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The clock on the mantel-piece chimed midnight. "There sounds the knell of my doom!" said Cyrilla, with a mournful sigh.

"It is the signal that summons you to a new life—to a life of love, and freedom, and happiness!" said the Italian. "It tells me too," he added, "that I have other work still left to accomplish." He laid a finger lightly on her shoulder. "The man who calls you wife, the child who calls you mother, they must die."

Cyrilla's eyes confronted those of the madman steadily; not the quiver of a nerve betrayed the feelings at work within her.

Fastini began to move towards the door of the dressing-room; Cyrilla caught him by the button and held him. He turned on her in an instant, a wild devil of fury glaring out of his eyes. "Do you—dare—to say—that you care the least in the world about those two?" he snarled out. He had grasped her firmly by the shoulder with one hand; his other hand was behind her, and she felt the sharp point of the poniard prick through her dressing-robe into her flesh as he asked her the question.

"Care for either of them?" exclaimed Cyrilla with a contemptuous laugh. "Why should I care for either of them? It is not that. It is this, as regards the child: I do not think—nay, I am sure—that I could not love you so well as I do not: if I knew that you were guilty of

brooding over what she had just heard. To kill her husband and child! That would be a thousand times worse than death to herself. Theodore might come any moment now—come stepping jauntily in through the French window—to be sprung upon by this madman, and stabbed before her eyes. "If only I could steady my mind to think," she kept repeating to herself. What was it she had heard and read about the peculiarities of mad people? If she could only bring it to mind!

The Italian was watching her narrowly from under his bent brows. Suddenly, with that abruptness which marked all his movements, he got up, and striding to the easel, flung back the sheet with which it was covered. He started at the sight of the picture; but next moment his poniard was out, and the canvas stabbed through in a dozen places. "Out! out! cursed likeness of a false-hearted fiend!" he exclaimed. "Oh that a soul so vile should lodge in a husk so sweet!"

If she could only bring it to mind! All at once, something seemed to catch her breath, and she pressed her hand to her heart for a moment, while a strange expression crept over her face, which subsided presently into one of her sweetest smiles. Then she half rose from the easy-chair, and turned her large soft eyes full on the young Italian. "Pietro mio," she said; and there was a world of meaning in her way of saying those two little words.

The dark frown vanished like a cloud from the face of the young Italian, and the light of passion faded from his eyes when he heard himself addressed thus; and he turned on Cyrilla a look half-bewildered, half-suspicious, and felt with one hand for the haft of his poniard. She was standing with her head a little on one side, smiling at him; and while he was looking, her rosy lips whispered "Come!" and as if it were a command impossible for him to disobey, he came towards her, timidly, cautiously, half-unsuspiciously, but still step by step nearer. As she sank back in the easy-chair, still with the same fixed smile on her face, her finger pointed to a low footstool a yard or two away. He understood her gesture, and pushing the footstool across the floor, he seated himself on it close by her chair. Again the same strange expression swept over her face as the sleeve of his coat touched her dress as he sat down; but the smile was back again next moment, and her voice took an accent as low and tender as that of any love-born Juliet when she next spoke to him.

"You naughty, naughty boy!" she said, and she pinched his ear playfully as she spoke; "I vow you nearly frightened me to death, creeping into the room in that stealthy way, for all the world like the villain in the melodrama. How was I to know it was you that was behind the curtain? And then, when I did see you, I declare you gave my nerves quite a shock. I had heard such strange stories about your being mad, and all that, you know, so that my fright can hardly be wondered at. My poor Pietro, what you must have suffered!"

Every nerve and fibre in the Italian's body seemed to thrill under the influence of those loving words and that angelic smile; but his eyes were still full of bewilderment, and his lips moved inaudibly for several moments before he spoke. "Why do you pity me?" he said at last. "How can you be glad to see me, when you know that I am here to take your life?"

Cyrilla sighed. "Can you not understand," my Pietro," she said, "that when life has become a burden, it doesn't seem such a very difficult thing to quit it?"

"Your life a burden!" he said incredulously. "In this pretty nest, and mated with the husband of your choice, your life ought to be very precious to you, Cyrilla."

"The opinion of the world!" said Cyrilla, with a mournful ring in her voice.—"Is there not such a thing, Pietro, as being wedded to a man with whom you have nothing in common? You have read *Lovers' Hall*, and you know what I mean without my saying more. Once I had a treasure in my grasp, but not knowing its value, I threw it carelessly away. Do you think that life to such a one can be a thing of much value?"

She turned away her face, and buried it in her handkerchief. Fastini fell on his knees before her. "Cyrilla, Cyrilla! say that you love me!" he cried. One of her hands was lying carelessly on her lap; he seized it, and covered it with passionate kisses. She did not repulse him; she only said gently. "You must not do that; you know that you have vowed to kill me."

"No, no!" he cried passionately, starting to his feet. "You shall not die! I will intercede for you with the mandarin. The Dog-star himself shall hear your story and pity you. Some other life shall be sacrificed in place of yours; you shall live. Together, we will quit this hateful England—together, in my own sunny clime, in Italy the beautiful, we will!"

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shedding the blood of that innocent; and he at least is innocent."

"No blood, Cyrilla," he whispered—"only the pillow." "No!" said Cyrilla loftily. "The man I love must be above a deed like that. To be the murderer of a smiling babe! Faugh!—You can go, Signor Fastini," she added coldly, stepping from before him. "The child is asleep in yonder room. When you have killed him, come back and kill me, if you don't wish to see the unutterable contempt with which I should then look upon you!" She pointed to the open door of the dressing-room as she spoke, and drawn up to her full height, stared steadily into the lunatic's eyes. He quailed under that fixed, stern gaze; he wavered; he whispered something to himself; and then with the air of a beaten hound, he slunk up to Cyrilla, and taking her by the hand humbly, he lifted it to his lips, and kissed it twice.

"Your pardon, Cyrilla," he said, "for having misunderstood you. The child, truly, is beneath my notice. Let him live."

"Spoken like my own Pietro," said Cyrilla, thawing suddenly into a very May-day of love and sunshine. "You were only jesting with me, I know."

"But he—the man who has caused you so much misery—your husband; you will not intercede for him," said Pietro, gloomily. "He—he above all men—must die."

"So be it," said Cyrilla, with a little shrug of supreme indifference. Ten minutes past twelve! Theodore could not be long now. How her ears strained, how her heart beat at the slightest sound from without! If he were only to come now, he could hardly escape with life, unless she, Cyrilla, were to sacrifice her own life in the endeavor to save his. She was quite prepared to do that, she said to herself.

"But pray, tell me," she resumed aloud, "what plan you intend to adopt for carrying out your scheme of vengeance?"

"As soon as I hear his footsteps, I shall hide behind those curtains," said the madman. "As he steps across the threshold I shall rush forth and strike him dead with my poniard."

"A pretty scheme—a very pretty scheme!" said Cyrilla, encouragingly. "But I think I know one still better—one that will avoid all bloodshed, which is objectionable in a lady's room."

"Tell me," said the Italian, eagerly. "When he comes in," said Cyrilla, "he will ask for a cup of coffee—he always does. Into his coffee I will put a few drops out of a certain vial which I have in my dressing-room. He drinks the coffee and five minutes later he is a dead man!"

"Good, good!" said the madman, rubbing his hands gleefully. "And then, when he is dead, I will cut off his head, and carry it to my friend the mandarin, and he will give me his magic ring—his cat's eye ring, that is worth a king's ransom; and we will sail across the seas, you and I together; and you will be mine, my own, forever! Say, shall it not be so?"

"I shall, my Pietro!" answered Cyrilla, boldly. "Ah! you don't know how much I shall love you. But we have no time to lose; Thornhurst will be here presently, and I must hide you at once."

"Yes—yes! behind the curtains," said Fastini, eagerly. "No, not behind the curtains," said Cyrilla, "because the first thing Thornhurst will do after coming in will be to draw back the curtains and fasten the windows. Let me consider; where will be the best place to hide you?"

She paused, and with her fingers on her lips, looked round the room, as if in search of a hiding-place. Fastini was holding her other hand, and pressing it now and then to his lips.

"I have it," she said at last. "Nothing could be better. You shall hide yourself in this old chest; and she ran across the room, laughing gaily, and dragging the Italian after her, and flung open the lid of the old carved chest. "It might have been put here on purpose," she said, still laughing. "See—you will have plenty of room; and there will be this advantage in hiding here, you will be able, yourself unseen, to witness the whole of my little drama from beginning to end—from your private box, you know. (A little pun that, is it not? I really won't let you kiss my hand any more.) You must just keep the lid open about a quarter of an inch—not more; and presently you will see Thornhurst come stepping in through one of these windows. You will see him kiss me—for the last time, you know, so you must not be angry. Then he will go round and fasten the windows; then he will yawn and stretch himself; and then he will seat himself in his easy-chair, and ask for his meerschaum and a cup of coffee. But you must not stir till you see his eyes close, and his head droop back on the chair. And now, sir, to your hiding place. If you love me, don't delay, for Thornhurst may be here any moment. No—not a single kiss now, but as many as you like afterwards. Why can't you tie those lanky limbs of yours in a knot? A little lower, please. So—that is better."

She was just lowering the lid of the chest gently over him when he struck it up suddenly with his arm. "Cyrilla," he said, "something whispers to me that my friend the mandarin would like me to do this deed myself. Perhaps the Dog-star!"

"Hush!" exclaimed Cyrilla with a start. "The king of the pelicans is coming this way. I hear his footsteps. Hide, hide!" She tried to press the lid down on him as she spoke; but his suspicions, ever on the alert, were roused in an instant, and with all his strength he strove to keep himself from being shut in, but he then was. Cyrilla of little avail in the position in which he then was. The madman's efforts, little by little, inch by inch, the lid came down upon him, his power to struggle against it decreasing in proportion the closer it shut him in. Suddenly he changed his position, and before he could recover himself the lid had shut him in completely, and the same instant the iron staple in the body of the chest shot up through a slit in the lid. The moment she saw it, Cyrilla's instinct pointed out to her the only method by which Fastini could be retained a prisoner, for her bodily strength was all but exhausted. The iron bar that should have passed through the hole in the staple, and have kept the

chest fast shut, was broken away, and all that Cyrilla could now do was to push her thumb through the staple and use it as the bar had been used.

The footsteps on the gravel outside were coming nearer and presently, Theodore Thornhurst, clear in mouth, and with a merrier twinkle than usual in his eye, stepped in through one of the French windows.

Not one moment too soon. "Saved! saved!" cried Cyrilla as her eyes met those of her husband, and then she sank fainting by the side of the chest. The painter was a cautious man as well as a brave one; he heard strange noises proceeding from the interior of the chest, and at the moment releasing Cyrilla's poor bruised thumb, he slipped his pocket-knife into its place. Then lifting his wife in his arms, he carried her into another room, and summoned the servants to her assistance. Armed with a revolver, he then went back to the chest, and lifted up the lid; but Fastini was half suffocated by this time, and was dragged out by Thornhurst more dead than alive.

Ultimately the Italian was reconsigned to the place from which he had escaped; but a long time passed before the painter's wife recovered thoroughly from the effects of that terrible hour.

The Home.

The old Athenians spent their money freely to build temples and erect statues, while their own homes were unattractive in appearance to the passer-by. We are glad our people do not follow their examples wholly. We judge of the people by their homes and not by the public buildings, for the home is, in a great measure, the index of the character of the home dwellers. This applies to the outside of the house as well as the inside. The man or woman who seeks to make the exterior of the house attractive as well as the interior, is as much a public benefactor as he who builds costly temples, though he may not be aware of it, nor have the public good at heart, but only be gratifying his own taste. However, the man who cares the most for his own home cares the most for the public good usually. A well kept house and yard is an educator, however humble it may be, and the man or woman who spends money in decorating his home because it is his home, is not so selfish as he might appear.—A. C., in *Vick's Magazine* for September.

Cheerful Women.

In marrying, men should seek happy women. They make a terrible mistake when they marry for beauty, or for talent, or for style. The sweetest wives are those who possess the magic secret of being happy under any and all circumstances. Rich or poor, high or low, it makes no difference, the bright little fountain bubbles up just as musically in their hearts. Nothing ever goes wrong with them—no trouble is too serious for them "to make the best of it." Was ever the stream of calamity so dark and deep that the sunlight of a happy face falling across its turbid tides would not awake an answering gleam? Why, the joyous tempered people don't know half the good they do. No matter how cross and crabbed you feel, no matter if your brain is full of meditation on "afflicting dispensations," and your stomach with medicines, pills and tonics; just get one of those cheery little women talking to you, and we are not afraid to wager anything she can cure you. The long drawn lines about the mouth will relax—the cloud of settled gloom will vanish, nobody knows where, and the first thing you know you will be laughing! Ah, what a blessing are these happy women! How often their little hands guide the ponderous machine of life, with almost an invisible touch! How we look forward through the weary day to their fireside smiles! No one knows, no one will ever know until the day of judgment reveals, how much we owe to these helpful, hopeful, uncomplaining, happy women.