

AN INTRODUCTION

of your teapot to "SALADA" will do more to convert sceptics and disbelievers than all the eloquence and advertising zeal in the country.



"THE PEER OF ALL TEAS"
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In the Net.

And they had been believed, and believed in the example of a stranger! It was a simple matter of what a few words and a pious pretence could accomplish.

Miss Pendleton—the informant could be no other—knew how to tell her tale, with what necessary reticence, with what excuses, with what expressions of devoted attachment, with what doubts, and above all, with what piety! And her correspondents lacked the penetration to see that, if really reluctant, she need not have told; if doubtful and friendly, she would have sought to disprove such absurdities; and if really pious, she would have shown some mercy and nobility of soul.

The proof of the dispositions of a story-teller is not in the professions, which she makes, but in the effect which she produces.

"Are they imbedded?" cried Valeria fiercely, crushing the letters in her hands and flinging them away.

Two others remained. She tore them open, and found traces of the same work.

Both were from correspondents of Mrs. Harwood, and the writer of one of them, who, for some mysterious reason, assumed that that lady was a person of inflexible judgment, and most devoted friend, Valeria ever had, insisted that she would never have approved of what had been done without the best of reasons, and that she had acted on the surest information which she could obtain.

"What has Mrs. Harwood to do with the matter?" Valeria exclaimed, flinging this letter after the others, and taking up the last one.

And here, at length, was a beam of light through the chaos which surrounded her. A woman of extreme sensitiveness and delicacy, but of a clear and independent judgment, this writer had not been imposed upon by authorities nor by phrases; and she considered Valeria's confinement, an outrage.

The same reason for it which had been written to the others had been given to her also, and she scornfully pronounced them null and void. Lying at a distance, she was in England—she could do nothing personally; but she could procure the intervention of a high foreign official, who would demand an investigation of the affair.

It was useless. Unless he knew all the story, or could bring these people before her, it would avail nothing. As long as they could talk unanswered, they could always conquer. Their strength was in their secrecy. There needed a bold and resolute questioner, who would oblige each one to prove what she should assert, give her her authority, and who would tell Valeria everything. So pursued, they would have melted like shadows. They would have heard from someone, would have forgotten whom, would have shirked responsibility. They would have been a retelling, which could not be grasped, though they had been a thick fog to suffocate.

But she could not hope for such an investigation.

Neither could she hope for any active partisanship from the people of the Manicomio, kind as they were. Official reserve, and Italian caution would prevent their taking any aggressive part. But that they would do anything against her she could not believe. The most that she could expect, and all that she could ask, was that they should make her detention as tolerable as it could be made.

But in this moment, even liberty was almost lost sight of in the misery of this inevitable inferno of warring tongues.

"Oh! who will ever give me back the silence of my life?" she cried out.

Into the solitude where she had meant to hide herself with nature and art and religion for companions, had broken the full pack of yelping gossips.

There was a tap at the door, and Sister Agnes put her head in. "Well, signora," she began, "I hope—then broke off. 'Why, ha! ha! your cheeks are! What is the matter?'

"You hope that I have had pleasant news," Valeria said. "Come in and hear them. Sit down. Excuse my standing and walking about. And don't be alarmed if I should catch you and shake you. I feel as if I were a

tempest shut into the puny form of a woman."

"Why signora—"

"Listen!" And Valeria told her story.

The sister was shocked. She began to murmur consolations and exhortations, saying the best she knew. She begged Valeria to leave all in the hands of God, who would surely protect her, and raise up friends for her. She must try to forgive.

"Forgive!" Valeria burst forth. "I would like to drive over them with wild horses!"

"Oh, don't speak so, signora! Try to wait; and God will right you."

"Oh, I must wait, for I am tied hand and foot!" she cried, wringing her hands. "But you may be sure that the time of God to right me will come the very first moment that I can right myself."

"But signora, a Christian must bear patiently—"

"Ah! ma signora," Valeria interrupted, sweeping away the gentle voice, "nous avons change tout cela."

The sister was silent a moment. Then she said: "Miss Pendleton has been here."

"She has! Keep her out of my sight!"

"She wished very much to see you," the nun went on. "She says that if you will receive her, she will never again interfere with your affairs in any way. And she wanted me to tell you that she loves you just as well as ever."

"I have no doubt that she does—just as well. Keep her out of my sight. Don't allow her to be in the garden when I want to walk there. And assure her that I do not love her as well as ever, nor at all."

"I told her that the director does not allow her to see you," the sister said.

"I do not allow her to see me!"

The sister had an inspiration. "Wouldn't you like to take a little walk?" she asked.

It was the best diversion possible. They went down the stairs and out through the garden. Sister Agnes stopping to gather for her companion a bunch of purple pansies out of the crowd that stood all facing the sun, each with the image of an oriental bearded face painted on its rich petals. They went up the avenue under the dense foliage, crossed the little bridge that would soon be draped with purple wistaria and snow-white multiflora roses, and came to a large green in Villa Gabrielli, where a few benches were set in the lee of a wide semicircle of laurels joined thickly into a hedge.

Valeria left Valeria in the company of a nurse they had met, and returned to her own duties.

The green was bright with daisies. In summer the grass would be over the head of the tallest man there. Everything in that place was luxuriant with a dancing growth.

Valeria seated herself by the laurels, and the nurse went about gathering daisies for her.

It was one of the days when the Manicomio was open to visitors, and two gentlemen were wandering about not far away. Then went down the avenue toward the bridge, then turned back on to the green.

"Don't take any notice of them," Valeria said in a low voice to the nurse. "They show very little discretion in coming here."

She turned away in speaking, and began to examine the dark laurels behind the bench.

The steps came nearer, and the voice of the nurse was heard talking with one of the strangers. In spite of the charge she had received, it was impossible for the girl to resist the compliments and inquiries addressed to her.

Hearing a step beside her, Valeria turned to go away, and found herself face to face with the Count Belvedere.

He looked at her with eager excitement, too much engrossed in the object for which he had sought her to even salute her.

"Signora," he said hastily, and in a low tone, "it is possible that I see the American of the casaca in this place."

"If you have any inquiries to make about the place, it would be better to go to one of the men-servants," she said coldly. "I do not play eleeone."

He regained his composure immediately.

"I do not wish to intrude," he said respectfully. "I only wish to say that I am sorry to see you here, and to ask if you have anything to say to me."

"Who sent you?" she asked.

"No one."

"And, pray, what could I have to say to you?"

He had dropped his eyes. He now raised them and looked at her fixedly.

"I should be happy if I could be of any service to you. And I fancied that you might have something to tell me."

"I have nothing to tell you," she replied.

He continued to look at her with steady and penetrating eyes. "We were very close," he said, "and I am glad to see you looking so well. Your apartment is as you left it, and ready for you whenever you wish to return."

"Thanks! but I do not wish to return there," she said. "It was already being relinquished—without my authority. It is true—and I do not wish to renew the lease."

"Is that all?" he asked, as she made a motion to go. "You are resolved?"

"It is all, Signor Count. Good-morning."

[To be Continued.]

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