COUSINS AND LOVERS.

or The Wind of Destiny.

Rudolph and I had loved each other ever since children, and so when Grandfather Ackland said on his deathbed that it would make him happy if we promised to be married at a certain age, we readily consented.

We were not to marry until I was twenty and he twenty-two, and in the meantime travelled through Europe with some relations. While in Rome I met a rich young sculptor, by name Giovanni Monaldi, and he proved such an interesting companion that I and my chaperon found new pleasure in visiting the sights of the Imperial City. I woke up one morning to find that, while I still loved Rudolph, I loved the sculptor and that he loved me.

I felt miserable over this dawning truth and prayed for help, not knowing what to do in such a trying emergency. After a long and tearful time I slipped away from the house and entered a church near by, where I thought to spend an hour in prayer.

There were few in the church at that hour, but my attention was attracted to an English girl in deep mourning who knelt at a shrine, her face buried in her hands. There was a wild look in her eyes, as if she contemplated suicide.

"The victim of some wretched deceiver," I thought to myself. "But she shall not—she shall not. I will follow her and save her;" and when, in a moment or two, she slipped out of the church, I was at her heels.

She turned, as I expected, into the Strada di Repetta, which leads straight to the banks of the Tiber, and at last she stood close to its edge, in the shelter of an old wall, making up her mind, as I saw, to the awful plunge she had contemplated. Then I went close to her and caught her by the dress, and said, softly:

"Stop! I know what you are going to do. You are wrong, whatever troubles you have. I have followed you to keep you from the river."

The girl turned sharply and looked at me.

"What do you know about me?" she asked.

"Only what I saw in the church," said I.

"Is it so plainly written in my face that a stranger can see it?" she cried; "Then, indeed, the water is the place for me—no other!"

I held her tighter.

"How do you know what comes after?" I cried, "after this life? Worse than shame, perhaps."

"Shame!" she said. "Oh! how dare you! Do you think I am a young person who has had no respect for herself?"

"People always think that of girls who drown themselves," I answered.

"Don't think it of me," she said. "I am only foolish. Perhaps you came there to the cathedral to pray because you were sad?"

"Yes," I said.

"You know about me because your own heart told you," she said. "You've been good and kind to follow me. I think I'll tell you—but tell me your name."

"I'm a governess, as poor as a mouse. I came here with a rich family, and a friend of the son's—he visited them. He is a splendid creature, good, true, perfect, beautiful; but he liked little me. And I used to sing to him—I am quite one of the family—and—I grew to love him; and yesterday, as twilight, he walked on the hills with me. Suddenly he told me how he loved me, and how he should never be happy, for he was engaged to a girl whom he must marry.

"'Little Violet,' he said, 'I ask nothing of life but the right to love you and protect you, and that I cannot have for honor's sake.' And he told me how good she was, and handsome; and nothing, nothing to him beside little me.

"So all night I lay awake, and I made up my mind to kill myself this morning. Now you know all. Life is nothing to me if Rudolph is lost—married to that girl! Rudolph, who cried when we parted, though he was a man!"

"Rudolph!" cried I.

"Hush! she cried. "I did not mean to say that."

"Rudolph Ackland?" I continued.

"I never told you," said she.

"No," said I. "I am a fortune-teller. Violet, look into my eyes. Believe—me I know. There is no need of drowning yourself. That girl will not marry Rudolph Ackland. She loves some one else better. She feels free to marry him now. She knows that Rudolph's heart will not be broken. Go home, Rudolph will come to you."

"What do you mean?" asked the girl. "Are you a fortune-teller? I believe you are—that girl herself."

"We will make no confessions," said I. "Kiss me and go home."

She put her lips to mine. And then we went together up the Strada, and I went home. On the way I met Giovanni. My heart beat high with joy—yet when we parted, for we had pledged our faith to each other.

My chaperon and Cousin Rudolph were breakfasting together. Rudolph was pale; he said nothing. My chaperon scolded me. But when she left us for a moment I said to him:

"Cousin, cheer up. Let us thank Heaven we were only engaged, not married. I think you had better go and see Violet this morning. I am going to the Vatican with Giovanni. We make excellent cousins. Let us retain that relation only. Our romance has come to us otherwise than we hoped."

I think—such a man—that he was hurt and angry with me, but he went to Violet, and she is his wife to-day, and I Giovanni's.

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"Well, yes; you are always 'round."

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