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Art and Heart in Florence, by Maturin M. Ballou**

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## **THE DUKE'S PRIZE.**

**A Story Of Art And Heart In Florence**

**By Lieutenant Maturin Murray Ballou**

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## PREFACE.

THE scenes of the following story are laid in Italy, that land of the sun. They are designed to impress a goodly moral, as well as to amuse the reader—to show that patience and perseverance will conquer all things—and that a poor coat may cover a rich heart. The reader will find also herein, that love raises the humblest; and that true merit, like true genius, tramples upon misfortunes; and that "some falls are means the happier to rise."

# THE DUKE'S PRIZE.

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## CHAPTER I.—FLORENCE.

Lend thy serious hearing to what I shall unfold.

-Hamlet.

COME with me, gentle reader, on the wings of fancy into the mild and genial latitude of the Tyrrhenian Sea. The delightful region of the Mediterranean has been the poet's ready theme for ages; then let us thitherward, with high hopes (and appreciating eyes) to enjoy the storied scenery of its shores. Touch, if you will, at Gibraltar; see how the tide flows through the straits! We go in with a flowing sail, and now we are at Corsica, Napoleon's home. Let us stop at Sardinia, with its wealth of tropical fruits; and we will even down to Sicily,—for this mimic ocean teems with subjects to delight the eye even of the most casual observer, with its majestic boundary of Alps and Apennines, and the velvet carpet of its romantic shores, while its broad breast is dotted with the sails of the picturesque craft whose rig is peculiar to these seas.

It were worth the journey we have taken, if only to behold the curious maritime scene before us now-made up of the felucca, the polacre, and the bombard, or ketch all equally unknown in our own waters.

Well, on with us still; let us up again and new through the canal of Piombino, touching at the isle of Elba, the "Great Emperor's" mimic domain; step into the town lying beneath this rocky bluff; which is crowned by a fort—it is Porto Ferrajo. Look off for a moment from this rocky eminence, back of the town, and see the wild beauty of these Tuscan mountains on the main land. Now, we will over to the Italian coast, and cross, if you will, from Leghorn to Florence. There, we are now in the very lap of genius and of poetry; let us pause here and breathe the dreamy, soothing, balmy air of Italy.

Florence, most favored daughter of Italy, sweet, sunny Florence, where dwelleth the gallantry and beauty of Tuscany, with thy wealth of architectural beauty, thy magnificent churches and palaces, thy princely court and hoarded beauties—favorite of that genial land, we greet thee! How peacefully dost thou lay at the very foot of the cloud-topped Apennines, divided by the mountain-born Arno in its course to the sea, and over whose bosom the architectural genius of the land is displayed in arched bridges; loveliest and best beloved art thou of sunny, vine-clad Italy.

The poetical luxury of Italian genius is nowhere more plainly manifested than in Florence. 'Tis the artist's favorite resort and best school; 'tis the city the traveller likes least to turn his back upon; and the spot being consecrated by poetry and art, where the blood flows quickest through the veins, warmed by a fervid and glowing clime. A clime which breathes in zephyrs of aromatic sweetness, wafted over the fragrant blossoms of the land so redolent of loveliness, that they would seem to rival the fabled Loto tree, which springs by Allah's throne, and whose flowers have a soul in every leaf.

There is a breathing of the arts in the very air of Florence, whose galleries are crowded with the choicest collections of paintings and statuary in the world. Here have ever congregated the talent and beauty of every clime. With the painter, the poet, the sculptor, here sleep, in the city of the silent, Michael Angelo, Alfieri, and like spirits, rendering it hallowed ground to the lovers of art. Proud and lovely city, with thy sylvan Casino spreading its riches of green sward and noble trees along the banks of the silvery Arno, well may a Florentine be proud of his birthplace!

It is in Florence, this very paradise of art, that our tale opens. Here the poor scholar or artist, who seeks to perfect himself by viewing the glorious works of the old masters, may live like a prince on the most moderate and frugal means, in a bright and sunny land, where the heart's blood leaps most swiftly to the promptings of imagination; where the female form earliest attains its wonted beauty, and longest holds its sway over the heart; where art and nature both combine to entrance the soul in admiration; in that land of the sun-genial Italy; that soft, yet wild country, whose children learn the knowledge of poetry and art from visible things,

while the rest of the world derive them from books.

It was noonday in Florence, and a group of artists were wending their way from the grand gallery to their midday meal. It was a motley sight to look upon them as they gaily chatted together-for among them were men of different countries. There was the rough, hearty Englishman, the light, witty Frenchman, the intelligent and manly-looking American, the dark, swarthy Spaniard side by side with the dark Italian-fit companions, both in outward hue and their native character-and many others, forming a group of peculiar interest to the beholder.

As the troop emerged from a narrow street and came full upon the bright and sunny piazza, near the splendid shaft of the Campanile, the gorgeous equipage of the Grand Duke was passing the spot. The monarch was returning from a morning drive in the Casino with a small retinue, and accompanied by one or two strangers of distinction. The group paused for a moment to witness the passing of the duke and his suite, and then turned gaily towards their hotel to dine, the duke forming a new theme of conversation to those who, conversing under the disadvantage of but partially understanding each other, from the variety of tongues among them, ever chose the most visible subject for comment.

"What a brilliant turn-out," said one, in honest admiration.

"Those leaders are as proud as their master," said another.

"But he becomes his state well, if he is proud," answered a third.

"Newman couldn't get up a better four in hand," said the first speaker, a young Londoner.

"Who is that by the side of the duke?" asked one.

"The English consul," replied his countryman; "you ought to know him."

"The whole affair now is wanting to my eye," said a young, sentimental artist.

"And what does it want, pray, Mister Critic?" asked the Englishman.

"A woman."

"Egad, that's true! There should be a woman in the picture, if it was to be painted, if only to introduce color."

"Don't be so mercenary," added the other.

And the group thus idly conversing lounged on their way to dine. But see, one of their number still lingers near the base of the shaft, apparently absorbed in admiring its beautiful proportions; his pale but fine intellectual features overspread by a spirit of admiration as he beholds the column. But still there is some other motive than mere curiosity that engages him thus; he seems to have thus designedly dropped the company of the party he was just with. Now suddenly turning and satisfying himself that his late companions were out of sight, the young artist-for so his appearance evidently bespoke him-slowly and sadly retraced his steps toward the grand gallery.

The expression of his countenance was that of suffering and physical pain, as well as of mental inquietude; but his late companions had none of them noticed or cared for this. They could take especial cognizance of the points of excellence in the duke's horses, but not of the grief that shaded a fellow-being's countenance. No, the single artist, who now retraced his steps from the base of the Campanile, let his cause for sadness arise from whatever source it might, was alone in his sufferings, and without any one to share his sorrows.

Once or twice he seemed to hesitate and half turn round again, as if to join the party he had left; but some inward prompting appeared to prevent him from doing so, and once more he walked on by the same street which he had just came. A sigh now and then heaved his breast, as though some mental or physical suffering moved him, but his form was erect, and his step not that of one weakened by physical disease. And yet in looking upon him, an instinctive desire would have possessed the careful observer to offer him aid in some form.

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## CHAPTER II.—OUR HERO AND HEROINE.

But love is blind, and lovers cannot see.

-Merchant of Venice.

AT the close of a long summer's day under the skies of Italy, the shades of twilight were deepening on a verdant and vine-clad hillside of the Val d'Arno, when two lovers, who had evidently been strolling together, sat down side by side under a natural trellis of vines. The twilight hour of midsummer will lend enchantment to almost any scene; but this is peculiarly the case in Italy, where every shadow seems poetic-every view fit for the painter's canvass.

The gentleman was of frank and manly bearing, and as he had approached the spot where they now sat,

with the graceful figure of his fair companion leaning upon his arm, he evinced that soft and persuasive mien, that easy elegance of manner and polish in his address, which travel and good society can alone impart. Around his noble forehead, now bared to the gentle breeze, his long auburn hair hung in waving ringlets, after the style of the period, while his countenance was of that intelligent and thoughtful cast, tinted by a shade of sorrow, which rarely fails to captivate the eye.

In person, he was rather tall, erect and well-proportioned, though perhaps he was rather thin in flesh to appear to so good advantage as he might have done, yet altogether he was of handsome form and pleasant mien. His dress bespoke the hollowness of his purse, notwithstanding he bore about him the indelible marks of a gentleman; and the careful observer would have recognized in him the artist that had separated from his companions on the Plaza at noonday near the shaft of the Campanile.

His companion was manifestly a lady of rank and a most lovely female, satisfying the eye at the first glance, and constantly pleasing the longer it dwelt upon her. When we describe an Italian lady as being beautiful, she must be so indeed; for there is no half way between beauty and the opposite extreme here. There are but few really handsome women in Tuscany, but these few are of a class of beauty that may well have ravished the rest of their sex in this fair clime. Her countenance was radiant with thought and feeling, and her large and dewy eyes of blue—nature's own sweet tint—rested fondly on him by her side.

Her rich and abundant dark hair was parted smoothly across her unblemished forehead, which might have been marble, so smooth and pure, but for the warm blood that flowed through those delicate blue channels. The mouth and features were of the Grecian model, and when she smiled she showed a ravishing sweetness of expression, and teeth that rivalled those of an Indian. In form, her person was slightly voluptuous, though strictly within the most true female delicacy. Such is a sketch of the two whom we at the outset denominated as lovers; and such they were, as the progress of our story will disclose.

"There is much between thee and me, Florinda," said her companion, sighing heavily; "and of a metal worse than all others—pride and gold! jailors both of the daring heart!"

"Nay, dear Carlton, thou art ever foreboding ills," said the lady persuasively, and in a voice as sweet as that of the idolized Pagoda Thrush of India.

"Perhaps so; and yet full well I know that I am no favorite of fortune, by stern experience."

"She will smile on thee yet, believe me, Carlton; and the more sweetly for this seeming neglect. She's a fickle goddess, and often plays the coquette, but, like others of this class, she seldom chides but she smiles again the more winningly."

"She has already done so through thee, Florinda."

Florinda answered with her eyes.

"Ah, I am blessed indeed in thee; and poorly do I appreciate the blessing of thy love, when I forget myself and complain."

"Now thou art content."

"In thy smiles, dearest, ever."

And Carlton pressed the hand with fervor to his lip that was smilingly extended towards him.

"Ah, how long it may be, before I can call this little hand mine."

"It is thine already, Carlton."

"Thy heart is, I trust; but the hand, Florinda, is quite another thing."

"True, Carlton."

"My means are so humble."

"You would make them so."

"But are they not, Florinda?"

"Not in my eyes."

"The future looks dark to me."

"The great proficiency you have attained in your profession, as an artist, dear Carlton, argues well for our hopes. Already has thy name reached the Grand Duke as one of remarkable ability in thy noble art; and such constant attention and unwearied industry must ensure improvement."

"True, dearest, I may in time hope to be counted, a worthy follower of those whose noble efforts grace the grand gallery, and the halls of the Palazzo Pitti; but alas, many years of toil might not place me in the pecuniary eye of the duke, as a fitting suitor for thy peerless portion. And then, Florinda, the pride of birth! Alas! I have little hopes of ever attaining my most earnest wish—that which would render me the envy of all Florence—thy hand, Florinda."

"Have I not possessions enough for both of us, dear Carlton? Indeed, I am told that my rightful property bears a goodly proportion to that of the Grand Duke himself, who has the reputation here in Florence of possessing unbounded wealth—actually unequalled in amount by that of any European monarch. Until the prospect of aiding you by this amplitude of fortune occurred to my mind, I saw no value in this boasted wealth; but now that I know that you will be benefited by it, Carlton, I rejoice at its possession and its

magnitude."

"Dearest," said the artist, as he listened to her generous declaration.

"There will be no want, no question of necessity; all shall be yours."

"In your love and kindness of heart, you do not consider these things as does the world, Florinda. The greater the amount of thy riches, the farther art thou removed from me; thus reasoneth the world—the cold and calculating world."

"Nay, Carlton, thou art again foreboding," said the lady in the sweet, honeyed tongue of her land. "All will yet be as our hearts could wish, I am confident."

"Love sees with blind eyes, dearest."

"I know the proverb; but each case is a peculiar one, and this is not this more so than any other?"

"So thy gentle heart would make it," he answered tenderly.

"And will not yours assent?"

"In one respect—yes."

"And that is—"

"Never was one so loved as thou art; and yet who could look upon those eyes, and hear thee speak thus, and know the goodness and gentleness of thy kind heart, and not love thee, Florinda?"

"Ah, flatterer!"

"Dost thou mean that?" said Carlton, earnestly and quickly.

"Nay, forgive me, Carlton," said his fair companion.

"Always but when thou shalt question my sincerity; and yet," he continued, after a moment's pause, "there are ample grounds for such suspicions."

"Say not so, Carlton."

"Behold thy large fortune; am I not penniless?—thy noble birth; am I not an humble citizen? O, Florinda, there are few in this cold and mercenary world that would accord to me, under these circumstances, the meed of sincerity."

"There is one who will never doubt thee," said the lovely girl, placing a hand affectionately within his.

"Dear Florinda, I have thought of another tie to bind us to each other still more dearly, if possible."

"Pray, what is that, Carlton?"

"We are both orphans, Florinda; both stand, as it were, alone in the world, without any natural protectors even from childhood."

"True," said Florinda, "my parents died while I was yet too young to know or love them and thine, Carlton?"

"While I was an infant."

"How pleasant it must be to have parents to love and advise one. I have often envied my companions."

"Ay, it must indeed be a source of happiness; and none would seem to deserve them more than so gentle a spirit as thine."

"It is indeed an enviable blessing."

"Father and mother are sweet words," said the artist, thoughtfully,—and drawing her gently to his side.

"They are sweet words," said Florinda; while a sympathetic tear trembled for a moment beneath those long eyelashes, proving the poet's words, "that beauty's tears are lovelier than her smiles." Carlton saw and marked the truant jewel as it glided down her fair cheek.

And thus they talked on of love, of griefs and hopes, Carlton pressing the hand of his lovely companion affectionately to his lips at times, with a gentle and affectionate tenderness far more eloquent than words; while the response that met this token from her expressive face might have told the most casual observer how dearly and how deeply she loved the young artist, and how the simplest token of tenderness from him was cherished by her.

La Signora Florinda was a grand-daughter of the house of Carrati, one of the oldest and proudest of all Italy. Having been placed in a convent in the environs of Florence for her education, the Grand Duke by chance met her while quite young, and learning her name, he at once knew her to be an orphan, and now under the care of her uncle Signor Latrezzi. By his own request he became her guardian, and from that time Florinda became an inmate of the palace of the duke, and the constant companion of the duchess.

Her parents deceased, as the reader has already gathered, while she was yet a child, leaving her an immense property, which was now in the hands of her protector, the monarch himself. About the time, or rather some months previous to the commencement, of our tale, the duchess had died of consumption. Florinda for more than a year had been her intimate and dearly loved companion, and for this reason alone was dearly prized by the Grand Duke, who still sincerely mourned his wife's death.

The deep devotion and constancy of this monarch, Leopold of Tuscany, to his wife, evinced an affection rarely found in marriages of state. Inconsolable for her death, he shut himself from the world for a long time, weeping in secret the affliction he had sustained in her loss. To this day there ornaments the private apartments of the Pitti Palace busts of the grand duchess, and portraits of her by the first artists; on the walls of the duke's private study there is a full length portrait of his wife done in fresco, representing her to be what she really was, a noble and lovely woman.

Since the death of the duchess, Florinda had experienced, as we have intimated, an increased degree of fatherly care and affection from the duke, because of the fact of her intimacy with her whom he had now lost. The duchess, during the period that Florinda had been with her, had contracted for her a tender affection, and did not forget in the trying moments of her last hours to commend her to the continued and true guidance of the duke. This circumstance of course rendered her an object of renewed interest and regard in the eyes of her noble protector, with whom she dwelt as though she had been his own well-beloved child.

In addition to this, she presented claims to his kind protection, from the fact that she was an orphan, the last of a proud and noble house long attached to the service of the crown—a fact that had in the first place attracted his interest.

"Come, Carlton," said the lady, with a sweet smile, "now tell me one of those Rhine legends which you relate with such spirit. You promised me another."

"I will, dearest," was the reply; and her companion, drawing still closer to her side, began as the next chapter will relate.

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### CHAPTER III.—A RHINE LEGEND.

An honest tale speeds best being plainly told.

-King Richard III.—"THE valley of the Rhine," commenced Carlton, "is no more famous for its classic beauty than for the romance of its historic story; and the traveller is sure, while his eyes drink in of the beauty of its scenery, to have his ears regaled with the tragic record of its neighborhood. The name of Petard—the name of as bold a bandit as ever led a company of mountain-robbers—has become classic as any historic name of the Germanic confederacy, or the Italian states, by reason of the influence he exerted, the boldness of his deeds, the oftentimes chivalric character of his conduct; but, above all, for his singular personal bravery, and his remarkable prowess in battle. Only second, as it regarded the extent of his fame, to the renowned Schinderhannes, he even exceeded that bold and romantic bandit in the general character of his purposes, and the extraordinary success that attended his plans of operation.

"Petard held one of those lofty mountain-passes," continued Carlton, "that lead from the valley of the Rhine, and through which at times much travel passed. Here he had so thoroughly entrenched himself, with his band of some sixty bravadoes, at the time of our story, that ten and twenty times his own force sent against him, in the shape of the regular government troops, had utterly failed to reach even the outer walls of his retreat, they being entrapped in all manner of snares, and shot down like a herd of wild and distracted animals. Several repetitions of these attempts with similar results had fairly disheartened the officers and soldiery, and they utterly refused to proceed on any such dangerous service for the future, while the officers of the government in their weakness were quite powerless. So that Petard remained virtually the master of the district, and levied such tax as he pleased upon such of the better classes as he could arrest upon the road.

"The story of Petard's generous charity to the peasantry is preserved and related to the traveller by the grateful people; and there is no doubt that, springing from this class, he felt a sympathy for them that induced this honest generosity towards them on his part. The cunning plans which he and his band adopted to obtain the necessary information for the prosecution of their designs, it would be tedious to relate. The peasantry, ever oppressed by those in authority, were, of course, most faithful to the interests of this famous outlaw, to whose open hand they often came for bread, and who was ever ready to aid them. Thus, no bribery nor offered rewards could induce one of these rough but true-hearted mountaineers to betray Petard, or disclose the secret paths that led to his lofty stronghold.

"Cunning beyond what usually falls to the lot of roguery," continued Carlton, "Petard delighted in outwitting his enemies of the law, and in leading those whom he desired to fleece into his net. Thus practised in intrigue, he plumed himself in detecting any trick that was attempted against him; and thus on the constant *qui vive*, he was enabled to avoid detection and arrest. Every effort, however ingenious, that the officers of the government made, was therefore futile and of no advantage; and Petard was still regarded as master of his mountain home, and leader of as brave a band as ever beset a traveller's carriage, or broke the ranks of a treasury escort.

"Those were wild and lawless times when the feudal spirit and power had not yet lost all its sway, and when each man's house was often made to be his castle, and himself called upon to defend it with his life. Might made right; the strong hand often carried it against the law, and justice often, slept. It sounds like romance indeed to depict those times."

"It does, indeed," said Florinda; "but go on, Carlton, do not interrupt the story."

"On the left bank of the noble river, in whose valley this story is laid," said Carlton, "rose the turrets and towers of Botztetz castle, the remains only of one of the fine old strongholds of the middle ages, which had by degrees descended through generations, until it was now the home of a rich, retired merchant from Coblentz, who was repairing it and removing the rubbish that age had collected about it. Himself a man of distinguished family, Karl Etwell had retired from the bustle of his heavy business, purchased this place, and proposed here to make himself home, and here to die. The old merchant had an only child whom he idolized, and for whom alone he seemed to live since his wife and other children had died.

"Bettina was one of those delicate, lovely-featured children of grace and beauty that would have been chosen in "Merrie England" to preside over a tournament, as queen of beauty, in Ivanhoe's time. Born to bloom in a peculiar period of history, her character partook in some measure of the characteristics of the times. To our age, Florinda, and our appreciation, this lovely woman would have seemed rather Amazonian. She rode her fine and dashing horse with a free rein, and in the vigor of her robust health she could walk for miles, if need be. Yet still Bettina lacked not for tenderness and gentleness of spirit. She loved her father, was fond of music, and sung most sweetly to her own accompaniment upon the guitar.

"Egbert Hosfeldt was the descendant of a proud line of ancestors, and was himself now left alone of all his family. His castle was on the opposite side of the Rhine, and ere Karl Etwell's daughter had been a twelvemonth at her father's new home among the now half-restored towers of Botztetz Castle, Egbert Hosfeldt and Bettina were the most tender friends. His boat was ever on the left shore at nightfall, though his castle was on the right. No carpet knight was he, Florinda; he pulled his own oar. He was as stout of limb as of heart, and yet was as gentle when by Bettina's side as the tame doves she fondled. His was indeed a knightly figure to look upon. He had often distinguished himself upon the tented field, and in the forest sports. He lived in an age when personal prowess was highly esteemed, and when those high in birth failed not to mature the strong muscles and stout limbs which Providence had vouchsafed to them.

"My story, Florinda, opens upon one of those soft summer twilights which hang over this incomparable valley to-day, as they did centuries gone by. Two figures rested near a soft bed of flowers in the broad grounds of Botztetz Castle. The luxuriant, curling hair of delicate auburn that strayed so freely over the neck and shoulders of the female figure, betrayed her to be the lovely daughter of Herr Karl Etwell; while the reader would have recognized at once in the person by her side, the fine athletic figure of Egbert. They sat in tender proximity to each other, and Bettina was listening to Egbert's eloquent story of the olden times, and of the many chivalric deeds for which the neighborhood of this spot was celebrated. He told her, too, of legends connected with the very towers and battlements that now surrounded them, until at last the lateness of the hour warned them that they must part; and the gallant Egbert, pressing her hand tenderly to his lips, bade her a brief farewell as he said, and would meet her there again with the twilight hour on the following day.

"Scarcely had he left her side when a decrepit figure, dressed in as shabby garb as ever clothed a beggar woman, tottled towards her, and in saddest tones besought the fair girl to come a few steps from the castle walls to aid her in carrying her sick infant, who she feared was dying. The chords of tender sympathy were at once touched and Bettina followed the old woman outside the walls, and beyond an angle of the ruins a few rods, when the person who had so excited her commiseration suddenly stopped, and tossing off the wretched rags he wore, he stood before her the athletic leader of banditti, Petard!"

"How frightful!" said Florinda, interrupting him.

"The faint scream Bettina uttered," continued Carlton, "was smothered by his ready adroitness; and seizing the fainting girl, as though she was an infant, the robber bore her away to a spot concealed by the darkness, where several of his confederates met him, as had been preconcerted; and in a few minutes after Egbert had left her side, Bettina, all unconscious, was being carried fair away to the almost impregnable stronghold of the robbers.

"It would be vain to attempt a description of the consternation and misery of her father when it was found that his child-she who was everything to him; whom he loved better than life itself-was lost. Whither to seek her no one knew. The most improbable places were searched. Egbert, who was last seen with her, was sent for; but he could give them no information. He supposed, of course, that she returned directly home after he parted with her. Every conceivable means were adopted to discover some trace of the missing girl, but all in vain, and the most tantalizing anguish took possession of every bosom. Two days had passed in this fruitless and agonizing search, when a note was delivered at the castle which threw light upon her disappearance. The purport of the note was to this effect:

"KARL ETZWELL:-Your daughter is safe in my possession. Her simplest wish is strictly regarded. No harm will come to her, provided you pay the ransom of one thousand marks of gold. You may not possess the ready means, rich as you are, to produce this sum at once; therefore it may be paid in four instalments, and in four months of time, if you can do no better. red When the sum shall be paid, your daughter will be restored to you as pure and unharmed as when she left you. You have two days to think upon this. My messenger will then see you, and receive the first instalment of the money. Those who know me will tell you that you had better not harm one hair of that messenger's head, but your best course will be to meet this demand. 'Signed,' PETARD.

"The mystery was solved, and the father knew that the robber, vile as he was, would keep his word; that though Bettina was thus fearfully situated, Petard would protect and restore her, if he acceded to his demand. The sum named was far beyond his means to raise before the expiration of a considerable period of time; for though, as the robber chief denominated him, rich, yet the princely sum of money demanded could hardly have been raised at once, had the united interest of the country for miles round been brought to bear upon it.

"After consulting with Egbert and other friends, the father saw that there was but one course left for him to pursue under the circumstances of the case, and that was to comply with the demand as far as was possible, and to get ready the first instalment of the money for the following day. It would have been madness for him—his daughter's safety, of course, being paramount to every other idea—to have called upon the authorities to serve him. They had already, as we have before stated, often failed in their efforts upon the robber; and to incense Petard against him, was for the father to sacrifice the life of his child. Thus influenced, the sum of money demanded as the first instalment was made up by the assistance of Egbert and others, and was quietly paid over to the robber messenger, by the anxious father of Bettina.

"It was a fearful thought to father and lover, that there was even a possibility of Bettina's remaining in the hands of those fierce and lawless men for such a period of time as had been named. Yet it would be impossible to raise the amount of the ransom in a shorter period of time. Four months seemed to them almost as so many years, and Egbert longed, at the head of a few faithful followers, to attack the redoubtable brigand; but this would have been to sacrifice Bettina's life at once. Alas! the ransom, and the ransom only, could liberate her, all agreed.

"But I weary you, dearest, and will at another time complete my story."

"Nay, by no means."

"But the story is not yet half told."

"The more of interest is then in store."

"But it will keep until our next meeting."

"As you will, Carlton; and so now, indeed, good night. You will come with the sunset, tomorrow?"

"I will, dearest."

And Carlton turned away to seek his own humble lodgings, while the lady returned to the sumptuous apartments which she called her home, to dream of the young artist, and the tale he had thus left but half related. In the meantime with the reader we will turn to another chapter in the thread of our story.

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## CHAPTER IV.—THE DUKE'S PRIZE.

I see this hath a little dashed your spirits.

-Othello.

CARLTON was a young American, passionately devoted to the art he was studying at Florence, the home of the arts. His pecuniary means, which were of a limited character, were, at the time our story opens, at an unusually low ebb—indeed, he was almost penniless. He had been able, by losing much valuable time upon trifling and toyish pieces, to procure nearly enough for subsistence, taken in connection with the little he already possessed. But of late he had not been able to find any spare time for the trifles he had heretofore engaged himself upon at times, when he was obliged to obtain money for daily food, for reasons which we shall understand as we proceed with our story.

Though of highly respectable birth, yet he was an orphan, and dependent upon the liberality of a rich relative for the advantage he had already received in an excellent classical education, and the means of travelling while in the study of his art. A few months previous to the opening of our tale, this patron, who had been a father indeed to Carlton, died suddenly, and the news of his decease reached the young American at the time he was just expecting a remittance of money. The consequence was, he found himself friendless and without means, thousands of miles from his native land. He had incurred some small debts in anticipation of the expected remittance, which placed him in a still more unpleasant situation.

It was a severe blow to Carlton to lose one who had been so kind to him almost from childhood. It was hard, too, to sink at once from a state of plenty to one of absolute want. But thus it was, and he endeavored to bear his lot with all the philosophy and resignation he could command; but it was a bitter stroke for him to bear, particularly at this time, when so much depended upon his being able to pursue his calling uninterrupted, and still make the proper appearance in his person. He felt that at no previous moment had he so much at stake as now; that at no previous time in the course of his life could such an event have been more unfortunate. But Carlton was blessed with a heart easy to keep afloat; and though his future was hard, he looked upon its sunny side, and bore bravely up against it, enduring not only mental but positive physical suffering in his manliness. For months he had been almost constantly engaged in secret upon a painting, which he designed to present to the Grand Duke, for his private collection in the Palazzo Pitti, and on which he was to stake his reputation as an artist. He worked in secret, we have said—ay, and with the pains of hunger gnawing him often, his scanty purse scarcely affording him the means of procuring sufficient to sustain life. But still he worked on unwearied, in the hope, if not to gain the hand of Florinda, at least to be thought more worthy of her.

Little did she he loved know of the actual want he experienced. He was too proud to acknowledge it even to

her; and often did he sit by her side faint and hungry, while he held a hand, the jewelled ornaments of which alone would have rendered a peasant independent for life. He exerted every faculty to obtain the means of dressing at least with seeming good taste; he endeavored to do this for appearance sake, and that he might pass well with the world, which scans with inquisitive eye the outside show, and pays homage accordingly. He did not fear that it would make any difference with Florinda, yet he felt some pride, of course, in that quarter. It required in his present emergency the sacrifice of many a meal to procure him a coat, or any other necessary article of clothing.

Carlton was not in the practice of meeting Florinda at the palace; the manifest impropriety of the thing rendered this out of the question. It was the practice of Florinda to call at certain periods at the palace of a relation in the environs of the city, and here Carlton often went to meet her; it was hard by the monastery where she had been educated, and where they had first met. The two sat together one twilight hour; it was their chosen time of meeting.

"Carlton," said Florinda.

"Well, dearest."

"Why dost thou—" here Florinda hesitated.

"Speak freely; what would you ask?"

"You will not be offended?"

"Indeed, no!"

"Nor think strange of me?"

"Nay, I promise thee."

"Then—"

"Well, Florinda."

"Why dost thou wear such a threadbare coat, Carlton? You know I care not for such things, but I would have thee appear among thy fellow-artists as well clad as the best of them."

"You know, Florinda," said Carlton, blushing in spite of himself, "I told you of my misfortune in losing my friend and patron."

"True, but what has that to do with thy coat, Carlton?" asked the lady, who, never having known the want of money, could not realize the effect of such a condition. And then, too, she did not exactly understand the dependency of Carlton upon his patron.

"O, nothing particular, dearest; but one must dress according to his means, you know."

Florinda mused for a moment, and at length appeared to understand the meaning of his words, when taking a rich purse of gold from her girdle, she endeavored to give it to him in such a manner as to spare his feelings, but her utterance failed her, and she burst into tears! Carlton could not accept it. He would rather have starved first; his proud spirit could not brook the deed.

"No, Florinda," he said, "I cannot accept the purse, or any assistance from thee, noble lady. But if you will bear with my humble attire for a while, I hope to be able to dress in a style to suit thy taste, and which will render me worthy, at least in point of personal appearance, to walk by thy side."

"Do you forgive me, Carlton, for this? It was but the impulse of the moment. I did not mean to insult thee."

"Insult me!"

"Alas! I was but rude."

"Nay, dearest."

"You forgive me?"

"Florinda, I appreciate the feeling that prompted the generous act. Forgive thee? Yes, dearest, and love thee more for it."

He pressed her hand to his lips, and they parted—Florinda to the regal palace of the duke, and Carlton to his humble lodgings. That night he went to his bed without having tasted food throughout the whole day. The next morning with the first light he rose, unable to sleep from hunger, and sought his canvass. While he could summon his pride, and season it with his ambition, this formed food and stimulus enough for him—a sustaining principle equal to natural nutriment. But in his sleep, when nature asserted her power, and the physical system claimed precedence over the brain, then the gnawings of hunger could not be stilled; and thus he awoke, and, as we have said, sought his canvass to drive away the demon; for it was a demon—a tormenting fiend to him now!

Among the collection of artists at Florence—as in all Italian cities—there were representatives from nearly every part of the world; and much rivalry and pride often showed itself, not only among the students of the academy, but even among the masters or teachers themselves. This feeling at the time to which we allude, prevailed to an unusual extent, and its pernicious effects had been the cause of one or two duels of fatal termination. Carlton had long since been obliged to leave the academy from want of means, and even while there, he labored under great disadvantage in not being able to keep up the appearance of a gentleman among his fellow-students, who were generally well supplied with pecuniary means.

His comrades finding that he far exceeded them in point of application, and consequently in execution and general improvement, naturally disliked him; and strange enough, too, the teachers treated him with marked coolness and dislike, whether from a similar sense of his superior ability even over themselves, or otherwise, remains to be seen.

"What a hang-dog look that Carlton has," said one artist to another.

"But he's a master with the brush, and bids fair to distance some of us," was the reply.

"For my part, I hate all Americans."

"Or rather all successful rivals," suggested the other, sarcastically.

"Rival or not, this Carlton is a bore."

"So far I agree with you," answered the other.

"He's the poorest dressed artist in Florence."

"There you are right again."

And thus they sneered at him.

Under all these disadvantages, Carlton was by no means discouraged. He was sustained by his ambition and love of his noble art, and, above all, by the love he bore Florinda. He hoped, through the means of the picture he was engaged upon, to introduce himself to the good will of the duke; and this accomplished, one important step would be taken towards the goal his fancy had pictured in futurity.

As we have said, Carlton left the academy through necessity, but he still studied constantly in the grand gallery, and other places, as his means would admit, while he worked on in secret. He had determined that his picture should be presented without a name, that it might thus rise or fall honestly, upon its own merits.

The duke had offered a princely prize for the favored picture, to be selected from out a collection to be exhibited to himself and court on a certain day. The monarch was devotedly attached to the art, and thus each year, by a like method, strove to encourage the talent and industry of the students assembled at Florence. There were many competitors among the artists of the city on the occasion alluded to. Those who had gained renown in bygone years now took up the brush anew, and pupils and masters strove alike for the enviable goal.

And this was not so much for the mere winning of the prize—though that was a princely object—but it was well-known that whoever succeeded in the contest, established his fame at once in Italy, and from that time forward could command his own terms for his pictures, and find a ready sale, too, for as many as he chose to complete. It was, in short, a diploma in art that was almost beyond value to the ambitious students that had devoted themselves to art in Florence.

Carlton worked incessantly and in secret upon his picture, which was of a most elaborate and original design. Alone in his humble apartment he worked by himself, without any kind word of encouragement, or skilful suggestion. The time for the exhibition was fast approaching. Carlton was met by his former fellow-students every morning,—pale and emaciated, returning from his frugal meal, of which he was obliged to eat enough to serve him through the day; for with his limited means he could afford but one! They joined him often, and asked, insultingly, why he did not try for the rich prize offered by the Grand Duke for the choicest painting.

Smothering the resentment he felt at these a insults, Carlton made no answer to them, but contented himself with redoubling his exertions with the brush; and it did seem to him after such encounters, and every new insult, that his hand received a fresh inspiration, and his mind renewed vigor. Perhaps he needed the incentive of pride, as well as that of love and ambition, to lead him on, and sustain him in the prosecution of his noble endeavors.

Thus it was, when the long expected day at last arrived—the day which was to make or mar his hope of the future; he trembled as he realized it. The various competitors had sent in their pieces accompanied with their names, each confident in the excellence and finish of his own production. All were arranged in the favorite gallery of the Grand Duke, and among them Carlton's, simply bearing the name of "The Unknown."

The hearts of the artists of Florence beat high on that day, and the moments were impatiently counted by all until the hour should arrive for the public presentation and audience in the picture gallery. The selection having been made on the previous day by the Grand Duke and his court, the time had now arrived for him to award the prize he had offered.

Among the throng that crowded the gates of the palace, Carlton was observed humbly pursuing his way, turning neither to the right nor left, and passing unnoticed some of his brother artists, who ventured a jeer at his expense.

"That coat of thine is not fit for the presence of the Grand Duke," said one.

"Carlton, you forgot to dress, today," said another, tauntingly.

"Don't bother him," added a third; "he's only a looker-on."

"That is all, gentlemen," said Carlton, as he quietly passed the portals of the palace, secretly biting his lip with restrained feeling. He had other business in hand than to notice these insults. His soul was pre-occupied, and he scarcely heeded them a moment after they had been spoken.

## CHAPTER V.—AWARDING THE PRIZE.

Let the end try the man.

-Henry IV.—THE beauty and the aristocracy of Florence crowded the gorgeous apartments of the ducal palace, admiring the matchless pictures now first exhibited to the public view—the productions of the artists of the city for the prize of the liberal monarch.

There was not one which did not draw forth high and just encomiums for its beauty and excellence; but all paused to admire above the rest, one which, from originality of conception and perfection of finish, was pronounced to surpass all its competitors, and great was the curiosity expressed as to who was the author.—Some said that Michael Angelo himself must have arisen from the tomb to produce so perfect a picture. Throughout the hours of the exhibition, until the time appointed for the awarding of the prize, the superb picture bearing the name of "The Unknown," was the constant theme of all, and the centre of attraction.

Among that lovely collection of beauty and fashion stood Florinda, in all the loveliness of youth and high-born beauty, "the star of that goodly company." How different was the expression of her face from the majority of those about her. No pride or envy could be traced on that beautiful brow, stamped with innocence and gentleness; those mild deep blue eyes knew no deceit, but frankly shared the promptings of her pure, untainted soul at every glance.

She looked more like the formation of the fancy in some fairy dream than a reality, so angelic did she seem amid that princely throng. She did not know that Carlton had contended for the prize; he had kept his own secret, and she expressed her unfeigned admiration of the picture by "The Unknown." She was the belle of the hour, if not of the court, and her commendation alone would have served to attract attention to the picture; but already had the duke in person pointed out some of the most prominent beauties in the piece to those about him.

After a few preliminary remarks addressed by the liberal monarch to the large assembly, which was now as still as death itself, he went on to compliment the rare collection of art which was exhibited on the occasion; and to prove the sincerity of his remarks, and the compliment to all on this point, he offered a most princely price for each and all presented for the prize. He observed that had one of the pieces which had been sent in failed to have been received, he should have found it absolutely impossible to designate the best painting from out the collection, each one of which was so excellent and perfect in itself. He then remarked that he was unable to award the prize he had proposed to present to the author of the painting which would seem to himself and court to embody the greatest degree of excellence, inasmuch as the picture which had been decided upon as possessing the most merit, in every department of its execution, had been sent to the gallery by unknown hands, and was the work of an unknown artist.

He closed his remarks by saying that the piece alluded to must be the work of one high in his profession, for it fell little short of the works of the old masters themselves. "And," added the duke, "if there is any one in this assembly who can inform us as to the authorship of the piece in question, we most earnestly hope they will oblige us by doing so at this time, that we may do the author the honor his talents merit, and also avail ourselves of his unequalled powers in his art."

After a short pause, he proceeded to designate some of the most prominent points of excellence in the painting; and being a connoisseur in these matters, the assembly were highly entertained by his well-chosen remarks, and his subject being one to call forth all his admiration, he was unusually eloquent. Indeed, his remarks were so in unison with the appreciation of all who were present there and heard his voice, that he seemed to carry them along with him, and to infuse fresh enthusiasm among those who had already expressed so much admiration of the picture.

There was another pause, the duke evidently awaiting an answer to his query as to the authorship of the piece. Yet there was no answer given, nor was there any perceptible movement among the group of artists, who were assembled together in one corner of the gorgeous apartment, and upon whom all eyes were turned. But they also stared at one another, wondering who could be the man. Many of them had been liberal enough to express a feeling of delight and admiration, in beholding, as they said, so noble a production of modern times, and by a living artist. There were those, among them who really loved the art they followed, and thus were constrained to acknowledge their admiration.

"I hope," again repeated the duke to the assembly, "if there is any one present who can inform us as to the authorship of this masterly effort of genius, he will do so at once, and confer a personal favor upon us."

There was a slight movement perceptible among the group of artists at this moment, and Carlton, the young American, was seen making his way to the front of his companions, several of whom rebuked him for his forwardness in so doing.

"Why do you push forward, Carlton?"

"Nay, give way but a moment," said our hero.

"What would you?"

"To speak to the duke."

"Fie, man, don't you see he's busy now?"

"Give way but a moment," was the reply.

"May it please you, excellenza," said Carlton, stepping before the group of artists, and addressing the monarch in Italian, which he spoke like a native, "I am the humble author of the picture it has pleased you to compliment so highly."

All eyes were turned upon the speaker, who stood forth from his companions with downcast eyes and burning cheeks, for well he knew that the eyes of all Florence, or rather its nobility, were resting upon him at that moment. The countenances of his former companions evinced no emotions of resentment, as one might have expected who understood their former feelings toward the American. No; they were too much filled with surprise to entertain any other feeling for the moment, and they looked at each other in the utmost amazement, scarcely believing their senses.

The eyes of the assembly were bent upon him, and in wonder, too, at the threadbare coat and emaciated countenance, which told but too plainly the tale of hunger and want he had suffered. And so it was, as the reader has seen. Carlton was too proud to make known his necessities, and he had suffered most incredibly from want.

Hardly had Carlton spoken in answer to the question of the duke, when there was a visible commotion among the high-born dames that surrounded his seat, and one was carried by the attendants from the apartment fainting. It was the duke's ward, the Signora Florinda. The surprise and delight which crowded itself upon her gentle sensibility, was too much for her to bear, and she sank insensible into the arms of those about her.

"What so strangely affected the Signora Florinda?" asked the duke.

"We know not, your highness," replied one of her late companions. "She seemed regarding this young artist at the moment when she was taken ill."

"Singular."

"Very, your highness."

"Hasten after her, and return and let me know how she is."

"Si, excellenza."

"Say I will join her anon."

"I will, excellenza."

It was many minutes before the Grand Duke recovered from the surprise occasioned by the appearance of Carlton, and the confusion consequent upon the sudden illness of his ward; but at length he put the question inquiringly:

"Americano?"

"Si, excellenza."

"And this is the work of thy hands?"

"It is, excellenza."

"It is a most masterly piece, by our lady," said the duke, looking first upon the painting and then at Carlton, as if half in doubt as to the truth of the young American's assertion.

"Your excellenza is pleased to honor me," said Carlton, with a respectful inclination of the head.

"If the piece be thine, it is well merited," continued the duke.

"It shall be proved to thy satisfaction, excellenza."

Carlton thanked in his heart the long auburn hair that covered in part his burning cheeks, while he thus stood before that gallant assembly of the elite of the court of Florence.

"What proof, sir artist," said the duke, "shall we have of the genuineness of this production?"

"By referring to the painting, excellenza," replied Carlton; "you will find a peculiarity of expression, a want of finish in the features of the third figure on the extreme left of the canvass."

"You speak truly, Signor Americano; we had before noticed the defect, and were at loss to account for it in so perfect a picture as this before us. But what of the flaw, signor?-the discovery of that which any one of thy profession would have noticed does not prove the piece to be the work of thine own hands, for we also had observed it."

"Very true, excellenza," replied Carlton, "but with your permission, I will complete the expression of that countenance with a touch; and when complete, it shall agree in strength of touch, style, tone of finish, and every particular, with the rest of the piece. And, moreover, you shall be enabled therein to recognize the likeness of one of your own household. Is it the pleasure of your excellenza that I add the finish before the

present assembly?"

"It is our desire," said the now deeply interested monarch.

A hum of admiration arose as Carlton, after retiring for a moment, returned with his palette and brush, and approached the picture.

While the duke's band now played to the deeply interested assembly, Carlton, with a firm, bold touch, immediately supplied the indescribable something that had been wanting—the *je ne sais quoi* that had been referred to as being requisite to its proper finish. It was done with such judgment and skill, that the addition, though fresh, could not be detected unless by a very close observation. None save the author, who had purposely left that flaw, could so have remedied it. It was done almost instantly, yet with precision and accuracy.

The duke gazed upon the canvass for a moment, and then exclaimed with admiration:

"The Grand Chamberlain!—by our lady, what a likeness! Sir artist, thou hast the pencil of a Raphael!"

"Is your *excellenza* satisfied?"

"We are convinced that the piece is thine own. None other than its author could have accomplished that which we have just witnessed."

"Come hither, gentlemen," said the duke to several of his court about him; and pointing to the canvass, and the touch it had just received, said, "This proof is incontestable!"

"It is, indeed," was the response,

"Are you, too, satisfied, gentlemen?"

"We are."

"Enough."

The duke then assuming his seat of state, directed the artist to approach him. First complimenting him as a son of America, the glorious Republic of the West, and on his extraordinary genius—as he was pleased to express himself—he awarded him the rich prize prepared for the occasion, at the same time offering him a sum for the painting which would have rendered a man of moderate wishes independent for life.

"The prize, your *excellenza*," said Carlton, "I gladly accept as a token of your liberality in advancing the interests of the noble art I follow. But as it regards the high price you have set upon my humble effort, I can only say, that I had designed it from the first as a present for your *excellenza*, and only ask in return, that it may find a place in your private and unrivalled collection—if, indeed, it shall be deemed worthy of that honor."

"Signor Americano," said the duke, "it shall share the Tribune with our best pictures, and shall be prized alike with them."

Now the Tribune, so called, was a small apartment of the duke's gallery devoted to the gems of his collection, and so named after a similar appropriation in the departments of the grand gallery of Florence. The hanging of a picture in this place was of itself alone the highest compliment the author could receive through his production; and so did Carlton understand and appreciate the honor thus designed him, which also was the more welcome, being entirely unexpected.

He could hardly realize that his humble effort should be deemed worthy of such preferment, or that it could possibly possess such merit as to warrant its being placed side by side with those of the immortal masters, whose humblest follower he had ever deemed himself. No wonder his heart beat now so quickly, and he breathed so fast; the goal of his ambition was before him, and almost within his grasp. It seemed only necessary for him to reach out his hand and pluck the garland of success and of renown. The pause that had intervened here was but for a single moment of time, when it was once more broken by the duke himself, who spoke, as he felt, most kindly and in encouraging tones.

"Signor Americano," said the duke, "thy habiliments are those of one whose purse is but narrowly lined, and we are at a loss to account for this willingness to part with that which has cost thee labor of months, and in which thou hast been so eminently successful. We do much crave the picture, but will nevertheless forego its possession unless it can be had at our own valuation."

"As the picture was painted for your *excellenza*, and you design for it such honor, I could wish its free acceptance; but it must be yours on any terms," said Carlton.

The assembly then dispersed, and our hero received a purse of gold for his picture, exceeding in amount his wildest expectations of what he might earn by his art in years of industry and frugality.

The scene he had successfully perfected, represented two applicants for justice, standing before the Pope of Rome. They were priests, and had come before him for his judgment in the matter of contention between them. They were ushered into the presence of the pope by a high official, and to this usher had Carlton given the features of the duke's chamberlain. It was a superb design, and represented a late occurrence well-known to the people of Florence, and for this reason, aside from that of its acknowledged superiority, possessed peculiar interest at that time.

The deep, yet natural expression of feeling depicted in each countenance, the perfect harmony of the general conception and its completeness of finish, rendered the picture a study requiring time to comprehend and appreciate all its many excellences. It was finished, and the work of half a year, pursued with the utmost assiduity in secret, had proved successful. All his pains and self-denials were now forgotten; he was doubly

paid for all his sufferings—he even looked back upon them with a conscientious pride, and deemed that he had bought his preferment cheaply.

And such is ever the fate of true genius; it rarely receives the aid of fortune in gaining fame, but struggles on, dependent upon its own slow but sure preferment. This is self-evident; for genius may remain ever latent, unless brought out and improved by stem necessity.

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## CHAPTER VI.—THE MASQUERADE BALL.

Prosperity's the very bond of love.

-Winter's Tale.

WHAT a perfect chequer-board is this same game of life on which we all hold so transient a lease. Time is the board, and the various vicissitudes of life make up the chequered field, ourselves the wooden "men;" each and all strive for preferment, and whether it be gained or not, depends solely upon the shrewdness of him who plays the game. The "king-row" may designate the pinnacle of earthly wishes and hopes, while the various "moves" may show the struggle for that desirable goal-happiness. Ah! how many of us get "penned" and "cornered"—and many too, in their headlong course, are "jumped," and taken off the scene of action. Truly, there is a vast similitude between this game of chequers and the bolder one of life.

Here was poor Carlton but lately struggling along the chequered field, now moving literally towards the king-row. In a few subsequent weeks, with a well-filled purse, he was enjoying life and his art like a true gentleman, and was the envy of every artist in Florence; and yet they all strove to do him honor, at least; so it appeared, orders for his productions crowded upon him from all the nobility, not only of Florence, but of all Tuscany. The private palaces of the environs of the city were thought incomplete in their collections, unless supplied with one at least of his pictures, the patronage of the Grand Duke, and his own work, which occupied the favored place in the Pitti Palace, having raised him to the pinnacle of fame as an artist.

All Italy honored the productions of the fortunate American, and scarcely could a Raphael or a Titian have been more respected or honored. It was his own genius that had raised him and no accident of fortune.

"This young American monopolizes the market with his brush just now," said one artist to another.

"Ay, and gets such princely prices, too, for his pictures! Funny world, this! It is scarcely three months since he was likely to starve for want of work."

"All the Grand Duke's doings; he can make as easily as he can mar a man", replied the other.

"But a man must have genius to fill the place Carlton holds."

"As much as you might put on a knife's point—no more," said the other, enviously.

The long Italian day is past, and its shadows have died over the neighboring mountains, giving place to the voluptuous and dewy twilight, which lightly wraps itself with its soft mantle of studded stars closely about the lovely breast of the Val d'Arno. But a few hours later, and the Palazzo Pitti is one blaze of light, and the thrilling music of the duke's favorite band resounds already among the fountains and groves of the gardens; already have commenced to congregate the gay courtiers and lovely dames of this land of the sun. The diamond tiaras that sparkle on those lovely brows are less dazzling than the lovely and soul-ravishing eyes that look out from that mental diamond, the soul within; the jewelled stars upon those manly breasts well become the noble bearing of the wearers. Brilliant indeed was the soiree of the rich and liberal Grand Duke of Tuscany. The Austrian-born monarch seemed to delight in surrounding the nobles of his court with the most magnificent luxury and display that wealth could procure, as if he would fain show his Italian subjects his own national taste.

"The duke spares no expense in his entertainments," said the English consul to a friend, by whom he was standing.

"I have known him send to Rome frequently for an artifice to serve him a single evening," was the reply.

"It may be a weakness thus to lavish expenditure, but it is a most brilliant one," said the consul.

"And one which is dictated as much by policy as by his own personal gratification," said the other.

"Perhaps so; but without questioning his motives, we may at all events enjoy the feast he spreads."

"That is but proper and reasonable, and I most heartily subscribe to the same,"

It is a masked ball that occupies the gay throng in the ducal palace. That is to say, in accordance with a general custom of the times, those who please are masked until midnight, when, at the sound of the hour from the great throat of the bell, all masks are removed, and all disguises laid aside. Carlton as the successful protege of the Grand Duke, and Carlton the humble artist, was a very different person. He was the observed of all observers; and many a rich belle sought his side-nay, even leaned upon his arm, as he strolled through

the gorgeous rooms of the palace. They were sufficiently disguised by their masks to remove any fear of personal recognition; and therefore, those who knew him not, save by the late scene of winning the prize, besought his escort for the dance—a piece of forwardness quite allowable during the masked part of the ball. Many were the eyes that were bent upon him; and more than one glance of jealousy was shot towards him by young nobles, as they saw the belles drawn to his side.

### [SEE ENGRAVING.]

Carlton was naturally graceful, dignified and handsome, and bore his new position as though he had ever filled it—now chatting gaily with this lady, now with that, but all the while striving to detect through the many disguises of dresses and masks, the one form that was to him all in all—the queen of his heart and his love, Signorina Florinda. He was himself unmasked, and wore a rich Grecian head-dress, a tunic of dark velvet, trimmed with rich ermine, and clasped close about the throat with checks of gold. His silken hose, and velvet shoes faced with silver thread, set off his fine limbs to perfection. A light, graceful dirk hung at his silver girdle, finishing a costume of great simplicity and beauty. On his right arm there now leans the peerless figure of a countess, with whom he promenades and chats in his gay and spirited way, while she is evidently much captivated with him—indeed, so much is this apparent, that a figure of less height, dressed in a simple peasant's garb and masked, steals up to his side and whispers some words into his ear; but though the reader may easily guess who that peasant girl really was, for the moment Carlton knew her not, and gently declining some proposal from her lips, he turns and walks on with the countess through the blaze of light and grandeur.

"That fellow carries it with a high hand," said one young noble to another, referring to Carlton.

"Ay, but he has the full countenance and favor of the duke, and none can gainsay him."

"Well, he is deuced clever," said the English consul, who was talking with the other two.

"Is it a fact that he is American?" asked the first speaker, still regarding him.

"Undoubtedly. You know he was announced as such when he won the duke's prize."

"How the ladies take to him," said the English consul.

"And he to them," added another.

"The Signora Florinda is said particularly to affect him, and he may win a prize there," said one of the group.

"That would be too bad—the richest heiress in Florence to throw herself away thus!"

"There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," quoted the English consul, and then walking away.

And thus Carlton was the unconscious theme of comment to a large portion of the assembly. But the hour approaches when the heavy bell of the palace strikes the midnight hour, and the masquerade will be broken up, and each and all appear before each other in their true characters. Peasant girls will don the attire more fitting their station; kings and queens will descend to their true estates; brigands will lay by the threatening paraphernalia of the mountain-robber, and hooded monks will assume a more worldly attire. The hour is struck, and the scene changes!

All is once more life and gayety, but the mask is discarded, and each one is undisguised. See, as the grand chamberlain, with the golden key of office wrought ostentatiously upon his ample velvet mantle, aids in arranging the preliminaries of the dance, he pauses to address with respect, and yet with a degree of familiarity, a tall, manly person of noble bearing, and of handsome features, opposite to whom stands, as partner for the dance, Signora Florinda, the duke's ward. The queenly beauty of her person is the same as when we first met her, so lovely and captivating. The few months which have intervened since that period, have only served still more to perfect her ripening mould; and though scarcely nineteen summers have shed their golden wealth upon that genial land since her natal hour, yet she is in the full bloom of lovely womanhood.

See how gracefully glides that beautiful form through the mazes of the dance!—how fondly, as she rests within the encircling arm of her partner, does she look up into his face, drinking from the eloquent eyes that meet her own of the nectar of love, as the Suri rose of Syria sips the dewy treasures of the twilight hour. That partner on whom she rests so fondly, gentle reader, is the humble painter who won the prize of the Grand Duke; the now rich and honored Carlton, the protege of Leopold.

The generous monarch who ruled over that portion of Italy under his charge with the liberal and provident hand of a father, held most regal court-spending of his enormous revenue with a gallant and open hand. His excellency was a connoisseur in all matters of the arts, to which he was enthusiastically devoted, and also a most liberal patron to their interest; consequently he lavished all honor on him whom he thought so deserving of it, and the entire court now pointed to the envied artist as being the favorite of the Grand Duke. Carlton's new patron found qualities in the young American artist to admire and love, and there grew up between him and the duke a real and earnest friendship quite remarkable.

"No more thanks," said the duke to him one day as they were together. "You challenge me to praise, to reward, and to love you, and I cannot help doing all three."

"Your highness is only too lavishly kind to me," was the earnest reply.

"But touching this affection which has sprung up between you and my ward. I shall have plenty of opposition in that matter; but if Florinda loves you, by our lady, she shall be yours."

"Your highness is ever adding to my indebtedness to you," said Carlton.

"Say no more, say no more, Carlton, but make your own terms."

The consent of the duke was thus freely obtained to the marriage of Florinda and Carlton, and the observant monarch discovered the preference of his ward long before it was announced formally to him. So far from opposing the object, he even encouraged it in every way that propriety suggested; forwarding its interests by such delicate promptings as his feelings would permit. He loved Florinda as though she had been his own child. This feeling, as we have seen, was first induced by the affection which existed between his ward and his lamented wife, and was afterward strengthened by her many beauties of mind and person.

Carlton and Florinda sat together in a private apartment in the royal palace. The latter was playing a favorite air upon the guitar to the artist, who sat at her feet watching with admiration every movement of that beautiful and dearly loved form. He found every attribute there worthy a heart's devotion. Like the worshippers of the sun, who believe that God sits there on his throne, so did he, in his homage, picture the good angel of all things in the heart of Florinda.

Let us pause for a moment, to describe the apartment in the Palazzo Pitti, devoted to the fair Signora Florinda, and where she now sat with him she loved. It was fittingly chosen, being in a retired yet easily accessible angle of the palace; an apartment lofty and large, yet not so much so as to impart the vacant and lonely feeling that a large room is wont to do over the feelings of the occupant when alone.

It was lighted by two extensive windows, reaching nearly from the ceiling to the floor. The magnificence of the furniture, the rich and well chosen paintings that ornamented the walls, and in short, the air of unostentatious richness that struck the beholder on entering it, showed at once the good taste and general character of the occupant.

On a little table of elaborate and beautiful workmanship, were placed with a few rare and favorite books, some curious ornaments from the hands of the cunning artificers of the East, most beautifully fancied, and from which a moral might be read telling the fair occupant of the unhappy state of her own sex in that far off clime.

The broad, heavy and richly-wrought curtains that tempered the light admitted through the gorgeously stained glass windows, were of Tuscan satin, blending, like the skies under which they were manufactured, a most happy conceit of rich and rosy colors. Pendant from the hoops in which both were gathered, hung a bunch of ostrich feathers of showy whiteness belieing, as it were, the country of their nativity-swarthy Africa. They were more for fancy than for use, though they did sometimes serve to chase the flies.

The seats and couches were of stuffed and figured velvet from the manufactories of the queen of the Adriatic, Venice. The scarcely less soft and pliant carpet was of eastern ingenuity, and no richer served the Turkish Sultan himself. Two opposite sides of the apartment were ornamented each with a mirror of extensive size. About their richly gilded frames was wound, in graceful festoons, the finest Mechlin lace as a screen for the eye.

On one side of the room stood an American piano, and beside it a harp of surpassing richness. Here Carlton and Florinda were seated at this time in all the confidence and enjoyment of acknowledged love.

"Carlton, I told thee that fortune would smile upon thee; thou rememberest that I told thee."

"It has indeed, and I am blessed."

And thus saying, he pressed the delicate, jewelled hand that he held affectionately to his lips, while his eyes beamed with love.

"You have promised me that you will visit my native land with me after our marriage, dear Florinda."

"O, nothing will delight me more than to see the American Republic; the cities and towns of the New World, its people and customs. O, how I have ever wished to travel! Only to think, Carlton, I have scarcely been out of Italy! I once made a trip with uncle across the sea to Malaga and back, touching at the islands; that was years gone by. Since then I have been at times to Milan, Genoa, Leghorn and Bologna, but never out of Italy."

"America is not like thy sunny land, Florinda."

"Ay, but it is the land of thy nativity, and I will love it for thy sake, And then it is a free, republican government; there are no serfs there-all are freemen. How proud you should feel to belong to such a country."

"I do indeed feel proud, dear one; and doubly so when thy eloquent tongue describes it so well."

He touched the guitar lightly and gaily, while he thought of the happy tour they would make together.

"How proud I shall be of thee," he continued.

"How proud I am of thee."

"There is little pride in thee, Florinda, or thou wouldst never have consented to marry one of my humble pretensions."

"Carlton," said the lady, reproachfully.

"And thou wilt marry the humble painter?"

"Nay, the envied artist, and protege of the duke."

"Ah, little have I coveted this advancement, but for the hope that it has given me concerning thee, Florinda! The favored friend of the Grand Duke has dared boldly to ask for that which the poor artist could only hope for."

Florinda and Carlton were happy in the anticipation of future joy, foreseeing for themselves a path of roses in the fairy future.

"But fortune is fickle, dearest, and even now I tremble."

"You are ever suspicious, Carlton."

"Not in most matters, but in those relating to thee, Florinda."

"Now, I am ever looking on the sunny side of our life-picture."

"It is good philosophy to do so, if one can but accomplish the purpose."

"And yet, Carlton, one will sometimes be reminded that there is a shadowed side to the brightest scenes and hopes."

"We will seek its bright side, dearest."

"With all my heart.-Carlton, do you not remember that you left the heroine of that story you were last telling me in a most critical situation?"

"True, she was carried off by the banditti. Shall I complete the story?"

"Yes, pray do."

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## CHAPTER VII.—THE RHINE LEGEND COMPLETED.

They laugh that win.

-Othello.

"WELL, Florinda, you must go with me in imagination to the mountain fastness, which I referred to as the robbers' stronghold in the mountains. A month nearly had passed since the period of Bettina's being carried away from her home, and the time I would introduce you there. It is a wild spot, almost inaccessible, unless one knows the secret paths which have been hewn up the sides of the rocks, and through the otherwise impassable undergrowth of the forest, by the perseverance and labors of the robbers. The rude castle, which I would now describe to you, was built with consummate military skill, and the walls and bastions, though small and low, could hold out a long time against any strength that might be brought against it. Ever prepared for an enemy, too, was its cautious master and his outposts were as regularly set as are those of an advancing army in an enemy's country.

"Hither had the fair Bettina been conducted; and here, with a simple peasant girl to serve her, had she been treated with all respect, save that she was a prisoner. Rude were the inhabitants of this uncongenial spot; fierce in aspect, but completely under the control of the master spirit, whom they called captain. Hark! A peculiar wild cry rings over the tree-tops, and echoes among the rocks and hills; and observe how quickly those who have been loitering upon the ground spring to their feet, and Petard himself comes forth from that portion of the tower devoted to his retirement. That was some recognized signal-that cry which, to the uninitiated, might have been mistaken for the whoop of an owl, or some wild bird's cry of fright.

"The secret is soon disclosed. That signal betokened the taking of a captive, and there was soon led into their midst the person of one whom misery seemed to have laid violent hands upon, with garments torn and soiled, with a step that indicated weakness almost to death itself, the face disfigured by unshorn beard and hair, and eyes that looked sunken and large from famine. Such was the bent and woe-begone figure that was now half-supported, half-led into the midst of the band.

"'From whence comes this man?' asked Petard, regarding him curiously.

"'He was found lurking about our outskirts, captain, and we thought it best to arrest and bring him in.'

"'It is well,' continued the captain of the robbers. 'What have you to say for yourself, fellow? What brought you in these regions, away from town and habitations?'

"'Give me food, food!' gasped the prisoner.

"'Ay, by our lady, he's famished,' said Petard, with a natural burst of feeling. 'Here, bring bread-a flask of wine.'

"He was obeyed, and the new comer drained the flask to the bottom, and devoured the food voraciously, until those about him interfered, saying that he would kill himself after so long an abstinence; and truly there

seemed to be some grounds for this fear, so ravenously hungry did he seem. Gradually, as the wine warmed his veins, and the food, to which some dried meats had been added, began to satisfy the cravings of hunger, the stranger rose from his bending posture, and new life seemed infused into his system. His eyes, though somewhat hollow, seemed to brighten and light up his rugged face. There was manhood in him, and that pleased the bandits; he showed no signs of fear, and looked boldly about him, like one who was accustomed to rely on himself, and was prepared to stand forth at any moment in defence of his rights.

"If thou canst fight as well as thou canst eat, my man, thou art a jewel of a fellow," said Petard, carefully scanning the new comer, who seemed every moment brightening up from the effects of the nourishment.

"Give me but rest and more food, and you may then try me," was the brief reply.

"Thou art a sensible fellow," continued Petard, who was evidently pleased with the stranger, "and shalt be humored."

A rude couch was spread by the robbers amidst their stacks of arms, and throwing himself upon the skins thus prepared for him, the stranger slept for hours, until the bright sun was high in the heavens on the following morning, when, after another abundant meal, he seemed like a new creature; he stood erect, and his fine dark eye shone with the fire of resolution and of strength. His story was soon told; he had outraged the laws, was seized and condemned to punishment, had effected his escape and fled to the mountains, and wandered about until half-starved, and nearly dead with fatigue, he had thus been found.

"Your story is plausible, but what shall we do with you? You know the secret of our paths through the mountain, and it is not safe to let thee go abroad to reveal them," said the bandit chief.

"Make me one of you, then," said the stranger.

"We make but few members," replied Petard. "It is not our way; and men must possess peculiar qualities to obtain a place with us, and a share of our prize-earnings."

"Probably courage, strength and a ready hand are worth something among you," said the stranger.

"Yes, but we all possess these," replied Petard.

"In a degree," said the stranger, emphasizing the last word.

"What mean you?" asked Petard.

"That perhaps he who offers you his services is a better man than you take him for," said the other.

"In what respects?" asked Petard.

"In all things that constitute manhood," was the reply. "Yesterday I was weak and worn; to-day I am myself again. And no man of this band can bear the palm from me in the use of those powers which Heaven has given us."

"Without weapons, you mean to say," added Petard.

"Without weapons I defy your best man," said the stranger, evidently desiring to display some prowess which should gain him admission to the band.

There was a consultation between Petard and a few of his officers and men, and finally there stepped forth a large, powerful member of the troop—the bully of the band—who offered without weapons to contend with the new comer. The terms were properly stated by the captain, the ground chosen, and the contest begun. The skill, strategy and strength of the stranger were confounding to the robber, and he was cast upon the ground totally disabled in a very few moments. The robbers being angry at this, another stepped forward, was vanquished as quickly, and another, and still another, until Petard himself interfered, declaring that he who could thus fight without weapons, and with such skill and decision, must be a strong auxiliary in time of need. He was installed, therefore, with due ceremony, as a member of the band.

"It was a fine, clear night," continued Carlton, "that on which it came the turn of the new comer to guard the tower in which Bettina Etzwell was confined. The stars shone out like mystic lamps, and the broad turrets of the robbers' stronghold cast deep shadows upon the open plats that had been cleared about the spot. All was still. After an evening of revelry, the band was sleeping, and the single guard paced to and fro, apparently not daring to sit down lest he should fall asleep. In the lone tower above him was the fair prisoner. She realized her true situation, and she knew that her father would use every endeavor to raise the sum requisite for her ransom. She knew enough about the habits and practices of the banditti, not to have any fears for her personal safety, since it was so much for their pecuniary advantage to protect and respect her. Indeed, Petard had frankly told her of the communications that had taken place between her father and himself concerning her ransom.

"But hark! What startles the fair girl so suddenly? See, she hastens to the turret window, and listens absorbedly to the low but musical notes of a human voice. Is it because the song is so familiar to her ear, that she is thus moved? Perhaps there are recollections connected with this air that are particularly affecting to her, for her fair bosom heaves quickly, and her whole figure seems agitated, as she gazes out upon the night, and her eyes rest upon the person of the robber who guards her captivity, while a clear, manly voice, though in subdued cadence, pours forth the touching notes of a Rhine song with singular delicacy and sweetness.

"Can there be two such voices?" she asked herself. "Is there magic at work? That is certainly the voice of Egbert, but yonder guard who sings thus is one of these detested banditti!"

In her excitement, she leaned forth from the turret-window, while at the same moment the new member of

the band drew towards it. All was still; the revellers slept. Petard himself slept. Only this single sentinel and the prisoner were awake!

"Bettina, Bettina!" whispered the guard, with his hands to his mouth, so as to direct the sound to her ears alone.

"God be praised, Egbert! Is it indeed you?" she exclaimed aloud.

"Hush, it is your devoted lover; be discreet!" he answered."

"I knew it was he," interrupted Florinda.

Carlton continued. "I will, I will. But this dress-the office you fill. What does this mean? I am amazed, Egbert."

"I am here under a disguise," he replied, "and have just joined the robbers to liberate thee. Be careful, watchful, but never appear to regard me let what may occur, for I may be foiled at first in my purpose."

"My father-" lisped Bettina.

"Is well," said her lover. "All will go well if thou wilt but be cautious." Come to the outer door-I have the key."

"Shall we fly?" she asked.

"Not to-night; preparation must be made. Perhaps to-morrow night, for I have the watch here for two nights, and shall see you then. Come down for a few moments."

In an instant more the lovers were folded in each other's arms. Egbert had never before embraced her; but their present situation was one to break down all barriers of mere formality, and Bettina sobbed upon his breast, blessing him for his courage in thus seeking to rescue her. These were precious moments, and they improved them in arranging everything for the coming night. Egbert, as she bade him good night, handed her a jewelled dagger, saying that let what might occur, she had that silent friend!

It is just four weeks since the first instalment on the robber's demanded ransom was paid, when the agent of Petard again appeared in the hall of Botzletz Castle, confident in his personal security, well knowing that the old man's daughter was the hostage held for his safety and the fulfilment of the contract, and demands a second quarter of the ransom. He was a dark, sinister looking Jew-for this was the class through whom the bandits universally performed all their business arrangements with people whom they could not personally approach-himself interested by the large percentage which was the payment for his part of the business. The Jew was most pertinacious in his demand.

Karl Etwell, the merchant, received the Jew, listened patiently to his demand, and then calmly said:

"Two hundred and fifty marks of gold thou hast already received from me on this business."

"I have," replied the Jew.

"And thou now demandest an additional two hundred and fifty?" said the merchant.

"It is my business," was the answer.

"Canst change me a good obligatory note for five hundred?" asked the merchant.

The Jew drew forth his bag of gold, and after a brief examination, said:

"If thou wilt take a few diamonds at their true valuation, I can make up the sum on the spot, but I shall charge you goodly usury."

"It is well," replied the merchant.

"You agree to this?"

"Count out the money," said the old merchant.

It was done, and the Jew deposited upon the table two hundred and fifty marks of gold, partly made up by a score of fine diamonds.

"We should have some witnesses to this transaction," said the merchant. "I will summon them."

"It were better done between ourselves alone," said the Jew.

At the same moment the heavy folding-doors behind the seat occupied by Karl Etwell were thrown open, and two persons, a lady and gentleman, advanced towards the old merchant, They were Bettina and Egbert!

"Foiled with thine own weapons!" said Egbert, advancing and securing the money which the Jew had deposited upon the table. "This is the exact sum that was paid to thee four weeks since. It is now returned, and you are a marked man. If seen again in these parts, I will myself have thee cut in piecemeal, and hung at my castle gates. Now, villain, get thee hence!"

"Gentlemen, you forget that there is a captive who will pay the penalty of all this," said the Jew, with a demoniacal grin.

"You are not fully informed, Sir Jew," said Egbert. "Your principal could inform you that his bird has flown, and I tell you that there she stands beside her father."

"The Jew uttered a smothered execration, and tore his hair for a moment in despair at the loss he had experienced. But the iron grip of Egbert's powerful hand upon his shoulder awoke him to a sense of pain and fear for his safety, and he hurried away.

"The descendants of Egbert and Bettina still live happily in their ancestral home," added Carlton, "and often relate the story of the manner in which the famous bandit Petard was foiled by the gallant and daring stratagem of Egbert Hosfeldt."

"This is a happy ending, indeed," said Florinda.

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## CHAPTER VIII.—A RIVAL.

Excellent! I smell a device.

-Twelfth Night.

EVERY picture has its dark side-no scene is all sunshine; and so it is our duty to depict the shadow as well as the brightness of the fortunes of those whose story we relate. Carlton had met with opposition, circumstances which he had bravely overcome had impeded his progress, physical suffering had been patiently endured, and yet the dark side of his fortune might be said to have hardly been turned upon his gate as yet. The love of Florinda had ever sustained him; her solemn promise to be his wife, her tender love and constant affection-all these had rendered his hardships mere pastimes. But now matters were to assume a different aspect; a new stumbling-block was to appear in his path, and a most serious one, indeed.

Florinda had an uncle resident at Bologna, where he had lived some three years previous to the opening of our story, filling some post delegated to him by the government. This uncle, Signor Latrezzi, was very fond of Florinda, or at least he had always appeared to be so; and up to the time the Grand Duke had become her guardian, he had himself assumed the care of his lovely young niece. Some openly declared that he had done this from mercenary motives; but be that as it may, the story will divulge his character. He had not left her surrounded by the gayety and dissipation of the court of Florence without some misgivings, lest some untoward circumstance might befall her, or that she might become entangled in some alliance contrary to her own interests and his desires.

In consequence of these promptings, he had earnestly impressed upon Florinda at the time of his parting from her, on his way to Bologna, to be wary and careful. The truth was, that her uncle had laid out a plan for her future, and would have been very glad to have remained by her side in order the more surely to carry it out, but he could not decline the office to which he was now appointed, and thus he was obliged to leave. He had long designed her hand for an equally favorite nephew on his wife's side, and on this match had firmly fixed his heart. Some said that this was because he desired so earnestly to sustain the character, name and blood of the house of Carrati, of which Florinda was the sole survivor; others, more shrewd, declared that the uncle had a sinister motive beneath all of those so apparent.

Florinda was no stranger to this expectation, but had never given it thought, either in favor or against the consummation of her uncle's ideas. The subject was rarely alluded to, and even her uncle deemed her still too young to entertain the idea of matrimony. In a country and among a class where matches were so commonly mere matters of business and mercenary calculation, such an affair did not create much remark or interest between even the parties themselves. Aside from the considerations of family honor, the pride of birth and noble blood, the large, nay, unequalled fortune of Florinda-always excepting that of the Grand Duke-was a strong inducement to this step. That her relation had some personal ends in view, in connection with the proposed alliance, was equally obvious to all who knew the mercenary and selfish character of his general disposition. His treatment towards Florinda had ever been kind and fatherly, but this course was adopted only that he might gain the necessary ascendancy over her mind and purpose to make sure of his plan.

This plan of procedure, artfully adopted by her uncle from her very childhood, had completely deceived Florinda-as we shall have occasion to see-and she was led to believe him kind and affectionate to her, who was proud and selfish in all his dealings with the rest of the world. His nephew, Petro Giampetti, was probably the only being he really loved; nor was his regard for him unalloyed, but tempered with that selfishness that formed a prominent trait in his natural disposition. He was childless himself, and had lost his wife by death not many years previous to the time of which we write-two circumstances which had rather tended to augment his unhappy disposition.

At times he was moody and thoughtful, and some matter seemed to weigh heavily upon his mind. He was, however, a peculiar man, with few personal friends and no confidants, and there were some dark hints thrown out touching his honesty in the matter of a sum of money entrusted to his care and disbursement by the government. But policy had led to this report's being hushed up on the part of government, for he was of noble blood.

This nephew, Petro Giampetti, was a handsome youth after the style of the Italians, possessed of all the noble and revengeful passions so common to his countrymen, yet by no means an evil-disposed person. His dark, swarthy countenance was rendered handsome by a remarkably deep, piercing eye, about which there

was a certain something which, while you could not exactly describe, yet left an unpleasant effect upon the beholder; a certain expression that seemed to say that when an object was to be gained, the means would sometimes be disregarded.

He had been much with Florinda from childhood, and he was taught to consider her as his future wife. As to love, he might be said to admire her beauty of person and mind, for none knew better how to appreciate both than Petro; and, taken in connection with his anticipated union with her, he perhaps loved her as the world goes. But she had never excited in his bosom that latent passion which smoulders in every heart, and which chance, earlier or later, will eventually fan into a flame.

He thought the matter settled, and lived accordingly, giving himself little trouble or thought as to the affair. He had often congratulated himself, since he had become of an age to appreciate such things, that he was to be so nobly connected, aside from the unbounded wealth there was in store for him. To speak more particularly, this latter consideration was of no little weight with one whose family coffers and private purse were sadly low and much needed replenishing.

Petro held the office of private secretary to his uncle in his capacity as an officer of state, and was consequently called with him to Bologna, and there resided with him until a few months subsequent to the awarding of the prize by the Grand Duke for the favored picture presented at the Pitti palace, when the business which had called them from home being completed, he followed his uncle on his return to Florence. He came back with a light heart, little anticipating the scenes that were to follow, or deeming that his hopes of future wealth and distinction by means of the proposed alliance with Florinda, had suffered in his absence.

Thus stood matters at this period of Carlton's good fortune; and here might have commenced our tale, but that we wished to show the reader "how love does not level the proud, but raiseth the humble."

When Signor Latrezzi learned what had occurred during his absence—that his most darling wish was about to be frustrated, and the work of years overthrown, as it were, in a single day—his anger knew no bounds, nor did he attempt to control it. He threw aside the mask, and the storm burst about the devoted head of Florinda in all its wrath and fury.

The uncle could hardly realize the present state of affairs, so unexpected was it to him, Was it to this end he had played the hypocrite so many years, that he had given away to all the caprices of a wayward girl, and humored her most annoying fancies? He could scarcely contain himself. Here was a denouement for the proud old noble—his niece engaged to an American artist; his Italian blood boiled at the thought. Petro, too, as we have intimated, little dreamed of the fire that had been kindled in Florinda's heart—a flame that all the coldness of her uncle, ay, and his assumed authority, too, could not possibly quench.

She was an inmate now of her uncle's household, or rather, he had full charge of her father's house, where she resided; and though in many respects entirely independent of him, still, in the matter of forming so important a connection, she hardly dared to proceed openly and at once contrary to his expressed wish, and even orders. Immediately on her uncle's return to Florence, Florinda had removed from the duke's palace to that of her forefathers, in order to assume, in some degree, the direction of her own affairs. Here Carlton was peremptorily refused admittance by the directions of her uncle; and thus poor Florinda was little less than a prisoner, in her own house, not daring to meet Carlton, if she could have done so. Thus commenced a drama which was to have a tragical end; and Florinda and Carlton found a sudden end to their late happy and joyful intercourse which neither had anticipated.

"Signor Latrezzi," said the duke one day to Florinda's uncle, "this young American is a noble fellow."

"Doubtless, if your highness thinks so."

"Think so—I know so, signor!"

"Your highness has much befriended him."

"No more than his merit deserves."

Signor Latrezzi bowed, but said nothing.

"Signor, you have observed his intimacy with Florinda?"

"Eccellenza, yes."

"A fine couple they would make."

"Does your excellenza think so?"

"To be sure I do; and if I mistake not, so does the lady."

"I know not that, excellenza."

"Ask her then, Signor Latrezzi. Either I cannot read the language of her fair face, or she loves the artist."

"But he's a foreigner, excellenza."

"What of that?"

"Nothing, save that Florinda is nobly born, and bears some of the best and oldest blood of Italy."

"Time will settle the matter," said the duke, turning away.

Signor Latrezzi having ascertained that the duke favored the alliance of his niece with the American artist, was too good a subject—or rather, too experienced a courtier—to attempt openly before his master to oppose

the matter, taking good care to avoid any interference with one whose wish, when expressed, was law. His opposition to the proposed marriage was, however, none the less rigorous; and he determined, on such occasions as he could do so, to exercise his spirit with impunity, and he was often heard to say that the affair should never take place, even if he was himself obliged to call out the young American to single combat.

The thought of the bare possibility of the connection as sanctioned by the duke, so embittered his feelings as to render him disagreeable to all about him. His conscious pride and self-interest both prompted him in this emergency; for in the case of Florinda's marrying Petro, as we have already intimated, there would be some important pecuniary interest of his own benefited thereby-and then his old aristocratic notions were shocked at the prospect of the plebeian match.

Now was poor Carlton cornered on the chequer-board of life, and he must play boldly, if he would reach the desired goal. He had those to deal with who possessed every facility and advantage successfully to battle him in his hopes and plans. But then he was no longer the poor painter, who did not know where his next meal was to be obtained; he was no longer the hungry artist-the butt and jest of his old companions. No! he was under the patronage of the Grand Duke, whose personal friendship he could boast. His brush brought him daily-or as often as he was pleased to exert himself-large sums of money; and his well-lined purse was significant of his unbounded success in his profession as an artist.

Carlton knew as well as those who had ever possessed the means, how best to employ them when at his command. His noble person was now garbed in the rich dress of a court favorite, while the plenty and comfort he now enjoyed had again filled his sunken cheek, and lit up the fire of his bright hazel eye; his hair, long and curling about his spirited and intelligent face, was the pride of Florinda, and the envy of the whole court.

His fellow-students of the academy were also but too happy to receive the least attention from their late companion; he now moved in a grade of society far above them-a circle which was as inaccessible to them as the throne itself. What was his return to them for the spirit they had ever manifested towards him? Did he retaliate and put them to shame? He did not retaliate, and yet he put them to shame-ay, his was a noble revenge; he returned them good for evil.

Carlton's kindness to those who had so illy treated him was unbounded; they received no such return from him-far from it. He encouraged in every way their studies, and even condescended gratuitously to teach them, and they were very ready and happy to thrive under his instruction. Thus did he heap coals of fire on their heads, showing them what sort of a spirit they had trampled on in its adversity.

"Whither away, in such haste?" asked one young artist of another in the streets of Florence.

"To Signor Carlton's, the American artist," was the reply.

"All Florence is after him-what want you?"

"He is to give a finishing touch to a bit of canvass for me."

"That's clever of him."

"Yes, since no one can do so well as he," was the ready acknowledgement.

Thus were the tables completely turned. Little did his former companions and fellow-students dream of this transition of good fortune to the share of him they had so lately scoffed at in the open streets of Florence. One, to see their ready obeisance now, and their earnest endeavors to please him, would hardly think they had ever treated him with less respect.

So goes the world. If ill fortune betide us, how many stand ready to give us a push on our downward course, and to scoff at our misery; but let the tide turn and set favorably on our bark, and none are so ready to do obeisance as those very curs who have barked and growled at us the loudest. Carlton, the court favorite, the unrivalled artist, the now liberal and wealthy Carlton, was a very different person from the threadbare artist who turned from his companions on the piazza at noonday.

He retraced his steps towards the grand gallery at that time, faint and hungry, because he had not the means to procure for himself a dinner, avoiding his fellow-artists to escape the mortification of expressing the extent of his poverty and want.

Carlton was in doubt as to the most proper course for him to pursue. He hardly dared to lay the matter in its present form before the duke, lest it might seem impertinent and obtrusive in him towards one who had already extended unprecedented kindness and protection towards him; and yet he knew no other source upon which he might rely. In this dilemma, Carlton grew quite dejected. He was one of those persons who, notwithstanding he possessed a strong mind and determination of purpose, was easily elated or depressed in his spirits; and the present state of affairs rendered him sad enough.

He was rudely repulsed in every endeavor to gain an audience of Florinda by the menials of Signor Latrezzi-who had been instructed to this effect by their master-and Carlton was obliged to content himself with an epistolary communication, having to conduct even this in secret.

At length one day, finding the duke in a happy mood and at leisure, he frankly stated the matter to him as it actually existed, and begged of him to advise him what course to pursue in the case.

"Signor Carlton," said the duke, kindly, after hearing him to the end, "I have little love for this uncle of Florinda's, and therefore avoid any issue with him, or I would openly express my wishes on this point. But as it is, Signor Americano, there are fleet horses in Florence, and ready postilions about the gates of the city, who know the route to Bologna over the mountains! Thou hast ridden in a cabriolet, signor?"

"A cabriolet?" repeated Carlton, inquiringly.

"Yes, there are plenty in Florence."

"Your highness is pleased to be facetious."

"Not at all."

"Then why speak of cabriolets in this connection?"

"Canst not take the hint?"

"Your excellenza speaks in riddles."

"One of thy discernment, Signor Carlton, should understand me."

"Would your excellenza have me clo—"

"I would not have you do anything but that which your own judgment should approve," interrupted the duke.

"Thanks, excellenza, I understand you."

"You may be assured of my friendship in all cases when it can be reasonably exercised," continued the duke.

"Your excellenza is ever kind."

A new field was opened for Carlton, and he was as much elated as he had heretofore been depressed; and he resolved to take the hint of the duke, and bring matters to an issue in the most summary manner.

Young Petro Giampetti immediately on his return to Florence, having learned the state of affairs between Carlton and Florinda, had resolved at once to challenge his rival; being an expert swordsman, and knowing Carlton's peaceful occupation, he made no doubt that he could easily despatch him in single combat, and thus rid himself of one who, to say the least, was a very dangerous rival.

In this frame of mind, Petro sought some cause of difference with Carlton other than the true one at issue—a quarrel could hardly be raised, inasmuch as the latter remained ignorant even of the pretensions of Petro, or the design of Florinda's uncle up to the time of their return from Bologna.

Failing otherwise to accomplish his purpose, Petro, whose standing and connection served him as a key to the royal presence, sought to offer at court some slight to Carlton, so public and marked as to render it necessary for him to demand satisfaction after the code of Italian honor. Three times, in pursuance of this object, he had vainly endeavored to accomplish his purpose; but each time, Carlton, basking in the sunshine of royal favor, turned by without notice the intended insult in such a manner as to show himself as feeling far above an insult from such a source, and again in so cool and diplomatic a manner, as to turn the very game upon poor Petro himself, who found that nothing save some open and decided offense could bring matters to an issue.

"You don't seem to get along very fast in this little matter," said one of his friends rather tauntingly to him.

"No, it doesn't look much like a draw-game between them, either," said another friend, venturing a pun.

"Curse him," growled Petro, "he's a coward, and wont take offence. What can a man do in such a case as that?"

"Carlton doesn't look to me just like a coward," said one of the speakers; "but he doesn't want to fight you, Petro."

"Can't help it," said Petro, "he must do it."

"Well, then, give him a chance, and have it over."

"I'll improve the first opportunity, believe me."

But Petro did not further annoy Carlton that evening; the coolness and self-possession he evinced quite nonplussed the angry Italian.

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## CHAPTER IX.—THE DUEL.

What folly 'tis to hazard life for ill.

-Timon of Athens.

AS we have said, Petro, finding that nothing short of an open and downright insult could bring Carlton to be the challenging party, therefore resolved to make a bold attempt to accomplish this. He was revolving this

matter over in his mind, when an event occurred which led him to be the challenger in fact. He was strolling home from the weekly cordon of the Grand Duke one evening, and was just turning an angle of his uncle's palace walls, when hearing the voice of a female in answer to that of a man, he paused, and following the sound, discovered Florinda leaning from a balcony in the lower range of the palace, and in close conversation with his hated rival, Carlton. This was sufficient, under the circumstances, to raise all his fiery spirit, and he determined that it should serve him as a pretext for a quarrel.

Placing himself hard by where he knew Carlton must pass in his leave-taking of the palace, he patiently awaited his coming; and but a short time elapsed before Carlton, bidding good night to Florinda, was hastening from the spot, when he encountered Petro, whose dark countenance was the very picture of rage, while his large, dark eyes were wild with inward passion.

"Signor Carlton!"

"Signor Petro!"

They exclaimed, on confronting each other.

Carlton for a moment was thrown off his habitual guard, and losing his temper, was about to retort upon Petro with interest, both in frown and, if need be, with blows also. But recalling himself, he assumed his usual precaution, and looked upon the angry Italian coolly, and without the least exhibition of temper.

"Well, Signor Carlton."

"Well, Signor Petro."

"Your mock me, signor."

"You mock me, signor."

"Signor, you are my enemy."

"You seem to wish me so."

"This talk will not serve for you, signor."

"If you like it not, it were best for you to step on one side, and I will pass."

The Italian bit his lips with suppressed rage, and seemed too angry to trust even his voice; but he did not remain long silent.

"Signor Americano," said Petro, warmly, "you have insulted my uncle and myself by this secret interview with Signora Florinda, and I demand of you immediate satisfaction for it."

"Signor Petro, I have no cause for contention with you," was the reply of Carlton. "I know you love not the lady, and you are equally aware of her feelings towards you. Why then, I ask, should there be strife between us upon this subject? Surely, you would not seek the hand of one who does not love you! This is inconsistent, Signor Petro."

"Do you accept my challenge, or shall I brand you as a coward in the streets of Florence," was the abrupt and passionate rejoinder. "It would sound bravely, by our lady, to write coward against the name you have rendered so popular, sir artist, among the nobilita in Florence."

"I will have no contention with thee," said Carlton, his feelings struggling warmly with his determination to avoid the course which his early education had taught him to regard with the utmost abhorrence.

"Then I will brand thee as a coward!"

"Until you do that, I shall never fight you," said Carlton, calmly. "I would rather lose my hand than draw the blood of one related by any ties to her I love; but if it must be so, you can take your own counsel."

"This is fine language, signor."

"It is honest language."

"I should require other evidence to make me think so."

"Because you cannot appreciate the feelings that dictate it."

"In what respect?"

"As they are caused by my regard for Signora Florinda."

"It is well to assume a virtue, if we have it not," said the Italian, scornfully.

"I assume nothing, Signor Petro."

"Flatter not yourself that you can escape me by this assumed tone of feeling, Signor Americano."

"You have my answer, signor."

"I shall take an early opportunity to keep you at your word," was the menacing reply, and they separated.

Carlton would rather have engaged with any other person in an affair of this kind than with Petro, for obvious reasons; and, as he said to him, besides which, he had the greatest aversion to "affairs of honor," but from principle only, for his was as brave a heart as ever drew sword.

Petro at length hit upon a plan which must necessarily bring on the desired meeting. Accordingly, at the cordon of the Grand Duke, on the following week, at the Pitti Palace, when Carlton entered the gorgeous apartments, a murmur ran through the assembly, raised by the friends of Petro, who had preconcerted the plan, of "Coward, coward!"

It was uttered, as we have said, in whispers, but it is a word that can be heard a long distance. The young American did not even change color, but turning his bright and sparkling eyes upon some of the principal offenders, he gave them a look that touched them keenly. He did not evince by any outward appearance how deeply his pride was wounded, but he felt it at heart none the less severely. He even looked more cheerful than was his wont, conversing gaily with the ladies of the court. His fine noble countenance was lit up with additional spirit, and his friends even complimented him on his happy appearance. Yet it was all forced-ay, a lie that his proud heart compelled him to.

"What a goodly outside falsehood hath!" How many there are like Carlton at that moment! While they smile, they but hide a raging passion within. A smile may cover up the wildest storm of the spirit, as well as show forth its own sunshine!

The giddy dance went on, and gayety was the mistress of the hour. Carlton mingled in the dance, and even by good chance succeeded in gaining the hand of Florinda for a set. Her uncle, fearing the displeasure of the duke, avoided any public opposition as we have before said, to the attentions of Carlton; consequently in public he enjoyed her society as one friend may enjoy that of another, while the world are by. The hours flew by as hours only fly along the happy, until the time had nearly arrived for the guests to depart, when Carlton, coolly walking up to Petro, who stood in an exposed situation, said, in a tone not to be mistaken:

"Signor Petro, follow me!"

"Si, Signor Americano," was the prompt reply.

Both left the hall together, the friends of Petro alone understanding the probable design of the movement. The two sought a secluded cafe in silence, and then settled the preliminaries for a meeting, or duel, on the following morning, in which Petro declared one of them should fall.

"I would have escaped this encounter for your sake as well as my own," said Carlton, after the arrangements were concluded. "I know very well that you have a reputation for being an expert swordsman, but I fear not. Justice is stronger than art, and you will find it so, Signor Petro, on the morrow."

"I do not wish to anticipate, Signor Americano, but I must advise thee to prepare for death on the morrow."

"True, Signor Petro," said Carlton, earnestly, "neither of us knows what the morrow may bring forth."

"Signor," said Petro, now in evident good humor at his anticipated success, "you should have chosen the pistol, to have placed yourself in any possibility on equal terms with me."

"I can use either," was the reply.

"Ay, as a child would use them. What has thy profession to do with arms, that thou shouldst ever deign to know their use? It is not yet too late-say, shall it be pistols? You can yet choose," said Petro, touched with that spirit of honor which would sometimes actuate him.

"I have already spoken on that point," said Carlton.

"Very well, then, signor, with the sword. But in that case, the game will possess but little interest, being all on one side."

"To-morrow's sun can speak more fittingly of these things than we can do to-night," was Carlton's reply.

"You bear yourself with assurance, signor."

"We will not hold any controversy, Signor Petro."

"Until to-morrow."

"At the appointed time I shall be ready."

"Be sure I shall expect you."

"We understand each other on that point."

"Hold, will you bring weapons, or shall I procure them?"

"Our seconds can arrange for us."

"True."

Thus saying, the two separated to meet on the following morning at a secluded spot in the Apennines, which rise gracefully from the very gates of Florence, gradually attaining to an immense height, and making their home among the clouds. To have travelled where we would fain have taken the reader at the outset, one must have sailed in the southern seas among the islands, have run the Gibraltar passage, and seen the blue water that lies among the Italy mountains. He must have looked upon the Apennines from the sea, and run down the coast that teems with the recollections of three thousand years.

The mist was slowly creeping up the mountain's side on the following morning, scarcely three hours from the time that the duke's guests had departed, when Petro and his friends, closely followed by Carlton and his companion, sought the appointed rendezvous for the meeting. The cool, fresh breeze of the morning air, that

strengthened as they ascended the mountain, one would think should cool the passions of any creature. Not so with Petro; for the Italian fire of his spirit was up-the dark, deep passions of his nature-and nought but blood could appease their cravings.

The spot was gained, and each made the usual preliminary arrangements-all being prepared, the two approached each other. Carlton had disrobed himself of coat and vest, and now stood before his antagonist clothed only in his lower garments and linen. Petro laughingly told his companions that he could punish the Americano with his garments on, not deeming the task of sufficient weight to compel him to remove his tight-fitting upper garments. A few moments were passed in the usual guards and thrusts, when anon commenced the feint, the ward, as each grew warmer in the contest.

It was evident to all at the outset that Carlton as well as Petro was master of his weapon. This much had surprised those who had supposed him not possessed of the least knowledge of the exercise. But Petro found him far more than a match for all his boasted skill and experience, but with great astonishment, he continued to exert himself to the utmost.

It was a singular scene, that presented by the two combatants thus arraigned before each other in mortal combat. The Italian heated, his eyes and face swollen with excitement and passion, while his antagonist was as calm and unmoved in temper, as though he were fencing with the foils, and only for pleasure. It was a tragic scene, as evincing the brute nature to which man can bring himself.

In the heat of the contest, Petro soon lost his temper, while Carlton, cool and collected, parried his wild and headlong thrusts with consummate skill; and at length, after showing him how fruitless were all his efforts to wound him, Carlton by a masterly movement disarmed his antagonist of his blade, at the same time striking the left hand of the Italian a blow with the flat of his sword that laid it bare to the bone!

This put a stop to the duel for a few moments, when Petro, almost beside himself with rage, now threw from him his upper garments in imitation of Carlton, and having had his hand properly dressed, yet smarting under the severe wound he had received, resumed his sword— Carlton remaining in the meantime resting upon his sword, careless, as it were, whether the fight was resumed or not.

"Signor Petro," said Carlton, when they approached each other the second time, "it is evident to your friends, I presume, that you are no match for me in the weapons we hold. I advise you to withdraw from the contest. You have already expended your blood in the vindication of this system of honor, and wounded as you now are, can hardly do yourself justice."

"Stand to your defence!" said the enraged Petro, whose blood was now completely up. And unheeding the generous proposal and language of his antagonist, he rushed upon Carlton almost without warning, thus essaying to take advantage of him; but the quick and practised eye of the latter saved him, and the rain of blows and thrusts that Petro made at him were as harmless as hail-stones upon a slated roof. Carlton acted entirely on the defensive; had it been otherwise, he could at any moment have drawn the heart's blood of his enemy, who, only intent on the life of his successful rival, strove not at all to protect himself from the sword of Carlton while they fought.

Carlton again permitted him to work thus in his wild fury for some minutes, when at length, by another masterly effort with his weapon, he again disarmed his antagonist, throwing his blade over the heads of the company, and immediately, apparently with the same effort, he wounded Petro in the sword arm with such force and earnestness, that it fell powerless by his side. Though severely wounded in both arms, still in his wild rage the Italian could hardly be persuaded to leave the ground peaceably.

Thus ended the duel between Carlton and Petro.

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## CHAPTER X.—THE ELOPEMENT.

Not vanquished, but cozened and beguiled.

-King Lear.

THE duel described in the last chapter, it will be remembered, was not sought by Carlton. Indeed, he would gladly have avoided it, if possible-first and foremost, because it was diametrically contrary to his principles and sense of moral rectitude; and secondly, because his opponent was indirectly kin to her whom he loved above all in life. Thus much we say to place our hero rightly before the reader, who should not look upon him inconsistently.

The critical reader may perhaps question the propriety of Carlton's wounding Petro at all, inasmuch as he is represented to be able to have defended himself with comparative ease from the heated and headstrong Italian's sword. In answer to this, we would say, that besides there being always the possibility of his being wounded by the enemy's sword, the very fact of his returning to the fight when severely wounded, showed that Carlton had rightly judged of his character, its vindictive impulses, when he deemed both wounds necessary. He gave the second one unwillingly; and not one moment before he thought it absolutely necessary to do so; all those on the ground could have borne testimony that there was scarcely an instant of

time that Carlton had not Petro's life at his command, if he had chosen to take it.

"Why, Carlton," said a merry-faced Englishman, who had been his companion during the interview, and who was now walking with him down the mountain's side, "I could hardly believe my eyes to see thee such a master of thy weapon. How hast thou possibly attained to such extraordinary proficiency with the sword?"

"You remember the little Frenchman, who lived so long with me?" asked Carlton. "He who had his snuff-box ever in his hand?"

"That I do," said his companion; "and a merry, studious, jocund, lazy, cowardly and brave little fellow he was. In short, I believe there was no quality, however contradictory-good, bad, or indifferent-that he did not possess."

"He was a bundle of inconsistencies," added Carlton, smiling at his friend's description.

The truth was, he had accurately described a certain class of that versatile nation, the French, which are often met with in every country, wanderers or exiles from home. While we write, we have one in our own mind, well known to our good citizens who is familiarly designated by the sobriquet of "the Emperor."

"Well, Carlton, what of our little knight of the snuff-box, eh?"

"You remember that I was poor in those days, and the clever little Frenchman offered to teach me the sword exercise, if I could teach him to speak English. It was a bargain, and so did he, and so did I, until I flatter myself both became proficient in their distinctive branches of learning. Carnot taught the exercise in the Grand Army; so he graduated in a good school, and was indeed an excellent master of the weapon. It has been my only recreation and exercise for nearly a year; and I confess I feel quite at home with a good blade in my hand."

"You use it with wondrous skill."

"Do you think so?"

"Certainly; even his second complimented you, and said blade was never more skilfully handled."

"This Petro Giampetti is also a good swordsman," said Carlton, "and with a little more coolness would carry a sure point. The pistol is the weapon for your hot-headed fellow; he does not find a chance while using it to work himself into a passion, as with the sword."

"Yes; but then with powder and ball, the veriest dunce in Christendom may blow out a gentleman's brain, while it takes an artiste to run one through the body handsomely. Give me the sword, Carlton-I've a great horror, in such cases, of 'villanous saltpetre.'"

"I have no taste in such matters; but knowing the boasted prowess of Signor Petro with the sword, I preferred that weapon, though I think you have seen me do some pretty things with the pistol, Brownlow? It was a silly fancy I had when a boy to learn its use."

"An' I had carte and tierces at my fingers' ends as thou hast, I would give a thousand pounds," said his companion.

"I'll tell thee how to gain it."

"By what means?"

"Shut thyself up as I have done for months together, with no companion save the brush, and no money to purchase books for perusal, and thou couldst learn it as readily as I have done; always supposing you to have as expert a teacher as that little Frenchman, Carnot, who in all else was anything but a companion-ay, a regular bore. But in mastering my aversion for him, why, you see, Brownlow, I became master of the weapon."

"Very true, but I have no Carnot to teach me; and to-day I see what I lose by the want of one."

"I'll teach it to thee, myself, Brownlow, when both of us have leisure," said Carlton.

"Do so, and I will repay thee at any cost."

And this, too, was one of those very artists, who but a few months previous had scoffed and jeered at him in the open streets of Florence.

How beautiful was the prospect that spread itself out to their view as the mist cleared away from their path down the mountain. Below them lay, in all its beauty, the city of Florence, the pride of Tuscany, and the Val d'Arno, crowded with white palaces, whose walls lay sparkling in the morning sun like the trembling waves of the sea.

Carlton returned to his lodgings, which were now the best and most capacious apartments of an ancient palace, the principal windows of which opened fronting the tall eminence of Fiesole, crowned by the gay old monastery where Milton passed many weeks while gathering materials for "Paradise Lost."

Here Carlton had his studio, the daily resort of the beauty and fashion of Florence, while his home was also the receptacle of all that taste could suggest, or the most fastidious could desire, contrasting strongly with his late want and suffering. Even the Grand Duke honored his studio with an occasional visit, which rendered the other artists of the city more jealous and envious than ever.

About a month had passed since the duel upon the mountain-side, and during that time Carlton was only able to communicate with Florinda through means of epistolary correspondence. For some time he had

employed a servant of the house of Carrati as his messenger; but the fellow being bribed by the agents of Petro, intercepted the letters, and now Carlton was forced to become his own messenger or bearer of the letters he himself wrote. He was now urgent in his communications to the gentle Florinda that she should elope from her home and become united to him; and their arrangements were nearly completed, as the following letter, written at this time, will show:

"DEAR FLORINDA:-I am more and more convinced of the propriety of the course I have urged upon you. You say that such a plan may jeopardize your large property. This is a mistake, I am fully convinced; and even were it otherwise, what need we care for wealth, if we are sure for a sufficiency for life, and of each other's love? I am highly gratified, dearest, that you have at length consented to this arrangement. I will, in the meantime, make all necessary arrangements for our journey. I count the moments until we shall meet again. Guard your health, dear Florinda, and believe me, Devotedly yours, CARLTON."

Carlton then proceeded immediately to perfect his plan, and to make all necessary arrangements for the proposed elopement, and in another letter to Signora Florinda, he made all preliminary arrangements with her also, so that there might be no misunderstanding in the case.

It was night, and the pale moon, as if in a fickle mood, was smiling and scowling by turns, as the fleecy clouds hurried swiftly past her. The fitful and sudden glances of light appeared doubly bright from the transient shadows made by the officious clouds. They, deeming that the moon took too much credit to herself as queen' of light for the hour, designed apparently to let her know that she reigned only at their will and pleasure.

Now bursting through their veiling power, the moon would for a moment cast long deep shadows down the narrow streets, and here and there would light up for an instant some antique palace front with dazzling richness, and as quickly die away again, as though it were at play with the earth. It was difficult in this alternating of light and darkness to use the eye so as to discern objects with certainty; and an individual could with difficulty be recognized between the changes, however near he might be to the observer. The character of the night was wild and threatening—a night for evil deeds.

The gates of the city of Florence were just closing, and the gathering clouds had entirely obscured the light of the moon, as a caleche-and-four, with an extra postilion, dashed off from the Borg' ognisanti, on the mountain-road towards Bologna. The inmates of the vehicle exchanged not a word. The female seemed to be affrighted at the headlong speed with which the double team drew the light caleche up the mountain's side, while a postilion sat so near, and the attendant at the lady's side, together seemed an excuse for the silence, even if they were that which any one would have pronounced them, a runaway couple.

Anon the gentleman would offer some polite attention to his companion, but without the exchange of a syllable; and, indeed, words could hardly have been heard at the rate they were driving through the dark, on account of the loud noise of the wheels and horses' feet among the stones and uneven soil of the rising ground. On rolled the vehicle with the speed of the wind—every one knows how Florentine horses can go when they have a mind to—until at length it pulled up at a highland roadside inn of most uninviting character. The lady was immediately assisted in silence from the vehicle, and scarcely had they entered the low, dark parlor of the inn before the gentleman whispered to her:

"The priest is here, and will unite us immediately."

"But why this haste, dear Carlton?" said Florinda, for it was her.

"There is no time to lose," was the whispered response.

"But should not—"

"Hush, Florinda!"

"But Carlton—"

"He is here," was the whispered interruption.

And in a moment more a priest made his appearance, and, without giving either time to unrobe themselves, had they been so inclined, commenced the marriage service. The ring was given in that dark room—so dark that the features even of the minister of the church could not be discerned—the prayer was made, and the two were solemnly declared to be husband and wife. The lady had essayed several times to speak aloud, as we have seen, to express some feeling or wish, and she seemed as if anticipating some encouragement from him she was about to wed; but she was each time hushed by the speed with which everything was done, or by a gentle whisper from her companion. The ceremony completed, the signora drew back to a chair, overcome by her swift ride, and the emotions that crowded themselves upon her throbbing and trembling heart.

At this moment there entered the apartment the tall figure of a man apparently advanced in years, who, turning his back upon Florinda, conversed for a moment with the bridegroom, then both turning towards Florinda at the moment a couple of lamps were introduced into the room, when lo! she beheld before her Signor Latrezzi, her uncle, and her husband, Petro Giampetti! With a scream of horror and affright, she fell fainting upon the floor.

The uncle and nephew were both filled with horror, for both believed that they had killed her, as they gazed upon her pale and lifeless form. Either would have sacrificed everything to have taken all back again, and restored her to life and happiness. Can this be thee, Petro Giampetti, trembling like a child—nay, a tear actually wetting that swarthy cheek, as you chafe the pulse, and bathe the temples of that insensible girl? And hast thou really so tender a heart, and yet couldst enter into so hard-hearted a conspiracy? And thou, Signor Latrezzi, well mayst thou hide thy face in thy hands, for thou art the greatest sinner here; thine has been the

hand that hath done this; that hath triumphed over this poor girl, whom thou shouldst have protected.

"Holy virgin," cried Petro, "she's dead!"

"Say not so," eagerly exclaimed her uncle.

"God forgive us!" answered Petro.

"Ay, we have need of forgiveness, if we have brought on such extremity," said the uncle, trying to raise the lifeless head of their inanimate victim.

Leaving the guilty, nephew and uncle for a while, we will take the reader back for a moment in the thread of our story.

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## CHAPTER XI.—THE INTERCEPTED LETTER.

Any man that can write may answer a letter.

-Romeo and Juliet.

IN such a tale as we now tell you, gentle reader, and when written within such limits, it is impossible to keep each portion of the plot equally advanced, or rather not to anticipate certain results. There is also an advantage in this mode of arrangement which perhaps is in itself sufficient excuse for the author. It heightens the plot, and renders it more absorbing to the reader, by suddenly laying before him some startling tableau and seeming inconsistency, but which the sequel of the story renders plain and reconcilable with other portions of the story.

Having said thus much for the scene we have presented to the reader at the roadside inn on the Apennines, we must now go back with him to the night on which Carlton delivered his letter of arrangement to Florinda, and thus render our tale plain to the comprehension of all.

Carlton, as we have said perfected his plan for the proposed elopement, and in another letter to Florinda he communicated the particulars, delivering the missive with his own hands as heretofore. There was a certain hour agreed upon between them, in which Signora Florinda was to be at the balcony of her apartment every evening; and thus, although Carlton might not be able to hold much conversation with her, yet he could deliver any written paper he might desire, without the fear of interruption or detection.

It was necessary to accomplish all with the utmost secrecy in order to ensure success. Now Petro had been led to suspect by some circumstances, that the meetings between Carlton and his cousin had been renewed. He determined to ascertain if this was the case through his own personal observation; and on the occasion of the delivery of the letter in question, Petro being on the watch, discovered Carlton in the act, and also overheard the following appointment made by him with Florinda:

"I will call for an answer at eleven, signora; I hope you may perfectly comprehend my plan and fully acquiesce in it."

"At eleven?"

"At eleven, signora."

"Hark, heard you not some one?"

"No, I heard nothing."

"It sounded very near to the balcony."

"In the street?"

"Yes; I am sure I heard someone."

"Some passer-by, Florinda," said Carlton.

"Pray thee be careful, Carlton, we may be watched."

"I will be discreet; do not fear."

"There, the figure is turning yonder street!"

"Ay, and pauses to observe us; I will away. You will remember."

"I will await you at that time, Carlton."

"Good night, Florinda," whispered Carlton, pressing the hand extended to him from over the balcony, just within reach.

"Good night." And they parted from each other, not daring to hold further conversation lest they might be

observed, and their future plans suspected and defeated by the agents of her uncle.

Petro determined to prevent this meeting, or rather to be present at it, and he hurried from the spot without meeting Carlton, resolving to be punctually at the terrace a little before eleven. It was evident that he had formed some plan in which he placed much confidence, by the revengeful smile that played about his scornful lips.

It was near the hour of eleven that night, when Carlton drew near the little terrace that jutted from the window of Florinda's apartment, He saw by the pale moonlight reflected upon the clock of the neighboring church, that it lacked yet some fifteen minutes of the appointed time for the meeting, and humming lightly to himself, to kill the minutes, he sat down within a shady angle of the palace wall. His approach was noted by the watchful Petro who, as soon as he saw him seated, determined, if possible, to obtain possession of the answer which he knew Carlton awaited!

To accomplish this purpose, required much cunning and prudence; but he was fully equal to the plan-for what Italian has not cunning and intrigue in his natural disposition? In pursuance of this object, he approached the little terrace before alluded to, and which was a trifle higher than his head, and situated at this time within the shadow of the moon. By a slight and almost imperceptible noise, he essayed to attract the attention of Florinda, and led her to suppose that he was Carlton, and there awaiting the expected answer according to appointment, The wily Italian gathered the ample folds of his rich cloak about his person, so as to partially cover his face, upon which there was a most demoniac smile, picturing revenge, hate and every evil passion, to which a heavy moustache lent additional fierceness.

In one hand he held a keen stiletto, while he extended the other above his head to receive the letter from the hand of Florinda. It was necessary for her to reach some distance over the edge of the small projecting terrace, in order to place it in his hand; this she did, using the customary precaution, and not venturing to utter a word as she heard footsteps approaching her room. Petro having thus possessed himself of the letter, retired to a place from whence he could watch the movements of Carlton without himself being observed by the young American.

As the clock of the neighboring church struck eleven, Carlton sprang to his feet, and assuming his place under the terrace, awaited the coming of Florinda, little suspecting the trick that had been played upon him. But after awaiting somewhat impatiently for nearly an hour, he was compelled to return to his lodgings, almost trembling with fear lest some serious accident had befallen her he loved, or at least that their plan might have been discovered, and she subjected to consequent ill-treatment and fresh rigor by her uncle. All this while Florinda, as little suspecting the fraud that had been played upon them as Carlton himself, was quite contented and happy in the anticipated success of their plan, and dropped to sleep, thinking of him, after humbling herself before the throne of grace in fervent prayer-that key to the gates of Paradise.

Florinda was naturally of a devotional character; and this feeling had grown and strengthened by her companionship with the late duchess, who was noted for her piety and goodness-and in fact came to her death, as is well known, by too much rigor imposed upon herself in devotional penance!

Petro, after satisfying himself that the ruse had not been discovered, sought his own apartment in the palace to read the letter he had thus possessed himself of. He hesitated for a moment before he broke the seal-we will do him the justice to say so-even in this stage of his conduct, his sense of honor had not entirely left him. It had not yet become so blunted as to render him entirely reckless in the debasing deed he was about to perform. With a sort of desperate resolution-for he had never before done so mean an act-he opened the seal. The letter was brief, and ran as follows:

DEAR CARLTON:-I leave every necessary arrangement to you. I will meet you as you propose to-morrow evening at the hour of ten. I would for certain reasons that it might be later, but the gates of the city I am aware close at that hour. Have a care for your own health and safety, Dear Carlton. I will meet you with a single attendant on whom I can rely, at the appointed time, and at the gate opening upon the Borg' ognisanti. Affectionately thine, "FLORINDA."

"So, so; the bird had nearly flown from us," said Petro, as he read this epistle. "Here's a plot; and if I do not so counter-plot as to render it of no avail, other than for the furtherance of my own design, then I am no man. It is well that I took this matter in hand at this time. A day-nay, an hour later might have been too late. Singular coincidence that should have brought me to the place and the subject at the most opportune moment. Little does this fellow think of the rod that is in pickle for him. But I will be even with him. I will not sleep while he pursues the game; vigilance alone must gain me my object. No, no, Signor Artist, you cannot thus pluck this beautiful flower unchallenged; you are observed, and your object is understood, Scheming requires counter-scheming; and you shall have that to your heart's content. Italy against America, by the virgin; but we will make this a national quarrel, if it be necessary."

He gazed upon the letter thoughtfully for some moments.

"Let me see," he continued, "this is not a very difficult hand to imitate." And he commenced to write different words and form capitals after the style of Florinda's note. "I think I can do it," he said at length. "But the seal-how shall I manage that? Stay, I can use this same one with a little care. Capital!" he exclaimed. "I'll have this business all in my own hands." And Petro Giampetti laughed outright at the prospect of his success in this vile plot against his cousin.

Petro was an expert and practical penman, being, as we have said, private secretary to his uncle, Signor Latrezzi; and thus being quite an expert in the use of the pen, he was the more easily able to prosecute his dishonest purpose, Thus he commenced carefully to write a note addressed to Carlton, and purporting to come from Florinda, in answer to his note of that evening. With her note open before him, and carefully noticing its style and manner, both in chirography and composition, he cunningly traced the following lines:

"DEAR CARLTON:—In consequence of an unforeseen accident which I need not now explain, I shall not be able to meet you until to-morrow night, when I will do so at the hour named, and at the place designated. Be careful of your own health and safety, and do not attempt to see me until the time we meet at the gate opening on the Borg' ognisanti.

"Affectionately thine, FLORINDA."

This he addressed after the style of Florinda's note, sealed very ingeniously with the identical seal she had used on the note which he had intercepted, as we have seen, and forwarded it early on the following morning by one whom he could trust to Carlton, thus fully carrying out his plot of deception against them both.

Petro's heart somehow throbbed strangely in his breast, and his conscience was very ill at ease. He felt that he was enacting the coward's part in this business, and already half wished himself out of it. But if the game was a bold and hazardous one, so was the prize a brilliant one; and so he closed his eye to remorse, and spurred forward.

Thus we blindly pursue the goal of our wishes, little heeding the cost, though we know that retribution is sure!

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## CHAPTER XII.—NEPHEW AND UNCLE.

A serpent heart hid with a flowering face.

-Shakspeare.

HOW ingenious are the expedients to which the mind will resort to justify itself, and endeavor to still the warnings of conscience. He who commits a sin, first deceives himself, for he is led to believe that the culpable deed will be productive of a greater degree of happiness than evil to himself, else his own selfishness would deliver him from the act. I did not mean this into evil, he will say to his conscience, as it prompts him in its own silent way.

Thus Petro, by a like process of reasoning, had brought himself almost, if not quite to the relief that the end was a justifiable one, and so did not hesitate at the means necessary to accomplish it. Was not Florinda about to marry a heretic, an American, a mere artist, without any claim to noble blood, and against the wish of her uncle and guardian? How cunningly did Mahomet add a new chapter to the Koran in justification of his amour With Mary the Coptic girl! "All things are fair and honorable in love," said Petro to himself, "even as in war; and I should be a fool if I failed to take advantage of any circumstance that chance may throw in my way. No, no; honor is not to step in between me and my love-it shall not defeat my purposes. I will win the battle first, and then repent afterwards. 'Tis the only course I can pursue."

Having reasoned to himself much after this manner, he communicated the whole affair to his uncle, in whom he was sure of finding one who would lend his ready aid in the accomplishment of his purpose. Signor Latrezzi having employed every other means to prevent the proposed connection between Florinda and the American artist, gladly received the proposition made to him by Petro, and fully entering into the spirit of the latter, determined to resort to stratagem to accomplish his grand object.

It was accordingly agreed between Petro and his uncle that he, Petro, should be at the gate that night, as specified in Carlton's note to Florinda, where he should meet her so disguised and muffled up as not to be recognized, and thus by artful management pass for Carlton; soon after their leaving the city, they were to stop at a small public house on the road, where a priest should meet them; and having received his instructions from Signor Latrezzi as to the particulars of the case, would understand how to play his part in the deceit, uniting them without question.

And thus it was agreed that Florinda should be made to marry Petro, thinking him to be Carlton. To render all things sure, and that nothing should be overlooked as it regarded necessary precaution, the uncle was to go on and stop at the inn during the afternoon with the priest, and arrange everything properly for the proposed deception.

"It is the only means by which we can accomplish our purpose," said Petro to his uncle, in justification of the plan they had adopted, and snatching at any idea that might screen him in some degree from his own conscience, relative to the dishonest measure they were engaged in.

"It is plain," said Signor Latrezzi, "that this Signor Carlton-this American artist, has got the girl's heart."

"Irrevocably."

The uncle started-the thought shooting across even his hardened and calloused heart-can this man design to marry Florinda, and yet believe, as he says, that she irrevocably loves another man?

"Ay," he continued, with the purpose of justifying himself, as Petro had done, "she is so obstinate about it, too."

"Yes, but this will most certainly render her perfectly tractable-no doubt," said Petro-with a laugh, thus showing how much he really loved her who was destined to become his victim.

"There's little heart in this business."

"True."

"And after all I like it not."

"Nor I, but it must be."

"It does seem necessary."

"Unquestionably."

"If I thought otherwise, I would not consent to it, Petro."

"Nor would I engage in it," said the nephew, with some degree of honesty.

"We shall be sure of the duke's displeasure."

"Yes, that we must count upon,"

"It will not, however be anything serious."

"Probably not."

The thought again striking Signor Latrezzi, he said:

"There will be little love between thee and the girl, I fear."

"It will be all her own fault if I do not become devoted to her," said Petro, in answer to this suggestion, and yet in a tone of derision; for he had his mind more upon Florinda's fortune and title than upon her person, though he did also feel an ambition to possess so rich and rare a jewel as herself.

"Do you know, Petro, how Signor Carlton first became acquainted with Florinda? It has ever been a mystery to me."

"'Twas at the convent, I believe," replied Petro. "I have been told that he was employed by the prioress to copy some valuable painting, and while thus engaged, formed the acquaintance."

"Gita" (Florinda's maid) "has told me that it was he who taught her to play so sweetly upon the guitar. Can this be so?"

"Si, signor, this also commenced at the convent. Carlton exhibited by chance one day his singular skill upon the instrument, and being engaged there for many weeks, he became acquainted with many young ladies, and among them Florinda, to whom he gave a few lessons on the instrument. Afterwards becoming better acquainted with Florinda, he taught her some of the airs of his country, and by degrees seemed to impart his really singular skill upon the instrument to her. I never knew that these Americans were such musicians before."

Petro spoke truly. Carlton had first become acquainted with Florinda at the convent as stated, and while teaching her upon that most graceful instrument, the guitar, of which he was a perfect master-each learned to love the other, without realizing the fact until the time for parting arrived, when the tears stood in Florinda's eyes while they met Carlton's, and each read a volume of love and constancy there. They often met from that time, and the gentle and high-born Florinda loved the young American artist as dearly as he did the loveliest girl of the sunny Val d'Arno.

Petro was safe in his calculation, at least as far as it regarded his deception and stratagem with the letter between Florinda and Carlton; for, having received the letter despatched by Petro that morning, Carlton did not for a moment question its genuineness, but proceeded at once to make his arrangements accordingly, supposing that the intended elopement was only delayed for twenty-four hours by some unforeseen circumstance which had occurred in the household of Florinda's uncle.

This was a reasonable construction of the matter; and with this view of it, and as she had requested him not to attempt to see her until they met at the gate, Carlton mounted his horse and rode out of the city, proposing a pleasure trip upon the mountains until night. We will not deny that he was disappointed, but having implicit confidence in Florinda's judgment, he believed that she could not have unnecessarily delayed the appointment.

Petro had made all his arrangements with a zeal and care worthy of a better cause. It is but too often the case that we find activity and zeal exerted in behalf of the wrong; for the rogue, conscious of his evil purpose, exerts every faculty to accomplish his end, and to screen himself from the detection he constantly fears.

Here was an uncle and nephew plotting a young girl's misery-coolly and understandingly consigning her to a lot, which, of all others, is most to be dreaded by a female heart. She little suspected their treachery-and where should she not have first looked for deceit, rather than among those who should have proved her protectors? Florinda had ever loved her uncle and, until she had learned some of the evil traits of his character, had respected him, too. But as she grew older and more observant, these things forced themselves upon her attention, and she was obliged to concede their truth to her own heart, though she never made mention of the matter to another. Of Petro-she had never loved him; and while they were yet children and playmates together, they could never agree.

The deep, dark passions that Petro inherited from his father, often broke out on the most trivial

provocation, to the terror of Florinda, until she more feared than loved him. As both had grown older, Petro acquired more command over his evil passions, and Florinda had learned to look upon him with indifference; and yet she felt his absence for so long a time at Bologna to be a relief from an unpleasant restraint she felt in his or her uncle's presence. Signor Latrezzi discovered this growing dislike of his niece for himself; and this was another argument with himself why he should resort to the proposed stratagem to accomplish an end which otherwise appeared to be receding farther and farther from his grasp every hour.

His earnestness in the matter showed fully that he had some private purpose in view, and this Petro suspected, and he at length ascertained his desire to cover up some pecuniary fraud he had committed upon her estate. But he was willing to let that remain in obscurity, provided he could get the management of the rest, which was indeed an immense estate in value.

Such were the uncle and nephew to her. But as they stood now together—that is, the uncle and nephew—the most casual observer would have noticed that the business they were engaged in but illy suited them. They were by no means so heartless or mercenary as not to feel strong compunctions.

"Petro," said the uncle, "if you marry Florinda, remember you must respect and cherish her afterwards."

"Of course, I shall. You need not lay any injunctions upon that score, my good uncle."

"Ay, 'twill be poor enough reparation for the loss of her freedom," mused the uncle.

"Don't moralize," said Petro. "We are in for the game, and must play it out, come what may."

"That is true."

Saying which, the two silently saluted each other, and then separated.

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## CHAPTER XIII.—THE ROADSIDE INN.

You shall see anon; 'tis a knavish piece of work.

-Hamlet.

NIGHT came, and Florinda counted the moments as they passed, anxiously awaiting the time at which she must leave the palace to meet Carlton, according to his last directions. The time so anxiously anticipated at length arrived, and stealing from a private entrance to the Palazzo, accompanied by a faithful female servant, who had been her attendant for years, she hurried on foot to the designated spot. She had shrewdly avoided the employment of a vehicle, deeming it more safe and expeditious thus to make the passage to the spot on foot.

There was one of the most delicate and high-born beauties of all Tuscany wending her way through the dark and deserted streets, attended by a single female as helpless as herself. She was doing this for the love she bore to Carlton; she was risking thus her character, and perhaps even her life, to be united to him she loved, the gallant Americano. On she sped, now half-running, and now retiring within the deep shade of some projecting angle of the palaces that lined the route, thus to screen herself from the observation of some passer-by.

The gate was reached at the precise moment. There stood, wrapped close in his ample cloak, with his hat slouched well over his eyes, him she took for Carlton; he stood apparently expecting her at the door of a caleche. With a whisper of recognition, he assisted her into the vehicle, which immediately dashed off at a reckless speed on the mountain-road. The reader need hardly be told that this was Petro, who thus cunningly executed the plan agreed upon, as we have already seen, between him and his uncle, Signor Latrezzi. Thus we explain to the reader the tableau we have presented him at the little roadside inn on the Apennines; thus it was that Petro Giampetti, in place of Carlton, was wedded to Signora Florinda.

Fatal mistake! Ay, fatal, indeed, was that unfortunate billet delivered by Florinda unwittingly to Petro. It was the author of all her present misery, and the consequences to follow were, if possible, of a still more fatal character. In that little note, Petro possessed himself of an agent which enabled him to work out his treacherous plans—a key wherewith he unlocked the purposes of Carlton, and made himself master of his secret design. We have seen, gentle reader, to what use Petro put the information he had so treacherously obtained, and now we will show the close of this fatal drama.

While Florinda was still insensible, and surrounded by the servants of the house, under Petro's directions, endeavoring to resuscitate her, a single horseman rode up to the door of the inn on his way down the mountain. Dismounting, he stood by his weary steed for a moment, regarding both him and the ominous signs of the weather, then turning to the attentive hostler, he asked:

"How far to Florence, sir?"

"A couple of leagues, signor."

"And the gates close at ten?"

"Si, signor."

"Can you accommodate me within?"

"Si, signor."

"And my horse?"

"Si, signor."

"I may as well stop here," said Carlton, for it was he, "as a few miles nearer the city, for I cannot enter until morning."

Resolving to tarry here for the night, he threw the bridle of his weary steed to the hostler, and entered the house. He had ridden out from the city early that morning for exercise and pleasure, and had ascended many miles the wild and majestic Apennines to obtain a view of the glorious scenery presented from their lofty heights, and get a sight of the far-off Adriatic; he was belated on his way, and resolved to go no further in the deep darkness of the night. A storm, too, was evidently about to break in all its fury, and might overtake him before another shelter could be obtained. It was this latter inducement, in connection with the weary state of his horse, that led him to decide upon stopping at so uninviting a house as the one in question.

It was a noble animal which he seemed to have such consideration for, and was a gift of the duke's from his own stable—an animal that had already learned to love his new master, and stood with arching neck, and brilliant eye, as though no labor or fatigue could banish his conscious pride. The young artist regarded him with undisguised admiration, petted him by a few gentle strokes upon the head and a kind word, and said, "Yes, Prince, you and I will tarry here until morning, and go back to town with renewed strength and vigor gained from this mountain air."

Having seen that his horse was properly bestowed, Carlton returned to the house, and passed immediately into the little parlor of the inn where the ceremony had just been performed, little anticipating the startling scene that there awaited him. The astonishment of Carlton at beholding Florinda there, surrounded by the servants endeavoring to resuscitate her, with Petro and his uncle, Signor Latrezzi, can better be imagined than described. Twice did he dash his hand across his eyes, as if to assure himself that he was not dreaming; then thrusting them recklessly aside, he was about to raise her in his arms, when Petro, who was taken completely by surprise, recognized him and, drawing his stiletto, struck fiercely at his heart.

Carlton received the blow partly upon the arm, where it inflicted a flesh wound only. Turning upon the Italian, with one blow of his muscular arm, he threw him prostrate upon the floor; and half way across the apartment; then drawing from the ample pocket of his riding-coat a pistol, he presented it at the infuriated Petro, bidding him to stand back, or his life should pay the forfeit.

"By this light, one step in advance and you die!"

Carlton was in earnest, and Petro could read the determination of his spirit flashing from his eye, and he quailed before it. He felt that he was in the wrong; that the manly interference of Carlton had right to back it; and this consciousness, while it unnerved his own arm, nerved that of the artist's. Carlton paused for a moment, as if to consider what to do; he was amazed and confounded, and his arm sunk by his side.

Petro and his uncle drawing together, exchanged a few hasty words, while Carlton stood there mute, as though struck dumb.

"We are two to one," whispered Petro, "let us upon him."

"Nay, he has a pistol; we have only our swords."

All this passed in one instant of time; but the next chapter must describe the close, of the scene which had assumed so tragic a character and such a fearful aspect.

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## CHAPTER XIV.—THE FINALE.

Some falls are means the happier to arise.

-Cymbeline.

THE low rough room of that roadside inn presented a wild and tragic appearance at that moment. On the floor, her head supported by her faithful attendant, lay the insensible form of Signora Florinda. Just at her feet, and standing between her and Petro, was the tall, manly person of Carlton, his right hand holding a pistol towards the breast of the former, in whose dark countenance was depicted every evil passion of the soul. The servants in their fright at the sudden affray had retired to a distant corner of the apartment, while in another, with his hands over his face, as if to shut out the horrid scene before him, stood the person of Florinda's uncle.

"What means this scene?" asked Carlton. "Can some of ye speak and tell me? Gita, what brought your

mistress here, and under such escort? Speak out, girl-I'll protect you."

"Treachery, signor, dark and deep!" said the girl, whom Florinda had found it necessary to make a confidant of in relation to the intended elopement and marriage.

"Noble business for an uncle and nephew!"

"Repeat not those words" said Petro, angrily.

"I repeat them, and am ready to abide by them," said Carlton.

"Cospetto!" exclaimed Petro, in a rage.

"Ay, talk on," said Carlton; "so valiant a knight need have plenty of words at command."

"Hold, for the love of the virgin, hold both of ye!" said Signor Latrezzi, foreseeing the catastrophe that must ensue, yet still remaining with his face hid in his outspread hands.

"By our holy church," said Petro, "must I be met at every turn by this braggart of an American, who thwarts my dearest wishes, and foils me at every point? I tell thee I will have thy heart's blood!" he continued, rushing wildly towards Carlton.

The pistol was raised on a level with the head of the revengeful Italian, as he advanced furiously, with his stiletto reflecting the glance of the lamps. Carlton cried to him:

"Have a care, Signor Petro. Thy blood be on thine own head. Stand back, I say."

"By heaven, I will not longer bear this!"

"I have warned thee!"

But the enraged Petro heeded not the warning of Carlton, upon whom he was just about to throw himself, when the black throat of the pistol emitted in liquid fire its fatal contents, and when the stunning effect of its voice and the smoke had subsided, there lay the lifeless corpse of Petro upon the floor at the feet of the American. The ball had passed through his brain; and thus, in the full tide of life, with health and strength, and, alas! with all the evil passions of his heart in operation, and his soul craving the blood of his fellow-man, he had rushed in one moment into eternity.

A fearful death, and a fearful thought; but the deed was now done, and there was no recalling it. Its fearful consequences were inevitable, and must be borne by the actors in that scene in the drama of life.

"Holy virgin, he is dead!" said Signor Latrezzi, as he bent over the inanimate form of Petro.

"God forgive him!" said Carlton. "He would have taken my life with that thirsty dagger!"

"By this light, you acted only in self-defence," said the trembling landlord to Carlton.

"Quick, sir," said Carlton, "remove all appearance of this struggle before the lady revives."

The sad finale of the tragic scene was at once enacted by the landlord and his people, who bore the body into a private apartment.

Signor Latrezzi, who had himself to blame for the greater part of this fatal business, stood horror-struck by the sight now presented to his view. If he was not the actual murderer, was he not the instigator of the whole business? He put this question to his conscience, and it whispered to him in deep and thrilling tones-guilty, guilty! He would have given everything he possessed, ay, life itself, to have been able to recall the whole transaction; but alas! it was now too late, and the consciousness of his guilt drove him almost to madness.

The servants, who had witnessed the whole affair, could testify that Carlton had acted only in self-defence in the matter, and from a conviction of this, they offered no interference. Signor Latrezzi, after giving directions for the removal of the body, took his departure towards the city, without attempting to interfere with either Carlton or Florinda, whom he left to themselves unmolested. Florinda happily was insensible of the tragic scene performed in her presence. When she revived, all traces of the deed were removed, and she found herself in the care and protection of Carlton.

"Where am I?" she asked, as she recovered from the insensibility which had seized upon her, when she realized the treachery that had been played upon her; her eyes resting on Carlton, she clung instinctively to him for protection. She closed them again, scarcely daring to trust their evidence, lest she should again realize that scene.

"Is it a vision or reality?" she asked tremblingly of Carlton.

There is nothing done but has been undone, dearest," was the answer. "You shall know more when you are more composed."

"But, Carlton, the priest married us," said Florinda, shuddering at the thought. "I am his wife!"

"Compose thyself, dearest; and believe me, thou art no one's wife, but still my dear Florinda. All is well."

By degrees as Florinda became more composed, the whole matter was told to her; and though she deeply sorrowed at the fatal necessity, yet she could not blame Carlton for taking the life of him who was at the moment seeking his. They sought her home in Florence, from whence Carlton was no longer excluded, but came and went at will. Signor Latrezzi and he never met; but it was plain that the servants had been ordered to admit him in future, as any other respected guest of Signora Florinda's.

The uncle's darling project was utterly defeated, and the hopes thereby of securing himself from his just reward for the dishonest act he had committed in appropriating a large sum of his niece's property, was rendered abortive. What course did the old man pursue in this dilemma? He did that which he should have done years before, as soon as he awoke to the realization of the crime he had committed; he went to Florinda, confessed his dishonesty, and begged her to spare his gray hairs from dishonor. She was but too happy to relieve him from his misery and suffering on this account.

"Uncle," said she, "give thyself no further uneasiness on this point, but sit thee down, and draw a paper absolving thyself from the matter in proper form, and I will sign it."

The paper was drawn and signed, and Signor Latrezzi from that hour became a different man; he had thoroughly repented.

"You are now content?"

"I am, my dear Florinda, and thankful to you for thus relieving my mind."

"Say nothing about it, my dear uncle."

"I will not, save in action towards you, Florinda, who have placed me under lasting obligations."

Though Carlton deeply regretted the fatal occurrence of that night at the inn on the Apennines, still his conscience did not upbraid him for the part he had enacted; for though he had taken the life of Petro, it was done in self-defence, and the court of Florence so decided, Carlton having given himself up to trial. It would have gone hard with him, or any foreigner in Italy, and especially in Tuscany, who should chance to be thus situated; but Carlton had the all-powerful influence of the Grand Duke Leopold exerted in his favor, and in this case justice was rendered.

True, it was some time before the American artist was again received at court, or made his appearance at the Grand Duke's weekly cordon, as public opinion was against him-and very naturally, too, for he was a foreigner, and had taken the life of a citizen of Florence, and one closely allied to the nobility and gentle blood. But after the decision of the court-which the duke took good care to have made in the most imposing and public form-was thoroughly understood, and the memory of the matter had grown a little dim, Carlton again resumed his place at court, as the protege of the Grand Duke, and royal favor was again shown him.

Signor Latrezzi shut himself from society for many months almost broken-hearted, now fully realizing the error of his conduct in relation to Florinda and Petro. The generous act of the former in absolving him from the responsibility he had incurred in relation to her estate, had done much to awaken his better feelings. Petro he had loved with the affection of a father, and he now keenly mourned his untimely end. People saw the great change in Signor Latrezzi, for he no longer sought to oppress any one, but in his few public dealings he was strictly honorable and true.

He had indeed thoroughly reformed; he no longer sought to interfere in the plans of his niece, who was left to follow her own wishes. Out of respect for her own feelings, and those of her uncle-whom Florinda had now begun to respect, seeing a complete change in him that showed an honest and honorable purpose-her proposed marriage was deferred for some weeks, when at length, under the sanction of the Grand Duke, Florinda and Carlton were united to each other, and found happiness in the love and constancy of their own true hearts. Thus happily ended the high thoughts and bright dreams of the humble painter.

In one of the lovely palaces whose lofty walls of white bask in the warm sun of the Val d'Arno, lives the last surviving branch of the noble house of Carrati in the person of the peerless Signora Florinda. Joyful and happy in domestic felicity, there, too, is Carlton, the American artist, surrounded by everything that wealth can procure, or refined taste suggest, and master of the unbounded estates of Carrati, but above all, happy in Florinda's love.

**THE END.**

**[FROM "THE FLAG OF OUR UNION."]**

**THE PRIMA DONNA.**

**BY M. V. ST. LEON.**

"WHAT is to be done?" exclaimed the manager of the principal theatre in Havana. "What is to be done?" and he paced the room in angry despair. "This is the second time within a week that Signora Buonatti has been too ill to sing-and to-night every seat is engaged, the house will be full to overflowing. The audience scarce endured the first disappointment, and how will they receive the second? O, for some expedient. I must hunt the whole city through till I find some one to supply her place decently!" and seizing his hat, Diego Cartillos rushed into the street, and was out of sight in a few minutes.

"Alfin brillar, nell i rede," sang a voice of surpassing sweetness, which came from round a corner. Cartillos stopped an instant in silent ecstasy, and then hurriedly advanced in the direction of the sound. In front of a handsome house stood a young girl apparently near sixteen years of age, in poor but clean garments, and holding a mandoline in her hand with which she was playing an accompaniment to the words she was singing. The manager stood listening to it attentively, and as the rich, clear tones of the girl dwelt on the lower notes, or rose with a birdlike gush to the higher ones, he could scarce restrain some display of his delight. Such, however, it was not his policy to exhibit, and when at the close of the song, she timidly approached him, and, lifting her mandoline and large, sad eyes at the same time, besought him in broken Spanish to give her a

single maravedi for pity's sake, he coldly drew forth a few small coins and handed them to her.

"This is a poor way of earning your support," answered he.

"I know it-but it is all the one I have."

"It is a pity, for you seem to be an honest sort of a body, and perhaps with the assistance of friends you might be made something decent," then without noticing the indignant flush that had risen to her cheek, he continued. "Now I am willing to help you-that is, if you're respectable and humble-minded, and I will let you sing in my theatre, although I am sure I shall lose by it."

The first impulse of the young girl was to refuse with anger, the proposal offered almost in an insulting manner, by the hard, avaricious man, but a moment's reflection showed her she could not afford to be particular in choosing the manners of an employer, and she replied:

"Why are you willing to take a stranger who has no claims upon you, if you are certain you will be a loser by so doing?"

"Because, although I shall be at an extra expense for a while, I am in hopes you will repay it sometime," he replied, with a scowl at being questioned. "Come, what say you?"

"I am willing to better my condition, sir, and as for being humble in my manners, few are otherwise who have their living to earn," replied the maiden, with a touch of haughtiness.

"Then come with me," said Cartillos, leading the way to the house he had quitted a short time previous. When they were seated, the manager commenced questioning his companion.

"It is rather a singular thing for a street musician to sing such songs as you do, and in such a manner,"—then, after a pause, during which she did not volunteer any information on the subject, he renewed the attack, with, "You must have had some instruction. Who was your teacher?"

"A countryman," was the reply.

Baffled in this direction, Cartillos commenced in a fresh quarter.

"You are an Italian, I suppose?"

"I am."

"Of what part are you a native?"

"Before I came to Havana, I resided in Naples."

The manager bit his lip at the small amount of information he obtained, and commenced again.

"One of the troupe is ill, and I wish to obtain some one to supply her place-but I suppose you are unacquainted with any opera?"

"I will engage to perfect myself in any one within a week."

"I cannot wait so long. To-night is the evening I most desire your services," Cartillos replied, in despair.

"What is announced in the programme?"

"Lucia," was the gloomy response.

"If that is all, sir, I ask but seven hours practice and study. I am familiar with it, but need instruction in the acting of it."

Her companion eagerly replied that he would engage her for that night at least, and was departing to send some one to instruct her, when she timidly inquired:

"But my dress, sir-how shall I arrange that matter?"

"O, I'll see to that! You prepare yourself in the part-I'll do the rest," and he was gone in an instant.

Night came, and also a crowded house. Presently the people became impatient, and with eagerness called for the commencement of the performance; at the expiration of five minutes whistling, screaming, stamping, etc., the manager made his appearance and announced "that Signora Buanatti was unable to appear, but Signorina Zampieri had kindly offered to take her place!" But the audience did not take it kindly-the lady was unknown to them, and who could say anything about her singing-besides, they had excused the favorite vocalist once, and they were not to be put off in this same way again. Accordingly, a tremendous hiss arose, in the midst of which the unfortunate manager rattled off the physician's certificate, letting his voice drop, and flat away towards the end most comically, then hastily departed for the side scenes.

In a few minutes the young debutante appeared. She was received with a chilling silence, broken only by a few faint claps from some half dozen good-natured persons, in consideration of her youth and beauty. In defiance of her prepossessing appearance, the audience seemed determined that they would not be cheated or flattered into a single expression of approbation, but the manager observed with rising hope that they forbore to hiss. Undismayed, and regardless of the reception she met with, the young girl, with perfect composure, began her role. As she continued, the whole richness and beauty of her voice were brought out, and wholly unable to withstand such wonderful, unexpected melody, the people manifested their delight loudly, and at the conclusion of the opera, Signorina Zampieri was called for loudly. At the request of the manager, she came forward, and with polite indifference bowed in reply to the applause. Signora Buonatti was forgotten! The people were amazed at the nonchalant manner of the young favorite, who actually

received a burst of enthusiasm, such as rarely had greeted any singer, with such coolness—who and what was this slender, youthful being, that was neither awed by their sternness, nor delighted at their praises?

The selfish, scheming Cartillos at once perceived he had made a fortunate speculation, and hastened to engage his prize for a year at one third her real value, as the next day proved when notes came flocking in from all directions, urging her to name her own price. With a feeling of deep indignation Teresa Zampieri determined after her engagement with Cartillos expired, that he should never acquire another farthing by her. She speedily became the pet of the people, yet notwithstanding her surprising good fortune, nothing had the power to charm her out of the subdued manner so unnatural in one so young, or throw a lightsome sparkle into those large, dark, melancholy eyes, while almost the first exclamation made by every one on hearing her sing, was, "Her voice sounds like a fountain of tears!" The only thing that absorbed and rendered her forgetful of the present, was her music, and when in the opera, her whole being seemed merged into the character she was representing. Her large, sad eyes grew still larger and sadder, and she seemed like one in a dream—it was with her a passion, an existence.

But she was subject to many annoyances from Cartillos, who constantly took advantage of her ignorance concerning money matters, which Florian Gerald, the handsome tenor of the troupe, plainly perceived and with burning indignation. He would have protected her and prevented these impositions, but they were both young, and he feared his motives might be misunderstood, and so he continued from day to day, each showing him plainer that his heart was given to the beautiful songstress, whose course had been so like a comet, rising from darkness, and no one knew whither, for all felt instinctively that a mystery hung over the young girl.—At last some fresh act of injustice on the part of Cartillos thoroughly aroused Gerald, who, at the risk of losing his situation, determined to tell Teresa how much she was imposed upon. The mournful tone and manner with which she replied—"Alas, I am aware I have no friends to protect me," quite startled her companion out of his composure. He had resolved never to speak of his affection till he had more reason for hope than he then possessed, but at these words his resolution was forgotten, and rapidly, earnestly, he detailed his past wishes and present hopes, and urged her to reply. For an instant she was silent, but then she addressed him in firm, sad, yet kind tones.

"This declaration is wholly unexpected to me, and while I cannot but be flattered at the compliment—the highest a man can offer, I am obliged to decline it. Your pity for me has perhaps misled you into the belief that you love me, but you will soon forget one that can never be yours."

Gerald, who thought she might doubt he loved her sufficiently, was about to assure her on that point, but he had scarcely commenced speaking, ere she interrupted him.

"Even supposing I loved you as I ought to the man whose heart I take into my keeping, there are obstacles—do not ask what—such being the case, is it not best to conquer all but friendship in the beginning?"

"Alas, it may be easy for you to counsel who do not endure, but this is not the beginning of my love," murmured the Italian, in despairing accents, as he left her.

The tone and mournful eyes made Teresa unhappy; she regretted deeply the necessity of giving pain in this world, though she felt she might unavoidably be the cause of more disappointments than even the beautiful are generally, and with a sigh realized that in accordance with her principles, she must draw yet more tightly the lines of isolation about her. Life already had but few pleasures, and even this scanty list must be curtailed. Gerald, convinced that his poverty and comparative obscurity were the objections to him, determined they should not long remain a barrier, and immediately on the expiration of his engagement with Cartillos, departed for his native land, determined not to see Teresa Zampieri again till he had won a name worthy her acceptance. He mentioned his plans to no one, however, but bidding farewell to his friends departed on his errand. Time flew by, and Teresa was released from her engagement. Cartillos begged earnestly that she would continue with him, but the young girl told him just her sentiments regarding his conduct, and much as he regretted his past error, it did not help the matter in the least. Engagements from far and near poured in upon her, and the only difficulty was, which to choose.

"Somewhat of contrast!" thought Teresa. "One short year ago, I scarce knew where to lay my head. Heigho! Methinks my present station elevated as it may appear—but what! is this foolish heart forever crying more?" and the tears so seldom permitted to visit those sad, dreamy eyes, now came unchecked. Her sorrow once indulged, returned more and more often; so to divert her mind, Teresa Zampieri visited distant countries, always avoiding Italy, however, and journeyed and sang without cessation. This constant exertion was too much for her to bear, and she was obliged to omit singing entirely for several months, during which time she travelled through many delightful places, and frequently recalled those days in after years, as some of the happiest she had known. At the expiration of her wanderings she returned to Havana refreshed, and comparatively happy, to commence a new engagement. This was the third year of her theatrical life, and Teresa was now nearly twenty years of age, and though so young, she possessed the manners of an accomplished, experienced woman. It was a matter of wonder to all, that amid such a throng of suitors as she was known to possess, she yet remained Teresa Zampieri; but few dared request the guardianship of the peerless girl, for it seemed as though between her and themselves a vast gulf lay. And notwithstanding superior rank and position, many a noble felt himself awed by the unaffected dignity of the actress.

One evening as the breathless multitude were listening to the soft, high note the songstress had already sustained for several measures, as her eyes suddenly rested on a figure in a box near the stage, it was interrupted by a wild, piercing shriek from the blanched lips of Teresa, who instantly fell senseless. In a second all was confusion. The orchestra stopped short in the middle of a note, the curtain was speedily lowered, several ladies fainted, and the audience were in a fever of excitement, each one talking to his neighbor.

"We must be careful of our treasure," said one, "or we shall lose it."

"What is the matter?" eagerly asked another.

"That last note was held too long," suggested a third.

"A touch of the heart complaint I should think," etc.

When the manager announced that Signorini Zampieri requested the indulgence of a few minutes before resuming her performance, there was a general expostulation, so much had she endeared herself to every heart. But the manager assured the audience that the lady thanked them for their considerate kindness, but that she was perfectly recovered, and preferred finishing the little that remained of the opera. When she reappeared, the burning cheek and glittering eye deceived many as to the suffering she endured. Her gaze restlessly sought the figure that had caused her emotion, and as she met the person's glance, a shudder passed over her. At first her voice trembled with weakness, but meeting the mocking, sneering triumph in that sarcastic face, the blood boiled in her veins, and trembling with indignation, she startled the audience with the wild burst of scorn she threw into the part she was representing. The stranger at first turned pale with anger and surprise at the surpassing delineation, but the next instant his eyes gleamed with malicious satisfaction, which seemed to chafe the singer to madness.

At the conclusion of the opera, Teresa, with feverish impatience to arrive at home, was hastily leaving the theatre, when she fancied she saw in the front entrance doorway that Mephistophiles-like face, and ordering the coachman to drive to her lodgings as speedily as possible, threw herself back upon the cushions, and repressed a strong inclination to take a certain individual's web of life out of the hands of Fate. In a few minutes she arrived at the hotel, and entering her parlor stood face to face with the stranger, who had risen with the most easy coolness, and advanced to meet her.

"Mille pardons m'amie, for the intrusion, but I have not seen you so long, that I was quite unable to resist the temptation of a call."

Teresa, overpowered with the most painful emotions, sank into a seat and covered her face with her hands. With an expression of savage pleasure, her tormentor approached quite near, and said:

"I beg, my charming friend, that you will not put yourself to the fatigue and trouble of a sentimental reception, for I assure you it will be entirely wasted."

These words roused the young girl from her stupor of agony, and raising her form to its full height, she exclaimed:

"Brandini Villani, it would appear that the just avenging God hath forgotten thee, miserable sinner, but it matters not; eternity, methinks, will be long enough for thy punishment." Then with less passion, but with regal, even awful dignity, she freezingly inquired—"What have you to say?"

For an instant the wretch was intimidated, but noticing the tremor of Teresa's whole frame, and mistaking it for fear, concealed beneath affected scorn, he regained his assurance and tauntingly replied:

"It is a trifling oversight, ma chere, to affect a callous indifference towards me, when I have the charm with a single glance to render you insensible, and to make you tremble at the mere sound of my voice—no, no, Teresa, it will not do. While my presence affects you thus, I know the power to fascinate has not yet deserted me."

"Contemptuous wretch! With what feelings does the scaly, venomous serpent inspire one when he approaches with slimy track and fetid breath, with stealthy, coil and sickening glare? Think you would not that fascinate with terror, cause a tremble of disgust, and produce insensibility and delirium that such a loathsome reptile should exist and breathe the same air? Yet having now called forth that emotion in its deepest degree, you rejoice to have moved me! Truly you have, and I can conceive your mind just fitted to appreciate the honor!"

The worst passions of Villani were now thoroughly awake, and he retorted with flashing eyes and a fierce tone, while his face even to his lips, turned livid white.

"You may regret your liberal use of words when I unfold my errand. I will trouble you for half your proceeds for the last year!"

With blazing eyes, from which sparks of fire actually seemed to flash, and a form that appeared to dilate, Teresa turned full upon Villani.

"How now, traitorous villain? Is not your list of perjuries, thefts, deceptions and murders long enough, but you must add to it, ere you are qualified to become the privy councillor to the arch fiend? Get thee hence, grovelling worm, ere the lightnings of heaven blast thee!"

At this instant the storm which had been gathering, burst with fury over the city, and the dazzling sheet of flame was succeeded by a deafening, rattling peal of thunder. Teresa sank on her knees beside a lounge and buried her face in silent prayer; even Villani turned pale and moved to the centre of the apartment, where he stood with folded arms and compressed lips. Presently the violence of the tempest abated, and the pallid Brandini approached Teresa, who had not changed her position, and had forgotten in the storm almost the existence of her persecutor, and in a low, dogged voice, said:

"I am waiting for your reply."

With a faint shriek Teresa raised her head.

"I thought you were gone—do you wish to tempt me further?"

"Will you give the money?"

"I will not!"

"Beware! Think again!"

"You have my answer. Never, while life remains, will I give another reply!"

Villani bent over her and whispered a word; with a wild, agonized shriek she sprang to her feet and gazed wildly into his face and in feeble, broken accents, exclaimed:

"O no, no, not that-it would kill me, Villani, Villani! You are not in earnest?"

"I most certainly am, madam, and I give you just five minutes to decide which alternative you will choose," and he drew out his watch and steadily gazed upon it. At the expiration of that time, Teresa, with a pale, tearful face, knelt before him, and in faint, despairing tones, murmured:

"I accept your terms! Villani's eyes lighted up with a fierce pride, as he exclaimed:

"I thought to bring you to terms!"

"Tempt me not, Brandini Villani!" vehemently replied Teresa, rising with flashing eyes; "you may rouse me yet beyond endurance-beware!" and she pressed her hand to her heart, while an expression of pain crossed her countenance. The extreme physical suffering so plainly marked, seemed to move even the hard, unfeeling Villani, who, taking her hand, said:

"I am afraid you are ill, ma belle," then as he gazed upon her lovely form and face, half affectionately, half in defiance, he suddenly exclaimed: "O Teresa, you're the handsomest woman I ever saw. I could love you so, if you'd let me. Why can't we be friends, Teresa? I know I did wrong, but why need we make an eternal quarrel of the matter. Ah, my charming prize, why not transfer to me the affection you are wasting upon one, who, perhaps ere this, is false to you, and—"

"Silence! I have borne too long with you from weakness and inability to speak, but depart now, or I recant my promise of submission."

"To hear is to obey-though the request might have been couched in more polite terms," returned Villani, his former cold, sarcastic manner returning with every word he uttered. "I may do myself the pleasure to call again, my love-at present I wish you a good night and pleasant dreams-of me!" and the door closed on his sardonic smile.

"Alas," exclaimed Teresa, "he has a hold upon me I dare not attempt to dispute."

The next morning as she was leaving the stage, after rehearsal, she was met at the green room door by a familiar face, fine, manly and handsome-yes, it was Gerald! With a glad cry of surprise and delight, Teresa sprang forward, and taking the outstretched hand of the young man, said in her joyous, musical voice:

"Welcome, my dear friend! How you have improved-I have heard of the laurels you have won!"

"And you too, Signorina Zampieri-you are paler and thinner than you were when I last saw you. I know you have prospered as well as myself, for Fame has not been idle with your name."

"Really signor, we are exquisitely polite and complimentary to each other, but this is hardly the place for a lengthy conversation," said Teresa, laughing, and coloring somewhat, as she met the slightly mischievous glances of the loungers who generally are to be found in theatres—"if you are at liberty, why not step into the carriage, and drive home with me?"

"I shall be most happy," replied Gerald, with a radiant, delighted smile, as he accompanied her to the vehicle.

For some time the presence and vivacity of Gerald roused Teresa from her serious, almost melancholy manners, and the wise ones looked knowing, and said:—"They had always thought it would come to something!"

At last Gerald did what every one was expecting him to; for finding Teresa alone one morning, he again offered himself with far better hopes and prospects than he had three years ago. To his infinite amazement, the color fled from Teresa's cheek, and covering her face with her hands, she sank upon a lounge with a wild burst of grief. Gerald, quite at a loss to interpret the nature of this emotion, surprised at its excess in one so generally self-possessed, hesitated what course to pursue, but at length said, in a low tone:

"May I hope?"

"Hope!" repeated Teresa, in a bitter tone—"what have I or any connection with me to do with that word. O Mary mother, help me-help me!" she wailed in a fresh agony as her whole frame trembled with emotion.

Gerald knew not what to say; with any other person he would have endeavored to soothe and discover the cause of this grief, but the agitation of Teresa was so fearful, and in her so unnatural, that he dared not question; he therefore did the next best thing, which was to keep silent. In a few minutes the storm had exhausted itself, and with sternly composed features she rose and addressed Gerald.

"Forget this! It is seldom my feelings obtain such mastery over me, but my dark fate occurred so vividly to my mind, that it quite overpowered me."

"Why not renounce it then? I would strive so earnestly to make a brighter one for you."

After a moment's hesitation, she seemed to conquer some inward strife, and said, in a low voice:

"I had thought never to have told it to any human being, but you are entitled to an explanation, and you are too honorable to expose me-Florian," here her face was averted—"Florian, I love another!"

For an instant Gerald remained without motion, then darting forward he seized her hand, imprinted one despairing kiss upon it, and without a word, was gone.

Teresa wrung her hands and exclaimed—"Villani, Villani! Could you know what I suffer, even your hard heart would pity me!"

The afternoon dragged heavily along, and evening was approaching, when a knock at the door aroused Teresa from a restless reverie. Bidding the person enter, she beheld Villani, who seated himself by her side, and informed her that he had something to propose which might please her. Teresa wondering what it could be, begged him to proceed.

"I sincerely repent the compact I obliged you to make, and now wish to destroy it."

Teresa looked at him in undisguised astonishment. "I do not think I understand you-is it your wish that I should enjoy the whole of the proceeds of my singing?"

"You have said it."

"And what concession am I to make in return?" she inquired, as though suspicious some greater enormity than he had yet been guilty of, was intended.

"What return? O Teresa, cannot you comprehend and believe, that I expect and desire none?"

"I know not how I should, since your whole conduct has hardly been such as to impress me very profoundly with the idea that generosity is a prominent characteristic of Signor Villani's!"

"Say no more-let us be friends, Teresa. I will do all I can for you, and do not utter reproaches for what is a misfortune to me, although it were a glory to any other."

His companion scarce credited her senses. Was it possible that Villani, her tormentor and cruel persecutor, indeed wished her well and desired to become her friend? It seemed strange, yet his manner was more like truth than she had ever seen it before, and she felt she had perhaps wronged him, that beneath all, a heart, human and accessible to some generous emotion, yet beat, and her own noble, ingenuous nature, ever ready to accuse itself and offer atonement, impelled her to extend both hands to Villani and reply:

"Pardon me, I have wronged you-it is indeed worse than foolish to cherish animosity toward each other, and henceforth let us not forget we are of one great family, equally cared for by our heavenly Father!"

Villani took Teresa's hands, and kissing them, thanked her so warmly and earnestly that she could not doubt his sincerity, and though she was aware love was impossible, she hoped to respect him more than she had done. Villani on his part, had acquired enough by Teresa to afford this seeming generosity, and his sole object was to win her love; he was well aware if his motive was known to her, she would not have accepted this proffered friendship, and he rejoiced that his past conduct had been such as to forbid the supposition that he sought anything more. Presently there came a pause in the conversation, and Villani, after gazing intently upon his companion, observed:

"How much you have altered since I first saw you, Teresa. I suppose it is partly owing to your natural progress from childhood to womanhood-why, you must be nineteen?"

"Just twenty."

"Perhaps you are even handsomer than you were four years ago, although I see you have called in the aid of foreign ornament-it was the wisest course, however."

The rich color which suddenly dyed Teresa's cheeks, most certainly was not the gift of art, yet she assented to Villani's words.

"Not but what I think your beauty sufficient to challenge improvement-indeed, I prefer you as you used to be-but you are lovely enough to cause heart aches as it is."

After some further conversation, Villani, saying it was time for Teresa to prepare for the opera, left her. No sooner did the door close, than loosening the rich masses of jetty hair which formed a veil around her and descended far below her waist, Teresa advanced to a large mirror, and without a shadow of vanity or a smile, gazed steadily at her reflection. Never had a glass shown a fairer face or form to the gazer.

The image that met Teresa's glance was majestic, with a regal expression of countenance. A broad, but not too high brow, eyes dark as a raven's wing-no, they are only deep, golden brown, yet the long lashes and eyebrows of jet, together with the ever dilating pupil, give the impression that they are darker, a complexion of sunny olive, and locks which are certainly the hue of night; a form richly moulded and of perfect symmetry, from the exquisite head to the slippered foot, stood before her. Surely it was not a vision from which my lady had cause to turn in vexation, yet with an expression of scorn, and a bright flush apparently of shame, mounting to her cheek, she impatiently moved away, and commenced braiding up the rich tresses. Throwing a mantle on her shoulders, she descended to the carriage and was soon at the opera house.

During the evening, in the midst of the performance, Teresa's eye lit for the first time on the nearest stage box. A mist overspread her eyes, her breath came hot and thick, a dizzy sense of overpowering fulness stole upon her, and when the time came for her response, she had hardly the strength to perform her part; yet she acquitted herself so well, that her emotion was unnoticed. The person who caused this wild tumult in Teresa's

frame, was a stately, handsome man, evidently of high birth, and apparently forty-five years of age, although the raven curls around the high, majestic brow were untouched by time. The slightly aquiline features, and dark, flashing eyes, revealed the haughty spirit within, which was softened, however, by the look of sorrow around the mouth, and the general expression of a settled grief. He was dressed in black, relieved by a brilliant and splendid order on the left breast, and unaccompanied, save by a servant in white and gold livery.

The nobleman, for such his appearance declared him, was evidently a stranger in the city, for every glass was levelled at him, but he seemed quite unconscious, and wholly indifferent. At the conclusion of the opera, roused from his languor by the thrilling manner in which Teresa rendered the last aria, the now animated listener rose and gracefully threw a garland of white lilies with such admirable precision, that they encircled the beautiful head of Teresa; upon which the audience, delighted at the compliment paid in so marked a manner, no less to the well known purity, than the wonderful voice of their favorite, made the theatre ring with their applause.

As soon as possible, Teresa arrived at her own apartments, and throwing herself on her knees, buried her face in the cushions of a lounge, while faint murmurs and sobs alone broke the stillness. Nearly a quarter of an hour had elapsed, when the opening of the door roused her, and starting up, she beheld Villani about to enter. Hastily motioning him not to advance, she wildly said:

"Forbear! Do not cross that threshold tonight! Villani, I have seen him this very evening—he sat so near I might almost have touched him—so near, and yet not a thought that I was more to him than any other of that crowd! Bear with me for this night—I must be alone."

"It shall be as you wish—I will speak of what brought me here some other time, perhaps to-morrow."

"To-morrow let it be then."

Presently Teresa became calmer, yet through the remainder of the night she sat by the open casement without motion or apparent life, thinking over bitter memories without a gleam of hope to illumine the future.

After Teresa's first agitation had subsided, the stranger's presence seemed to exert a most powerful and calming influence upon her mind. He was seldom absent at her performances, and it seemed to give her an increase of strength as well as happiness; she always received some token of his delight, and many said the Duke di Castiglioni—so he was called—had a very superior taste, and wondered what would come of it. Villani had exacted a promise from Teresa, that she would not permit an introduction to him, and shortly after left the city for a few weeks.

Teresa felt relieved by his absence, although they were no longer enemies, and her mode of life was unchanged. Nearly a fortnight had elapsed, when another incident occurred that changed the whole future of her life. One evening Teresa eagerly sought the familiar face of the foreign nobleman, but in vain, and a disappointed look replaced the smile; but presently he entered the accustomed place, followed by a young man of aristocratic bearing, but no likeness bespoke them to be father and son. Teresa turned pale as marble, but a tear started to her eye as she observed the complete friendship and affection that evidently existed between them, and a thrill of anguish shot through her heart, as she murmured, while her eyes met the young stranger's gaze—"So near—yet so distant!" Several times in the course of the evening she fancied a look of recognition passed over his face, and once, when he touched his companion's arm, her heart leaped to her mouth, but in an instant, perceiving they both glanced at some one on the opposite side of the house, she smiled bitterly, and thought—"How should they know me, in this place, and so altered!"

Late that night when the city was wrapped in slumber, a lamp burned brightly in Teresa's chamber, and a figure paced wildly up and down with clasped hands and floating hair. At last the restless girl stopped and exclaimed:

"If I am wrong, Heaven help me—but this agony is killing me! If I sin, I am sinned against, and God judge between us, Villani!"

Then hurriedly, as though fearful her resolution would falter, Teresa drew her writing-desk towards her, and wrote a note so rapidly, and with so unsteady a hand, that there was little resemblance to her usual writing, and then sought for sleep—but in vain—and at the earliest possible hour she despatched a messenger with the note.

Just as the hour of eleven chimed, the door of the room where Teresa sat, was opened, and a servant, announcing Signor Da Vinci, ushered in the young stranger of the preceding night. He advanced with a puzzled, inquiring expression, and with a slightly apologetic bow, said:

"I came in accordance with a request expressed in a note from Signorina Zampieri."

"I presume you were somewhat surprised, signor, but my motive must be my excuse. I have a friend in whom you were greatly interested, and who wishes you to be made acquainted with the solution of the mystery which separated her from you."

The gentleman had hitherto been only attentive, but at these last words, an expression of eager inquiry pervaded every feature. Teresa continued:

"This lady, five years ago, was betrothed to Leonarde Da Vinci."

"Myself!"

"I am aware of that fact, but permit me to continue without interruption. Well knowing her father would never consent to her marriage, a plan of elopement was arranged. On the appointed night, the lady, according to agreement, stole to the palace steps, and seeing in the deep shadow a gondola which drew up as

she approached, doubted not that the occupant was her lover. She was received, to her belief, in his arms, the light was burning but dimly, and for greater security her companion, who was masked, proposed in a whisper that she should cover her face also. She was nearly beside herself with agitation, and when the gondola drew up at a little chapel standing nearly by itself, she unhesitatingly accompanied him, and knelt beside the altar where stood a priest and attendants.

"So absorbed with the various and conflicting emotions in her heart, she uttered the responses mechanically, and when she rose, the chapel was deserted, save by her husband and herself. Turning to him, what was her horror at seeing not Leonarde Da Vinci, as she had supposed, but Villani Brandini, a rejected suitor, and seeming friend to Da Vinci, who had discovered the plan of escape by some means, and revenged himself upon the lady in this manner. In spite of her resistance, she was carried to Brandini's palace, from whence in three days she escaped; and fearing her father would never grant his forgiveness, knowing she was forever separated from the one to whom her heart was given, she managed by the sale of several valuable jewels which she had upon her person at the time of her flight, to procure a passage to Naples, where she hoped to turn her numerous accomplishments to advantage.

"Shortly after her arrival in that place, an American family, who were in need of a governess for two little girls, met with her. Her appearance spoke so strongly in her favor, that notwithstanding the absence of credentials, they engaged her, and in a little while sailed for America. When near the place of their destination, a violent storm arose, and they were shipwrecked. The young girl was lashed to a spar, and the last thing she remembered was, being washed overboard by a mountain wave. She was picked up by a merchant vessel bound for Havana. There she arrived in a state of utter destitution, and she who was once the companion of princesses, was obliged to sing in the street for a living, and now—"

"Viola—my long sought love—where, where is she?"

"She stands before you!" said a thrilling voice, while Teresa, now divested of her disguise, stood with clasped hands, eagerly gazing at Da Vinci, her long, bright golden curls enveloping her as with a veil. In an instant Da Vinci, recovering from his overwhelming surprise, had folded her to his heart. Viola, as we must now call her, after an instant's silence, disengaged herself, saying;

"We must not forget that we can never be more than friends, Leonarde."

"Never more than friends, Viola! Why do you not know that you are free?"

"Free! What is it you mean?"

"Is it possible you still believe yourself Brandini's wife?"

"Believe myself! Am I not?"

"No, my own dearest Viola! It was no priest who performed that ceremony. Two years since, a dying man confessed that for a large sum he had assumed the character of a minister of God, and performed a mock marriage between Brandini and yourself. Your father and I have been seeking you ever since your flight, and at last our dearest wish is granted."

"You are sure he will forgive me?"

"Forgive you! He has sought for you with the blessed hope of clasping you once more in his arms before he died—for years, O Viola, we have all suffered deeply."

"We have, indeed, but now—" a shudder passed over her as she clung closer to Da Vinci, on hearing a quick footstep in the hall. Another moment and Brandini was face to face with Leonarde. We leave the scene that followed to the reader's imagination; the torrent of rage which Villani poured forth, together with the fatigue she had lately undergone, caused Teresa to faint in Da Vinci's arms, when Brandini, finding his villany was discovered, made a hasty retreat. A message was despatched for the Duke di Castiglioni, and in an hour Viola was in his arms, and receiving his fall and free pardon.

A week afterward the now united family were leaving Havana, the scene of so much grief and joy. Teresa stood on the steamer's deck, with her husband gazing at the city, when the pilot came on board.

"Quite an affair came off last night," he said to the captain; "an Italian gentleman, Signor Brandini, who ran through a splendid property in his own country and was a spendthrift here was found dead—blew out his brains—it was supposed to be some love affair that caused it."

Teresa's cheek turned very pale, as she hid her face on Da Vinci's shoulder, who whispered:

"So ends the last scene in the dark drama of thy past. Look up, my Viola! The clouds are passed, and sunshine is over all."

**[FROM "THE FLAG OF OUR UNION."]**

**THE ARTIST OF FLORENCE.**

**BY JAMES DE MILLE.**

IT was evening in Val d'Arno. The sun was sinking behind the horizon and twilight was descending upon the glorious vale. There lay the garden of Italy enclosed by mountains on either side, green and glowing in its verdant and luxuriant fertility, shaded by its groves of olive and cypress, with long avenues of stately trees. Flocks and herds grazed in the fields, vineyards flourished on the mountain declivities, and in the distance

arose the summits of the wooded Apennines. The classic Arno flowed through the valley, bestowing gladness and plenty on every side, its waters rolling on in slow and most melodious motion. On every side, on the plain, on the sides and summits of the hills, everywhere appeared the white villas of the nobles, now hidden by the thick foliage of surrounding trees, and encircled by gardens where bloomed the most gorgeous and odoriferous flowers, now standing alone and lifting up their stately marble fronts surrounded by magnificent colonnades. In the midst of this lovely place, a queen over all around, lay Florence, the dearest and most charming city of the south-Florence, whose past glows with the brilliancy of splendid achievements in arms, arts and song, whose present state captivates the soul of every traveller, and binds around him a potent spell, making him linger long in dreamy pleasure by the gentle flow of the Arno's waters.

"Here," exclaimed Byron, in a rapture, as he looked down from a neighboring mountain upon this earthly paradise—"here—

*"—the Etrurian Athens claims and keeps  
A softer feeling for her fairy halls.  
Girt by her theatre of bills she reaps  
Her corn and wine, and oil, and plenty leaps  
To laughing life from her redundant horn"*

Twilight came on, and soon the moon arose, throwing a gentle glow upon the scene, and shedding around it a more bewitching influence. It was an evening fitted for pleasing meditation, such meditation as the poet loves, and for the interview of lovers. The gardens of Boboli never appeared more beautiful than now, for the solemn shadow of the groves was relieved by the soft illumination of the broad paths; the sheets of water glistened in the quiet moonbeams, and every statue and every sculptured form was invested with a new and indescribable beauty. Upon the summit of a hill within these gardens, sat a youth and maiden engaged in most earnest conversation. The maiden was exceedingly beautiful, with a face which reminded one of the Madonna of Murillo, so gentle, so tender, and so bewitchingly lovely. The youth sat at her feet upon the green turf, and with his head turned back, gazing upon her, there was disclosed a noble and most handsome countenance. His long hair, black as night, fell from his forehead, and his eyes burnt like stars in the paleness of his face. There was an expression of genius stamped upon his lofty forehead, but there were care and anxiety in its frown. The stately form of the Palazzo Pitti was near at hand, and in the distance lay the city, with the stupendous dome of the cathedral, and the lofty form of the beautiful Campanile.

"Stella," he said, in deeply musical tones—"Stella, you know all my love and the desires of my soul. All are fixed upon you. Fame and glory I only wish for as the means of obtaining you. But O, hard is the task and difficult is it for an unknown artist to gain the hand of the proud Count Borelloni's daughter. I would not grieve you by taking you without his consent, even if I were able."

"Bless you! God bless you, my noble Mario for those noble words! Do not seek to draw me from him. Willingly would I give up all-wealth, and power and all-to live in obscurity with you. But my father loves me so fondly, that if I were to leave him, he would die. Let us wait, and perhaps he may overcome his prejudice toward you."

"He dislikes me because I am poor and unknown. But," exclaimed Mario, with a haughty glance, "the time may come and will come, when he will not be ashamed to acknowledge me. Art can ennoble the poor and obscure."

"I know you will become great, Mario. I know that your name will be spoken with honor, and that before long. When I first saw you here in Florence, when I afterwards heard you tell me your love as we walked by the waters of Lake Perugia, I knew that you would become famous."

"And then, if I ever gain fame and honor, all shall be laid at your feet, Stella."

"You can wait then, and seek for fame, Mario, to give you acceptance in my father's eyes. You can wait, for you know my constancy."

"I know it, and I would trust it always. I know your noble soul, Stella, its lofty qualities lead me captive, and I worship you as a divinity."

The impassioned youth bent down before her, but she prevented him, and suddenly asked:

"How do you proceed with your painting?"

"Well, I am proceeding well, for I am inspired by the thoughts of Stella."

"Then I inspire you, do I?"

"O Stella, you fill my soul with new conceptions of angelic beauty, and while your image dwells in my mind, I look back upon it and place every feature, every expression living upon the canvass! If this picture is completed, your father's love for art will make him respect the creator of this new piece."

"And he will honor you and love you."

"It must be completed in two or three months now. I seek new ideas of loveliness from you, Stella, and then my picture receives them."

"And suppose you fail, Mario." said Stella.

"Fail? O I cannot. But if I do, then will I despair? No, I will go to Rome and devote myself entirely to art. But it is late, Stella. We must go, and I will see you home before your father returns."

And the gardens of Boboli were empty.

What city is so delightful as Florence on the afternoon of a lovely day in early spring, when the sun glows above from an unclouded sky, and the Arno flows on through the midst of the city, amid its magnificent palaces, beneath its lovely bridges. Then beauty reigns everywhere. The Lung' Arno, the Casino, the Via Calzolaio are thronged with carriages, with horsemen and footmen, with offices and soldiers, men, women and children. Beautiful flower girls carry around their bouquets and bestow them on the stranger, expecting but never asking some little douceur in return. The gloomy palaces of the middle ages, the magnificent churches of early times, towers and colonnades, statues and fountains, arrest the eye and charm the beholder. All is joyousness and beauty.

Among the throngs of carriages which rode along the Lung' Arno and down to the Casino, none was more noticed than that of the Count Borelloni. It was a splendid equipage drawn by two fiery horses, to guide which the utmost skill of the coachman was needed. The old count was of a remarkable appearance. His countenance was noble and his air commanding. He was noted through Florence for his wealth and taste. Artists of every kind found in him a patron. It was at his palace that Mario Fostello had first attracted attention by his genius and the beauty his pictures. He had seen Stella, had loved her, and had spoken to the old count, telling him that he would seek after fame if he would bestow his daughter upon him. But the indignation and pride of Borelloni rose high, and he contemptuously ordered Mario to withdraw and never again to enter his house.

There was one feeling in the heart of the old count which far exceeded every other, and that was an intense love for his daughter. Beautiful, high-souled and accomplished, she was worthy of the highest station in the land, and such a station he desired for her.

They now rode in their carriage-father and daughter; an aged oak and a young and tender vine, one supported the other, which gave it beauty and attractiveness.

Stella attracted the gaze of all by her exquisite beauty, but there was one whom she saw walking swiftly past, the sight of whom sent a thrill through every vein-for well she knew the tall and stately figure of Mario.

"Stella," said her father, "there goes the ambitious painter-that is the man who had the unspeakable presumption to ask your hand of me. He, a paltry artist. See him as he walks along there."

Stella's blood rushed to her face, and her frame trembled with agitation. She turned away her head to hide her confusion.

"Look, do you see him?" said her father.

"Who?" said she.

"Why, Mario, the artist, but he is out of sight. What is the matter, Stella? Tell me my child, are you ill? Why are you so pale? You change color. You are sick, my daughter. We must go home."

"O no, father. Do not go home. It was but a passing faintness, I will soon get over it."

"You are very pale, my child."

"It is nothing, father. But look-what is the matter with the horses?"

The horses seemed fretful and impatient. They reared and kicked, they were unruly and troublesome. The coachman looked pale and anxious.

"The horses? Nothing!" said her father. "They are quiet enough. I like to have a little spirit in my animals."

Many of the passengers in the streets looked with alarm upon the animals whom the count dreaded so little.

"Good day, Borelloni," exclaimed a gentleman on horseback; "a most beautiful day!"

"Your servant, signor," answered the count. "It is a lovely day."

"Your horses seem vicious, they are very unruly, are they not!" said the gentleman.

"O no-they are a little excited-they will presently become calm. A very great number of people are out to-day."

"Yes, a large number," replied the gentleman, looking somewhat anxiously at the horses.

After a few moments he rode away.

"Your excellency?" said the coachman to the count.

"Well?" he replied.

"Your excellency's horses are unmanageable, or will be so soon. They are not used to these crowded streets."

"If they do not become so soon, they never will be," said Borelloni.

The horses began to plunge, and rear, and snort more violently, so much so, that all the people were terrified and got out of the way. The coachman seemed unable to control them.

Mario was in the Casino, walking beneath the shadow of the trees. The cool breeze from the mountains fanned his fevered brow, as he walked hurriedly along.

"I am poor. I am an artist, unknown, uncared for but by one, and that one is the noblest of her sex. I live only to gain her. When my picture is finished, I shall be no longer obscure. When my fame exceeds that of the

haughty count, I may well demand his daughter." Such were the thoughts that passed through his mind as he walked on.

"I heard his words," he proceeded. "I heard his contemptuous words as I passed the carriage, and know the scorn which he feels for me. But Count Borelloni," he exclaimed, raising his hand, "I will make you know that birth alone does not constitute greatness. I will make you know that a lofty soul can struggle upwards."

Suddenly, far away from the Lung' Arno, sounded a loud reverberation of many voices, an immense outcry mingled with the deep rumbling of carriage wheels, and the fierce neighing of horses. There were sounds like the rush of a great multitude, and cries of terror mingled with one another in appalling confusion.

Mario started, and turned back. Casting his eye toward the city, he saw far away in places where the trees did not intercept his view, numbers of men rushing to and fro.

He stood alone in the utmost perplexity, for no one was near to tell him the cause of that great uproar.

The clamor and rumbling of wheels came nearer and nearer, rattling over pavements, dashing against obstacles. It came nearer, and soon he saw a carriage dragged on with terrific speed by two furious horses, who, without driver or postilion, came on unrestrained. The carriage was knocked against trees and dashed violently against stones. In it there was an old man leaning back with a pale face, expressing intense agony, and close to him, clung the form of a young girl—her arms wound round him, and her dishevelled hair floating in the breeze.

"O God! Stella!" exclaimed Mario, in unspeakable horror. "Stella!—my God, she's lost!"

With one bound he rushed in the midst of the course taken by the infuriated horses. His cloak fell from him, his hair flew about his pale and fixed countenance, and like a rock in the centre of a torrent, he stood in the way of the horses!

He waved his hands wildly—he shouted to the steeds. On they came, lessening for a moment their speed—there was a bound forward. Mario clung at the reins with the grasp of a drowning man—there was a whirl of dust, a rush of the multitude who followed after, and then with a sound like the sudden peal of thunder, burst forth the acclamation of a thousand deep-toned voices:

"Saved, saved!"

They raised Mario up—they placed him in the carriage, and bore his insensible and much bruised form slowly to the palace of Borelloni. All Florence rung with the tidings of the deed—the name of Mario was spoken everywhere, and the city honored the performer of so bold an action.

"Now what will Borelloni do to reward the gallant preserver of his own life and his beloved daughter!"

"He will give him a thousand piastres," said one.

"He will enrich him for life," said another.

"He will do no such thing," said a third. "Mario is no mercenary man. He despises rewards of that kind. I will tell you. He loves the count's daughter."

"Ah," said all.

"And he deserves her. But for him she would not have lived to have his love, nor would Borelloni have been living to refuse."

"Does he refuse?" said they.

"Mario said nothing to the count. It is an old story. He has loved her long. But the count, who refused him once before, will not now retract his word, even to the preserver of his life."

Mario was cared for and soon recovered. He spake not a word about his love to Borelloni. He would not ask him now, for then he would seem to demand payment for his action, and such a thing he scorned—even though it should bestow upon him the hand of his beloved.

"I will wait," said he. "I will raise myself to an equality with her, and then Borelloni shall not refuse."

It was summer, and the sun glanced brightly, gloriously, over the silver waters of Thrasymene's lake, for such we love to call the lake which the Italians name Perugia. The wind blew softly over the plain, and the rich groves all covered with luxuriant foliage shaded the quiet fields beneath, which more than two thousand years before had resounded with the roar of battle. The hills encircled the plain on three sides, protecting it in winter from the cold blast and causing it to bloom with perennial verdure. The lake rippled on the shore of the other side, and stretched away—a sheet of molten silver, till it watered the bases of distant hills.

In this charming spot which every traveller loves to view, had the Count Borelloni reared a summer palace. It lay on the southern shore of the lake, half way up the mountains, and in from its roof a scene like one in fairy land burst upon the view. The cool winds which blew here were an alleviation to the heat of summer and Florence, with its noise and dust, was gladly exchanged for the quiet scenes of this enchanting spot.

There was a boat upon the lake, and the enjoyment of sailing formed a chief attraction to visitors, for Borelloni's villa was always open to his friends. Yet at times there was danger attending this pleasure, for tempests would arise and the waters would be converted into furious waves.

"How beautiful is this lovely place?" said the count to his daughter, as they walked upon the terrace! "What a scene is this for a painter. See where the sun is setting over yonder—those clouds tinged with myriad tints

surrounding him in glory! See above us, how intensely blue the sky, how clear the atmosphere! Look at the opposite shore-how green, how glowing in fruits and flowers-all again appearing down in the depths of this unruffled lake! O Italy, my country, how beautiful thou art!"

"And father, look at these heights around us, and on the western shore-these bold rocks with their summits all covered with spreading trees. How grandly they set off the picture!"

"If I were a painter, I know no scene that I would choose to portray, rather than this."

"Since you respect and love art so highly, father, why did you not learn this?"

"I was too busy in my youth, Stella."

"Who of all you know is best in this art?"

"I know a great many excellent ones-many who excel in landscape painting-many who are good in historic pictures, but of all whom I know, the one is undoubtedly the greatest, the one who excels all others in mingled grandeur and loveliness of conception, and who approaches nearest to the grand old masters is he-the artist who saved us from death—Mario."

"Mario!"

"Yes, and if he had not been guilty of such great presumption, my palace and my esteem would have been thrown open to him always-first, because he is chief of artists, and especially because he saved my darling's life."

"Yet is he so presumptuous, my father?"

"My daughter! Stella Borelloni, can an obscure man aspire to the hand of the fairest in Tuscany?"

"He may not always be obscure."

"Why do you speak thus to me, Stella? Can it be possible that you-But no, it is not. I will not think of it nor speak of it."

And shortly afterwards they went within. Stella retired to her chamber, and thought of her father's words. They gave her hope. He no longer despised Mario. He could not. But he was angry at his presumption. Obscurity was Mario's greatest fault in his eyes.

"I will take courage," she thought. "Hope comes to me. Mario's greatness of genius has been confessed by my father. It will soon be confessed by the world."

Meantime, Mario had become wearied of the heat of Florence. He longed for quiet and seclusion. He wished to spend the sultry summer months in some cooler and more agreeable retreat.

"By the lake of Perugia," thought he—"Stella lives. If I go there I can see her as she walks or rides around. I can feast my eyes upon her, although I am resolved to remain unseen myself. I will take my picture there, and receive that inspiration which her angelic beauty always gives me."

He came to the lake and dwelt in a small house upon its banks, scarce half a mile away. Daily he would go to the top of a cliff near by, and when Stella walked out his eyes followed her, and she, always thinking of him, knew not that he was so near.

When she departed to ride along the borders of the lake, or for a sail upon its waters, he watched her, and sometimes encountered her dressed in disguise.

For two weeks he remained there, and kept his resolution of never making known his presence. But soon an occurrence took place which caused him to be discovered, yet in such a way that he rejoiced at the discovery.

It was a sultry morning, and desirous of coolness, Stella with a few other friends resolved to take a sail upon the lake. There was a threatening aspect about the horizon, but it was unnoticed by those who were intent on pleasure. Borelloni remained at home, being employed at some business.

Mario sat at his usual place on the summit of the rock, and watching the preparations, knew their object. An awning was placed above the boat—a high and broad awning, which could effectually keep off the hot rays of the sun.

Mario looked with anxiety upon the preparations, for he knew the signs of the weather, and feared the appearance of the sky. All was calm, oppressively calm, and fearful to one who knew how suddenly storms arise under such circumstances. He would have warned them, but he did not dare to, for fear of discovering himself. So he was compelled to sit in a state of inaction and watch with feverish anxiety the approaching excursion.

The party left the house, they were four in number, and the heart of Mario throbbed violently as he recognized the form and features of Stella among them. They went gaily to the boat which was now completely ready, and soon were seated beneath the awning. As there was no wind, sails were useless, so they were rowed out into the lake.

Two or three hours passed away, and still Mario sat gazing upon the boat which was carelessly lying still in the middle of the lake. Mario watched them with anxiety, and occasionally cast a troubled glance at the sky. He would have made signals, but they were too far away to notice them.

The sky became darker, and there came a peculiar thickness and oppressiveness to the atmosphere. Still the boat moved not.

"Can they be asleep? Can the rowers be insane?" thought Mario. "The sky is clouded, and they do not notice it. O heaven, what can they do! They cannot see the sky for the awning hides it."

His attention was now attracted by a sudden voice from Borelloni's villa. The old count appeared upon the terrace, pale and terrified, and waved his arms in the air, and screamed to those in the boat. The shout went across the water, followed immediately by the tolling of the great bell at the villa, which was now all in confusion. Borelloni rushed about like one distracted, sending his servants after boats to go out and save his daughter.

"My daughter, my daughter," he cried, "my beautiful Stella. O my daughter!"

And with frantic gestures he rushed down to the water's edge, and shouted to the boat-at times gazing at the angry sky above.

Those in the boat had heard his voice and seen the confusion at the villa. Instantly the rowers put out their oars and turned the boat's head toward the shore. They rowed fast, for hope was trembling and preparing to take her flight from the souls of the endangered boatmen.

The deep tones of the bell, sounding loudly and fearfully, went over the country, arousing multitudes of men, who left their fields and came to see the cause of such unwonted noise.

Mario sat on the rock till the boat turned toward the shore. Then viewing the dark sky and the occasional flash of lightning, he descended with fear to the shore of the lake. A half hour passed, and but three miles had been passed over. One yet separated the boat from the shore. One mile-a short period of time would suffice for the passage, yet in that short time what might not happen!

But soon all suspense was over. There gleamed a sudden flash of lightning over the whole sky, intensely, terrifically bright, followed by torrents of rain. There was a short pause, and then with a crash-a roar that sounded like the wild rage of an earthquake, burst the awful peal of thunder-then peal on peal, roar on roar, rolled in long reverberations along the sky, round the rocky shores, and the heavens grew more intensely black! The storm had burst upon them! Down came the blast of the tempest's breath, in an overwhelming torrent of wind, and the whole surface of the lake rose in wild surges, foaming and tossing.

When the first horrible confusion had passed away, all eyes were strained to where the boat had been. It was nowhere to be seen. Amid the gloom a few dark objects were all that could be descried in the foam of the upheaving billows. There came a scream from that aged man who had watched the boat so intently-a despairing cry, and with his white hair streaming behind him, he dashed forward to throw himself into the water. The servants seized him and prevented him.

"My daughter!" cried the old man. "O my daughter, she has perished! Let me go to her!"

"Look!" exclaimed a voice, pointing to the water. "I see a dark form amid the foam. I see it-it is a man, and he swims, bearing something with him."

All eyes turned there. The baron revived, and again looked hopefully at the water, where the brave swimmer so gallantly breasted the waves.

But could it be his daughter?

They came nearer-nearer, and now the face was seen, and the hair, as it fell and rose above the water. It was-it must be-yes, that long, dark hair and those lovely features belonged only to Stella!

The old man bowed down his head and wept.

Nearer, nearer, and now all fear was gone, for the bold swimmer still showed an unfailing strength and energy. But his face was unknown. None had seen it before. Yet Borelloni knew it-well he knew it. The same face had appeared amid the death struggle, the dust and wild prancing of maddened horses on the Casino.

And now Mario touched the land. And now he bore his senseless burden through the crowd to her father's arms.

"O take her Mario, to the house-carry her there, or else she dies."

But Mario laid her down at her father's feet, upon the grass, and voicelessly, nervelessly fell down beside her.

They carried them both to the villa. They cared for them, and soon Mario opened his eyes and asked eagerly for Stella.

"She is saved, and well. She is with her father."

"Saved? then I am happy."

He arose, and all dripping as he was, left the house, in spite of the eagerness of the attendants.

"No," he said, "my home is near by, and why should I remain here? I will go. Leave me."

And he arose and left the house.

"Where is the saviour of my child?" said Borelloni, on the following morning.

"Gone?" said his attendants.

"Gone? Fools! Why did you send him away thus?"

"He would not stay, your excellency. He said his home was near by."

"Then go, I tell you, and search the country far and wide, and bring him to me."

After their departure, the baron remained in deep thought for a long time.

"Strange," muttered he, "passing strange, how this painter seems to be my genius. A good genius too-near in moments of peril. How he looked as his face rose above the waves, while he bore my daughter to the shore. Yet how can I give her to him? I cannot."

The attendants returned at evening. Their search was unsuccessful. But one said that a tall, noble-looking man had departed in the diligence for Florence at early dawn.

"'Tis well," exclaimed Borelloni. "I fear to meet him. Better is it that he should go."

Summer with its heat had passed away, and mild September had now come, when Florence again becomes delightful. The villa at Thrasymene was now forsaken, and the palace of Borelloni at Florence again was all joyous and thronged with people as of yore. Again the carriage of the count rolled along the Lung' Arno, and he received the salutations of his friends.

Stella was lovely as before, but in her face there was a more pensive expression than usual, a sadness that was not customary. For she had not seen him whom she adored—the brave youth who had twice esteemed his own life as nothing, in order to snatch her from death. And what could move her father if this could not? He was more thoughtful than before, and never spoke of that scene. He had never even offered to express his gratitude to her deliverer.

Yet that evening she was again to go to the gardens of Boboli and meet her lover. Her heart bounded with joy at the anticipation of coming happiness; and the moments seemed like hours, as they slowly, slowly passed away.

Again the beautiful gardens were arrayed in loveliness, and beneath the solemn shade of the lofty trees Mario again sat beside his Stella. They could hardly speak their hearts were full.

"And so you were long by Thrasymene and never came to me, Mario," she at length said.

"I would not do so. It was enough for me to be near and watch you."

"But not enough for me," she cried, with tears in her eyes. "O Mario! I am doubly yours, for you have twice saved me from death."

"Speak not of that," he said. "I must soon know my fate. My picture is nearly finished. In two days it will hang in yonder palace," said he, pointing to the Palazzo Pitti. "For-what do you think—the Grand Duke has visited my studio, and told me to bring it there."

"The Grand Duke! Was he pleased with it?"

"He praised it in unmeasured terms."

"I knew so, Mario."

Blissful was the interview, and sad were the lovers to separate. But they had to depart, and soon Stella was at home.

Mario, filled with pleasing hope, looked at the beauty of the scene, and went out for a walk. He wandered toward the southern gate, and went out up a long avenue, where trees overhanging formed a long and shadowy archway. It was a still and peaceful walk at evening. He sat down at length behind the trunk of one of the trees, and fell into a reverie.

Soon he was roused by the sound of approaching footsteps. He looked down the road, and saw two men stealthily approaching, armed, and conversing earnestly in low tones. They stopped not more than two yards from him and sat down. Mario could not be seen on account of his concealed position.

"Federigo," said one, "this is bad business."

"What!" said the other—"a bad business?"

"I mean not bad, but dangerous. Now if it were only to take a few piastres, I would not care; but to kill a man, coldly and without provocation, is rather bad."

"But we get two hundred, you know?"

"Ah, there you are right. They will jingle pleasantly, will they not?"

The sound of a horse's steps was heard coming down the road. The men crept into concealment and were silent. Mario also preserved silence, and clenching his stout stick more firmly, waited the issue.

"He is coming," said one in an earnest whisper. "It is he—Borelloni."

Mario's heart leaped within his bosom at the word. He almost determined to rush upon the villains. But it would be premature, and he would be attacked. He could save the life of Borelloni more easily by waiting.

The horseman drew nearer and nearer. He was walking his horse slowly down the road. He soon came up a few yards from the spot where these men and Mario sat concealed. There he paused for a moment.

"Will he stop, or go back?" whispered one.

"No-hush!" said the other.

Borelloni came on, he came abreast of them-then one fired a pistol, and both sprang out. One seized the horse, while the other dragged the baron to the ground, crying:

"Say your prayers, old man. You must die."

"Villains!" roared a loud voice behind them, and Mario, springing out, gave one bound and felled the wretch to the earth. The other, frightened and surprised, stood in speechless astonishment. Mario rushed up to him and raised his arm to strike. The man fired. His pistol was knocked aside by Mario, and the next moment he lay senseless on the ground.

Mario came to Borelloni and raised him from the ground.

"Are you hurt?" he inquired.

"Good God! Is it possible!"

"I am Mario. I thank Heaven I am here to prevent these ruffians from executing their design. Can I assist you to mount?"

He assisted the count to get on his horse again. By this time a troop of soldiers, alarmed by the pistol reports, had come to the place.

"Take those men with you," said Mario. "They have attempted the life of Count Borelloni. And accompany the count to the city. But what-you are wounded."

"No, the bullet only grazed my head. Mario you have saved my life. I am speechless. I feel more than I can utter now."

"Do not thank me. Thank Heaven who sent me here. Good-night, my lord." And turning, he was soon out of sight.

Stella sat in her chamber that night thinking upon her interview with Mario. She lost herself in conjectures about the future-so dark, so obscure, and yet it might be-so bright and happy. The noise below told her of her father's arrival home, and she ran down to welcome him.

"My father! How late you are! But what!" She started back in horror at the sight of his bloody forehead. "Are you hurt? are you wounded, father?"

"I was set upon by two ruffians, and would probably have been killed, if—"

"Attacked, wounded! O Heaven! You shall not go out alone, father, you must not. You are feeble, and cannot now defend yourself."

She made him sit down, and tenderly washed his wound, and stayed the blood till the doctor came. After the wound was dressed the doctor departed and Stella spoke.

"You said you were saved, but did not tell me how, nor did you tell me his name. Do you know him?"

"Yes, I know him well, and have reason to know him?"

"Who is he?"

"Mario."

"Mario again? Great Heaven!"

Two days afterward Count Borelloni sat in his study, musing upon the strange occurrences of the few past months. His thoughts dwelt upon Mario, who thrice had been his benefactor.

"I cannot account for it. How intense, how absorbing, how wonderful must be his love for my daughter. He has treated my scorn with kindness. When I forbade him the house, he never came here. I admire, I reverence so lofty a spirit!

"Where would I be now-where would my daughter be, if Mario had not been near to save us, if he, careless of his own life, had not been our preserver? I wondered before. Twice he had come before me-a genius-a preserver of myself and my child. Now he comes again and saves me. It is wonderful! I am overcome. Pride cannot resist such greatness of soul-such magnificent actions, and Stella adores him. I do not wonder at it. Shall I then refuse to make her happy? A few short years are all that remain of life to me. I wish to leave my child happiness as her best inheritance. I can make her happy now. I can make a return to Mario for his generous actions. I can make myself happy in the contemplation of their joy. All is over. Farewell pride. What is birth and wealth and pride, when compared to the glory of such illustrious actions?"

He sat down at his desk and wrote as follows:

"Mario, you have conquered. I have treated you with scorn and indignity. You have returned it with kindness. You have saved my own life twice, and twice have you saved the life of one for whose happiness I would die a thousand deaths. Mario, I reverence your lofty spirit. I admire such noble feeling-such bravery and generosity. Come to my home. It shall henceforth be yours also. Come to my heart, which is proud to love and honor you. Come, and Stella shall be the reward which you shall receive as the best and most priceless gift of the grateful BORELLONI."

He rose from his chair and called for Stella. She came to him speedily.

"Stella," said he, "I have at last found one to whom I can confide you, who will be your protector when I am gone. What do you say to that? You change color-you tremble."

"O father, why now? Why not wait for a time? I am young. I will not-I cannot leave you."

"You need not leave me. Your husband shall stay here, you both shall cheer my old age."

"Father, I—"

"Read this, my child."

Stella glanced at it, read it hurriedly, and in a transport of joy flung her arms about her father's neck and kissed him again and again, while the tears stood in his eyes as he embraced his daughter.

"Yes, Stella, all is over. I bow before him and do him honor. This shall go to him, and he will come here to receive his reward." He gave the letter to his servant, and again sat down to receive the thanks and witness the happiness of his daughter.

An hour passed away, and a messenger came from the duke bearing a letter to the Count Borelloni. It was a request that in an hour he should come to the Pitti Palace. "For," said he, "I have lately received as an accession to my paintings, a picture of such rare excellence, such exquisite beauty in conception, and wonderful skill in execution, that I set no bounds to my joy in obtaining it. Knowing your passion for art, I have sent to you this notice of its reception."

The count hastened to prepare for his departure. He wondered what was the nature of the piece of which the duke had spoken so highly.

"It must be a wonderful painting," said he, "for the duke is usually sparing in his praise. It is probably one of Rafaele or Guido. Well, I will soon see it."

Stella felt a joy which words could not utter. She recollected all that Mario had told her of his picture, and of the duke's visit, of his flattering words of commendation-and she believed at once that his picture was the one he spoke of.

The count went off, and at the expiration of the hour entered the palace. He was received by the duke. He was led through the long suite of rooms where the splendor of royal magnificence is all unnoticed amid the charms of priceless paintings, for there the Madonna of Rafaele tells of the boundless depths of a mother's love, and there Murillo's Madonna breathes forth virgin purity.

At length the duke stopped before a picture covered by a screen. He turned to the count, and saying, "Now Borelloni prepare for a surprise," drew aside the curtain which covered it.

The count started, for not among all the galleries of Italy, not among the priceless collections of Rome, had his eyes ever rested upon so wonderful, so living a picture! It was a living, a breathing form, which there, drawing aside a hanging, seemed to come forth to meet the gazer. Upon the countenance there was the perfection of ideal beauty. Loveliness, angelic, heavenly, was radiant upon the face, and that face was one well known to him, for Stella stood there, but Stella-glorified and immortal.

"Wonderful! Miraculous!" burst from his lips. "It is the creation of a god. It is not the work of man! Who is he? Where is he? The genius who formed this? How could it happen that it should be Stella, my daughter? Who is the artist?"

"He is here in the next apartment," said the duke, and going to the door he spoke to some one. He returned, leading the artist.

"This is he," said the duke. "Mario Fostello."

"Mario!" cried the count. "Mario, my preserver!" And he ran up to him and embraced him.

"Mario, is all forgotten? Forgive me. But I wrong you in asking it."

The duke looked on in wonder, and could not conceal his surprise. But the count begged him to excuse his emotion. "Would you know the cause of it?" said he.

"I am all curiosity."

The count then related all-told him of Mario's love for Stella, of his own pride, of Mario's actions. When it was ended, the duke, who had displayed the greatest emotion, arose and went to Mario.

"Never," he cried, "most noble youth-never have I heard of more generosity and greatness of soul. Happy is he who can call you his friend. But you shall not be neglected by me, for while I live, you will always have a friend. I honor your actions. I love your noble character."

Mario was overwhelmed by mingled emotions of happiness and confusion. Joy had rushed in upon him, like a torrent, and unable to speak, he could only express by his glance, the feelings of his soul.

"God bless you, my lord duke!" at length he cried. "God bless you, Count Borelloni! I am unworthy of such praise, but I can never forget your kindness to an obscure artist."

"An obscure artist? No, not so," answered the duke. "No longer obscure, you are the greatest in the land, and none shall call you otherwise. I name you count-and in a week your title shall be formally bestowed, so henceforth, Count Fostello, you may not be obscure."

A week afterward the palace of Borelloni was all festivity. Lights gleamed in dazzling rows within the long

halls where all the flower of Tuscan nobility, and all the lords and barons and great men of other lands were assembled. For this was the day when the Count Fostello led to the altar the lovely Stella Borelloni. The Grand Duke condescended to be the head groomsman. The magnificent form and features of the noble artist were the admiration of all, and only equalled by the beauty of his bride.

The story of his love and constancy, of his wonderful actions and splendid achievements in the realm of art, was told to all, and the city rung with his praise. All courted his friendship. All of noble nature loved him for himself, and the baser spirits were compelled to do him homage, for in him they saw the man whom the duke "delighted to honor."

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