

In The Furnace of Temptation

"Our gondoliers! I don't believe it. They've no right to keep us here all night. Tell them you're the American Consul."

"I'd rather not try my dignity on these underlings, Mrs. Vervain; there's no American Consul here that I could order to bombard Fusina. If they didn't mind me, I'll see what I can do further in quality of courteous foreigner. Can you perhaps tell me how long you will be obliged to detain us here?" he asked of the guard again.

"I am very sorry to detain you at all, signore, but what can I do? The commissary is unhelpfully absent. He may be here soon."

The guard relieved his apathetic contemplation of the gondoliers who did not speak a word; the windy lamentation of the fishermen rose and fell fitfully. Presently they went out of doors and poured forth their wrongs to the moon.

The room was close, and with some trouble Ferris persuaded Mrs. Vervain to return to the gondola, Florida seconding his arguments with gentle good sense.

It seemed a long time till the commissary came, but his coming instantly simplified the situation. Perhaps because he had never been able to befriend a consul in trouble before, he befriended Ferris to the utmost. He had met him with rather a beating air, but after a glance at his card, he gave a kind of roar of deprecation and apology. He had the ladies and Don Ippolito in, out of the gondola, and led them to an upper chamber, where he made them all repose their honored persons upon his sofas. He ordered up his housekeeper to make them coffee, which he served with his own hands, excusing his hurried feelings, and he stood by, rubbing his palms together, and smiling, while they finished themselves.

"They need never tell me again that the Austrians are tyrants," said Mrs. Vervain in undertone to the consul. It was not easy for Ferris to remind his host of the malefactor, but he brought himself to this ungraciousness. The commissary begged pardon, and a bed him to accompany him below, where he confronted the accused and the accusers. The tragedy was acted over again with blood-curdling effectiveness by Chiozzotti; the gondoliers maintaining the calm of conscious innocence.

Ferris felt outraged by the trumped-up charge against them.

"Listen, you others the prisoners," said the commissary. "You are all anxious to return to Venice, and I wish to fulfill it. But first I place upon him. Re-toe their robes to these honest men, and go about your business."

The injured gondoliers spoke in low tones together; then one of them shrugged his shoulders and went out. He came back with a rope and laid a rope before the commissary.

"Is that the rope?" he asked. "We found it floating down the canal, and picked it up. It is a little matter, I am glad to have served you."

"Oh, a beautiful story!" wailed the Chiozzotti. "I am sure it is a rope upon the rope, and I will go off to heaven we had let it sink to the bottom of the sea."

"Oh, a beautiful story!" wailed the Chiozzotti. "I am sure it is a rope upon the rope, and I will go off to heaven we had let it sink to the bottom of the sea."

The commissary turned to Ferris with an agreeable smile. "I am sorry that the rogues should escape," said the American.

"Oh," said the Italian, "they are poor fellows. It is a little matter, I am glad to have served you."

He took leave of his involuntary guests with effusive following them with a lantern to the gondola.

Mrs. Vervain, to whom Ferris gave an account of his trial as they set out again on their long-hindered return, had no mind save for the magical effect of his comical quality upon the commissary, and accused him of a vain and culpable modesty.

"Ah," said the diplomatist, "there's nothing like knowing just when to produce their dignity. There are some officials who know too little—like those guards; and there are some who know too much—like the commissary's superiors. But he is just in that golden mean of ignorance where he supposes a consul is a person of importance."

Mrs. Vervain disputed this, and Ferris submitted in silence. Presently, as they skirted the shore to get the bearings for the route across the lagoon, a fierce voice in Venetian shouted, from the darkness, "Indro, indro!" (Back, back!) to a group of the moon through the pale, watery clouds revealed the figure of a gondolier on the nearest point of land. The gondoliers bent to their oars, and sent the boat swiftly into the lagoon.

"There, for example, is a person who would be quite insensible to my greatness, even if I had the consular seal in my pocket. To him we are pitiable snugglers; and I must say," he continued, taking out his watch, and staring hard at it, "that if I were a disinterested person, and heard his suspicion met with the explanation that we were a little party out here for pleasure at half-past twelve a.m., I should say he was right. At any rate, we won't engage him in controversy. Quick, quick!" he added to the gondoliers, glancing at the receding shore and then at the first of the lagoon for which they were approaching. A dim shape moved along the top of the wall, and seemed to linger and scrutinize them. As they drew nearer the challenge, "Wer da?" rang out.

The gondoliers eagerly answered with the one word of German known to their craft, "Freunde," and struggled to urge the boat forward. The air of the gondolier in front slipped from the high rowlock and fell out of his hand into the water. The gondola lurched, and then suddenly ran against a post in the shallow. The sentry halted, dropped his gun from his shoulder, and ordered them to go on, while the gondoliers clamored back in the high key of fear, and one of them screamed out to his passengers to do something, saying that, a few weeks ago, a sentinel had fired upon a fisherman and killed him.

"What's that he's talking about?" demanded Mrs. Vervain. "If we don't get on, it will be that man's duty to fire on us; he has no choice."

she said, nervously and interested by the presence of this danger.

The gondoliers leaped into the water and tried to push the boat off. It would not move, and went out warning, Don Ippolito, who had sat silent since they left Fusina, stepped over the side of the gondola, and thrusting an arm under its bottom, lifted it free of the shallow.

"Oh, how very unnecessary!" cried Mrs. Vervain, as the priest and the gondoliers clambered back into the boat. "He will take his death of cold."

"It's ridiculous," said Ferris. "You ought to have told these worthless rascals what to do, Don Ippolito. You've got yourself wet for nothing. It's too bad!"

"It's nothing," said Don Ippolito, taking his seat on the little prow deck, and quietly dripping with the water would not incommode the others.

"Oh, here," cried Mrs. Vervain, gathering some shawls together. "I'll make him wrap those about his head. He'll die, I know he will—with that reeking shirt of his. If you must go into the water, I wish you had worn your abbate's dress. How could you, Don Ippolito?"

The gondoliers set their oars, but before they had given a stroke, they were arrested by a sharp reek from the fort. Another figure had joined the sentry, and stood looking at them.

"Well," said Ferris, "now what, I wonder? That's an officer. If I had a little German about me, I might state the situation to him."

He felt a light touch on his arm. "I can speak German," said Florida, timidly.

"Then you had better speak it now," said Ferris.

She rose to her feet, and in a steady voice briefly explained the situation. The figures listened motionless; then the last came politely replied, begging her to be in no uneasiness, made her a shadowy salute, and vanished. The sentry resumed his walk and took no further notice of them.

"Brava!" said Ferris, while Mrs. Vervain babied her satisfaction. "I'll buy a German Ollendorf tomorrow. The language is indispensable to a pleasure excursion in the lagoon."

Florida made no reply, but devoted herself to restoring her mother to the state of defence against the discomforts of the time and place, which the common agitation had impaired.

She seemed to have no sense of the presence of any one else. Don Ippolito did not speak again save to protect himself against the anxieties and reproaches of Mrs. Vervain, renewed and reiterated at intervals. She drowsed after a while, and whenever she woke she thought they had just told her own mind. By fits it was cloudy and moonlight; they began to meet peasants' boats going to the Rialto market. At last, they entered the Canal of the Fattori, then they came into a narrow way, and presently stopped at Mrs. Vervain's gate; this time she had not expected it. Don Ippolito gave her the hand, and entered the garden with her, while Ferris lingered behind with Florida, helping her to put together the wraps strewn about the gondola.

"Wait!" she commanded, as they moved up the garden walk. "I want to speak with you about Don Ippolito. What shall I do to him for my rudeness? You must tell me—your shall," she said in a fierce whisper, gripping the arm which Ferris had given to help her up the landing-stairs. "You are older than I am!"

"Thanks, I was afraid you were going to say wiser. I should think your own sense of justice, your own sense of duty—"

"Decency, say it, say it!" cried the girl, passionately. "It was indecent, indecent—that was it!"

"—would tell you what to do," concluded the pointer dryly.

She had been clinging to him, and where the priest stood with her mother at the foot of the terrace stairs. Don Ippolito, she cried, I want to tell you that I am sure I want to ask your pardon—how can you ever forgive me—for what I said."

She instinctively stretched her hand towards him.

"Oh!" said the priest, with an indescribable, long, trembling sigh. He caught her hand in his, held it tight, and then pressed it for an instant against his breast.

Ferris made a little start forward.

"Now, that's right, Florida," said her mother, as the four stood in the pale, estranging moonlight. "I'm sure Don Ippolito can't cherish any resentment. If he does, he must come in and wash it out with a glass of wine—that's a good old fashion. I want you to have the wine at any rate, Don Ippolito. I'll keep you from taking cold. You really must."

"Thanks, madama; I cannot lose more time, now. I must go home at once. Good-night."

Before Mrs. Vervain could frame a protest, or lay hold of him, he bowed and hurried out of the lagoon.

"How perfectly absurd for him to get into the water in that way!" she said, looking mechanically in the direction which he had vanished.

"Well, Mrs. Vervain, it isn't best to be too grateful to people," said Ferris, "but I think we must allow that we were in any danger, sticking them in the mud. Don Ippolito got out of it by putting his shoulder to the oar."

"Of course," assented Mrs. Vervain. "In fact," continued Ferris, "suppose we may say that, under a friendly eye, we probably owe our lives to Don Ippolito's self-sacrifice and Miss Vervain's knowledge of German. At any rate, it's what I shall always maintain."

"Mother, don't you think you had better go to bed?" asked Florida gently. Her gentleness ignored the presence of the existence of Ferris. "I'm afraid you will be sick after all this fatigue."

"There, Mrs. Vervain, I'll be no use offering me a glass of wine, I'm going away. Good-night. Good-night."

"What's that he's talking about?" demanded Mrs. Vervain. "If we don't get on, it will be that man's duty to fire on us; he has no choice."

Florida did not look towards him. She gathered her mother's shawl about her shoulders for the twentieth time that day, and softly urged her indoors, while Ferris let himself out into the camp.

IX.

Florida began to prepare the bed for her mother's lying down.

"What are you doing that for, my dear?" asked Mrs. Vervain. "I can't go to bed at this hour."

"But, mother—"

"No, Florida. And I mean it. You are too headstrong. I should think you would see yourself how you suffer in the end by giving way to your violent temper. What a day you have made for us!"

"I was very wrong," murmured the proud girl, meekly.

"And then the mortification of an apology; you might have spared yourself that."

"It didn't mortify me; I didn't care for it."

"No, I really believe you are too haughty to mind humbling yourself. And Don Ippolito has been so uniformly kind to us. I begin to believe that Mr. Ferris's true character in character in that sketch. But your pride will be broken some day, Florida."

"Won't you let me help you undress, mother? You can talk to me while you're undressing. You must try to get some rest."

"Yes, I am all anstrung. Why couldn't you have let me in come in and talk a while? It would have been the best way to get me quieted down. But no—you must always have your own way. Don't twitch me, my dear; I don't intend to undress myself. You pretend to be very careful, but I wonder if you really care for me."

"Oh, mother, you are all I have in the world!"

Mrs. Vervain began to whimper.

"You talk as if I were any better off. Have I anybody besides you? And I have lost so many."

"Don't think of those things now, mother."

Mrs. Vervain, tenderly kissed the young girl. "You are good to your mother. Don Ippolito was right; no one ever saw you after me, or unkindness. There, there! Don't cry, my darling. I think I had better lie down, and I'll let you undress me."

She suffered herself to be helped into bed, and Florida went softly about the room, putting it in order, and drawing the curtain closer to keep out the near dawn. Her mother took a little while, and presently fell into a slumber of silence, and so to sleep.

Florida looked hesitatingly at her for a moment, and then set her candle on the floor, and sat down on an arm-chair beside the bed. Her hands fell into her lap; her head drooped sadly forward; the light flung the shadow of her face, grotesque, exaggerated and foreshortened, upon the ceiling.

By and by a bird piped in the garden; the shriek of a swallow made itself heard from the distance; the vernal day was beginning to stir from the light, brief drowses of the vernal night. A crown of angry red formed upon the candle wick, which toppled over in the socket, and guttered out with a sharp hiss.

Florida started from her chair. A streak of sunshine pierced shutter and curtain. Her mother was supporting herself on one elbow in the bed, and looking at her as if she had just called to her.

"Mother, did you speak?" asked the girl.

Mrs. Vervain turned her face away; she sighed deeply, stretched her thin hands on the pillow, and seemed to be sinking—sinking down through the bed. She ceased to breathe, and lay in a dead faint.

Florida felt rather than saw it all. She did not cry out nor call for help. She bathed her mother's face, and then chafed her hands. Mrs. Vervain awoke revived; she opened her eyes, then closed them; she did not speak, but breathed with the long and even respirations of sleep.

Florida noiselessly opened the door, and called the servant with a tray of coffee. She put her finger to her lips, and motioned her not to enter, asking in a whisper: "What time is it, Nina? I forgot to wind my watch."

"It's past eight, signora; and I thought you would be tired this morning, and would like your coffee in bed. Oh, miseria!" cried the girl, still in whisper, with a glance through the doorway, "you haven't been in bed at all!"

"My mother doesn't seem well. I sat down beside her, and fell asleep in my chair without knowing it."

"Ah, poor little thing!—you must drink your coffee at once. It refreshes."

"Yes, yes," said Florida, closing the door, and pointing to a table in the next room. "But it's down here. I will serve myself, Nina. Go call the gondola, please. I am going out at once, and I want you to go with me. Tell Chio to come here and stay with my mother till I come back."

She poured out a cup of coffee with a trembling hand, and hastily drank it; then, bathing her eyes, she went to the glass and bestowed a touch or two upon yesterday's toilet, studied the effect a moment, and turned away. She ran back for another look, and the next moment she was walking down to the water-gate, where she found Nina waiting for her in the gondola.

A rapid course brought them to Ferris's landing. "Ring," she said to the gondolier, and say that one of the American ladies wishes to see the consul."

Ferris was standing on the balcony over her where he had been watching her approach in mute wonder. "Why, Miss Vervain," he called down, "what in the world is the matter?"

"I don't know. I want to see you," said Florida, looking up with a wistful face.

"I'll come down."

"Yes, please. Or no. I had better come up. Yes, Nina and I will come up."

Ferris met them at the lower door and led them to his apartment. Nina sat down in the outer room, and Florida followed the painter into his study. Though her face was so wan, it seemed to him that he had never seen so lovely a face, and he had a strange sense of something of the same kind as when with which young ladies regard the haunts of men when they come into them by chance; in doing this she had a naughty, slow turn of the head that fascinated him.

"I hope," he said, "you don't mind the smell," which was a mingled odor of oil-colors and tobacco smoke. "The

woman's putting my office to rights, and it's all in a cloud of dust. So I have to bring you in here."

Florida sat down on a chair fronting the easel, and for several looking into the sad eyes of Don Ippolito. Ferris brusquely turned the back of the canvas toward her. "I didn't mean to show, yet," he said, and then he stood expectantly before her. He waited for her to speak, for he never knew how to take Miss Vervain; he was willing enough to make light of her grand moods, but now she was too evidently unhappy for mocking; at the same time he did not care to involve a snub by a prematurely sympathetic demonstration. His mind ran on the events of the day before, and he thought this visit probably related somehow to Don Ippolito. But his visitor did not speak, and at last he said: "I hope there's nothing wrong at home, Miss Vervain. It's rather odd to have yesterday, last night, and next morning all run together as they have been for me the last twenty-four hours. I trust Mrs. Vervain is turning the whole thing into a good solid oblivion."

"It's about it, about it—I came to see you," said Florida, hoarsely.

"You hurried on to say that I want to ask you who is the best doctor here?"

"No, it's not about Don Ippolito. Is your mother sick?" asked Ferris, eagerly.

"She must have been fearfully tired by that unlucky expedition of ours. I hope there's nothing serious."

"No, no! But she is not well. She is very frail, you know. You must have noticed how frail she is," said Florida, emphatically.

Ferris had noticed that all his countrywomen, past their girlhood, seemed so, he did not know how or why; he supposed it was all right, it was so common. Mrs. Vervain's case, though she talked in a grand deal about her ill-health, he had noticed it rather less than usual, she had so great a spirit. He recalled now that he had thought at times rather a shadowy presence, and that occasionally it had amused him so slightly a structure should hang together as it did so unimpairedly successfully, but triumphantly.

He said yes, he knew that Mrs. Vervain was not strong, and Florida continued: "It's only advice that I want to give you. I would be better than see some one—or know some one who we could go to in need. We are so far from any one we know, or help to account for, rather than to go to Ferris, for what she was doing."

"We mustn't let anything pass unnoticed. She looked at him entreatingly, memory, passed over her face, and she said no more."

"I'll go with you to a doctor's," said Ferris kindly.

"I don't want you to go with me, please. I'd rather go alone." Ferris looked at her perplexedly, as she said, "Just give me the address, and I shall manage best by myself. I'm used to doing it."

"As you like. Wait a moment," Ferris wrote the address. "There, he said, giving it to her; but he didn't think anything I can do for you?"

"Yes," answered Florida, with awkward hesitation, and a half defiant, half imploring look at him. "I want to have all sorts of people applying to you as a consul; and you look after their affairs—and try to forget them."

"Well?" said Ferris.

"I wish you wouldn't remember that I've asked this favor of you; that you'll consider it a—"

"With all my heart," answered Ferris, thinking for the third or fourth time how very young Miss Vervain was.

She brought water and wine, and then bathed her mother's face. "I don't have any right," said Florida, smiling piteously. "I only mean, don't speak of it to my mother. Not," she added, "but what I want her to know everything I do, by the way, worry her if she thought I was anxious about her. Oh! I wish I wouldn't."

She began a hasty search for her handkerchief; he saw her lips tremble and his soul trembled with them.

In another moment, "Good morning," she said, briskly, with a sort of airy sob. "I don't want you to come down, please."

She drifted out of the room, and down the stairs, the servant maid coming into her wake.

Ferris filled his pipe, and went out on his balcony again, and stood watching the gondola in its course toward the address he had given, and smiling thoughtfully. It was really the same girl who had given poor Don Ippolito that cruel slap in the face yesterday. But that seemed no more out of reason than her sudden generous, exaggerated remorse; both were of a piece with her coming to him for help now, holding him at a distance, flinging herself upon his sympathy, and then trying to snub him, and breaking down in the effort. It was all of a piece, and the piece was bad; yet she had an angry temper, and yet she had magnificent moods, too. These contradictions, which in his reverie he felt rather than formulated, made him smile, as he stood on his balcony bathed by the morning air and sunlight, in fresh, strong ignorance of the whole mystery of women's nerves. These caprices even charmed him. He reflected that he had gone on doing the Vervains one favor after another, in spite of Florida's childish petulance, and he resolved that he would not stop now; her whims should be nothing to him, as they had been nothing hitherto. It is flattering to a man to be indispensable to a woman so long as he is not obliged to it; Miss Vervain's dependent relation to himself in this light gave her a grace in Ferris's eyes which she had wanted before.

In the meantime he saw the gondola stop, turn round, and come back to the canal that bordered the Vervain garden.

"Another change of mind," thought Ferris complacently; and rising superior to the whole fitful sex, he released himself from uneasiness on Mrs. Vervain's account. But in the evening he went to ask after her. He first sent his card to Florida, having written on it, "I hope Mrs. Vervain is better. Don't let me come in if it's any disturbance." He looked for a moment at what he had written, dimly conscious that it was patronizing, and when he entered he saw that Miss Vervain stood on the defensive, and from some weakness meant to make him feel that he was presumptuous in coming; it did not comfort him to consider that she was very young.

"Mother will be in, I'm sure," said Florida, in a tone that reargued their morning's interview to the age of table.

Mrs. Vervain came in smiling and cordial, apparently better and not worse for yesterday's misadventure.

"Oh, I pick up quickly," she explained. "I'm an old campaigner, you know. Perhaps a little too old now. You'd do me a kindness, and you'll find it out as you get on, Mr. Ferris."

"I suppose so," said Ferris, not caring to have Mrs. Vervain treat him so much like a boy. Even at twenty-six, I found it pleasant to take a nap this afternoon. How does one stand it at seventeen, Miss Vervain?" he asked.

"Haven't felt the need of sleep," replied Florida, indifferently, and he felt relieved, as an old fellow.

He had an empty, frivolous visit to his thinking. Mrs. Vervain asked if he had seen Don Ippolito, and wondered that the priest had not come about, all day. She told a long story, and at the end tapped herself on the mouth with her hand, and punished a yawn.

Ferris rose to go. Mrs. Vervain wondered again in the same words why Don Ippolito had not been near them all day.

"Because he's a woe man," said Ferris with bitterness, "and knows when to time his visits." Mrs. Vervain did not notice his bitterness, but something made Florida follow him to the outer door.

"Why, it's moonlight!" she exclaimed; and she glanced at him as though she had some purpose of atonement in her mind.

But he would not have it. "Yes, there's a moon," he said, moodily. "Good-night."

"Good-night," answered Florida, and she impulsively offered him her hand. He thought that it shook in his, but it was probably the agitation of his own nerves.

A consciousness that had been lifted from his heart came back; he walked home disappointed and defeated, he hardly knew why or in what. He did not laugh now to think how she had asked him that morning to forget her coming to him for help; he was outraged that he should have been repaid in this sort, and the rebuff with which his sympathy had just been met was vulgar; there was no other name for it but vulgarity. Yet he could not relate this quality to the face of the young girl, and he constantly beheld it in his homeward walk. It did not defy him or repulse him; it looked up at him wistfully as from the gondola that morning. Nevertheless he hardened his heart. The Vervains should see him next when they had sent for him. After all, one is not so very old at twenty-six.

X.

"Don Ippolito has come, signorina," said Nina, the next morning, approaching Florida, where she sat in an attitude of listless patience, in the garden.

"Don Ippolito!" echoed the young girl in a weary tone. She rose and went into the house, and they met with the constraint which was but too natural after the events of their last parting. It is hard to tell which has most to overcome in such a case, the forgiver or the forgiven. Ferris ruminates even in a generous soul, and the memory of having pardoned embarrasses the sensitive spirit before the object of its clemency, humbling and making it ashamed. It would be very strange, but there need be nothing of the kind between human creatures, who cannot sustain such a relation without mutual distrust. It is not so ill with them when apart, but when they meet they must be cold and shy at first.

"Now I see what you two are thinking about," said Mrs. Vervain, and a faint blush served the cheek of the priest as she thus paired him off with her daughter. "You are thinking about what happened the other day; and you're very good to forget it. There is no use brooding over these matters. Dear me! if I had stopped to brood over every little unpleasant thing that happened, I wonder where I should be now? By the way, where were you all day yesterday, Don Ippolito?"

"I did not come to disturb you, because I thought you must be very tired. Besides, I was quite busy. Oh, yes, those inventions of yours. I think you are so ingenious! But you mustn't apply too closely. Now really, yesterday, I was quite busy. I have been through it, was too much for the brain." She tapped herself on the forehead with her fan.

"I was not busy with my inventions, madam," answered Don Ippolito, who sat in the womanish attitude priests get from their drapery, and fingered the cord round his throat, as if he were a miser.

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part in the procession of Corpus Domini in the Piazza, and I had my share of the preparation."

"Oh, to be sure! When is it to be? We must all go. Our Nina has been telling Florida of the grand eight—little children dressed up like John the Baptist, leading lambs. I suppose it's a great event with you."

The priest shrugged his shoulders and opened both his hands, so that his hat slid to the floor, bumping and tumbling some distance away. He recovered it and sat down again. "It's an observance," he said, coldly. "And shall you be in the procession?"

"I shall be there with the other priests of my parish."

"Delightful!" cried Mrs. Vervain. "We shall be looking out for you. I shall feel greatly honored to think I actually know some one in the procession. I'm going to give you a little nod. You won't think it very wrong?"

She saved him from the embarrassment he might have felt in replying, by an abrupt lapse from all apparent interest in the subject. She turned to her daughter, and said, with a querulous accent, "I wish you would throw the afghan over my feet, Florida, and make me a little comfortable before you begin your reading this morning." At the same time she feebly disposed herself among the sofa cushions on which she reclined, and waited for some final touches from her daughter.

Then she said, "I'm just going to close my eyes, but I shall hear every word. You are getting a beautiful accent, my dear. I know you will. I should think Goldoni must have a very smooth, agreeable style; he's now in Italian?"

They began to read the comedy, after fifteen or twenty minutes, Mrs. Vervain opened her eyes and said, "But before you commence, Florida, I wish you'd play a little to get me quieted down. I feel so very flighty. I suppose it's this sirocco. And I believe I'll lie down in the next room."

Florida followed her to repeat the arrangements for her comfort. Then she returned, and sitting down at the piano struck with a sort of soft firmness a few low soothing chords, out of which a lulling melody grew. With her fingers still resting on the keys she turned her head, and glanced through the open door at her mother.

"Oh, Ippolito," she asked, softly, "is there anything in the air of Venice that makes people very drowsy?"

"I have never heard that, madamigella."

"I wonder, continued the young girl, absently, "why my mother wants to sleep so much?"

"Perhaps she has not recovered from the fatigue of the other night," suggested the priest.

"Perhaps," said Florida, sadly looking toward her mother's door.

She turned again to the instrument, and let her fingers wander over the keys, with a drooping head. Suddenly she lifted her face, and smoothed back her temples some straggled curls of hair. Without looking at the priest she asked with the child-like bluntness that characterized her, "Why don't you like to walk in the procession of Corpus Domini?"

Don Ippolito's color came and went, and he answered evasively. "I have not said that I did not like to do so."

"No, that is true," said Florida, "telling her fingers drop again on the keys."

Don Ippolito rose from the sofa where he had been sitting beside her while they read, and walked the length of the room. Then he came towards her and said meekly, "Madamigella, I did not mean to read any interest you feel in me. But it was a strange question to ask a priest, as I remembered I was when you asked it."

"Don't you always remember that?" demanded the girl, still without turning her head.

"No; sometimes I am suffered to forget it," he said with a tentative accent.

(To be Continued.)

Water is the hardest of all substances to heat, with the