

VENDETTA;

The Story of One Forgotten.

CHAPTER XVII.—Continued.

And as I obeyed her request she enfolded me in her arms, while she still clinging to me with the other, and added— "To—remember you Papa; you know you brought him from Rome, and he is fond of you, too, but not so fond as I am."

"Darling, you must not talk," I whispered imploringly; "try to be very still—then the poor throat will not ache so much."

"Kiss me then, and I will be quite good."

"Why do you have those ugly black things on?" she asked, the feeblest and most plaintive tone imaginable, so weak that I myself could scarcely hear it.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

After some little time, the doctor's genial voice, slightly tremulous from kindly emotion, roused me from my grief-stricken attitude.

"Monsieur, permit me to persuade you to come away. Poor little child she is free from pain now. Her fancy that you were her father was a fiction of her fevered brain."

"The little angel did not once ask for her," murmured Assunta.

"Will you tell the Countess?" I replied decisively. "I am not at all in the humor for a scene."

fainting. All very well done! I have assured the lady there is no fear of contagion, and my every wish is to see her in the best of health."

"And so the little angel is dead!" he murmured in a thin, quivering voice. "Dead! Ay, that is a pity, a pity! But my master is not dead—no, no! I am not such an old fool as to believe that."

"Yes, yes! I understand!" faltered Giacomo nervously. "My master never thought of the child as being a condemned man."

"Do you know, my friend," I observed in a purposely cool and cutting tone, "that I have heard somewhat too much about your master? The subject is tiresome to me! Were your master alive, he would say you were in your dotage! Take my message to the Countess at once!"

"Excelsenza, my master would never speak to me so." Then his countenance fell, and he muttered softly—"Though it is just—I am a fool, I am a mistake—quite mistaken—where do you think I am?"

"I was glad, yes, glad! Glad that my own child was dead? You call this inhuman perhaps? Why? She was bound to have been miserable, she was no happy!"

"I know these things are managed by the Divorce Court. Lawyers are paid exorbitant fees, and the names of the guilty and innocent are dragged through the revolting slums of the low London press. It may be an excellent method, but it does not tend to elevate a man in his own eyes, and it certainly does not tend to the respectability of his name."

"I believe so! He intimated as much to me." I smiled scornfully.

"I am too much honored! And did you, Conte, think for a moment that such an arrangement would meet with my approval?"

point of absolute exhaustion on the part of those who are forced to listen to it. As for me, I believe in the old, old, apparently foolish legend of Adam and Eve's sin and the curse which followed it—the curse on man which is invariably carried out to this day."

"True enough! The curse is upon all who trust women too far—the sorrow in all who are beguiled by her wifely flatteries. Of what avail her poor excuse in the ancient story?—The serpent beguiled me and I did it! Had she never listened she could not have been beguiled. The weakness, the treachery, was in herself, and is there still. Through everything the bitterness of it runs."

"More than ten days had passed since Stella's death. Her mother had asked me to see to the arrangements for the child's funeral, delecting herself too ill to attend to anything."

"It is true!" she exclaimed with sudden emphasis. "He is rough and ill-mannered; I have seen him the worse for wine; sometimes he is insufferable! I am afraid of him."

"Why?" I asked. "I wish to avoid him," she said deeply. "I wish to avoid him," she said deeply. "I wish to avoid him," she said deeply.

"I mean what I say," I continued in a cool, level tone, "and I picked up her work and restored it to her, but I do not excuse myself. I say you can not always enjoy my protection; it seems to me that you can, by becoming my wife."

"I am perfectly aware," I went on in a business-like accent—"Of the disparity in years that exists between us. I have neither youth, health or good looks to recommend me to you. To be sure, my intellect and my character have made me what I am. But I have wealth which is almost inexhaustible—besides these things—and here I looked at her steadily, "I have an ardent desire to do justice to your admirable qualities, and to give you all you deserve. You think you could find fault with my money, my position, my youth, my blood is cold and my pulse is slow—but what I can do, I will!"

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run the risk of what the world would say of such marriage."

"How, madams? Pardon me if I fail to comprehend you."

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She started from my arms with an exclamation of delight.

"Oh, Cesare! how lovely! How good you are to me!"

"You will not tell Guido? no, yet?"

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second thoughts you would rather not marry me, you have only to say so, and I shall accept my fate with equanimity, and shall not blame you."

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