リーロール (一方**を)**を)を)

VENDETTA;

The Story of One Forgotten.

CHAPTER XXI.-Continued.

"Vincenzo! As started

" Eccelenza?"

"Eccelenza I"
To-night you will stand behind my chair and
assist in serving the wine."
"Yes, Eccellenza."
"You will," I continued, "attend particularly to Siguor Ferrari, who will sit at my right hand. Take care that his glass is never empty."
Yes, Eccellenza."

"Whatever may be said or done," I went on nietly, "you will show no sign of alarm or irprise. From the commencement of dinner quietly, surprise. hill tell you to move, remember your place is

The honest fellow looked a little puzzled, but Yes, Eccellenza."

I smiled, and advancing, laid my hand on

"How about the pistels, Vincenzo?"

"They are cleaned and ready for use, Eccellenza," he raplied. "I nave placed them in your cabinet."

"That is well!" I said with a satisfied generated them. "You can leave me and arrange the salon for the reception of my friends."

He disappeared, and I busied myself with my toilette, about which I was for once unusually particular. The conventional dress suit is not very becoming, yet there are a few men here and there who look well in it, and who, in spite of similarity in attire, will never be mistaken for waiters. Others there are who, passable in sppearance when clad in their ordinary garments, reach the very acme of plebeianism when they clothe themselves in the unaccommodating even-ing dreess. Fortunately I happened to be one of the former class-the soher black, the broad white display of starched shirt front and neat tie became me, almost too well I thought. It would have been better for my purposes if I would have feigned an aspect of greater age and weightier gravity. I had scarcely finished my toilette when the rumbling of wheels in the courtyard outside made the hot blood rush to my face, and my heart beat with feveriah excitement. I left my dressing room, however, with a composed countenance and calm step, and entered my private salon just as its doors were flung open and "Signor Ferrari" was announced. He entered smiling—his face was alight with good humor and glad anticipation—he looked hand-

numor and glad anticipation—he looked handsomer than usual.

"Eccomt que!" he cried, seizing my hands
enthusiastically in his own. "My dear Conte,
I am delighted to see you! What an excellent
fellow you are! A kind of amiable Arabian
Nights genius, who occupies himself in making
other mortals happy. And how are you? You
look remarkably well!"

'I can return the compliment," I said gaily. "You'are more of an Antinous than ever."
He laughed, well pleased, and sat down, drawing off his gloves and loosening his travel-

ling overcoat.
Well, I suppose plenty of cash puts a man in good humor, and, therefore, in good condition," he replied. "But my dear fellow, you are dressed for dinner—quel preux chevalier! I am positively unfit to be in your company. You insisted that I should come to you directly on my arrival, but I really must change my apparel. Your man took my valiso, in it are my dress-clothes,—I shall not be ten minutes putting them on."

"Take a glass of wine first," I said, pouring out some of his favorite Montepulciano. "There is plenty of time. It is barely seven, and we do not dine till eight." He took the wine from my hand and smiled, I returned the smile, adding. "It gives me great pleasure to receive you, Ferrari! I have been impatient for your return—almost as impatient as—" He paused in the act of drinking, and his eyes

flashed delightedly,

"As she has? Piccinina! How I long to see her again! I swear to you, antico, should have gone straight to the Villa Romani had I obeyed my own impulse,—but I had promised you to come hero, and on the whole the evening will do as well." should have gone straight to the Villa Romani had I obeyed my own impulse,—but I had promised you to come here, and, on the whole, the evening will do as well,"—and he laughed with a covert meaning in his laughed,—"perhaps better!"

My hands clenched, but I said with forced gaiety.

arrisofuncomfortable presentiments and forebodings"

"No wonder," I returned carels:ly, "with such a spectacle as you have described before the eyes of your memory. The Eternal City savors somewhat disagreeably of graves. Shake the dust of the Caesars from your feet, and enjoy your life, while it lasts!"

Excellent advice!" he said, amilian the said.

gaiety.
"Ma certamente! The evening will be much

better! Is it not Byron who says that women, like stars, look best at night? You will find her the same as ever, perfectly well and per-fectly charming. It must be her pure and candid soul that makes her face so fair? It may be a relief to your mind to know that I am the only man she has allowed to visit her during Thank God for that!" cried Ferrari de-

voutly, as he tossed off his wine. "And now tell me, my dear Conte, what bacchanalians are coming to-night? Pcr Dio, after all I am more in the humor for dinner than love-making!"

Thursh out laughling harshly. "Of course I burst out laughling harshly. "Of course! Every sensible man prefers good eating even to good women! Who are my guests yo usk I believe you know them all. First, there is the Duca Filippo Mariana."

"By Heaven!" interrupted Guido. "An absolute gentlemen, who by his manner seems to challenge the universe to disprove his dig-nity! Can be unbend so far as to partake of fied in public? My dear Conte, you should have asked him that question!"

I watched him narrowly, and went en with the list of my invited guests. "After these, comes the Capitano Luig

ccia"
What! the raging fire-eater?" exclaimed
do. "He who at every second word raps out a Pagan or Christian oath, and cannot for his life tell any difference between the two !" "And the illustrious gentlemen Crispiano Dulci and Antonio Biscardi, artists like yourself." I continued. He frowned slightly, -then smiled.

"Then," I went on, not heeding this inter-ruption, 'Signor Fraschetti and the Marchese

Giutano drinks deep!" laughed Ferrari "and should he mix his wines, you will find him ready to stab all the waiters before the dinner is half over."

"In mixing wines," I returned coolly, "he will but imitate your example, care mio."
"Ah, but I can stand it!" he said. "He cannot. Few Neapolitans are like me !" "I wish them good appetites! Time was when I envied their skill—now I can afford to be zenerous. They are welcome to the whole

field of arb as far as I am concerned. I have said farewell to the brush and palette—I shall

True enough, I thought, eyeing the shapely white hand with which he just then stroked his dark moustache; the same hand on which my family diamond ring glittered like a star. He looked up suddenly.

"Go on, Conte! I am all impatience. Who ome next?"

"More fire-eaters, I suppose you wi ileall them," I answered. "and French fire-eaters, oo. Monsieur le Marquis D'Avencourt and le beau Capitaine Eugene Hamal."

Ferrari looked astonished. "Fer Bacco,' he exclaimed. "Two noted Paris duellists! Why—what need have you of such valerous asceiates." I confess your choice experience as

"I understood them to be your friends," I said composedly. "If you remember, you introduced me to them. I know nothing of the gentlemen beyond that they appear to be pleasant fellows and good talkers. As for their reputed skill I am inclined to set that down to a mere rumor, at any rate, my dinner-table will scarcely provide a field for the display of

swordsmanship."
Guido laughed. "Well no! but these fellows

said Ferrari gaily, enumerating them on his fingers. "Per la madre di Dio! With such a goodly company and a host who entertains en roi we shall pass a merry time of it. And did you, amico, actually organise this banquet, merely to welcome back so unworthy a person as myself?"

Solely and entirely for that reason," I replied. He jumped up from his chair and clapped his

two hands on my shoulders.
"A la bonne heure! But why in the name of "Why have I taken such a fancy to me?"
"Why have I taken such a fancy to you?" I repeatedly slowly. "My dear Ferrari, I am surely not alone in my admiration for your high qualities! Does not every one like you? Are you not a universal favorite? Did you not tell me that your late friend the Romani held you as the dearest to him in the world after his wife? Liberc! Why underrate yourself?"
He let his hands fall slowly from my shoulders and a look of pain contracted his features. After

a little silence he said. "Fabio again! How his name and memory haunt me ! I told you he was a fool,-it was part of his folly that he loved me too well,perhaps. Do you know I have thought of him very much lately?"
"Indeed?" and I feigned to be absorbed in

fixing a star-like japonica in my butten-hole. "How is that?"

A grave and meditative look softened the usually defiant brilliancy of bis eyes.

"I saw my uncle die," he continued, speaking in a low tone. "He was an old man and had very little strength left, yet his battle with death was horrible—horrible. I see him yet,—his yellow convulsed face,—his twisted limbs—his death with the horrible. his claw-like hands tearing at the empty air,— then the ghastly grin and dropped jaw—the wide-open glazed eyes—pshaw! it sickened me l'

"Well, well!" I said in a soothing way, still busying myself with the arrangement of my button-hole, and secretly wondering what new emotion was at work in the volatile mind of my victim. "No doubt it was distressing to wit-ness,—but you could not have been very sorry, —he was an old man, and, though it is a plati-

—he was an old man, and, though it is a platitude not worth repeating,—we must all die."
"Sorry!" exclaimed l'errari, talking almost
more to himself than to me. "I was glad!
He was an old scoundrel, deeply dyed in every
sort of social villainy. No—I was not sorry,
only as I watched him in his frantic struggle,
fighting furiously for each fresh carn of breath fighting furiously for each fresh gasp of breath,

—I thought,—I know not why—of Fabio."

Profoundly astonished, but concealing my astonishment under an air of indifference, I began to laugh. Upon my word, Ferrari-pardon me for saying so, but the air of Rome seems to have somewhat obscured your mind! I confess I

cannot follow your meaning."

He sighed uneasily, "I dare say not! I scarce can follow it myself. But if it was so hard for an old man to writhe himself out of life, what must it have been for Fabio were students together; we used to walk with our arms round each other's necks like school girls, and he was young and full of vitality—physically stronger, too, than I am. He must have battled for life with every perve and sinew stretched to almost breaking." He stopped and shuddered. "By heaven! death should be made easier for us!

It is a frightful thing !" A contemptuous pity arose in me. Was he coward as well as traitor? I touched him lightly

on the arm.
"Excuse me, my young triend, if I say frank ly that your dismal conversation is slightly fatiguing. I cannot accept it as a suitable pre paration for dinner. And permit me to remind

you that you have still to dress."

The gentle satire of my tone made him look up and smile, His face cleared, and he passed his hand over his forehead, as though he swept it free of some unpleasant thought.
"I believe I am nervous," he said with a half

laugh. "For the last few hours I have had all sorts of uncomfortable presentiments and fore-

not difficult to follow. Now to attire for the

festival, Have I your permission?"

I touched the bell which summoned Vincenzo, and bade him wait on Signor Ferrari's orders. Guido disappeared under his escott, giving me a laughing nod of salutation as he left the room. I watched his retiring with a strange pitifulness - the first emotion of the kind had awakened in me for him since l learned his treachery. His allusion to that time when we had been students together when we had walked with arms round each other's necks "like school girls," as he said, had touched me more closely than I cared to realise.

It was true, we had been happy then—Two
careless youths with all the world like an untrodden race course before us. She had not then darkened the heaven of our confidence she had not come with her false fair face to make of me a blind, doting madman, and to transform him into a liar and hypocrite. It was all her fault, all the misery a she was the blight on our lives; she merited the heaviest punishment, and she would re-ceive it. Yet, would to God we had neither of us ever seen her. Her beauty, like a sword, had severed the bonds of friendship that after all, when it does exist between two men, is better and brayer than the love of woman. However, all regrets were unaviling now; the evil was done, and there was no undoing it. I had little time left me for reflection; each moment that passed brought me nearer the end I had planned and foreseen.

CHAPTER XXIII.

At about a quarter to eight my guests began to arrive, and one by one they all came in save two—the hrothers Respetti. While we were two—the hrothers Respetti. While we were awaiting them, Ferrari entered in evening dress, with the conscious air of a handsome man who knows he is looking his best. I readily admitted knows he is looking his best. I readily admitted his charm of manuer; had I not myself been subjugated and fascinated by it in the old happy, foolish days? He was enthusiastically greeted and welcomed back to Naples by all the gentlemen assembled, many of whom were his own particular friends. They embraced him in the impressionable style common to Tablans with the execution of the tracket live. Italians, with the exception of the stately Duca di Marina, who merely bowed courteously, and inquired if certain families of distinction whom he named had yet arrived in Rome for the winter season. Ferrari was engaged in replying to these questions with his usual graceful ease and fluency, when a note was brought to me marked "Immediate." It contained a profuse and elegantly worded apology from Carlo Respetti, who regretted deeply that an unforeseen matter of business would prevent himself and his brother from having the inestimable honor and delight of dining with me that evening. I thereupon rang my bell as a sign that the dinner need no longer be delayed; and, turning to those assembled, I announced to them the un-

those assembled. I announced so them the unavoidable absence of two of the party.

"A pity Francesco could not have come," said Captain Freecia, twirling the ends of his long moustachies. "He loves good, wine, and,

tong monaraginos. The loves good wine, and, better still, good company."
"Caro Capitano!" broke in the musical voice of the Marchese Gualdro, "you know that our Francesco goes nowhere without his beloved Carlo cannot come,—altro! Francesco will not. Would that all men were such brothers!"

"If they were," laughed Luziano Salustri,

rising from the piano where had been playing softly to himself, "half the world would be thrown out of employment. You, for instance" turning to the Marquis D'Avencourt, "would scarce know what to do with your time."

Guido laughed. "Well no I but these fellows would like to make it one, —why they will pick a quarrel for the mere lifting of an eyebrow. And the rest of your company?"

"Are the inseparable brother sculptors Carlo and Francesco Respetti, Chevalier Maucini, scientist and man of letters, Luziano Salustri, poet and musiciau, and the fascinating Marchese poet and musiciau, and the fascinating Marchese thou was remarkably small and delicately formed, — it looked almost fragile. Yet the attength and supplied the strong of D'Avan Gurt's wrist was reputed.

idea of all men fraternising together in one common pig-stye of equality. Look at the differences of caste! Birth, breeding and education make of man that high-metiled, sensitive animal known as gentleman, and not all the metile of the cast of th socialistic theories in the world can force him down on the same level with the boor, whose flat nose and course features announce him as plebeian even before one hears the tone of his voice. We cannot help these things. I do not think we would help them even if we could."

"You are quite right," said Ferrari. "You cannot put race-horses to draw the plough. I

have always imagined that the first quarrelthe Cain and Abel affair,-must have occurred through some difference of caste as well as jealousy, for instance, perhaps Abel was a negro and Cain a white man, or vice versa; which would account for the antipathy existing between the races to this day."

The Duke di Marina coughed a stately

The Duke di Marina cooga-cough, and shrugged his shoulders. "That first quarrel," he said, "as related in the Bible, was exceedingly vulgar. It must have been a kind of prize fight. Ce n'était pas

We laughed,—and at that moment the door was thrown open, and the head waiter an-nounced in solemn tones befitting his dignity— "Le diner de Monsieur le Comte est servi!"

I at once led the way to the banqueting room,-my guests followed gaily, talking and esting among themselves. They were ail in high good humor, none of them had as yet noticed the fatal blank caused by the absence of the brothers Respetti. I had,—for the number of my guests now thirteen instead of fifteen. Thirteen at table! I wondered if any of the company were superstitious? Ferrari was not, I knew,—unless his nerves had been latterly shaken by witnessing the death of his nucle. At any rate I resolved to say nothing that should attract the attention of my guests to the ill-omened circumstance; if any one should notice it, it would be easy to make light of it and of all similar superstitions. I myself was the one most affected by it,— it had for me a curious and fatal significance. I was so occupied with the consideration of it that I scarcely attended to the words addressed to me

by the Duke di Marina, who, walking beside me, seemed disposed to converse with more familiarity than was his usual custom. We reached the door of the dining room; which at our approach was thrown wide open, and delicious strains of music met our ears as we en-tered. Low murmurs of astonishment and admiration broke from all the gentlemen as they viewed the sumptuous scene before them. pretended not to hear their eulogies, as I took my seat at the head of the table, with Guido Ferrari on my right and the Duke di Marina on my left. The music sounded louder and more my left. triumphant, and while all the company were senting themselves in the places assigned to

as I can translate it ran as follows:-"Welcome the festal hour! Pour the red wine into cups of gold! Health to the men who are strong and bold! Welcome the festal hour!

them, a choir of young fresh voices broke forth into a Neapolitan "madrigale," which as far

Waken the echoes with riotous mirth-Cease to remember the sorrows of earth In the joys of the festal hour! Wine is the monarch of laughter and light, Death himself shall be merry to night! Hail to the festal hour !"-

An enthusiastic clapping of hands rewarded this effort on the part of the unseen vocalists, and the music having ceased, conversation be

came general. "By Heaven!" exclaimed Ferrari, "if this Olympian carouse is meant as a welcome to me, Olympian carouse is meant as a welcome to me, antico, all I can say is that I do not deserve it. Why, it is more fit for the welcome of one king to his neighbor sovereign!"

"Ebbene!" I said. "Are there any better kings than honest men? Let us hope we are thus for worthy of each other's esteem."

thus far worthy of each other's esteem."

He flashed a bright look of gratitude upon me and was silent, listening to the choice and

complimentary phrases uttered by the Duke di Marina concerning the exquisite taste displayed in the arrangement of the table.
"You have no doubt travelled much in the East, Conte," said this nobleman. "Your

East, Conte," said this nobleman. "Your banquet reminds me of an Oriental romance I once read, called Vathck." laimed Guido. Oliva must be Vathek himself !"

"Scarcely!" I said, smiling coldly. "I lay no claim to supernatural experiences. The realities of life are sufficiently wonderful for

Antonio Biscardi, the painter, a refined, gentle-featured man, looked towards us and

said modestly.
"I think you are right, Conte. The beauties of rature and of humanity are so varied and profound that were it not for the inextinguishplaced in every one of us, I think we should be perfectly satisfied with this world as it is."

"You speak like an artist and a man of even

temperament," broke in the Marchese Gundro, who had finished his soup quickly in order to be able to talk,—talking being his chief delight.
"For me, I am never contented. I never have enough of anything! That is my nature, When I see levely flowers, I wish more of them. when I behold a fine sunset, I desire many more such sunsets, when I look upon a lovely

"You would have lovely women ad infinitum," laughed the French Capitaine de Hamal. "En vérité, Gualdre, you should have been a

"And why not?" demanded Gualdro. "The Turks are very sensible people—they know how to make coffee better than we do. And what more fascicating than a harem? It must be like a fragrant hot-house, where one is free to wander every day, sometimes gathering a gorgeous lily, sometimes a simple violet—some

"A thorn?" suggested Salustri. "Well, perhaps!" laughed the Marchese. Yet one would run the risk of that for the sake of a perfect rose."

Chevalier Mancini, who wore in his button

hole the decoration of the Legion d'Honneur looked up-he was a thin man with keen eye and a shrewd face which, though at a first glance, appeared stern, could at the least pro-vocation break up into a thousand little

wrinkles of laughter.
"There is undoubtedly something entrainant about the idea," he observed, in his methodical way. "I have always fancied that marriage, "And that is why you have never tried it?"

"And that is why you have never tried it?"

queried Ferrari, looking amused.

"Certissimamente!" and the Chevalier's grim

countenance began to work with satirical humor. "I have resolved that I will never be bound over by the law to kiss only one woman As matters stand, I can kiss them all if I like. A shout of merriment and cries of "Oh! Oh!" greeted this remark, which Ferrari, however, did not seem inclined to take in good

"All ?" be said, with a dubious air. "You mean all except the married ones?"

The Chevalier put on his spectacles and surveyed him with a sort of comic severity.
"When I said all I meant all," he returned.

part.

I burst out laughing. "You are right, Man-cini," I said. "Come, amico!" I added, turn-ing to Ferrari, "those are your own sentiments; you have often declared them to me. He smiled uncomfortably, and his brows contracted. I could easily perceive that he was annoyed. To change the tone of the conversation I gave a signal for the music to recommence, and instantly the melody of a slow voluptuous Hungarian waltz-measure floated voluptuous Hungarian waltz-measure floated through the room. The dinner was now fairly on its way; the appetites of my guests were stimulated and tempted by the choicest and most savoury viands, prepared with all the taste and intelligence a first-rate chef can bestow on his work, and good wine flowing freely,

Vincenzo, obediently following my instructions, stood behind my chair, and seldom my chair, and seldom my chair appears to ratell Ferraria class.

know, is more entrancing than the voice of Adelina Patti. I have only to add," and I hand'e the sword, whether in play or grim smiled half mockingly. "the name of Signor Guido Ferrari, true friend and loyal lover,—
and the party is complete."

"It is an impossible dream." he said in reply to the first beverage he had selected, a to the remarks of Guildro and Salustri, "that the sal to be prodigious by those who had seen him hand'e the sword, whether in play or grim hand'e the sword, whether in play or grim the good example shown by the wisest Italians, who never mix their wines. He remained to the remarks of Gualdro and Salustri, "that idea of all men fraternising together in one common pig-stye of equality. Look at the differences of caste! Birth, breeding and eductions and careful man, and follows in an abstemious and careful man, and follows in a national support mix their wines. He remained the faithful to the first beverage he had selected, a specially fine Uhianti, of which he partock freely without its causing the slight firstly without its causing the slight former on his pale, aristorated features. Its warm and meliow flavor differences of caste! Birth, breeding and eduction in the good example shown by the wisest Italians, who never mix their wines. He remained the good example shown by the wisest Italians, who never mix their wines. He remained the good example shown by the wisest Italians, who never mix their wines. He remained the good example shown by the wisest Italians, who never mix their wines. He remained the good example shown by the wisest Italians, who never mix their wines. He remained the good example shown by the wisest Italians, who never mix their wines. He remained the good example shown by the wisest Italians, who never mix their wines. did but brighten his eyes and loosen his torgue, inasmuch that he became almost as elegant a talker as the Marchese Gualdro. This latter, who scarce had a scudo to call his own, and who dine: sumptuously every day at other people's expense for the sake of the pleasure his company afforded, was by this time entertaining every one near him by the most sparkling stories and witty pleasantries. The inerriment increased as the various courses

were served; shouts of laughter frequently interrupted the loud buzz of conversation, mingling with the clinking of glasses and clattering of porcelain. Every now and then might be heard the smooth voca of Captain Freccia rolling out his favorite oaths with the sonority and expression of primo tenore; sometimes the elegant French of the Marquis D'Avencourt, with his high, sing-song Parisian accent, rang out above voices of the others; and again, the choice Tuscan of the poet Luziano Salustri rolled forth in melodious cadence as though he were chanting lines from Dante or Ariosto, instead or talking lightly on indifferent matters. I accrited my share in the universal hilarity, though I principally divided my conversation between Ferrari and the Duke, paying to both, but specially to Ferrari, that absolute attention which is the greatest compliment a host can bestow on those whom he undertakes to entertain.

We had reached that stage of the banquet when the game was about to be served,—the invisible choir of boys voices. had just completed an enchanting stornello with an accompaniment of mandolines, when a stillness, strange and unaccountable, fell upon the company—a pause—an ominous hush, as attend to him or not. The glib tongue of though some person supreme in suthority had the Marchese Gualdro ran on smoothly suddenly entered the room an! com manded "silence!" No one seemed dismanded posed to speak or to move, the very rootsteps of the waiters were muffled in the velvet jile of the carpet;—no sound was heard but the measured plash of the fountain that played among the ferns and flowers. The moon, shining frostly white through the one uncurtained window, cast a long pale green ray, ike the extended arm of an appealing ghost,

against one side of the velvet hangings—a spectral effect which was heightened by the contrast of the glarish glitter of the waxen tapers. Each man looked at the other with a sort of uncomfortable embarrassment, and somehow, though I moved my lips in an endeavor to speak and thus break the spell, I was at a loss, and could find no language suitable to the moment. Ferrari toyed with his wine glass mechanically,—the Duke appeared absorbed in arranging the crumbs beside his plate into little methodical patterns; the stillness seemed to last so long that it was like a suffocating heavmess in the air. Suddenly Vincenzo, in his office of chief butler, drew the cork of a champagne bottle with a loud-sounding pop! We all started as though a pistol had been fired in our ears, and the Marchese Gualdro burst

out laughing.
"Corpo di Bacco!" he cried. "At last you have awakened from sleep! Were you all struck dumb, anici, that you stared at the tablecloth so persistently and with such admir-

were all dead men!"
"And that idea made you also hold your tongue, which is quite an unnaccountable miracle in its way," laughed Luzian Salustri. acle in its way," laughed Luzian Salustri. "Have you never heard the pretty legend that attaches to such an occurrence as a sudden si-lence in the midst of high festivity? An angel enters, bestowing his benediction as he passes "That story is more ancient than the Church,

said Chevalier Mancini. "It is an exploded theory,—for we have ceased to believe in angels—we call them women instead."

"Bravo, non vieux gaillard!" cried Captain de Hamal. "Your sentiments are the same as mine, with a very trifling difference.

And he drained his glass, nodding to Mancini,

who followed his example.
"Perhaps," said the smooth, slow voice Captain Freecia, "our silence was caused by the instinctive conscioueness of something wrong with our party—a little inequality,—which I dare say our noble host has not thought

it worth while to mention."

Every head was turned in his direction.
"What do you mean?" "What inequality?"
"Explain yourse'f!" chorused several voices. "Really it is a mere nothing," answered Freecoa lazily, as he surveyed with the admiring air of a gourmet the dainty portion of phea-ing air of a gourmet the dainty portion of phea-sant just placed before him. "I as ure you, only the uneducated would care two scudi about such a circumstance. The excellent brothers Respet i are to blame, their absence to-night has caused... but why should I disturb your equantarity? I am not superstitious-ma, chi sa?-some o

I see what you mean!" intercupted Salustri quickly. "We are thirteen at table!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

At this announcement my guests looked fur tively at each other, an i I could see they were counting up the fatal number for themselves. They were undeniably clever, cultivated men of the world, but the superstitious element was in their blood, and all, with the exception perhaps of Freezia and the ever cool Marquis D'Avencourt were evidently rendered uneary by the fact now discovered. On Ferrari it had a curious effect, he started violently and his face flushed. Diavalo /" he muttered under his breath, and seizing his never-empty glass, he swallowed its contents thirstly and quickly at one guip as though attacked by fever, and pushed away his plate with a hand that trembled nervously. I, meanwhile, raised my voice and addressed my guests cheerfully:
"Our distinguished friend Salustri is perfect-

ly right, gentlemen. I myself noticed the diecrepancy in our number some time ago, but I knew that you were all advanced thinkers, who had long since liberated yourselves from the tranmels of superstitious observations. servances. Therefore I said nothing. The silly notion of any misfortune attending the number thirteen arose, as you are aware, out of the story of the Last Supper, and children and women may possibly still give credence to the fancy that one out of thirteen at table must be a traitor and doomed to die. But we men know better. None of us here to night have rea on to put ourselves in the position of a Christ or a Judas—we are all good friends and boon companions, and I cannot suppose for a moment that this little cloud can possibly affect you seriously. Remember also that this is Christmas Eve, and that according to the world's greatest poet, Shakespeare, "Then no planet strikes,

No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm, So hallowed and so gracious is the time.'" A murmur of appliance and a hearty clapping of hands rewarded this little speech, and the Marchese Gualdro sprang to his feet—
"By heaven!" he exclaimed, "we are not a party of terrified old women to shiver on the

signori! More wine, garcon! Per Bacco! if Judas Iscariot himself had such a feast as ours before he hanged himself, he was not much to be pitied! Hold amic!! To the health of our noble host, Conte Cesare Oliva!"

He waved his glass in the air three times,

every one followed his example and drank the toast with enthusiasm. I bowed my thanks and acknowledgments, and the supersti-tious dread which at first had undoubtedly seized the company, passed away quickly,
—the talking, the merriment, and laughter
were resumed, and soon it seemed as though
the untoward circumstance were entirely forone autoward circumsusuce were entirely for-gotten. Only Guido Ferrari seemed still some-what disturbed in his mind, but even his un-easiness dissipated itself by degrees, and heated by the quantity of wine he had taken, he began to talk with boastful braggartism of his many moved except to re-fill Ferrari's glass, to talk with boastful braggartism of his many and occasionally to proffer some fresh vintage successful gallanteries, and related his most to the Duke de Marina. He, however, was questionable anneedetes in such a manner as to

cause some haughty astonishment in the mind of the Duke di Marina, who eyed him from time to time with ill-disguised im-patience that bordered on contempt. I, on the contrary, listened to everything he said with urbane courtery, -I humoured him and drew him out as much as possible, —I smiled complaiently at his poor jokes and vulgar witticisms,—and when he said something that was more than usually outrageous, I contented myself with a benevolent shake of my head, and the mild remark—"Ah! young blood!" uttered

in a bland souto-voce...

LARANGE SERVICE

The desart was now served, and with it came the costly wines which I had ordered to be kept back till then. Priceless "Chateau Yonem," "Clos Vougeot," of the rarest vintage, choice "Valputcello" and an exceedingly superb "Lacrima Cristi"—one after the other, these were tasted, criticised, and hearthy appreciated. There was also a very unique branc of champagne costing nearly forty francs a bot-tle, which was spackling and mellow to the palate, but fine in quality. This particular beverage was so seductive in flavor that every one partook of it freely, with the result that the most discreet among the party now became the most uproarious. Antonio Biscardi, the quiet and unobtrusive painter, together with his fellow-student, Crispiano Dulci, usually the shyest of young men, suddenly grew excited, and uttered blatant nothings concerning their art. Captain Freccis argued the niceties of sword-play with he Marquis D'Avencourt, both speakers illustrating their various points be their dessert-knives skillfuly by thrusting their into pulpy bodies of the peaches they had on their plates. Luziano Salustri lay back at ease in his chair, his classic head reclining on the velvet cushions, and recited in low and measured tones one of his own poems, caring little or nothing whether his neighbors and incessantly, though he frequently lost the thread of his anecdotes and became involved in a maze of contradictory assertions. The rather large nose of the Chevalier Mancini reddened visibly as he laughed joyously to himself at nothing in par-ticular,—in short, the table had become a glittering whillpeol of excitement and feverish folly, which at a mere touch, or word out of season, might rise to a raging storm of frothy dissension. The Duke di Marina and myself alone of all the company were composed as usual,—he had resisted the champagne, and as for me, I had let all the splendid wines go past me, and had not taken more that two glasses of a mild Chianti.

I glauced keenly around the riotous board,-I noted the flushed faces and rapid gesticula-tions of my guests, and listened to the Babel of conflicting tongues. I drew a long breath as I looked.—I calculated that in two or three minutes, at the very least, I might throw down the trump card I had held so patiently in my

hand all the evoning.

I took a close observation of Ferrari. He had edged his chair a little away from mine, and was talking confidentially to his neighbor, Captain de Hamal,—his utterance was low and have awakened from sleep! Were you all struck dumb, anici, that you stared at the tablecloth so persistently and with such admirable gravity? May St. Anthony and his pig preserve me, but for tas time I fancied I was attending a banquet on the wrong side of the Styx, and that you, my present companions, were all dead men!" sacred in heaven or earth. My blood rapidly beated itself to boiling point—to this day I remember how it throbbed in my temples, leaving my hands and feet icy cold. I rose in my seat and tapped on the table to call for silence and attention-but for some time the noise of argument and clatter of tongues were so great that I could not make myself heard. Duke endeavored to second my efforts, but in

At last Ferrari's notice was attracted-he turned round, and seizing a dessert knife reat with it on the table and on his own plate so noisily and persistently, that the laughter and conversation ceased suddenly. The moment had come—I raised my head, fixed my spectacles more firmly over my eyes, and spoke in distinct and steady tones, first of all stealing a covert glance towards Ferruri. He had sunk back again in his chair and was lighting a cig-

arette.

"My friends," I said, meeting with a smile the inquiring looks that were directed towards me, "I have presumed to interrupt your mirth for a moment, not to restrain it, but rather to night, as you know, to honor me by your presence and to give a welcome to our mutual friend, Signor Guido Ferrari." Here I Here 1 the stains of wine from my coat and vestwas interrupted by the loud clapping of hands and ejaculations of approval, while Ferrari bimself murmured affably between two pulls of his cigarette, "Tropp' onore, amico, tropp' onore!" I resumed, "This young and accomplished gentleman, who is, I believe, a favorite with you all, has been compelled through domestic affairs to absent himself from our circle for the past faw weeks, and I think he must himse'f be aware how much we have missed his pleasant company. It will, however, be agreeable for you, as it has been for me, to know that he has returned to Naples a richer man than when he left it—that fortune has done him justice, and that with the possession of abundant wealth he is at last called upon to enjoy the reward due to his

Here there was more clapping of hands and exclamations of plea ure, while those who were seated near Ferrari raised their glasses and drank to his health with congratulations, all of which courtesies he acknowledged by a non-chialant, self-satisfied bow. I glanced at him again—how tranquil he looked, reclining among the crimson cushions of his chair, a brimming glass of champagne beside him, the cigarette between his lips, and his handsome face slightly upturned, though his eyes rested half drawsily on the uncurtained window through which the Bay of Naples was seen glittering in the moonlight.

I continued,-" It was, gentlemen, that you might welcome and conventuate Signor Ferrari as you have done, that I assembled you here to-night,—or rather, let me say it was partly the object of our present feativity,—but there is yet another reason which I shall now have the pleasure of explaining to you,—a reason which, as it concerns myself and my immediate happiness, will, I feel confident, secure your sympathy and good wishes."

This time every one was silent, intently fol-

lowing my words.
"What I am about to sey," I went on calmly, "may very possibly surprise you. I have been known to you as a man of few words, and, I known to you as a man of new words, and, I fear, of abrupt and brusque manners,"—cries of "No, no!" mingled with various complimentary assurances reached my ears from all sides of the table,—I bowed with a gratified air, and when glence was restored,—"At any rate you would not think me precisely the sort of man to the chart force." take a lady's fancy." A look of wonder and curiosity was now exchanged among my guests. Ferrari took his cigarette out of his mouth and stared at me in blank astonishment.

"No," I went on meditatively, "old as I am, and a half-blind invalid besides, it seems incredible that any woman should care to look at me more than twice cn passant. But I have met,—let me say with the Chevalier Maucini,—an angel,—who has found me not displeasing to

her, and, in short, I am going to marry."

There was a pause. Ferrari raised himself slightly from his reclining position and seemed

laughter.

"Say farewell to jollity, Conte!" cried Chevalier Mancini; "once drawn along by the rustling music of a woman's gown, no more such feasts as we have had to-night!"

And he shook his head with tipsy melan-

choly.
"By all the gods!" exclaimed Gualdro,
"By all the gods!" and I should have

too ! Why, man, freedom could give you twenty !' "Ah !" murmured Salustra softly and senti mentally, "but the one perfect pearl—the ene

"Bah! Saluetri, caro mio, you are half asleep!" returned Gualdro. "Tis the wine talks, not you. Thou are conquered by the bottle, amico. You, the darling of all the vomen in Naples, to talk of one ! Buona notte, bambino !" I still maintained my standing position, lean-

ing my two hands on the table before mea.
"What our worthy Gualdro says," Lwent on, "is perfectly true. I have been noted for my antipathy to the fair sex. I know it. But my antipathy to the fair sex. I know it. But when one of the loveliest among women comes out of her way to tempt me,—when she herself displays the matchiess store of her countless fascinations for my attraction—when she honours me by special favors and makes me plainly aware that I am not too presumptuous in venturing to aspire to her hand in marriage,—what can I do have cover with what can I do but accept with a good grace the fortune thrown to me by Prividence? I should be the most ungrateful of men were I to refuse so precious a gift from heaven, and I confess I fell no inclination to fell no inclination to reject what I consider to be the certainty of happiness. I, therefore, ask you all to fill your glasses, and do me the favor to drink to the health and happiness of my future

EGualdro sprang erect, his glass held high in the air; every man followed his example. Ferrari rose to his feet with some unsteadiness, while the hand that held his full champagne

while the hand that held his full champagne glass trembled.

The Duke di Marina, with a courteous gesture, addressed me—"You wi!!, of course, honor us by disclosing the name of the fair lady whom we are prepared to toast with all bediting reverging?" fitting reverence? "I was about to ask the same question," said

Ferraii in hoarse accents,—his lips were dry, and he appeared to have some difficulty in speaking. "Possibly we are not acquainted speaking. with her?" "On the contrary," I returned, eyeing him steadily with a cool smile. "You all know her name well! Illustrissimt Signori!" and my

voice rang out clearly—"to the health of my betrothed wife, the Contessa Romani!"

"Liar!" shouted Ferrari, and with all a madman's fury he dashed his brimming glass of champagne full in my face! In a second the wildest scene of confusion ensued. Every man left his place at table left his place at table and surrounded stood erect and perfectly calm, wiping with my bandkerchief the little runlets of wine that dripped from my clothing, the glass had fallen at my feet, staiking the table as it fell, and splitting itself to atoms.

"Are you drunk or mad, cried Captain de Hamal, seizing him by the arm—"do you know what you have done?"

Ferrari glared about him like a tiger at bay-Ferrari glared about him like a trger at oay—his face was flushed and swollen like that of a man in apoplexy—the veins in his forehead atood out like knotted cords,—his breath came and went hard as though he had been running. He turned his folling eyes upon me. "Damn you!" he muttered through his clenthed taeth—then suddenly raising his voice to a "Damn you!" he muttered through ship voice to a teeth,—then suddenly raising his voice to a shriek, he cried, "I will have your blood if I tear your heart out for it!"—and he made an effort to spring upon me. The Marquis D'Avencourt quietly caught his other arm and held it as in a vice.

"Not so fast, not so fast, mon cher!" he said coolly. We are not murderers, we! What davil possesses you, that you offer such unwarrantable insult to out host !" "Ask him !" r plied Ferrari fiercely, strug-

gling to release himself from the grasp of the Frenchmen-"he knows, well enough Ask him !" All eyes were turned inquiringly upon the. I was silent. "The noble Conte is really not bound to give

"The noble Conte is really not bound to give any explanation," remarked Captain Freccia, "even admitting he were able to do so."

"I assure you, my friends," I said, "I am ignorant of the cause of this fracas, except that this young gentleman had pretensions himself

to the lauy whose name affects him so se-For a moment I thought Ferrari would have

choked.
"Pretensions—pretensions!" he gasped. "Gran Dio ?" Hear him !—hear the miserable acoundrel."

"Ah, basta!" exclaimed Chevalier Maucini, scorufully—" is that all? A mere bagatelle! Ferrari, you were wont to be more sensible! What! quarrel with an excellent friend for the sake of a woman who happens to prefer him to you! Mache! Women are plentiful, -- friends ate few."
"If," I resumed, still methodically wiping

Signor Ferrari's extra rdinary display of temper is a mere outcome of natural disappointment, I am willing to excuse it. He is young and hot-blooded—let him apologize, and I shall freely pardon him."
"By my faith!" said the Duke di Marina

with indignation, "such generosity is unheard of, Conte! Permit me to remark that it is aitogether exceptional, after such ungentlemanly conduct. I conduct.

I crear looked from one to the other in silent fury. His face had grown pale as death. He wrenched himself from the grasp of D'Aven-

court and De Hamal.
"Fools! let me go!" he said savagely. "None of you are on my side,—I see that." He stepped to the table, poured out a glass of water and drank it off. He then turned and faced me, -his head thrown back, his eyes blazing

with wrath and pain,
"Liar!" he cried again, "double-faced, accursed liar! You have stolen her, you have fooled me, but you shall pay for it with your

life."
"Willing'y!" I said with a mocking smile, restraining by a gesture the hasty exclamations of those around me who resented this fresh attack, "most willingly, caro Signer! But ex-cuse me me if I fail to see wherein you consider yourself wronged, The lady who is now my fiancee has not the slightest affection for you,— she told me so herself. Had she entertained any such feeling I might have withdrawn my proposals, but as matters stand, what harm

have I done you?" A chorus of indignant voices interrupted me. "Shane on you, Ferrari!" cried Gualdro. "The Count speaks like a gentleman and a man of honor. Were I in his place you should have had no word of explanation whatever. I would not have condescended to parley with you."
"Nor I!" said the Duke stiffly.

"Nor I!" said Mancini.
"Surely," said Luziano Salustri, "Ferrari
will make the amenda honorable."

There was a pause. Each man looked at Ferrari with some anxiety. The suddenness of the quarrel had sobered the whole party more effectually than a cold douche. Ferrari's face grew more and more livid till his very lips turned ghastly blue—he laughed aloud in bitter scorn. Then, walking steadily up to me, with his eyes full of a baffled vindictiveness, he said,

in a low, clear tone:—
'You say that,—you say she never cared for me—you! and I am to apologize to you! Thief, coward, traitor!—take that for my apology!" And he struck me across the mouth with his bare hand so fiercely that the diamond ring he wore (my diamond ring) cut my flesh and alightly drew blood. A shout of anger broke from all present. I turned to the Marquis D'Avencourt.

"There can be but one answer to this." I said with indifferent coldness. "Signor Ferrari has brought it on bimself. Marquis, will you do me the honor to arrange the affair?"

The Marquis bowed, "I shall be most

about to speak, hut apparently changing his mind he remained silent,—his face had somewhat paled. The momentary hesitation among my guests passed quickly. All present, except Guido, broke out into a chorus of congratulations, mingled with good-humored jesting and laughter.

The manques have the manques of the said, "Freccia, you will second me?" Captain Freccia shrugged his shoulders. "You must positively excuse me," he said. "My c.n. science will not permit me to take up such a semantably wrong cause as yours, caro mio! I remarkably wrong cause as yours, caro mio! I shall be pleased to act with D'Avencourt for the Count, if he will permit me." The Marquis received him with cordiality, and the two engaged in earnest conversation. Ferrari next proffered his request to his quondam friend De "By all the gods!" exclaimed Gualdro, "your news has surprised me! I should have thought you were the last man to give up liberty for the sake of a woman. One woman, the bit his lips in mortification and wounded vanity, and seemed hesitating what it does not be a supplementation. For a surprise to his quondam friend De Hammal, who also declined to geomed him, the bit his lips in mortification and wounded vanity, and seemed hesitating what it does not be a surprise of the sake of a woman.