

A VENDETTA.

(FROM THE FRENCH OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT).

Widow Saverini lived alone with her son in a little old house on the ramparts of Bonifacio. The town, built on a projection of the mountain, even suspended in places above the sea, looks down on a reef-covered strait, and the lowest coast of Sardinia. At its feet, surrounding it almost entirely, an indenture of the cliff, which resembles a gigantic corridor, serves it for a harbour, and attracts to the nearest houses close to a long inlet between two abrupt cliffs, the little Italian or Sardinian fishing boats, and, every fortnight, the wheezy old steamer which crosses from Ajaccio.

On the white mountain the cluster of houses forms a spot whiter still. Perched thus upon the rock, they have the appearance of wild birds' nests overlooking the terrible passage into which ships are loth to venture. The wind roughens the sea unceasingly, beats upon the rugged mountain fretted by its fury and almost destitute of vegetation; it launches itself into the strait and lays waste the shores. The white foam caught on the black points of innumerable rocks, which protrude above the waves, resembles shreds of cloth rising and falling on the surface of the water.

The house of Widow Saverini, welded to the edge of the cliff, opened its three windows on this wild and desolate landscape.

She lived alone with her son Antonio and their hunting dog Sémillante, a huge gaunt beast with a long shaggy coat, an animal of the species known as *gardeurs de troupeaux*.

One evening after a brawl, Antonio was treacherously stabbed by Nicolas Ravolati, who that same night fled to Sardinia. When his old mother received the body of her child, whom the bystanders brought home, she did not weep, but stood motionless looking at him for a long time, then laying her withered hand on his body, she swore that she would carry out the vendetta. She would have no one remain, but shut herself up with the dead man and the moaning dog. The animal howled continuously as it stood at the foot of the bed, with its head stretched towards

its master and its tail drooping between its legs. It moved no more than the mother, who now bent over the body and wept large, silent tears as she gazed on her son. The young man, lying on his back, clothed in his coarse cloth jacket, rent and torn at the breast, seemed asleep; but there was blood on everything; blood on his shirt, torn away to bandage the wound; blood on his waistcoat; blood on his trousers; blood on his face and blood on his hands; clots of blood had hardened in his hair and in his beard. The old woman began to address him, and at the sound of her voice the dog ceased moaning. "Rest in peace! Rest in peace! Thou shalt be avenged; dost thou hear me? Thy mother swears it and she always keeps her word; thy mother whom thou hast known so well." And slowly she stooped to press her cold lips to the lips of the dead man. Then Sémillante began to whine; he uttered a long, blood-curdling wail, and there they stood, the woman and the dog, until morning.

Antonio Saverini was buried the next day and soon they spoke of him no more in Bonifacio.

He had left neither brothers, nor cousins, no man was there to take up the vendetta. But his old mother, the decrepit old woman, brooded over it. On the other side of the strait she saw from morning till evening a white spot. It is a little Sardinian village, Longosardos, where the Corsican banditti take refuge when too hotly pursued. They alone inhabit this hamlet opposite the coast of their native country, as they await the time when they may return to their haunts. She knew that to this village Nicolas Ravolati had fled.

She sat, friendless, throughout the weary day looking down on this spot as she thought of vengeance. How could she, so old and so near death, accomplish it? But she had promised, nay she had sworn on the corpse, and she could not forget, she could not wait. What could she do? She no longer slept at night, she had neither peace nor rest, and she kept thinking doggedly. Sémillante slept at her feet, and occasionally lifting her head, would utter a disconsolate moan. Since her master's death she often roared thus, as if her love kept fresh the memory that nothing could efface.