be happier? But what of my health or happiness?—they are nothing to me, and should be less to you. Listen; I have something I wish you to do for me."

He gave me a sidelong and half-expectant glance. I went on: "To-morrow evening I want you to go to Avellino."

He was utterly astonished.

"To Avellino!" he murmured under his breath, "to Avellino!"

"Yes, *o* Avellino," I repeated, somewhat impatiently.

"Is there anything so surprising in that? You will take a letter from me to the Signora Monti. Look you, Vincenzo, you have been faithful and obedient so far, I expect implicit fidelity and obedience still. You will not be needed here to-morrow after the marriage ball has once begun; you can take the nine o'clock train to Avellino, and—understand me—you will remain there till you receive further news from me. You will not have to wait long, and in the meantime," here I smiled, "you can make love to Lilla."

Vincenzo did not return the smile.

"But—but," he stammered, sorely perplexed—"if I go to Avellino I cannot wait upon the eccellenza. There is the portmanteau to pack—and who will see to the luggage when you have on Friday morning for Rome? And—and—I had

thought to see you to the station——" He stopped; his vexation was too great to allow him to proceed.

I laughed gently.

"How many more trifles can you think of, my friend, in opposition to my wishes? As for the portmanteau, you can pack it this very day if you so please—then it will be in readiness. The rest of your duties can for once be performed by others. It is not only important, but imperative that you should go to Avellino on my errand. I want you to take this with you," and I tapped a small square iron box, heavily made and strongly padlocked, which stood on the table near me.

He glanced at the box, but still hesitated, and the gloom on his countenance deepened. I grew a little annoyed.

"What is the matter with you?" I said at last, with some sternness. "You have something on your mind—speak out!"

The fear of my wrath startled him. He looked up with a bewildered pain in his eyes, and spoke, his mellow Tuscan voice vibrating with his own eloquent entreaty.

"Eccellenza!" he exclaimed, eagerly, "you must forgive me—yes, forgive your poor servant who seems too bold, and who yet is true to you—yes, indeed, so true!—and who would go with you to death if there were need! I am not blind, I can see your sufferings, for you do suffer, *lustrissimo*, though you hide it well. Often have I watched you when you have not known it. I feel that you have what we call a wound in the heart, bleeding, bleeding always. Such a thing means death often as much as a straight shot in battle. Let me watch over you, eccellenza; let me stay with you! I have learned to love you! Ah, *mio* signor," and he drew nearer and caught my hand timidly, "you do not know—how should you?—the look that is in your face sometimes, the look of one who is stunned by a hard blow. I have said to myself, 'That look will kill me if I see it often.' And your love for this great lady, whom you will wed to-morrow, has not lightened your soul as love should lighten it. No! you are even sadder than before, and the look I speak of comes ever again and again. Yes, I have watched you, and lately I have seen you writing, writing far into the night, when you should have slept. Ah, signor! you are angry, and I know I should not have spoken; but tell me how can I look at Lilla and be happy when I feel that you are alone and sad?"

I stopped the flood of his eloquence by a mute gesture and withdrew my hand from his clasp.

"I am not angry," I said, with quiet steadiness, and yet with something of coldness, though my whole nature, always

highly sensitive, was deeply stirred by the rapid, unstudied expressions of affection that melted so warmly from his lips in the liquid music of the mellow Tuscan tongue. "No, I am not angry, but I am sorry to have been the object of so much solicitude on your part. Your pity is misplaced, Vincenzo, it is indeed! Pity an emperor clad in purples and seated on a throne of pure gold, but do not pity *me!* I tell you that tomorrow, yes, to-morrow, I shall obtain all that I have ever sought—my greatest desire will be fulfilled. Believe it. No man has ever been so thoroughly satiated with—satisfaction—as I shall be!"

Then seeing him look still sad and incredulous, I clapped my hand on his shoulder and smiled.

"Come, come, *amico*, wear a merrier face for my bridal day, or you will not deserve to wed Lilla. I thank you from my heart," and I spoke more gravely, "for your well-meant care and kindness, but I assure you there is nothing wrong with me. I am well—perfectly well—and happy. It is understood that you go to Avellino to-morrow evening?"

Vincenzo sighed, but was passive.

"It must be as the eccellenza pleases," he murmured, resignedly.

"That is well," I answered, good-humoredly; "and as you know my pleasure, take care that nothing interferes with your departure. And—one word more—you must cease to watch me. Plainly speaking, I do not choose to be under your surveillance. Nay—I am not offended, far from it, fidelity and devotion are excellent virtues, but in the present case I prefer obedience—strict, implicit obedience. Whatever I may do, whether I sleep or wake, walk or sit still—attend to *your* duties and pay no heed to *my* actions. So will you best serve me—you understand?"

"*Si*, signor!" and the poor fellow sighed again, and reddened with his own inward confusion. "You will pardon me, eccellenza, for my freedom of speech? I feel I have done wrong—"

"I pardon you for what in this world is never pardoned—excess of love," I answered, gently. "Knowing you love me, I ask you to obey me in my present wishes, and thus we shall always be friends."

His face brightened at these last words, and his thoughts turned in a new direction. He glanced at the iron box I had before pointed out to him.

"That is to go to Avellino, eccellenza?" he asked, with more alacrity than he had yet shown.

"Yes," I answered. "You will place it in the hands of the good Signora Monti, for whom I have a great respect. She will take care of it till—I return."

"Your commands shall be obeyed, signor," he said, rapidly, as though eager to atone for his past hesitation. "After all," and he smiled, "it will be pleasant to see Lilla; she will be interested, too, to hear the account of the eccellenza's marriage."

And somewhat consoled by the prospect of the entertainment his unlooked-for visit would give to the charming little maiden of his choice, he left me, and shortly afterward I heard him humming a popular love-song softly under his breath, while he busied himself in packing my portmanteau for the honeymoon trip—a portmanteau destined never to be used or opened by its owner.

That night, contrary to my usual habit, I lingered long over my dinner; at its close I poured out a full glass of fine *Lacrima Cristi*, and secretly mixing with it a dose of a tasteless but powerful opiate, I called my valet and bade him drink it and wish me joy. He did so readily, draining the contents to the last drop. It was a tempestuous night; there was a high wind, broken through by heavy sweeping gusts of rain. Vincenzo cleared the dinner-table, yawning visibly as he did so, then taking my out-door paletot on his arm, he went to his bedroom, a small one adjoining mine, for the purpose of brushing it, according to his customary method. I opened a book, and pretending to be absorbed in its contents, I waited patiently for about half an hour.

At the expiration of that time I stole softly to his door and looked in. It was as I had expected; overcome by the sudden and heavy action of the opiate, he had thrown himself on his bed, and was slumbering profoundly, the unbrushed overcoat by his side. Poor fellow! I smiled as I watched him; the faithful dog was chained, and could not follow my steps for that night at least.

I left him thus, and wrapping myself in a thick *Almaviva* that muffled me almost to the eyes, I hurried out, fortunately meeting no one on my way—out into the storm and darkness, toward the Campo Santo, the abode of the all-wise though speechless dead. I had work to do there—work that must be done. I knew that if I had not taken the precaution of drugging my too devoted servitor, he might, despite his protestations, have been tempted to track me whither I went. As it was, I felt myself safe, for four hours must pass, I knew,

before Vincenzo could awake from his lethargy. And I was absent for some time.

Though I performed my task as quickly as might be, it took me longer than I thought, and filled me with more loathing and reluctance than I had deemed possible. It was a grewsome, ghastly piece of work—a work of preparation—and when I had finished it entirely to my satisfaction, I felt as though the bony fingers of death itself had been plunged into my very marrow. I shivered with cold, my limbs would scarce bear me upright, and my teeth chattered as though I were seized by strong ague. But the fixity of my purpose strengthened me till all was done—till the stage was set for the last scene of the tragedy. Or comedy? What you will! I know that in the world nowadays you make a husband's dishonor more of a whispered jest than anything else—you and your heavy machinery of the law. But to me—I am so strangely constituted—dishonor is a bitterer evil than death. If all those who are deceived and betrayed felt thus, then justice would need to become more just. It is fortunate—for the lawyers—that we are not all honorable men!

When I returned from my dreary walk in the driving storm I found Vincenzo still fast asleep. I was glad of this, for had he seen me in the plight I was, he would have had good reason to be alarmed concerning both my physical and mental condition. Perceiving myself in the glass, I recoiled as from an image of horror. I saw a man with haunted, hungry eyes gleaming out from under a mass of disordered white hair, his pale, haggard face set and stern as the face of a merciless inquisitor of old Spain, his dark cloak dripping with glittering rain-drops, his hands and nails stained as though he had dug them into the black earth, his boots heavy with mire and clay, his whole aspect that of one who had been engaged in some abhorrent deed, too repulsive to be named. I stared at my own reflection thus and shuddered; then I laughed softly with a sort of fierce enjoyment. Quickly I threw off all my soiled habiliments, and locked them out of sight, and arraying myself in dressing-gown and slippers, I glanced at the time. It was half-past one—already the morning of my bridal. I had been absent three hours and a half. I went into my salon and remained there writing. A few minutes after two o'clock had struck the door opened noiselessly, and Vincenzo, looking still very sleepy, appeared with an expression of inquiring anxiety. He smiled drowsily, and seemed relieved to see me sitting quietly in my accustomed place at the writing-table. I surveyed him with an air of affected surprise.

"Ebbene, Vincenzo! What has become of you all this while?"

"Eccellenza," he stammered, "it was the Lacrima; I am not used to wine! I have been asleep."

I laughed, pretended to stifle a yawn on my own account, and rose from my easy-chair.

"Veramente," I said, lightly, "so have I very nearly! And if I would appear as a gay bridegroom, it is time I went to bed. *Buona notte.*"

"*Buona notte, signor.*"

And we severally retired to rest, he satisfied that I had been in my own room all the evening, and I, thinking with a savage joy at my heart of what I had prepared out there in the darkness, with no witnesses of my work save the whirling wind and rain.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

My marriage morning dawned bright and clear, though the high wind of the past night still prevailed and sent the white clouds scudding rapidly, like ships running a race, across the blue fairness of the sky. The air was strong, fresh, and exhilarating, and the crowds that swarmed into the Piazza del Popolo, and the Toledo, eager to begin the riot and fun of Giovedì Grasso, were one and all in the highest good humor. As the hours advanced, many little knots of people hurried toward the cathedral, anxious, if possible, to secure places in or near the Chapel of San Gennaro, in order to see to advantage the brilliant costumes of the few distinguished persons who had been invited to witness my wedding. The ceremony was fixed to take place at eleven, and at a little before half-past ten I entered my carriage, in company with the Duke di Marina as best man, and drove to the scene of action. Clad in garments of admirable cut and fit, with well-brushed hair and beard, and wearing a demeanor of skillfully mingled gravity and gayety, I bore but little resemblance to the haggard, ferocious creature who had faced me in the mirror a few hours previously.

A strange and secret mirth too possessed me, a sort of half-frenzied merriment that threatened every now and then to break through the mask of dignified composure it was necessary for me to wear. There were moments when I could have laughed, shrieked, and sung with a fury of a drunken madman. As it was, I talked incessantly; my conversation was flavored with bitter wit and pungent sarcasm, and once or twice my friend the duke surveyed me with an air of wonder-