

stone wall," was the dry rejoinder of the shrewd young stripling.

"Heaven forbid," exclaimed the other, "that your seats should have aught of truth for their foundation! But, tell me, of whom are the drugs purchased which Vivaldi prescribes?"

"Of Grasso, the little apothecary, by the church yonder," was the answer.

"An honest man and a true," remarked the student. "I know him for one who would not put his hand to so dark a deed as that you hint at. But, tell me, who is despatched for the medicines?"

"Myself," replied the page.

"Then, perhaps," resumed his companion, "you can name the ingredients?"

"Nay," said the boy, "it passes my humble knowledge to read the cramped scrawl of the learned physician; but there," he added, drawing a paper from his bosom; "read it yourself! I am even now on my way for another supply."

Leonardo eagerly snatched at the paper; but after a glance at its contents, he remarked, "Well! there is nothing here to kill or cure. One would think that Vivaldi, having been called in, deemed he must do something for his fee; and, therefore, has prescribed that which will do neither good nor harm, while he trusts to Nature to work the cure of an unimportant ailment in her own way."

"But are you sure," said the page, "that it is not the mere vehicle—menstruum I think you doctors call it—of some pernicious drug, intended to work the mischief I apprehend?"

"Shrewdly put, my young sir," exclaimed the other; "but now, tell me, into whose hands do you deliver the mixture when it is obtained?"

"To the nurse," was his reply.

"Who, of course, administers it to the patient," resumed Leonardo.

"No," said the boy, "that office, by special arrangement—wherefore, I know not, except for the purpose of implicating me—is reserved for me; and as the portion is not taken until noon, when my lady has quitted her chamber, there would appear to be no reason why I should not perform it."

The student made no immediate rejoinder to this remark, but seemed lost for some moments in profound meditation upon the startling intelligence which had been communicated to him. At last he said, "Reluctant as I am to believe that there are three persons in Padua base and wicked enough to entertain so diabolical a project, I confess there is that in what you have told me which has given me cause for uneasiness, if not for suspicion. Yet what to do in the matter passes my poor judgment to decide. Do you, however, keep your own counsel, until this mystery be further developed, in order to which, do you procure two phials of the mixture this evening; delivering one to the nurse as usual, and secreting the other on your person; and you have much less dexterity than I give you credit for, if, when you are about to perform your office of Aesculapean cupbearer, you cannot exchange the bottles, and giving your lady the contents of the concealed bottle, secure for me that which had previously been in the custody of the nurse. Will you undertake to do this?"

"That will I," was the answer, "though the eyes of Argus were upon me the while."

The Council of Two adjourned their sitting until the following evening; and having arranged to meet at the same hour, the page proceeded on his errand to the apothecary, and thence returned to the palace of the marchese, whose anxiety at the situation of his only child it is impossible to describe, aggravated as were his apprehensions by the singular and distressing effects of the potion which had been given the day previous. It was accordingly with the utmost impatience that he waited for the arrival of Vivaldi on the following morning. The learned physician, however, listened to an account of the effects produced by the medicine with great complacency; assured the marchese that they were precisely those which he expected and desired, and that if the course adopted were persevered in, he should have not the slightest doubt of the result being every thing that he could wish.

During this conference, Vinzentio was waiting in the ante-room of Giulietta's chamber, out of which the nurse followed the physician on his taking leave, probably for the purpose of some communication on the subject of their patient, with which, however, the presence of the page appeared to interfere. The looks exchanged by the worthy pair tended to confirm him in his opinion as to the existence of a confederacy, whether for good or for evil, and he resolved to be more than ever on the alert.

As on the preceding day, Vinzentio was summoned to administer the unwelcome dose to his lovely mistress, in whom he was greatly shocked to perceive an alteration, which, prepared for it as he was in some manner, he could not have supposed would have occurred in so brief a space. A moment's thought, however, on the important part which he was conscious of playing in the drama—he hoped it would not prove to be a tragedy—restored his self-possession. The duplicate bottle was concealed in his sleeve, and with a nerve and hardihood scarcely to be looked for at his years, but which, nevertheless, was essential to the success of his manœuvre, he effected the exchange at the very mo-

ment that he was staring the nurse full in the face. This piece of audacity he subsequently justified by alleging that had he turned from her during the operation, he could not have been sure that it had not been watched, while the attempt at concealment would, in itself, have excited suspicion.

Giulietta turned from the nauseous mixture with a shudder, occasioned by a recollection of the effects of the first she had taken; but encouraged by her favourite page, who ventured to hint that the same consequences might not result, she swallowed the draught, observing, as she did so, that there was a slight difference in the taste, which she thought not quite so disagreeable as that of the former one. This remark was not heard by the nurse, who was engaged at the window of the apartment, and Vinzentio was not sorry that it had escaped her.

Punctually at the hour of nine was our trusty page at the door of Leonardo, to whom he delivered the phial, the contents of which had been intended for his mistress. The liquor in it was perfectly transparent, and to all appearance in the same state as he had received it from the apothecary. Our student, having extracted the cork, put the bottle to his lips, and then replaced it on the table before him. He then rose, and taking from a cupboard a small mahogany cabinet, of exquisite workmanship and curiously inlaid, he opened it with a key which, suspended round his neck by a ribbon, had been concealed beneath his vest.

"This," said he to the page, "was presented to me by a celebrated German chemist, to whom it lay in my way to render some slight service. It is a valuable collection of what we call technically *tests* and *re-agents*, and consists of some very rare and costly drugs."

As he spoke, he took from the cabinet a small bottle, from which he transferred a single drop into the phial already mentioned. He then, with fixed attention, and apparent anxiety, watched the effect for some minutes, but it was scarcely perceptible, the transparency of the liquid remaining undisturbed.

The student shook his head, and resorted again to his cabinet, whence he drew another small bottle containing a powder, of which he took a few grains on the point of his pen-knife, and dropped them into the medicine. The effect of this experiment was not immediately discernible; but after the lapse of perhaps two minutes, the liquor in the phial became slightly clouded—and in the course of another minute its transparency was utterly gone.

A slight ejaculation escaped Leonardo at this stage of the experiment, but he made no remark, continuing to watch the process with intense anxiety as before. Another minute elapsed—probably a shorter space, for time moves heavily while we are looking eagerly for a result—when the opacity of the liquid diminished, and shortly afterwards, its transparency was restored, with the exception of a whitish sediment, which extended about the sixteenth part of an inch from the bottom of the phial.

"You are right, boy," exclaimed the student at the close of his test; "there is foul play here!"

"And my poor mistress is murdered!" returned the page, with a cry of horror.

"Not yet, at any rate," replied Leonardo; "but if she be not murdered, the failure will not be at the door of Vivaldi."

"I will denounce him instantly to the marchese," said the youth, in an agony of indignation and grief, at the same time seizing his cap.

"You will do no such thing, Vinzentio," responded the student, "because you will bring yourself into the awkward predicament of making a charge which you have no means of substantiating even in *foro conscientiæ*, much less in a court of justice. I see—or I greatly wrong Vivaldi—the game he is playing—which is to destroy life by degrees; so that when death occurs it should seem to be the consequence of disease, and not the result of a conspiracy, which it is hard to conceive even the devils in hell could form against so fair and amiable a being. The powder which you perceive forms a sediment in that bottle is a deadly poison, and administered even in that minute quantity, would, in the end, as surely destroy life as the pistol or the dagger. Nevertheless, it is sometimes used medicinally; and were you to denounce Vivaldi at this early stage of his plot, he would justify himself upon that ground."

"But in the meantime," inquired Vinzentio somewhat indignantly, "is my poor young lady to be sacrificed to these fiends in the guise of humanity?"

"Not if I can prevent it," replied Leonardo, "as with God's blessing and your help, I yet trust to do. You say she had taken but one dose of this devil's elixir?" he continued.

"But one," was the answer.

"Then the evil ends with the temporary inconvenience to which it subjected her. Nature will soon regain her balance, and our care must be for the future."

Thus speaking he again resorted to his cabinet, and opening another division in it, drew forth a bottle nearly full of a powder, which he remarked, as he displaced the stopper, was as precious as gold; but he added, "Were it my heart's blood, the preservation of that dear girl would consecrate the sacrifice."

He then delivered the bottle to Vinzentio, and with it, taken from a small drawer of the cabinet, a series of very minute silver

cups one within another, forming, what is technically called, a nest of measures, of course of different capacity.

"This powder," continued the student, "is in itself perfectly innocent," of which, he added, filling the largest cup with a portion of it, and placing it on his tongue, "be this the proof. It has, however, the quality of counteracting many mineral poisons and especially that to which Vivaldi has had recourse. Now with the dexterity which enabled you to substitute one phial for another, you will be at no loss to drop a portion of this powder into the cup from which the fair Giulietta takes the draught. The potion will then be as innocuous as that which you administered to her this morning, and thus she will recover in spite of the physician—and that is saying something in most cases, and a great deal in this."

"But which," asked the page, "of all these measures, am I to use?"

"Begin," replied Leonardo, "with the smallest; then use the next, and so on—increasing the quantity every day; for I doubt not that when Vivaldi perceives that his medicine fails of its desired object, he will go on adding to the portion of the pernicious ingredient in each successive dose. Now," asked the student, "can I trust you to do all this?"

"As implicitly," responded the page, "as you would one whose own life depended on his fulfilling your instructions to the letter."

"Then to you work!" said Leonardo; "which may God prosper, and thus shall we foil the conspirators with their own weapons." The duumvirate council then separated.

On the following day the physician repeated his call at the palace, when he was met by the marchese, who, his eyes sparkling with joy the while, announced to him a material improvement in his daughter. Vivaldi, with an expression of satisfaction on his lip, which however was belied by the perplexity of his looks, proceeded to the apartment of Giulietta, whom greatly to his surprise if not to his delight, he found in much better spirits, and certainly bearing the appearance of improved bodily health.

The first question propounded by the doctor was whether the last draught had produced effects similar to those which followed the former one; and on being answered by the patient in the negative, a cloud passed over his countenance; and sinking his head, he expressed his disappointment, as well as his fears, that matters were not going on as he could wish.

He took his leave, followed by the nurse into the ante-chamber, where as usual, was the indefatigable page, looking as stolid and stupid as his naturally handsome and intelligent features would allow him to do. His quick eye, however, was upon them the instant that theirs were removed from him, and he perceived Vivaldi direct a look of inquiry at the nurse, which the latter answered by an affirmative gesture.

Thus matters went on for some time; the doctor becoming every day more and more mystified, and prognosticating the worst consequences from the disappearance of the symptoms which followed the first draught, and the patient declaring that she did not care a rush for what the doctor said, for she felt that she was everyday getting better, and referred to the returning roses on her fair cheeks as evidence of the fact.

Vivaldi said nothing to her, but by way of damping the marchese's exultation on the occasion, hinted at " hectic bloom," as indicative of that disease which he feared, since his remedies failed their effect, it was past the power of medicine to cure.

In the mean time, the Council of Two met at irregular intervals, when Vinzentio reported progress, and Leonardo analyzed Vivaldi's nostrums, of which the page, by way of caution, occasionally brought him a sample acquired by a repetition of his ruse. The investigation in each case bore out the student's prediction, that the proportion of poison would be gradually augmented. The stripling, to whom the sight of Vivaldi, and the harriidan his confederate, was an abomination, was impatient to play the game out as he termed it, and thus bring matters to a crisis, by denouncing the criminals. He was, however, continually restrained by his graver and more cautious companion, who counselled him to wait for an opportunity, which the chapter of accidents would at no distant day afford him, of striking a blow with effect.

Giulietta had borne what she rightly deemed her unnecessary confinement to her apartment for a reasonable, or as some would say unreasonable, period, without a murmur, as well as without any perceptible diminution of her cheerfulness or good humour. At last, however, she began to grow impatient, to sigh for a canter on her grey palfrey, and for her accustomed drives; and we will not pledge ourselves, that her impatience was not increased by a desire to know whether a certain student of Padua looked as merry—shall we add, as handsome?—as he was wont to be. That she had some curiosity on the subject is to be inferred from the fact of her occasionally putting a careless question on the subject to her page.

Vinzentio, however—it being no part of his policy in the present position of affairs to acknowledge any very close intimacy with the student—displayed a very remarkable, and to her extremely provoking, ignorance of the individual to whom her inquiry referred. "Was he a pale young man, with a snub nose and red hair?"—"No." "Then perhaps, it was a pock-marked