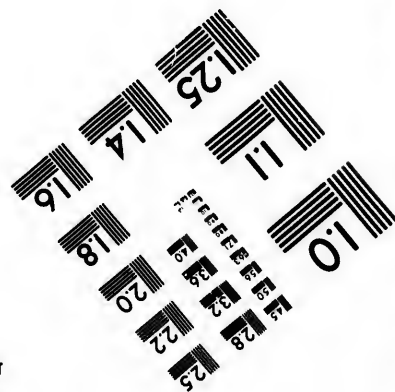
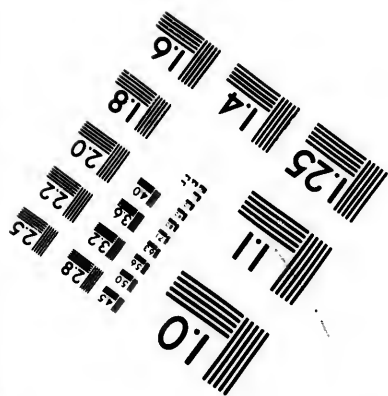
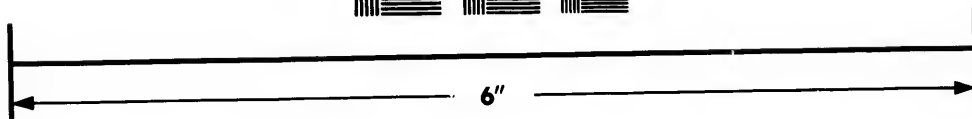
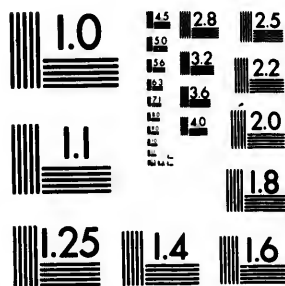


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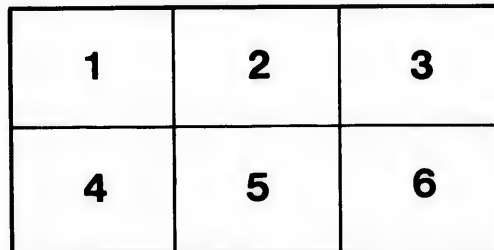
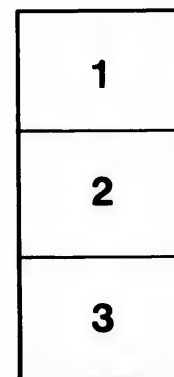
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SAN MINIATO.

A Novel.

BY
Mrs. C. V. HAMILTON,
AUTHOR OF
"Woven of Many Threads," "Crown from the Spear,"
ETC., ETC.



NEW YORK:
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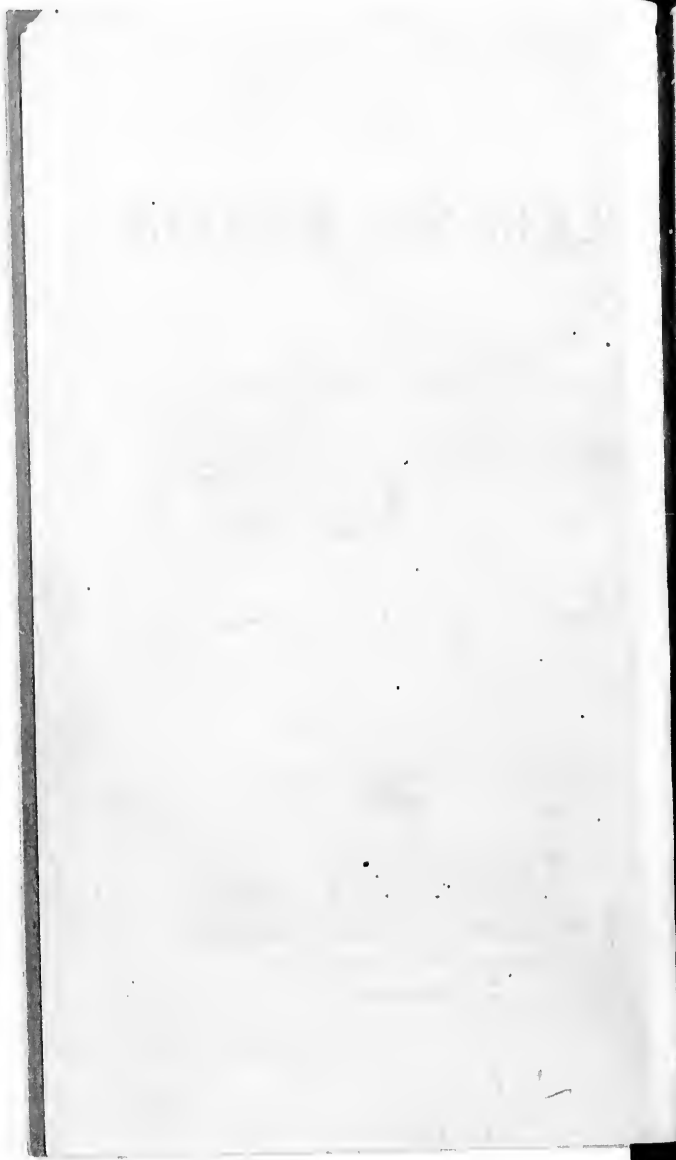
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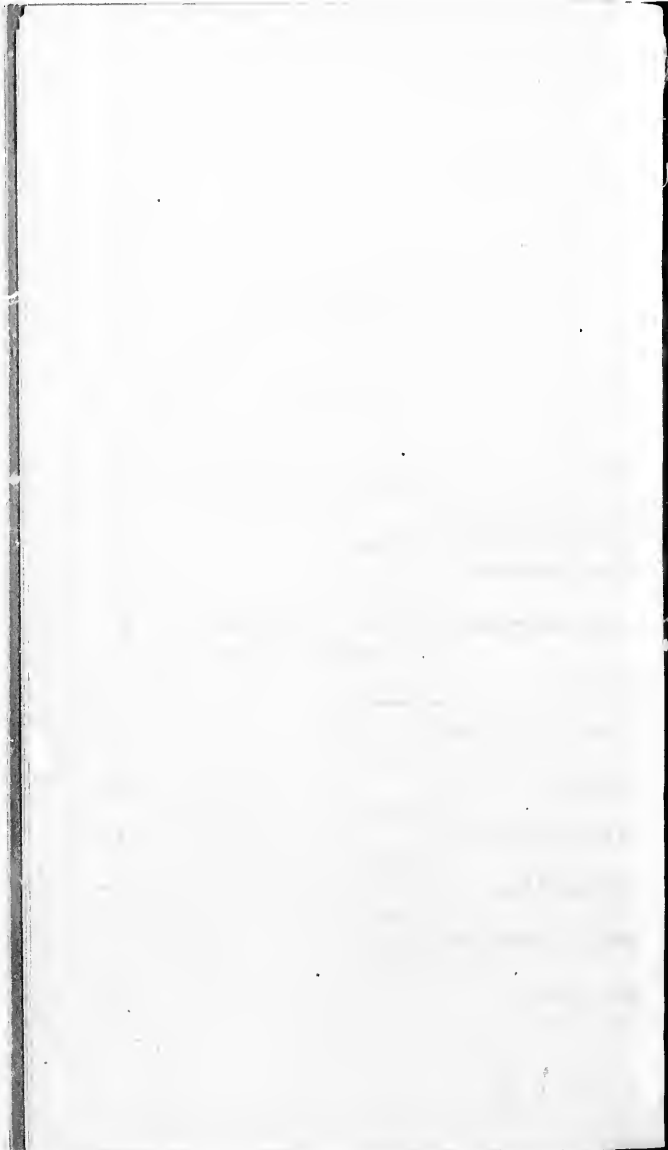
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*Che di amara radice
Amare foglie, e amaro frutto nasce;
Il misero si pasce
D' orrore, e di paura,
Di lacrime e sospire,
Sempre in nuovi martiri,
E per lui solo al mondo il piante dura.*

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LILY OF SAN MINIATO.

A STORY OF FLORENCE.

CHAPTER I.

INFELICE.



NE intensely hot afternoon in the latter part of July, when nearly all the wealthy and fashionable of Florence had left the city for the lakes or mountains, and most of the idle and poor were resting their languid limbs under the trees of the Cascine, Boboli, or some other of the many beautiful gardens on the banks of the Arno, the public thoroughfares seemed almost deserted, those only remaining in the streets who were engaged in some sort of traffic, or on duty as guards and drivers of the numerous vehicles which were drawn well up in the shade.

The *gamins*, indigenons to all large cities, and usually as impervious to heat as salamanders, were for once

subdued into silence and repose, lying face downward under the massive walls that protect the west side of the Piazza della Signoria from the ardent rays of the sun; and even the dogs, oppressed by the stifling atmosphere, lay panting with extended tongues and drowsy eyes in the coolest places, if any one place could be cooler than another, on that day of our Lord, July 6, 1823.

Under the open arcade that surrounds the Loggia di Lanzi, seemingly unmindful of the discomfort that affected every living thing around him, sat a strange-looking figure, huddled together in the most ungainly fashion imaginable; his knees, drawn nearly up to his chin, supported a small slab of soft, light-colored stone, upon which he was skilfully copying in *alto rilievo* the Judith and Holofernes of Donatello.

While he worked with eager, feverish haste, his head, covered with thick, dark hair, was bent so closely to his knees that one could scarce catch a glimpse of his face; only when, from time to time, he looked up to study his model, his thin, sallow features were clearly outlined against the dark arches behind him.

In his cramped, awkward posturo there was neither grace nor beauty; but his delicate, sad face was full of feeling and repressed passion. His brow, over which the heavy hair fell when his head was bent above his work, was broad and intelligent; his eyes, deep-set,

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large and dark, had something of the wistful, appeal-
ing expression in them that one often sees in those of
dumb animals, blended with a sort of intensity and
strength which the firm and fine outline of his mouth
and chin fully sustained.

His long, thin fingers, singularly slender and white
for one evidently so low in the scale of humanity,
manipulated with ease and dexterity the tiny chisels
he used to perfect his exquisite work.

One seeing him there, crouched before the noble
group, so utterly unmindful of all around him, so
silent and absorbed, might have thought him also a
figure of stone, save for the rapid movement of his
hands, the occasional uplifting of his head, and the
quick, impatient movement with which he threw back
the heavy locks that sometimes came between his
vision and the object of his careful study.

The pitiless sun was sinking lower and lower, and
already the cooling breeze, that in these southern
lands usually springs to life at the close of day, was
drifting in refreshing waves among the open arches
and over the bent head of the patient artist, as grad-
ually men and animals crept out from the shadows,
shaking off the slumber from their heavy lids, and
stretching their stiffened limbs gratefully in the fresh
evening air which brought them renewed life and
vigor.

"What! what! Hugo! still working here all through the day, in spite of this heat, that fairly broils one?" and a short, stout priest, with untidy garments and oily face, who crept along in the shade of the arches, stopped a moment to look over the artist's shoulder.

"Yes, Father Ilario, I am still here, and here I have been since early morning; for one must work, if one would live in this hard world," returned Hugo, without raising his head.

"And it seems that your task is nearly completed."

"Nearly, thank the Blessed Virgin."

"And well done, too, and I count myself a judge," said Father Ilario, mopping down his face with his coarse blue handkerchief, as he leaned over to inspect the work more closely.

"I trust it is well done," returned Hugo, humbly; "or else it would be better not to be done at all, for no one will buy copies from me unless they are exact; and for the most perfect thing I can do, the dealers only pay me one-quarter of what they would pay others for poorer work. So you see, Father Ilario, what it is to be unfortunate. The more God has afflicted you, the more your fellow-men oppress you."

"Nay, nay, say not so, my friend; that is rank injustice to your Creator," returned Father Ilario, in a smooth, conciliating voice. "Now, see what you have in compensation for your deformity—a talent, a real

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talent, by which you can earn your bread, while others
who are tall and straight have to go hungry or beg."

"Thank God! I have never yet begged, though I
have often gone hungry," said Ilugo, still bending
over his work.

"Then, why not be thankful for what you have?"

"It is so little," and a hot tear dropped on the busy
fingers of the artist.

"Ah! there it is again—your ingratitude. Now,
look at me. Look at my life of constant self-denial,
fasting, prayers at midnight, heat in summer, cold in
winter. If I am hungry, I must not eat. If I am
thirsty, I must not drink. If I am weary, I must not
rest. If I am cold, I must bear it; and if I am like to
melt in the sun, I must go forth to mass or vespers ;
and if I am never so sleepy when the bell for prayers
rings at midnight, I must arise and go into the cold,
gloomy chapel, no matter how pleasant my dreams
may have been. Think of that!—one has not even
the privilege of dreaming without being interrupted.
Now, you, although you think yourself unfortunate, you
can eat all you can get when you are inclined to eat."

"Ah! but if you cannot get food, of what use is the
inclination and the liberty?" asked Hugo, raising his
pathetic eyes to the fat face of the priest.

"But you can get it if you are industrious. However,
we will say no more of that. I was only trying to show

you how ungrateful you are, and that others beside yourself have their troubles and mortifications of the flesh. Now, this afternoon, I desired to read my breviary under the shadow of the trees on San Miniato, where there was quite a refreshing breeze; but, instead of resting there comfortably, I had to plod down that long, weary hill to say vespers for Brother Ambrogio, who has gone into the country to see a sick man; and then I have to prepare to leave for Rome to-morrow right early. Ah! there is the bell of San Michele, so I must hasten. Thank the Virgin, it is near, for I am more weary with my walking in this heat than you are with your working. *Addio*, and say fifty *aves* to-night, and the Blessed Mother will give you patience to bear your lot uncomplainingly." With this pious advice, the old priest hurried away as fast as his short, fat limbs would take him, wiping his streaming face as he went.

Scarcely had Father Ilario disappeared around a corner, when a number of small boys, who had been invisible for hours, sprang up suddenly all over the great square, as lively and wicked as though such discomforts as heat and weariness were never known.

Looking about for some new object on which to vent their long-repressed mischief, they discovered the unfortunate Hugo diligently bent over his work, and, swooping down upon him like birds of prey from all

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four corners of the piazza, they began a series of small persecutions—poking at him with sharp sticks, twitching his garments, and slyly pulling his long hair, while they shouted in every note of the gamut, "Here is the hunchback ! here is the hunchback !"

For some time the unhappy creature remained indifferent to their taunts and gibes. As silent as the marble statue before him, he worked on with bowed head and steady, dexterous touch, until at last, when one bolder and more fiendish than the others, flinging a bit of decayed vegetable at his head, which, missing its mark, struck the pillar behind him, and rebounding, fell into the very midst of his beautiful design, leaving an ugly stain on the carefully wrought surface, he could endure it no longer ; but, springing up with livid face, quivering lips, and flashing eyes, he pressed his work close to his breast with one hand, while with the other he dashed aside the little imps, hurling them violently right and left in spite of his deformity, which, now that he had risen from his crouching position, was plainly visible. He was, indeed, a hunchback ; his head bowed, his shoulders reaching to his ears, his limbs unnaturally long, and his body unnaturally short.

Poor, unfortunate, tormented being ! There he stood like a hunted stag at bay, with quivering nostrils, wild eyes, and trembling limbs, anxiously trying to shield

his treasure from those sacrilegious hands, and himself from their rude and boisterous attack.

At length, almost exhausted from his effort to protect his work from injury, rather than his own person, and seeing that his persecutors had not in the least abandoned their intention of routing him entirely, he looked around appealingly for assistance, while he cried in tones of mingled indignation and entreaty:

“Mother of God! have you no pity, that you will allow these little demons to torment me so? I only am trying to live—to keep the wretched life confided to my care. I ask but to remain here and work in peace, and that even is denied me. Children, children!” and stretching out his disengaged hand towards them, he turned his white, weary face, from which all the anger had gone, full upon them. “Why will you torment me so? I love you all, and I would not injure you. I am not bad, nor given to quarrel. I am only a poor, unfortunate being, tired and faint from hunger, and I cannot buy bread until I finish this copy; therefore, I entreat you to allow me to complete it.”

But his touching appeal fell on deaf ears; and seeing that it was useless to try to continue his work, he gathered up his small tools and turned away from the spot with a disheartened sigh, followed by the hooting, shouting rabble.

As he left the piazza behind him and entered a

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narrow street that led to the gate of San Miniato, he clasped his hands with a gesture of repressed anguish, while the large tears gathered slowly, and rolling down his wasted cheeks, fell in great drops on his design—disfigured by the uncleanly object that had struck it—stained and utterly ruined beyond all hope of repair.

"It is cruel, it is wicked," he muttered to himself; "all the labor of weeks destroyed in a moment, for I cannot erase this stain without marring the features, which I cut with such care. It is the best piece of work I have ever done, and the most difficult; and this head of Judith is so delicate. I have wearied my eyes so in copying it, and I was so proud of it! If God had not allowed the sun to set so soon, the heat would have kept these wicked little demons quiet, and I might have finished it; then, I should have been paid ten *scudi*; but now, I shall get nothing. It is of no value, it is imperfect, and I may as well destroy it altogether."

As he spoke, a spasm of anger distorted his face, and his eyes glared with fury, as he turned impetuously and dashed the stone against the angle of a building, crushing it into a dozen fragments, which he gathered up and hurled fiercely at his pursuers, with curses and cries of rage.

This exhibition of passion did not daunt them in the

least, but instead, only excited their mirth, as they followed him into a narrow street, whither he ran wildly, holding his hands over his ears to shut out their shouts of laughter. As he fled, they pursued, and one of the most daring, hurrying on in advance of the others, flung a piece of the broken stone at him, which struck his deformed back, causing such acute pain that in an instant he seemed transformed into a wild beast.

With foaming mouth and glaring eyes, he turned suddenly, and before the boy could escape, he seized him, and holding him high in his long arms, seemed about to dash him on the pavement, when a carriage rapidly turned the corner and stopped before the excited and terrified group of children, who were now screaming wildly, greatly alarmed at the fate of their comrade.

"What is this disturbance? Hold there, ruffian! release that child!" shouted a voice from the carriage, and a man in the uniform of an officer of the *governo civile* sprang out, and seizing the hunchback dashed him aside, while he pushed the trembling boy into the midst of his companions, telling him to take himself off as quickly as possible. Then, turning to Hugo, who stood pale and trembling, all the anger and courage gone out of him at this sudden apparition, he said sternly:

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"Did I not tell you, if I caught you in the city again, I should send you to prison?"

"Ah! Signore, I remember that you did."

"Then why are you here now, in defiance of my orders?"

"Because I was starving, and I could do nothing beyond the walls to earn a *soldi*."

"Is it necessary, because you come into the city, to make such a disturbance as this?"

"I pray you, Signore, to believe me when I tell you that it was not my fault. I was working peaceably in the Loggia di Lanzi, when these boys beset me, ruined my work, and drove me away."

"That is the old story, and I do not believe it. These troubles would not occur if you did not provoke them. You are a bad, quarrelsome fellow."

"You mistake, Signore. I am not bad; I would not harm a fly, if I was left in peace."

"Silence! do not contradict me. Did I not just see you about to dash that child to pieces on the pavement. If I had not arrived the moment I did, you would have murdered him."

The hunchback shivered and turned paler than before; then said humbly, while tears filled his eyes, "It was my dreadful temper, Signore, and the pain—I forgot myself. Believe me, if I was left alone, I would do no harm."

"It is useless to promise me; I have no faith in your word. This is the third time I have detected you disturbing the peace, and if I did my duty, I should send you to prison at once."

"O Signore! for the love of the Virgin, pardon me this time and let me leave the city, and I will never return here to work, even though I starve. At San Miniato, I am safe; no one disturbs me there. If I die, I shall die in the only home I have on earth, in the free air, where I can see the trees, and the blue sky above me. I am so miserable. I implore you to spare me. I am not worth your anger."

"There, there, that will do," said the officer, evidently moved by the poor creature's appeal. "I have no ill feeling against you; but the public peace must be respected. Get out of the city as quickly as you can, and remember, if I see you here again, you will be put where you will be obliged to conduct yourself peaceably. Now go, and thank your good fortune that you fell into my hands instead of another's."

Hugo, without waiting to reply, with a wild, hunted look in his eyes, clenched his hands in a sort of repressed agony and rushed away into the shadow of a narrow street that led straight to the Arno. As he went, he muttered to himself: "I knew it would come sooner or later. I knew that, through their cruelty, I should be driven out of the city. Oh, my unfortunate

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temper! why did I not control it a little longer, though
it did burn within me like the flames of *inferno*?
Now there is nothing left for me but to cool my angry,
hot heart in the river. I have always known that
everything would end there for me some day. The
river! the river! I have heard its cool, clear ripple, as
it sounds against the bridges hour after hour, when I
have been hungry and cold and in pain, and it seemed
to call to me gently and kindly: 'Come to me, come
to me.' But while I had my art, while I could come
into the city and copy, and worship these beautiful
marble gods, I would not listen to it. I said: 'No, no,
I will come to thee only when there is no other ref-
uge for me.' Now there is no other refuge, and I
must go. It is only a moment of dread—one short,
quick plunge, and all will be over, and this poor, mis-
shapen, aching body will be at rest forever. Why is
it, I wonder, that when I am the only one to suffer
because of my misfortunes, every one treats me as
though I inflicted some torment upon them. Perhaps
I do, with the sight of my hideous form. In this love-
ly country, where all is grace and symmetry, the
distorted *gobbo* is looked upon as an impersonation of
God's anger—a creature set apart by his Creator for
the scorn and loathing of all mankind. And yet I am
innocent of any wrong to others. I have a nice sense
of justice in my soul. I love the fortunate beings

who have neither affection nor pity for me. I can forgive those who make me suffer. I am grateful for one word of kindness, one glance that is not full of abhorrence. I worship all that is beautiful, and I would rather live, if I could; but there is no place for me on earth; the city I worship is closed to me; I can see its beauties no more, and the river calls me—calls me, as it always has in my hours of anguish."

Suddenly the deep tone of a bell struck on his ear, and looking up in his hurried flight, he saw the door of the church of Santo Spirito standing open before him. "I will enter," he said, "and offer up one prayer to the Mother of God for the repose of my poor soul, before I usher it into eternity."

Slipping through the black shadows of the great pillars, he crept into the almost empty church, and falling on his knees before one of the altars, he tried to turn his troubled thoughts to heaven; but, instead of divine mercy claiming his attention, the memory of earthly injustice overpowered him, and the wrongs he had just experienced oppressed him so heavily, that he covered his face with his hands and burst into deep, heart-breaking sobs.


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CHAPTER II.

THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH.

 **W**HAT is the matter, my poor friend, and why do you weep so?" The voice fell on Hugo's ear like a strain of sweet, sad music, and looking up, he saw a figure before him so lovely that his first thought was of saints and angels. But the human sympathy of the face, and the kind touch of a soft hand on his poor deformed shoulder, told him that it was no celestial visitant—only a lovely and compassionate woman who looked down on him from her serene height.

She was young—not over twenty—fair and graceful, and her rich robes denoted wealth and rank, as well as her jewelled fingers, and the heavy gold clasps that bound the prayer-book she held in her hand. But, although so young and beautiful, and evidently a child of fortune, there was an expression of deep sorrow on her face, and her voice sounded like the sob of a stringed instrument touched by a rude hand.

"Your trouble must be great, poor mourner," she continued, as the hunchback, staggering to his feet, turned his mournful, tear-stained eyes upon her.

"It is indeed great, Signora," and he leaned heavily against the railing, as though he would faint from weakness.

"And you are ill—your pallor shows it."

"I am weary and hungry, that is all. But now I am better; your kind words have cured me."

"Tell me the cause of your trouble, and perhaps I can aid you; at least, if you are suffering from want, I can relieve you, for I have more than I need. Now tell me all."

"Ah! gentle lady, it would weary you to hear all the story of my wrongs and sufferings. Humanity is so cruel to those who are afflicted as I am!"

"I pray you, tell me, for I would fain find another soul as miserable as mine is to pour some balm upon, if it is possible, in the hope that it may ease a little my own pain."

Encouraged by these gentle words, Hugo told the story of his persecution and disappointment to the lovely stranger, who listened attentively, sighing heavily from time to time.

"Holy mother! can it be possible that there can be such gross injustice here, in our lovely city of Florence?"

"Aye, my lady, what I have told you is true, and how I am to live now I know not, for my only means of subsistence was in copying the different antiques,

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which a dealer in the Ponte Vecchio bought from
me—at a very low price, it is true, but still it has kept
me from starvation. If I am not allowed to come
any more into the city, I cannot continue my former
employment, as I have nothing to serve me as
models.

"Poor unfortunate! Your lot is indeed a cruel one
—afflicted by God, and wronged and despised by your
fellow-creatures."

"Padre Ilario says I have much to be thankful for;
that I have my talent, which was given me by the
Creator in compensation for my deformity; but if I
cannot use it, of what use is it to me?"

"Have you no parents?"

"Alas! no, Signora. My mother died when I was a
child, and my father I can scarce remember."

"Were you born here, in the city that refuses to
shelter you?"

"I know not where I was born; but I think it was
here, for my earliest recollections are of a pretty cot-
tage on the banks of the Arno, surrounded by trees
and flowers, and filled with pictures and books; and
of my mother, who was very young and lovely, and
who must have been a famous singer, for I have never
forgotten her voice. She often sat for hours at her harp,
and sang more like an angel than a human being; and
I have never heard any music like it, not even the ves-

pers in the churches, where I often go, so that I may be a little nearer her."

"And what else can you remember?" asked the lady, as she wiped away a furtive tear.

"Not much of that time, for I must have been very young then; but later, when I was larger and could run around the garden, I have a distinct remembrance of her coming to me and bidding me to enter the house, telling me that my father had come and she wished me to remain in my chamber until he went away. Poor mother! child though I was, I understood that she did not wish the author of my being to see his poor afflicted offspring."

"Then you never saw your father?"

"Yes, I saw him at that time. Burning with curiosity to see what a father was like, I crept from my hiding-place and went unobserved into the garden again. There I saw, sitting on the loggia of our little cottage, a tall, handsome man, dressed in an officer's uniform. He held my mother's hand in his, and she was weeping bitterly. I could not endure to see her trouble, and, moved by a sudden impulse of tenderness, I rushed from my concealment and threw myself on her neck, embracing her and kissing away her tears. She put her arms about me, for, hideous though I was, I was her child, and her heart was true to the maternal instinct; and, leaning her face on my deformed

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shoulder, we wept together. I remember all her love
and tenderness, but not better than I remember the
exclamation of surprise and horror with which my
father greeted my sudden appearance. From that
moment I hated him, and if he is in the world, I some-
times think that he must suffer dreadful remorse for
his cruelty to me and my mother."

"Then you know not whether he be living?"

"No, Signora, for not long after that he deserted
the woman who had lost all for him, and left her and
her unfortunate child to the cold charity of the world.
It broke my mother's heart. She died in my arms
when I was eight years old, without telling me the
name or rank of her betrayer, and I have never known
until this day; but sometimes I am confident that I
shall meet him face to face, a living witness of his sin
and deception."

"And who cared for you after the death of your
mother?"

"No one but the God of the helpless, if being
allowed to live was being cared for. My mother did
not leave enough to bury her, for before her death she
had quitted her pretty cottage and gone into a squalid
garret near the Ponte Vecchio, where she breathed out
her unhappy life in want and tears. So I was thrown
a waif on the stream of life, to float or sink as it hap-
pened—the butt of scorn and contempt, jeered at and

mocked, and buffeted by all, and pitied by none, not even those whom God hath bidden to be merciful to his afflicted ones. During the day I sought the refuge of the churches to be freed from the persecution of the children, who followed me relentlessly; and at night I slept wherever I could find a place to lay my weary, suffering body. To satisfy the cravings of hunger, I ate the crumbs that fell from the tables of the rich, the scraps that were thrown me by the hand of charity, indifferent whether it were a dog or a human being that devoured their scanty offerings.

“Passing, as I did, most of my time in the churches, I began to study, almost unconsciously, the works of art that surrounded me, and dimly, at first, I felt the dawning of a new life within me. Some one gave me a broken knife, and with the aid of that I cut out of soft stone a little figure, a copy of one of the saints around the high altar of San Marco. When I first saw the likeness to the original, and knew that I possessed the power of imitation, I thought I should die of joy. I wept, I kissed the feet of the Madonna in the most fervent gratitude, and from that moment I entered upon another life; I was never as wretched and lonely as I had been before.

“One day, Padre Ilario, a monk from San Miniato, saw me crouched at the foot of the altar in San Ambrogio, carving steadily at a little figure of the Holy

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Mother. My industry, youth, and pitiful deformity attracted his attention, and he examined my work with great interest, and praised it without stint; this encouraged me to show him several others which I had concealed about my person. It is true, they were crude and imperfect, yet they possessed some merit, and the good Father saw it, and was delighted at what he considered a precocious talent.

“Have you ever tried to sell them?” he asked.

“I replied that I never had, not dreaming that it was possible to receive money for what had been but a pastime to me.

“Go to-morrow on the Ponte Vecchio, and sit you down where travellers pass most; be modest and well behaved, not too shy, nor too eager, in displaying your work, and I will wager you that before night you will dispose of one or more of your figures. Set no price upon them yourself; leave it to the generosity of the buyer, and you will be better paid than you think. And if you succeed, forget not to go to the Holy Mother and give her thanks for your good fortune.’

“The next morning, at sunrise, I crept out from under a vender’s cart—my only bed—and going to the nearest fountain, I washed my hands and face as cleanly as I could, and wiped them on a cabbage-leaf thrown me by a good-natured market-woman; dusted and cleaned my rags as much as possible, and with my little figures

neatly ranged by my side, I seated myself in a conspicuous place and awaited my first customer. But alas! my hopes were soon destroyed. I was not allowed to remain anywhere in peace. Several mischievous children gathered around me, and with shouts and jeers routed me and compelled me to move on. During the day I located myself in fifty different places. Patient, resolved, and hopeful, I was not overcome by the cruel treatment I received, and before sunset I had succeeded in disposing of two of my little figures—one to a priest for ten *soldi*, and the other to a kind-faced lady for two *liri*. I had never before held a *liri* in my hand, and I was richer than a king upon his throne, and happier than any boy in Florence that night. Nor did I forget to return thanks to the Madonna. I went to the nearest church, and, falling on my knees, I poured out my very soul in thankfulness."

"And did you continue to sell your work?" asked the lady, deeply interested in Hugo's narrative.

"Yes, for a time, until there was not a spot where I was not known and greeted with the cry of '*Ecco il gobbo, ecco il gobbo*,' which was the signal for an attack, when I was invariably driven away, sometimes with blows, sometimes with my wares utterly ruined. However, I managed to exist, until one day a dealer in *bric-a-brac*, on the Ponte Vecchio, noticing the little figures and seeming struck with their accuracy, told me to

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bring them to him and he would dispose of them for me to better advantage. Since then he has bought all I can make; but some are so difficult and take me so long to carve, and I get so little for them, that I am often hungry. The *alto rilievo* that was destroyed to-day I have worked weeks upon, and had about completed it; but now it is gone, and I shall have to go hungry, for God only knows when I can do another, seeing I can come into the city no more."

"How much were you to have received for the Judith?"

"Ten *scudi*, Signora—a fortune to me."

The lady drew a heavily fringed purse from her pocket, through the meshes of which shone a number of gold pieces, and opening it, she counted out fifteen *scudi*, and put them in the hand of the hunchback, saying:

"Take these; here are ten *scudi* for your ruined work, and five *scudi* from me as a gift. It will last you some time, and when it is gone come to me, and I will see how I can help you again."

"O Signora! you are too good," and Hugo dropped on his knees, and pressed her robe to his lips.

"Rise, my friend. Do not kneel to me; I am a sinner like you. Kneel only to God and the Blessed Virgin. Now, tell me, when you leave the city, where will you go?"

"To my little hovel on San Miniato. Father Ilario allows me to stay there; it was built for the goats, but it is very comfortable, and I am thankful for such a shelter."

"If you are in want, and dare not come to me—for I had forgotten that you were not to enter the city—send Father Ilario, and I will aid you through him."

"Thanks a thousand times, Signora. Oh, if you could but know of half the gratitude that fills my heart!"

"Be grateful to God, then, and not to me; for if I have done aught of good to you, I am your debtor instead of you being mine."

"You have saved my life," returned Ingo, shivering, "for I could see only the Arno before me. I had resolved to die, being too wretched to live; and I was hastening there when the open door of this church bade me enter and pray, before I hurried my poor soul into eternity. Your words and deeds of kindness have saved me. Henceforth I shall try to live and be patient under all my troubles. I shall remember always the angel of the church, and pray to the Virgin to bless and protect her."

"O my friend! call me not the angel of the church. I am but a poor mortal like thee, with a sorrow that neither kind words nor gifts of money can ease. Would to God that human sympathy could comfort

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me; then, perhaps, I should not be so wretched. But
 the day is drawing to a close, and I must finish my
 prayers before I leave this sacred spot. Take this
 ring, and when you need any assistance, send it by a
 trusty messenger, and I will aid you in every way that
 lies within my power."

Drawing a slender gold band from her white fin-
 ger, she laid it in Hugo's palm as she continued: "I
 am Contessa Elena Altimonti, and I live in my
 father's palace on the Lung' Arno. Now, farewell,
 and may you be happy and prosperous in the future."

Hugo leaned against the altar railing and watched
 her as she passed out of sight into a side chapel, whither
 she went to pray; and when the last gleam of her
 pale blue drapery disappeared he sighed heavily, and
 a tear rolled slowly down his cheek. "God, the Vir-
 gin, and all the holy saints bless her!" he exclaimed
 fervently; then pressing the ring to his lips over and
 over again, he hid it with the gold in his bosom, and
 hobbled away with a lighter heart than that which
 beat in his breast when he entered the church.

The day was far advanced, and the sun was already
 low in the west, when he paused half-way up the steep
 ascent of San Miniato, and looked back on the city
 below him, with its spires and domes and towers
 painted with dusky gold, from the last rays of the
 departing day

The Arno flowed peacefully ; the deep, distant murmur of humanity fell on his ear like the reverberation of a mighty organ, and as his eyes wandered away toward the purple hills of Fiesole, they softened again to tears, and he said in a sad, broken voice :

“The world is beautiful, the city is beautiful, and large enough for all. Yes, there is even room for me, poor unfortunate though I am, and I want but a small place to work, and live and be at peace. I could be happy there. Yes, happy, for my Creator has planted the seeds of happiness in my heart, in spite of my deformed body, if these miserable children, whom I never harmed, did not drive me away because I am more wretched than they. I wonder why God made life so easy for some and so hard for others ! Why did the accident of my birth and my deformity place me in abject want and suffering, while others, with meaner souls and less appreciation of the true and beautiful, live in luxury and refinement ?

“I am tired and hungry, and I must go to my hut among the tombs, and make my supper off the coarsest fare, provided me by the bounty of a stranger, while the rich eat and drink, and make merry—and yet I do not hate them now. A little while ago I did ; my soul was full of dark passions at my wrongs and sufferings ; but that angel, the Angel of the Church, dispelled the demon of despair, and now I love even

the deep, distant murmur like the reverberation of eyes wandered away, they softened again in a broken voice:

"My city is beautiful, and there is even room for me, and I want but a small part of peace. I could be content if my Creator has planted me here, in spite of my deformity, in spite of my deformed children, whom I have driven away because I am a curse. I wonder why God made me a curse for others! Why did he put my deformity place here, while others, with the blessing of the true and living God, are in contentment?"

"I must go to my hut and eat my supper off the coarsest bread of a stranger, while others are merry—and yet I do as they do while ago I did; my life is full of my wrongs and sufferings, and I am the outcast of the Church, and now I love even

those who harmed me. Yes, I love all humanity, and if I had the power given me to curse this city that refuses me shelter and food and the privilege of toiling within its walls, I would not. I wish it no harm. I only ask to be allowed to live and die in peace."

Turning to the golden light of day that still lingered in the west, he drew forth the money that he had hidden with the ring, and looking furtively around to see that no one was near him, he sat down on a stone by the wayside, and counted it over and over again, pressing each piece to his lips before he returned it to his bosom. At last, when he came to the ring, he examined it closely, and saw engraven on it the initials *E. A.*, and underneath them a coronet, and the legend *A cruce salus*.

"She has worn it!" he said, kissing it reverently, "and it is sacred to me. Her memory will be a constant blessing. It will still my angry passions; it will make me calm and patient, and inspire me to greater perfection in my art. I have not a bad heart—God knows I have not, and I would be gentle and peaceable, if I was not provoked into frenzy by those little demons yonder. O Florence! O my beloved city! and all thy beauties that I have worshipped, shall I see thee no more? Shall I enter thy gates no more? Must I remain without, like a soul banished from paradise? Father in heaven, this is hard! O mother! O sainted

mother! intercede with the Virgin to soften their hearts, so that I may return again."

Wiping away the tears which bedewed his face plentifully, and with another long, lingering look into the plain below, now one golden river of light from the last level beams of day, he turned his weary steps again toward the solemn and majestic pile of San Miniato al Monte, that rose before him nearly to heaven.

Approaching the Church of San Salvador, he stopped suddenly, overcome with a nameless fear, for an object prone upon the ground, in the shadow of a cypress, attracted his attention, and it bore the mysterious and startling outline of a human form, still and rigid, and destitute of the flexible curves of sleep or weariness.

Drawing nearer, his limbs trembling with terror, Hugo knelt beside the prostrate form, and in the gathering darkness discerned that it was a woman with a babe in her arms.

The mother was unconscious, perhaps already dead; but the child was sleeping peacefully, as though it reposed upon a bed of down, with its warm red mouth pressed against a breast as cold and white as marble.

"Angel of God!" exclaimed the hunchback, kneeling reverently, and fixing his eyes on the infant with a sort of greedy admiration, "how lovely! how exquisitely lovely! What grace! what innocence!

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What softly rounded features! what matchless out-
lines! Oh! if I might have this cherub for a model,
I need go no more to the city to copy from the lifeless
stone.”

Then bending lower, he peered anxiously into the
woman's face, and laid his hand over her heart to dis-
cover whether it still beat; but there was no responsive
throb that he could detect.

“She is dead,” he said at length in a hollow whisper,
“and no one will ever know if I take the child. I won-
der if it will be wrong? I wonder if she, the Angel of
the Church, would call it a sin? No! no! it cannot be;
the mother is dead, and will never know if I take the
child. She is some poor outcast. The society of La
Misericordia will care for her body, and the babe, if I
do not take it, will be sent to the foundling hospital.
So I may as well have it. I will be kind to it, and I
will not let it suffer for food while my goat yields me
one cup of milk; the lovely little angel shall have it all,
even if I go hungry myself. It is but a little thing,
and I can feed it, and take care of it by depriving my-
self, and that I do not mind. I am used to self-denial
and hunger; and I am so lonely, now that I can go no
more to the city; I shall find the days so long and
dreary, and this little creature will fill my heart, and
make my gloomy hovel bright and cheerful. None
will know where to look for it, even if they wish to

claim it. I can hide it in my hut, and model the most angelic things from it while it sleeps—and I fancy it does sleep most of the time. See how it smiles in its dreams, and reaches out its little hands! It is asking for love and care—my love and my care, and it shall have both. I will give my life to it, my worthless life that has so far been only a curse to me. To-day God has sent me two angels. Yes, I know he sent the Angel of the Church, and perhaps this sweet child will be a blessing to me also. I will take it and leave the result to God. I do not mean to do wrong. My heart craves something to live for, and this child seems as helpless and abandoned as I am. How can I leave it here on its dead mother's breast? No! I must take it, and I will."


Looking stealthily around to see that no one was approaching, he snatched the child from the rigid embrace of the mother, and fled with it into the darkness and shadows of night, trembling with the guilty consciousness of having robbed the dead.

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CHAPTER III.

THE PALAZZO ALTIMONTI.

T was an hour after midday, and the Contessa Elena Altimonti was receiving her most intimate friends in a magnificent apartment of her father's palace. For the past six months she had been in retirement in the Convent of the Sacred Heart, and had but just returned again to the world.

It had been a subject of considerable discussion in the fashionable society of Florence, when the lovely young countess declared her intention of quitting the pomps and vanities of the wicked world, to immure herself for several months within the walls of the convent where she had been educated. But it was well known among her friends that the charming contessa was somewhat eccentric, and, at times, piously inclined; and when her father confessor hinted to them that she was weary of the folly and excitement of her gay life, and desired a time of silent communion with her own soul apart from the world, and that it was only natural she should return again to the calm and sacred retreat that had sheltered her innocent young girlhood, all speculation ceased.

When six months had passed, and she returned again to her world of gaudy glitter and hollow pleasures, all her friends were impressed by the profound sadness of her face, as well as her weary, listless air. For some reason, the petted child of fashion had lost her interest in her former amusements, and declared often that she preferred the solemn silence of the cloister to the gayest ball or carnival, and the holy services of the church to the most brilliant opera that had ever been performed.

On this day of which we write, she was to receive for the first time since her return, dressed in her usual rich and tasteful fashion, which was due, on this occasion, more to the efforts of her maid than to any wish of her own heart. She was beautiful, and she could not help knowing it, for she had heard it repeated over and over by the gay young nobles who frequented her father's palace to bask for a blissful hour in her bright smiles, which she seemed to bestow on all alike.

As she sat at the window of the elegant *salon*, one elbow resting on a small table before her, and her chin pressed in her open palm, her eyes were fixed on the distant sky, instead of the garden below, filled with flowers, and musical with the tinkling of fountains, whose waters fell over beds of lilies resting on moss and fairy-like ferns; and her face had the absorbed,

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She should have been joyous and light-hearted, living as she did in the sunshine of prosperity. Young, beautiful, and beloved, what more had the world to give her? And yet her sad face and abstracted manner told plainly that a secret grief was hidden in the heart that beat so wearily under her rich robes.

"Ah, sweet cousin! how happy I am to see you again in your old place," cried a young, fresh voice; and a handsome youth entered the room, who seized the white hands of the Countess, and pressed them again and again to his lips.

"And I am glad to see you, dear Enrico!" returned the Countess, rising, with a smile that betrayed some pleasure, to receive her visitor.

"How could you be so cruel, Elena, as to withdraw the light of your presence from us all this while, leaving us to pine in darkness while we waited for your return?"

"To try your devotion and affection," returned the lady, at the same time asking her cousin to take a chair near her, "for you know we prize the sunlight more after many cloudy days, and I wished to see if it would be so with my friends; if, instead of forgetting me during my brief absence from them, they would be longing for a sight of me again."

"Ah, cousin, you have been too cruel; and such a test were useless, for you well know that we think but of you, and worship you, whether present or absent."

"The old story, Enrico—flattery and protestations; and I presume you love me not a whit better for it all. A little cool, calm friendship would please me better now, not having listened to these extravagances for some time."

"Of course, Elena, it is the old story; what else can it be?" cried the young man passionately. "You well know I adore you. But of what use, seeing I am poor and your father would wed you to a rich husband?"

"Which he never will do with my consent," returned the Countess firmly. "Enrico, I am resolved never to marry, and at times I think seriously of devoting myself to a religious life."

"Oh, say not so, cousin; that would be impossible. You are not in the least fitted for such a vocation; why, you would beat yourself to death against your prison bars in a little while."

"Nay, Enrico, for I would have no desire for freedom; the peaceful calm of the cloister suits me now better than the tumult of the gay world."

"How so, sweet cousin? You were not inclined to such a life a short while ago. I remember when you were the merriest of us all."

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change, and the gay become grave, and the grave gay.
I am but obeying a law of nature. However, we will
not talk so sadly on this our first meeting after my ab-
sence. Tell me something of the gay world, of what
has happened these last six months."

"A great deal must have happened certainly, but I
made no note of passing events while you were gone.
I thought only of you night and day."

"Foolish again, Enrico. Now tell me, how is the
pretty little Marchesa whom you admired so ardently
six months ago?"

"The Marchesa? Oh! that is all over. It is true,
I admired her, but only *en passant*. She is be-
trothed to the old Connt Artiloni, and is to be married
soon."

"Poor child! I am sorry for her," said Elena with a
sigh.

"Sorry?—pray tell me why. He is rich and has one
of the finest palaces in Florence."

"That may be, but it is the greater cause for pity,
for it plainly shows that she has sold her youth and
beauty to his old age and decrepitude for sordid gain—
for gold and jewels."

"But the world does not look at it in that way,"
cried Enrico astonished.

"No, perhaps not, for the world has only eyes for its
own interests, and gold and pomp is the god it wor-

ships. O Enrico! I would rather be the veriest beggar than to so degrade myself."

"And yet, Elena, rumor says that you are about to practise what you so strongly condemn."

"I?—how so?" cried the Countess in astonishment.

"Then you do not know that the Duke of Castellara has returned."

"My God! is that true?"

"Yes, he came back a few days ago, wearied enough with his diplomatic mission at Vienna; and they say he has renewed his suit for your hand, and that the Count, your father, looks favorably upon his proposition."

"I have heard nothing of it, and I scarce think such an arrangement can be made without consulting me," replied the Countess proudly.

"It would appear so," said Enrico thoughtfully; "and yet you know my uncle's character. Even you, his only child, whom he loves to distraction, have no power to change him when he has once decided on any course."

"Yes, that is true," sighed Elena. "Alas! I know too well how vain it is to try to move him."

"Your sad experience of a year ago with the young English lord taught you that. There seemed to be no reason for refusing his suit; he was both rich and noble, and, Elena, I always thought you loved him."

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"I did, cousin," replied the Countess in a low voice, turning away her head to conceal her dreadful pallor. "And I entreated my father on my knees to allow me to become his wife, but he refused his consent coldly and sternly, in spite of my tears and prayers."

"Poor Elena!" said Enrico tenderly. "It almost broke your heart, I well know, for you have never since been the same."

"It was, indeed a cruel blow, for I loved him as I never shall love another. And when I heard of his death a few months ago, I felt that I could not survive him; but I am still living, for the young and healthy cannot die, even though their hearts are crushed and withered."

"Elena, did you ever suspect that he was unfairly dealt with?"

"Hush! for God's sake, cousin; you do not mean—no! you cannot mean that his life was sacrificed to my father's ambition."

"No, cousin, not to your father's ambition, but to the vengeance of the Duke of Castellara, who could not forgive him for being your accepted lover. He lingered in Florence so long after the refusal of his suit, that, perhaps, the Duke feared you might flee with him to England, in spite of your father's commands."

"But you remember the manner of his death?"

"Certainly; he was attacked by brigands in a pass

of the Apennines, and was shot down after a gallant defence; all Florence rang with the story of his bravery."

"Then, in Heaven's name, how could the Duke of Castellara have had anything to do with this tragic and fearful death among the mountains; for at that very time the Duke was here, persecuting me with his hateful attentions."

"God knows, cousin, I do not wish to accuse any man of a crime that he may be innocent of; but it is my opinion, and it may remain a secret between us, that the brigands in the mountain pass were no brigands at all, but minions of the Duke, hired to take the life of your lover!"

"Holy Mother in Heaven! and my father would sacrifice me to the monster who has murdered the only man I have ever loved! O Enrico! this is too terrible."

"Hush! dear cousin, calm yourself; for visitors may arrive at any moment, and you would not wish them to witness your agitation."

"Ah! it is easy to bid me be calm; but if you could see the tempest raging within my soul, you would know how impossible it is for me to follow your advice. Enrico, dear cousin, I am most unhappy! I am terrified at the gulf before me, and my past haunts me ceaselessly. This world has no further happiness for me; fashion

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and splendor are but empty words; wealth I do not
 value, unless I can use it for the good of others. Life
 has lost its savor; at twenty I am old and weary;
 then, why should I linger in a world that has nothing
 to give me? Is it not true that the cloister is a fitting
 place for me?"

"Ah! poor Elena," returned Enrico, wiping away a
 sudden tear. "If I could make you happy, I would
 gladly give my life to do so, for it is worthless when
 you suffer; but I can do nothing, save to kneel at
 your dear feet and offer you my heart's unselfish de-
 votion, my friendship, my brotherly love. You must
 bear your burden as you best can, trusting to me to
 lighten it all that lies within my power.

"Thank you, my dear friend—my brother, if you
 will. Now that I know I have one true heart to lean
 upon, I will try and live, if not for myself, for others.
 Only yesterday, I thought it would be possible for me
 to still find some happiness on earth, for I saw another
 more wretched than myself, whose sorrow I softened
 and whose tears I dried."

"Sweet cousin, it may be your mission on earth to
 make others happier through your angelic ministra-
 tion; but tell me, pray, who was the happy recipient
 of your kindness."

"One who needed it, Enrico. At Ave Maria I went
 to Santo Spirito to pray, and just as I was about to

kneel, I heard such heartrending sobs near me, that I turned to see who was in such bitter trouble; and there, prone before the altar, I saw a poor, deformed creature, weeping and praying pitifully. I spoke to him gently, and he raised a sorrow-stricken face to mine—such a pained, worn face as I never saw before; it has haunted me ever since with its patient, resigned expression—like that of a poor animal that has received only blows and cruelty, and expects nothing else.”

“Ah! he was happy, cousin, to receive your sweet sympathy. Tell me, pray, what was the cause of his grief, for all that interests you finds a responsive echo in my own heart.”

“He told me such a tale of wrong and injustice that my very soul burned with indignation. Think of it, Enrico, he is frightfully deformed, utterly friendless and poor, abandoned by his father, who betrayed and deserted his mother, and left her to die in poverty of a broken heart. He is an artist, and only asks to be allowed to work in peace at his humble occupation, which is copying in stone the statues in the squares and churches; but the children about the streets torment him so, that he cannot remain long enough in one place to complete his work. Sometimes, he confesses that his temper gets the better of him, and that he resents the indignities heaped upon him. Yesterday an officer came upon him just as he was about to

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 this minion of the government threatened the poor
 hunchback with prison, if he did not leave the city at
 once, thereby depriving the suffering creature from
 earning his daily bread in the only way that he can.
 Such injustice filled me with contempt for those who
 have authority over the weak and helpless. Is there
 no way, cousin, in our good city, where God has given
 us so much, that the poor and defenceless can be pro-
 tected against such cruel oppression?"

"You ask me a question difficult to answer, Elena.
 The poor are powerless in the hands of the rich. We
 cannot change the state of society; only such angels as
 yourself can, with saintly charity, soften a little their
 hard lot."

"Ah! if I could but devote myself to such a work
 in peace. If my father would permit me to remain as
 I am, I think I might be good and patient; but,
 Enrico, I feel that there are slumbering fires in me
 that may burst forth at any moment. If I am com-
 pelled to marry the Duke of Castellara, I am lost; my
 nature—my very soul, rebels against it, and if I am
 sacrificed to his ambition and pride, it will not be the
 soul of Elena Altimonti that will inhabit my wretched
 body, but a cruel demon that will avenge my ruined
 life on all mankind."

"Hush! hush! dear cousin, do not speak such dreadful words!" cried Enrico, springing to her side, and taking her cold hands in his, for she had fallen back in her chair, pale and exhausted from her strong emotion.

"They may seem terrible, but they are truthful!" she returned, looking at him steadily with gloomy eyes. "It is the protest of my better nature against such a sacrilege; and you, my cousin, can bear witness in the future, that on this day I was truthful, charitable, and even patient and resigned under my sorrow; that I would have lived a good life if I could have done so; that I would have been gentle, humble, and holy, if my father had not forced me to marry a demon."

"But, consin, he has not done so yet; rumor may be false."

"No, it is not. I have a premonition of my fate. I was separated from the man I loved, to be given to Castellara, because he is richer and more powerful than the other—because he is Ferdinand's favorite and a duke."

"But you can resist your father's wishes; you can rebel against his authority. There is no law to compel you to obedience."

"Alas! Enrico, I know too well how useless it is to struggle against his will! I am doomed to become the

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wife of a man I abhor. I have opened my heart to you, but it cannot in any way change my lot. I may as well submit to the inevitable without a murmur. You only have listened to the moanings of my heart, and you will keep my secret. When you see me in the gay world apparently happy and contented, you will know then that my soul is but a chaos of sin and misery, and you will pity me and remember this hour. Hark! there are carriage-wheels in the court; visitors are arriving, and they must not find the Countess Elena sad and *distraine*, or they will think that I mourn for my dead lover—and that is not allowed in this false world."

Enrico gave his hand to his cousin, his eyes full of sorrow and his heart heavy with her trouble. "You know you can always count on my fidelity and love," he said, in a broken voice; and then, with a tender pressure of her cold fingers, he turned away and left her alone, as proud and calm as though no mighty wave of emotion had ever swept over her soul.

The day before, at that very hour, she had stood in the Church of Santo Spirito, and Hugo had called her an angel; but now the haughty face and mien bore little resemblance to the divinely compassionate figure that had bent over him then.

Standing in stately dignity in the centre of the elegant *salon*, her beautiful form in its satin drapery

reflected from a dozen mirrors, gold and glitter around her, the air heavy with the perfume of flowers, strains of distant music mingled with rippling of the fountains soothing her soul with its tender melody, she calmly awaited the new-comer, whose footsteps she heard without, as two liveried footmen, with great ceremony, threw open the door and announced his highness, the Duke of Castellara.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DUKE OF CASTELLARA.

THE Duke of Castellara had passed by some years the meridian of life, although he did not appear an old man, being of a fine, tall figure, smooth, florid complexion, and quick, vigorous movements. His well-shaped head was covered with thick, closely-cut gray hair, and a heavy moustache, well silvered, partially concealed his mouth, which was coarse, cruel, and sensual in expression, while his heavy jaw and muscular neck denoted in no small degree the animal in his nature, which was fully confirmed by the tigerish glitter of his small, steel-colored eyes.

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was called a handsome man by the fair sex, he was not exactly pleasant to look upon, and generally inspired more awe and admiration than affection. His reputation as a diplomat, officer, and gentleman was good; but his private character was execrable, in spite of the care which he took to conceal his dark doings. There was scarce ever a duel fought, a young wife dishonored, a maiden betrayed, that his highness, the Duke of Castellara, was not at the bottom of it; and it was well known in Florence that he never tolerated a rival, either husband or lover. Being utterly unscrupulous and possessed of enormous wealth, he found means of disposing of those who came between him and his desires in a manner that, though it did not place a public stigma upon him, was talked over and well understood in private.

Many a noble lady of Florence, in spite of his evil character, had coveted his title, wealth, jewels, and palaces; but he had reached his fiftieth year without conferring them upon any one, though it was said that Ferdinand had selected more than one excellent *parti* for him, which he had firmly declined, preferring his freedom to the most honorable alliance that could be bestowed upon him.

A few years before the opening of our story, the young Countess Elena Altimonti had flashed suddenly upon the fashionable world of Florence, fresh from the sombre shades of the convent where her childhood and

girlhood had been passed, owing to the death of her mother shortly after her birth.

Her surpassing beauty, her grace, her wit, had placed her at once on the very summit of popularity, and, before she had been in society one season, she was declared the reigning belle, the adorable Contessa, the sweetest flower, the brightest gem that had ever adorned the fair city of the *Val d'Arno*.

Among her most devoted suitors, and the first in the field, was the Duke of Castellara; but, strange to say, the young beauty was not at all dazzled either by his wealth, title, or person, and treated him with less consideration than she did her very humblest lover.

Before her first season was over, a young Englishman, Lord Challoner, appeared on the fashionable horizon, who bade fair to rival the Duke in the favor of the queen of beauty. He was young, handsome, brave, generous, and rich, though his wealth could not compare with the Castellara estate; however, he was not a suitor to be despised by the most aspiring maiden.

Rumor did not couple the young lord's name particularly with that of the Contessa Elena Altimonti, for all masculine Florence was at her feet, and it was difficult to fix upon any one who received marked favor. Suddenly the pulse of the gay world beat more quickly with the news that the Duke of Castel-

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lara had offered himself to the proud beauty, and had
been refused.

"Can you imagine such a thing?" cried more than
one intriguing mamma. "They say she has actually
refused Castellara. What presumption! a chit of a
girl, with little besides her title, to refuse the favorite
of Ferdinand—a duke—and a rental of more than half
a million scudi—why, she must be insane!"

The young nobles gathered apart and discussed it,
secretly glad that at last their insolent rival had re-
ceived a check to his ambitious hopes. "However, it
is no use to congratulate ourselves," said a young
marchese to Enrico Altimonti. "Your cousin will
finish by marrying him. Castellara is invincible and
irrepressible; he never sets his mind on anything
but what he succeeds in getting it. Why, it is even
said that he had the impudence to bid against the
Grand Duke's equerry at the sale of a horse, though he
well knew his royal master wanted it. Oh, his confi-
dence is something sublime. I would wager my roan
mare against your new landeau that he will ultimately
win her consent."

"Time will show," replied Enrico, turning away
with flushed cheeks and angry eyes.

Not long after the startling rumor of the Duke's re-
fusal had died out, another of hardly less interest set
the tongues of all the gossips wagging. Lord Challon-

ner had offered himself to the Contessa. Whether he had been accepted by her, no one knew; but it was generally understood that her father, Count Altimonti, had received his proposition with scorn, and refused him his daughter's hand in the most decided manner, forbidding him the *entrées* to his palace, and even going so far as to prohibit all intercourse between them in society.

"He is reserving her for Castellara," said the worldly wise. "The old Count is clever; he will not allow his daughter to wed a lord when she may become a duchess."

But, as the lovely Contessa appeared in society as gay and beautiful as ever, and as she seemed to avoid Lord Challoner, the idea gained ground that her affections had not been in the least involved, and that she too shared her father's ambitious schemes, and had only refused the Duke out of girlish caprice, being sure that he would return again a willing captive to her charms.

One day the news reached Florence that Lord Challoner had been shot by brigands in one of the Apennine passes, during a short excursion from Florence in the company of a party of English people.

This sudden and tragic taking off of one who had been a favorite in the best society of the city caused a great deal of excited discussion. Why had he alone

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been singled out for the murderer's cruel blow, and the others allowed to escape without even being held for a ransom? There was a mystery about it all that no one could solve; but gradually people ceased to talk or think of it, for a new subject claimed their attention. The Duke of Castellara had been sent by Ferdinand on a diplomatic mission to Vienna, and the Contessa Elena had gone into retirement during his absence. So for six months these important personages dropped out of their little world, and were almost as seldom spoken of as though they had never existed.

However, the wheel of time slowly and surely revolved, and brought the Duke and the Contessa Elena again to the surface of society. The fair recluse came forth from her retirement lovelier than ever, because of the gentle melancholy that invested her with a new charm, adding a little mystery to what before was as clear and bright as day.

Scarce had her serene beauty beamed again on the happy hearts of her adorers, when the Duke of Castellara appeared in their midst, as gay and alert, as confident and insolent as ever, and the lesser stars drew aside with diminished lustre, convinced that their ascendancy was over, and their waning light quenched in his superior brilliancy.

When the Duke of Castellara was so unexpectedly announced to the Contessa Elena, after the departure

of her cousin, she turned deathly pale, and could scarcely control her agitation. However, her pride came to her aid, and she succeeded in returning his courtly greeting with her usual calm and graceful manner.

"Now the sun shines for me again," cried the duke, pressing his lips gallantly to her hand, and bowing almost to the ground. "And I have not seen it since I last looked upon your lovely face; so you may know how welcome it is to me."

"Indeed! then is it always dark in the gay city of Vienna? I had thought the sun shone there as it does everywhere else," returned the Contessa coldly, as she seated herself and toyed with her fan carelessly.

"Ah! yes, for others, but not for me. Your smile is the only sunlight that gladdens my eyes," said the Duke, as he drew a chair near her and slowly seated himself, regarding her closely all the time.

"Your remark is not original, Duke. I heard the same sentiment, expressed in almost the same language, not a half-hour ago."

"Ah! then some other adorer has been here before me. I hoped to be the first to welcome you," replied the Duke in low, even tones, still searching her face with his cold, glittering eyes.

For a moment neither spoke; then the Duke, bending nearer and raising his glass, said with meaning:

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s, said with meaning:

"It seems to me, Contessa, that your retirement has not quite agreed with you. You are lovelier than ever, a thousand times more adorable, but there is a slight shade over your beauty that was once so dazzling that we poor mortals could scarce look at it. You are a little paler, a little *distraine*, a little melancholy—is it not so?"

"Since your highness has done me the honor to inspect me so closely, you are surely able to judge for yourself," returned the Contessa, rising with a hot flush and seating herself on a sofa at a little distance.

With imperturbable gravity and coolness, the Duke rose and seated himself by her side, while he made an effort to take her hand.

"Duke, you forget yourself!" cried Elena hotly, her pale face burning and her eyes flashing defiance into his. "I pray that you will return to your former seat. Your familiarity is insulting."

"Ah! sweet Elena, what severe words you use. Do you not know that I am here as your accepted husband, that within an hour your father consented to my proposition and promised me your hand?"

"Duke, I beg that you will listen to me, and permit this interview, on a subject I dislike, to be final."

The Duke silently bowed.

"I regret to be obliged to repeat to you what I said a year ago, but you compel me to do so. My father

cannot dispose of my hand without my consent, and that I refuse, as I did then—decidedly, irrevocably.”

“Pardon me, Contessa, for renewing a subject so disagreeable to you. I hoped ere this your views had changed, and that you would be disposed to obey your father and make me the happiest of mortals; but I perceive you are as little inclined to listen to me now as you were then.”

“As little, and even less, your highness,” returned Elena coldly.

“But the reason that decided you to refuse me then does not now exist.”

“I do not understand,” and the Contessa raised her head proudly. “Pray do not speak in riddles; I hate all that is obscure.”

“And I also.”

“Then explain your remark.”

“I said the reason does not exist.”

“What reason?”

“I will repeat the remark; the reason that decided you to refuse my offer of a year ago.”

“This fencing with your words is not agreeable to me,” replied the Contessa, rising suddenly and turning her back upon her tormentor, while she looked steadily from the window.

“Ah! now, my sweet lady, do not affect to misunderstand me,” said the Duke, following her. “Pray be

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seated again, and I will make my words plainer, but perhaps less pleasant."

Elena suffered him to lead her to a chair, where she seated herself in haughty silence.

"Since the reason does not exist," continued the Duke in his hard polished tones.

"But the reason does exist!" interrupted the Contessa, with a sudden burst of emotion, "and it is my aversion to you—I do not love you. I repeat what I said a year ago."

"A year ago, it is true, you did not love me, because you loved another."

Elena turned deathly pale, but made no reply.

"A year ago," continued the Duke in his icy tones, "you loved Lord Challonner."

"How dare you make such an assertion? What authority have you for it?"

"Your retirement from the world after his death, your pale cheek, your sad air."

The Contessa shivered slightly and looked resolutely away from the demon before her.

"Do not avert your lovely eyes. I see that I have guessed the truth. You loved him and you mourn for him still."

"Yes, you are right. I loved him and I mourn for him still," cried Elena, pressing her hand over her lips to keep back her sobs.

"At last, then, we have arrived at the true reason for your refusal of my hand."

"Having loved him, could I marry his murderer, think you?" and the Contessa turned her flashing eyes, from which the tears had dried, full upon the Duke, as though she would read his very soul.

For a moment his insolent gaze fell beneath her searching look; then, smiling cruelly and sarcastically, he said: "Pray do not speak in riddles. I hate all that is obscure."

"My words, Duke, are not as obscure as the manner of his death, or the mystery surrounding it."

"I was not aware that there was any mystery. I have understood that he was killed by brigands—a common enough occurrence, I think, in this country."

"On the contrary, a most unheard-of thing in such a place. They must have been hired to do it by some one who desired his death."

"And if any one did such a deed for love of you, could not you forgive him, and return such a passion?"

"My God! what a monstrous thought. Do not torture my ears with such words. I fear you. I hate you, and I pray you to leave my presence!" cried Elena, beside herself at this horrible question.

"Calm yourself, Contessa, I am but jesting; and rest assured I had nothing whatever to do with the death of your lover," said the Duke, soothingly.

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"I implore you to leave me," continued Elena, now pale and weeping, "or you will compel me to retire from your presence."

"As you will," and the Duke, bowing low, turned toward the door. "For the present, I will leave you, since you wish it; but I pray that you will endeavor to overcome your repugnance to me, as it will be decidedly uncomfortable when I am your husband."

The Contessa pressed her hands together, striving to recover her composure as she said, with forced calmness: "Once for all, Duke, let us end this. You will never be my husband; my very soul revolts against the thought. I will defy my father—aye, all the world, to force such a bond upon me. You cannot wed me without my consent, and that I will never give."

"Pardon me for contradicting you, Contessa, and allow me to say that you *will* consent; that before another day is gone you will give me your hand of your own free will. The Duke of Castellara is not used to being thwarted in his dearest wishes. Now, farewell, until you summon me to your side as your accepted suitor."

Elena stood upright in the centre of the room, cold, rigid, and silent, until the door closed upon the demon who had so tortured her; then, with a wild cry, she sank down in a heap on the rich carpet, and lay panting and weeping in an agony of grief.

Scarcely had the footsteps of the Duke of Castellara died away in the distance, before an inner door that led to the *salon* opened, and an old man, with slightly bowed figure, thin, gray hair, and pale, worn, resolute face, softly entered.

He paused for a moment on the threshold, with the door still open behind him, seeming irresolute whether to advance or retire; then, with a glance of infinite pity, that changed instantly into a hard, stubborn look, he came towards the weeping girl, and leaning over her, lifted her tenderly in his arms, while he said somewhat sternly:

"What is the meaning of this unseemly grief, Elena?"

The sound of her father's voice appeared to soothe the Contessa instantly, for, leaning her head against the Count's shoulder, and pressing his hand to her heart, she said between her sobs: "It must have been a frightful dream, and now, my father, you are here, and it is gone."

"What has happened, what was a dream?" asked her father, with a puzzled look.

"This dreadful interview with the Duke of Castellara. It surely could not have been real?"

"Are you insane, child? What could there be dreadful in a visit from the Duke? Why, every lady in Florence welcomes him with outstretched hands?"

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"Ah! now I am convinced that it is real, since you know of it and have allowed it," cried Elena, weeping again. "Oh! my father, how could you permit him to torment me so? A year ago I begged you to spare me such torture again."

"What strong words you use, child! Why should it torture you to listen to the Duke? Other women would be flattered by his preference."

"Other women do not hate and loathe him as I do."

"I pray you to moderate your expressions; they are too severe."

"But, my father, they are not stronger than my aversion."

"Why should you hate the Duke of Castellara? He loves you, and has but told you so; surely that is a strange reason for hating him."

"He persecutes me, he insults me when he talks of his love."

"This is childish folly, Elena, and you know not what you are saying."

"Alas! I know too well; my poor heart speaks through my lips."

"It is an honor that you are insane to refuse. What prouder destiny could you ask than to be the Duchess of Castellara—the wife of Ferdinand's favorite?"

"Father, father, I implore you—you who know the

secret of my unhappy love, not to speak of my wedding another."

"Miserable child, will you allow that romantic folly to ruin all your prospects in life?"

"How can you call it a folly? It was part of my being, and it lives now within my heart."

"Then I advise you to kill it as soon as possible, for it can do you no good to nourish it and keep it alive with your tears."

"Listen to me, father. When you refused my prayer to allow me to wed the man I loved, I submitted to your will; I obeyed you outwardly, but my love still remained. His death removed him from the path of your ambition, and now you think you can tear his image from my heart and replace it by another; but you are mistaken. I shall never love again, and I shall never become the wife of any man."

Count Altinonti turned fearfully pale as his daughter's words fell on his ears, and the nervous clasp of his hands told how deep was his emotion; but he replied as calmly as though she had made a remark of little importance.

"Elena, my poor child, our wills seem to come into constant conflict. Whatever I wish, whatever I know to be for your best good, is sure to meet with opposition from you. Now, be calm and listen to reason. Granted that you loved Lord Challonner, and that I

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refused my sanction to your union with him—that you obeyed me, and that afterwards he died—is there any reason in all that why you should not marry now? Why, even the most devoted wife will lay aside her weeds for a new love. It seems to me that this maidenly grief is unbecoming."

"Nay, father, do not taunt me. God knows that, next to my duty to you, it is the holiest feeling of my heart. I will obey you in aught else, but do not ask me to give my hand in marriage, especially to the Duke of Castellara, whom I hate with my whole soul."

"Elena, the time has come at last—the hour that I have dreaded for years, when I must tell you the truth. I hoped your acquiescence to my wishes would have spared me the humiliation of this moment. You have believed your father to be rich; you have thought this palace, these pictures, this costly furniture, the plate and jewels, belonged to me, but they do not; all that I call mine in the world belongs to the Duke of Castellara."

"My God, is this true?" cried Elena.

"Yes, it is true, fearfully true; and now, when you refuse to listen to his proposal, I see what a fearful gulf yawns before me."

"What can I do—how can I help you? Alas! I know not."

"By becoming the wife of the Duke. The day you

consent to be his, he will destroy every proof of my indebtedness to him ; he will restore my property to me, and I shall be a free and happy man again."

"And I the most wretched of slaves. O father ! the sacrifice is too much."

"Listen to the other side of my humiliating story. If you refuse, Count Altimonti and his lovely and accomplished daughter will be turned out upon the world helpless beggars."

"Ah ! my father, I would a thousand times prefer poverty—even beggary—to becoming his wife."

"But your father's honor—have you no thought of that ? The proud name of Altimonti will be dragged through the mire, the palace of his ancestors will pass into the hands of strangers, and he will have no other refuge than the grave."

"Can the Duke of Castellara buy me at such a price ? Can he make the father's misfortune a means of winning the wretched reluctant daughter ? Oh, he is a greater monster than I thought him !"

"Hush, my child ; he loves you, and he will not be thwarted. Had you listened kindly to his proposals, and accepted him voluntarily, he would not have resorted to such means : as it is, he is resolved to gain your consent or complete my ruin."

"O father ! is there no way of escape ? Cannot you free yourself from his power without sacrificing me ?"

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I will bear any lot patiently, however humble, if you
 will but spare me this dreadful fate."

"There is no way, my child. We are helpless in his
 hands, and you exaggerate your position. The Duke
 offers you the greatest honor that can be conferred
 upon you. Your life will be one triumph, and you
 will be happy in having done your duty, in having
 saved your father from a dishonored grave."

"Say no more, I implore you. Do with me as you
 will—I am ready for the sacrifice; but, my father,
 never reproach me if you see forever before you, in-
 stead of the Elena you have loved, but a wretched
 mockery of her image, a body without a heart, a crea-
 ture destitute of one noble impulse; for, to become the
 wife of the Duke of Castellara, I must kill all that is
 good in my nature; every tender emotion, every holy
 thought, must be torn from my wretched, suffering
 soul, and instead of a gentle, loving woman, I shall be
 changed into a cruel, reckless creature, unloved by all
 and despised most by myself."

"My poor child, your recent sorrow has unnerved
 you, and you take a morbid view of everything.
 When you are the Duchess of Castellara you will
 think differently, and will be ready to bless me for
 showing you your duty and saving you from your-
 self."

"God grant that it may be so. I am doing my duty,

you say, and that should be enough to insure my happiness. Write to the Duke of Castellara, and say that he was not wrong when he told me I would recall him to my side as my accepted suitor. Tell him to come. I consent, I consent!" and, with a sob of anguish, the unhappy girl fell back in her father's arms unconscious.

CHAPTER V.

FIORDILISA.

WHEN Hugo fled in the gathering twilight, with the infant he had taken from the dead woman whom he found near the Church of San Salvador, his only thought was to reach the shelter of his hovel on San Miniato as quickly as possible. Without looking behind him, he hurried up the steep hill, breathless, trembling, guilty, for, now that he had really done the deed, he wished it undone and the child safely back on its mother's bosom. It seemed to him that footsteps were pattering after him; that the very air was full of horror, beating on his ears with a strange, low plaint, as though a mother mourned for her first-born and would not be comforted.

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warm little face pressed to his poor heart, that had never throbbed before with such tender emotion. Already he seemed to love it; his desolate life needed something to render its burden endurable. Then, what sin was there in his caring for this motherless infant?

Suddenly a figure appeared to stand before him, clad in soft, light drapery, with golden hair falling away from its face, and eyes filled with divine love and compassion. Was it the Holy Virgin, who was thus barring his way, or was it a vision of the Angel of the Church? The sweet face, as he looked, seemed to change from pity to rebuke, and one hand pointed to the city he had left behind him—to the dead woman lying under the cypress near San Salvador.

Hugo was a creature of impulse, and, as most of his countrymen, superstitious to folly. Although he was sure that this vision before him was only visible to his mental eyes, yet it seemed to him as though he had really seen the Angel of the Church, and she had spoken to him reproachfully and warningly.

Stopping, like a wild animal suddenly brought to bay in its flight from its pursuers, he would have turned and retraced his steps, but already he heard a murmur of voices behind him. Some monks were creeping slowly up the hill, in the shadows of the cypress trees, and they evidently had passed the dead

woman without seeing her. He dared not meet these holy men with the evidence of his theft in his arms. So, instead of turning back, he hurried on faster than before, and did not pause again until he reached the door of his hovel.

Outwardly, the place where the poor hunchback found shelter, and which he called home, was little better than a pile of stones thrown rudely together and covered with a sort of coarse cement which filled up the crevices, keeping out the wind and rain in winter, and the heat and dust in summer.

There was a square hole for a window, with a board that slid back and forth as it was needed, either to open or shut the aperture, and a door so low that an upright man could not have entered without stooping; but it was high enough for the bent figure of Hugo. Everything about the exterior of the humble place was neat and orderly; a few morning-glories crept over the rough walls and shaded the casement, and several rose-bushes and myrtles grew in boxes standing near the entrance; a clump of cypress trees and a stunted olive made a background for the rude hovel, shading it from the too ardent rays of the sun, and giving it a picturesque, if not a cheerful, appearance.

Although the outside of the hunchback's home was so poor and unattractive, the interior presented a pleasant picture, for everywhere the artist's taste was visi-

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ble. Scraps of different colored drapery which had been given him, or that he had picked up from the *bric-à-bras* shops on the *Ponte Vecchio*, were arranged over the rude walls with remarkable taste, both in regard to harmony of color and design. A simple bed in one corner was covered with a drapery, which he had manufactured himself from bright bits of cambrie and other stuffs that the more fortunate had thrown away as useless, while everywhere his skill in carving was visible. The frames that surrounded a few coarse prints were works of art; the small table, chair, and stool had been fashioned by his own hands, as well as a book-case that hung against the wall, filled with some worn books that he had bought for a trifle from the stalls in the streets. They were mostly works on art, or the lives and writings of the different Italian authors, plainly showing that the poor hunchback loved literature as well as all other beautiful and ennobling things.

In one corner, and screened off from the remainder of the room, was a chimney, a few shelves and cooking utensils, all as clean and bright as the most fastidious housekeeper could desire, and at the foot of his bed was a little altar carved with a loving, reverential hand, supporting a crucifix and a dying Christ, copied from *Luca della Robbia*, with two kneeling angels on each side.

Nearly ten years of Hugo's life had been passed in this little room, and he had spent all his leisure time in improving and decorating it, until at times it seemed to him as beautiful as the most elegant palace in Florence, and a fit place for a king to dwell in. It had cost him very little to live there; he paid the monks of San Miniato a trifle for the privilege of inhabiting the little hovel that was, after all, only an abandoned goat-house, and no living thing, save Nana his goat, ever came near him. The gentle animal was his sole companion as well as his principal source of sustenance, for her milk and a few vegetables that he raised off a little plot behind the hovel, served him for food when he had no money to purchase better.

On this night, when Hugo entered his low door and gained the shelter of his humble roof, he felt as though he had been away for months, so much had happened to him, and he had experienced so many new emotions. His first act was to place the child upon his bed, and then groping around he found and lighted a small lamp which he held over the infant, examining it closely. It moved and nestled as though it was about to awake, and then cried a little in its sleep.

The hunchback looked around half frightened. What should he do if it should weep and wail for its mother?

"Perhaps it is hungry," he said. "I must find Nana and get it some nice fresh milk." Going to the door, he made a peculiar noise by placing his hands over his mouth, and in a moment Nana answered his call, and came trotting to him, rubbing her docile head against his knee.

When he had milked the goat and returned again to the room, he found the babe fairly awake and crying lustily for food.

Taking it up awkwardly, but tenderly, he soothed it and fed it with the warm milk, which it took readily, much to his surprise, for he thought the tender nursing would refuse to be fed in any other than the natural way.

"Ah! what an exquisite little creature it is," said Hugo, watching it with fervent admiration. "Its eyes are as blue as heaven, and its tiny rings of hair are like threads of yellow silk."

After it had eaten until it was satisfied, with a woman's tenderness and thoughtfulness he unfastened the swathing bands that surrounded it, and allowed its little limbs the freedom that was natural to them. It seemed to enjoy its unaccustomed liberty hugely, stretching out its chubby arms and cooing and laughing in the pale, sad face that was bent over it.

The hunchback had always adored the little cherubs and figures of children in pictures and statuary, look-

ing upon them as something holy and pure, and far beyond his earthly affections; and he had always modelled and carved them with singular reverence and love; and now, when he held in his arms this warm, living, exquisite creature, this perfect model of all that was angelic, and his artistic nature revelled in its dainty outlines, its soft curves, its dimpled roundness, it seemed as though Heaven itself had opened before him, and he was filled with an ecstasy of delight.

It was a strange picture that the flickering light of the little lamp fell upon. The deformed, grotesque figure of Hugo bending over the divine loveliness, innocence, and purity of the infant on his knees, with such a worshipping gaze as is only seen in the face of the Blessed Mother, or the adoring saints, looking with reverential awe at the holy child slumbering in the manger of Bethlehem.

For a long while he looked and worshipped, until the drowsy lids closed over its blue eyes, and sleep folded it again in its peaceful embrace; then he wrapped its robes softly around it, and laid it on his pillow to sleep by his side.

As he was turning away from the bed, something glittering on the floor at his feet attracted his attention; he stooped and picked it up, and on examining it, he found it to be a small gold clasp that had evidently fallen from the child's clothes. It was of

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antique and costly workmanship, and on the inside
was engraven daintily a coronet and crest.

"What can this mean?" he said, with sudden pallor.
"How could a child of the people become possessed
of this costly trinket? The woman was of humble
position, her dress denoted it; and her hands were
coarse and rough with toil, while the child, though as
lovely as an angel, does not seem to belong to wealthy
parents; its garments are such as are worn by the chil-
dren of the poorer classes—clean and comfortable, but
neither rich nor costly. It is a mystery that I cannot
understand. However, it is not worth worrying about;
the little angel belongs to me now, and it can make no
difference about its past; I must think only of its
future. Can it be possible that I can have an interest
in the future of any human being?"

Holding the clasp still in his hand, he turned again to
the bed and gazed long and thoughtfully on the child.

"It must be some weeks old—I wonder how many?
I wonder if its father lives, or if he has abandoned its
mother, as my unhappy mother was abandoned? I
wish I could know whether it had been baptized and
named, but I cannot. I can know nothing of its his-
tory. I have taken it instantly from one life to
another, and it must begin again, sweet, unconscious
innocent. To-day will be its birthday, July 6th, 1823,
and I must give it a name."

For a long time Hugo seemed to be revolving something in his mind, something important, for his brows were knit, and his face had an anxious expression; it was important—this giving the child a name without priest or holy water—but it must be done, “and I am the only one to do it,” he said gravely. “At first it seemed easy, very easy, but now, I think of it more, it is difficult to decide what to call it.”

“Ah! I have it now,” he said joyfully, after a moment more of silent cogitation, “and it will be so suitable, ‘Fiordilisa,’ how sweet and pretty, a lily, yes, she is a lily of purity and delicate whiteness, and I will call her Lisa—it will be shorter and more childlike. I wonder if she would awake if I should kiss her. My lips have never touched a human being’s since they were pressed upon my dead mother’s face. They are pure, and my kiss would be a benediction on her name, because I have sworn that they should touch no other face until I saw my mother again in paradise, and it seems as though I was with her to night, and as near heaven as I ever shall be. Oh! this wondrous human love, even for a child! How it ennobles and purifies the soul. I *shall* be better now. My lily, my sweet lily, I will toil for you, I will live for you, and be so tender and gentle to you that you will love me, even though I am a deformed and wretched being whom every one despises.”

Then with the hot tears falling over the pillow, he stooped and pressed his lips reverently to the white forehead of the babe, and made the sign of the cross over her, saying in a deep solemn voice: "May God and all the blessed saints protect thee from sin and sorrow in this hard world, and make thee good and happy through my humble instrumentality."

The child was sleeping soundly, unconscious of his prayers and tears; and fearing to awake it if he lay down by its side, he drew a chair near the bed, and leaning his weary head on the pillow close by his newfound treasure, he slept soundly until the sunlight shining into the window of his little room awoke him.

With the new day began a new life for him. The babe had to be fed, bathed, and swathed again in its clinging garments, which Hugo did as carefully and tenderly as a woman; for his artistic nature, and the constant and delicate handling of his carving-tools, made him expert in those things that men generally do awkwardly and roughly.

While he busied himself about his duties, he was revolving in his mind some plan by which he could communicate with the city, for he saw at once that the infant would need clothes and food, and many little delicacies which his humble way of living had never demanded; and he had the means of procuring them—thanks to the bounty of the Angel of the Church—but

who should he employ as a messenger, and who could he trust to lay out his money economically and judiciously? He thought of Father Ilario, his only friend; but he was about leaving for Rome, and beside, he was not the one to purchase the numberless little articles he needed, neither did he desire to impart his secret to any one; he did not wish any human being to know that the child was beneath his roof.

"No, no! I must not tell any one," he said; "for I might not be allowed to keep it, and it would kill me to lose it now."

He went to the door and looked out. The sun was just rising beyond the purple hills; the birds fluttered and chirped in the cypress; Nana browsed near the border of his small garden; a little rivulet running among the vines over some mossy rocks murmured pleasantly on his ear; the walls of the convent and the windows of the church were all ablaze with the sunlight; nature was awake, singing her morning song joyously, and Hugo's happy heart joined in the chorus.

Suddenly he thought of the dead woman lying under the cypress, and he turned pale and shivered.

"I wonder if she is there still," he said; and an irresistible desire to know took possession of him. "I must see; and if the child is sleeping, I will go; I need not be absent but a few moments."

The baby, refreshed by its bath and warm milk, had dozed off again; and Hugo, carefully locking the door, started down the hill in trembling haste. His very soul shrank from looking upon that terrible sight, even though the sun shone brightly and the whole world was awake.

"Some one must have discovered her before this," he said, to reassure himself. "A great many peasants must have already gone into the city." As he approached the spot, he scarcely dared to look, but when he did so, he uttered a cry of relief—she was not there! there was nothing on the ground but the flickering shadow of the foliage and the warm bright rays of the newly-risen sun.

Who had carried her away, and when had she been discovered? Had she lain there alone all through the dreary hours of the night, or had some belated peasant, trudging homeward, come upon her as he had done, and offered the services to the poor clay that he had refused? A sharp pang of remorse darted through his heart—he had acted a cruel and selfish part. He had taken the child because it was living and beautiful, and his heart desired it, and had left the dead mother to the mercy of others.

There was nothing in the sunlit silence of morning to explain the mystery of the dreary night; she was gone and had left no trace, save the marks of footsteps

on the grass ; whether his, or another's who had come to her aid, he could not tell. He could do nothing now, so remorsefully, and dejectedly, he retraced his steps toward his hovel on the hill.

Half way up the steep ascent he met a bright-faced peasant woman, who lived in a little cottage a mile beyond on the country road. She had often spoken to him kindly and cheerfully, and he had learned to like her and respect her ; she was clean and thrifty-looking, and he knew she was honest. At once the thought occurred to him to entrust her with his commissions. She was going direct to the city and would return in a few hours ; there could certainly be no better chance.

"Good morning, Signora," he said politely, as she paused in the road to return his greeting. "I see you are on your way to the city right early."

"Yes, Master Hugo. I go early to escape the heat. But you, how is it that you seem to be returning at this hour?"

"I am not returning, Signora, or rather I have not been to the city," replied Hugo, stammering and confused. "I wish to go, but I dare not." Then he told her briefly of what had happened the day before, omitting, of course, his discovery and theft of the child.

"Ah! my friend, you are hardly dealt with," returned the good woman compassionately. "And it is a sin and a shame to drive you from the city for no

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fault of your own. What can I do for you there? Tell me, pray, for I shall be glad to serve you in any way I can."

Then Hugo gave her a list of the articles which he desired to purchase, and taking one of the gold pieces that the Countess Elena had given him, from his pocket, he placed it in her hand. "Bring me these things when you return, and I shall be very grateful. I will await you here, so that you will not have to go out of your way."

"Very well, my friend, I will do your errand as though it were my own, for I cannot tell how soon I may want a like favor for myself. We none of us know what misfortune may come upon us," and with a cheerful *addio*, she started on her way, singing a merry song, as though her heart was light and free from care.

After that Hugo found no trouble in communicating with the city, for the kind-hearted Nella undertook all his commissions cheerfully, and performed them carefully and judiciously.

When he returned to his hovel his mind felt relieved of a heavy load. The dead woman was no longer near him to remind him of the dreadful scene of the night before, and his secret now seemed safe; beside, he had succeeded in finding a trusty messenger, who would bring him the articles he needed for the comfort of the child that he already loved so tenderly.

The baby still slept, and Hugo set about preparing his simple breakfast, and putting everything in order about the little room. So many other things had occupied his thoughts during the morning that he had forgotten the clasp he had picked up the previous night, and was not reminded of it until he came upon it in a drawer of his table, where he had placed it with the blanket that had been folded around the child.

On seeing it again an uncomfortable feeling of mystery and uncertainty troubled him. Taking it to the door where he could see it in the full light, he turned it over and over and examined it closely; there were nine points to the coronet, and around it a legend, in small and half-effaced characters, which he was unable to decipher.


"I wish I had not found this," he said, anxiously. "I would rather there had been nothing by which she could ever be identified. I have a mind to destroy it; but no, I will not. I will hide it, and it can make no difference. When she is old enough to understand, she must think that I am her father, and she must never see this, nor know that it was on her when she was taken from her mother. I will put it with the ring the Angel of the Church gave me, and I will wear them always next my heart."

Drawing from his bosom a small silk bag that contained a lock of his mother's hair and the ring given

him by the Countess Elena, he placed the clasp with them, shivering slightly as he did so, for what reason he could not tell, and then glancing furtively around, as though the child might see and understand, he returned his treasures to their hiding-place, with a feeling of superstitious awe and foreboding.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MARRIAGE IN THE DUOMO.

ONE morning all Florence was awake and stirring bright and early, for a thrill of excitement ran through the city, from the highest to the lowest. There was to be a great wedding in the Duomo, on a scale of splendor and magnificence never witnessed, except on the occasion of a royal marriage.

For weeks before this day, the fashionable, who expected to be present, had done little else than discuss it, dwelling on its grandeur, the wealth of the bridegroom, the beauty of the bride, the number of the bridesmaids, the costliness of the decorations, the unheard-of pomp and show, the superb trousseau, the wonderful banquet that was to be provided for hun-

dreds of guests, in short, all things that go to make up a display of royal splendor.

The fortunate and much-envied bride was the Contessa Elena Altimonti, and the happy, and equally envied groom was the Duke of Castellara.

At an early hour, the square in front of the Duomo was filled with an eager, curious crowd, in holiday attire, talking, laughing, and jostling each other good-naturedly, each trying to get the best places, where they could see to the best advantage the elegant *cortège*, while the vast Duomo was packed in every available place, except the centre of the grand nave, which was kept clear by a cordon of *Bersaglieri* in their handsome green uniforms and plumed helmets.

Since early morning the patient crowd had waited, and now the sun had nearly reached its meridian, when the rumble of wheels in the square, the tramp of horses, and the clatter of spurs and sabres, told that the splendid pageant had reached the door of the cathedral. First there came a mounted guard in brilliant uniform, Ferdinand's own body-guard, then the officers of the Grand Duke's household, then his Highness in his gilded chariot drawn by six spirited horses, then the Cardinal Bishop in his scarlet and gold equipage, followed by more dignitaries of the Church, then a guard of cuirassiers, then a pure white chariot decorated with nodding white plumes, and drawn by eight

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milk-white horses caparisoned with housings of silver cloth and decked with wedding favors. Within this superb carriage, as pale as a beautiful statue, sat the Contessa Elena Altimonti, and by her side, insolent, haughty, and contented, was the Duke of Castellara—Ferdinand's favorite, and the wealthiest noble in Florence. After them came more gaily decorated carriages, filled with the bridesmaids and the wedding guests, and last of all, forty or fifty young cavaliers, in brilliant uniforms, mounted on prancing chargers, each with a wedding favor of the Altimonti and Castellara colors blended.

When the beautiful bride entered the cathedral, every eye was fixed upon her, unmindful of all else, for a more lovely vision never dawned upon an enraptured crowd. Pale and graceful as a swaying lily, she leaned upon her father's arm, her train of white velvet floating behind her like waves of sea-foam, her satin robe, pearl embroidered, clinging to her slender figure, her arms and neck one blaze of gems, and a coronet resting on her golden hair, of such rare brilliancy that even royalty might envy it, while a veil as delicate and white as the spray of a fountain covered her in its transparent folds, softening her beauty without concealing it.

The mighty organ burst forth in grandest melody, as the Duke and his bride stood before the high altar.

Ferdinand descended from his chair of state, the Cardinal approached the chancel, and the ceremony that was to make Elena Altimonti the Duchess of Castellara, began. There was profound silence. Every word of the priest was heard distinctly, and the clear, proud voice of the Duke sounded like an exultant and triumphant song, as he responded, while the liquid tones of the Contessa were as calm and sweet, as though she were uttering some commonplace sentence in her father's *salon*.

The Grand Duke Ferdinand gave her away, the ring was placed upon her finger, and she knelt to receive the benediction of the holy father, like one in a dream, for her thoughts were far from the splendor of the scene around her. She was living over another hour in her life, a moment when one she loved with all her soul had knelt at her feet and whispered words of tender passion in her willing ear. So absorbed was she in her sad sweet memories, that she scarce heard the words of the priest, the roll of the organ, or the murmur of the vast multitude around her. At last the voice of her husband—that hated voice—fell upon her ear and recalled her to herself. Without raising her eyes to his, she listened in silence to his words of tenderness, which seemed more like an expression of triumph, and then turned to her friends, who crowded around her with their well-meant congratulations.

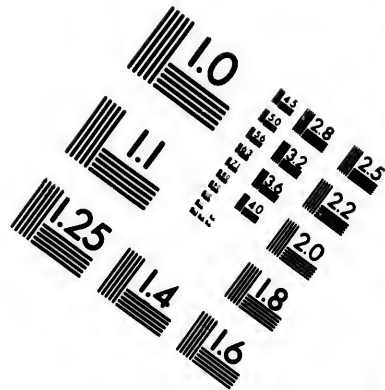
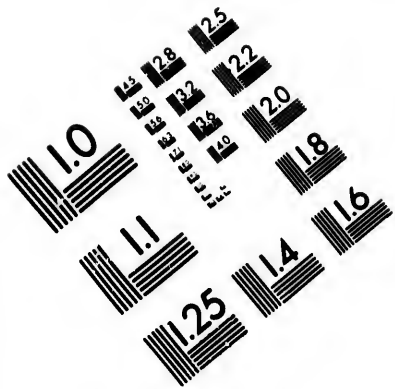
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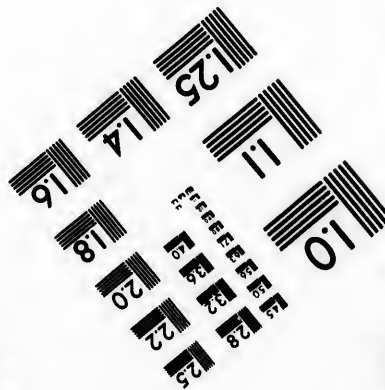
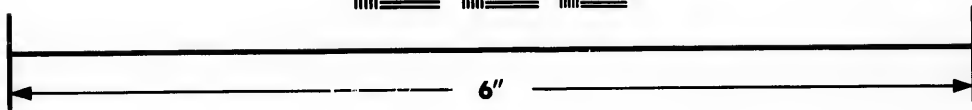
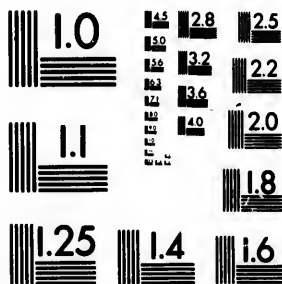
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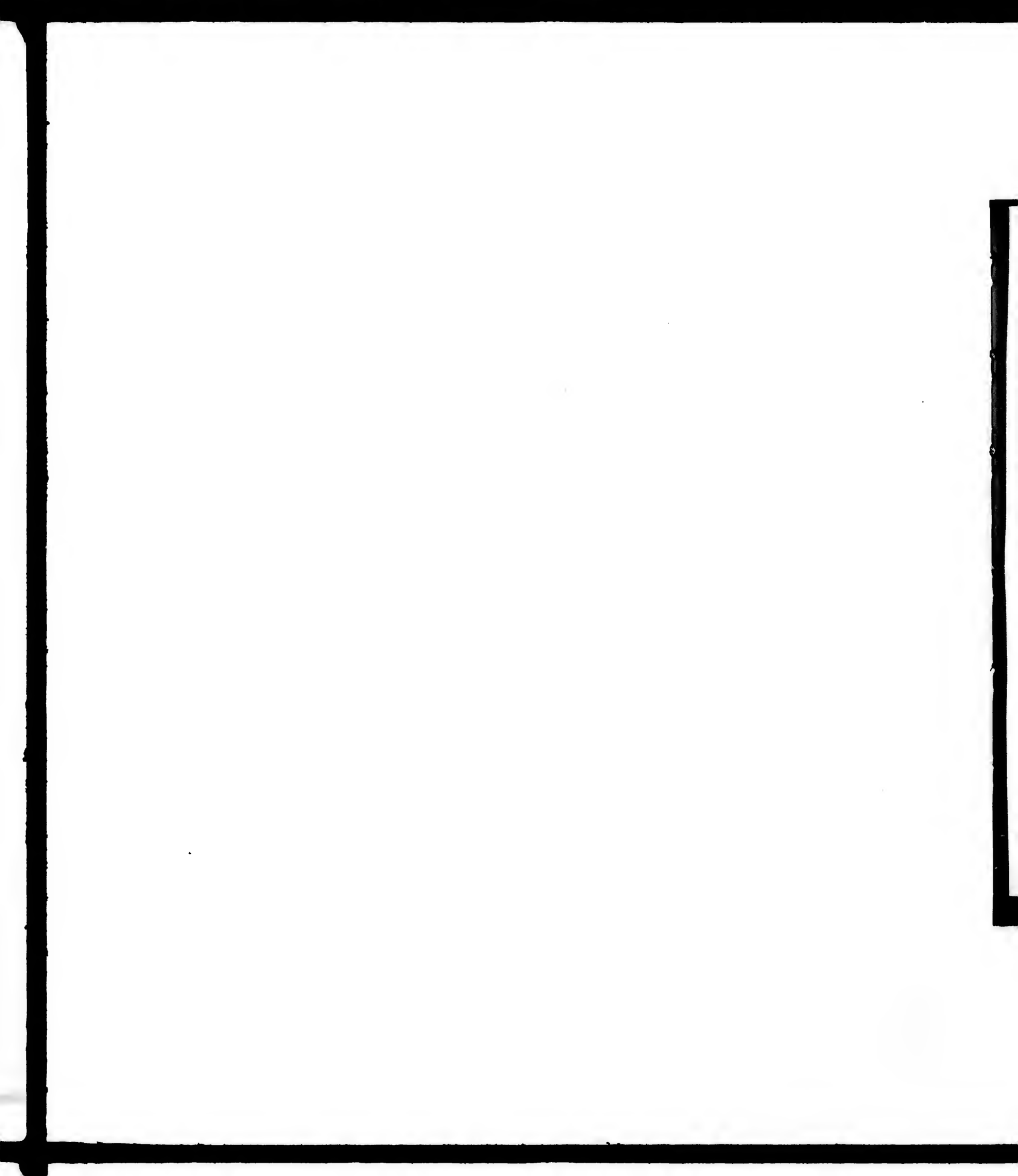
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Almost the first one to press to her side was Enrico, who, pale as death, looked pityingly on the lovely victim of a father's ambition. The silent, firm pressure of his fingers, the earnest expression of his eyes, reassured her, and enabled her to overcome the emotion that threatened to vanquish her forced calmness.

Again the organ pealed forth ; all was over, and the angels of heaven must have wept at the spectacle, for a greater mockery of all that is holy, a more pitiless sacrifice, a more cruel deception was never practised.

The Duchess of Castellara took the arm of her husband, but as she did so, she shot from under her down-cast lids such a glance of hate and scorn straight to his very soul, that he quailed under it, and looked away almost terrified.

The brilliant *cortège* filed out of the church ; the crowd huzzaed wildly, shouting " Long live the Duke, long live the Duchess ; " the bells rang out their merriest peals, and amid the general clamor of rejoicing the pale young bride drove away to her future home, the magnificent palace of the Duke of Castellara.

" I should not like to have had you look at me that way on our wedding day, Francesca," said a good-natured peasant to his buxom wife, who stood with wide eyes eagerly fixed on the Duchess.

" How, foolish Gito ? Do you expect the nobility to

appear as we do? Why, she only looked pale and proud, just as a duchess should."

"She looked as though she would like to stab the Duke, that was how she looked to me."

"Oh, nonsense. Why, her crown of diamonds was as handsome as a queen's."

"And her face as pale and fixed as a corpse."

"And the pearls on her necklace as large as my thumb."

"She never smiled once. I watched her face all the time. She never raised her eyes to her husband's, once."

"Did you notice the length of her train, and such velvet to drag over the ground? She never even raised it when she entered her carriage," said a shopkeeper, ruefully.

"Do you think the Duchess of Castellara would take the trouble to lift her train?" asked a little milliner near him. "I only wonder she did not have a couple of pages to bear it."

"They must have bought all the white plumes in Florence. I have counted more than fifty on the bride's chariot," returned the shopman. "Well, it is a good thing for we poor people who work. I wish the Duke of Castellara would get married every day."

"So do we," cried a group of children. "Have you heard what they are going to do?"

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"No. What is it?"

"The Duke's majordomo is going to shower lots of *confetti* in the square, and bags of silver coin—so much that those who pick it up will be rich all their lives."

"Is that true? Ah! his highness has the right kind of a heart after all. Now, look out *cara mia* for the silver, and let the *confetti* go. Silver will buy all the *confetti* you want, but *confetti* will not buy silver," and, with this sage advice, the man of business walked away.

"I dare say old Giovan would like to be a child, too, so that he might get some," said a pert little girl, holding up her apron in anticipation of the shower of sweets that would be poured into it.

"I'm glad that it is only for the children, else the grown people would push us little folk aside, and get it all."

"They can't do that, for, you see all these soldiers standing about to prevent them, and, it will be like stealing, if they take any. The Duke gave orders that it was only for the children," said a pale, eager boy, coming forward anxiously.

Presently, while they all pressed nearer to the main entrance of the Duomo, the stately majordomo came down the steps, followed by two servants bearing each a huge bag.

"There is the *confetti*! there is the money," they all cried, excitedly.

With one majestic wave of his hand, he cleared a space around him while he said, in a loud, pompous voice: "His highness, the Duke of Castellara, has remembered the children of Florence on this, his wedding day, and has ordered me to distribute among you three thousand *mezzi liri* and a number of bushels of *confetti*."

Before the majordomo had well finished his speech the air was rent with the joyous cry of "Long live the Duke of Castellara, long live the Duke!" Then each of the servants raising their hands, threw out over the crowd, handful after handful of *confetti* mingled with small silver coins.

Then such a wild scene as ensued would be impossible to describe; children rushing pell-mell over each other. The strong and greedy snatching from the timid and weak what they had picked up, one jostling aside another just as his fingers were about to close on a coveted piece—shouts, laughter, groans, tears and cries of rage and disappointment all mingled together, And when, from time to time, some poor trembling beggar who could not resist the temptation to stealthily snatch a piece was detected by one of the soldiers and rudely made to disgorge, a yell of delight would rise from the crowd, for the rights of the children were

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generally respected; the adults standing by to cheer on their own offspring, or the strong and rapacious who got the most in the struggle. At length the last handful was dispensed, and the last howl of delight uttered, and the dense crowd gradually dispersed, some contented with their share of the spoils, others crying and complaining over their disappointment and the bruises and blows they had received, but all, nevertheless, well satisfied that the Duke of Castellara was a good, generous man and a public benefactor, who had dispensed his charity right nobly and judiciously on this his wedding day.

While this rude scene was taking place in the square of the Dnomo, the banquet at the Ducal palace was progressing on a scale of magnificence and splendor seldom, if ever, equalled.

The Duke, with the Duchess by his side, received his guests in the most courtly manner, indicating the place of each one at the banquet; Ferdinand and the Court first, and after them each noble according to his title, and each officer according to his rank. When all were seated and the gilded covers were removed, it seemed as though every dainty and rarity had been gathered from the four corners of the earth. Fruits from the tropics, birds and game from the far North, fish from all the rivers of the earth, wines from every vintage under the sun.

Gold and silver dishes of antique workmanship were piled with rare fruit and decorated with costly exotics. Platters of delicate Sèvres ware, each a work of art in itself, held the game and meats of every description, which were served to the guests on plates of oriental china as thin and richly colored as the petals of a flower, while the wine flowed in old Venetian glasses as delicate and transparent as bubbles. Nothing was wanted at this *Lucullean* banquet that money could procure or the most extravagant taste devise, and yet the Duke did not seem satisfied with the result, for while the wine flowed as freely as the wit of his guests, and the merry laughter of fair maidens mingled with the gay *badinage* of their cavaliers, his Duchess remained silent, sad, and indifferent.

When the moment arrived for the bride to cut the bridal cake, as was the custom, all stood up and the Duke, with a graceful and pleasant speech gave her the gold knife, while Ferdinand held her fan; but, instead of performing the simple ceremony, she declined, with a cold and haughty bow, and requested her maid of honor, who stood behind her, to do it for her. Then, without appearing to notice the Duke, who was greatly annoyed at this breach of etiquette, she turned and made some remark to Ferdinand, who sat on her right.

"The Contessa Elena always was eccentric," said one

of her admirers in reply to the remark of a lady next him, "and now that she is a bride and a duchess, she has a better right than ever to indulge in her little whims."

"But the Duke is in a fearful rage," said the lady. "See how pale he is, and how he gnaws his upper lip. I should not like to offend him so openly. It is a bad beginning, and I am sure they will never be happy."

"Bah! what difference, *entre nous*, she has bought her coronet, and she must pay for it; but she must not drive the Duke to the wall, for he is a dangerous enemy."

"She looks resolute and proud enough to be a match for him, and more than that, she seems most unhappy. I am sure she never became Castellara's wife of her own free will; there must have been some coercion, which she is revenging on him by treating him with this studied coldness and scorn."

"Ah! how you fair creatures like to speculate, and weave romances out of the most practical things. It seems to me very reasonable that she should marry him, for who could resist Castellara, gilded as he is?"

At that moment the Duchess rose from the table, the royal guest retired, and the grand banquet, that had been the talk of all Florence, was over.

An hour later the Duchess, leaning on the arm of Enrico, entered a small *boudoir*, fitted up with the

most exquisite taste, and redolent with the perfume of flowers, which were placed everywhere in lavish profusion.

With a heavy sigh she withdrew her arm from her cousin's, and throwing herself wearily into a chair she said: "Well, Enrico, what have you to say to me that requires this privacy? The Duchess of Castellana must not absent herself from her guests on her wedding day, so pray be brief."

"I will not detain you long, cousin, for I well know that the time is inopportune, but I am so anxious to ask you why you have so steadily refused to see me ever since your betrothal to the Duke. Did we not agree to be the closest and dearest friends?"

"Yes, dear Enrico, we did, and my part of the compact is unbroken. You are the only friend I have on earth beside my father."

"Then why did you not see me before your marriage?"

"I did not know you wished to see me. I was not told of your visits. I denied myself to every one, but never to you; it was a mistake that you were not admitted, for I needed your friendship as I never have before. O Enrico! I am too wretched."

"And all Florence is envying you your good fortune."

"Ah! my God! if they only knew how gladly I

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to-day gazed with open-mouthed admiration at my
pomp and splendor."

"I do not understand you, Elena," returned Enrico
gravely, "you are a strange contradiction. When I
last talked with you, you assured me most solemnly
that you would never marry the Duke of Castellara,
and yet, three days after, your engagement to him was
announced. Why did you change so suddenly?"

"I was forced to accept him. You surely do not
think me so weak and base as to marry him volun-
tarily?"

"Forced! I scarcely comprehend your meaning.
What coercion was powerful enough to hasten you to
such sudden decision?"

"My cousin, it is a secret that I never intended
should pass my lips, but you I can trust; beside, I
wish to offer some extenuating reason to you for my
conduct. I married the Duke of Castellara to save
my father from irretrievable ruin."

"Your father from ruin! What can you mean,
Elena? Surely your trouble has turned your
brain."

"Alas! no, Enrico, it is too true, my unhappy father
was in the power of the Duke. For years we have
lived upon the wealth of the man I treated with scorn
and contempt, and all that appears to belong to my

father is not his, but the property of the Duke of Castellara."

"Elena, you must be jesting. Who could have told you this silly tale?" cried Enrico in astonishment.

"My father told me the humiliating story of his ruin, with his own lips, and entreated me to save him from utter beggary."

"Your father! My uncle! Can it be possible? What could have induced him to utter such a falsehood? The Altimonti estate, though small, is unencumbered. Your father is a wealthy man. I surely should know, for I receive my revenue from the same property."

"Oh! my cousin, are you sure of what you assert? Tell me quickly, I pray you, for I cannot endure to think that I am the victim of my father's deception."

"I am positive of what I have told you, and I have every means of knowing there was no such necessity. It was but a plot to force you into compliance. Your father well knew the strength of your filial affection for him, and used it to subserve his ambition. He knew that what you would resist with all the strength of your soul, you would finally agree to from a sense of duty to him."

During Enrico's words the Duchess stood before him as pale and still as marble, her hands clenched, her lips compressed, and her eyes filled with tears

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that did not fall. At last she spoke in low measured tones, as though her heart were uttering the words instead of her lips:

"If this be true, then I am the victim of the father whom I loved and trusted, and he has been my most cruel enemy, and I cannot revenge myself upon him, because he is my father. There is nothing good, or holy, or pure in life, and there are none we can trust, not even those who brought us into the world; they even are destitute of natural affection, and will sacrifice their own offspring to ambition and wealth. But it is too late now. Had I known this before, I might have been saved."

"Had they allowed me to see you, I should have discovered their plot, and frustrated their plans. I feared there was some treachery when I was so constantly refused."

"And do you think the Duke was a party to this cruel conspiracy?"

"I know not, but I presume he was the instigator, and first proposed it to your father as a means of winning you."

"My father, and my husband, the two beings I should love best on earth, are from this moment my most bitter enemies; and they shall rue the hour when they plotted my ruin. Enrico, bear witness to what I say, the Duke of Castellara shall be punished as sure as

there is a God in Heaven! I will bide my time. I will wait patiently for the hour of my vengeance. I am an Altimonti, and I inherit something of my father's implacable nature, for I never forget an injury. Henceforth I stand alone, my heart and soul opposed to every living thing."

"Not to me, Elena, surely not to me!" cried Enrico alarmed at her violence.

"I said to all the world; I trust no one. My *father* has deceived me, and you would do the same if it served your interests."

"Never, as God hears me, never."

"I trust no one. Remember what I have said. Farewell, the Duchess of Castellara must return to her guests."

And with a low bow, and a bitter mocking laugh she raised the silken curtain over the door and disappeared, leaving Enrico motionless with surprise and sorrow.

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CHAPTER VII.

SIGNORA PIA.

TELL me, papa, please, what is there fastened to this black cord you always wear around your neck?" asked a child of eight years, a fair, blue-eyed, golden-haired girl, who clung to a pale, deformed man, caressing him affectionately, pressing her rosy cheeks to his sallow face, and smoothing his long, dark locks with her white dimpled fingers.

The child was Fiordilisa, the babe that was stolen from her mother, as she lay under the cypress tree near San Salvador, and the man was Hugo the hunchback, who had carried her in his arms, trembling with fear, to his hovel on San Miniato.

The infant had lived and prospered under the tender care of Hugo. Shut out from the world, with no companions save her father and Nana, the goat, she knew nothing of a life beyond the church and the hill of San Miniato, yet she was contented, healthy, and happy, and as beautiful as a poet's dream, while she loved the strange, deformed man with the unselfish, trusting affection of childhood, that neither questions

nor exacts, taking what is given it gratefully and cheerfully.

They were sitting on a rude bench under the cypress—or rather, Hugo was sitting, and the child stood beside him with one arm thrown fondly around his neck, when a small silken cord just visible above his open collar attracted her attention, and caused her to ask the question at the opening of the chapter.

Hugo did not reply, but looked uneasily away toward the city below him, while an expression of fear and anxiety crossed his face.

Again the child, with gentle persistency, repeated the question, "Tell me, papa, what is there on the cord? Is it an *Agnus Dei*?"

"No, Lisa, it is a ring that I have worn for a long time."

"A ring? Oh, let me see it, papa. I never saw a ring."

"Certainly, darling, if you wish to," said Hugo, taking the ring reluctantly from the little bag, which he held closely, fearful lest the clasp that the babe had worn might meet the eye of the child. "I have never parted with it for a moment," he said, kissing it reverently, as he laid it in Lisa's outstretched palm.

"Oh, how pretty!" she exclaimed, turning the band on her rosy finger, while she examined it closely. "It has a picture on it, papa, such a tiny picture."

"It is a coronet, my child. It was given me by a good and noble lady."

"A good and noble lady! Ah! papa, I know who gave it you. It was the one you call the Angel of the Church, the one whose image you carved so beautifully, and whom you said I might love next to the Holy Virgin."

"Yes, my Lisa, you are right; it was she who gave me the ring when I was in sore trouble and near to death; when I was poor, despised, and friendless."

"O papa! why were you despised and friendless, why were you in trouble?" and the child put her arms around him in a pitying, protecting way, while tears filled her eyes, and fell over Hugo's face as she pressed her soft cheek to his.

"Never mind, darling; don't weep; every pain I have suffered is not worth a tear from your sweet eyes, and my troubles are over now. I have you to love, and so it does not matter what happened to me in those sorrowful days; so kiss the ring, dear child, and I will put it away; for my heart is restless when my treasure is not near it."

Lisa pressed her pretty lips to the gold band with lingering fondness, and then, giving it to Hugo, she said softly, and with a shy, downcast look: "I love it, too, because the lady was good to you; but, papa, when I first saw it, I thought you would tell me that it had

belonged to my mamma ; that she had worn it, and given it to you when she died ; for you remember you told me once that she was dead."

"Yes," replied Hugo, with sudden pallor. "I told you she was dead."

"She died when I was a very little baby then, for I cannot remember her. Oh, how I wish I could remember her."

"You were too young when she died ; you were but an infant."

"Why do you never talk to me of her, papa ?"

"Because, Lisa, it makes me unhappy ; and I wish to forget her."

"Wish to forget my mamma ? Is that right, to forget those you have loved ?"

"Yes, when the memory causes us pain, my child."

"And did she make you unhappy, that you wish to forget her ?"

"Hush ! hush ! Lisa ! do not speak of that ; it hurts me to hear it. Let us talk of something else."

"Poor papa," she said, tenderly, trying to stroke away the trouble she saw in his face ; "don't look so sad, and we will talk of the noble lady, 'the Angel of the Church,' and that will make you happier."

"Yes, Lisa, talk of her, think of her ; and so your thoughts will be nearer heaven."

"Is she in heaven, papa ?"

"No, my child, she is on earth; but the memory of her charity and goodness makes a heaven in my heart when I think of her."

"And do you never see her, papa?"

"No, my child, she is a great lady. She is the Duchess of Castellara. She lives in Florence, where I never go, only in secret. For eight years I have not seen her, but I remember her as well as though it were but yesterday that she stood before me in the church; and I shall see her again, some time, when I am more worthy of her kindness than I am now. But see, my Lisa, it is growing late; the sun is nearly down, and you have not yet recited your lesson."

"Oh, papa! I have not learned it. I am so sorry; but after I sat for you to model my face, I was so tired with keeping still that Nana and I had to run around the convent garden. And then it was warm, and it is so quiet there since the monks went away, that I fell asleep and only awoke when you called me."

"Well, I suppose I must forgive you," and Hugo smiled indulgently at her innocent excuses. "But bring your book and recite your lesson with me, for my Lisa must not grow up ignorant and stupid. I began to teach myself to read when I was but a few years older than you are, and I was all alone in the world and had no one to help me—only now and then when Father Ilario, a good monk who went to Rome years

ago, loaned me a book or pointed out the letters to me on the scraps of journals I picked up in the streets; but I was never discouraged, and afterwards I found my books my greatest comfort. And since I have had you, while you were sleeping at night, I have sat by your bed and studied, that I might be able to teach you when you were old enough to learn. Now the time has come, and you must begin to study. So run and fetch your book."

"Yes, papa, and to-morrow I will not be so idle," said the docile child, as she ran to obey her father, her beautiful hair making sunlight about her, and her eyes radiant with life and happiness.

In a moment she returned with her book, and leaning against the hunchback's shoulder, with her arm around his bowed neck, and her cheek pressed close to his, she recited with him her lesson, which was to open the door of poetry and romance to her ardent young heart.

Then when the sun was low and its last rays lingered for a moment on the topmost tower of the church, gilding the sombre walls of the convent and the fortress of the great Angelo, Lisa saw it vanish, leaving all in purple shadow, saw the red line of light in the west beyond the black cypress, and the city below like a vapory violet sea, just as she had seen it all a hundred times, without being aware of its grandeur and beauty--

and without one lingering glance. After she had finished her lesson, she kissed her father lovingly, and with a good-night to Nana, who browsed near, she ran away to her humble bed to sleep the sleep of innocent childhood, watched over by that God who cares for His lowliest creature.

For a long while after the child had left him Hugo sat there in deep thought. It was the eighth anniversary of the night that he had brought her home, and for eight years he had kept his secret, and enjoyed his happiness undisturbed—for eight years he had lived in the retirement of his little cottage, without exciting curiosity or suspicion, and he had prospered, too, and made wonderful strides in his art.

For several years the honest Nella had been his only medium of communication with the city; he had modelled and carved his cherubic figures, which she carried to the dealer on the *Ponte Vecchio*, who took them as soon as they were finished, and now paid more liberally for them than he did at first, for he found that they were the production of genius, and sold at once to strangers and lovers of art for six times the price he allowed the poor artist who made them.

Hugo was frugal and industrious, and it cost but little for him and the child to live, though he gave her good wholesome food, and dressed her neatly in quaint little garments that he fashioned with his own

hands ; therefore he was able to save quite a sum, and when Lisa was a few years old he had, with the assistance of an honest workman, enlarged his hovel to a comfortable little cottage of three rooms, and these he had decorated after his own fashion until they were not only cheerful and picturesque, but almost luxurious in their dainty arrangement.

He had planted flowers everywhere, and a little vineyard flourished on the hillside near a well-kept garden, where at early dawn the hunchback could always be seen digging, weeding, and pruning. Sometimes the fair-haired child was at his side, but oftener he was alone, for he preferred that she should sleep until his out-door labor was over and his humble breakfast was spread. Then the remainder of the day was devoted to his art, when Lisa patiently posed to him for hours together, never complaining of weariness if her father needed her ; always docile, sweet, and patient, she seemed more like the angels he modelled than an earthly child.

When Lisa was between five and six years old, his trusty messenger, Nella, went to live on a little farm at Fisoletto, and he was obliged to go to the city to transact his own business, which he did from time to time, never lingering longer than was absolutely necessary, and always avoiding his old haunts. But such precaution was no longer necessary, for his little tormentors had

grown out of their childish mischief, or had forgotten him, and as he was well dressed and respectable looking, he passed through the city without being disturbed. Still he never entered the gate of San Miniato that he did not experience an uncomfortable feeling, and he was never quite at his ease until he found himself on his way back, and in sight of his own little cottage under the two tall cypress trees.

On this eighth anniversary of the day when he had brought the infant to his hovel, he had completed the most important work he had ever attempted, the figure of a child pursuing a butterfly, and he was satisfied with it as he had never been before with anything that he had done. He well knew that it was exquisite in form, graceful, plastic, full of movement, that the uplifted hands and radiant face expressed childish, exuberant life, the earnest eyes expectancy and desire. He had succeeded in representing marvellously well what was in his soul and what he had modelled from, for the statue was the matchless image of Lisa, changed, as it were, from softly-rounded flesh into cold fixed marble.

He was thinking now of his work as he sat there alone in the gathering twilight, and a feeling of deep satisfaction, at its successful completion, filled his heart.

"God has been good to me, much better than I have deserved, and I will go to the church and return thanks to Him for all His mercies. The bells of San Sal-

vador are ringing for Vespers, they seem to call me with their clear, sweet tones, and I will obey them. My Lisa sleeps, and the Blessed Virgin will watch over her until I return.

Going slowly down the hill toward the church, his thoughts naturally reverted to that night eight years before. It was about the same hour, the sweet, solemn *Ave Maria*, and already the shadows were gathering under the cypress trees, but surely that was not a shadow, the dark object which he saw crouched on the ground as though it were praying or weeping.

For a moment the old feeling of superstition and horror took possession of him, perhaps it was the spirit of the mother that had returned to weep on the spot where her child had been taken from her.

His heart ceased to beat, his limbs seemed palsied, and he could neither advance nor retreat, great drops of sweat streamed down his face, and a thick mist gathered before his eyes. In a moment he certainly would have fallen to the ground, for reason and strength deserted him at once, had not the figure covered its face suddenly and burst into loud sobs.

There was something human in such grief that touched the tender chord in Hugo's nature; recovering himself immediately he went toward the woman, for he now saw that it was a woman and no spirit, and putting his hand gently on her bent head he asked her

why she wept, and if he could do ought to help her. He had often been in sore need himself, he had often fallen on his knees in some lonely spot and implored God to aid him, so he knew how to pity another in such a strait.

The woman raised her head at the sound of his voice, and then started back in affright at the strange figure bending over her, which in the gathering darkness seemed more like an evil spirit than a good one.

Hugo saw the gesture with bitter pain, but nevertheless hastened to reassure her, saying gently, "Do not fear me, I am a poor misshapen creature, it is true, but my heart is not bad. I have suffered myself, and I know how to pity others who are in distress. Tell me, can I do ought to aid you?"

The woman raised her haggard, weary face to his with more confidence, for his sympathetic voice had touched her heart, and she no longer feared him. "I am hungry and weary," she said; "can you give me food and shelter?"

"Yes, I can give you both," replied Hugo promptly; then he thought of Lisa and hesitated, "or I can give you a little money, if you have none, and you can find what you need in Florence."

"Alas! I am exhausted, and can go no further. Your gift of money would be useless, for I have no strength to find a place where food is sold."

"Why are you here beyond the city? You could scarce expect succor in this lonely spot."

"I have come from a long distance. I am footsore with my journeying over rough roads, and I thought to reach the city to-night; but my strength has failed me, and I cannot go on. I did not expect aid here on this deserted road, yet I prayed to the Virgin, and she has heard me when I least hoped for it."

"Have you friends in Florence, and a shelter when you reach the city?"

"Alas! no, Signore, I am alone in the world."

"You cannot be a stranger in these parts, for your speech seems to be that of Tuscany?"

"I am a native of Florence, Signore, but I have been absent for years."

"And now you would return?"

"Yes, but God only knows why, for I have neither kith nor kin, nor any to welcome me."

"Why did you leave your native city to seek a home among strangers?" asked Hugo, watching her closely.

"Ah! Signore, who can tell what prompts the human heart to seek for change?"

"It was no misfortune, no fault then of your own? I pray you to deal fairly with me, for I have a good reason for all I ask."

"I will, Signore, for something in your manner in-

spires me with confidence. It was a misfortune, but not a fault, that caused me to leave Florence."

"Were you forced to quit the city?"

"No, I was not forced, but I feared to stay; I pray you ask me no more, for my secret is my own, and I cannot reveal it."

"You feared to stay, and now you dare return, how is that? Does the misfortune that caused you to leave no longer exist?"

"I know not, Signore—I cannot say. I beg you to question me no more. I am returning in the hope that I am forgotten by the few who once knew me, and I think I shall not be disappointed, for my former self would never be recognized in the poor wayfarer before you."

"Your speech shows that your position in life must have once been superior to your present condition."

"It was, Signore, I was respectably born and reared."

For a moment Hugo remained in silent thought, while the woman leaned wearily against the trunk of a cypress, as though her strength was well nigh exhausted. At length he spoke again, gravely, and gently.

"You are a stranger to me, and I know naught of your character, whether it be good or evil, but I like your speech, and I believe you to be an honest woman."

I am an artist, and I live alone in a little cottage yonder with my only child, a girl of eight years. For some time I have needed a trusty woman to take charge of my humble household; but I have always shrunk from admitting a stranger into the peaceable privacy of my home, and particularly a woman that would brawl and gossip, and run into the town, and have a crowd of relatives and followers after her; who would eat and drink and waste my substance—for that is what a servant does—instead of being quiet, industrious, and frugal; a common, coarse woman that would make my little Lisa like herself from being so constantly with her, and who would do both her and me more harm than good.

“Such as these are all that I have hitherto been able to find, and I want none of them; but you seem of a different character, your speech is gentle and refined, and you have no relations to annoy me, and no interest in the city, and no motive to gossip. Therefore, if you will accept my humble offer, I will give you food and shelter and what further I can spare, and you will in return take care of my child and keep my house neat and clean, use your needle to fashion our garments, and in short do all you can for my interest. Do you accept these conditions?”

“Thankfully and willingly, Signore, for all I ask in this world is what you have offered me—a respectable

roof to shelter me and honest labor for my hands. God surely has sent you to me in my sore need, and I will go with you gladly."

"Then let us hasten from here, for night is fast gathering, and you need food and rest," said Hugo, kindly assisting her to mount the steep ascent.

She could not have gone on alone, for more than once she stopped and seemed about to sink to the ground; but the hunchback supported her feeble steps, and encouraged her to renewed effort, until he reached the gate that opened into his little garden.

"Ah! this looks like home. I am sure I shall find peace here," said the stranger with heartfelt gratitude, as Hugo ushered her into his neat apartment that served as *salon*, studio, and dining-room.

When he had brought a light, and the woman had removed her veil that partly hid her features, Hugo looked at her a moment with a close scrutiny that evidently satisfied him, for he put the lamp on a table and poured her a glass of wine, which she drank eagerly, looking at him with tearful, thankful eyes when she had emptied the glass.

She was evidently fifty years of age, with a thin, sad face full of intelligence and gentleness, smooth gray hair combed neatly back from a frank, open forehead, quiet manners, and a low, soft voice.

While Hugo went to seek some food for her, she

carefully studied the pretty room with a contented expression on her worn face, and when he returned she said in a broken voice:

"How can I be thankful enough to you? It seems like Heaven to me here after the weariness and suffering I have endured."

"If I have made one human being happy, I am contented," said Hugo; "but do not thank me, thank the Blessed Virgin, who sent me to you. Now take this food, and then you may sleep in Lisa's little room, for you surely need rest—but first tell me your name, for I know not what to call you."

"I am called," she hesitated a moment, and then added, "you may call me Pia, Signora Pia."

"Now I will show you my child," said Hugo, taking the lamp, "and you will love her when you see what an angel she is."

An hour afterward Signora Pia, instead of reposing peacefully, as a weary traveller should, was kneeling by the bed of the sleeping child, weeping as though her heart would break.

CHAPTER VIII.

LISA AND THE DUCHESS.

THE Duchess of Castellara was alone in her morning room, as it was too early for visitors to be admitted, yet she was evidently expecting some one, and, judging from her expression of impatience and vexation, the anticipated interview was not of a pleasant nature.

She was exquisitely dressed in a morning toilette of pale blue silk *négligé* over a petticoat of delicate embroidery, white slippers ornamented with golden buckles set with pearls, soft lace around her neck and arms, and a dainty little cap with blue ribbons set jauntily on one side of a tower of golden puffs and curls; her white hands were covered with jewels, and strings of immense pearls were twisted around her neck and arms, while the clasps that fastened her robe each contained a pearl pure enough, and of such a size as to render it worthy a princely diadem.

In one hand she held a gold-mounted fan, and a handkerchief of the most delicate texture, in the other a book in costly binding, which she only glanced at

from time to time, being evidently too much disturbed to read or even think.

The room was a marvel of luxurious splendor; a white velvet carpet strewn with roses and lilies covered the centre of the inlaid floor. Mirrors in frosted silver frames decorated the walls, which were frescoed in the most artistic and dainty style, each panel displaying some charming rural scene after the manner of Watteau, while the ceiling was covered with pale blue silk, studded with silver stars and upheld by the chubby hands of winged loves, wrought from the same precious metal. The furniture was of heavy white satin and velvet, strewn with pale roses, and yellow green moss, picked out here and there with silver threads; and the lamps that depended from the ceiling, and the sconces between the mirrors were of the most delicate Venetian workmanship. Roses and lilies bloomed everywhere in transparent crystal vases, and a little fountain of crystal and silver threw its misty spray over a bed of moss studded with odorous Parma violets.

Surrounded by such beauty and fragrance, how could the lovely face of the Duchess be clouded, and her heart be heavy?

Alas! for her, her splendor was what the gilded bars of the cage are to the poor bird that beats itself to death in the vain effort to regain its liberty. This

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magnificent palace with its countless rooms, its gold and silver, and precious stones, its pictures and statuary, and costly tapestry, its fountains and gardens, and all its pomp and splendor, was her prison, and so to her was no more than the dreariest cell where a weary convict pines and longs for freedom or death.

At length, the Duchess, wearied with waiting, touches a bell on the table near her, and a smart French woman with keen eyes and silken speech, enters.

"Lisette, ask the Duke's valet if his master is still in his chamber. I am not inclined to await his visit much longer."

"He is dressing, your highness, his barber is with him."

"This is too disgusting; it is midday, and other visitors will soon arrive; and I wished to get rid of this hateful interview first," said the Duchess to herself, as the door closed upon her maid.

"I have not seen him for six weeks, and why should I now? I really cannot understand why he wishes to intrude upon my privacy this morning. I suppose I must endure it, as he announced his desire for an interview. What can he have to say? I wonder that he cannot communicate to me through my father, or my man of affairs. Some absurd nonsense, I suppose, about the Duke de Beaumont; and he may as well save his breath as to waste it, for if the Duke de Beaumont

contributes anything in the world to my pleasure, and if his society relieves a little the *ennui* that is gnawing my heart out, I shall receive him, and accept his attentions in spite of all the world, or the Duke of Castellara either."

At that moment there was a knock at her door, and a stately servant in scarlet and gold livery announced his highness, the Duke of Castellara.

The Duchess rose with dignity, and bowed coldly. The Duke advanced and took her hand, pressing it ceremoniously to his lips.

The Duchess was the first to speak: "To what do I owe the honor of your visit this morning, Duke?"

"Allow me to sit down, Duchess, for the labors of my toilette have fatigued me; and then I will answer your question."

"Oh! pray choose your own time; at your age one moves slowly, and is not hurried by the impetuosity of youth," returned the Duchess with cutting sarcasm.

"Thank you; you are inclined to be more charming and gracious than usual, this morning," replied the Duke with cool irony.

"If your highness has anything of importance to communicate to me, I beg that you will do so; that is, if you are sufficiently rested to endure the exertion of speech, as I expect other visitors and I should like to be at liberty to receive them."

"Ah! the Duke de Beaumont, I presume?"

"Yes, I await the Duke de Beaumont."

"Your frankness is only exceeded by your impatience, which you may as well curb a little, as our interview is not likely to be a short one."

"Indeed?"

"I believe it is eight years since you became the Duchess of Castellara. Am I not right?"

"According to the calendar, you are right, Duke; but according to my own reckoning of the time, I should say it had been eight eternities."

"You are extravagant; there can be but one eternity, and that sits well upon you, for you look younger and more charming than you did on our wedding-day."

The Duchess made no reply, but impatiently twirled her fan, while she smiled scornfully.

"It seems that we cannot agree as to the time that you have been the Duchess of Castellara, but that matters little, it is sufficient to say that it has been long enough to have taught you prudence."

"In what respect, Duke?"

"In respect to your *liaison* with the Duke de Beaumont."

"Indeed. I was not aware that I had been so imprudent. And if it were true, is it not a common and undignified expression to use to the Duchess of Castellara?"

"I should say not when all Florence couples your name with your French lover."

"I beg that you will not insult me, for I am not in the mood to bear it," returned the Duchess rising suddenly, pacing the floor rapidly, her face deadly pale, her eyes glittering ominously.

"I am telling you but the truth."

"Then, I pray you, select your language, for it offends me with its coarseness, and finish your vulgar slander as soon as possible."

"I repeat again that it is not slander, that it is the result of your own folly."

"Well, providing that be true, of what use to retail it to me? I have heard the same story from your lips a dozen times before, and it makes no more impression on me than a bubble on a wall of adamant."

"For Heaven's sake, if you have no respect for yourself have some for the name you bear; do not drag it through the mire and dirt."

"The name I bear is as hateful to me as the one who conferred it upon me by the basest deception. I respect neither the one nor the other, and if without ruining my own self I could blacken your name, I would make it darker and viler than the lowest pit in the infernal regions."

"Truly an amiable and pleasant declaration; but I will prevent you from disgracing me any further."

DUCHESS.

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me any further."

"You will never prevent me if I choose to do it. When you and my father plotted my sacrifice, you did not think that you were turning the honey of my nature into gall, that you were changing a gentle and loving woman into a demon of hate and scorn. Or if you thought it you did not care. You have made me a reckless, heartless woman. Now reap the reward of your own crime."

"Then you will not listen to me; then you will not promise to break off this intimacy with de Beaumont?"

"No, I have told you before that I will not; he amuses me and pleases me, and I will not be deprived of his society."

"I forbid you to receive him to-day. I am resolved."

"And I am resolved to see him. I pray that you will not drive me to some disgraceful extremity."

"He shall not enter my palace."

"Then I will meet him clandestinely, and all the world will know that the Duke of Castellara suspects the honor of his wife, and has closed his door against his rival."

"Ah! you madden me, and I will not endure this any longer."

"How can you help it? I have told you dozens of times that it was folly for you to interfere with my affairs. I leave you to go your way; pray oblige me by giving me the same privilege."

"Do you intend to drive with de Beaumont to-day in the Cascine?"

"I have made an engagement with him to do so, and I never break a promise."

"Then, by heaven, you shall break this one, for you shall not appear in public again by his side."

"How will you prevent it?"

"I will kill him!" cried the Duke, now fairly beside himself with rage and indignation at the cold contempt of the Duchess.

"What folly to make a threat that you will not put into execution."

"Has the Duke of Castellara ever had the reputation of being a coward? Has he ever suffered a rival to come between him and his honor? I tell you if you drive to-day on the Cascine with the Duke de Beaumont, before this time to-morrow he will be in eternity."

"And the Duchess of Castellara disgraced forever! for what is now only the suspicion of the evil-minded, will be then a certainty to the good and noble. Destroy your own honor if you will, debase your own name if it suits you, but I shall drive to-day with the Duke de Beaumont. I have the honor of wishing your highness good-morning; other visitors await me," and with a haughty bow the Duchess of Castellara left the room before her husband could utter another word.

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When the Duchess left her husband, her heart full of anger and hate, she found Enrico, with a troubled and anxious face, waiting to see her.

"I am so glad you are not gone out, cousin," he said, as he took her hand and led her to a chair, "for I have a request to make of you that will not admit of delay."

"Indeed! what can it be that requires such immediate attention?"

"Elena, I ask you as a favor not to drive with the Duke de Beaumont to-day."

"There it is, Enrico, you at last must torment me; it is not enough to be bored to death by others, to listen to my husband's folly, but you, my friend, who at least might have some consideration, you are like all the rest."

"It is because I have the greatest consideration for you, Elena, that I ask this favor. You know I love you, that I am heart and soul your friend, and that I have no selfish interest in the matter."

"Explain your reason for this singular request."

"I do not wish you to drive with de Beaumont to-day, because if you do it will provoke an open quarrel between him and the Duke of Castellara, and your husband's jealousy will be the cause of it."

"Thank Heaven if he is jealous at last. I have done all I could to make him so, and I sincerely hope he will suffer the tortures of the damned."

"Oh, Elena! I pray you not to be so bitter. It is not only your husband you are injuring, but it is yourself and all who love you. I entreat you for my sake, if you value my friendship, not to go to the Cascade to-day in company with the Duke de Beaumont."

"I have sworn to Castellara that I would drive with de Beaumont. I have defied him, and I cannot change my determination now. If I do, he will think I have yielded to his request, and I would rather suffer any torture, any disgrace, than to allow him to suppose that he has the slightest influence over me."

"Then you will not listen to me, Elena?" returned Enrico, sadly. "And I, your best friend, have no influence with you either."

The Duchess remained silent a moment, her proud face as inscrutable as a sphinx, while Enrico watched anxiously, to see if he could discover any signs of relenting.

At length, she said firmly, "It is no use, Enrico; as much as I love you and value your interest in me, I cannot refuse to drive with de Beaumont to-day. I shall drive with him as I said I would, but there will be no trouble; rest assured there will be no quarrel at the Cascade, or no cause for it. You can trust me to keep my promise to you."

"Ah! thank you, cousin. Now I am happier, for you have removed a heavy burden from my heart. I un-

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derstand Castellara's implacable nature so well, and I
know that when he has once decided upon any course
of action he will never abandon his intention. To-day
he has determined to prevent your being seen in the
Cascine with de Beaumont.

"That is enough, Enrico; now let us dismiss this
hateful subject," said the Duchess with rising color and
flashing eyes.

At that moment a footman announced his highness
the Duke de Beaumont.

An hour after the elegant equipage of the Duchess
stood waiting for her in the court of the palace, and a
footman in blue and white livery held the door open
as she descended the broad marble stairs, leaning on
the arm of the young Duke de Beaumont. When she
was seated in her luxurious carriage, with de Beau-
mont by her side, and the servant waited in respectful
silence to receive her order, he was surprised to hear
her say: "Drive to San Miniato al Monte," instead of
her usual direction, "To the Cascine."

A moment after the Duchess had given her instruc-
tions to the footman, and before the sound of her retreat-
ing wheels had ceased to reverberate in the court, the
Duke of Castellara appeared with pale face, com-
pressed lips, and dogged determination in his glittering
eyes. Hastily stepping into a small close carriage that
drew up to the grand entrance in obedience to an im-

perative wave of his hand, he said, in a hard, husky voice: "To the Cascine, as quickly as possible."

During the drive the Duchess was silent and absorbed, and her companion tried in vain to arouse her from her abstraction. When at last they drew up before the church of San Miniato, and the Duchess leaving her carriage, stood for a moment on the terrace looking back at the city below her, her face softened and a long-drawn weary sigh fell on the ear of de Beaumont.

"Why are you so *triste* to-day, Duchess?" he asked as they entered the silent, sombre church, "and why have you, instead of the bright sunny Cascine, chosen to visit this gloomy spot with its tombs and shadows?"

"Because I am in the mood for tombs and shadows. I like a change. I hate sunlight, music, and laughter, always, and prefer, for variety, darkness and silence, but if you find it unbearable you can be driven to the Cascine, and I will remain here until my carriage returns."

"Now, Duchess, you are cruel; you know that every place where you are is beautiful to me; your smile, the light of your heavenly eyes make sunshine to me in the dreariest spot."

"That will do, Duke, let this flattery and pretty speech-making be enough for to-day. I am not inclined to hear it. I told you I was gloomy and preoc-

DUCHESS.

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 graver things."

"Well, what shall we discuss? religion, politics, or
 love?"

"Either of the former; the latter I detest, as I have
 told you a thousand times."

"Ah! Duchess, you are most cruel. I am in tortures,
 one moment, daring to hope, the next, cast down to the
 lowest depths of despair."

"Duc de Beaumont, is it necessary for me to re-
 peat again what I have so often said?"

"No, no, your highness; spare me, and I will be
 silent, for I cannot endure your scorn."

"Then never speak to me of love. I am unac-
 quainted with such an emotion. I know of no other
 desires than those of pride and ambition."

"You wrong yourself, Duchess; a sweeter, nobler
 heart never beat in a woman's breast."

"You are mistaken, my friend, I have no heart. I
 sometimes have impulses, and they are rarely good and
 unselfish."

"Ah! What is this?" cried de Beaumont, before
 the Duchess had finished her sentence. "As I live, a
 child asleep here on the steps of the altar."

"And how lovely," said the Duchess, bending over her
 and stroking softly with trembling fingers the masses of
 golden hair that lay in disorder around her rosy face.

"And she seems to be quite alone," said de Beaumont looking at her admiringly.

"I wonder how she came here?" and the Duchess stooped still lower to hide the tears that filled her eyes. "Lovely innocent, sleeping here at the foot of the altar among these gloomy tombs as sweetly as though she were resting on a bed of flowers under some shady tree."

At that moment the child opened her beautiful eyes, and without manifesting any astonishment, smiled in the sweet face bending over her, and said, as she raised herself on one elbow, "I was dreaming of angels, and I thought you were one."

Then seeing the Duke de Beaumont, she blushed timidly and looked down.

"Where did you come from, sweet child?" asked the Duchess sitting on the altar steps by her side and twisting the rings of her soft hair around her own delicately gloved finger.

"I live near, in the little cottage under the cypress trees, and I come here every day."

"What is your name?"

"Fiordilisa, Signora, but papa calls me Lisa, because it is shorter."

"A pretty name, and it suits you well," returned the Duchess looking at her tenderly, "for you are as fair as a lily and as graceful."

DUCHESS.

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"Have you never seen this face before, Duchess?"
asked de Beaumont after he had gazed at the child
steadily.

"Never, that I am aware of, and yet it strikes me
familiarily."

"Is it not like the face of that exquisite statuette
you purchased the other day on the Ponte Vecchio?"

"Yes, now you speak of it I discover the resem-
blance, but, I presume it is only accidental."

"Probably, but it is like a copy of this face," re-
turned the Duke.

While this conversation was going on between the
Duchess and de Beaumont, the child studied, with wide
open eyes, the face of the lady.

"Why do you look at me so, my child?" asked the
Duchess drawing her to her side.

"Because it seems to me that you must be the
Angel of the Church," the one papa always speaks of.
He has her image near the crucifix, and he tells me I
must love it next to the Virgin."

"The Angel of the Church," repeated the Duchess
slowly and with a far-away look. "I have heard
that expression before, and it awakes some strange
memory; but it is nothing only a memory. No, my
sweet child, I am no angel, I am but a poor unhappy
woman."

"The child is right," said de Beaumont with an

admiring glance. "She discovers in you what you will not allow others to see."

"Have you no mamma, Lisa?" asked the Duchess without noticing the Duke's remark, "that you speak of your papa only?"

"Ah! no, Signora, my mamma is dead, she died when I was a baby."

"And you live alone with your papa?"

"No, not now, for Signora Pia has come to live with us, and she will stay with us always. She is very good, and I love her dearly."

"And so you come here often, do you?"

"Yes, Signora, I come every day to this altar to say my prayers, and sometimes when I am tired I go to sleep, and then the Blessed Virgin takes care of me."

"Sweet innocent, will you pray for me sometimes? for I need the prayers of such as you. Now *addio*, and do not forget me, and I will come again some day to see you. Here, take this and keep it always," and unfastening a rosary of exquisite workmanship from her belt she threw it around the child's neck, and then stooping, pressed a kiss on her white forehead, where she left more than one tear—such tears as did not often fall from the proud eyes of the Duchess of Castellara.

When Lisa, flushed and delighted, rushed into her father's presence and told him of the beautiful lady she had seen in the church, and showed him the rosary

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she had given her, Hugo looked grave, and said, more severely than he had ever spoken to her:


"You did wrong, my child to talk to a stranger and accept a gift. Never do it again, unless you wish to displease me; and never go again to the church without Signora Pia."

"But I may wear the rosary?" asked Lisa, caressing it fondly, "and I may pray for the sweet lady, may I not papa?"

"Yes, my child," replied Hugo; "but remember in the future that you are never to talk with strangers."

 CHAPTER IX.

THE STATUE OF AURORA.

T is a rare work, a wonderful work. I have seen nothing equal to it produced by modern genius. It has all the grace, purity, and dignity of the antique, combined with the careful study, plastic movement, and dainty detail of the best school."

"Who is Hugo?"

"Do any of you gentlemen know the artist who seems so suddenly to have sprung into notice? On the base of the statue I see the simple name 'Hugo.' Who is

Hugo? I should like to know, for if this exquisite figure is for sale I will purchase it."

"I think I can give you the information you desire, Signore," replied a pale little man, with large eyes, hungry expression, and shabby dress, which denoted that he belonged to the great army of martyrs whose labors, self-denial, and patient suffering are never rewarded, appreciated, or understood. "He is called Hugo and has no other name that I ever heard of; he is a hunchback, and he now lives in the Via di San Gallo near the gate, though until recently he dwelt in a little cottage on San Miniato with his only child a beautiful girl, who has always borne the title of the Lily of San Miniato. She is now about sixteen, and is as fair and graceful as the flower she is named for. But you can judge of her beauty for she was the model for this work, as she is for everything he does."

"What! you do not mean to say that this exquisite figure is modelled after his own daughter, and that she is as lovely as this divine creation?"

"She is of the most remarkable beauty, Signore, and I am told that she is as gentle and virtuous as she is beautiful, and that he has never employed any other model, but has always worked from her, and he has produced the most wonderful studies of children in every pose you can imagine—sleeping and waking, merry and sad, human and angelic. These dainty

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figures are sold in every shop in Florence, and the demand for them has been so great that he has amassed quite a snug fortune, for they say he adores the lovely Lisa, and is a miser, that he may lay aside a handsome dowry for her."

"Have you ever seen this prodigy of beauty, this fair flower that he prizes so highly?"

"Only once, Signore."

"And how did it happen that you were so favored?"

"I chanced to see her in the Torrigiani gardens with her father."

"And does rumor exaggerate her charms?"

"No, indeed, Signore; she is lovely beyond all comparison."

"How can one get a glimpse of this divinity?"

"I cannot tell you, for the hunchback, in spite of his genius, is a strange character—a proud, reticent man, who has no associates, and who lives in the strictest seclusion, guarding his treasure with all the careful vigilance of Cerberus."

"I am interested in this artist, and also in his lovely model, and am determined to make their acquaintance."

"I am afraid that will not be easy, Signore."

"I wonder if a commission for a statue would admit me into his confidence?"

"Doubtless it would, for I have been told that his

only vulnerable point is his love of money. He has the greatest ambition to be rich, and apart from that desire, and his affection for his daughter, he has no other interest in life."

"Are you acquainted with him?"

"I have met him and spoken with him a few times, but I have never been to his studio; in fact, he has never invited me—he is very distant, and avoids all communication with his brother artists, especially those who are fortunate, rich, and popular. I am not of that happy number, therefore he treats me with some little consideration."

"A disagreeable, conceited fellow I should say?"

"No, Signore, hardly that; he seems very gentle, and at times almost humble, and will talk pleasantly on any subject beside his own affairs; but if one dares to approach him with the least familiarity or intimacy, he immediately becomes haughty, reserved, and silent."

"It would require some tact, then, to get admitted to his distinguished presence?"

"Yes, Signore, I think it would, for he seems to avoid and dislike strangers."

"Do you suppose it would be possible for you to arrange a meeting between him and me, so that I may make my proposals in regard to an order for a statue?"

"I will try, Signore, and if you are lucky enough to

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of this lovely model, they have been foiled in every
attempt, and I, alone, am the only happy one among
them; but my good fortune in that respect is owing
to my misfortune in other things, for I am so ugly and
poor, that there is no danger for her in an encounter
with me, so, when I met them accidentally in a se-
cluded part of the garden, the hunchback did not run
away like a timid hare, and the lovely Lisa did not
draw her thick veil over her face until I had feasted
my eyes for a moment on her charms."

"Lucky mortal, I wish I had been in your place."

"If you had, you would not have met with my good
fortune, a handsome young noble like you would have
alarmed the poor man to such an extent that he would
have enveloped his fair lily in a twinkling, and hur-
ried her away before you had a chance to get the first
glimpse of her beauty."

"It might have been so, but still I should like to try
the experiment. Now, tell me, do they visit the gar-
den often, and do they usually resort to the same se-
cluded spot?"

"As to their visiting the garden, Signore, I cannot
say whether they are there often or not, for I have
never seen them but once; but doubtless when they

do go, they seek the most retired place, where they will be freest from observation."

"And where is that place?"

"In the northeast corner, under an acacia tree, near the ruined statue of Fauna."

"At what hour did you meet them there?"

"Near *Ave Maria*."

"Well, I will try my luck to-morrow, and if I admire this goddess of beauty as much as I do her marble image, I will report to you, and you must try to arrange an introduction to Cerberus."

"*Bene, Signore, a rivedere.*"

The above dialogue was conducted near a statue of Aurora, exhibited in the *Accademia delle Belle Arti*, at Florence, during the season of 1839. And the two persons engaged in the conversation were the Russian Count Valdimer Nordiskoff, a rich patron of art, as well as an amateur of no mean merit, and a poor copyist in the *Galleria*, who had volunteered the information respecting the unknown sculptor, as he stood among a group of artists around the wonderful work that excited their most ardent admiration.

The sun was slowly slipping down behind the dusky acacia trees near the fountain and the statue of Fauna in the Torrigiani gardens, as a handsome, distinguished looking man, with light curly hair and pleasant brown eyes, sauntered carelessly toward the secluded spot,

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where the marble goddess stood, white and graceful, against the background of laurel and rose that twined together in loving embrace around the gnarled trunk of an ancient ilex; as he went on humming a gay air, and switching lightly the grass and flowers with the cane he carried in his well-gloved hand, he glanced in eager scrutiny from side to side as if in search of something he longed to find.

He was Count Valdimer Nordiskoff, the rich young Russian, who had passed a number of winters in Florence, and who lived in one of the most elegant palaces on the Lung 'Arno, who drove the finest horses in the Cascine, who owned the handsomest yacht that had ever sailed in Italian waters, and who had one of the most charming villas on Lake Como, where he entertained, during the summer, the fashionable, wealthy, and beautiful of the fair city of flowers.

Although he was adored by all the distinguished belles and flattered by their manœuvring mammas, he still remained uncaught in the matrimonial net, and it was generally conceded that it was useless to fish for him, since he was the devoted *cavaliere servante* of the Duchess of Castellara, who, in spite of her thirty-six years, still remained the most beautiful and the most fascinating woman in Florence.

As Count Valdimer sauntered along, looking carelessly to the right and left, his mind was occupied

with some such thoughts as these: "I wonder what the Duchess would say if she knew of this adventure? She thinks I adore the very ground she walks on, and so I did once, but I am getting over such folly. I am weary of her platonic affection. I am weary of devoting myself to a woman who has so little heart. It is true she is beautiful and possesses a strange power, but she is destitute of all tenderness, all passion. What she calls love—the noblest, the most sacred of love—I sometimes think is mere calculation, selfishness, and vanity. If she loved me, she would not endure for one day the bondage of her lot as Castellara's wife. She would fly with me from this city, where she is so wretched, and seek another and a happier life, contented with my love and devotion.

"I know she hates her husband with unutterable hate, and I think she loves me as much as she is capable of loving any one; and if she were free to-day she would gladly become my wife. If she were free? Well, would I be as ready, as I have thought I would a thousand times, to offer her my hand and name? Ah! it is weary waiting; for four years now I have lived on her smile, her favor. I have endured all the strange caprices of her nature—her tears, her sadness, her scorn, at times; I have studied her day by day, and yet I know not if she loves me, I know not if she has a heart or whether she is but the vain, cruel coquette the world calls her.

lay in her lap, and her slender rosy fingers turned from time to time the pages which she was reading aloud to her companion, who listened with the closest attention, devouring her face all the time with his melancholy eyes that still had the same wistful, appealing expression of one whose heart longs for tenderness and affection. There was something touching in the almost humble devotion and attention with which he listened to the words of the gentle reader.

Her dress of dark cloth and of the most simple design, fell in graceful folds from her shoulders to her feet, faintly outlining her slender young figure; a white scarf folded modestly over her shoulders formed a veil for her head, from which escaped the yellow fringes of her hair, touching with light and color her sombre attire, and producing the same effect that the old painters loved when they embroidered with golden threads the purple robes of their saints.

Close in the shadow of the Fauna, Valdimer Nordiskoff caressed the face of the young girl with his ardent gaze, his admiration beaming in his eyes, which studied every outline and tint with the passionate appreciation of the artist and the lover. And the silence was only broken by the clear evening song of the birds and the low sweet voice of the girl as she read the romance of another life, little dreaming how near she was to the first page of her own.

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At length the hunchback, starting from his listening attitude and gently closing the book with one hand, while he drew the scarf closely around her with the other, said, in a voice as tender as a mother's, "Lisa, my child, the sun is setting, the dews are falling, and the white vapor will soon hover over us with its poisonous breath. It is not healthy here at this hour. Let us go before the sun sets."

"Oh! papa, must we go so soon? I like this hour so much."

"Why should you like this hour? At your age one likes midday and sunshine better than twilight and shadows."

"But I do not like this hour always. When the sun is high, I like to go into the gardens and see all the gay people in their carriages, dressed so beautifully, and looking so happy."

"Their dress is but vanity, my child, and their looks are deceitful; under their light manners and gay smiles they carry aching hearts."

"Oh! papa, why do you think so when they do not show that their hearts ache?"

"Because, Lisa, it is not allowed to show one's real feelings in the fashionable world."

"But I like a glimpse of that world, nevertheless. It is beautiful on the outside, and it pleases me; then why, dear papa, do you never allow me to remain a

little while where the crowd are laughing, singing, and dancing?"

"Because I like it not."

"But I like it, dear," continued Lisa, with sweet persistency, while she caressed the long, thin hand that lay in hers.

"I am sorry for it, for you have nothing to do with such a world, and it should have no attractions for you."

"But I cannot help it—my heart is light, I am young and happy, and Signora Pia says it is no harm to dance and sing when one is young and happy."

"Signora Pia should not tell you such things," returned Hngo, with a jealous glance and rising color; "she should teach you that life is too short and too serious for such folly."

"Oh! papa, pray do not blame Signora Pia; she is good, and teaches me everything good; but do not be displeased, I will not be happy if you do not wish it."

"Hush, my darling, for God's sake; you hurt me with such words. I wish you to be happy, sincerely and truly happy, but not after the fashion of the false, wicked world."

"But a little pleasure with young companions, a little music and dancing and mirth, is not the false, wicked world, papa."

"Do you wish mirth and dancing and young companions, my child?" asked Hngo, sadly.

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Hugo, sadly.

"Sometimes I do," returned Lisa, dropping her eyes
and sighing lightly.

A spasm of pain passed over the hunchback's pale
face, and his eyes filled with tears, as he said, with
infinite tenderness, "My Lisa, you had no such long-
ings when we were in the little cottage on San Mini-
ato."

"No, papa."

"You were contented then with your poor father,
your humble home, Nana and the little garden."

"Yes, I loved it all dearly, and I was always happy
then."

"And you are not now?"

"I did not say that. I am always happy with you,
darling," said Lisa, pressing her face against his
shoulder; "but then I had not seen this beautiful city,
the gardens, the streets, and all the gay, bright things."

"And they have made you discontented with your
humble lot, your quiet life, your books and the dull
society of Signora Pia, and your poor father?"

"No, no, dear papa, I am not discontented, and I
love my books and you better than ever. Am I not
loath to leave this sweet story and this quiet place for
the gay crowd that linger yonder?"

"But we must go, my darling, the air is poison in
spite of the beauty of the hour. I too love to linger
here and listen. Tommaso Grossi is sweet to my ear,

and your voice is music itself, but we must leave Folchetto di Provenza until some other time."

Reluctantly the young girl closed her book, for the sad romance of the

— "*giovane paggio*
Di Raimondo di Tolosa "

had touched her heart to the very core with a nameless yearning, with pity and sorrow for the sad fate of one so young and brave.


Reluctantly she took the arm of her father, but before she drew the thick veil over her face she caught a glimpse of a brown curly head and a pair of luminous eyes, and a form as straight and handsome as that of the Apollo in her father's studio.

For a moment her heart bounded timidly, for she thought it might be a vision of the young Folchetto, evoked from her admiration of his beauty and her sympathy for his sad fate; but when he smiled on her with a warm, bright smile, and withdrew quickly again behind the statue, she knew he was a mortal man and no imaginary hero of romance.

With the natural *finesse* of a woman, she understood that he did not wish to be seen; so she said nothing to her father, but with a sigh and a backward glance, she went away in the twilight among the shadowy trees like a fair young saint leading an evil spirit to heaven, followed by the worshipping eyes of Valdimir Nordiskoff.

CHAPTER X.

THE HOME IN THE VIA SAN GALLO.

HE humble cottage under the cypress trees on San Miniato was deserted. The pale face and bent figure of the hunchback was seen no more in the little garden, working in the shade of his trellis, where the vines grew so luxuriantly, nor at twilight in the seat under the cypress, with the fair-haired girl bending over a book on his knee. Nana browsed no more in peaceful content among the rocks or on the garden border, where Lisa so often had decked her with flowers and romped and laughed with her in childish glee; for her poor old bones lay quietly at the foot of the gnarled olive, where her sweet mistress, with many tears, had seen her buried, a few days before she left the beloved spot forever.

The docile animal had died of old age, and when one morning, coming no more at Hugo's call, they searched for her and found her cold and stiff under the olive where she had rested her feeble limbs for many a day, they buried her there, and Lisa mourned for her as though she had been human, and even the hunchback wiped away a secret tear and said to him-

self sadly, "It is the beginning of change, and things will never be the same again."

His words were prophetic. It was the beginning of change, for he had already decided that he must leave the retirement of the cottage, which, on account of his increasing reputation and Lisa's young womanhood, was altogether too small for their needs.

His work found such a ready sale, and his orders being more important, required greater space and better light than his little studio on the hill afforded him. Beside, he could no longer remain unknown and hidden from the world in his seclusion, for his genius, as well as the beauty of his model, the Lily of San Miniato, as she was called, had attracted the attention of the world to his modest retreat, and he now felt that he could be more secluded in the great city than in the spot where he had passed his early days of obscurity and poverty.

After some search for a suitable place, both by himself and Signora Pia, who had remained an inmate of his home ever since the night he had found her weeping under the trees near San Salvador, he at length fixed upon a roomy and commodious apartment in the Via San Gallo, that had formerly been occupied by an artist, and whose chief attraction was a vast and well-lighted studio.

To this place Hugo moved his humble household,

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not without some regret and misgiving ; for the cottage on San Miniato had become very dear to him ; there he had passed the only happy, peaceful days he had known since his early childhood ; there he had lived in uninterrupted seclusion with his Lisa during the time of her infancy, enjoying her sweet babyhood undisturbed, and her first love undivided, for no one had come between them. As much as he liked and respected Signora Pia, and as faithful and efficient as he had found her, he was at times jealous of the young girl's affection for her, and even of the time they passed together, and never did he see Lisa lean upon the woman's shoulder, twine her arm around her neck, or lay her golden head upon the kind, motherly bosom, that he did not feel a sharp pang, a pain, as though some one had stabbed him to the heart.

He tried to overcome this unreasonable feeling, for he well knew that he could not monopolize the affection of her ardent, loving heart, that he could not control her desires and aspirations, her romantic fancies, her vague longings after another and brighter life.

"Some time," he thought, with unutterable sorrow, "She may see another whom she will love better than the poor deformed creature, who, after all, has no natural claim upon her heart."

Again, at times, he was seized with fear that in some way she might discover that she was not his child, and

if she should, what guarantee had he that she would not hate and despise him for the deception he had practised upon her.

"She must never know. I must guard my secret with double vigilance now. Oh! if she had been but the least like me in color or feature, if she had been dark instead of this fair, delicate beauty, this lily-like grace. I cannot keep her concealed from all eyes, for that in itself would cause suspicion, and when strangers see her, as they must some time, will they not make invidious comparisons between us? Will they not say, 'How came that hideous creature by such an exquisitely lovely daughter?' And then they may suspect and investigate, and perhaps discover, for God may help them to punish the guilty. And they will say that I am doubly criminal because I stole her for gain, that I have traded on her charms, that I have copied her matchless beauty and turned it into vile gold. O Holy Mother, thou knowest my heart, and thou knowest how I love her, and how unselfish that love is, that I have been tender and good to her, that I have taught her only what is noble and pure, that I have toiled faithfully and that I live only for her."

At such moments, when the poor hunchback imagined the possibility of his secret being discovered, he would suffer terrible agony. If it happened that at night the thought came to him, he would arise from his

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bed and pace the floor of his room, trembling with a nameless dread, a sort of superstitious fear that, by some means brought about by a mysterious Providence, his sin would be discovered and that he would lose the treasure of his life, and not only herself, but her love and respect.

Lisa was his world, beyond her he saw nothing, her praise was sweeter to his ear than the united voice of all creation. Her flattery, her pretty compliments, and evident satisfaction in his success, made him the happiest of mortals, for all he had that she could be proud of was his genius. Often he wondered if his mischappen body looked as hideous to her as it did to others, or whether, always having seen him, she had become so accustomed to him that she did not notice the great difference between him and the rest of mankind.

If the girl did notice and feel the misfortune of his deformity, she never showed it by word or sign, and if she had been really his child, she could not have felt a deeper devotion, a more genuine love than she did for the patient, gentle being who lavished such constant care and affection upon her. Perhaps there was something in her tender, noble nature that responded to his needy, suffering soul more readily because he was afflicted and despised by others. Whatever the bond was between them, the girl certainly loved the hunchback with all a daughter's reverent

fondness, never seeming to notice his ungainly person, or showing the slightest repulsion to a form that others looked upon as altogether unlovely.

"He is so good, and has such a beautiful heart, and such wonderful genius, that all the world ought to admire him," she would say proudly to Signora Pia, who always agreed with her and encouraged her in her devotion to her father.

One day the two sat together in Hugo's studio—Lisa on a low stool at the feet of a life-size cast of Apollo, busy with some embroidery, while Signora Pia plied her needle industriously, fashioning a simple garment for the girl, who did not like plain, uninteresting work, but something dainty and pretty, that amused as well as occupied her.

"I wish I liked to do useful things," she said in reply to a remark from Signora Pia, "but I do not; it is my nature, and I cannot change it."

"Perhaps it does not matter while there is no need for it, but if you were obliged to, I think you would be equal to the emergency."

"I know not; I like only what is pleasant and beautiful," replied the girl with a sigh.

"Ah, my dear child, that is wrong, for in this world we cannot have only what is pleasant and beautiful."

"I know that well, Signora, for if we could I should not be sitting here in this gloomy room, when I should

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like to be out in the sunshine, among the trees and
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"But you cannot go to the gardens every day, my
 dear; you are unreasonable; why, only yesterday your
 papa took you to the Torrigiani, and you remained
 there until the sun went down. Now you should be
 contented to stay quietly at home to-day."

"But that is just the reason I am not contented
 to-day. I am thinking all the time of how delight-
 ful it was then, and how dull it is now. It always
 seems more gloomy here after I have been to the gar-
 dens."

"That would not please your father should he hear
 you; nay, it would pain him deeply, for he wishes you
 to be happy in his society, and in the home that he
 labors so hard to make for you."

"Yes, it would make papa unhappy I know, for he
 never likes to take me out. I see that he is always re-
 luctant to go, and why should he be? Other parents
 are not so."

"My child, you should not complain of your father;
 he knows what is best for you."

"I do not complain, only I should be happier if I
 were not always shut up," returned the young girl with
 a sigh.

"Now, my dear, you are in a bad humor this morn-
 ing, and you should say fifty *aves*, and then you will be

happier when your papa returns. I beg that you will not let him see the least shadow on your face."

"Ah! Signora, you are always good," cried Lisa, rising impulsively and putting her arms around the woman's neck, "and I am a wicked, ungrateful girl, but I will not let papa know of my discontent and complaining."

"Now you are your sweet self, and you shall go to Vespers with me by and by, and ask the Holy Mother to strengthen your good resolution."

At that moment the door opened and Ingo entered with an unusually quick step, and a cheerful smile on his thin face. Going straight to Lisa he bent over her and kissed her forehead, saying, in tones of suppressed happiness and gratification, "I have pleasant news for you, *cara mia*. My statue of Aurora has taken the prize."

"Oh! papa, is it true? I am so glad," cried the girl, throwing her arms around her father's neck and kissing him fondly on both sallow cheeks. "Why, I am so proud, so happy," and then, overcome by her joy, she burst into tears.

"Ah! now do not weep, my Lisa, or I shall regret my success, for I would not bring a tear to your sweet eyes for the honor of all the world," said the hunchback, tenderly stroking the girl's lovely hair.

"But they are tears of joy, papa; and see, they are

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gone already," returned Lisa, holding up her face that
looked as bright and fresh as a rose washed by a
summer shower.

"Now, my child, you see how good our Blessed
Mother is to us," whispered Signora Pia. "But a
moment ago you were complaining because you had
no more pleasure, and see how soon happiness came
when once you resigned yourself to the will of God,
and promised to be contented with your lot."

"It is a great honor to receive the medal, certainly,"
said Ingo, after a moment's thought, "but I wish I
might sell the statue at once to some of these great
nobles who have awarded me the prize."

"You will, papa; I am sure you will sell it for a
great deal of money; you know everything you do is
sold at once," cried Lisa hopefully.

"I was told that a rich Florentine noble, the Duke
of Castellara, has asked what price I have put upon it,
and has spoken highly of its merits, and a Russian
noble also has noticed it favorably."

"You are fortunate, Signore, to receive praise from
such great men," said the Signora Pia. "The Duke
of Castellara is one high in power, and richer than any
other noble in Florence, and as generous as he is rich;
let us pray that he may purchase the Aurora."

While Signora Pia was yet speaking there came a
ring at the door, and it was so unusual an occurrence

that Lisa started up, flushed with delight, for she fancied one of the rich nobles that they had been speaking of had certainly appeared to offer her father a fabulous price for the statue of Aurora; but Hugo, instead of showing any satisfaction, looked around anxiously, much like a startled animal that would conceal itself, and said, "Who has come to disturb us, I wonder?"

"I dare say it is only one of the *mendicanti*," said Signora Pia, going to the door.

In a moment she returned, smiling and excited. "It is a Signore, who wishes to see you on a matter of importance."

"Who dares intrude upon my privacy in this way?" cried Hugo in sudden wrath. "Say to him, whoever he is, that I have no business with him, and that I will not see him."

"Why, papa, it may be some one to buy your statue; do not send him away without a hearing," said Lisa soothingly, greatly surprised at her father's singular manner.

"He seems an honest man," ventured Signora Pia, quite alarmed at the hunchback's pallor and agitation.

"Ask him his name and business," at length said Hugo, evidently trying to master his annoyance.

When Signora Pia returned, she smiled triumphantly, and laid a soiled card before the hunchback, saying,

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"He is no impertinent intruder, as you will see, and he has come to speak about the statue."

"Signor Berto—who is Signor Berto?" said Hugo, reading the name aloud, "Ah! I remember; he is the copyist in the *Galleria*. Well, I will see him this time; but remember, for the future, that I do not receive visitors. Tell him to enter, Signora Pia, and you, Lisa, go to your own room."

The young girl went out rather unwillingly, while the hunchback waited in sullen silence to receive his visitor.

When Master Berto entered and Signora Pia closed the door upon him, Hugo came forward with the most forbidding air, and curtly inquired his business.

The poor little copyist, now that he had succeeded in gaining admittance to the eccentric sculptor, was as timid and frightened as he had been hopeful and bold before he entered, and the sullen manner of the strange man did not tend to reassure him in the least, so it was with trembling and much hesitation that he finally made known his errand.

"Pardon me, Signore, for intruding upon you; but I trust my errand will excuse my seeming rudeness."

"I never receive any one in my house," interrupted Hugo, with more frankness than politeness.

"So I have understood, Signore, but pray listen, and you will see that my visit is not of any interest to me, but rather a favor to yourself."

"I will judge of that when I know your object in coming," returned Hugo, coldly and proudly.

"Yesterday, at the *Academia*, I heard a Russian noble asking who you were and where you could be found, as he wished to give you a commission for a statue."

Hugo's severe face relaxed a little, and he seemed to listen with interest, as Berto went on.

"As no one present seemed able to give him the information he desired, I came forward and told him what little I knew of you. Of course, Signore, I praised your work greatly, and said all that I could in your favor."

"Thank you. I am deeply obliged to you," replied Hugo, looking at him anxiously, for he was in a hurry to have him end his communication.

"The noble then requested me to arrange a time and place of meeting; therefore I took the liberty of coming to ask you what hour you would wish him to call upon you."

"I do not wish him to call upon me at all," said Hugo, excitedly; "I just now told you I did not receive visitors."

"But surely, Signore, when it is so much to your advantage, you will not refuse?" said Berto, timidly.

"I am the best judge of that, and I will not allow strangers to intrude upon the privacy of my home."

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"Then where may I tell him that you will meet
him?"

"Is it absolutely necessary that I should meet this
man? I dislike much to meet strangers; my infirmity
and my ill-health make it painful," said Hugo, as if
to apologize for his seeming rudeness.

"I understand, Signore, but he is decided to have
an interview with you; there are certain conditions
that he wishes to make with you personally."

"Very well, you can say to him that I will meet him
to-morrow at two o'clock, in the north room of the
Accademia."

"Thank you, Signore. I am obliged to you for your
kindness," and the little copyist hastened to the
door, thankful that the disagreeable interview was
over.

"If I have seemed inhospitable and rude, I beg that
you will pardon me," said Hugo, with more gentleness
than he had shown during the interview; "but I am
not like other men; to be polite, I cannot be untruth-
ful, therefore my lips say what my heart dictates; and
believe me, though my manners are ungracious, I am
none the less thankful to you for your interest and
trouble in this matter."

"It has been no trouble, Signore, I am happy to
serve you."

And Berto went away with the impression that, after

all, the hunchback was not as disagreeable as he had thought him at first.

"Here he comes, Signore; now is our chance to speak to him. You stand aside a little, please, and I will speak to him first, for, although he expects to meet you, he is as shy as a wild beast, and might run off, after all, without waiting for the interview; then our only sure opportunity of meeting him would be lost, and I had so much trouble to get admitted to his house, and more to get him to promise to meet you; he is a most singular character, as you will see for yourself."

Count Valdimer Nordiskoff and Berto stood in the north room of the *Academia* waiting for Ingo, who approached them slowly, coming out of the shadow of an inner room into the broad light that streamed on him from a lofty window.

He was very pale, and his eyes were cast down as though they were weighted with unshed tears, while his thin hands were clenched together tightly, for he was trying to control his natural timidity and dislike to meeting strangers.

The unfortunate man started like a frightened deer, as Berto approached him, and looked around as though he would rather retreat than advance; however, controlling his feelings, after a moment, with a wan smile, he

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held out his hand and said, "You see I am here, Signor Berto, according to agreement."

"I am glad you have not failed to come, for I have good news for you," said Berto in a low tone and glancing at Valdimer, who stood a little aside. "I have been talking again with this Russian noble, while we waited your coming. I am told he is as rich as a gold mine, and he will give you a commission, I am sure, for he tells me he admires your Aurora beyond anything modern."

At that moment Count Valdimer came forward, and Berto, with a satisfied smile, presented the sculptor to him.

The Count held out his hand frankly and said pleasantly, "I am happy to meet one whose genius I so much admire."

Again Hngo looked around as though he would like to escape, if he could, and much to Berto's surprise refused to take the hand the noble had so kindly offered him, standing silent with downcast eyes and dull, impassive face.

Count Valdimer did not seem to notice his singular manner, but went on in his easy way: "I suppose Signor Berto has told you that I should like to give you a commission for a statue?"

"Yes, Signor Count."

"And you will accept it, will you not?"

"I will, Signore."

"And you will work from the same model as that of the Aurora?"

"Certainly, Signore, if you wish it; but what does it matter who my model is so that my work pleases you? It will depend upon the subject you choose, whether I can use the same model or not," said Hugo, with a strange, inquiring look at the Count.

"You may select your own subject. Let it be Hebe, if that suits you. I care not what name you give it, so that the face is the same as the face of the Aurora."

An ominous flush passed over the sallow features of the hunchback, and he clenched his hands, looking around restlessly, but said nothing.

Count Valdimer went on, "If you will agree to this I will pay you, on the day it is finished, ten thousand *scudi*."

Hugo started and muttered: "Ten thousand *scudi*?"

"Otherwise," continued the Count, "I shall not give you the commission."

"I will do as you wish, Signore."

"And I wish to see the work from time to time during its progress."

A dark, stubborn expression settled around Hugo's mouth, while he closed his lips firmly and made no reply.

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Count Valdimer waited a moment, and then asked, a little impatiently, "Do you agree to this?"

"No, Signore Count; I admit no one to my studio during the progress of my work."

"Very well, then, I withdraw my offer; but ten thousand *scudi* ought not to be thrown away on a caprice."

"It is not a caprice, Signore; it is a principle. I prefer not to admit the outside world into the privacy of my home."

"I do not wish to intrude into the privacy of your home, I only ask to visit your studio."

"My studio is my home, but, as you have said, ten thousand *scudi* is not to be thrown away, therefore you may come."

"When will you begin your work?"

"To-morrow."

"And when may I make my first visit?"

"In a month," and without another word Hugo turned his back on the Count and walked away, clenching his hands and frowning sullenly.

"An amiable, grateful fellow," said Count Valdimer to Berto, who stood speechless, watching the retreating figure of the hunchback. "Upon my word, his insolence was almost unbearable."

"I told you he was a singular being," replied Berto apologetically. "But he is a great genius and one must put up with his eccentricities because of that."

“And he has a lovely daughter,” returned the Count, “which I care much more for than I do for the old monster’s talents. I am much obliged to you, Signor Berto, for your success in bringing about this meeting, and if I am as fortunate with the daughter as you have been with the father, I shall be still more indebted to you. So good day, and many thanks,” and Count Valdimer walked away, well satisfied with his morning work.

CHAPTER XI.

LISA'S ROMANCE.

LISA was alone in her father’s studio on the day of his meeting with the Count Valdimer Nordiskoff in the north room of the *Academia*. Signora Pia had gone to market, and there was no one in the great silent apartment but herself.

The studio was a large, dreary room, lighted by one high window, through which was visible a patch of blue sky, a lofty tower, and a line of distant hill; casts from the antique, looking grim and ghostly with their sightless eyes, stood in the shadowy corners, and bits of drapery fluttered in the soft air that entered through the open window. Old carved furniture, chairs, tables,

ter," returned the Count, "more than I do for the old man obliged to you, Signor." "Talking about this meeting, the daughter as you have been still more indebted to me," and Count Valdinieri smiled with his morning

her father's studio on the second floor with the Count Valdinieri's room of the *Accademia*. The room was quiet, and there was no one but herself. The study room, lighted by one lamp, was visible a patch of blue on the distant hill; casts from the statues, ghostly with their sightless eyes, in the shadowy corners, and bits of furniture, chairs, tables,

and a great black chest, that looked like a sarcophagus, stood here and there without any regard to careful arrangement, and in that sort of careless confusion that artists love so well. Everything about the place was ancient and austere; no bright color, no dainty trifles such as please a young girl, gladdened the eyes of the hunchback's daughter, who sat in her favorite seat at the base of the statue of Apollo, holding a book, which she was not reading, in one hand, while the other supported her fair cheek.

She wore no veil nor scarf now, and all the wealth of her hair fell unconfined over her graceful shoulders, which were visible through the thin drapery that covered without concealing them.

As she sat there in languid repose, with eyes full of pensive sweetness, it was evident that her thoughts were of a pleasant nature, and that she was dreaming a young girl's first sweet dream of love. The book she held in her hand was the work of Tommaso Grossi, and it was open again at the story of Folchetto di Provenza. She had been reading over the sad romance of the beautiful young page, and thinking, as she had almost every hour since the day she had read it to her father in the garden, of the handsome stranger who had smiled on her from behind the statue of Fauna.

Should she ever see him again? Why was he there, and why did he smile on her with a look that went

straight to her heart? Curious and anxious to discover the secret of her first adventure, she had the day before entreated her father to take her to the garden again; but her evident desire had excited the lurchback's suspicions, and he had refused her, for the first time, with sullen decision.

She was a prisoner in her father's house, watched over by his jealous eyes; denied all young companionship, and all the pleasure of the bright gay world, she had never tasted any of the joys of youth, but had lived always in retirement—her only society her sad, strange father, and the serious Signora Pia, who was growing more grave and pious as she grew old; and who lectured her somewhat severely if she laughed in the freedom of her young heart, or sang a snatch of a gay song, such as she occasionally heard from the street below her window.

Sometimes she longed to look into the street, but the windows of her little room were so high that she could only see the clouds sailing by, or the distant tree tops beyond the Arno, and if she grow weary of looking at the sky and the distant hills, and went for a change on the little balcony that opened into the court, she saw but a moss-grown fountain, its basin full of vegetables or soiled clothes, and tired, draggled women washing, or nursing their cross, hungry babies. The only bit of green, the only pleasant thing there, was a stunted fig-

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tree in one corner, where a bird had built its nest, and now, chirping and fluttering about, it fed its young in happy ignorance of the great bright world beyond those four dingy walls.

At times she longed again for the little garden and vineyard on San Miniato, the seat under the cypress trees, the old convent garden, which was now turned into a cemetery, and the distant view of the hills, with the lovely city below.

Now the only change or pleasure she ever enjoyed was on these rare occasions when, closely veiled like a nun, she went out into the bright noisy street with Signora Pia to a neighboring church, or with her father to some of the gardens, where, from a secluded spot, she could see the trees and flowers and listen to the singing of the birds.

Such hours were like glimpses of Paradise to her, she was so happy there ; and why could she not go often ? Why was it that her father, who loved her so tenderly, who was so patient and gentle to her, who taught her all she knew, who clothed and fed her so daintily, could deny her this simple pleasure that her heart craved so strongly—freedom and the society of human beings like herself, young and beautiful and happy ?

She had lived all her life in the company of cold, dumb marble and clay, and had seen little that was

beautiful save herself, and she was not aware how lovely she was, but unconsciously admired her own charms in the productions of her father's genius.

That day in the garden, for the first time in her life, she had been attracted to a handsome living face, and it haunted her incessantly. She saw it before her, waking or sleeping, alone or with others; it was always before her, and she could not banish it.

To-day was a *festa*, and she had hoped, with a trembling hope, that her father might grant her the pleasure she so ardently desired, though she did not dare express it, and take her again to the garden where she might see that handsome face looking at her from behind the statue of Fanna. So she waited anxiously for the hunchback's return, while the slow hours seemed to drag pitifully, for he lingered longer than usual on this day when she was most impatient for his coming.

At length she heard his step, and her lovely, wistful eyes sought his face anxiously as he entered, for she saw that something uncommon had happened, and that he was strangely excited.

"What is it, dear papa?" she asked eagerly, rising and taking his hands tenderly in hers, and holding up her face for his accustomed kiss.

But instead of the gentle caress she had always received, he clasped her in his arms passionately, and,

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sinking on the bench where she had been sitting, he
held her to his heart, sobbing and weeping in a sort of
delirious joy.

Lisa was alarmed, and disengaging herself from his
embrace, she cried: "Tell me, pray tell me what has
happened? You weep, and yet you seem more joyful
than sorrowful."

"God be thanked!" at last said Hugo, making a
supreme effort to control his emotion. "I am over-
come with happiness, and I scarce know what I say;
but God be thanked that now my desire is realized.
My fortune has come, and we are rich."

"Rich, papa? What can you mean?"

"I mean that we are rich, Lisa. That at last wealth
crowns my labor, and you, my love, my treasure, shall
have it all. It is for you, to make you happy. We
will go away from here, away from this great noisy
city, and find a home in a forest among the hills
where no one will come to disturb us, and where the
flowers will always bloom and the birds will always
sing."

"Tell me, darling, for I do not understand you.
What fortune has come to you?" and she looked into
her father's eyes with eager questioning, while she
stroked his dark cheek tenderly.

"It is ten thousand *scudi*. Think of it—ten thou-
sand *scudi*!"

"*Madre di Dio!* ten thousand *scudi*," echoed the girl, half alarmed at her father's strange excitement, and fearing that he was no longer in his right mind. "Is it yours? Have you all that money?"

"I *am* to have it, my angel."

"How, in what way, papa?" cried Lisa, more and more bewildered.

"I have but just now come from the *Accademia*, whither I went to meet a rich Russian noble, and he has engaged me to make a statue of Hebe for him, for which he is to pay me ten thousand *scudi*. Do you understand, my child, that that is a fortune to us?"

"Yes," she gasped breathlessly. "Yes, I understand that it is a great sum of money, and that it will make you rich and famous."

"And you happy, my Lisa, in our home in the forest."

"But why leave Florence?" she said eagerly. "Why seek a home away from our lovely Arno? We can find happiness here surely," and she sighed as she thought of the handsome face she had seen in the Torrigiani garden.

Her father did not reply to her question; but holding her away from him he gazed at her long and searchingly. He was calm now and there were no traces of sobs or tears. His sudden emotion had

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At length he said, coldly: "Have you not always wished for the flowers, and trees, and birds?"

"Yes, papa. I love nature, and everything beautiful and bright."

"And have you not always entreated me to take you away from these gloomy rooms into the open air and sunshine?"

"Yes," she replied again, with a little hesitation; "but we need not leave Florence to find these, they are in all the gardens."

The hunchback sighed heavily, as he drew her face down to his shoulder with motherly tenderness, and as he stroked the yellow threads of her hair he said, in a voice of mingled sorrow and pity:

"My heart aches for you, my child, because I cannot make you happy as you wish. It is not trees, and birds, and flowers, and all beautiful things in nature that your hungry heart longs for, it is the world with its pomp and vanity, its falsehoods and cruelty, its hollow joys, its certain sorrow, its human beings, young, happy, and beautiful, that my Lisa desires and loves; and her unfortunate father loves them not."

"Oh! papa, why should you not love what God has created?"

"My child, once I adored my fellow-creatures. I

worshipped their comeliness. I longed for their sympathy and affection; but, in return, they gave me scorn for my adoration, and loathing for my love; they thrust me out from everything good; they turned my gentle nature into gall; they taught me that those whom God afflicts humanity does not pity, and now I hate all mankind and regard them all as my enemies; therefore, I would hide my only treasure away in the heart of a forest, where none can find her, or rob me of her."

"No one can rob you of me, dear papa. Why do you speak of that always? Why do you fear it? Am I not your child, your own Lisa? Then, who can take me from you?"

The hunchback did not reply, but, trembling visibly, he started up and began pacing the large room with rapid strides.

Lisa watched him anxiously for some moments, and then, going softly to him, she twined her arm in his, and raising her sweet face said coaxingly: "I have vexed you, *caro mio*. Forgive me, and kiss me, and smile on me as you do when you love me."

Hugo stooped, and pressed his lips to her forehead and cheek with sorrowful fervor, but said nothing.

"Do not be sad on this day of all others," she continued, clinging to his arm, and joining him in his walk. "It is a *festa*, and besides it is the day of your good fortune, and we ought to be very happy."

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"It is you, my darling, who are not happy, and it grieves me because I cannot make you so."

"But you can, *caro mio*; you can make me the happiest girl in Florence. Do you remember that you promised to take me to the garden on this *festa*? It is now near the hour. Shall we go?"

Her father hesitated a moment, and then, noticing her look of eager anxiety, he said reluctantly: "If you wish it so much, I have no heart to deny you. Put on your thickest veil and we will go."

Lisa darted away to her little chamber, as light and radiant as a sunbeam, and while she was arraying herself with more than usual care, Hugo recounted his good fortune to Signora Pia, who had returned in time to hear the welcome news before Vespers, where she intended to go and thank God devoutly for his mercy and favor to her master.

When Lisa and her father reached their accustomed seat near the granita tree, her first timid glance sought the statue of Fauna to see if the handsome face was there; but no—much to her disappointment she saw only the waving branches and the blue sky beyond, and her heart sank heavily, for suddenly it seemed as though the sunlight was less bright, the flowers less fair and fragrant, and nature less beautiful than she had thought it when she first entered the garden.

The distant voices of the crowd, and the merry laughter of the children sounded harsh and discordant on her ear, and she almost wished that she was in the silence and retirement of the studio, which she had found so wearisome in the morning.

Her father seemed absorbed in gloomy reflections, perhaps it was a premonition of the shadow that would so soon fall upon his life, and the poems of Tommaso Grossi were not as sweet as they had been the day before. It was her first great disappointment, and she could scarce restrain her tears.

"After all," she thought, as the afternoon wore away, and the eagerly-longed-for face did not appear behind the statue, "it could not have been a human being. I must have fancied I saw some one, or it was a vision, for the face was too beautiful to be real. Ah! me, why did it come to haunt me forever, if I can see it no more?"

At last, restless from hope deferred, she arose, and leaving her book upon the bench, she took her father's arm and together they strolled into a lonely, unfrequented path, each silent and absorbed, each hoping and dreading they scarce knew what. As they passed along under the overhanging trees, some one stepped out of the shadow of a thicket and walked away rapidly with his finger on his lip as if to enjoin silence. Lisa had but a glimpse of him, and Hugo saw him not, for if he

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had he would have instantly recognized Count Valdimir Nordiskoff.

But the rapid glance, the smile, the motion of his head, were all familiar to the girl. It was the handsome face that had haunted her night and day ever since she first saw it, and her heart throbbed so tumultuously with joy that she could hardly walk steadily or control her voice to reply to a question her father asked her at that moment.

When they returned to their seat the hunchback sank down wearily, and covering his face with his hands, as was a habit with him, he seemed in deep thought and lost to all around him, as though he were revolving some important question in his mind, some subject that required the deepest deliberation.

Lisa watched him anxiously, dividing her attention pretty equally between the bent figure at her side and the battered statue of Fauna; but her father still remained silent, and the trees still waved their fantastic arms against the blue sky, and no warm, admiring glance met her searching gaze, that turned again and again hopefully to that spot, where her first romance had dawned upon her.

At length she took up the neglected romance of another life, and, turning the pages abstractedly, a folded slip of paper attracted her notice. It was between the pages where she had been reading, and suddenly

she remembered that it was not there when she laid the book down. Glancing at her father to see if she was observed, she unfolded it with trembling fingers, and read :

"I love you, and I must see you. To-morrow, at Ave Maria, I will be in the Church of San Marco, and I shall look for you in the Chapel of the Sacrament."

Bewildered and trembling, she thrust the paper into the bosom of her dress, and closing the book, she said, "Come, papa, do you know the sun is nearly down?"

Hugo looked up like one awakening from a dream, and, rising, he gave his daughter his arm silently, and together they walked away, absorbed in their own thoughts. Hugo was trying to find some means of evading the agreement he had made with Count Valdimer, in regard to his visiting his studio; some way to guard his treasure more closely until he had completed the statue, and then he determined, in spite of his daughter's objection, to find some other home where there would be less chance of his secret being discovered.

And Lisa, trembling under the burden of her first secret, happy and yet fearful, her whole soul thrilling with the joy the words had given her, though she only half understood their meaning, was already planning some way by which she might evade her father's

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watchful eyes, so that she could meet her hero of ro-
mance, as he had requested, in the Church of San
Marco at Ave Maria the next day.

Her first thought on awakening the next morning
was of the communication she had received, and the
means to be used to gain permission from her father
to go without him to Vespers. Occasionally he had
allowed her to accompany Signora Pia, but not often,
and she feared to express a wish in that direction, lest
it might excite his suspicion, which seemed strangely
alive at this time to any indication of preference on
her part.

If Signora Pia would only propose it, it would
render the matter easy; but the morning passed away
without the pious woman making any allusion to the
church services, and Lisa saw the hour approach with
terrible anxiety and uncertainty.

Her father had already begun his new order, and
the statue of Hebe, though but a shapeless mass of
clay behind the red curtain where Hugo worked, was
nevertheless a commencement, and for the time ab-
sorbed all his attention.

Lisa sat with her embroidery at the feet of Apollo,
and watched the shadows on the floor grow longer and
longer with a trembling, fainting heart, when suddenly
Signora Pia laid aside her knitting, and taking her
veil and shawl, she declared her intention of going to

Vespers ; as she was leaving the room she turned and said :

" Signorina, have you been to church to thank God for His goodness to your father ? "

" No, Signora, I have not yet been, " replied Lisa, trembling with impatience to hear her next remark.

" Then put on your veil and come with me to San Marco ; for it is not well to forget God in our prosperity. "

The girl did not wait for a second bidding ; and when they entered the gloomy old church, instead of following Signora Pia to the high altar where the lamps were burning, she slipped into the chapel of the Sacrament. It was empty and in deep shadow. Falling on her knees and covering her face, she tried to pray, but in vain ; her thoughts would not soar above earth and earthly desires. While she murmured *Ave Maria* with her trembling lips, she was listening for a footstep on the marble pavement, and in a moment it came. Without raising her head she was aware that some one entered the chapel and knelt before the altar by her side.

Her heart seemed to stand still for an instant ; and then suddenly it throbbed so heavily that she felt as though she were suffocating. She did not move, and the new-comer did not speak ; was he praying silently or was he waiting for her to give some signs of life ?

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She could endure this uncertainty no longer, lifting her head from the railing and softly drawing her veil aside, she glanced around timidly, and there she saw near her, absorbed in deep devotion, not her hero of romance, but Signora Pia, who had followed her and was praying devoutly with clasped hands and closed eyes.

Was she to suffer a second disappointment? If so, she felt that she could hardly endure it, but just as she was about despairing another person came in softly and knelt on her other side. This time there could be no mistake, for she felt that it was he without seeing him. An electric thrill seemed to run through every fibre of her frame, as he murmured in a low tone some words that Signora Pia must have thought to be a prayer, for she did not seem to notice the intrusion, so absorbed was she in her own devotions.

For perhaps five minutes they knelt there side by side, outwardly as still as statues, then Count Valdimer, softly reaching forward, slipped a folded paper into Lisa's trembling fingers, and with a gentle pressure of her hand rose from his knees and went out as quietly as he had entered.

Signora Pia, her devotions ended, laid her hand on the girl's shoulder who seemed to be absorbed in prayer, and said gently:

"Come, my child, you have remained here long

enough, and God must be well pleased with your sincere piety. It is late and your father will be anxious. Let us go."

Silently Lisa rose from her knees, holding the note close to her heart, and followed the old woman out into the lighted church, where the penitent and sinful still lingered and prayed.

CHAPTER XII.

AN EVENING AT THE OPERA.

IT was the fashionable opera night at La Pergola, and thousands were rushing in to hear a new *prima donna* in "La Favorita." The royal box was brilliantly lighted, and hung with crimson satin studded with gold, while a crown of flowers depended from the ceiling, and garlands and bouquets made it look almost like a rural bower. The Grand Duke and his suite, in their brilliant uniforms; sat under the odorons coronet, talking and laughing gayly, when the sweet, thrilling voice of the *prima donna* did not claim their attention.

On the right of the royal party was another box, scarcely inferior in size and brilliancy of decoration,

THE OPERA.

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AN EVENING AT THE OPERA.

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and in it sat the Duchess of Castellara, surrounded by
the most distinguished men in Florence.

Time had dealt kindly with her, and though she was
no longer young, she was still considered the most
lovely woman in Italy, for the fame of her beauty had
spread beyond her native city, and wherever she went
she was surrounded by a train of admirers selected
from the *beaux esprits* of society.

She had never looked more beautiful than she did
on this night. Her dress, a pale green satin, set off the
rare pallor of her skin, which was as white as the petal
of a lily, save where a delicate flush came and went on
her softly rounded cheek. Her eyes, under their long,
dark lashes, seemed to glow and burn like deep fires,
unextinguished by time or tears, and the rich gold of
her hair had lost none of its burnished lustre, while a
tender smile, strangely sweet, and almost happy, trem-
bled from time to time around her lovely mouth.

She was listening to some low-spoken words from
Valdimer Nordiskoff, who sat behind her chair, his
handsome head close to hers, and his fine eyes studying
her face admiringly.

"There, that will do," she said at length, tapping
him reprovingly with her fan, "you have monopolized
me quite long enough, and Baron Loder is green with
jealousy."

"Bah! let the heavy German wait; he is slow enough

to tarry any length of time for a word or a look, and will go away contented if he is rewarded with a smile at the end of the evening."

"Not so; I wish to talk with him. He is very entertaining and original, and his realistic views of things are quite refreshing."

"Do you wish to banish me to the far corner of your box, where I can only bite my lips in vexation and envy?"

"Valdimer," and she lowered her voice to a more confidential tone, "you well know how pleasant your pretty speeches are to me, you know your power, and you must not abuse it, if at times you surprise me into being truthful. To-night, for some unexplainable reason, I feel almost happy; my heart goes out to you with a warm, true friendship, and I would rather have you by my side than any other person in the world."

She paused and looked at him earnestly, flushing a little as though she had said too much, and then waited for him to speak, or to answer her with his eloquent eyes.

But instead of meeting the grateful, happy glance that she expected after her heartfelt expression, she noticed that he looked away, as if embarrassed, and hesitated slightly before he replied:

"Thanks, Elena, for your sweet words, which, if you are sincere, make me the happiest of mortals."

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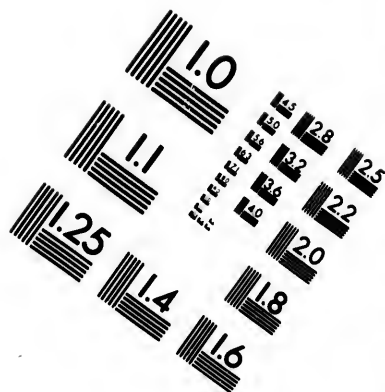
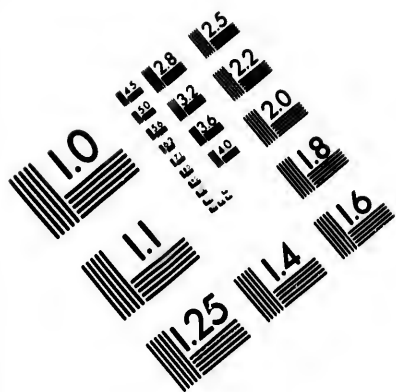
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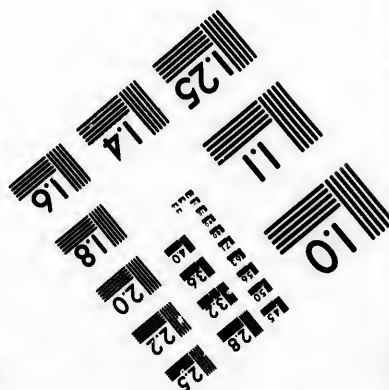
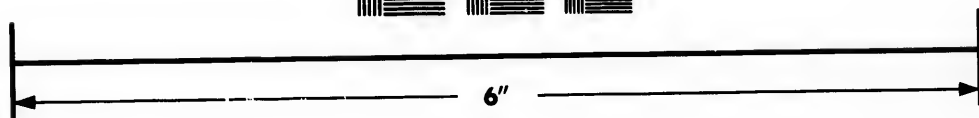
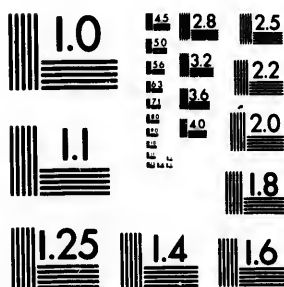
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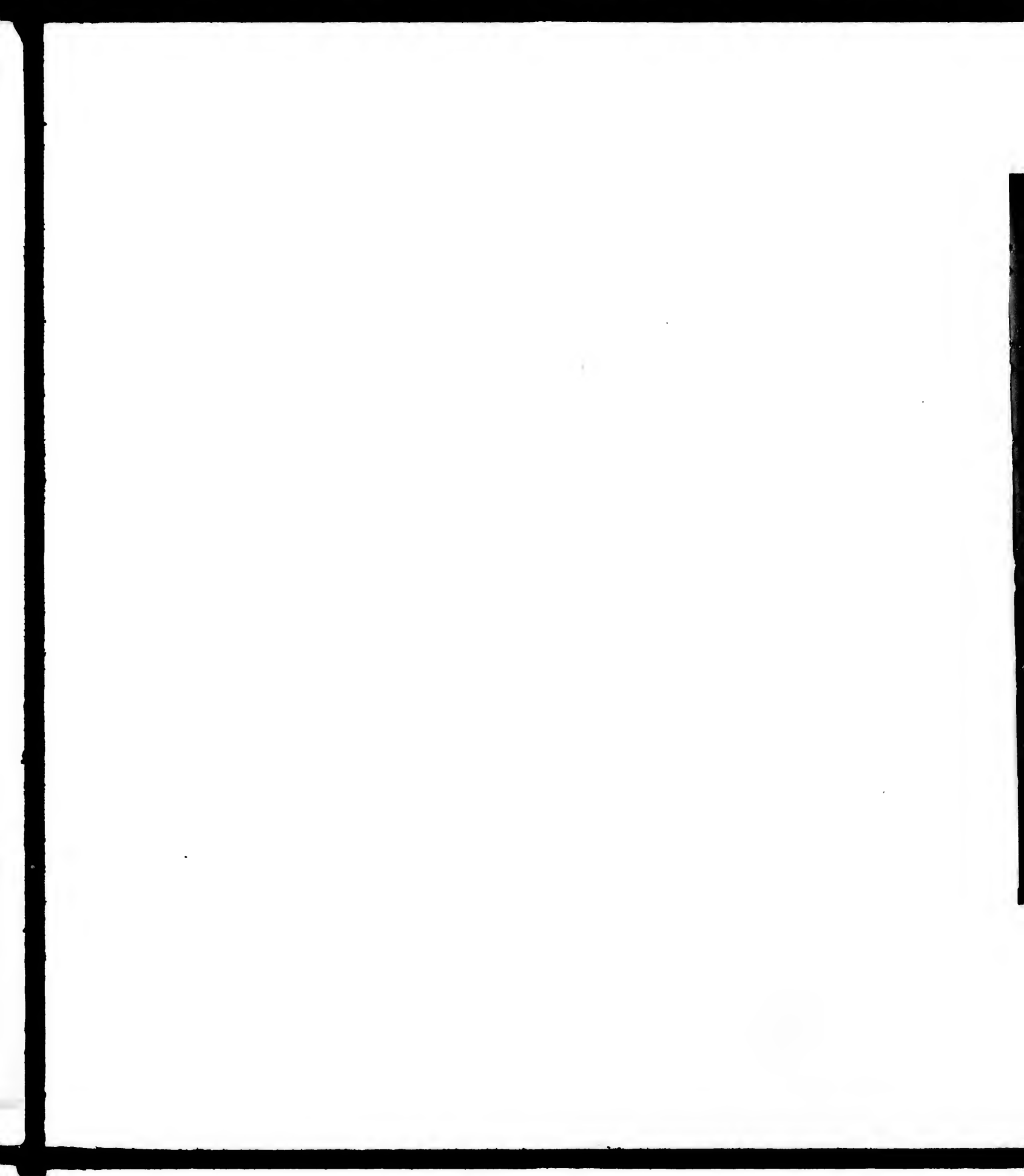
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"Can you doubt my sincerity, Valdimer? Am I one to speak lightly?"

"But you have spoken so differently for four years, that I have despaired of ever inspiring any warmer feeling in your heart than that of ordinary friendship."

"And yet you have always been contented with my friendship, at least you have professed to be, and you have assured me over and over, that you would rather possess my esteem than the most ardent love of any other woman."

"Yes, Duchess, I have repeated those words many times, and I meant them; but pardon me, now, if I say that the human heart cannot rest forever satisfied with only professions, and platonic affection, which is but the cold, pale shadow of love."

A light shiver passed over the Duchess, and her voice sank so low that it only seemed a murmur to the others in the box. "Valdimer, I do not quite understand you. You surely are not weary of waiting."

"Not if I could see an end to my torment, a termination to my martyrdom."

"But it will come some time," said the Duchess with an uneasy look, a strange, restless light in her eyes. "He is old, and he cannot live forever. Valdimer, you forget that the Duke is nearly thirty years older than I am. Naturally I shall be free from my bondage before many years."

"Hush, Duchess, I pray you. I cannot endure to speculate on a happiness built upon another's grave."

"But you could endure it if you hated him as I do, if you had waited, and watched, and counted the weary years away as I have."

"Poor Elena!" said Valdimer with gentle pity, as a look of anguish swept for a moment over her face. "Your life is indeed a bitter disappointment, and your struggle with yourself a noble one. I love you, I admire you, God only knows how deeply, for many a woman would have cast off all the fetters of duty, all the obligations due society and friends, and taken unlawfully the freedom and happiness which a cruel destiny had denied her."

"Valdimer, you know I have done right in spite of the evil tongue of the world; you applaud my firm resolves, my moral courage, my self-sacrifice, and yet you have not the strength and patience to wait with me for the end."

"Do not accuse me, Elena, of a lack of patience and strength. God knows I have not failed in either. I have been faithful and long-suffering."

"But you are weary now?" said the Duchess, looking sadly at him.

"I did not say I was weary. No, I could still endure if there was any hope."

"But there is the same hope, Valdimer," replied the

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Duchess with a low thrill of happiness in her voice, and a warm flush on her cheek. "Only to-day I have thought and dreamed of it, as I never have before. I know not why, but some new life, some new confidence has taken possession of me, and I feel that I may yet be happy, that I may yet be your wife, if only you are patient and faithful. I have been a cold, vain, cruel woman, and my life so far has been a bitter failure, but it is not too late to redeem the past. I will be better, more gentle, more womanly. I will try and kill my anger and hate for those who wronged me so. I will endeavor to obtain pardon from God for my anger against my father, who died without my forgiveness; I will change my manner of life, I will think of something besides fashion and folly, and you shall love and esteem me more than ever before."

Count Valdimer looked with wonder at the Duchess. She seemed to him a revelation, a new being—she, usually so cold, so proud, so reticent, to become so gentle and womanly and almost humble in her affection for him. What could have wrought the change? and at the very time, too, when he was less devoted, less affectionate than he had ever been since he laid his heart at her feet. As he looked into her flushed, happy face and beaming eyes, he felt the guiltiest of traitors, for had he not been dreaming and thinking night and day of another; had he not been trying by every means to

see his new charmer, to pour into her innocent young heart the story of his love, a love that he had already pledged solemnly to another, and which, in honor and truth, as a gentleman, he was bound to respect as something more sacred than an ordinary intrigue with a woman of fashion. The Duchess of Castellara, the proud, the beautiful, the courted Duchess, really loved him, had really given him her heart in all sincerity, and with womanly confidence was patiently waiting until God removed the barrier between them to become his happy, honored wife.

And now that the consummation he had desired so long and that he had sworn a thousand times was the dearest, the most sacred wish of his heart, was, by her own confession, possibly to be realized, he shrunk from it with a guilty consciousness of deception and dishonor. Another, a young, unknown girl, the daughter of a poor deformed artist, had won his treacherous heart away from the noble, beautiful woman at his side, and he was overwhelmed with contrition and shame.

While the Duchess was waiting for him to reply to her earnestly-spoken words, and while his thoughts were wandering in this labyrinth of self-contempt, doubt, and regret, he raised his eyes accidentally to a small box in the third tier, usually occupied by the middle class of well-to-do Florentines, and there he caught a glimpse of a face, a young, angelic face

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framed in masses of pale yellow hair, that instantly
changed the current of his thoughts and brought him
back to the emergency of the moment.

The Duchess, by a singular chance, raised her eyes
at the same moment, and she too saw for an instant a
face that touched a long silent chord in her heart. A
swift pallor passed over her cheek, and the hand that
held her jewelled fan trembled visibly, while Valdimer
started so suddenly and colored so vividly that she at
once noticed his agitation, although, with the ready tact
of a quick-witted woman, she resolved not to appear to
observe him; but she remembered the face for more
than one reason, and when she saw it again, she looked
at it with different eyes, and different emotions, for
her soul was a prey to jealousy, hate, and revenge,
and she would willingly have annihilated the innocent
object of her contempt with one haughty glance of
her eyes.

Happily for both Valdimer and the Duchess, at
that moment the *prima donna* began an *aria*, and in
spite of their deep emotion they could not refrain from
listening, or at least appearing to; but in reality both
were making a supreme effort to recover their calm-
ness and self-control.

"Do you see the Duke in the opposite box glaring
at us?" asked Valdimer, as the last sweet notes of the
song died on the perfumed air.

"Yes, I see him," returned the Duchess, in her usual calm voice; "but it does not disturb me. I am accustomed to it."

"He notices that our conversation has been more confidential than is judicious in public, and he is irritated."

"Since you have suddenly become so prudent, had you not better give your chair to the Baron? I am sure you have kept him waiting quite long enough," said the Duchess, in her iciest tones.

"There you mistake me, Duchess," replied Valdimer, with some annoyance. "I am not needlessly prudent, I can assure you, for the Duke has been in a very bad humor lately. He has insulted me several times recently in public, and I have endured it rather than quarrel with him."

"Thank you, how considerate!" returned the Duchess, haughtily. "I pray that you will not deny yourself satisfaction on my account."

"That is enough, Elena. I will remember what you have said," and Valdimer, rising, bent over her so low that no one could hear his words. "You are an enigma to me. A moment ago you were a woman, now you are the Duchess of Castellara, so I will wish you good-evening, and give my seat to some one more fortunate than myself."

The Duchess did not raise the long lashes that

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rested on her pale cheeks, but bowed coldly to Valdi-
mor, as she turned to welcome the German Baron who
slipped into the Count's seat the moment he vacated
it.

" I thought your friend was about to monopolize you
for the evening, Duchess. I waited patiently for
Nordiskoff to go, so that I might have a word with you,
and before I could get to your side, that great German
bear slipped into the place I was dying to reach."

The speaker was Enrico, as handsome and kind as
ever, though he was no longer the ardent, hot-headed
youth, who, in the beginning of our story, had sworn
eternal devotion to his sweet cousin. He was now a
grave, quiet man, of a singularly pure life and noble
character, and none the less the devoted friend and ad-
viser of the Duchess.

" You are always welcome, cousin, and Heaven
knows I would much rather have had you here this
last hour, for I have been wearied to death with the
senseless chatter of one and another," said the Duch-
ess, kindly giving him her hand.

" Well, you do not mean to tell me that Loder's
grave, deliberate words, and Valdimer's confidential
talk was all senseless chatter?" asked Enrico, leaning
over her chair and fixing his eyes earnestly on her face.

" No, perhaps not; Loder is sensible enough, but to-

night he has almost put me to sleep, and Valdimer was so grave and abstracted that he annoyed me, and I showed it, so he left me in a bad humor, and that spoiled everything; even the voice of the *prima donna* sounded harsh and discordant afterward. Enrico, I sometimes think that I have an evil spirit in me, that forces me to be cruel and cold and haughty when I most want to be womanly and gentle. I came to the opera to-night light-hearted and happy, which is a new experience with me; but a little thing, a simple thing, brought back my evil spirit, and I have lost all the good I gained."

"May I ask what caused your vexation, Elena?"

"Certainly, cousin; you know I always open my heart to you as I do to no other, and I have never concealed from you my affection for Nordiskoff." A pained, anxious expression passed over Enrico's face, but he said nothing, and the Duchess went on: "Lately, I have had the faintest suspicion that he is growing weary with hope deferred, and tired of the nameless bond between us. O Enrico! this waiting for dead men's shoes is something terrible."

"Oh, Duchess! for Heaven's sake do not speak so lightly on such a subject. How can you thus count away the days of Castellara's life? He is an old man, it is true, but he may outlive you for all that."

"Why does my remark seem to shock you, Enrico?"

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Have I ever made any secret of my hate for the man,
that was forced upon me by the vilest deception—of
my hope that God would one day free me from a
bond that I have endured as well as I could? I never
professed the least affection or esteem for Castellara.
He is my husband only in name. Then why should I
conceal from you my desire to be free from him, that
I may become the wife of the man I love?"

"Am you sure, Elena, that you love Nordiskoff—
that you would become his wife if you were free?"

"Quite sure, and it is my dearest wish; but who
knows whether it will ever be realized?"

"Pray, do not dwell upon such a thought. It is
wrong, my dear cousin. Trust the future to God, and
do your duty for the present, leaving Nordiskoff en-
tirely out of the question."

"How can that be, since I care for him, and suffer
to see him wasting his youth in such a hopeless love."

"That is it, cousin; you wrong him, and you wrong
yourself."

"Good Heavens! Enrico, would you advise me to
give him up?"

"I would. It is best for you that you should."

"Ah! those are the same words you said six years
ago, in regard to my friendship for the Duke de Beau-
mont, and I listened to you then. I gave him up. I
sent him back to France half broken-hearted, for the

poor fellow really loved me ; but it cost me nothing to separate from him, for my heart was not the least involved. I never cared for him, and I did it to please you, and silence the venomous tongue of the world ; but this is another matter. I love Valdimer," and the Duchess, overcome by her feelings, brushed a tear from off her burning cheek, and turned her head away that no one could witness her emotion.

"When did you see the Duke last ?" asked Enrico, after a moment's pause.

"I do not remember. I think I have not spoken to him for some months, and he certainly has not entered my box for a number of weeks."

"Do you see nothing portentous in his avoiding you so continually in public ?"

"I have not thought of it. I know that he has been constantly in the society of Ferdinand's discarded mistress, who has gone over to the other party and is working against her former lover, and that on account of this Castellara has lost the favor of his Highness."

"Then you had not heard that Ferdinand dismissed the Duke from his service to-day ?"

"No, I had not, and if it is true I rejoice, for I have spared no pains to ruin him with the Grand Duke."

"Elena, pray do not be so vindictive. He is an old man and this dishonor maddens him ; he knows that,

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in a measure, it is your work and he is desperate, and will revenge himself on Nordiskoff."

A dreadful pallor passed over the face of the Duchess, but she said bravely, "I do not fear him. I have heard his threats before."

"He will insult Valdimer and force him to fight."

"As he threatened to do with the Duke de Beaumont."

"It is different now; he is a disgraced man, and he has nothing to lose."

A vindictive joy sparkled in the Duchess's eyes, and her voice had a ring of triumph in it as she exclaimed: "I have kept my vow. I swore to be revenged on Castellara for my ruined life, and at last I see my hour drawing near. Who knows but that this may be the end of my bondage? for if he challenges Nordiskoff, his death is certain, and my freedom assured."

"Hush, Elena, hush, for Heaven's sake," said Enrico, bending over her. "You forget where you are; you are excited and nervous; you are not yourself; come, allow me to take you home."

Without the least resistance she allowed Enrico to wrap her cloak around her and lead her to her carriage; and when there, and the door closed, she leaned her head on her cousin's shoulder and wept long and bitterly.

While this scene was going on with Enrico in the

box of the Duchess of Castellara, Count Valdimer Nordiskoff sauntered slowly up to the third tier, where he found an empty box, which he entered, and concealing himself behind the curtain, he fixed his eyes on the *loggia* opposite, where, in the shadow of the drapery, he could discover the bent form of Hugo, and near him, her face radiant with delight, his daughter Lisa.

It was the first time in her life that the young girl had ever listened to an opera, although she had entreated her father repeatedly to allow her to enjoy that happiness, if only for once; but he had always refused her decidedly, telling her that it was no place for the poor and lowly, especially for one afflicted as he was—who had no desire to flaunt his deformity in the eyes of the proud and fashionable. To such reasoning she could find no answer, for she understood how sensitive her unfortunate father was, and how cruel it would be to force him into a position where he must suffer intolerably to give her a pleasure; so for some time she had not spoken of it; but, in spite of her silence, she desired it all the same.

One day it occurred to Hugo, after he had watched the girl narrowly, that some change had come over her. She was pale and silent, and her eyes often looked as though she had wept in secret; or she was restless, feverish, irritable, her appetite failed, and she lost her

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interest in her father's work, posing wearily and lan-
guidly for the statue of Hebe, that was growing slowly
and surely into life and beauty under the artist's cun-
ning hand.

"What can ail her?" he said to Signora Pia.
"Can she be ill?"

"No, indeed, she is not ill, she is only dull; she is
young and needs pleasure—give her a little change,
and she will be cheerful again."

So Hugo conquered his repugnance to appearing in
public, and took Lisa to hear "La Favorita."


At first the girl was almost wild with delight. The
music, the lights, the gay crowd, the beautiful scenes
on the stage, the acting, the singers—and more than
all, the lovely *prima donna* enchanted her, and her
father could scarce keep her ardor within the bounds
of propriety. She would lean forward, and clasp her
little hands rapturously, and almost shout with delight,
until her beauty and enthusiasm attracted the atten-
tion of many, and numerous glasses were levelled at
their humble *loggia*. Suddenly she started and turned
deadly pale, and her eyes had a wild, frightened look,
as she leaned forward and fixed her gaze on an oppo-
site box. Hugo watched her narrowly, a strange sus-
picion filling his heart. She had seen some one she
recognized, and who could it be? There seemed to be
nothing where she was looking but a fluttering curtain

before an empty box. Still the expression of her face did not deceive him, there was some mystery that he did not understand.

At length she turned her fixed gaze from the empty *loggia* opposite, and glancing down to the first tier, her face suddenly lighted up, and leaning toward her father, she said, in a suppressed whisper, "Look, papa, do you see that lovely lady yonder? I know her face, she is the one I talked with that day in San Miniato—she is the one who gave me the rosary."

CHAPTER XIII.

NEMESIS.

T the end of the month, according to his agreement with the hunchback, Count Valdimer presented himself at the studio of the strange artist, ostensibly to criticise the statue of Hebe, but, in reality, to endeavor to obtain an interview with the fair model.

When he entered, admitted by Signora Pia according to instruction, he found Hugo working diligently, but he was alone, and the visitor sought vainly in every part of the vast room for the fair face and

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XIII.

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golden hair of the lovely Lisa, whom he hoped to find
in the company of her father, or rather alone, for he
fancied it might be his happy chance to arrive during
some of the frequent absences of the artist. But his
good genius did not favor him to that extent; the
hunchback was at his post and received his patron
with almost sullen indifference, scarce deigning to dis-
cuss the merits of the work that was growing into sur-
passing beauty under his skilful hand.

But while Valdimer was secretly enraged at this
apathetic reception, he could find no rational fault,
since the work was so perfect; neither could he frame
any excuse for prolonging his visit beyond a reasonable
time; so, reluctantly, he was obliged to leave without
obtaining even a glimpse of the object of his adora-
tion.

It had been some days since he had knelt by her
side in the Church of San Marco, and although he had
haunted the same spot at Vespers, she had come no
more, and his heart seemed to be consuming with the
ardor of a love which, the more it was suppressed and
thwarted, the more it was increased and strengthened.
It was true that he had seen her that night at the
opera, had watched her exquisite face lighted up with
enthusiasm and delight. How fresh and sweet and
innocent she was; how different from a cold, haughty
woman of the world; how he longed to be by her

side, to hear her *naïve* expressions of pleasure, to look into the depths of her heavenly eyes, to listen to the music of her laugh! but that was not possible; he was separated from her by the *convenances* of society, by the watchful care of her sullen, suspicious father, by every obstacle that could keep two ardent, loving hearts asunder. But these he meant to overcome; there was nothing that his impetuous heart would not undertake to break down the barriers between them. He was rich and free, then what was there to prevent him from winning her at last? A little time, a little patience, and he would have his reward.

So he went as often as he dared to the studio in the Via San Gallo, where he always found Hugo alone, working in sullen silence, in feverish haste to complete an order that was to give him wealth and peace, and freedom from fear and anxiety.

One day, as he entered rather hastily, he caught a glimpse of a blue robe and a fringe of golden hair just disappearing through the door, and that was all; for Hugo was before him, almost barring his entrance until the light figure had entirely disappeared. The same day he saw a piece of embroidery lying on a bench at the feet of Apollo, and taking it up, when Hugo was not looking, he pressed his lips to it, feeling sure that she would know that he had kissed it. But she did not. As subtle as love may be, Lisa did not

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detect her lover's kiss or touch on the work she had so
hastily dropped when her father told her to leave the
room, for a stranger was about to enter. Neither did
she know that the rich Russian noble who had ordered
the Hebe was the same person who had smiled on her
from behind the statue of Fauna, and knelt by her side
in the Church of San Marco.

Another day, after he had been there, she found a
violet carelessly dropped on her work. Was it an
accident, or had it been placed there? She could not
tell, but she pressed it to her lips, and afterward hid it
in her bosom without saying anything to her father.
For some reason it seemed a message from the one she
thought of so constantly.

As day after day passed by, the poor girl grew paler
and sadder, and her father watched her more closely,
until his anxious scrutiny became a positive pain to
her; he would not suffer her to leave his sight, nor
take her to the gardens, nor allow her to accompany
Signora Pia to Vespers. It seemed as though he
feared that the very air would absorb her, or some
unseen hand snatch her away from his side; and as
his anxiety increased, he too became restless and fever-
ish; he could not sleep, he no longer relished his food,
even his work became distasteful to him; but he forced
himself to it for the sake of what it was to give him.

Sometimes in desperation he would throw down his

tools and rush out into the open air, and hurry through the streets and gardens as though an evil spirit pursued him. He was haunted by a fear, a vague, nameless fear, that some terrible calamity was coming upon him; that his secret was about being discovered; that all he loved or prized in the world was about to be taken from him, and he was almost in despair; the slumbering fires in his nature seemed about to break forth in awful destruction, and he had no power to restrain them.

One day he climbed the hill of San Miniato, and entering the church, he knelt and prayed long and fervently; then he descended to the spot under the cypress trees where he had stolen the child, and wept and entreated God again and again to forgive him and save him from despair.

He had reached what seemed to him the summit of worldly prosperity, wealth was about to be his, and he had already won all the fame his heart desired, yet he was wretched, more wretched than he had ever been, for he felt with fatal certainty that he was about to be plunged from prosperity and happiness into sudden, irretrievable ruin.

One morning he tried vainly to work from Lisa's drooping, spiritless figure, but even his model failed to inspire him; instead of the glowing goddess of youth, he was modelling a statue of sorrow; her wan, sad face

was a reproach to him, and seemed to arouse a feeling of anger in his heart that he could not overcome.

"In Heaven's name," he said harshly, "why do you wear such a face, when I wish you to look happy? Go to your room, and do not return until you can bring a more cheerful expression with you."

The poor girl went away weeping bitterly, and the sight of her tears almost maddened him. Throwing down his tools, he sank into a chair and covered his face in an agony of sorrow. He had made his idol weep, he had spoken harshly to this lovely, tender child that he worshipped. What a fiend he was! There must be some evil demon in his misshapen body that was suddenly unloosed. What could he do to gain her forgiveness? Where could he go for help in his trouble? Suddenly he remembered that day, so many years ago, when in his despair he had gone to pray before he ushered his guilty soul into eternity, that the Angel of the Church had appeared to him and saved him from himself. Would she save him now? He had always worn the ring that she had given him; drawing it from his bosom he pressed it to his lips, and the touch seemed to reassure him. "I have never needed her before," he said. "I have never been in despair since that day. Now I will see if I can find her, and perhaps she will save me, as she did then."

At that moment there was a knock at the door, and

Signora Pia, looking in, said: "Here is a lady who wishes to see you, Signore. May she enter?"

And before he could reply, the visitor stood in his presence.

For a moment neither spoke. Signora Pia closed the door, and left them alone.

Then the lady, fixing her clear eyes upon him with earnest scrutiny, said, in a voice that sounded in his ear like a strain of heavenly music:

"Is it possible! are you Hugo the artist? Are you the great sculptor that all Florence is talking of?"

"I am Hugo," he answered, humbly and simply, and all the while his sad gaze seemed to be searching for something in her face.

"And you have forgotten me?"

"Ah! Signora. You bring back something in my past, some blessed memory, but of what I cannot tell."

"Have you forgotten the Church of Santo Spirito, where, sixteen years ago, you wept and prayed in terrible grief?"

"Forgotten it! no, Signora, how could I ever forget that day when an angel saved me from despair?"

"A woman offered you her human sympathy, you should say, and gave you a ring, which she told you to keep until you needed her help."

"Ah! Signora, how did you learn that? Yes, you speak truly, and I have the ring. I have worn it next

my heart ever since. Here it is," and Hugo drew forth the little band of gold, so lately wet with his tears.

A sad smile passed over the visitor's face, and she said softly, as though she were speaking to herself, "The gift is retained, but the giver is forgotten."

"*Madre di Dio!* Is it true? Are you the Angel of the Church?" cried Hugo, dropping on his knees, and clasping his hands appealingly.

"Yes, my friend, I am the same woman; but rise, I pray you. Do not kneel to me."

"And to think that I should ever forget the face of one who was my salvation," said the hunchback, overcome with shame and surprise.

"But my face is not the same, my friend; the years, the bitter strife, the pain, and sin, and anger of my life, have changed and marred my features."

"Ah! not so, Signora; you are lovely now," murmured Hugo, with reverent admiration; "but you are different. You were like an angel then, but now you are like a queen."

"And you, my friend, how little I thought to see in the great artist, the man whose genius all admire, the one whom I once comforted a little with my aid and sympathy."

"The one you saved, Signora, for had it not been for you I should not be living to-day. I should not be

what I am. God sent you to save me from destruction then, and perhaps he has sent you again, for I need you now."

"What, is it possible that you are unhappy, when you are so prosperous?"

"Most wretched, Signora."

"In what way, my friend? How can I aid you?"

"By saving me from myself. I suffer because I am my own enemy. I am ungrateful. God has given me much, and I would have more."

"What would you have that you have not?"

Hugo dropped his eyes, and hesitated before this direct question. Alas! now that he had found a heart to pour his sorrow into, he could not avail himself of the comfort it might give him. He could not be cured because he could not tell his disease. He could not confess his sin, therefore he could not be forgiven; realizing this, he paused on the threshold of confidence, and withdrew his sorrow again within the recesses of his own overburdened soul.

"What is your sorrow? Cannot you open your heart to me?" urged the gentle voice.

Then Hugo, evading the true answer, said with some hesitation:

"I hate myself, Signora, and I would be as others are."

"My poor friend, why hate thyself when God hath created thee as thou art?"

"Ah, Signora, because I would have what my talents can never give me, and what I would prize more than honor, wealth, or fame."

"And what is that?"

"Human love, Signora."

"Alas, my friend, it is but a name. There is no such thing as love. There is self-interest, there is passion, there are a thousand emotions that the heart mistakes for love; but love such as you have dreamed of—perhaps, such as you believe exists—I have never met with."

"And if you have never met with it, you, so lovely, so favored by your Creator, how can I, a poor, afflicted, misshapen creature, dare to expect it?"

"As you are, you are spared all illusions, all deceptions, all professions that mean nothing. Your heart is not wounded as others have been. Thank God for that. It is His compensation for your misfortune."

"Can you say truly, Signora, that love is a myth, imaginary, and not possible? because if you can, it will reconcile me to my deformity, my trouble, my disappointments—in fact, to the life that an hour ago I felt to be a burden too heavy to bear."

The Duchess turned her face away from the sad, imploring gaze of the hunchback, who seemed to wait for her answer as though his very life depended upon it. But for her soul's salvation she could not have

said, at that moment, that there was no such thing as human love; for a memory, a clinging, tender memory of her girlhood, that had colored her whole life, and had given her all the sweet, pure happiness she had ever known, flooded her heart, and welled to her eyes in hot, passionate tears.

"You do not answer me, Signora, because you would not teach me what is false. The heart beating in my ill-favored body is like that of all mankind, and it tells me I can never enjoy the sweetest blessing that God has bestowed on all humanity, and I do not expect it; but a filial love, a natural love, ought my misfortune to deprive me of that?"

"I scarcely understand you, Signor Hugo; explain yourself more clearly."

"I have a daughter—a young and beautiful daughter."

"You? Is it possible?" said the Duchess with unconcealed surprise. "I did not suppose you had any ties of that kind."

"I have this one child," continued Hugo, without seeming to notice the Duchess's astonishment. "She is all I have in the world to love, and I worship her."

"And her mother, where is she?"

"She is dead, Signora," replied the hunchback, lowering his eyes; "she died when Lisa was a baby."

"You say your child is lovely. I trust she is affectionate and dutiful."

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"She is an angel of goodness, Signora, and she has always loved me so tenderly; her heart has been like an open book before me; she has told me all her little joys and sorrows. She has made me her *best friend*, her only companion, and she has seemed light-hearted, happy, and contented until recently. Within a few weeks there has been a change in her. She is silent and sad, or feverish and restless by turns. She is dissatisfied with her humble home, she cares no more for her books, and, worse than all, I fear she does not love me as she did. I fear that she is concealing something from me, and my heart is breaking, I am too miserable to live, and I know not what to do. Tell me, I pray, Signora, how can I win back her love and confidence?"

"How old is she, my friend?"

"She has just passed sixteen, but she seems older than her age."

"She may be in love. Has she a lover?"

"A lover, Signora? Why, she is but a child," cried Hugo, pale and trembling at the possibility, "and she has seen no one, she has never been anywhere without me, then how can she have a lover?"

"I know not, but it seems a reasonable solution to the riddle, and if she is young and lovely, it is but a natural consequence."

"But she has seen no one, Signora," persisted the

hunchback. "It cannot be. Oh! she cannot love another better than the father who has worshipped her. The thought is death to me."

"But you must give her up to a husband some day, my friend."

"That I never will do!" cried Hugo, with sudden rage. "No one shall take her from me. I will see her dead first."

"That is unreasonable. Calm yourself, and you will see that such a determination is folly."

"Pardon me, Signora; you see that my evil spirit still gets the better of me. I have loved the child so, that I cannot think calmly of the possibility of losing her."

"Perhaps I am mistaken; the change that you notice in her may arise from other causes."

"Can it be that she has just begun to realize what a wretched, deformed creature her father is? Is it a natural repugnance for my hideous self that keeps her away from me? Oh! tell me, Signora, can it be that?" And the hunchback, entirely overcome by his feelings, covered his face and sobbed as he had done on that day when the Duchess first saw him weeping in the Church of Santo Spirito.

"My friend, you must control yourself, and not give way in this weak manner to imaginary trouble. Your daughter, as you say, is but a child; and who can

account for the caprices of childhood? Do not distress yourself with the idea that your deformity estranges her heart from you. She has seen you always, and I will wager that she never thinks of it; and that she loves you as well as any child can love a parent."

Hugo raised his tear-stained eyes to the face of the Duchess with a look of gratitude, and taking her hand, he pressed it humbly to his lips.

"Thank you, Signora, for your kind words; they give me new life; but tell me, what can I do to make the child happy as she once was?"

"Give her young companions and more freedom; for youth craves change and amusement. Take my advice, and you will see her as gay and happy as a bird."

Hugo's countenance fell. She had advised what he could not and would not do, but he said nothing.

The Duchess watched him closely for a moment, and then added: "I hope you have told me the real cause of your trouble; that you have kept nothing back, otherwise my advice will be of no benefit to you."

"I have told you all, Signora," returned the hunchback a little sullenly, "and I thank you for your advice."

"Now, my friend, I will inform you of the object of my visit; for I had an object in coming, but my surprise at finding in Signor Hugo an old acquaintance

has almost driven it from my mind," said the Duchess, looking curiously around the studio. I came here to give the most popular sculptor in Florence a commission."

"I am at your service, as you well know, Signora. What would you have me do?"

"I would like a statue of myself."

"That will be a pleasure, and I need not assure you that I will do my best. Is it to be a portrait, Signora, or in character?"

"A character and a portrait both, if you can combine the two effectively."

"That depends on the character."

"I have decided on it. It is to be Nemesis."

"Nemesis, the goddess of vengeance?"

"Yes, it is a fancy, and I would have it so."

"But, Signora, I cannot model a portrait of you in that character. There is not a line or an expression in your face like the fierce demon of revenge."

"When I think of my wrongs, I can put my desire into my face, and instead of the Duchess of Castellara, you will see before you retribution personified."

And as she spoke her eyes glowed and deepened with such vindictive hate that Hugo trembled and shrunk from her as though she had some injury to avenge on him. The years had indeed changed her. Was this the sweet, compassionate woman who had

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stood before him in Santo Spirito? was this implacable, cruel enemy the Angel of the Church?

"*Madre di Dio*," he thought, "if I were her victim, she would kill me with her glance." But he only said, "I will try, Signora. I will do my best to produce the character you desire to assume; still I wish it were some other impersonation in which I could do both you and myself more justice."

"I am satisfied with my choice, and I am willing to leave it to you to work out. Do not lose my face in the character nor the character in my face, that is all I ask; combine the two, and I shall be content. When can I have my first sitting?"

"To-morrow, if it suits you, Signora."

"Then I will be here at this hour."

"Very well, I shall be at your service."

"And I trust to find you in better spirits, and more reconciled to your destiny," added the Duchess, rising and drawing her veil over her face.

"I will endeavor to be, Signora," returned Hugo, as he opened the door for her.

Then he watched her descend the stairs with a proud, firm step, her silken garments trailing after her, and he murmured to himself:

"The Angel of the Church as Nemesis. What can it mean?"

CHAPTER XIV.

A DISCOVERY.

AS soon as the Duchess of Castellara left Hugo's studio, he sent Signora Pia to bring Lisa to him, for his heart was longing to be reconciled with the child, to whom he had never before, in all her life, spoken an angry word.

As she entered, her red, swollen eyes, and pale face were a silent reproach to him, although she had wiped away her tears, and was striving to appear cheerful, as he had commanded her to do. Looking timidly at him to see if he were still angered, there was an expression of fear mingled with sorrow on her sweet face, that pierced him to the heart, and almost bowed him to the earth before her in deepest penitence.

With all his love and contrition in his face, he held out his arms as she approached, and taking her close to his heart he sobbed: "Forgive me, my darling, for speaking to you in anger, forgive me."

"Hush, dear papa! It was I who provoked it with my indifference. My heart was not in your work, and so my face showed it; but I will do better now."

"And why was not your heart in my work?" asked Hugo, tenderly stroking her hair.

"I was thinking of something else, papa."

"And what sad thoughts could my Lisa have—for surely they were sad when her face looked so sorrowful?"

"I do not know," she stammered. "I scarcely remember now what was in my mind."

"My child, look into my face; do not avert your gaze from me. There is something in your heart that you would conceal from your father." He spoke very gently, but very earnestly, as though he entreated her to unburden her soul to him. But she continued to look away without speaking.

"If there is any ungratified wish in your heart, any sorrow, hope, or fear, tell it me, and let me be your best friend, your guide, your support. God knows, I will do all for you that a loving, unselfish parent can."

"I know it, papa; you are always good; but there is nothing to tell you," she replied, in a low voice, still looking away.

"Are you quite sure, darling?"

A vivid blush passed over the girl's cheeks and brow, and the tears came suddenly to her eyes, but she forced them back, and said quietly: "Have I ever told you an untruth, papa?"

“Never, my child.”

“Then, cannot you trust me now, and I will be your own dear, good Lisa, and never grieve you again.”

“God bless you, my treasure,” and Hugo took her lovely face between his hands, and looked down into the liquid depths of her eyes with an eager, hungry, longing gaze, as though he would read her soul through and through, and then asked: “My Lisa, are you sure you love me?”

“Quite sure, papa,” she returned, with unflinching eyes.

“Better than any one in the world?”

The white lids fell, a hot blush suffused her cheeks again, and, with a short, forced laugh, she replied: “Oh! you dear, foolish papa, whom have I in the world to love beside you?”

Hugo let her face fall from between his hands, and turned away with a heavy sigh; he was not satisfied—she was hiding something from him. Her nature was as transparent as crystal, and he could detect the faint shadow of concealment there.

“Now, papa, do not look sad; come, let us go to work on the Hebe, and I will try to appear as you wish me to, for I am happier than I was, and I do not mean to offend you with my sad looks again.”

“You may amuse yourself with your books or your

embroidery, my child, for I shall not work on the Hebe to-day. I must go out and find some clay for a new order."

"A new order, papa? Why, what have you to do now? Oh! how famous you are becoming. Tell me, what is it?" cried Lisa, running to him and kissing him fondly on both cheeks.

"I have to make a statue of the Duchess of Castellara."

"The Duchess of Castellara! Is she not the one they call the most beautiful lady in Florence?"

"She is very beautiful and very rich," returned Hugo musingly.

"Ah, papa, how proud I am when all the great Florentines come to you to ask for your work! Some day we will be as grand and rich as they are, and it will be because of your genius."

An expression of satisfaction passed over the hunchback's face, for her praise was very sweet to him, and kissing her again he took his hat and went out, leaving her alone in the great, dreary room, with her dumb companions and her own thoughts.

Taking her embroidery, as her father had recommended, she sat down in her usual place, but, instead of working, she fell to thinking, as she always did when she was alone, of her hero of romance—the handsome unknown who had written those sweet words that lay next her heart, and who had pressed her hand as she

knelt at her prayers in the Chapel of the Sacrament. How long it had been since she had seen him, and how slowly the days dragged away, without the hope of seeing him again.

Suddenly she heard steps outside. "There comes Signora Pia," she thought. "Oh, I cannot even be alone long enough to think of him."

The door opened, she heard the old woman say, "The Signore has come," and looking up she saw the object of her thoughts standing before her. Then the door closed. Signora Pia went away without looking in and they were alone.

At first she was so overcome by surprise and joy, that she could neither move nor speak, but sat at the feet of Apollo silent, her face covered with burning blushes, which she feared would betray her secret.

Count Valdimer cast a hurried, searching look around the studio, and seeing that no one was present but the girl, he came forward eagerly, with outstretched hands and radiant face, saying, "Ah! this is a greater happiness than I dared to hope for."

"My papa is not in, Signore," said Lisa, rising and making an effort to recover from her confusion. "If you wish to see him, perhaps you will be good enough to wait until he returns." And she turned towards the door, as if she were about to leave the room.

"Pray do not go, Signorina," cried Valdimer, step-

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ping before her, "I have been trying for weeks to see
you a moment alone, to speak to you without being
overheard, and now that my good fortune has given me
the chance, I beg that you will not deprive me of it."

"But papa would be angry, if he knew I spoke to a
stranger when he was absent," returned the poor girl,
trembling with mingled happiness and fear.

"But he need never know it, my sweet child."

"Signora Pia will tell him. Oh! why did she al-
low you to enter?"

"She did not know your father had gone out; she
believed him to be here, or she certainly would not
have ushered me in with such confidence; but since
she has done so, permit me to remain, Signorina;
permit me to tell you how I love you, and how long I
have been trying to see you. In all my visits here,
which were only for you, this is the first time my pa-
tience has been rewarded. Now do not banish me
before you listen to what I have to say."

"I pray then, Signore, that you will be brief. If
my father should return and find you here, his anger
would be terrible, for he has always forbidden me to
speak with strangers."

"But, sweetest Lisa, we are not strangers. I love
you! I adore you; then how can we be strangers? I
see you do not know who I am."

"No, Signore, I do not even know your name."

"I am Connt Valdimer Nordiskoff. I am the Russian noble for whom your father is making the statue of Hebe."

"Oh! Signore, is it possible that you are he?" and Lisa drew back with a sort of awe in her face. "I did not know that you were a noble. A poor girl such as I am must not listen to your professions of love."

Valdimer smiled at her sweet simplicity, and went on: "I love you, and I gave your father this commission so that through it I might see you, for I cannot live without you."

"But you are a noble, and so rich," said Lisa, her sweet earnest eyes fixed on his handsome face.

"That surely is no objection. It is much better to be noble than common, and rich than poor. I will make you a lady, my lovely angel, and give you all your heart can wish for."

"How good and generous you must be. Why, you are giving papa a fortune for the Hebe."

"Ah! that is but little. My love for you is greater than all the wealth of the world. Now, what will you give me in return?"

"I know not, Signore. What can a poor girl like me give to one so noble and rich as you are?"

"You can give me your sweet love, my lily, my fair, pure flower, and that is all I ask."

"But why should you care for my humble love? Surely the proudest in the land would not scorn you?"

"I care not for the proudest, I care only for you. Tell me, Lisa, do you love me?" and Count Valdimer took her pretty white hands in his and looked earnestly into her eyes.

The girl withdrew her hands from his passionate clasp, and leaning her slim young figure against the statue of Apollo, she looked at him steadily with her pure, candid eyes, and said: "I have never told a falsehood, Signore, and I know not how to now; therefore, I must say that I think I do love you, that I fear I do, for I have thought of you ever since I saw you that day in the garden behind the statue of Fauna. I suppose it must be love that I feel for you, but it is different from my love for God, the Blessed Virgin, or even my father."

"Sweet angel! and so it should be; for you should love me better than anything in heaven or on earth. Now we understand each other, do we not? I worship, I adore you, and you return my love. Is that not true?"

"It must be as you say, Signore," returned Lisa, looking at him with worshipful glances.

"Do not call me Signore, call me Valdimer."

"Ah! I dare not."

"But you shall not fear me, you must not. You

must trust me before any other on earth, and you must think only of me, and try to see me as often as possible."

"How can I, Signore, without my father's consent?"

"But you must; he must never know it, for if he should discover our love, he would separate us forever."

Lisa trembled and turned pale. "Ah! my God, if I should see you no more."

"But you shall, if you listen to me and do what I tell you. I have taken an apartment on the other side of the court, where I can see your room. When your father is absent draw the curtain of your window, and I will come."

"And Signora Pia, she will not admit you if she knows my father is from home."

"But you must open the door for me yourself when she is engaged with her household duties."

"That cannot be right to deceive her and my father."

"My Lisa, if you love me it is right. I must see you, and I can think of no other plan for the present. Now, my angel, I must leave you before your father returns, for if he should discover us, it would be ruin to our hopes, and eternal separation. Go to your room and I will ring for your woman and tell her that I can wait no longer for your father, and she will never know you were here when I entered. One kiss, my sweet love, before we part, and remember our compact."

Lisa gave him her hand, and before he could touch her sweet face she slipped away from his clasp and disappeared through the door leading to her own room, her heart beating tumultuously with rapture, fear, and love.

Valdimer watched her out of sight, with an expression of deep satisfaction. "What an angelic creature she is," he said; "and she loves me beyond a doubt. Now, if I can only outwit that old fiend of a hunchback, my way is clear, and she is mine."

Then he turned and touched a bell on a table near, summoning Signora Pia, who entered immediately.

"Did you not tell me that Signor Hugo was in?" he asked, coldly.

"Yes, Signor Count, and I thought he was. I did not know that he had gone out," replied the good woman, looking around the empty room in astonishment.

"Well, you see he is not here, and I can wait no longer. I will come to-morrow," and Count Valdimer walked calmly out, followed by Signora Pia's profuse apologies.

"That is singular," said she, as she closed the door. "I thought the Signorina was there with her father, but he has gone out and the child must be sleeping in her own room."

The next day the Duchess of Castellara came, accord-

ing to agreement, for her first sitting; and Hugo, almost unwillingly, began to model a Nemesis out of the clay, which he would have preferred to have made into something more gentle and womanly.

"You seem happier to-day, my friend," said the Duchess as the work went on.

"I am, Signora," returned Hugo, "for I had some conversation with Lisa, and the sweet child was so gentle and loving that I think my fears were groundless. Last night she was as bright and happy as ever, and this morning her voice has been ringing through the house as clear and joyous as a lark."

"Perhaps you promised her some amusement, and that expectation will make a young girl merry, if anything will."

"I promised her nothing. I only appealed to her love for me, to her noble, generous nature."

"Then I was mistaken about the lover?"

"I think so, Signora, or rather I am sure of it." Then Hugo remembered his own doubts, and his voice trembled slightly as he added, "She is such a child, and so truthful, that she would never deceive me; no, I will not wrong her by suspecting her. If there is anything on her mind, I think she will tell me some time of her own free will."

"That is a sensible view to take of it," returned the Duchess. "But still you must not neglect your duty

by trusting her too far; such a lovely girl can scarcely be without admirers, and she may have seen some one in the gardens or in the churches."

The hunchback grew uneasy as she went on, and looked around restlessly. "I always go with her to the gardens, and I select a retired spot where there are no gallants to look at her, and in the churches she is very devout and pious. I am sure she thinks of other things there."

The Duchess smiled a little sadly. "I see, my friend, that you do not understand a woman's nature. The most truthful will be hypocrites in affairs of the heart. I only wished to put you on your guard. I am a woman, and I understand their ways. It will do no harm to watch her."

"I shall watch her, never fear. She will have but a poor chance if she tries to deceive me; but I would rather trust her than suspect her," returned Hugo, working nervously and evidently ill at ease.

"Let me see the child," said the Duchess at length; "I am interested in her, for from all you say of her, she must be as good as she is lovely."

"Ah! Signora, you are most kind. If she is fortunate enough to find a friend in you, I shall be deeply grateful. Shall I send for her at once?"

"As you like. I am weary of sitting to-day, and am not quite equal to the character I am personating,

therefore I should like to see her while I am in a gentle mood."

When Lisa entered the studio, at her father's summons, she knew she was about to meet the Duchess of Castellara, the most beautiful lady in Florence, and she was in a little tremor of excited expectation, which made her lovelier than ever, adding lustre to her eyes and a deeper tint of rose to her cheek. Hugo looked at her with pride as he took her hand and led her to the lady, saying, "This is my child, Duchess. Lisa, this is the Duchess of Castellara, who is good enough to express an interest in you."

The girl raised her sweet, blue eyes timidly to the proud, beautiful face that looked down upon her at the first glance, and uttered a little cry of surprise and delight. "Oh! papa, I have seen the Duchess before; she is the kind lady who gave me the rosary in the Church of San Miniato."

"Is it possible that you can remember me? It was years ago," returned the Duchess, with a proud, cold look, "and I had quite forgotten the circumstance; but now that you speak of it, I have a recollection of giving a child some trifling present there."

"I have it here now, Signora," said Lisa, drawing it from her bosom; "I have worn it always, and I have never forgotten you."

While the girl was speaking Hugo watched both her

and the Duchess closely. What could be the meaning of that strange look on the face of the woman—the mingled expression of wonder, surprise, anger, and hate? Surely there was nothing in the sweet-voiced, gentle girl, with her eyes full of admiration, her smiling lips, her eager, happy recognition, to call forth such emotions. There was no need now of the Duchess assuming the character she wished to represent; it was there clearly enough—the Nemesis stood before him, a personation of vindictive scorn and revenge.

Suddenly Lisa stopped, as though a cold hand had been laid upon her, for her eyes met those of the Duchess, and her words of eager delight seemed to freeze on her lips. Turning to her father, who stood behind her, pale and troubled, she looked appealingly from one to the other, as though she would ask some explanation of this singular scene.

Then the Duchess, seeming to remember where she was, and becoming conscious that her angry look had attracted the girl's attention, made an effort to recover herself, and said, in a voice of forced calmness, "You have grown into a charming young woman, and I am sure you must be very good and a great comfort to your father."

Lisa made no reply to this formal speech, but stood, silent and alarmed, twisting the rosary around her fingers.

For a moment neither of the three spoke. Then the Duchess, with an impetuous movement, turned to Hugo and said: "Is your daughter like her mother?"

The hunchback started as though he had received a blow, and shivered slightly, then, without looking up, he replied: "She is fairer, Signora."

"There is no resemblance to you in her face," continued the Duchess, with a look of strange scrutiny.

"No, none whatever," said Hugo in a low tone, with his eyes still fixed on the floor. "How could one like her resemble such an ill-favored being as I am?"

"Oh, papa, why do you speak so? It hurts me; I am unhappy here. Pray let me go to my room," cried Lisa, turning suddenly from the Duchess, and going close to her father.

"There is something in this air that suffocates me. Open the door, Signor Hugo; call my servant, and I will go," said the Duchess, rising hastily. "I will inform you when I can sit again," and without glancing at Lisa, she bowed coldly to the hunchback and left the studio.

"Oh, papa, I am afraid of her," cried the trembling girl, clinging to her father as the door closed upon the Duchess. "Did you see how she looked at me? Her eyes were like flames of fire."

"Hush, my child; your timidity made you imagine that," said Hugo, soothing her gently. "She is a great

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lady, and very cold and proud, that is all, and my little Lisa is not accustomed to the manners of such as she."

"But she was so gentle and kind to me in the church when she gave me the rosary."

"You were but a child then, and cannot well remember. Now, go to your room and think no more of it. When you know her better you will love and reverence her as I do."

"Never! papa; I shall never love her, because I fear her," returned the girl, going away slowly and sadly.

Hugo stood still where his daughter had left him in deep and painful thought, his lips compressed, his eyes fixed on the floor. Suddenly he stooped and picked up something. It was a folded slip of paper. He opened it and read:

"I love you, and I must see you. To-morrow, at Ave Maria, I will be in the Church of San Marco, and I shall look for you in the Chapel of the Sacrament."

With a groan of agony he staggered back against the wall, and pressing his hands to his forehead he cried: "My God! my God! Has she deceived me, has my child deceived me?"

CHAPTER XV.

A MYSTERY.

SIGNORA PIA sat in her little room, knitting, and thinking of the Duchess of Castellara. She had opened the door to let her out, and her manner was that of one quite unnerved. What could have happened in the studio to disturb her to such a degree? Had her eccentric master said something to offend the great lady? He was so peculiar, so moody, at times so sullen and disagreeable, though none knew of his genuine kindness of heart, his self-denial and patience, as well as she did, yet often and often she was fretted and unhappy herself at his ungracious manner. And only the day before he had sent Lisa weeping to her room, and the poor girl had mourned herself almost ill because her father was angered at her without any apparent cause. What could ail him lately? His prosperity, his good fortune, instead of making him happy, seemed to have soured and annoyed him.

A rich Russian noble had offered him a fortune for a statue; and now the Duchess of Castellara, the great lady whose slightest glance was a favor, had

come to him to sit for a *ritratto*, had spoken to him in the kindest manner, as she had heard the day before when she opened the door for her, and after one sitting, had gone away in a state of strange excitement. What could it all mean?

While she was thinking this over, the door suddenly opened and Hugo entered from the studio. At the first glance Signora Pia cried out: "Why, Signore, what is the matter, are you ill?"

His face was white and drawn, his whole body trembling convulsively, and his eyes wild and red like those of an angry animal. He held a slip of paper in his hand, which he looked at in a blind sort of way, as though he could not read the characters, which were legible enough, the clear flowing lines of a man's writing.

"Have you ever seen this before?" he cried savagely, thrusting the paper into her hand.

Signora Pia put on her glasses and looked it over in a bewildered way, scarcely understanding its meaning.

"No, Signore," she said, at length, "I never saw this before. What does it mean?"

"Woman, are you telling me a falsehood?" shouted Hugo, his angry face uplifted more than usual, and his eyes glaring with rage.

"A falsehood, Signore! Why should I tell you a falsehood?" returned Signora Pia calmly, though in-

wardly she trembled with fear. "I do not know in the least what this paper means, and I have never seen it before, as sure as the Holy Virgin hears me."

"How came it here, then? How came it on the floor of my studio, where I just found it?"

"I know not, Signore," replied the woman, unflinchingly.

"Has any one ever been here during my absence?"

"No one, excepting the Russian noble, who waited for you a moment yesterday."

"Did he see Lisa?"

"Certainly not, Signore; the child was sleeping in her own room."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Quite sure. I went to her directly he was gone. She was lying on her sofa, her face covered, and fast asleep."

"Why did you let him in during my absence? Have I not told you repeatedly never to allow any one to enter when I was away?"

"Yes, Signore, and I have always obeyed you. I thought you were in your studio when I opened the door for him."

"In the future be more careful. The child might have been there alone. Never let such a thing happen again. But this letter, where did it come from, how did it get on my floor, who does it belong to?"

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"Might not the Duchess of Castellara have dropped it, Signore? She has just left."

"True, I never thought of that," said Hugo, eagerly seizing the idea, and appearing to find some comfort from it. "Yes, it may have been addressed to her, and she may have dropped it accidentally. It is a gentleman's writing. The paper is evidently a leaf torn from a pocket-book, and it has a subtle odor about it, such as the wealthy use."

Then he read it again thoughtfully and slowly, seeming to weigh the words well. After a moment he looked up and asked quite calmly: "Have you been lately to San Marco with Lisa?"

"Not very lately, I think. Let me see, it has been more than a week since we were there."

"Who proposed going to San Marco, you or the Signorina?"

"I did. I usually go there to Vespers, because it is near."

"In which chapel did you pray?"

"I do not just remember, but I think it was the Chapel of the Sacrament."

Hugo turned pale again, and again the lurid fire burned in his eyes. "Was it Lisa's wish to pray there in preference to the other altars?"

"I think not. I believe it was only accidental our going into that chapel."

"Was any one there besides yourselves?"

"No, Signore, we were quite alone. It was nearly dark, and the chapel was empty."

"You are certain of that—there was no one in the chapel?"

"Ah, now I remember, a man entered a moment, and knelt down and repeated a *pater noster* or two."

Hugo started and looked at her keenly.

"Did he remain long?"

"Only a moment."

"Was he a young man?"

"I did not notice him, for I was engaged with my prayers, but now I think of it I believe he was old. Yes, I believe his hair was white."

"Did Lisa appear to notice him?"

"She, Signore? No, indeed. I remember how devout the dear child was. She never took her eyes from the face of the Saviour. I doubt if she knew whether any one came in or went out."

"And you are sure no communication passed between them, that she did not linger, or speak to this man?"

"As sure as I am that I live; but if you doubt me, Signore——"

"Woman, if I thought you would deceive me, I would tear your heart out!" hissed Hugo, coming close to her and grasping her arm. "I have trusted you

and left my child in your care without fear; if you have deceived me and harm comes to her, my vengeance will be terrible."

"If you think that of me, Signore, I had better leave you at once," said Signora Pia, drawing away with fear from his grasp. "After all these years, it is hard to be treated with suspicion."

There was dignity in her manner and truth in her voice; and Hugo, in spite of his anger, was somewhat assured. "Pardon me," he said, in a calmer tone, "if I have wronged you, if I have done you an injustice; but this mystery maddens me, and renders self-control almost impossible."

"Signore, you do the child a wrong as well as myself. I would stake my life on her innocence, and that she knows no more of this letter than I do."

"You believe that firmly, do you? You believe this never was addressed to her?"

"Certainly; who would write such nonsense to a child?"

"You are a woman, Signora, and I thought she might have made a confidant of you," continued the hunchback, looking down dejectedly. "I thought she might open her heart to you when she would not to me."

"She has nothing to confide; her heart is as clear and open as the heavens; dear child, I dare say she has never thought of love, let alone receiving such a

wicked, silly letter as that. Why, if she had, she could not have kept it to herself, she would have told you of it at once."

"But why has she seemed so sad and absent-minded of late? I feared something was wrong before I found this."

"It was but a young girl's mood. She is happy enough now. Only this morning she told me if she had wings she could fly, her heart was so light."

Hugo's face softened, and the tears came into his eyes, as he said: "Your words give me comfort, and relieve my heart of a terrible load. I will trust the child. I will not think that she could deceive me. Say nothing to her about this letter, nothing about our conversation. I would not make her unhappy by appearing to suspect her." And after glancing at the paper again, he folded it and put it in an inner pocket with a sigh of relief, as though he intended to dismiss the subject.

After that, several days passed away without anything taking place to disturb the peace of the humble household of the artist. Lisa, with a face all sunshine, posed for the Hebe, and the hunchback went on rapidly with his work, now that his mind was at ease, and his confidence in his child restored.

One day, the Duchess came to sit again for the Nemesis, and when she entered Hugo felt as though

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a cold blast had entered with her, for she did not seem in the least like the lady whose memory he had worshipped all these years. She was no longer the Angel of the Church; she was rather a Nemesis than the divinely compassionate being who had won his soul from its dark intention. No sooner had she come into his presence than he began to feel ill at ease and fearful. The glance of her clear, cold eye chilled him. The look of scorn about her mouth and dilated nostrils made him shiver. What was the power, the peculiar fascination she exercised over him? Perhaps it was the genius of the artist imbued with the spirit of his subject—his soul in full harmony with his work, her impersonation in *rapport* with his intention. He could not describe nor understand the strange emotions that seemed to overwhelm him when in her presence. Yet, in spite of all, the work grew into fearful perfection under his hand, and the plastic clay was fast changing into the terrible goddess of revenge.

The Duchess seemed to feel the deepest interest in the statue, coming often and sitting patiently, as long as the artist desired her to. They scarcely ever spoke together, for the work demanded all their attention. The subject of Lisa seemed to be forgotten by her, for she never mentioned the girl nor referred in any way to their meeting, and the unpleasant impression each had made on the other.

One day, coming in late, she glanced around the studio, and said: "Are there violets here? I smell a subtle odor of violets."

"There are none here, Signora," Hugo replied, as he wheeled his work into position; "but I suppose it is the fragrance of them clinging about my clothes. I bought a bunch for Lisa when I was out. The child is very fond of them, and I like to gratify her when I can."

The Duchess made no reply, but took her place, sterner, paler, and more haughty than usual. That day, when she was about leaving, Hugo thought of the letter that he had found on the floor and which he had kept concealed ever since, and an irresistible desire to know if it belonged to her took possession of him.

Taking it from its hiding-place and handing it timidly to her, he said, "I found this paper, Duchess, one day after you had gone, near the place where you were sitting. Does it belong to you?"

She took it and unfolded it carelessly, looked at it with dilated eyes, reading it over and over, her face paler than the Nemesis before her, and then, with flashing scorn, she turned upon the trembling Hugo, and cried, "How dare you think that it belonged to me?"

"Pardon me, Signora, I did not mean to offend you. I only thought that you might know to whom it was addressed, and I had a reason for wishing——"

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"I do know," interrupted the Duchess, harshly;
"but I would have you understand that it was not in-
tended for my eye; however, I am acquainted with the
writer, and I will return it. Say nothing about it. It
was carelessly lost, but it will be better kept now."

"She is angry because she thinks I read it," said
Hugo to himself, after she went away. "Is it possi-
ble that these noble, high-born ladies have love affairs,
such as an honest girl of the people would scorn to
engage in? Had the letter not belonged to her she
would scarcely have been so angry at my having seen
it. If it were not that my heart is at rest concerning
Lisa, I should regret having returned it to her, for she
would never have known that she lost it here, and I
should not have incurred her displeasure by finding it."

More than a month passed away after Hugo had re-
turned the letter to the Duchess and nothing of impor-
tance had transpired to disturb his serenity. He was
happy again, that is, as happy as he could be with a
vague fear hanging over him, that never left him quite
at rest. Lisa was contented and cheerful; there were
no more complaints of her dreary life; she seemed
now to love the vast space within the four walls of the
studio better than any other spot, for Signora Pia often
said that formerly, when her father was absent, she had
liked to come and sit with her in the sunshine on the
little *loggia*, but now she preferred to remain in the

studio alone with her books, and she did not disturb the child, liking to see her happy in her own way.

One day, Hugo had been out; being late in December the days were short, and it was near dark when he reached the Via San Gallo. As he turned into the street he was surprised to see standing, not far from his door, an elegant equipage, whose livery he immediately recognized as that of the Duchess of Castellara. What could have brought her to his house at that hour, and especially as she had been there in the morning? While the hunchback was wondering over this strange incident a man, closely wrapped in a cloak, came out of the door that led into his own court, and hurried by him without a glance or sign of recognition. Approaching the equipage where the driver and footman sat like statues, he made a sign which was just visible to Hugo in the gathering darkness, and then went on swiftly toward the piazza San Marco, where he was soon joined by the carriage, into which the hunchback, who had followed after him in the shadow of the buildings, saw him enter and drive rapidly away.

Bewildered with surprise, Hugo turned and retraced his steps toward his house, thinking that there he would find an explanation of the mystery.

Scarcely had he touched the bell-cord, when Signora Pia answered his summons with a pale and troubled face.

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"Have you just now returned, Signor Hugo?" she asked.

"But this moment," he replied. "Who has been here?"

"That is just what I wish to ask you," returned the woman, dropping her voice to a confidential whisper.

"What can you mean? Explain yourself," cried Hugo excitedly.

"I will, Signore, if you can listen calmly to what I have to say, and not be hasty in your judgment."

"Go on, for Heaven's sake, and I will be as quiet as you wish."

"During most of the time that you were absent I was working in my room, and at last finishing what I had to do, and supposing you had not returned, I thought I would go and sit with the Signorina a little while in the studio. As I had my hand on the door and was about to enter I heard some one talking within—in a low voice, it is true, but loud enough for me to know that a man was speaking, and thinking that you had come back and let yourself in, as you sometimes do, I went away, not wishing to disturb you. After a little while I heard the outer door close softly, and supposing you had gone out again, I went the second time to the studio, and found it empty. This surprised me, so I knocked on the Signorina's door to see if she was in her room. She was there, and bade

me enter, saying that she was but just awakened, although she did not seem in the least like one aroused from sleep."

"Go on. What else have you to say?" said Hugo, in a suppressed voice, the fire of anger burning in his eyes, and his face drawn and ghastly in its pallor.

"Perhaps I had better leave you to discover who was with her. I asked the child no questions, I could not bear to; but I am faithful to you, Signore, and I am faithful to Lisa, therefore I tell you of this."

"You mean to say that, during my absence, she received a visitor in the studio?"

"I fear so, for some one was there with her and you say it was not yourself. I know not who it was, but I heard a man's voice distinctly talking with her."

"Have you any suspicion who it was?"

"No, but this may be a clue to lead to the right person. When I left the Signorina's chamber, I went to the outer door to see if I could discover anything, and on the landing I found this," said Signora Pia, drawing a handkerchief from her pocket and putting it in Hugo's hand.

The hunchback turned it over and examined it. It was a gentleman's handkerchief of fine lawn, with a coronet and coat-of-arms embroidered in the corner. "Here is a mystery," he said, "and I must unravel it. Send the Signorina to me."

A moment after Lisa entered the studio a little hesitatingly, and going to her father she kissed him as usual. The hunchback returned her embrace and then said kindly:

"My child, was the Duchess of Castellara here during my absence?"

"No, papa."

"Was any one here?"

"I do not know. Signora Pia will tell you if she opened the door for any one."

"Then you saw no one during my absence?"

"Who could I see, papa?"

"Answer my direct question with a direct answer."

She turned frightfully pale, but her voice never wavered as she replied: "Papa, once before you questioned and suspected me, and I told you that you must trust me. I tell you the same now. I cannot answer you; there is something in my heart that will not allow me to."

"Lisa, my child, think what you are saying," cried Hugo, in a broken voice. "Do not refuse me your confidence."

"Confidence must be given voluntarily, not forced, papa. I beg that you will not make me unhappy again."

"Then you have nothing to tell me."

"Nothing, papa."

"Leave me, then. I wish to be alone." With a heart-

broken, suppressed sob, and a look of deep affection, Lisa turned away from her father, and went back to the silence of her own room. From that moment there was a gulf between them, that no after-love or trust could bridge over.

When he was alone again, Hugo went to his desk and took out a card. It was the card of the Duchess of Castellara, on which she had made a memoranda of the hour for a sitting, and in the corner was the ducal coronet and coat-of-arms. Spreading the handkerchief on the table, he compared the card and embroidered monogram and found them to be precisely the same, and slowly and surely the tangled skein unravelled before his mind's eye.

"I see it all plainly—blind, weak, deluded fool that I have been. The girl has a lover, and it is the Duke of Castellara. The Duchess has discovered it, and that accounts for her strange conduct. The letter that I picked up on the floor was written to Lisa by the Duke; she recognized his handwriting, and that was the cause of her pallor, her rage, but she was too proud to betray her husband to me. He was the white-haired man who knelt by her in the Chapel of the Sacrament. It was he who passed me to-day at my very door, and recognizing me, dared not enter his carriage in my sight. Oh! had I known it, had I dreamed that he was my enemy, I would have felled him to the earth and

trampled him in the dust; my arm would have been like a bar of steel to have struck in her defence. But I let him pass me, I let him escape. Another time he will not be so fortunate. He shall taste the revenge of the despised hunchback. Oh! my Lisa; my child! and I trusted you and loved you so, and thought you so pure and innocent, and you must be deeper and more deceitful than any other living being to hide this from me with such care. But I forgive you, and I will save you in spite of yourself. You shall live to know the strength of my love for you."

CHAPTER XVI.

COUNT VALDIMER'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

FOR several days Count Valdimer waited in vain for a signal from Lisa. Something must have happened. The hunchback had either discovered their clandestine meetings, or the girl was ill, for the curtain remained closed, and there was no sign of life from the little window over the loggia. Impatient and restless, Nordiskoff went to the studio, hoping by chance to meet Lisa, or to hear something from her, but his visits were unsuccessful; he found Hugo

alone, and apparently absorbed, heart and soul, in his work, though his face looked worn and sad, and his manner was that of one engaged in a terrible conflict with himself. Every glance, every movement showed that he was trying to suppress some passion, some internal fire of anguish that was consuming him while it smouldered.

Nordiskoff felt a sort of pity for the wretched man, and began to think that perhaps he was in some way to blame for it. If he had discovered his daughter's deception, of course it would render him most unhappy; but if he had, would the hunchback meet him in his usual calm and indifferent way, without anger or remark? It was not reasonable to suppose so, for such an impulsive, uncontrollable nature would surely burst forth in passionate reproaches and sharp recrimination. There was a mystery that the Count could not understand, and Lisa's persistent silence only aggravated his love and desire to see her. He dare not ask after her, he dare not attempt any of the usual means of bribery with Signora Pia, for he at once understood that the faithful woman was not to be bought, and he dare not attempt to communicate with the girl by letter.

At last, urged on to desperation by a passion that he could not control, he had recourse to Berto, the copyist, confessing to him his love for the beautiful Lisa,

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COUNT VALDIMER'S DISAPPOINTMENT. 245

his present embarrassment, his impatience and desire to see her by some means, and promising the poor artist a handsome reward if he would bring about a meeting in any way that he could arrange.

Berto was not a bad man; he was only weak, and very poor, and therefore easily induced to undertake the dishonorable task. But for awhile he seemed no more successful than the Count had been. He had made various excuses to call at Hugo's studio, and had lingered around the house in the Via San Gallo as long as he could without attracting attention, and all he had succeeded in learning was, that the hunchback rarely left his house, and that the girl was kept almost a prisoner in her own room, never being allowed to remain a moment alone, and never going out except to Mass or Vespers, and then always in company with her father or Signora Pia, who was as vigilant and alert as Hugo himself.

Berto had tried, by following and watching closely, to find some opportunity of slipping a note into Lisa's hand, but all in vain; for the hunchback was not to be taken in any clumsy net, and the old woman's eyes were everywhere at once. Count Valdimer was wretched when he was informed that the poor girl looked pale and ill, and was evidently suffering deeply from her close imprisonment and her desire to see him.

"Poor child," he thought; "poor, gentle, lovely

child! This hideous wretch will kill her by his severe treatment; and if I love her why should I leave her in his power? There can certainly be nothing wrong in providing her with some means of escaping from his tyranny."

Pondering over this a great deal, he at last resolved, with the aid of Berto, to take the girl away from her father by force if he could not compass it by any other means; for he never doubted but what Lisa would welcome any deliverance from her hateful bondage.

"It will be very easy to arrange," said Berto, in one of his consultations with Nordiskoff, for, as the young Count grew more and more impatient, the poor artist grew more greedy for the gold that was to be his reward, and was now ready to push matters to any extreme, if he might but win a price equal to his service.

"Not as easy as you think," returned Count Valdimer, impatiently, for he was weary with this constant disappointment of his hopes. "One cannot storm the castle and bear the lady off as he could in feudal times. If so, she would not long be in the power of that old monster, her father."

"But what strength of arms cannot accomplish, wit and cunning can. You leave it to me, and I will find means to bring her to you."

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APPOINTMENT.

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COUNT VALDIMER'S DISAPPOINTMENT. 247

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"Certainly, Signore. I am not a cruel man, and I
would not undertake anything that would make another
human being suffer; but I know the girl will be as
ready to come as I shall be to bring her, and my plan
is this: I have discovered that on *festas* she goes to San
Lorenzo to Vespers, and sometimes she is alone with
her woman, whom Ingo trusts as he does himself.
They always pass the Via Ginori, which is a narrow,
lonely street, and at *Ave Maria* quite deserted. Now
I shall station a carriage there with a trusty driver,
and as they enter the street I shall arrange with a
friend to take Signora Pia by the arm, and, if neces-
sary, cover her mouth with his hand, while I lead the
young lady to the carriage, whispering to her, of
course, that you are waiting for her, which will pre-
vent any alarm on her part, and then when I have her
safely inside, the driver can cut up his horses and
gallop off, while my friend allows Signora Pia to go
about her business."

"Very simple and feasible, as you present it, but
perhaps not quite as easy of execution as you think;
however, I make no objection, so that you bring the girl
to a place that I will designate to you; only remember,
there is to be no violence, no force; if she objects, or
resists, you are at once to abandon your plan."

"She will not, Signore. What woman in her senses would prefer imprisonment with such a jailor as her father, to freedom with the man she loves? Oh, leave it all to me, and I will bring her to you before another week is over."

Signora Pia and Lisa were kneeling together in a quiet, unfrequented chapel in San Lorenzo. The girl was very pale and sad, and as she prayed earnestly the tears welled up into her lovely eyes and rolled down her cheeks like drops of crystal dew on the leaf of a rose, her sweet mouth trembled, and the words she uttered seemed more a suppressed sob than a prayer. Life had seemed hard to the poor child, since she had incurred her father's just anger and lost her lover's society at the same time. For several weeks she had neither seen nor heard from Valdimer, and her young heart was sick with disappointment. She no longer dared to summon him to the studio, for her father was scarcely ever absent, and if he was, Signora Pia watched in his stead, and she was as severe and as invulnerable as a rock. There was no way that she could see him, and as the days went on, hope left her and despair filled its vacant place. Instead of being merry and light-hearted, as she once was, she wept most of the time alone in her room, or prayed to God to restore her lover to her.

She never asked to go out, never expressed any wish

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COUNT VALDIMER'S DISAPPOINTMENT. 240

on any subject; showed no interest in anything beyond the walls of their home; avoided her father, if she could, and if she was obliged to be in his presence, remained silent and absorbed, neither giving nor seeking confidence. And the poor hunchback watched her troubled face with mute sorrow, feeling that the time had come when he had no power to comfort her, no means of making her happy, and no chance of winning her love and trust, since he must act the part of a cruel, pitiless jailor.

Signora Pia often took her to church from a pious sense of duty, feeling that religion might soften the girl's heart and bring her back to a sense of her duty; but she watched her so closely, and treated her with such rigorous severity, that it was more a pain than a pleasure to leave the shelter of her own room.

While the unhappy girl knelt and prayed in the Chapel of San Lorenzo, unconscious that any eye but God's was upon her, three men were watching her from different points of view. Two were Berto and his companion, waiting, like birds of prey, to pounce upon a timid, trembling dove; the third was a dark, handsome man, about thirty-six years of age, with gentle eyes, noble features, and a grave, sweet smile, that seemed the expression of a happy, generous nature. He had been praying devoutly at one of the altars, and had risen from his knees, and was about to leave the

church when the lovely, sorrowful face of Lisa attracted his attention; stepping behind a pillar, that he might watch her without being observed, he continued to gaze on her with respectful admiration; her youth, beauty, and sorrow; her maidenly, modest bearing; her slender white hands clasped so devoutly; the graceful turn of her head; her simple, neat garments, all pleased his refined and pure taste.

"She is no common girl," he thought, "and yet she cannot be a noble, or she would not be here at this hour with only a woman servant. They are evidently of the better middle class; the woman is most respectable, the girl is adorable and of different appearance and manner; they cannot be mother and daughter, there is nothing in common about them; and yet the elder seems not to be a servant. I am interested, and I will watch them, though it is an extraordinary thing for me to do. Fancy a man of my age and serious habits staring at a pretty girl from behind a pillar like a love-lorn rustic."

At length Signora Pia and Lisa finished their devotions, and rose to leave the church, the girl with downcast eyes and sad, abstracted air, the woman glancing constantly right and left, to see if the foe were in the field, or the way clear for them to pass out. The scrutiny seemed to satisfy her, for no one was in sight but the scattered worshippers intent on their prayers, so,

DISAPPOINTMENT.

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COUNT VALDIMER'S DISAPPOINTMENT. 251

drawing the girl's arm within hers, she walked toward
the door with a firm, resolute step.

Scarcely had they entered the vestibule, when Berto
and his companion stepped from their concealment
behind a confessional and followed the women at a
respectful distance, speaking in confidential tones from
time to time. The gentleman behind the pillar noticed
this, and being already interested in the lovely girl, he
was determined to see what was the intention of the
two men.

As Signora Pia and Lisa entered the Via Ginori,
walking quickly, for it was nearly dark, Berto and his
companion were close behind them, although they
knew it not; and at a little distance, with his eyes
fixed on the graceful girl, followed the tall, lithe form
of the man who had watched them from behind the
pillar in the church.

A carriage was drawn close up to a wall, and a
driver seemed to be nodding on the seat, while the
horses stamped the pavement restlessly, as though they
were tired of waiting. When the party of four came
opposite the vehicle, one of the men suddenly sprang
forward, and seizing the elder woman, he placed his
hand over her mouth and held her firmly, while the
other put his arm around the young girl and turned
her toward the carriage. It was but the work of an
instant, and had seemed simple enough, when Berto

had recounted his plan to Valdimer, but he had not expected any resistance on the part of the girl. However, no sooner had Lisa seen the attack on Signora Pia, and felt the man's arm about her, than she struggled violently, and uttered a piercing shriek.

It was in vain for Berto, then, to inform her that Count Valdimer was waiting for her, that no harm was intended, and a dozen other stupid assurances, for she was beside herself with fright, and did not distinguish a word that he said to her, but continued to call piteously for help; and he, anxious to silence her, and, in his excitement, quite forgetting the Count's injunction that no violence should be used, still insisted upon forcing the terrified girl toward the carriage, in spite of her struggles and screams.

At that moment, and just as Berto was about to succeed in forcing Lisa into the carriage, a vigorous blow from a strong hand sent him reeling backward, and, to his astonishment, a third party appeared on the scene, whose opposition he had not counted upon. Seeing that his cause was lost, and that a further struggle was useless, he called to his companion, who released the trembling Signora Pia, and with him sprang into the carriage, and was driven away before the rescuer had an opportunity of recognizing or detaining them.

When Lisa knew that she was safe, her first thought was of Valdimer, for, according to all laws of romance,

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Berto was about to succumb, a vigorous blow striking backward, and, to appeared on the scene, felled upon. Seeing that further struggle was useless, who released the man him sprang into the before the rescuer had detaining them.

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it should have been her lover that rescued her from peril; but, instead of the fair-haired Russian, she saw before her an entire stranger, with a tall, straight figure, and a dark face, that in the gathering twilight looked kindly and protectingly on her.

His arm was around her, and she was leaning against him, trembling like a reed smitten by a strong wind; and as he held her, he could feel her heart beating, and every fibre of her being throbbing with fear. She could not speak for some moments, but clung to him, sobbing and shaking, while he soothed her gently, smoothing her golden hair with a tender and reverent touch.

"Poor child, do not fear," he said in a clear, pleasant voice. "You are safe now, for the villains have fled, and I will protect you until you reach your home."

At that moment Signora Pia, who had recovered a little from her terror and surprise on seeing her young mistress supported by a stranger, and a man, came forward as quickly as her trembling limbs would allow her to, and putting her arm around the girl, she said:

"Thank you, Signore. Though I scarce know what has happened, yet I perceive that you have saved us from danger. May God reward you for your goodness to two defenceless women."

"Oh, Signora Pia, what did it all mean?" cried the poor girl, shivering and looking around.

"Be calm, Signorina; it is over now, and this gentleman will not leave us until we are safely home."

Lisa looked appealingly at her rescuer, who smiled confidently and replied: "Have no more fear. You are safe. But tell me where you live, for if it is far you are much too weak and shaken to walk."

"It is not far," returned the girl; "we live in the Via San Gallo."

"Her father is Signor Hugo, the artist," said Signora Pia with some pride.

"My poor father, how thankful I am that he was spared this scene! The shock would have killed him."

"Will you take my arm, Signorina?" said the gentleman, "and we will turn toward your home. We shall not be likely to meet a carriage in this street, and I dare not leave you to seek one."

"Oh! no, Signore, pray do not leave us. I can walk very well now; see, I scarcely tremble at all."

"I think I can support the Signorina without your assistance, if you will kindly leave her to me," said Signora Pia, a little doubtful whether she should allow her young mistress to take the arm of a stranger.

"My good woman, do not be uneasy," replied the gentleman, with a pleasant smile. "I will take care of your mistress, for you have all you can do to walk steadily yourself. The fright has not left you with any too much strength."

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When they reached the door of Hugo's house the stranger was about to leave them, but Lisa insisted that he should enter to receive her father's thanks and to give a correct version of the adventure, which their terror at the time would not permit them to do.

The hunchback was sitting alone in his studio when they entered. Signora Pia had opened the door with her key, and he had not heard them until they stood before him. Looking up with a startled expression in his eyes, which suddenly turned to anger and surprise at seeing a stranger with them, he said harshly:

"It is time you returned; your prayers take too much time, and I will not suffer this again."

"Oh, papa, do not be angry. Oh, papa, listen to us," cried Lisa, throwing herself into her father's arms and bursting into tears. "This gentleman will tell you what has happened. And thank him, papa, for he has been so good to us."

Hugo looked from one to the other, bewildered, while he tried to soothe his daughter.

"What does this all mean, Signore? Will you be good enough to explain?"

"Certainly," said the stranger, gravely. "It can be told in a few words, but it is a very serious matter. I was walking through the Via Ginori, when I came upon two men who were about to abduct your daughter. One of them had nearly succeeded in forc-

ing her into a carriage, when her loud screams reached my ears. I came upon the scene, and of course the villains fled; that is all, but I beg that in the future you will not allow so young and lovely a girl to go to Vespers at this hour without a proper escort."

During the brief and modest recital of the stranger, Hugo sat with his arm around his daughter motionless, like one stunned and deprived of all power. Then he put her away, and standing up, with an effort, he lifted his right hand to Heaven, and said impressively: "I needed but this to nerve my arm for revenge. Now the time has come, and the demon who has destroyed my peace of mind, brought contention and unhappiness into my home, shall reap the reward of his own deeds; and my child, my innocent, unhappy child, shall be saved from further danger."

"Oh, papa!" cried Lisa, with a terror-stricken face. "Do you know who did this?"

"Yes, my child, I know who my enemy is," returned Hugo, with an expressive look at the girl.

"Tell me, why did he do it? Why did he wish to take me away?" and, overcome by the very thought of her danger, she covered her face and began weeping again.

"Poor child! she is completely unnerved," said the stranger, compassionately, "and it is your first duty to calm and reassure her; she seems to be entirely igno-

loud screams reached me, and of course the beg that in the future I should have a lovely girl to go to with a proper escort."

"Recital of the stranger, his daughter motionless, of all power. Then he with an effort, he lifted said impressively: "I am for revenge. Now I know who has destroyed my attention and unhappiness, the reward of his own deceit, unhappy child, my father."

with a terror-stricken face.

"No my enemy is," replied he, looking at the girl.

Why did he wish to do so by the very thought of her and began weeping.

"I am unnerved," said the girl, "it is your first duty to know me to be entirely igno-

rant of any reason for this attack. If you suspect or know the person guilty of this outrage, tell me his name, and I will see that he is punished by the laws of his country, which will be more sensible and effective than any personal vengeance."

"Pardon me, Signore, but I am the best judge of that. I have a long score to settle with this person—wrongs that no law can redress, injuries that can only be wiped out with blood. I am deeply indebted to you for your interest in my child. You have saved her from a terrible fate, and henceforth my gratitude, my very life, all that I am or have, is laid at your feet; but you must allow me to avenge my own wrongs in my own way. Now, tell us to whom we are indebted, so that my child may remember you in her prayers, and keep your memory green with her tears of gratitude."

"I am Count Enrico Altimonti," said the gentleman, in a husky voice, while his eyes filled with tears, for the words of the strange creature before him had moved him deeply.

"Count Enrico Altimonti," repeated Ingo slowly. "I know the name of Altimonti; it was sacred to me for many years. I am glad to meet you now, and I would have a few words with you in private before you go. Lisa, my child, you may retire with Signora Pia."

The young girl bowed low, looking at Enrico with gentle, grateful glances, and, murmuring again and again her thanks, she left the room, followed by his admiring, earnest gaze.

When they were alone, Hugo closed the door carefully, and, laying his long, thin hand on the arm of Enrico, he said: "I like your face, and I am sure I can trust you, and depend upon your kindness to advise me in my trouble. When I tell you who my enemy is, you will see that I have acted wisely in making a confidant of you. The man who has destroyed my happiness, who has taught my child to deceive me, who has won her love and confidence from me, and who has tried to rob me of her, is your cousin's husband, the Duke of Castellara."

"It is impossible!" cried Enrico, with an expression of profound astonishment. "Surely the Duke of Castellara is incapable of such crimes?"

"One would think so, but nevertheless he is the villain who would rob me of my only treasure, who would steal her from me. Oh, my God! he would rob me of my child, the only thing I have on earth to love. It must not be; he must not live to take her from me," and Hugo looked wildly around, beating the air with his hands as though he were warding off an approaching danger. "I say he must not live; for if he escapes my vengeance he will accomplish my ruin,

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and I shall be left alone and desolate. No! no! I cannot spare him, even though it costs me my soul's salvation."

CHAPTER XVII.

ENRICO FAILS AS A MEDIATOR.

ENRICO stood for some time looking at the unhappy creature before him, silent from astonishment. Was it possible that his cousin's husband, a man of his age and position, could be guilty of such an outrage on a young and unprotected girl? "Are you sure," he said at length, "that there is no mistake? It seems incredible that the Duke of Castellara, who is no longer young, can be guilty of such an ignoble deed. What proofs have you that he is the man?"

Then Hugo told him of the Duke's mysterious visit to his studio during his absence, of his meeting him and seeing him enter his carriage, of finding the handkerchief at his very door, of the note and the appointment in San Marco, of the anger and agitation of the Duchess when he, in his renewed confidence, had given the letter to her, believing it to have been hers, and of Lisa's stubborn silence concerning the whole affair.

"But, my friend, you surely cannot imagine that so young and lovely a girl as your daughter can be interested in a man who is old enough to be her father? It is absurd. If he were young and handsome, there would be some reason to suspect her."

"It may be his wealth and position that have ensnared her, or he may be possessed with an evil power to win the confidence and love of women. He is a dangerous man. Oh! I know well how vile and black his heart is, and how basely he has betrayed others. But I do not say that my child encourages his attentions or returns his passion; no, on the contrary, I think she repulses him, and because of that he has resorted to this base means of gaining possession of her."

"If she does not encourage him, if his attentions are obnoxious to her, why does she conceal the affair from you?" said Enrico. "Would it not be more natural for her to confide in you and seek your protection against his persecution?"

"One would say so, Signore; and there is the mystery which I have been trying to unravel. I have been patient, and would not resort to any extreme measures until every other means failed; but this last outrage demands my speedy vengeance, and, by Heaven! he shall be punished, even though he be the Duke of Castellara."

Enrico talked a long while with the hunchback,

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with the hunchback,

reasoning with him, endeavoring to calm his terrible
anger, and dissuade him from his fatal purpose, but in
vain; the strange, passionate nature of the man was
fully aroused and only vengeance could satisfy his fury.

After some kind advice regarding the young girl,
and promises of assistance, if his aid were needed,
Count Altinonti took leave, with a firm determina-
tion of discovering, if possible, the solution to the mys-
tery, and of preventing a catastrophe which he feared
was imminent.

He first sought his cousin, the Duchess, whom he
found alone, much to his satisfaction. She looked pale
and sad; and seemed absorbed in painful thought,
from which she aroused herself to welcome him with a
dreary smile and a cold clasp of the hand.

"You are a stranger, Enrico; I have not seen you
since the night of our conversation at the opera."

"No, I believe not," returned Enrico gravely. "I
have kept away from you purposely, for I sometimes
fear I weary you with my advice, which I am sure is
often unwelcome."

"You judge so, cousin, from my not acting upon it.
But the time has not yet come when I can do as you
wish. I have been thinking seriously of what you said,
I have been trying to arrive at some determination re-
specting Nordiskoff, but, for my life, I cannot resolve to
give him up while I believe he entertains such an affec-

tion for me. If I could be convinced that he no longer loves me, that he loves another, then it would be an easy matter, for my pride would come to my aid, and I should despise him where I now love him. Say, Enrico, cannot you convince me that Valdimer is unfaithful? You wish to do me a kindness, you wish to save me from trouble and dishonor, you wish to see my heart at peace and free from these disastrous conflicts. Now, you who know him so intimately, who are so well acquainted with his private life, tell me, do you suspect him of any secret intrigue, any preference for another?"

"What an absurd question to ask, Elena! Why, all Florence knows him to be your most devoted admirer, your faithful friend, nay, almost your slave. It is an accepted fact that he sees nothing or nobody beyond the Duchess of Castellara, that he is waiting and serving as patiently as that long-suffering individual we read of in the Bible; for is it not nearly seven years since he put your welcome fetters about his neck, and bowed head and heart at your feet?"

"Pray, do not jest, Enrico. I am in earnest, and it shows that I still have some desire to save myself when I wish to be disenthralled from my own illusions, for, after all, my love for Valdimer may be but an illusion. It would, indeed, be a mercy to me, if you could convince me that he is insincere and unfaithful."

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"But I cannot, cousin, because I do not think so. I fear that he loves you too well."

"Why do you say that you fear he loves me too well? Has it really come to that? Is his love for me a misfortune to him?"

"It is, Elena, for it may be the means of his death. I heard a few hours ago, from good authority, that Castellara intends to challenge him at once, and that I shall have to act as second for one or the other, or decline both, is also a certainty. You can understand my dilemma. Valdimer is my friend, and Castellara is your husband. If I refuse one, I make him my enemy. If I refuse both, my position is no better. A catastrophe is inevitable unless you avert it."

"If how can I avert it, pray?" cried the Duchess excitedly. "What can I do?"

"I will tell you, Elena, and I entreat that in this case you will take my advice. Leave Florence early to-morrow for one of your country places—for Rome, for Naples, or wherever you prefer, and take your husband with you."

"Oh, Enrico! you must be insane. I take Castellara with me? Why, I have not spoken to him for months; that is a ridiculous proposition."

"By doing it you may save your husband's life."

"I do not wish to save it, you know I do not," she

cried passionately. "I would not go out of my way in the least to save him from a dozen deaths."

"Then, if not for Castellara, perhaps you will for Valdimer. You know your husband's reputation as a duellist. Who ever escaped from his hands with his life?"

The Duchess turned deadly pale, but replied resolutely: "It is of no use, Enrico, to strive to work upon my feelings in this way. The crisis must come, sooner or later; my running away from it would not avert it, it would only delay it; I am resolved to see an end of this, for I am weary of this fierce conflict. You will think me a monster if I confess the truth to you; nevertheless, I will. I prefer that this duel should take place. If Castellara falls, I am free. If Valdimer falls, I shall be spared the pain of giving him up to another; I would rather a thousand times see him dead before me than to lose his love, than to know him false; and that may be my fate if he lives."

"Oh! Elena, how can you be so cruel, so obdurate? Have you no pity on these two men, who will madly throw away their lives for you?"

"Enrico, I am now what I told you long ago I should become—a monster instead of a woman. Do not reproach me, do not blame me. Leave me to myself, to my own torture, but remember that I was once pitiful and gentle, pure and good, until everything holy was

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blighted by the deception and cruelty of others. I did
not create this demon in me, and I cannot control it;
those who made me what I am must suffer the conse-
quences of their sin."

Enrico did not reply, but sat in deep thought for a
few moments. He was striving to find some means of
saving Castellara from the hunchback's vengeance,
without exposing his baseness to his wife. Retribution
was following fast upon the steps of the hoary-headed
sinner, and although he merited his punishment, yet
Count Altimonti desired to save him, if possible.

At length he said, gravely and gently: "My dear
cousin, I sometimes think you show me the worst side
of your nature, for I am sure you have a noble heart,
and are capable of some self-sacrifice for others, if not
for those who have wronged you, for the defenceless
and innocent who have never in any way crossed your
path. I appeal to you in behalf of a young, pure girl
whom your husband is pursuing and hunting down.
Only an hour ago I saved her from the vile hands of a
ruffian who was about to abduct her. She has a father,
a man of most ungovernable temper, who knows that
this minion was employed by Castellara, on whom he
has sworn to be revenged. He has sworn to follow the
Duke and not to rest until he sees him dead at his feet.
But this may be only the threat of a half-demented crea-
ture, who is not aware of the power he has to contend

against, and, in spite of his fury, the innocent, lovely girl may yet be stolen from him and ruined forever. Take her under your protection and she will be safe, for the Duke will not dare to persecute her in your presence."

"Who is this unfortunate creature whose cause you wish me to espouse?"

"She is the daughter of a poor, deformed artist."

"What! the daughter of Hugo, the famous sculptor?"

"I did not know that he was the famous sculptor I have heard so much of, but his name is Hugo."

"He lives in the Via San Gallo?"

"Yes, and he seems very unfortunate and wretched, in spite of his genius. The girl is lovely, and he worships her, and he is quite beside himself with fury and indignation. If Castellara remains in Florence, and he can see him, he will certainly do him some harm."

"So you would have me save my husband from the anger of an infuriated father whose daughter he would ruin?" cried the Duchess with a hard, scornful laugh.

"Truly, Enrico, you expect too much of me; but what reason has the hunchback to think that Castellara is the guilty individual?"

"He has what he considers the best of reasons, the strongest of proofs."

"Poor, deluded man, he is mistaken," said the Duch-

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mistaken," said the Duch-

ess with a sudden flash of the eyes. "It is not Castellara, but I know who it is that loves the pretty Lisa, and I will protect her from him. You can tell Signor Hugo that he is mistaken. Castellara does not want his daughter; but another does from whom he will have to guard her with the greatest vigilance. But I will see him, I will take the girl under my own care. Yes, I will watch her closely; so closely that her lover will never find her."

"Thank you, cousin. It seems that I have come to the very one that can best protect her, since you know where the danger lies. Now, I will see Castellara and try all my powers of persuasion to induce him not to engage in a duel with Valdimer, and then all may be well, and this cloudy horizon become bright and clear again."

"As you like, cousin. I am indifferent. I care not how it ends; you are strong and hopeful, and I have lost all faith and trust in anything good, and am weak and wavering."

"Do not despair, Elena; there must be some happiness in store for you. Look on the bright side of things. Take care of that lovely child who needs your protection, and I will succeed in bringing about a reconciliation between Castellara and Valdimer, and all will go smoothly again."

The Duchess looked after her cousin as he went

away, and said, bitterly: "And so he too has seen her and is interested in her. He will love her, and Valdimer loves her. She is young and beautiful, and I am old and worn. I have lost my power over the only heart I cared for in the world, and that child, that ignorant, low-born child, has won him from me. Good Heavens! how desperate his passion and impatience must be when he resorts to such means to possess her. And Enrico has frustrated his plans. In that he has been my friend, and he asks me to protect her from Castellara. It is not Castellara I will protect her from, but from Valdimer Nordiskoff."

When Enrico sought the presence of the Duke of Castellara, he found him in his room, contrary to his expectation; for, although he had received a request from him to act as his second in the intended duel, he scarcely thought to find him quietly at home if he was in any way concerned in the abduction of Lisa.

Instead of meeting him with an air of excited expectancy and assumed youthfulness, such as would have been the case had he been engaged in so questionable an act of gallantry, he looked old and worn and very serious, and there was a grim determination in his voice as he welcomed Enrico.

"Elena is right," thought the Count, "and the hunchback is wrong. The girl has some other lover than Castellara. There is some mystery that I have

MEDIATOR.

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not yet fathomed. What could the Duke have been doing there? It was his handkerchief, certainly, with his coat-of-arms and monogram in the corner; and the hunchback is positive as to the waiting carriage, the liveries of the servants, and the man whom he met at his door. He followed him, and there can be no doubt but what the secret visitor to the studio was the Duke; and yet the Duchess seems positive in her assertion that it was not her husband, and she is always ready to believe anything evil of him. I would give much to know whom she suspects; her manner and her expression were strange. If there was any reason in such a statement I should say she spoke and looked like one devoured with jealousy; but that cannot be, she does not care enough for the Duke to be moved by any infidelity on his part; beside, she declares that it was not he, and his manner now certainly confirms her opinion. There is a mystery that neither Hugo nor I can understand at present, but, doubtless, time and circumstances will make everything clear.”

“I am glad you have come, Enrico,” said the Duke, offering his visitor a chair and drawing another close beside him, “for I am impatient to have this matter settled at once; say to-morrow morning at six o’clock, and I can depend on you, can I not?”

“I should rather dissuade you from a quarrel with Nordiskoff, Duke.”

"What! would you try to prevent me from avenging my dishonor and yours also, for is not my wife your cousin? I do not understand you, Enrico. This insolent Russian has ruined the reputation of the Duchess of Castellara, and you would have me sit quietly at home and endure it? Where is your pride, your honor, the just resentment you should feel against this man who has disgraced your cousin?"

"I cannot agree with you, Duke, that my cousin is disgraced unless this duel takes place; that alone will injure her reputation; as it is, the malicious world only suspects, and no living being dare assert aught against the fair fame of the Duchess of Castellara. But if her husband, who should protect her from dishonor, is the first to declare it by fighting with his rival, then, indeed, her ruin is completed."

"And you think I have no just cause?" cried the Duke, his metallic eyes flashing like polished steel.

"None whatever, except what your jealousy creates."

"You are insane, Enrico. I have every proof that my wife and Nordiskoff are *imprudently* intimate."

"Hush, Duke, on the instant, or I will be the one to fight with you. If you have no respect for your wife, I will compel you to have some for my cousin."

"Ha! ha! that sounds well, my young friend, but wait until you hear what I have to tell you," said the

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Duke with a mocking laugh, "and then I think you will be as anxious to kill Nordiskoff as I am."

"I care not what you tell me; no power on earth can make me doubt my cousin's virtue. That she feels a deep and pure friendship—call it love, if you prefer—for Count Valdimer, I am aware, for she makes no secret of it, and if she were free to-day she would become his wife, but as for the vile assertion you make, that is false, and it shall not pass your lips unresented," cried Enrico hotly.

"Calm yourself, I pray, for you but waste your anger on a most unworthy cause. What would you say if I should tell you that the Duchess of Castellara meets her lover clandestinely?"

"I should say that you were an infamous liar," and Enrico glared defiantly at the Duke, who remained calm and grimly determined, without appearing to notice the insult.

"Your language is a little immoderate, but I will let it pass for the present, for I have an affair of more importance on my mind. Pray allow me to continue my statement of facts; unpleasant though they may be, I am determined to lay them before you. For the last three weeks your cousin, the Duchess of Castellara, has met Count Valdimer Nordiskoff in a humble house in the Via di San Gallo, at least a dozen times."

"Be careful, Duke, how you make such assertions, unless you can prove them."

"I have the best of proof—my own eyes. I have not hired a spy to watch her movements, I have followed her myself, and have seen her enter this house and remain there a long time."

Enrico started, and said eagerly: "Well, what more have you seen?"

"I have seen Count Nordiskoff enter the same house."

"And what does that prove?"

"It proves that the Duchess of Castellara and her lover both visit secretly a humble house in a poor suburb of the city; there is but one inference to be drawn."

"It may be an accident, a coincidence; nothing more."

"*Madre di Dio!* Enrico, this is too absurd," cried the Duke, angrily. "You are a man of the world, and you know well enough that it is no accident. What accident could bring them together at the same house, the same day, and in an unfrequented part of the city?"

"Is it not the house of Hngo, the famous sculptor, that the Duchess visits?"

"I know not who dwells there. It is a house with but one story above the *mezzonino*; and there is a green gate to the court."

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"The very place where the artist lives. The Duchess admires the work of this remarkable genius greatly; then what more likely than that she goes there to attend to some commission?"

"And the Count Valdimer, does he go there for the same purpose?" asked the Duke with cutting sarcasm.

Enrico made no reply for a moment, but seemed to be thinking deeply. At last he said: "Perhaps this artist may have a pretty daughter who attracts Nordiskoff."

"I know not whether he has a daughter, and I care not. You will not blind me with any such flimsy excuses."

"Ah!" thought Enrico, "the Duchess was not mistaken when she said that some other than Castellara was the girl's lover. There is no acting here; he is perfectly honest in what he says, and too deeply moved to resort to any ruses to mislead me. It is as clear as day to me, now. Valdimer is in love with the angelic Lisa. It was he who visited her. It was he who tried to abduct her, and the Duchess suspects him because of the letter Hugo found, and makes some excuse to go there that she may have positive proof before she accuses him. And Castellara has been indiscreet enough to follow his wife and linger around the artist's house in order to confront her when she was leaving, or to attack Nordiskoff secretly. In some of these

visits the hunchback has seen him, and eager to accept any proof that will solve the mystery of his daughter's conduct, he has fixed upon the Duke."

Feeling confident that this was the solution to the whole problem, Enrico tried, with all his power of persuasion, to convince the Duke. But it was useless; he was fully satisfied of his wife's infidelity, and determined to be revenged upon his rival.

"It is useless to try to avert the catastrophe, Enrico," he said sternly. "I am resolved to kill Nordiskoff. I shall meet him to-morrow morning at six o'clock."

"Then, Duke, I must decline to act as your second; for in doing so, I would but confirm my cousin's dishonor."

"Very well, as you like. We will fight, then, without seconds or witnesses. The duel shall be strictly private, and thereby the Duchess's name will not be dragged into it. I will at once write to Nordiskoff to meet me to-morrow at six o'clock, wherever he prefers, and he may have his choice of weapons. Then one or the other of us must fall, for I am resolved to end this matter in the only way that it can be honorably concluded—by the death of either him or me. You will keep our secret from the world, Enrico, and tell the Duchess for me, if I should not survive, that if she becomes the wife of Nordiskoff, she will wed her husband's murderer!"

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DUEL.

THE night that followed the attempted abduction of Lisa was a terrible one to the poor hunchback. During the long and weary hours of silence and darkness, he paced back and forth in the vast studio, never pausing to sleep or rest, for a terrible purpose had taken possession of him, and he was struggling with it fiercely, striving to conquer it in vain; turning over and over in his mind every reason for and against the act he contemplated. He was not a depraved being; he had not a cruel nature; there was much that was good and noble in his compound character, a mixture of tenderness and gentleness with vindictive hate and tigerish ferocity. The good was on the surface and appeared uppermost in his daily life. The evil was the lower strata, that only the deepest wrong, the strongest desire for revenge could reach; but, when once touched and troubled, no earthly power could calm or allay the demon that raged with awful fury.

Since his earliest childhood there had been one undying purpose in his heart, one intense, deep-rooted

hate and desire for vengeance. He had concealed it and nourished it in secret, and kept it alive with the memory of his mother's tears, her poverty, and death, and his own despised suffering childhood, cast out from all human love and pity; a forlorn, unfortunate creature thrown upon the mercy of a hard world, to live or die as it might happen.

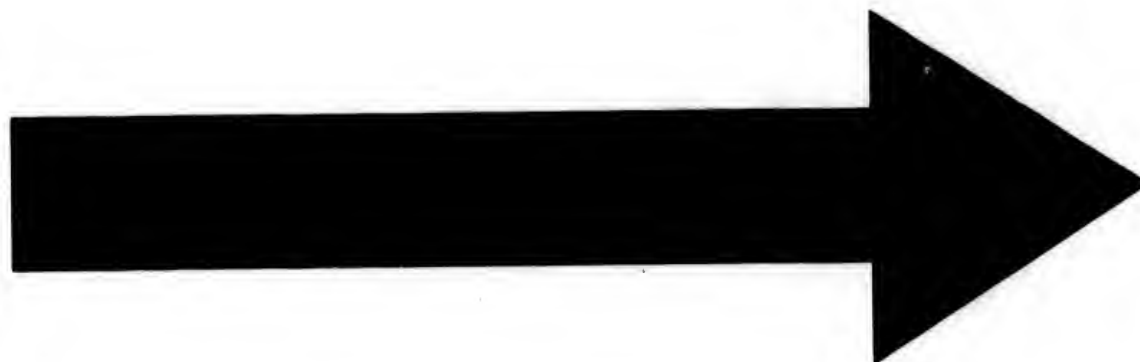
And who had been the cause of his mother's woe and ruin, his own poverty and suffering, but the author of his being, his father, who had only looked upon him once, and then with loathing? It was not natural, one might say, for a child to hate the being who gave him life; but Hugo was in a degree unnatural, his nature was as crooked and dwarfed as his person, and this man, even though he was his father, had wrought him only evil. He owed him nothing but suffering, and scorn, and misery! then why should he feel that affection which, after all, is more the result of patient, faithful love bestowed on a child by a parent, than any natural impulse?

As I said, he had always hated the man who had wrought such woe for his mother, such misery for himself, and had cherished the deep-rooted determination to revenge his mother's wrongs and his own misfortunes if his enemy ever crossed his path. But as the years passed away and the bitter sorrows of his early days were blurred and softened by time, he

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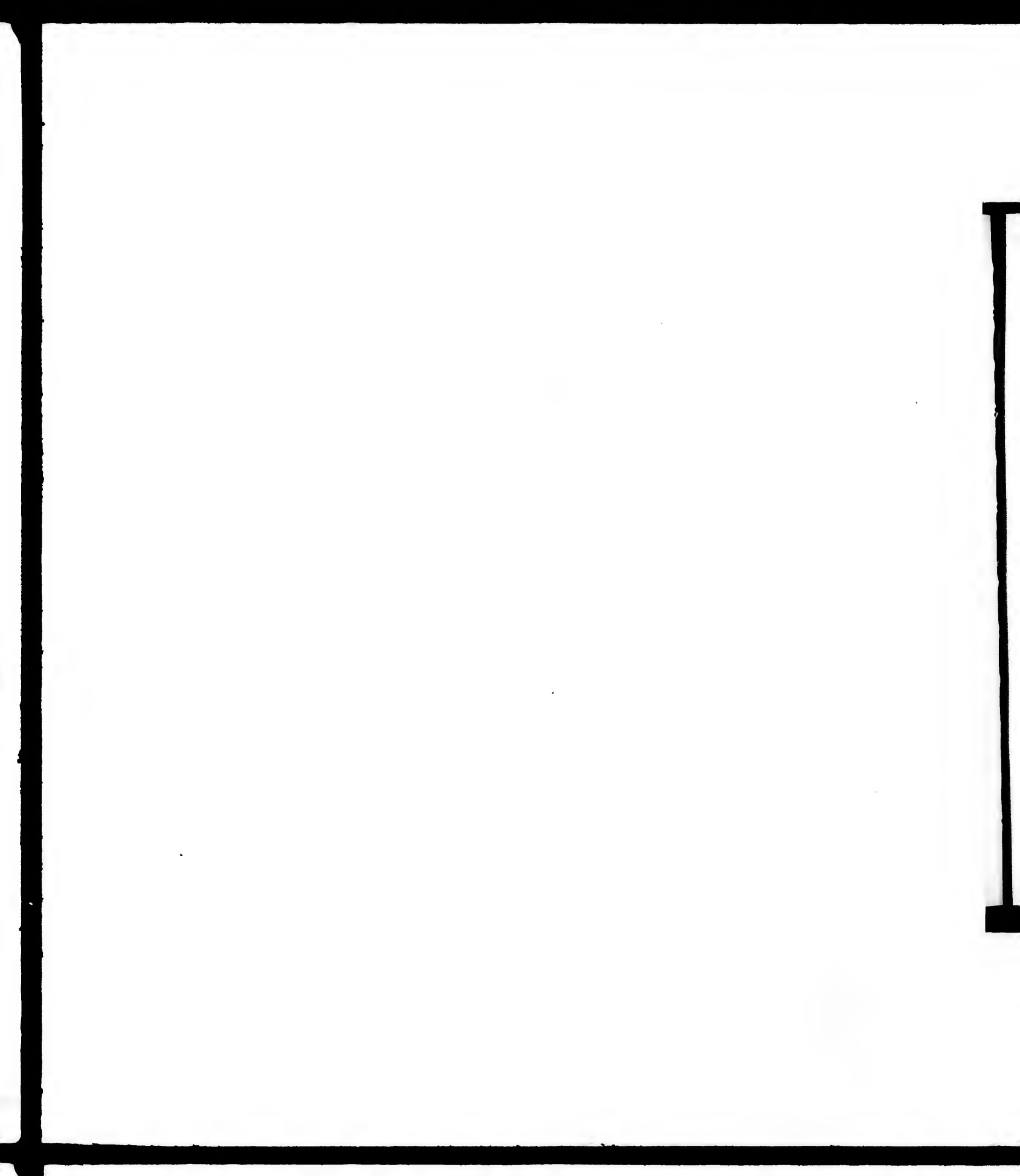
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ceased to feel the keen desire for vengeance, the gnawing hatred toward this unknown father, until he discovered the danger that threatened his adored child. This aroused the demon slumbering within him, and it seemed as though, with one fatal stroke, he could avenge all the wrongs that had blighted his life. The Duke of Castellara represented the betrayer, the spoiler of the innocent and defenceless, one who sought to ruin the girl he loved so passionately, and the only being on earth who loved him ; and he would deceive her and blight her sweet, young life, crush her, and kill her as some one had his mother.

And so he paced the night away, restlessly longing for the dawn, that he might begin his work of retribution, his face ghastly, his eyes wild and red, his long, thin hands clenched convulsively, and his bent body shaking as though an ague racked him from head to foot.

"A little while," he said, "but a little while and the hunger in my soul shall be satisfied ; hate, revenge, and all the dark desires that fill my heart shall be surfeited. I will pursue him, I will follow him like his shadow until the moment comes when I can strike him to the heart. Oh ! blissful moment, so long desired, thou art near, thou art near."

He watched the horizon faintly reddening in the east, the banner of the sun unfolding in the fair hands

of the morning, the pearly and violet clouds breaking up and floating away from the gate of dawn, and he thought: "Before this same sun goes down, he will be where he can work no more mischief. His proud head will be laid low, his cruel heart colder in death than it ever was in life; his ear as deaf to the music of the world he loved, as it was to the cries of anguish he so often wrung from his defenceless victims. Gray-haired sinner, I will send thee unshriven to the place prepared for thee; thou shalt not vex her sweet soul in paradise, thou shalt be consumed in eternal torture, while she you would ruin will one day live with God in peace."

At last the dim light of early dawn beamed into the studio, and Hugo, creeping softly to the door of Lisa's room, listened intently. Her quiet, regular breathing, told him that the girl was sleeping the unbroken sleep of the innocent. With a trembling step he approached the bed where she lay like the rosy goddess of youth and love, her silken lashes resting on her cheek, her golden hair making a halo round her head, her sweet lips parted, showing the pearls beneath, one white, exquisitely moulded arm thrown upward over the pillow, and the other palm pressed under her flushed cheek. As she lay there, wrapped in repose, she seemed more like a lovely picture than a living being, and the poor hunchback, with his haggard face, marred by the

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For a moment he stood silently gazing at her, then slowly there dawned upon his face an expression of unutterable love and sorrow, and tears—large, hot tears—gathered and fell from his eyes like drops of rain from the heavy clouds preceding a tempest. "Oh! my treasure, my darling, was ever a human being loved as I love you?" he murmured in a husky voice. "I would give every drop of my heart's blood for you, I would suffer tortures to save you from one moment of pain, and yet you think me harsh and cruel, and withhold your love and confidence from me. Now, to save you, I am about to stain my soul with the blood of a fellow-creature; I am about to become a monster, a wretch, to be feared and abhorred by all, to be hunted down and driven from the earth. And yet I do not hesitate; to save you I would commit any sin, I would endure any punishment. God knows I did not bring this upon myself; I have wronged no one; I have lived in peace apart from the world; I have asked nothing, except a place to labor in and a shelter for this child I worship. And the humble sanctuary of my home has been invaded, my happiness destroyed, and my Lisa's honor endangered by this gray-haired, ruthless spoiler. But I will save you, I will protect you, even though it costs me my life. Now, farewell.

When your miserable father looks upon you again he will be a murderer;" then stooping, he pressed his lips to her hair and garments with passionate fervor, not daring to touch her face lest he should awaken her, and with a long-drawn, convulsive sob he went away without one backward glance.

When he reached the streets, the city was already awake. The patient toilers were hastening to their toil, rubbing sleep from their heavy eyelids as they went. The air was fresh and damp with a frosty chill; but it did not cool the fever of his scorching brow and burning eyes, nor quench the fires of passion raging within him. Without looking to the right or left, he hurried on rapidly, and never paused until he reached the Ponte Vecchio. The merchants were just opening their shops, and more than one looked after him and wondered why Signor Hugo was abroad so early. An old man standing in a door, with his hands under his leather apron, spoke to him, and he looked up like one in a dream.

"Whither are you hurrying so fast, this morning, my friend?"

The hunchback stopped suddenly, and pushing his hat from his forehead, wiped off the great drops of sweat that had gathered there, and then replied, in a strange, absent voice:

"I am but out for the air and exercise; too close

attention to my work has made me nervous and weakly, Master Ercole."

"By my faith, you do look poorly. Sit you down and rest a bit."

Hugo entered the little shop of Ercole, who was an armorer, and looking about carelessly he said, "How goes your business, friend Ercole? I see you have a good stock of arms upon your walls."

"Indeed I have many more than I wish, but these times of peace are not favorable to my trade; however, it is otherwise with you, Signore, for I hear that you are well up in the world, with more orders from the nobility than you can easily attend to."

"Yes, fortune favors me, and I am truly to be envied," returned Hugo with gloomy sarcasm.

"Well, it's time some good luck came to you, for you have had your share of trouble as well as another."

"That is true, my friend," said Hugo, walking to the far end of the shop and taking a dagger from a hook, which he turned in his hand, running his finger carelessly over the blade. "This weapon is of curious and antique workmanship. I like the handle, it is truly an artistic design."

"Yes, it is an antique, a Toledo blade, and a *cinqueto* handle."

"What do you value it at?"

"Oh! Signore, in these times it is useless to talk of

the value of a thing. I have had it a long time, and I will sell it for six *scudi*."

"Very well; it pleases me, and I will take it. I have a fancy for antiquities, as you know, and my means will allow me to indulge my taste now and then," returned Hugo as he counted out the money.

Then, wishing the armorer good morning, he put the dagger under his coat and went out hastily.

"An early bird catches the worm," mused Master Ercole, as he watched the hunchback hurry down the bridge; "and such a valuable worm—why, I have made more than five *scudi* on that bargain; but I wonder what is the matter with the *Gobbo*, he seems excited and more absent-minded than usual, and he is a strange creature always. Five *scudi*, what luck; five *scudi* before breakfast—I wish I might make it every day," and Master Ercole stationed himself at the door again in the hope of catching another worm.

Hugo, with the dagger pressed close to his heart, hurried over the bridge, and down the Lung' Arno, in the direction of the palace of the Duke of Castellara. Just as he reached the corner, near the grand entrance, a carriage drove out of the court, and passed him rapidly, and one glance through the window showed him the face he hated with deadly hate, as haggard, as pale, and worn as his own, looking, with grim determination, out at the busy streets, as though

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it saw nothing near, for the cold metallic gaze was
fixed on something within its own vision. Perhaps
it was the dead face of a rival, or some haunting mem-
ory of long ago that rose before the Duke of Castellara
in the clear morning air.

The hunchback, on catching a glimpse of the occu-
pant of the carriage, uttered a sharp cry, which
sounded more like the howl of a wild beast than
anything human, and started as though he were about
to rush after his enemy, when a second thought
convinced him that such a course was foolish, and
but a waste of time. Looking around, he saw a non-
descript vehicle creeping along slowly, with a driver
only half awake upon the box. Beckoning to the
man as he approached, Hugo held out a piece of gold,
and said, eagerly, "Keep that carriage in sight, and this
shall be yours."

"All right, Signore; get in quickly, and I will do
it," replied the Jehu, fully awake at the sight of the
money.

After some rapid driving and turning through a
number of streets, the carriage in advance suddenly
stopped, and the Duke descended. Saying a few
words to the driver, who turned back, he glanced
hastily around him, and then walked away in the
direction of the Cascine.

Hugo, far enough behind to escape observation, also

descended, paid, and dismissed his driver, and then cautiously followed the Duke until they were near the Porta al Prato, when another carriage rapidly turned into the Via al Prato, and stopped a few paces from the hunchback, who saw with surprise his patron, the Russian Count, Valdimer Nordiskoff, get out hastily, dismiss his servant, and then hurry away toward the Cascine.

What could this mean? At first Hugo thought that some special Providence had ordered the Duke of Castellara out for an early morning walk, for the express purpose of giving him an opportunity to wreak his vengeance upon him in some retired spot of the garden. But why was Nordiskoff here also? Had he too some wrong to requite, and was he about to cheat him out of his much-desired revenge? This thought maddened him, for now that he saw his victim before him, his fingers longed to clench the dagger that was to drink his heart's blood.

Both were in advance of him, and as they entered the gate, they turned in different directions to avoid the observation of the custodian or gardeners, for two distinguished-looking men, in spite of their plain dress, and their being on foot, could not fail to attract some attention at that early hour.

No one noticed the hunchback, as with bowed form and bent head he wandered wildly from one path to

another, searching every thicket and clump of trees with his burning eyes to discover the figures that he had entirely lost sight of. Where could they have concealed themselves? Had they come to fight, and were they already engaged in deadly combat in some secluded spot of the garden where he could not find them, and now, when his triumph was so near, was he about to be defrauded of his bloodthirsty purpose? Like some wild beast that had suddenly lost the scent of its prey, he turned and rushed hither and thither, among the winding paths, the sweet, silent solitude, under the shadows of the trees, in and out, bewildered and maddened. He sought them in vain. If the earth had opened and swallowed them they could not have disappeared more quickly and more completely.

At last, hearing a sound, he stood still and listened. It was nothing but the shrill voice of a bird calling to its mate. Again he rushed on until he gained the farther boundary of the garden where the trees grew closer and the shadows were denser, and there distinctly another sound smote his ear; with bated breath and staring eyes he bent his head and hollowed his hands behind his ears to catch the metallic click, click, sharp and clear on the still morning air.

It was the unmistakable clashing of rapiers and the two men were fighting near him. Stooping low and creeping cautiously among the underbrush in the di-

rection of the sound, a few paces from him he saw a small open glade bordered by tall trees that protected it from the rays of the sun as well as from the obtrusive eyes of the passers-by. Shut in by this solid wall of shrubbery, Hugo had some difficulty in obtaining a view of the two men, but at last, by gently parting the boughs and creeping slowly and softly forward, he succeeded in concealing himself behind the trunk of a tree where he could command the situation without being seen by the combatants.

There, face to face, with deadly hate in each keen, steady glance, and cool determination in each well-controlled stroke, stood the Duke of Castellara and Count Valdimer Nordiskoff. They were well matched in skill, each equally calm, self-possessed, and watchful, with unflinching gaze, firmly compressed lips, and strongly nerved arm, each thrust and parry was well studied and masterly.

As Hugo watched them in breathless silence, it was difficult to tell which would be the victor, they seemed so well matched as to skill, so resolute as to intention, so thoroughly resolved, so unyielding. Each well-directed stroke was met with an equally well-directed defence, and there was no faltering, no advantage for several moments on either side.

The hunchback stood opposite Valdimer, and perhaps some movement on his part startled the Duke's

opponent and attracted his attention, for his eyes suddenly lost their steady, fixed gaze, his eyelids quivered, and a deeper pallor crept over his face. The sight of the haggard figure behind the tree had terrified and unnerved him. What was he doing there? Had he, too, come to be avenged upon him? was the thought that passed like lightning through Nordiskoff's mind causing him to lose his advantage, to falter, to waver; but just as the Duke was about to make a lunge at his unprotected breast, his rapier was struck aside by a sharp blow, and the hunchback rushed between them with a frenzied cry.

"Go!" he said, pushing Valdimer aside, "and leave him to me. I have a greater wrong than you to avenge," and before the Duke could put himself on the defensive, Hugo plunged his dagger to the hilt into the breast that was filled with such burning hate for another.

"My God!" cried Nordiskoff. "What have you done!" And springing forward he supported the Duke, who was sinking to the ground, his dilated eyes fixed upon the hunchback with a look of horror.

"Leave me!" he groaned, feebly waving Hugo away with his fast-failing strength. "I am dying. What evil spirit is here to torment me? Take him away, Amata, he is a horror to me. I loathe him, I hate him, I will not see him!"

"Ha! ha!" laughed the hunchback, with devilish glee. "My time has come. I torment you, and that is well. I have longed, and hungered, and thirsted for this moment."

"Amata! Amata!" cried the Duke in a sinking, husky voice.

"Your Amata is not here, but her wretched, despised father is before you to avenge his wrongs."

"For God's sake, stand aside!" cried Valdimer, trying to support the Duke; "he is dying, and we can do nothing for him. Do you not see that you torment him? Move aside, so that he cannot look at you."

But Hugo pressed nearer and nearer, bending toward the prostrate man until his fast glazing eyes, with their look of horror, could see no longer the fiendish face gloating over his last agony.

"He is dead!" said Valdimer, laying the heavy head gently down on the soft turf.

"Yes, he is dead, and I thank God that my hand dealt the fatal blow. Now she is safe from his deceiving, and my vengeance is satisfied."

"What cause had you to hate him so bitterly?" cried Valdimer, surprised and horror-stricken at the strange scene.

"He would have ruined my daughter, my only child; only last night his hired minions tried to steal her from me. I love her as my life, aye, and better, and he

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e, aye, and better, and he

would have robbed me of her," cried the hunchback,
dropping his handkerchief over the ghastly face and
staring eyes.

"Wretched man, you know not what you have
done," said Nordiskoff, starting as though he had re-
ceived a blow, and turning as pale as the dead before
him.

"He would have dishonored her, deserted her, and
broken her heart; she is all I have in the world, my
one ewe lamb, my pure white flower; she was good
and innocent, and truthful, and she loved the mis-
shapen being before you with a rare love, until he came
into her life and won her from me with his wiles. Do
you blame me, then, that I have sent him where he can
do no more harm?"

"Oh, unfortunate creature," cried Nordiskoff, cover-
ing his face to hide his dreadful agitation, "you will
suffer a fearful remorse some time in the future for
this deed."

"He was my mortal enemy, and I have killed him.
Thank God that my soul and not yours is stained with
his murder; but go, save yourself, and we will keep
each other's secret."

"Wretched man, I will not betray you, although
you are a murderer, for the Duke did not fall in a fair
fight, you took him unawares."

"And I saved your life; an instant more and his

rapier would have drunk your heart's blood; we are even, you can afford to keep my secret."

"And I will do it; may God forgive you for your fearful crime," said Valdimer, as he walked hurriedly away without looking again at the prostrate form of the Duke, who but a moment before had stood face to face with him, strong, upright, and proud, with steady eye and unflinching hand, ready to deal out death to his opponent. The Duke had fallen for his misdeeds, and he, unharmed, was leaving the spot without the curse of blood upon his hands. Another, through a fearful mistake, had dealt the death-blow, saved his life, and set him free. Truly, his star of fortune was in the ascendancy.

When Count Valdimer had disappeared among the trees the hunchback picked up his dagger and concealed it next his heart, then stooping over the prostrate form before him, he said in a hollow, broken voice, "It is done; my wrongs are avenged, my Lisa is saved; but henceforth I bear the mark of Cain upon my brow, and the blight of crime in my heart. O Revenge! thou art a demon that consumes us with remorse even in the moment of our triumph." Then, with a wild, searching glance around to see that no one was near, he plunged into the thicket and disappeared, and the Duke of Castellara was left alone, with the blue sky, the trees, and the birds for his companions.

A few hours later it was rumored all over Florence that the Duke of Castellara was dead. The rich, the powerful, the haughty Duke was found in an obscure part of the Cascine, pierced to the heart, cold and dead, a rapier clenched in his hand, and another at his feet; but the strangest part of all was that the weapon that had given him his death-blow was a dagger instead of a rapier, as the wound plainly showed. There was a mystery. That a secret duel had taken place was plain enough, but who had been the opponent, and how the blow had been dealt, was enveloped in complete obscurity.

Of course it was the common topic of conversation. And while his body lay in state, and the crowd passed in and out to look at one who had once been the favorite of Ferdinand, there was a murmur of disapprobation that the authorities had taken no steps to discover the murderer; but after he was buried, the matter was soon forgotten, or, if it was spoken of, there was little interest expressed, for the Duke, although a great and rich noble, had not been a good man, and there must have been many a father and husband who had private wrongs to avenge and old accounts to settle.

A handsome young Russian noble, who rode with Enrico in the funeral procession, and a bowed, haggard man who carried a blood-stained dagger next his heart could have explained the whole mystery, had they

chosen to speak. But they preferred to keep silent—and until this day the Florentines do not know by whom the invincible Duke of Castellara was killed.

CHAPTER XIX.

HAPPY AT LAST.

FOR six months the Duchess of Castellara had been a widow, and during that time she had remained in the strictest retirement at one of her villas near Florence.

The only visitor she had received, the only one that she had allowed to intrude upon her seclusion, had been her cousin, Enrico; through him alone she had learned of what was going on in the gay world. She listened with interest to the mysterious stories connected with her husband's death, and heard of the public curiosity and speculation concerning it, but said nothing herself; for it was well understood between her cousin and her, that the Duke had gone out to fight with Nordiskoff and had met his death at the hand of Hngo the hunchback.

Of course the Duchess did not go into retirement to mourn, for her only feeling was one of relief that at

last she was free from the galling fetters that had bound her so long. Mistress of herself and her handsome fortune, it now seemed to her that she might begin life again and blot out the suffering and misery of the past in a brighter and happier future.

There appeared to be now no obstacle to her union with Nordiskoff, after a suitable time had expired. Not that she had any respect for her husband's memory, or any scruples on her own account; but she would not shock the fashionable world, where she had so long reigned a queen, by ignoring any of its rules of propriety. So when she remained shut up in the deepest seclusion for six months without ever seeing Valdimer, she thought she had fully complied with the most rigorous laws of etiquette and well earned her restoration to society again.

But although she did not see Nordiskoff during that time she heard daily from him, and his letters breathed the deepest and most tender affection; for now that she was absent from him, with the strange inconsistency of the human heart, he really desired her presence, and sometimes regretted ever having met the lovely Lisa, who still exercised a wonderful power over him. Of course his love for the obscure and simple girl was not in the least like the feeling he cherished for the proud and noble Duchess of Castellara, and he even went so far as to think that he might

marry the Duchess, esteem and worship her as his wife, and yet love the adorable child upon whom he had fixed his heart.

He could not marry Lisa; that was not to be expected of a rich young noble, a son of one of the oldest and proudest families of Russia. How could he, even if he desired to do so, ally himself with a poor, low-born girl, the daughter of an unfortunate man, who knew nothing of his parentage? No, he could not marry the girl, and he could not help loving her; but his affection for her would not in the least prevent him from uniting himself to the Duchess, who had long loved him, and who now being free, he was in honor bound to fulfil her expectations.

With this false and base reasoning, he prepared himself to meet the Duchess, on her return to the world, as her accepted husband, while, at the same time, he professed the deepest love for the child who trusted and adored him.

The sudden and tragic death of the Duke of Castellara, and her immediate departure from Florence, prevented the Duchess from taking Lisa under her protection, as she had promised Enrico she would do, and as she was no longer tormented by further proofs of Valdimer's interest in the girl, she began to think that, after all, it was but a young man's silly fancy for a pretty face, which would lose its charm as soon as

the novelty wore off. And besides, it was humiliating to herself to acknowledge a feeling of jealousy for one so far beneath her, or to admit, even to her own heart, that the Duchess of Castellara could have a rival. And then, what greater proof could she have of Valdimer's love and devotion than his daily remembrance of her in her retirement, in the form of the most affectionate letters that ever were penned by a faithful lover?

And so their sentimental horizon, that at one time had seemed so cloudy, had cleared itself, and the Duchess returned to her palace in Florence and the society of her intended husband, with restored confidence, and renewed faith in her future. At times she felt some slight pangs of conscience in admitting to herself, that her husband had perhaps come to his death through a mistake, through the frantic rage of a man whom, possibly, he had never injured. At first she had believed Valdimer to be the guilty party. In her jealousy and anger she had mentally accused him of the attempted abduction of the girl; but now that she thought calmly of it in her renewed confidence, it seemed impossible that he could have been base enough to commit such a crime. But Castellara, her dead husband, had been fully capable of any wickedness, and doubtless the hunchback had the best of reasons for his suspicions. In any case, Hugo had saved Nor-

diskoff's life, who was not to blame, because Castellara had insisted upon the duel; one or the other had to die, and Valdimer would have been the victim or the murderer of her husband, therefore the hunchback's fatal blow had been dealt at the right moment, for he had avenged his own wrongs, and restored her freedom as well as saved her lover.

On the day of the Duchess's return to Florenee, she sat in the same beautiful room that we have already described, waiting impatiently the arrival of Valdimer. At last he came, and she, with a cry of delight, met his outstretched arms, and was clasped to his heart for the first time after all her weary years of waiting.

"Your torment is over, your martyrdom is ended," she said, clinging to his neck, and weeping from happiness.

"Yes, and thank God that it is ended through no deed of mine, Elena; if my hand had given you your freedom, I could not now hold you in my arms and look in your dear face with the same happy heart."

"Pray do not speak of this in the first moment of our happiness. Let us forget the sad and bitter past, and live only in this sweet present."

"And in a sweeter and better future, my Elena," he said, tenderly, as he led her to a sofa and seated himself beside her. "This is a proud and blissful moment for me, when I can hold your dear hand, and know that it is mine forever."

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"And you are contented, Valdimer; you would have nothing changed?" she asked, turning her clear, happy eyes full upon him.

"I am perfectly happy; everything now is as I would have it. I have nothing more to desire in this world," he replied, avoiding her steady look, while a faint tinge of red stole over his face, a scarcely perceptible flush of shame, for at that moment he seemed to see a pair of innocent, childish blue eyes looking into the very depths of his guilty soul, and, in spite of himself, he recoiled from the searching gaze as though a tender wound had been touched by a rough hand.

The Duchess noticed the slight change instantly, and, in spite of her happiness, a chill seemed to pass over her, just the faintest tremor, just a breath of suspicion, which she could not quite banish, though she said sweetly and gently: "I have been so wicked, Valdimer, that I scarcely deserve this happiness. I have doubted everything, even your love at times. Yes, I have been unjust enough to think that you loved another."

"Now you are jesting, my Elena; who could I love beside you?"

"Ah! I know not; some one younger and fairer than I am."

"There is no one living fairer, more beautiful, than you."

"But there are many younger, and youth has its own charm."

"You are young, you are all that is perfect. I pray you to say no more of your age. Every year that has brought your beauty to such perfection has been a gift from Heaven."

"Ah! that is sweet and kind, Valdimer; but still I wish I were younger for your sake."

"I like not a flower in the bud, neither do I prefer half-ripe fruit. If I worship you, and adore you as you are, why wish to take away from the years that have made you perfect in my eyes?"

"And you will never grow weary of my love?"

"Never, Elena! Can one grow weary of Heaven?"

"Valdimer, I trust you now, though I will confess that not long since I thought your love wavered; I feared another had won your heart from me."

"Elena, how could you wrong me so?"

"Have I wronged you, Valdimer? Now, look down deep into your heart of hearts, and tell me truly if you find any other image there than mine."

"How absurd, sweet love. Why, for four years your face has been impressed upon every fold of my heart; every fibre of my being has thrilled and responded but to your name."

"Pardon me, dearest, if I seem to question you closely, but now I wish my heart to be at rest, for

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HAPPY AT LAST.

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when I am your wife, I would not have a cloud come between us, not the faintest breath of a suspicion. You are sure, quite sure, that since you have professed to love me that you have never breathed the same vows to another?"

Valdimer looked away while he pressed her white hand fondly to his lips, and said, with some gravity: "My Elena, you are a woman of the world, you understand human nature, you know the folly a man may be guilty of at times, how he may mistake his imagination for his feelings, his fancies for his affections. I will be truthful with you, though it is a sort of sacrilege to oblige me to make odious comparisons between my love for you and my professions for others. Is it not enough for you to know that I adore and worship you, that you are far above any other in my estimation, that you are the chosen mistress of my destiny, my Elena, my wife."

"That is enough, Valdimer. I understand you, and I trust you. My love for you is a deep-rooted feeling, not a light or idle fancy. God knows how I have suffered, how I have struggled to crush and kill it in times past, when it seemed unworthy of me to cherish such a passion. It has been my one rock to cling to amid the mad waves of despair and anguish, hate and revenge, that have so often threatened to engulf me. It has saved me from fearful extremes, it has kept one

tender spot in my heart, one spark of womanly gentleness alive. It has been my only hope, my only salvation for so long, that were I to lose it, I should be utterly ruined and shipwrecked."

"You will never lose my love. Why dwell on such a theme?" returned the Count, deeply moved, "especially at the moment when our happiness is about to be consummated. Elena, I decided when I came here not to leave you until you named the day that is to make you my wife."

"Ah! Valdimer, let us not hasten the time, we are happy enough as we are."

"Why should we wait, Elena? You have done all that propriety demands of you, then why not become mine at once?"

The Duchess did not reply immediately, but seemed to be thinking deeply, and a shade of sadness passed over her face that had been so unclouded but a moment before, then she looked up at Valdimer, who sat with his eyes bent upon her, waiting for her answer, and said, with some hesitation: "I cannot decide now, Valdimer. I prefer to wait a little. I have an impression, a sudden conviction, that I ought to wait."

"Well, then, dearest, I will not urge you against your impressions, though you make me unhappy by refusing the fondest wish of my heart; however, I can wait a little longer, as I have waited so long, but I

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patience is exhausted."

"Give me a little time to decide, dear Valdimer, and
all shall be as you wish," she returned, with a tender
glance and a gentle pressure of the hand.

"And in the meantime shall we hide ourselves from
the world?"

"No, indeed. I shall go this very afternoon with
you to drive in the Cascine. Why, I am just longing
for the dear place once more. For six months I have
been buried, and now I want to see the gay world
again. Oh! Valdimer, how proud and happy I shall
be to appear in public with you as my own, my very
own!" cried the Duchess with childish gayety.

"And I shall be the envy of all Florence!" returned
Nordiskoff. "At what hour will you be ready?"

"At five o'clock; and after our drive we will have a
delightful *tête-à-tête* dinner in my own boudoir, and no
one shall come to disturb us. Will not that be charm-
ing?"

"Perfectly, a beginning of our paradise on earth,"
replied Valdimer. "But I must go, now, and allow
you to see your other friends, who, I know, are wait-
ing anxiously for you. At five o'clock I will be with
you, and until that hour I shall only half live." Then
he embraced her fondly and went away, feeling that
matters were entirely settled between them, and that

he ought to be, as he had declared he was, the happiest of mortals—instead of which he was most uncomfortable.

On one thing he had decided, and that was his marriage with the Duchess ; but he had not made up his mind to abandon his pursuit of the artist's daughter. The more he thought of such a termination to his secret and romantic love affair with the beautiful girl, the more impossible it seemed to relinquish her, and the more strongly his ungoverned heart craved for her.

"I love her, I am sure I love her!" he repeated over and over, "and God knows I would not harm a hair of her dear head. I would not bring one tear to her heavenly eyes. If she were my equal, if she were not low-born, all the world might go to the winds and she should be my wife ; but, as it is, I cannot marry her and I cannot live without her. But why should I have any scruples about taking her away from her father. He is a terrible, half-insane, ferocious brute, who may kill her in a fit of madness, in spite of his affection for her, which, after all, may be more avarice than love. She would be happier with me, poor, loving child. I will be tender and careful of her, and her life will be as cloudless as a summer day. I will hide her in some quiet, pretty spot, and surround her with every comfort, and the Duchess will never be any the wiser ; and I shall not esteem and love my wife any

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In this way, with this false reasoning, Count Valdimer reconciled his conscience with his conduct, and thought himself an honorable, high-minded man, and most fortunate to be loved so devotedly by two such adorable women.

After Count Nordiskoff left the Duchess, she paced the room slowly and thoughtfully, all the happiness fading out of her face as though she had suddenly confronted some sorrow of the past that would not be banished by her present happiness.

"It is of no use," she murmured with a weary sigh. "Just as I think I am at peace and free from suffering some old pain begins to gnaw at my heart. I have tried to drive away all memory to-day, tried to forget that I have lived before, tried to be happy in the present, and straightway this poor, pale ghost of a vanished joy rises before me, looks with unflinching eyes into mine, and points with steady finger to the grim tyrant, conscience, which I have endeavored to put under my feet. But he is stronger than I am, and rises undaunted and stands before me firm and resolute, my tyrant, always my tyrant. Why did I lack the courage to tell Valdimer all? His mood was gentle, his eyes kind; he would have pitied and forgiven me, and my tyrant would be content to leave me at last in peace. I accused and

questioned and suspected the man I love, and all the while kept my own heart closely covered from him. I said there must not be a shadow between us on this day, and yet I kept this dark cloud over my own soul. It is wrong, all wrong, and I cannot be happy—I must not be happy.

“Poor Valdimer, one day he will learn all, and then he will remember how I concealed my suffering from him, from all the world. I should have bared my soul to him to-day; it was my chance and I let it pass. I should have kept nothing back; even that letter, I should have laid before him. It was in his own handwriting, and it should have been explained. But it is too late. We have agreed to accept each other as we are, and now there can be no further opportunity of wiping out all the blurred, imperfect past.”

A few moments later Enrico entered, and the Duchess clothed her face again in smiles to receive him, for he must not find her sad on this day of all others; he must see her happy, and glad, aye, as joyous and light-hearted as she had been when they were children together.

“Why, my cousin, you look radiant,” cried Enrico, as she came to meet him; “your eyes are like stars, and your face one wreath of smiles. A happy heart must beat beneath that bewitching robe that becomes you so charmingly.”

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“I am happy, very happy. It is so delightful to return to Florence, and to my friends again.”

“No wonder, Elena, after your dreary seclusion; but you endured it like a heroine, and it has not impaired your beauty, but rather heightened it. You look as you did before you married Castellara.”

“I am thankful for that, and I might add that I feel as I did before my sacrifice. I am like a slave who has suddenly lost his fetters, and scarcely knows whether to walk or fly for lightness of heart.”

“If you are happy at last, my dear cousin, I rejoice with you, for a heavy heart is a wearisome burden to bear.”

“It is, indeed; but you speak as though you had experienced it; your tones are very dolorous, and now I think of it, your handsome face is just a little clouded. Tell me now what has happened to you.”

“Nothing, nothing ever happens to me; but I did not come here to talk of myself. I came to congratulate you.”

“Then you know, Enrico?” said the Duchess, with a blush and warm smile.

“Yes, I met Valdimer, and he told me that all was settled, excepting the day.”

“I could not decide just at once, and there is no hurry.”

“I should agree with you that there is no hurry. I

would let poor Castellara become cold in his grave before I married again."

"I am no hypocrite, cousin. I hated him; then why should I wait?"

"In spite of his faults, he was your husband, and I should treat his memory with some respect, if I were you."

"Bah! Enrico, you are my evil genius. I am happy, and you come like an ugly, croaking raven to make me sad again."

"You mistake me, Elena, as you always do. I am sure no one in the world can desire your welfare more than I do. I am Valdimer's friend, and I trust you will be happy together."

"Thank you, but there is not a hearty ring of assurance in your words. Your lips say you wish it, but your manner says you doubt it. Now, Enrico, I would rather you killed me where I stand, than I should marry Valdimer and make him miserable."

"Why, how absurd! You will make him the happiest of men."

"Do you sincerely think so, Enrico?"

"Yes, dear Elena, I do, though I will confess that at one time I thought he was interested slightly in another direction. But that is over, and I am sure he loves you truly and sincerely."

"You are sure it is over?"

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"Quite sure."

"Now, tell me, Enrico, but this, and I will question
you no more; was she the daughter of Hugo the
artist?"

"I am not sure, but I fancied so; however, it was
but a young man's folly, and it is over."

"Enrico, you will not deceive me, you are sure that
it is over?"

"As sure as I am that he loves you. If I were not
convinced that it was so, I should not be his friend;
for to tell you the truth, and you will keep my secret,
cousin, I have thought too much of the lovely girl
myself?"

"Ah! since the night you rescued her?"

"Yes, and I have never seen her since, save in
church, Elena; her beauty is something divine, and I
believe she is as pure and innocent as she is lovely."

"Well, Enrico, what does it matter whether she be
good or evil? You do not want her, you cannot make
her your wife, and you are too noble to injure the
girl."

"If I could win her love, I would marry her, Elena,"
returned Enrico seriously.

The Duchess looked at him in astonishment. "Why,
the beauty of this hunchback's daughter seems to have
turned your head! She is dangerous; she should be
shut up in a convent."

"On the contrary, she should be in a different position; she should have a home and husband worthy of her grace and beauty."

"And do you intend to elevate her to such a lofty station?"

"Elena, I am serious, I never was more so in my life. I love that girl, and you know what love means with me; if I could get her away from her father I would educate her and then marry her."

"Without knowing what she sprung from, who her mother was, or whether she is his child or not?"

"As she is I love her."

"Oh, Enrico, is it possible that you have lost your head as well as your heart? I really can't believe it; but I must leave you now to dress, for I have an appointment to drive with Valdinner at five. But let me advise you to see a doctor, to be bled, and to have a cold compress bound about your temples." And with a gay laugh the Duchess kissed her hand to him and went away.

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CHAPTER XX.

HUGO'S DESPAIR.

N the day of the tragedy in the Cascine, Hugo did not return to his house until nightfall.

Leaving the garden, where the sunlight shimmered through the trees on the dead face of the Duke of Castellara, he rushed away for miles into the country, flying in frenzied haste from a phantom that seemed to pursue him. Through deserted roads, over hills and plains, through tangled woods, across dank meadows, on and on he went, while the heavens seemed blood-red above him, and the earth a reeling, shifting leaden plain that scorched his feet as it slipped away from under his hurrying steps.

Now and then he pressed his hand to his forehead as though he would wipe off the burning mark that seemed imprinted there by a divine finger, while he muttered from time to time, "Cain, Cain." How the day passed he never knew, but at night he found himself near the Church of San Miniato, near the spot where he had passed the happiest days of his life, the only peaceful days he had ever known.

Going near his little cottage he found it inhabited.

Some peasants had sought a shelter there, a goat browsed where Nana had cropped the scanty grass, and a black-eyed, dark-browed child played under the cypress tree, where he had so often sat with the fair-haired Lisa. The trellis had fallen to ruin, the dead and ragged vines fluttered disconsolately from the broken arches, the garden was overgrown with weeds, and the little rivulet was choked and dried up.

With a groan of anguish, he turned away and sought the shelter of the church; there all was calm and holy. Religious quiet, and the shadows of coming night brooded over the solemn spot. Sinking on his knees at one of the altars, he tried to pray, lifting his eyes to the face of the dying Christ; but instead of the expression of divine pity mingled with its human agony, it seemed to frown on him, and the letters burned and glowed over the halo about his head, until they seemed to be written in fire. Slowly he spelled them out, one by one: "*Thou art accursed! the bra id of Cain is upon thee.*" With a cry of horror he started up and fled out into the gathering twilight. Hurrying down the hill with his hands pressed against his throbbing temples, he dared not look to the right nor left, for there, under the shadow of the cypress, he expected to see a phantom arise and come forth to meet him. It was there that he had committed his first sin, there that he had stolen the child which had given him all his happiness

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 disconsolately from the
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 he turned away and sought
 here all was calm and holy.
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 or he started up and fled out
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 ght nor left, for there, under
 , he expected to see a phan-
 to meet him. It was there
 s first sin, there that he had
 given him all his happiness

and all his misery. If he had not listened to that temptation, he would not now be suffering this torment of remorse, he would not be fleeing from his accusing conscience, a murderer, with the curse of his victim's blood upon his soul.

Going straight on, his head bent and his eyes covered, he suddenly came face to face with a priest, who was slowly toiling up the hill. Starting back affrighted, he was about to rush by him, when a voice that was not unfamiliar exclaimed, "As I live, I believe this is Ilugo, my old friend."

The hunchback stopped reluctantly, and with heavy, blood-shot eyes slowly scanned the face before him, while he said, in a hollow voice: "Your speech is familiar, and your face I have seen before. Surely it is father Ilario; though more than sixteen years have passed since you left Florence, yet I have not forgotten you."

"Can it be possible that it is sixteen years since I climbed this hill?" said the old priest, breathing hard and wiping the streaming perspiration from his forehead. "If it were not that I had grown so stout, and feel my age in mounting this steep ascent, I should say that I was scarcely a year older, for the time has passed happily since I saw you, and things have gone well with me in Rome, where I have been ever since I left our good city of Florence."

"I am glad to hear that some one has been fortunate," returned the hunchback with a groan.

"What does this mean, Master Hugo, that you speak in the same dolorous manner as you did in other days, for, unless rumor is false, you too have prospered and become famous in your profession? Why, the news of your success has reached me even in Rome."

"Yes, yes, Father Ilario, it is true. I have no cause to complain. My good fortune is on every tongue. I am no longer the poor despised creature that I was. The people respect me, and the great and noble seek my humble home to offer me their patronage. Wealth flows in upon me; but withal, I am wretched, more wretched than any living thing."

"Then, as I told you long ago, it must be your own morbid, unhappy disposition that makes you so. Pray to God to change your heart and give you a different nature."

"You bid me pray. Oh! Father, it is useless. I cannot. God's ear is closed against me; there is a black wall of guilt between the compassionate Saviour and me, that keeps me away from Him."

"Then go to your confessor and unburden your soul to him, and he will show you the way to obtain pardon."

"I have no confessor. I never have confessed to any one."

Some one has been fortunate with a groan. Master Hugo, that you suffer as you did in other days, you too have prospered in your profession? Why, the Lord has blessed me even in Rome." "It is true. I have no cause to be on every tongue. I am a poor creature that I was. The great and noble seek their patronage. Wealthy as I am, I am wretched, more wretched than you." "No, Hugo, it must be your own fault that makes you so. Pray God and give you a different

"Oh! Father, it is useless. I have sinned against me; there is a God, the compassionate Saviour, who will help me from Him." "No, Hugo, it must be your own fault that makes you so. Pray God and give you a different

"Is it possible, my son, that you so neglect your duty and the means of grace offered you? No wonder that you are oppressed with your load of sin. Come to me and unburden your heart; lay your breast bare before me, expose your most secret fault, and you will find peace and happiness."

"Oh! Father, is it possible, can I be forgiven?" cried Hugo, seizing this hope and clinging to it as eagerly as a drowning man would to a plank thrown him by a friendly hand. "Can the sins and secrets of years be blotted out and made clear in God's eyes? Can crimes be obliterated and pardoned by the most High? Can the suffering, burdened soul find peace and happiness at last?"

"Yes, my son, through God's mercy; but first you must come to His confessional with a sincere and penitent heart."

"I am ready. Oh! Father, help me if you can. When shall I come to you?"

"To-morrow, if you will. I shall be at San Marco during mass, every day for the future, as far as I can tell, for I am not to return to Rome again. And do not fail in your good resolution. May God help you, my son, to come to Him through the mediation of our Blessed Saviour. Now go your way and leave me to myself, for having just returned after my long absence, I would first offer up my thanks to the Holy

Virgin at her own altar in San Miniato, where she promised me her special protection."

With his heart somewhat lightened of its heavy burden, Hugo left Father Ilario and hurried through the city to his home, where he found Lisa and Signora Pia awaiting him in the greatest anxiety. When he crossed the threshold it seemed as though he had been gone for months, and when the girl threw her arms around his neck and kissed him fondly in her joy at his return, he shuddered and put her away, fearing lest his touch might contaminate and stain her pure soul.

"Are you ill, papa?" she said anxiously; "you look so pale and distressed."

"No, my child, I am not ill; I am only weary, and I will seek quiet and rest in my own room."

"But you will take some supper, surely, Signore?" said Signora Pia, "for after this long day's absence you must be hungry as well as tired."

"I am not hungry. I have eaten," returned the hunchback, avoiding Lisa's questioning, anxious look as he hastened to his room.

The next day, as Father Ilario had feared he might do, he wavered in his good intention, and was in a more miserable condition than before. There was only one thing that kept him back from confessing all to the good priest, and that was the fear of having to resign

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the girl he worshipped. When he looked upon her lovely face, when he felt the soft, tender touch of her hand, when he heard her sweet voice say, "papa," his resolve vanished, and the burden pressing so heavily upon his soul was light in comparison with what it would be if he were compelled to give her up.

He did not fear confessing to Father Ilario that he had stolen the child, he did not even fear to reveal the secret of the dreadful deed he had committed in the garden of the Cascine, none of his sins seemed great enough to deter him from confession; but the thought that he, by acknowledging the child was not his own, might have to give her up to her rightful parents, who, he believed, could be discovered, if they were sought for, maddened and tormented him more than the memory of his crime.

At times he tried to make a compromise with his own conscience, resolving that he would go to Father Ilario and confess part of his sin, keeping back that which related to the child; but then his reason told him that God would not accept such a half sacrifice, that his penitence would not be sincere and acceptable if his avowal was not entire and freely given.

At last, as day after day passed away in this sinful indecision, he became somewhat accustomed to the burden of his crime, and in a manner reconciled to his situation. Now that his enemy was removed by

death, and there was no further fear for Lisa's safety, he relaxed his vigilance and allowed the poor girl some liberty, permitting her to go out often with Signora Pia, not only to the churches, but to the gardens, where Valdimer soon discovered her and renewed his intercourse, which had been interrupted by her close imprisonment. He had found means of conveying notes to her, and even of exchanging a few words with her in the churches, while Signora Pia was intently engaged at her devotions; and had also met her many times in her father's studio, when the wretched man, driven by his uneasy conscience, was compelled to rush out and wander about the city or country to find distraction from his own thoughts.

These were happy days to Lisa—the color returned once more to her cheeks, the light to her eyes, and the ready smiles to her lips; and her father, seeing her contentment, thought it was because of her freedom from Castellara's persecution, and the renewed confidence and sympathy between them. And as the weeks passed on and his burden of crime became endurable, because of his familiarity with it, he began to regret his partial confession to Father Ilario, and even feared that he might possibly meet him in some of his wanderings about the city. Then the old idea of leaving Florence and hiding himself somewhere took possession of him, and he worked with a feverish haste on

her fear for Lisa's safety, allowed the poor girl some to go out often with Signora Pia to the gardens, and renewed his interrupted by her close and means of conveying changing a few words with Signora Pia was intently and had also met her many when the wretched man, science, was compelled to the city or country to find thoughts.

to Lisa—the color returned light to her eyes, and the and her father, seeing her because of her freedom, and the renewed confidence. And as the weeks of crime became endurable, with it, he began to regret her Ilario, and even feared him in some of his wanderings the old idea of leaving of somewhere took possession with a feverish haste on

the statue of Hebe, which was fast approaching completion; for he resolved that as soon as it was finished, and he was paid for it, to take Lisa with him and go as far away as possible from all who had ever known him—from the place where he had sinned and suffered—to some quiet retreat, where, with his idolized child, he might forget the past in a new and happier life.

The statue of Nemesis was still unfinished, for the Duchess of Castellara had been absent from the city for six months, and Hugo did not know when she would return; but he had resolved not to remain one day in Florence after Count Nordiskoff had accepted and paid him the price agreed upon for the Hebe, even though the order from the Duchess should never be completed.

One morning, after several days of almost incessant toil, Hugo put the finishing touches to the exquisite statue, that stood a marvel of loveliness behind the crimson curtain in one corner of his studio. He had cut the stone himself, for he would not allow any other hand than his own to copy his conception from clay to marble, believing that each stroke should be made by the hand of the master that conceived the whole.

He was very weary and oppressed by anxiety, in spite of his joy, at the completion of his work, and when he released Lisa from her last sitting, he remarked that he should go into the country for a long

walk, which would refresh and invigorate him. But, instead of going out as he thought to do at once, he sat down before the statue, and began to study it critically, and it seemed to him, as he looked at it, that it took life and moved, and breathed. It was Lisa, her lovely form, her exquisite face changed into the radiant goddess of youth. Her uplifted eyes, her smiling mouth, her white arms holding aloft the cup filled with divine nectar; the lithe, graceful limbs with their clinging, delicate drapery, the feet that seemed to spurn the clouds beneath them, could not all be cold, inflexible marble, the work of his hand, the conception of his throbbing, aching brain, but rather an emanation from an immortal power concealed within his hideous form. While he looked at it, it seemed to move and float toward Heaven, the white arms waved him a farewell, the eyes were turned toward him in a mute adieu, the lips murmured inaudible words of parting; the face grew fixed and stony, the limbs immobile, and, instead of Hebe, he saw before him the rigid, dead form of his child, his Lisa. A heavy stupor seemed to settle upon him; his senses were benumbed and dull, his eyes closed, his weary head fell forward on his breast, and he slept from exhaustion, quietly and deeply, sitting before the statue that he had just completed.

It was some time before he awoke, and then he was

and invigorate him. But, thought to do at once, he began to study it critically as he looked at it, that its face changed into the face of Lisa, her uplifted eyes, her arms holding aloft the cup of life, her lithe, graceful limbs, the drapery, the feet that were beneath them, could not be the work of his hand, his quivering, aching brain, but of an immortal power conferred upon him. While he looked at it, toward Heaven, the white gleam of the eyes were turned toward the lips murmured in the face grew fixed and unyielding, and, instead of Hebe, he beheld the dead form of his child, his head fell to settle upon him; his hands grew dull, his eyes closed, he lay down on his breast, and he fell into a quiet and deep sleep, sitting just completed. He awoke, and then he was

conscious that he was no longer alone, for two persons on the other side of the heavy curtain were engaged in a low, earnest conversation.

Holding his breath, and pressing his hand tightly to his throbbing heart, he listened, and recognized his daughter's voice, and the words she uttered seemed like liquid fire poured upon his brain.

"Ah, Valdimer," she said, "you know I love you better than any one on earth, better than my father, yes, a thousand times better, for I can leave him for you. Think what my love must be, when I can forget all his patient affection, all his life-long devotion and tenderness, to go with you, who are little better than a stranger to me, whom I have not tried and tested as I have him; then, I entreat you, not to say that I love him better than you, for am I not now about to prove which is dearest to me?"

"Yes, my sweet darling, you are, and this is the only way you can convince me of your love," returned Valdimer Nordiskoff in soft, insinuating tones that sounded like the howling of fiends to the tortured ears of the wretched man, who writhed with the agony he was trying to control. "And you must be brave, my treasure, for all depends upon your courage. Now listen carefully to the directions I am about to give you. To-morrow night, as soon as your father retires, you must unfasten the locks softly, and slip down the stairs,

swiftly and silently, to the outer door, which you will find open. At the corner of the street you will see a carriage, with a driver apparently fast asleep, which you will enter without a word, then you will be swiftly driven away to the *porta di San Gallo*. There I will join you, and before morning we will be far from Florence, and beyond pursuit."

"And where shall we find the priest to marry us?" asked Lisa in sweet, eager tones.

"In the first town we stop at. I have arranged it all, so do not worry your pretty head about that."

"And my father, my poor father, how unhappy he will be! Oh! Valdimer, would it not be better to tell him all? I am sure if he knew my happiness depended upon our union he would not refuse his sanction."

"Hush! my child, you do not know what you are saying; I know your father better than you do, his love for you is a selfish affection; he will not give you to any one willingly, and the first intimation that you care for me, would be followed by your close imprisonment, and I should never see you again; so unless you wish to be separated from me forever, conceal our love from him with the greatest care."

"Ah! you know I cannot be separated from you, yet I hesitate to make my father suffer, as I know he will when I am gone, and he has nothing left to love."

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"He will have what he loves even better than you,
 he will have ten thousand *scudi*."

"Oh! Valdimer, do not say that he is mercenary,
 that any amount of money will console him for my
 loss, for I know that he loves me better than wealth,
 better than his art, better than anything on earth."

"It may be, dearest, but I doubt it. However, it
 does not matter about *his* love, *you* have chosen me,
 have you not? You love me better than your father,
 is it not so? and you will leave him to go with me?"

"Ah! yes, dear Valdimer, I love you beyond any-
 one, and I will go with you, because I cannot live
 without you."

"That is enough, my darling. I am too happy, and
 may God forget me, if I ever cause you sorrow."

"There can be no sorrow with you. I shall always
 be happy in your love. Still, I must return soon to
 my poor father, for he will be so desolate without me."

"In spite of your declaration that you love me best,
 you still desire to return to him?"

"But you promised me that our parting should be
 but for a little while; that I should return to him soon,
 or that he should come to me; and you are so good
 that you will keep your promise."

"Then you cannot give him up entirely?"

"Ah! Valdimer, why should I?"

"Do you think that when you belong to me, you

will wish to return to him and be his model? You must understand, Lisa, that such a thing is impossible."

"But I can see him, I can love him. Oh! Valdimer, he is my father."

"I sometimes doubt that. Have you ever thought of such a possibility as his not being your father?"

"Never, Valdimer. As far back as I can remember, I have had no one but him."

"It seems impossible that you can have any of his dark blood in your veins, and why does he never speak of your mother?"

"She died so long ago. But do not speak of that, do not teach me to doubt my own father, whom I have always loved."

"But he has a fearful, cruel nature. Why should you love him?"

"I beg that you will not speak so of him; he has been good to me, and I love him and reverence his genius."

"Ah! his genius has had a valuable aid, my Lisa, in your beauty, which he has used long enough, and has turned into gold, all that he ever shall; henceforth it will belong to me, and I shall guard it well from his covetous eyes. I think when he loses you he will regret the model more than the child."

"I cannot think so, Valdimer; you are unjust to him because you do not know how tender and noble

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and sullen manners. And I am sure he is my father,
my heart has never doubted it; therefore, I must love
him and see him, and you will not deprive me of that
happiness if you love me."

"We will think of that hereafter, dearest. I shall
find a pretty little nest for my darling, not far from
Florence, where she can be as happy as a bird all day
long, and then she will forget all the past and live only
for me."

"I have given my life to you, Valdimer, and hence-
forth it is only yours."

"Sweet love, you make me happy beyond expression
when you speak so confidently of your trust in me.
Only one day more, and my treasure shall be mine,
forever. I shall not see you again until I hold you in
my arms, never again to lose you. To-morrow, at four
o'clock, I have an appointment here with your father,
to see the statue of Hebe completed. I shall then pay
him the price agreed upon, and, instead of ordering
him to send the work to its final destination, I shall
request him to keep it until he has further directions
from me, for it would be cruel to rob him at once of
his model, his child, and the most perfect production
of his genius."

"Ah! Valdimer, as dearly as I love you, my heart
aches at the thought of leaving him."


“Then you regret your promise, and you will fail to meet me to-morrow night?”

“No, I will not fail you. Nothing but death shall keep me from you.”

Then the wretched Hugo heard a few low-spoken words of tender farewell, some passionate kisses, and then the door closing upon Count Nordiskoff, and after that the slow, soft step of Lisa as she went to her own room, and he remembered no more. The world seemed to glide away from beneath his feet, and slipping from the chair, where he had listened, as silent as the statue before him, he fell in a heap upon the floor and lay like one dead, without sound or motion.

CHAPTER XXI.

HUGO CONFESSES.

OUNT VALDIMER NORDISKOFF, after his interview with Lisa, which we have recorded in the previous chapter, went directly to the Duchess of Castellara in order to make some excuse for his intended absence from Florence for a few days.

It was a little over two weeks since the Duchess had

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returned from her country residence, and during that time nothing had occurred to disturb her happiness with Valdimer. They had appeared in public together, and it was well understood in the fashionable world that the beautiful Duchess was at last to marry the man of her choice.

There was a romance about this long attachment that pleased the sentimental character of the Italians, and gave a poetical coloring to what otherwise might have been quite commonplace. So, wherever they went, they were the courted and flattered idols of society.

"The Duchess seems to have renewed her youth," said one of her admirers, watching her as she drove through the Cascine with Valdimer by her side, her face radiant with happiness, and her lips wreathed with smiles.

"Yes, happiness makes one young," returned another of a group of fashionable loungers about the music stand. "It was a lucky thing for her that Castellara was taken off the way he was, for she must have been tired of waiting."

"There is a mystery about his death fully as great as that singular affair of Challonner. Do you remember him; the young Englishman who was killed by the brigands?"

"The brigands! Ah! that is good," laughed the

group. "Why, who ever doubted that Castellara had him put out of the way?"

"Well, who can tell but what the Duke was paid in his own coin when that dagger-blow was struck in the Cascine? Heaven knows Nordiskoff waited long enough for him to die a natural death."

"Oh! nonsense. Nordiskoff had nothing to do with his death, it was some one who had a stronger motive than a lover's impatience."

"Well, I suppose it does not matter much, as long as he is out of the way, how he was taken off. For my part I am glad that she is free at last and can marry the man she loves, for she suffered enough with Castellara, who was a cruel, cold, selfish brute."

And so society discussed her, while she went about with a happy face, and a comparatively happy heart, in spite of the twinges of conscience now and then, which she was becoming accustomed to. The stream of her life seemed to be running smoothly at last, and so she surrendered herself to it, contented to be carried along over these verdant plains and sweet, flowery vales of pleasure, never dreaming of the broad, stormy ocean before her, or the lurid, tempestuous heavens above her.

When Valdimer entered the reception-room at the Castellara palace, on the day of which we are writing, he found Enrico waiting to be announced. On seeing

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Nordiskoff he rose and came toward him with an air of cold restraint, quite different from his usual frank, pleasant manner, saying, "I am glad to meet you, for I have been trying to see you all day."

"Indeed, Enrico; then how is it I have missed you?" returned Valdimer offering his hand cordially, which his companion appeared not to see, for he did not advance to take it.

"I wish to have a little private conversation with you, Count Nordiskoff;" the *Count* used by Enrico was ominous, and Valdimer felt a tremor of guilt pass over him.

"Very well, my friend, I am at your service, if the Duchess is not awaiting me."

"She will excuse you when she learns that I am speaking to you on her behalf," said Enrico opening the door of the library and making a sign for Nordiskoff to enter. "Let us speak here, where we shall not be overheard."

The room was empty. At one end was a handsomely carved screen before an alcove, and near this the two men took their seats.

"Your manner forebodes something unpleasant, Enrico," said Valdimer lightly, "but pray speak quickly, for I am impatient to see your cousin."

"Your impatience now is quite remarkable, seeing you controlled it so admirably during your long visit

in the Via San Gallo," returned Enrico with cutting coldness.

"Ah! then you have been spying upon my actions, an occupation truly worthy of you, Count Altimonti."

"That I have not done, as you well know, but accidentally I have learned of your affair with the hunchback's daughter, and I wish you to explain your conduct to me, as I am the only natural protector of the Duchess of Castellara, whose promised husband you are."

"I am not accustomed to explain my private affairs to any one; I therefore beg that you will excuse me and allow me to say good morning," said Nordiskoff, angrily rising and turning toward the door.

"I cannot allow you to leave until you hear what I have to say," returned Enrico resolutely. "When my cousin, the Duchess, told me of her engagement to you, she also spoke of some suspicion she had concerning your interest in this beautiful and innocent girl. I will avow that previously I, too, had some reason to think that you entertained a passion for her unworthy of you; but circumstances changed my opinion, and I thought I had wronged you, so when the Duchess asked me solemnly and earnestly if I believed you were free from your infatuation for Hugo's daughter, I assured her that you were, and so set her mind at ease on a matter that had caused her no little pain and

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anxiety. Now I know that unwittingly I deceived her, that you are still in pursuit of this poor child, that it was through your instigation the attempt to abduct her was made, and that Castellara perished by the hand of her father for your fault instead of his own. All this I have learned, and I know that you visit her daily during her father's absence, and that you profess a love for her which only belongs to the woman you are about to wed."

During Enrico's speech his companion turned paler and paler, and when at last he paused for an answer, Valdiner said, hoarsely and angrily: "I have heard enough; I do not like to give an account of myself to you like a school-boy to his tutor. Your relation to the Duchess you believe gives you the right to exact explanations which she alone should demand. I will make them to her and not to you. I am not yet her husband; until that time I am my own master, and shall do as I please in regard to the girl you speak of."

"Then, by Heaven, you shall not."

"Who will prevent me?"

"I will," cried Enrico, his eyes flashing ominously.

"By what right, pray, do you exercise such authority?"

"I love the girl honorably, I have saved her from you once and I will again."

"Good Heavens, this is too much," said Nordiskoff,

as pale as death and trembling with suppressed fury. "My former friendship for you, Count Altimonti, my love for your cousin, have given me patience and enabled me to control myself, but I can do so no longer. There is only one honorable way to settle our dispute. You understand what that is."

"Gentlemen, I trust you will not quarrel on my account," cried a clear, proud voice, and the Duchess of Castellara stepped out from behind the screen, pale and haughty, but calm and self-possessed. "Unfortunately I was reading here when you entered, and hearing my name a woman's natural curiosity prompted me to listen. I have heard enough, and I beg that you will not connect me with the low-born girl about whom you are disputing."

"I entreat you to allow me to explain the matter, Duchess," cried Valdimer, springing forward and attempting to take her hand.

She waved him away coldly, while her steady, level gaze seemed to read his cowardly, sinful soul. "There is no need of an explanation. I am to blame for trusting you. Spare me the humiliation of further remark upon the subject."

"I regret, cousin," said Enrico sorrowfully, "that you have overheard this unfortunate conversation; however, it has saved me the pain of telling you of my discovery."

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"It is all the same, Enrico; I should have learned it
 some time, and it is better now than later. Count
 Valdimer Nordiskoff, from this moment you have your
 freedom, and I trust you will find the happiness in it
 which you professed to enjoy with me; allow me to
 wish you good morning," and with a haughty bow, she
 turned and left the room.

Valdimer looked after her with bewildered silence,
 then turning furiously upon Enrico, he cried: "You
 shall suffer for this; you shall hear from me again."

"Whenever you like, I am at your service," replied
 Enrico coldly; and turning his back upon his former
 friend, he walked away, leaving him alone, the picture
 of baffled rage, disappointment, and surprise.

The Duchess of Castellara, when once out of the
 sight of the man she loved, forgot her pride and com-
 posure; with a trembling step she reached the privacy
 of her own room, and, locking the door, she threw her-
 self into a chair, and covering her face, sobbed: "It
 is over. I knew it could not last. I am not to be
 happy. A curse follows me and crushes me at every
 step. Oh, Valdimer! what a return for my patient,
 enduring love. Why should you, of all others, deceive
 and wound me so? and for that ignorant child—that
 low-born beggar. My God! how I forget my pride
 when I can weep after such an insult." Then rising,
 she paced the floor with flaming eyes and clenched

hands. "No! no! I will not weep, I will be avenged. He shall never have her; I will find some means to take her from him. She shall die before she shall be his. There must be some means of separating them. Let me think, I must not act hastily. Ah! there is another obstacle; Enrico, my cousin, loves her; he loves her, and he is my only friend, and I must not wound him to satisfy my pride and anger. No, I will help him to save her from Valdimer, that will be the sweetest revenge I can have, to assist his rival to win her; and yet I hate the girl, and would rather do her harm than good."

And Lisa, innocent, trusting child, while these dreadful complications were gathering around her, unconscious of all the trouble she was causing, was thinking fondly of Valdimer, wishing the hours away until she should see him again, her tender heart fluttering with mingled love, fear, and sorrow, yet none the less resolved to obey her lover's wishes, and to forsake all for him.

It was nearly *Ave Maria*, and Father Ilario, thankful that his day's duties were over, was about stepping out of one of the confessionals in San Marco, when suddenly Hugo, the hunchback, appeared before him, wild-eyed, haggard, and trembling.

"I have come to confess all," he cried, without waiting for the priest to address him first.

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"I expected you six months ago," returned Father Ilario dryly; "but, thank God, it is never too late for His mercy."

"I intended to come then. I should have come when I promised you, but I lacked the courage," groaned the wretched creature, falling on his knees.

"Well, my son, as I said, it is not too late; open your heart to me now; keep nothing back, and I will try to gain pardon for you."

Then Hugo, covering his face, told, with a choking, hesitating voice, of his theft of the child that night near the Church of San Salvador; and while he spoke Father Ilario listened intently, with a strange expression of interest, and a sudden kindling of his eyes.

"And you have never made any effort to discover the parents of the girl?" asked the priest, when he had finished speaking.

"Never, father! I have rather tried to hide her from all the world, and I have made her and every one believe that she is my daughter."

"A terrible deception, and perhaps a terrible wrong to her. Have you no suspicion to whom she belongs?"

"None, whatever."

"Was there nothing about the clothing that would indicate it?"

"There was only this, Father Ilario," said Hugo, reluctantly drawing forth the clasp, that he had kept concealed so many years, and, putting it in the priest's hand, looking about him timidly as he did so.

"A costly trinket, though small; a coronet and legend. This will be a clue to discover the girl's parentage."

"Oh! father, you do not mean to say that I must give her up, that they will take her away from me?"

"Certainly, if we can discover to whom she belongs, that is all the reparation you can make."

"I will never make it," cried Hugo furiously. "Never, never! no one shall take her from me. She is mine. I have cared for her, and loved her, and you cannot make me give her up."

"My son, she is not yours," replied the priest, sternly. "You stole her, and before God will forgive, you must make restitution."

"Then, I never will be forgiven," returned the hunchback, with sullen determination, "for no living being shall take her from me."

"Of what use your coming to me, then? It is an abominable mockery to God as well as the Church. My son, you must expect no blessing while you adhere to such a resolution. If you had stolen treasures from the King, would you expect his pardon while you retained them in your possession?"

Ilario," said Hugo, "sp, that he had kept it in the priest's as he did so.

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"But she belongs to me; her mother was dead when I took her, therefore she is mine."

"My son, the woman you took her from was not her mother, and more than that she was not dead."

"*Madre di Dio!* How know you that?" cried Hugo, looking around, his face distorted with terror.

"Because, I found the woman myself, unconscious, under the cypress near San Salvador. It was but a day before I left for Rome, and near nightfall. She was lying quite insensible, in a fit caused by a long journey in the excessive heat of the day. Happening to have a flask of strong *liqueur* in my pocket, I raised her head and forced some of it between her lips, which soon revived her. On returning to herself, her first words were: 'Where is the child?' Thinking that her mind was wandering, I tried to soothe her, telling her that there was no child with her; then she became half wild, and declared that when she lost consciousness she had a babe in her arms, and that some one had stolen it."

"Did she tell you to whom the child belonged?" asked Hugo in a husky voice.

"No, she did not, though I pressed her closely, she did not seem inclined to tell me. She only said that the babe had been given her to nurse, that it was no common child, and she was paid well for keeping it, on the condition that she would send her own infant

away and devote herself entirely to this child, which she agreed to do; but her intense maternal longing got the better of her prudence, and she had walked miles into the country, taking the nursling with her, to get one glimpse of her own babe; and on her way back she had fallen insensible under the cypress, overcome by heat and fatigue."

"Do you remember the month and the year that this occurred?" asked the hunchback, clinging desperately to the hope that the priest's dates and his own might not agree.

"Oh! yes, perfectly. It was but the day before I left for Rome, and I had much to do on that night, and the poor woman delayed me with her trouble. Let me see, I left for the holy city July 7th, 1823, therefore this was on the eve of the 6th day."

Hugo groaned and clenched his hands wildly, then trying to control himself he asked, "Should you know the woman if you saw her again?"

"Yes, I think I should, for I brought a lantern from the church to examine every spot, thinking that the child might be concealed among the trees, for it was already so dark that we could not tell what was near us, it was then I took pains to study her face, which was an uncommon one, for I wished to recognize her if I met her again."

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high forehead, and a black mole near the outer corner
of the left eye?" asked Hugo, in a trembling voice.

"The very same; then you have seen her?"

"Yes, I have seen her," returned the hunchback,
looking as though he would burst into a frenzy of rage
at any moment.

"If you know where she is now, and can find her,
we might learn all about the girl from her; doubtless
she knew who the child's parents were."

"I did not come here to ask you to discover my
Lisa's parents. I came here to unburden my soul, and
seek some comfort from religion," cried the hunch-
back, now fairly beside himself with fear and despair.

"Wretched man, have I not told you that I can give
you no consolation until you do all you can to make
reparation for your sin? If you know where this
woman is to be found, it is your duty to confess your
fault to her, and ask her assistance in restoring the
child to her parents, if they are living."

"I cannot do it. It is no use to ask me. You will
not betray my secret, Father Ilario. Let me keep the
child," pleaded the poor wretch, joining his hands, and
looking imploringly at the priest. "I am a most
miserable creature. See, I am penitent enough, I will
confess all. I am a greater sinner than you think. I
am a murderer."

"Holy Mother!" cried the priest, crossing himself.

“Yes, to save this child from misfortune, I killed the Duke of Castellara. What more could I do to show my love for her, than to stain my soul with another’s blood.”

“Unfortunate man, you are indeed a sinner, and only God’s mercy can save you from the just punishment of your crimes. Begin your penance at once. If you have any clue whereby you can discover the parents of the girl you call yours, follow it to the end, and spare no pains to make all the restitution in your power. Humble yourself in the dust; fast, and pray, and give of your substance for masses for the repose of the soul of your unhappy victim.”

“Father, I will do all you wish me to do. I will scourge myself, I will perform any penance you inflict upon me, I will be humble and patient, I will give half I have to the poor, I will sleep on thorns, and walk on sharp points that will puncture my feet at every step, if God will pardon me, and give me peace, and allow me to keep my Lisa.”

“Wretched sinner, do you think you can make a compromise with the most High?” said Father Ilario, sternly. “If you do not repent, His vengeance will follow you as sure as you live, and you will be robbed of your idol in some other way.”

“Yes, you are right, the avenger is on my track. I must lose her,” he cried, with frenzy. “Only to-day,

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I heard her say to another that nothing but death could keep her from him. She loves another better than she loves me, and she will leave me to go with him. This thought has turned my brain. There is a fire here that tortures and consumes me—perhaps I am mad; but no, I cannot be, because I am conscious of my suffering. I know all. I remember all. My mind is clear and strong. Oh, Father! tell me how shall I be saved from myself?"

"My son, I have told you," returned the old priest, compassionately. "Only God can help you. You are not mad, but your sin-sick soul is in torment. Your conscience burns and consumes you like a scorching fire. Ask the Holy Mother to shed her tears of divine compassion upon you, that the flames within may be quenched."

"I cannot pray! I tell you that I cannot pray!" cried Hugo, starting from his knees and looking wildly around. "Let me go, the pain gnawing at my heart will not allow me to rest. Something urges me on, and I must obey. I hear a voice calling me; it is my child. Ah! I will go to her; she is my hope, my salvation."

"He is a blasphemer, or he is mad," said Father Ilario, as he watched him rush away across the church and disappear through the door, as though the demon of retribution pursued him.

When he was out of sight the priest took the clasp from his pocket, and examined it carefully. "He has forgotten the trinket in his excitement. A coronet, with a legend. I know to whom it belongs, or I cannot read Latin rightly; now, if I could but discover the woman with the mole near her left eye, the hunchback might learn that his Lisa belongs to an old and powerful family, instead of being the friendless waif he thought her."

 CHAPTER XXII.

THE STATUE OF HEBE.

WHAT can be the matter with your father, Signorina?" said Signora Pia, the morning after Hugo's confession to Father Ilario. "All night long I heard him walking the floor and groaning from time to time like one in dreadful pain. I could not bear to listen to it, and so I got up and went to his door softly, to inquire if he were ill, and I could do anything for him; but he was so angry, and looked so wild and haggard when he answered my knock, that I was fairly afraid of him."

"What did he say, Signora? Was he ill?" cried Lisa with sudden pallor.

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"He told me to go away and not disturb him. I
said that I feared he was in pain, and he answered,
'Yes, I am in pain, but no one can cure me.' Then
he closed the door with a heavy bang, and left me
standing without."

"How strange! What could he have meant?" re-
turned Lisa anxiously, "I will go to him and inquire."

"He is not in his room, Signorina; I heard him go
out at daybreak."

"Poor papa! What can ail him? Have you not
noticed, Signora, that he has never been quite the same
since that dreadful night we were so frightened com-
ing from church?"

"It gave him a great shock certainly, as well it
might, and no doubt he has worried about it, beside he
has worked very closely lately on his statue, and that
has affected his nerves; but now it is done. To-day
the Russian noble comes to pay him for it, and look at
it for the last time, which will be a relief to your
father, though I shall miss seeing his handsome face;
when I open the door for him, he always has a pleas-
ant smile and a kind word, and he must have a gener-
ous heart to pay such a price for a piece of marble."

"But papa will be rich, and will not have to work so
hard after he is paid this money," returned Lisa, looking
away to hide the color that mounted to her cheeks.

"Yes, ten thousand *scudi* is a handsome fortune,

and he will be able to give you a suitable dower when you find a husband."

"Don't speak of that, Signora. I am anxious about papa. I wish he would return. Where can he have gone so early, and why does he remain out when the heat is so oppressive?"

"Doubtless he will enter soon, for he has eaten nothing, and while I am waiting to serve the meal I will step around to San Marco, and say a prayer for him, that all may go well on this important day!"

"And remember me also while you are praying," said Lisa, in a tremulous voice.

"Certainly I will," said the good woman, stooping to kiss the girl as she went out.

As Signora Pia entered the Church of San Marco, an elderly priest, with a round, pleasant face, and a short, stout figure, was slowly descending the steps, fanning himself with his broad-brimmed hat as he walked. With a sudden exclamation he stopped in front of the woman and laid a detaining hand on her arm, while he looked into her face with the closest scrutiny.

The pale, thin features of Signora Pia turned paler than usual under the priest's searching gaze, and turning her head aside she said, trembling visibly:

"Pray allow me to pass, Father, for I have but little time for my devotions."

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"Do not be in a hurry, my daughter, I wish a word with you. If I mistake not I have seen you before."

"Possibly you have, since I come here daily to pray," returned the woman evasively.

"Enter this confessional with me, where our conversation cannot be overheard," said Father Ilario, for it was he, as he turned and retraced his steps close by the woman's side, who looked around anxiously, as though she would like to escape.

"I did not come to confess, Father, I wish to say but a short prayer and then return home, where my duties await me."

"You need not be unwilling to listen to me, I will not detain you long, for I have but a few questions to ask you. Have you ever heard aught of the child that was stolen from you more than sixteen years ago, under the cypress trees near the Church of San Salvador?"

"I? What do you mean, Father? Pray explain, for your question confuses me."

"Ah! my good woman, do not affect to misunderstand me. You know very well what I mean, and you need not fear me. I am your friend now, as I was on that night when I assisted you to search for the babe."

"Pardon me, Father, I was not certain that you were the same, and I feared some one who was not my friend had discovered me and would betray my secret."

“No, your secret is safe with me; if it is still a secret. Then you have not found the child?”

“I have not, Father; for years I was absent from Florence. I dared not remain here after that misfortune; and I preferred that those to whom the child belonged should believe that we had disappeared together. My own infant died suddenly the very day after my nursling was stolen, and so I had nothing to keep me here. For eight years I wandered about in distant cities until poverty and homesickness drove me back. Since I returned I have found a shelter beneath the roof of a kind-hearted man who pitied my forlorn condition, where I have lived in seclusion under an assumed name. He has but one child, and I have been like a mother to her. He trusts and esteems me and I have a comfortable, respectable home; therefore, father, I pray that you will not injure me by revealing my past misfortunes.”

“Should you be glad to hear of the child again, and restore her to her parents if you could?”

“Yes, indeed; it would be the happiest day of my life, if I could know that no harm had come to the nursling, and that she was living and well.”

“Do you know who the parents of the child are?”

“No, Father, I know nothing of the parents; but I know who gave the child into my keeping, and to that person I should restore her if she were found.”

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“ Was there anything about her by which you could
identify her ?”

Signora Pia thought deeply for a moment, and then
replied : “ The only thing peculiar that I can remem-
ber, was a small gold clasp that fastened its little robe
at the throat.”

“ Should you know it if you saw it again ?”

“ Yes, I am sure I should. It was engraved with a
coronet, and had an inscription, which was too small to
read with the naked eye.”

“ Is this the trinket ?” asked the priest, laying the
clasp in Signora Pia’s hand.

“ Holy Mother ! it is the very one. Tell me, pray,
how did you come by it ?” cried the woman, excitedly.

“ Only yesterday I discovered the man who stole
the child from you while you were insensible. He
thought you were dead, and so considered that he had
a sort of right to take the infant and keep her, which
he has done, caring for her very tenderly, I should
judge, until now. She has grown into a beautiful girl,
always believing him to be her father, and it seems
that he has never felt any compunctions of conscience
until the present time ; and yet, he is resolved not to
give her up voluntarily, feeling for her an exclusive
and savage affection. He is an unfortunate, half-in-
sane creature of wonderful genius, deformed and un-
healthy in body and mind——”

"*Madre di Dio!* can it be Signor Hugo, the sculptor?" cried the woman, trembling with surprise and apprehension.

"Yes, he is the man; and the girl he calls Lisa is the child he stole from you."

"Can it be possible? and I never suspected it; but how should I? He told me that she was his daughter, and that her mother was dead, and I believed him. She is as delicate and white as the flower she is named for, and he is dark and heavy in feature; truly, a different blood must run in his veins. Why did I never think of it, before?"

"He is devotedly attached to the girl, it seems."

"He worships her. I never saw a human being adore another as he does this lovely child."

"Poor, unfortunate man, it will be a terrible blow for him if he is obliged to give her up."

"I fear that it will either kill him or drive him insane," returned Signora Pia, wiping her eyes. "And to think that it is through me he must suffer; he has been so good to me. Would to God that I could spare him the pain of parting with the child."

"That you cannot do; it is your duty to use every means to restore her to those you received her from."

"You are right, Father. My own conscience tells me plainly what I must do, and I shall not hesitate a moment."

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"Are you sure the person who entrusted the child
 to your care is still living, and that you can find him
 or her, which ever it was?"

"Yes, Father. I know where to go to find the per-
 son, for I have suffered enough from dread of being
 discovered, since I returned to Florence. Once I have
 seen her, only once; but, thank God, she did not rec-
 ognize me. Now that I know where the child is, I
 shall go to her without fear, and confess the whole."

"But you must not let Hugo know of your intention
 or he will be desperate, and may commit some rash
 act that will prevent our doing justice to the girl," said
 Father Ilario, thoughtfully. "I know his strange, un-
 governable character, and at present he is in a condition
 of peculiar mental excitement; therefore, if he sus-
 pected that measures were being taken to restore the
 girl to her lawful guardians, he might conceal her, where
 it would be impossible to find her."

"This accounts for his restlessness last night; he
 never slept, but paced the floor and groaned like one in
 agony, and when I went to him he drove me away sav-
 agely. I knew not what to make of it, but now I un-
 derstand it all."

"Through my description of you, he learned from
 me yesterday that you were the woman from whom he
 took the child, and whom he believed to be dead, and
 that doubtless added to his anxiety and trouble."

"Merciful Heaven! no wonder then that he glared upon me like a wild beast; Father, I fear to return to his house," said Signora Pia, trembling with dread.

"Do not shrink from your duty, my good woman. Heaven will protect you, and I will assist you all that lies in my power. Go, now, and learn what you can concerning the parents of the child, and return here and report your success to me; then, I will advise you what to do after, and I doubt not before nightfall that a mother's heart will be made glad by discovering a long-lost child."

After Father Ilario and Signora Pia had left the church and were out of sight, a bent and haggard creature, with wild eyes and drawn face, stepped out from behind the confessional, where he had overheard the conversation that had taken place between the priest and the woman, and shaking his fist menacingly in the direction that they had taken, he muttered, in a choked voice: "And she too, the outcast that I trusted, and loaded with kindness, that I sheltered when she was homeless, and fed when she was hungry, she will conspire to rob me of my child. O viper! that I have warmed at my fire, you think to turn and sting me; but I will protect myself from you, I will save my idol from your cruel fangs, your poisonous words shall not enter her ears. She shall not hear you say that the father she loves is a monster, a thief, a murderer, and

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tor. I will defeat your well-laid plans; you shall not
have her—no mother's heart shall be made glad, no
lover's arms shall enfold her this night, for I will
take her beyond their reach, where she will be safe
forever."

Lisa lay on the sofa in her room anxiously awaiting
the return of her father or Signora Pia, but as the hours
wore away and neither came, the poor girl's mind was
filled with misgivings of the most harrowing character.
What could ail her father? Had he discovered her secret,
and was he engaged in some plan to prevent her from
leaving her home that night with Nordiskoff? Or was he
ill and unhappy from some cause that she knew nothing
of? He certainly was not himself. Of late he had
avoided her, or treated her with a sort of savage affec-
tion. She had detected him often looking after her, as
though he would devour her, with a wild, hungry look,
such as she had sometimes seen in the eyes of the tigers
at the zoological gardens, and she had trembled with a
strange fear in spite of her love for him. She thought
of what Nordiskoff had said about his not being her
father, and suddenly she felt a revulsion of feeling
toward him. Then, the memory of all his goodness to
her, his tender affection during her helpless childhood,
his gentle care and patience, melted her heart, and tears
rose unbidden to her eyes. "I am ill repaying him to

leave him," she thought, "but when I return I will be so good and loving that he will forgive me and be happy again."

At that moment she heard the door open, and a heavy, uneven step crossed the studio. "It is he, at last," she cried, and, springing up, she ran to meet him, her face tender with her recent remorse and sorrow. But when her eyes fell upon his suffering countenance she uttered a cry of dismay.

"Oh! papa, what ails you, are you ill?"

"I *have* been ill, my child," he replied, with a wan smile; "but I am better now."

"Why have you remained so long abroad in this terrible heat?"

"Affairs of importance have detained me."

"And Signora Pia, where can she be? She went to mass two hours ago, and has not yet returned."

"Sleeping over her prayers, in the cool, quiet church, I dare say," returned the hunchback, with a hollow laugh.

"The time has seemed so long since I have waited," said the girl, with a heavy sigh.

"You are not well, my darling," and Hugo came close to his daughter, taking her hand in his, and, looking anxiously into her face. "Your hands are burning, and your cheeks are flushed."

"It is the heat, papa, and my anxiety about you."

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"Then you really love your poor father enough to
be anxious?"

"Oh! papa, how can you doubt it?" she cried,
bursting into tears.

In a moment Hugo had his arms about her with a
close, savage clasp, kissing away her tears passionately,
while he said, in a voice intense with emotion: "Say
that you love me, my Lisa, say it but once. Let me
hear it clear and sweet as you said it in childhood; my
ears long for the sound. Say it, I entreat you."

"I love you, papa, you know I love you," cried the
girl, struggling to free herself from his close clasp;
"but you terrify me with your violence, with your
strange manner."

"That is enough; thank you, my sweet child, for
those blessed words, and forgive me if I am impulsive
and rude. You know I am not like others," said
Hugo, with a sudden change from passionate eagerness
to extreme sweetness and gentleness. "Ah! I have
distressed you, your eyes are full of tears, and your
cheeks are hot and flushed. You are tired, you are
feverish; lie down and I will bring you a cooling
draught."

Lisa obeyed him willingly, for her anxiety, her own
painful thoughts, her father's strange agitation, and
the contemplated departure with Nordiskoff, had all
unnerved her to such a degree that her temples

throbbled painfully, and her eyes burned with the tears that would come to them in spite of every effort to repress them.

When her father returned with the cooling draught she took it and drank it gratefully, smiling her thanks as she lay back on her pillow; then a delicious languor stole over her, a sweet sense of repose. Her father sat by her side smoothing her hair tenderly; and she saw his face, his strange, solemn eyes, his look of intense love, until her lids fell, and a heavy, peaceful sleep wrapped her in its embrace.

Punctually at the appointed hour Count Valdimer presented himself at the studio of Hugo to express his final approval of the statue, and to pay into his hands the sum agreed upon.

The hunchback opened the door himself, and, instead of his usual sullen indifference, his manner was that of one greatly elated, and his eyes sparkled with a ferocious joy.

"Ah! the mercenary creature," thought Valdimer; now that he is about to touch the pecuniary reward of his labor, he is more delighted than he ever has been at my most extravagant praises of his work. How strange it is, that his divine genius can be united to such a low, sordid nature. My sweet Lisa need not mourn to leave this hideous deformity, the money will console him, it will be enough for him; he will have

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no further need of her beauty to win him wealth; he
has traded upon it long enough, and soon it will be
mine, and I shall keep it close enough from his covet-
ous eyes."

At the far end of the studio hung the heavy crimson
curtain, behind which the artist always worked, and
which was now lowered before the completed statue.
Count Valdimer walked toward it, and was about to
lift it, when Hugo touched his arm, and drew him
away, saying, as he offered him a chair, "Do not be
impatient, Signor Count, I have something to say to
you before you examine the statue."

"Very well," returned Nordiskoff, throwing himself
into a chair a little impatiently, for he was in no
mood on this day for tedious conversation, when but a
few hours stood between him and his long-anticipated
happiness. "I will listen if you will be brief, for I
am in haste."

Hugo drew his chair near, and leaning forward, and
fixing his wild eyes upon the Count's calm face, he
asked with startling intensity in his voice, "Do you
know, Signore, what I love best in the world?"

"I? how should I know? I know nothing of you
beyond your genius; but if I should venture an opin-
ion, I should say that it must be your daughter, the
lovely model of all your works."

"Yes, one would naturally think so; but it is not

Lisa that I love best, for she is not my child. I never had a wife; I never had a child. I stole her for a model, when she was but an infant."

"Wretched man, why have you not confessed this before?"

"Hush, do not interrupt me. I have kept the girl only for the wealth she brought me, for it has been her beauty as much as my talent that has raised me from want and misery. Lovely and affectionate though she is, I do not adore her as much as I do what I create from her. Every statue I model is a part of myself, and every one I dispose of takes a part of my heart and life with it. I know your opinion of me, Signore; you think I am a sordid, avaricious creature, who loves money more than his art; but you are mistaken. I love my art more than money, and I will prove it to you. This statue that I have just finished is the most perfect thing that I have ever executed. I worship it, and I cannot part with it."

"What!" cried Valdimer, "do you not intend to keep to your agreement with me?"

"Yes, if you insist upon my keeping it; but I appeal to your generosity."

"I cannot be generous in this matter. I have ordered the statue, and I am here to pay you for it; now let us consider the matter settled definitely."

A strange expression passed over Hugo's face, and

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he said almost entreatingly, "Oh, Signore! cannot you spare me this, the only thing I love—this work of my hands, of my brain, and of my heart? I have created it, and I never loved anything as much as I love this. As greatly as I desire wealth, I prefer to resign the large sum you are about to pay me, and keep the Hebe. Cannot I make a compromise with you? Cannot I give you something in its place?" and the hunchback leaned nearer to his companion, looking into his eyes with a fiendish leer.

Count Valdimer changed color, but made no reply.

"Ha! ha! I have discovered your secret; you love Lisa, you love my model; now let me make a fair proposal, give me the ten thousand *scudi* for her, and allow me to retain her image."

"Fiend!" cried Nordiskoff. "Would you sell this lovely girl?"

"I would rather part with her than with the Hebe, and you would rather have her. Would you not?"

"I prefer her to anything in the world, for I love her," said the Count. "How you have discovered my secret I know not, and I care not. I worship her, but I will not bargain for her."

"I cannot give up both the statue and the model; no, I cannot," returned Hugo with fearful emphasis. "Choose, then, one or the other, for I am resolved to keep one."

"Well, then," returned Valdimer, after a moment's thought. "You may keep the statue, and promise me not to raise any obstacles to keep Lisa from me, and you may have the ten thousand *scudi* also."

"Ah! Signor Count, now you are noble and generous," cried the hunchback in a tone of wild joy. "You may have the girl, I will give her to you with my own hands; but before I bring her to you, I pray that you will do me the favor to look at the statue, for you have not seen it since I put my choicest touches upon it. Ah! it is life-like, it is wonderful."

"What demon of avarice possesses this hideous creature? He seems transformed into a greedy fiend," thought Valdimer, as he followed him to the spot where the statue stood concealed behind the heavy drapery.

With his long, trembling fingers clutching the curtain, the hunchback turned, and, looking full in the Count's face, he said, in a hollow voice that swept over him like an icy wind: "This is the fairest, the best loved thing I possess. It is as beautiful as though it were fresh from the hand of God. It is my work. Behold it!" and with one sweep of his hand he flung the drapery aside, and revealed what it had covered.

Count Valdimer stood transfixed, white and cold, for instead of the radiant Hebe, the goddess of youth, the cupbearer of Jupiter, he saw the pale, dead form of

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Lisa extended on a couch, her lovely figure veiled by
the golden drapery of her hair, her hands folded, her
face upturned to heaven, and a smile of matchless
sweetness on her beautiful lips. With a groan of
agony he seized the trembling hunchback, and, dashing
him aside, he cried: "Wretch! fiend! is this your
work? Is this the way you have robbed me of her
love?"

A hollow, mocking laugh behind him turned his
blood cold in his veins.

"Yes, this is the way I am revenged; here is the
treasure you have bought. I loved her as you never
dreamed of loving her. I worshipped her as saints
worship the Mother of God. I toiled for her to win
wealth and honor, that she might share it with me. I
steeped my hands in the blood of a fellow-creature,
thinking to save her from him, and you were the one
I should have killed; you were the one who stole her
love from me, to ruin her and cast her aside when you
were weary of her. To-night, you were to take her
from me. I heard your honeyed lies, your false prom-
ises, and I resolved to put her beyond your reach.
The last face she saw on earth was mine, her last smile
was for me, her last word of love sounded in my ear.
Now you may take her body, for her soul is safe with
God beyond the power of your despoiling. My lily,
my white, stainless lily, you will live in paradise, while

the wretch that would have ruined you moans in torment."

There were voices at the door, some one was entering, and Nordiskoff, looking as through a thick mist, saw the Duchess of Castellara, pale, wide-eyed, and excited, followed by Signora Pia, and a woman in the dress of a nun.

"Where is she, bring her to me," cried the Duchess, looking bewildered at the group around the couch. Then, seeing the extended form of the girl, with a piercing scream she sprang forward and threw herself on her knees, pressing her lips to the immobile face, while she moaned, "My child, my child."

Count Valdimer heard no more, for the black mist closed around him, a sound like many waters surged in his ears, his limbs tottered under him, and fearing that his senses were deserting him he gave one last look at the beautiful still face, and then fled from the room, followed by the frenzied laugh of the hunchback.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

"A CRUCE SALUS."

HEN Signora Pia left the Church of San Marco, she went directly to the Convent of the Sacred Heart, and entering the public reception-room she asked if she might see Sister Prudenza immediately, concerning a matter of the greatest importance. The nun in attendance demurred at first, saying that the sister was very weary from watching all night with a poor sufferer, but finally, on seeing how anxious the visitor was, she summoned her.

When Sister Prudenza entered the room, Signora Pia trembled visibly, and her voice faltered so as to be hardly audible as she said, "I have something of importance to communicate to you. May I talk with you in private?"

"Certainly, my friend, come into this inner room," returned the nun in a gentle, pleasant voice, while at the same time she studied the visitor's face closely.

When the door was closed and the two were alone, Signora Pia threw aside her veil and said, "Sister Prudenza, I see that you do not recognize me."

"No, I cannot remember you, though your face and

voice are familiar," replied the nun with a puzzled, anxious look.

"I am Pia Passerelli."

"Ah! Holy Mother, why did I not know you at first? I did not suppose it was possible to forget you, for through you I have suffered enough."

"Forgive me, sister, I was not to blame; God knows I was not."

"Where is the child I confided to your care as a most sacred trust?"

"She is living and well, sister."

"And why have you kept me in ignorance of her all these years?"

"Because I knew not of her whereabouts myself."

"You talk in riddles; I pray you, speak quickly and clearly, for my soul is full of impatience."

"I speak the truth, sister; I have but to-day discovered the child."

"Then you lost her?"

"She was stolen from me."

"Then why, in the name of the Blessed Mother, did you not tell me? Why did you leave me all these years in such dreadful uncertainty?"

"I feared to come to you and tell you that I had lost the child through disobeying your orders. When you gave her to me, you forbid my ever leaving her alone, you made me promise that I would never take her

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beyond the city, which I did on the day that she was stolen from me. I went into the country to see my own child, who was ill, and returning I was overcome with fatigue and lost consciousness by the wayside. When I recovered the babe was gone."

"And you made no effort to find her?"

"I knew not what to do; my own abandoned infant died, and I was half insane. So I left Florence and did not return for eight years."

"And, in the mean time, what had become of the child I intrusted to your care?"

"A lonely, deformed man, living in a little cottage on San Miniato found me unconscious on the wayside, and, believing me to be dead, he took the child and carried it to his home, where he reared her in secret, carefully and tenderly, loving her as his own child, which he represented her to be. By a most singular coincidence, this same man, when I returned to Florence after eight years of wandering, pitying my poverty and forlorn condition, gave me a home, with the child, under his own roof, where I have lived ever since, a companion and mother to the girl who has grown up a very angel of goodness and beauty."

"Holy Virgin! this is a strange history," returned Sister Prudenza, crossing herself devoutly. "And plainly shows a Divine Providence in its mysterious ordering. I had long ago ceased to believe that either

you or the child were living. After your disappearance, I traced you to the country place you visited, and learned there that a woman and child had died suddenly. The woman answered your description, and the infant, I thought, must be your nursling."

"And the mother of the babe, did she believe it was dead?"

"Yes, poor, unhappy young creature, I thought it best to represent to her that it was dead beyond a doubt, for I feared the uncertainty and anxiety would kill her. She had been privately married and had lost her husband before the child was born, therefore, it seemed advisable to set her mind at rest on that point, for she had trouble enough in concealing her sorrow and her secret from her father, who was a stern, tyrannical man, as well as from the world, that would have been most unmerciful to her. She came to me in her trouble, for she was educated within these sacred walls, and I have been like a mother to her. When the child was born I gave it to you to be nursed, thinking that, after you had suffered, and I had befriended you, I could trust it with you more safely than with any other. Then think of my bitter sorrow and disappointment when, after a few weeks, you suddenly disappeared with the infant I had confided so solemnly to your care."

"But you see, Sister Prudenza, that I was not to

After your disappearance to the place you visited, and the child had died suddenly according to your description, and your nursing?"

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g creature, I thought it was dead beyond a doubt. My fainty and anxiety would not have been so lately married and had a child was born, therefore, my mind at rest on that point. I thought enough in concealing her from her father, who was a stranger as from the world, that she would be faithful to her. She came to me as educated within these few weeks, like a mother to her. I gave it to you to be nursed, and you suffered, and I had believed that with you more safely than with any other. I think of my bitter sorrow when I see a few weeks, you suddenly died. The infant I had confided so

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blame for the loss of the babe," said Signora Pia, wiping away her tears.

"Perhaps not for the misfortune of losing the child, but you were to blame in not making the loss known to me at the time."

"Certainly that was a sin, and I have shed tears enough for it to wash it away. But I trust it is not too late to restore the girl to her mother, whom I hope is still living."

"Yes, she is living, and she is free now to acknowledge her child before all the world, for her father is dead, and she is mistress of her own fortune. She is noble, rich and honored, but she is unhappy. Only yesterday she came to me and wept here on my bosom, which has always been her refuge in trouble. Her heart is empty, for she has neither husband nor children, and this girl, the daughter of the young husband she idolized, will comfort her desolate soul."

"I am thankful that all may yet be well, and to show my gratitude I will devote my life to the blessed Virgin more faithfully than I ever have done," returned Signora Pia, piously. "But this poor man who has always loved the girl, and has now come to think of her as his own, and who has been so good to me, my heart aches for him, for he will suffer so to lose her, and to lose her through me."

"You have only done your duty," replied Sister

Prudenza, "and you could do no less. Now come with me and we will hasten to tell the mother that her child is living, and near her, that she may embrace her, and hold her to her heart at once."

When the carriage containing the nun and Signora Pia entered the court of the Castellara palace, the poor woman was in a tremor of fear and excitement, for the splendor impressed her to such a degree with the wealth and power of the mother she had wronged, that she scarcely dared confess her fault to so august a personage; but Sister Prudenza encouraged her, telling her that the lady was kind and gentle, and would readily pardon her when she brought her such good news at last.

The nun was admitted immediately into the private apartment of the Duchess of Castellara, while Signora Pia waited in an ante-room, in a fever of suspense and excitement. She dreaded the interview with this great lady, the mistress of this magnificent palace, and she also feared the furious anger of Hugo when he learned that she whom he trusted had betrayed his secret.

At length the door opened and Signora Pia was summoned into the presence of the noble lady. With bent head and humbly-folded hands she followed the servant; and when she raised her eyes every vestige of color fled from her troubled face, and she gasped, "The Duchess of Castellara!"

At the same moment the Duchess, as pale and startled as the woman before her, looked at Sister Prudenza and exclaimed: "What does this mean? I have seen this woman before; she is Pia, the servant of Hugo the artist; she surely cannot be the nurse to whom you gave my child?"

"I am the same, Signora Duchess," said the woman, bowing low and clasping her hands entreatingly.

"And my child, where is she? Take me to her at once."

"She is at home in the Via San Gallo."

"My God! she cannot be Lisa, the hunchback's daughter?"

"Lisa is the child that was given me to nurse, and who was stolen from me by Hugo."

"Holy Mother! how I am punished, what a fearful retribution is this!" cried the Duchess, sinking into a chair like one smitten with palsy.

"But she is good and lovely, Signora Pia tells me, and she is restored to you safely; for that, you should be devoutly thankful," said Sister Prudenza, bending over the Duchess and stroking her hair with motherly tenderness.

"Lisa, the girl I have despised and hated, my child, Challonner's child, my husband's, my adored husband's child, and I have seen her and my heart did not tell me that she was mine! Oh! it cannot be possible; there

must be some mistake. Tell me that Lisa is not my child!"

Signora Pia and the nun looked at each other in astonishment. Instead of expressing joy at the recovery of the child, she seemed to regret it. What could it mean?

"Tell me," continued the Duchess, "that you are positive there can be no mistake; that this girl called Lisa is the babe who was born in the Convent of the Sacred Heart, more than sixteen years ago, and that she is my child, and no other's. Oh, do not deceive me; I pray you give me some proof that what you say is true."

"This may convince you," said Signora Pia, putting the clasp that she had taken from Father Ilario into the hand of the Duchess; "this trinket fastened the child's robe when I took her from Sister Prudenza, and it was stolen with her, and has been concealed ever since by the hunchback."

"Ah! there can be no mistake; she is indeed my child. I wore this clasp during my own babyhood; it was said to possess a charm that would protect the infant who wore it from all evil. I, with my own weak fingers, fastened it in the child's little dress when she was taken from me. There is no possibility of mistaking this; it has belonged to our family for centuries, and it has the Altimonti legend upon it."

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Then she started up wildly, her eyes flaming, her face burning with vivid red, and taking Signora Pia by the arm, she said fiercely: "You told me she was safe in the Via San Gallo—is it true?"

"Yes, your highness, she is there; I left her there but a few hours ago, and she will be anxiously awaiting my return," replied the woman, trembling and shrinking away from the angry eyes of the Duchess.

"I must go to her; ring for my carriage, Sister Prudenza. I must go at once. Oh! Valdimer Nordiskoff, if you have harmed one hair of her head, my vengeance will be terrible. Bring my bonnet, my mantle—I am going out," she said as her maid entered, "and make ready the sleeping apartment next to mine, for I shall bring back a guest with me." Then signing for the nun and Signora Pia to follow her, she hurried out, beside herself with impatience and eager haste.

During the short distance to the Via San Gallo, she bade the driver urge his horses to their utmost speed; seeming forgetful of her pride and self-control, she wrung her hands and moaned, "Oh, my child! my injured child, how can I ever make amends for my sin, my cruelty, my insensibility? Why did not my heart tell me that she was my child? Ah! now, I remember well when I first saw her, as lovely as a cherub, sleeping on the altar steps at San Miniato, how the depths of my soul were stirred at the sight of her. And when she

raised her sweet eyes to mine, it seemed as though her father looked at me through them. Then, for a moment, my better nature spoke to me; but pride, hate, and revenge drowned its gentle voice, and I went out into the world and forgot the angel that had smiled on me."

When at last the carriage stopped before Hugo's door, she sprang out and hurried up the steps, that she had mounted so many times with weary, indifferent feet, as though she scarcely touched them, for impatience gave her wings, and the two women found it difficult to keep pace with her. Signora Pia unlocked the door with trembling fingers, and in an instant the Duchess was in the artist's studio, looking with wild eyes and bewildered brain on the senseless form of the young girl extended pale and cold on the place where the statue of Hebe had always stood.

At first, the Duchess did not understand what had taken place. She saw Valdimer's pale and horror-stricken face as he fled, followed by Hugo's frenzied laughter. She saw the couch under the shadow of the crimson curtain. She saw the rigid, immobile form of the girl she had come to claim, veiled with its golden hair, the hands clasped over the breast, the eyes closed, the face upturned as white and still as chiselled marble. She saw it all, and yet she did not understand.

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"My child! My child!" and there was no response; when she clasped her arms around her and there was no warmth or motion; when she pressed her lips upon the peaceful face and there was no smile or word, then she knew that some dread calamity had overtaken her.

"You need not call her, she will not hear you!" cried Hugo, with a fiendish laugh. "You need not embrace her, for she is as cold and lifeless as the marble image before you. You need not kiss her, she will not be conscious of your caresses. Love and scorn are the same to her now, for she is beyond all earthly feeling."

"My God! you cannot mean that she is dead!" cried the Duchess in an agonized voice.

"Yes, she is dead. I killed her to save her from ruin. To-night she would have fled from me with the man who just looked upon her for the last time. He deceived her with his honeyed lies until she was ready to desert me for him; ready to leave the one that worshipped her for a stranger—a base, bad man. All have conspired to rob me of her; even this viper, that I warmed at my fire," and he turned his frenzied gaze upon Signora Pia, who stood trembling with fear and horror. "But I have defrauded you of your triumph, I have sent her beyond your reach; she is safe from the spoiler's snare. With my own hand I gave her the draught that quenched her sweet life. She smiled

on me when she drank it, and called me father with her last breath."

"Demon! she was not your child! Wretch! how dare you take her from me, her mother!" cried the Duchess, springing toward the wretched creature as though she would destroy him at a glance.

"You, her mother? You?" said the hunchback, slowly, pressing his hands to his temples and looking at her vaguely, with his red, wild eyes. "You are the Duchess of Castellara. Ah! I remember, now; you are Nemesis, Nemesis, and you have come to punish me; you have come to be avenged!" then with his hands outstretched he retreated slowly before her, as though he would protect himself from her fury until he reached the door. There his hands dropped, and, crouching at her feet, he turned his haggard face upward while a strange light broke over it, and he murmured, as though he were speaking to himself: "You were the Angel of the Church, you saved me once, you gave me this," drawing the ring from his bosom and pressing it to his lips; "and you told me if I ever needed help to come to you. I need it now. I have long needed it, and I come; forgive me, save me."

"Go, leave me, murderer, fiend! I fear you and I will never forgive you," cried the Duchess retreating from him in horror.

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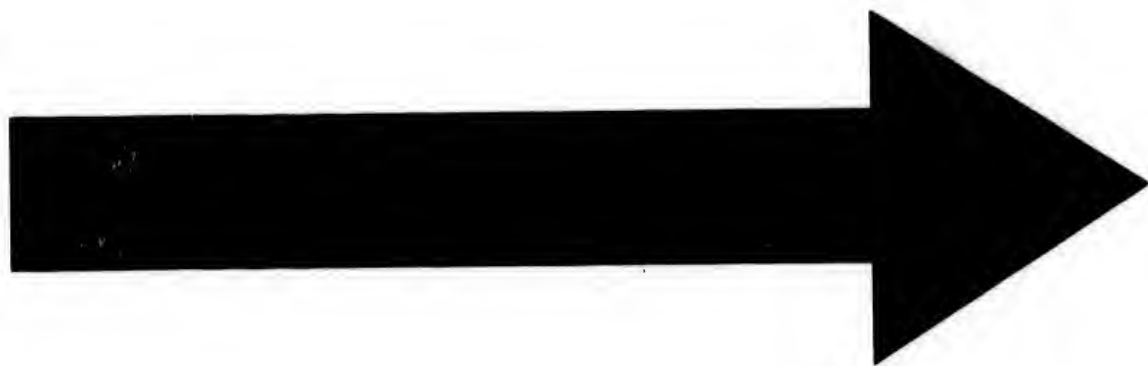
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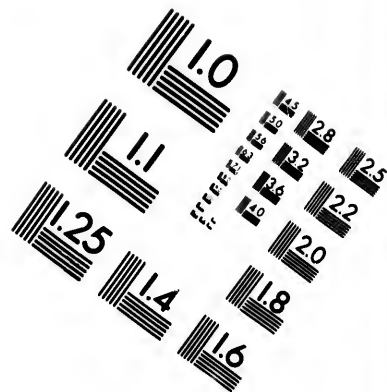
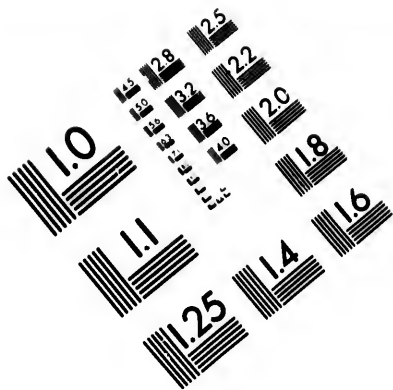
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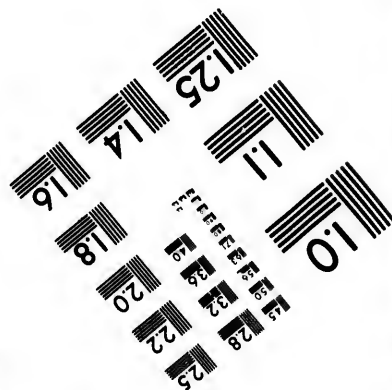
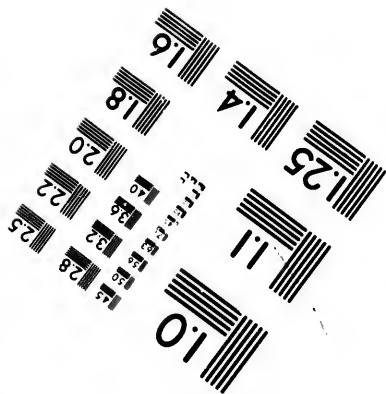
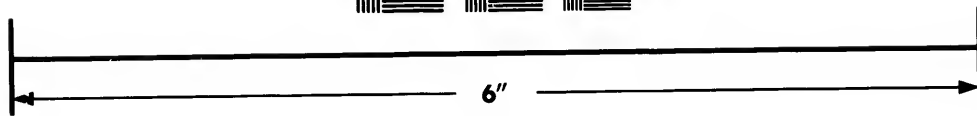
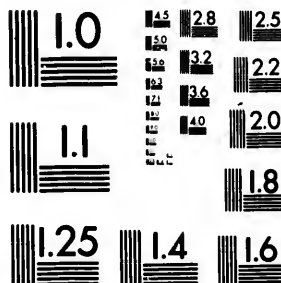
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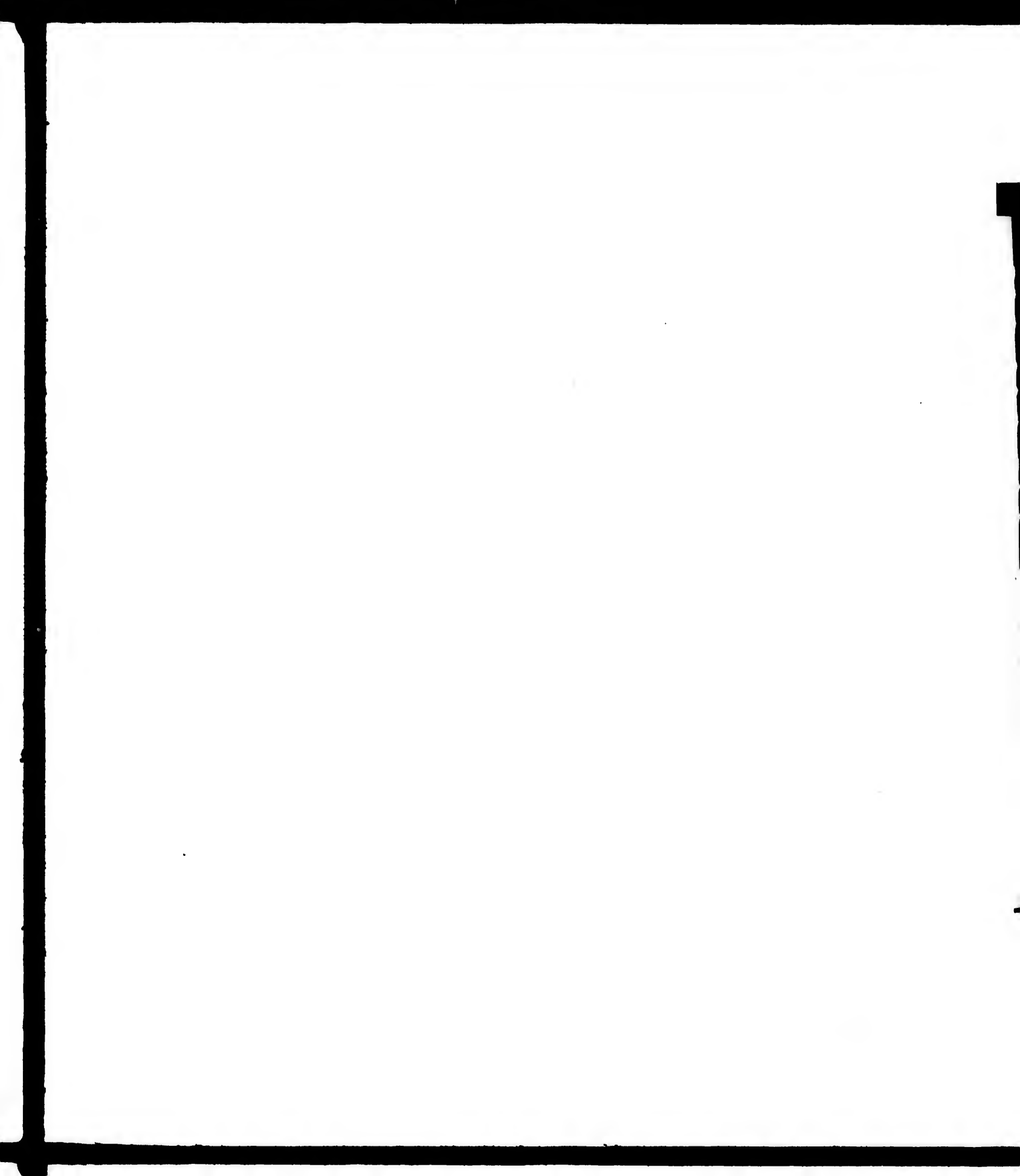
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gering to his feet he moaned, "It is true—there is no mercy for me, no salvation—the angel of compassion has changed to a Nemesis, and I am doomed. My Lisa, farewell ; I would have repented, so that I could have met thee again, but there is no mercy for me ; farewell life, farewell hope," and with a groan of heart-breaking anguish, he opened the door and disappeared from their sight, his haggard face wearing the expression of utter despair and hopeless agony.

When he had gone, the Duchess turned again to the couch where Signora Pia and the nun stood weeping silently. Kneeling by the side of her child, the wretched mother looked long and tenderly into her face, as though she were seeking to discover the lineaments of the one she had loved so well, and said between her broken sobs :

"My husband, forgive me, for I knew not what I did. I would have loved her. I would have devoted my life to her had she not been taken from me. Sweet victim! you have been sacrificed for the sin, the pride, the passion of those who should have loved and protected thee, and tears and prayers of penitence are alike useless now."

Lifting the heavy veil of her hair, the Duchess laid her face on the quiet bosom of her child, and folding her arms around her as though she would keep her forever in her embrace, prayed silently.

Suddenly, with a wild cry, she started up, and seizing Sister Prudenza by the arm, she said: "Listen and tell me if her heart beats, for I am sure I felt the faintest pulsation."

The nun placed her ear against the girl's bosom and listened intently; for a moment there was deep silence, the mother and Signora Pia standing with bated breath and compressed lips.

"Ah! yes, she breathes, her heart flutters feebly, she is not dead," cried Sister Prudenza. "She is in a state of syncope, and life has not left her."

"Go quickly for a doctor—go, Signora Pia, and if we can save her I will serve God as I never have before," and the Duchess seized the woman's hand and hurried her to the door.

Then she lifted the heavy head of the girl and laid it on her bosom, while she and the nun chafed the wrists and temples, which were as cold as marble under their touch.

Signora Pia's feet must have had wings on that occasion, for, before they had dared expect her, she returned with a doctor, who said at once that there was both life and hope.

The deadly draught had but half done its work; the wretched hunchback was not skilled in the use of poisons, and he had given an overdose that resulted in the appearance of death only, for in less than an hour,

she started up, and seized her, she said: "Listen and for I am sure I felt the

against the girl's bosom and silent there was deep silence, Pia standing with bated

her heart flutters feebly, Prudenza. "She is in a state not left her."

"—go, Signora Pia, and if I call on God as I never have before, I hold the woman's hand and

the head of the girl and laid her hands and the nun chafed the cheeks which were as cold as marble

she would have had wings on that day and I dared expect her, she replied at once that there was

but half done its work; the physician, not skilled in the use of poison, administered a overdose that resulted in the death of the girl in less than an hour,

under the judicious treatment of the physician, Lisa breathed softly, and opened her sweet eyes upon the happy face of her mother, who bent over her.

"Thank God, she is saved," cried the Duchess, falling on her knees in an ecstasy of happiness and gratitude.

When the wretched hunchback rushed away from the anger of Nemesis, he had but one desire in his despairing, hopeless soul, and that was to reach the river, where he could find speedy oblivion and relief from the anguish that was consuming him.

With wild, burning eyes, and clenched hands, he rushed on through the familiar streets, down the Lung' Arno, by the palaces and squares, among the gay crowd that turned and looked at him wonderingly, but no friendly hand was outstretched to save him. "To the river, to the river," seemed to sound in his ears like roaring torrents. "To the river," the people seemed to shout as he dashed by; the wind that smote his cheek seemed to hiss, "To the river." On the pavement under his feet, on the heavens above him, was written in letters of fire, "To the river, to the river."

And so he went on and on, until the peaceful, winding Arno reached out her arms for him, and with one dull, heavy splash he was folded in her embrace and at rest forever.

The next morning they found him floating among

the piers of the Ponte Vecchio. The bridge where he had made his first venture in life finished all his woes and disappointments.

"It is Hugo, the sculptor," said one of the bystanders, as they drew his deformed body out of the water and laid it on the bank for a curious crowd to gaze at. "His prosperity must have turned his brain, for he was to receive ten thousand *scudi* for a statue of Hebe."

"*Madre di Dio*, and he has drowned himself. Of course he was mad."

Tightly clasped in one stiff hand was a gold ring with a coronet and the legend "*a cruce salus*."

CHAPTER XXIV.

ENRICO'S REWARD.

IN a garden of one of the most beautiful villas on the lake of Como, two ladies were slowly walking back and forth among the roses and jasmines, shaded by the fragrant branches of the orange and myrtle, that extended protectingly over them.

One was not far from middle life, the other in the first flush of youth and beauty; the elder was a tall, queenly woman, with glorious dark eyes, rich golden hair, a soft pale skin, and a mouth of exquisite loveliness, around which lingered a sad smile. The younger was slight and fair, with blue eyes, complexion of transparent whiteness, and hair as light as the silken tassels of corn.

It was not difficult to judge that the relationship between them was that of mother and daughter, even if one had not overheard their conversation, for the girl clung affectionately to her companion, who walked with her arm around her in a tender, protecting manner.

The morning was lovely, the blue and cloudless sky was reflected in the mirror of the lake, the magnolia, orange, and acacia dipped their odorons branches in the gentle, rippling waves that washed the flowery banks. The marble steps of the villa, the urns of blooming flowers, the winged doves, the stately, slender columns, all were repeated again and again on the sapphire-like surface of the fairest sheet of water in the world; while the mountains and olive-crowned hills stood around like watchful sentinels, with linked hands, keeping guard over a precious jewel.

"Oh, mamma! is not nature perfect; does it not satisfy one fully?" said the girl in a clear, happy

voice, while her admiring eyes drank in the scene before her.

"Yes, my Lisa, it leaves us nothing to desire, and it never disappoints and deceives us; it is always sincere and truthful, no matter what its mood may be. We can worship it without fear, we can turn to it in sorrow, and it always consoles us. It is God's own handiwork, therefore it must be good."

"I used to dream of such a picture as this, hour after hour, when I was sitting in the dreary studio in the Via San Gallo," said the girl with a soft sigh; "and wish I had wings that I might fly to such a spot, and never leave it."

"Poor child, you were little better than a prisoner then, and those four gloomy walls were your prison; but it is over, and you must not think any more of it, my darling."

"But papa was good to me."

"Pray do not say 'papa;' it hurts me to hear you, and it would be better for you to forget the unfortunate creature who wronged you so."

"I cannot, mamma, if I desired to. Only think for how many years he was all I had in the world to love; why, there is not a day that I do not remember some little act of tenderness and patient self-denial toward me."

"For his care of you I owe him a debt of gratitude;

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but the memory of his sin, and his dreadful intention
 to take your precious life, fills me with horror when I
 think of it."

"But remember, mamma, that he was not in his
 right mind; he was insane, or he never would have
 harmed a hair of my head. Do not speak bitterly of
 him, he was so unfortunate, and he suffered so much.
 Poor, unhappy soul! I trust at the last that God for-
 gave him, for he died with your ring clasped in his
 hand, as though he found some hope in the legend to
 comfort him in his hour of supreme agony."

"Sweet child, your gentle nature, your generous
 heart, can find excuse and forgiveness for all who have
 wronged you," and the Duchess of Castellara stooped
 and pressed her lips fondly to her daughter's cheek.

"It is because I am so happy now, mamma. God
 has been so good to me, then why should I not be good
 to those who have sinned and suffered, for all who sin
 must endure some punishment as a penalty for dis-
 obeying their own conscience, and forgetting their
 sacred duty. Now that my trouble is over, and I can
 look calmly on the past, I know that I was a great
 sinner in my love for Valdimer—for Count Nordiskoff
 —for I deceived the one who was a father to me, who
 trusted and loved me; I concealed the truth from him,
 and allowed myself to be over-persuaded, when in my
 heart I felt that it was all wrong; but I loved him,

mamma, oh! I loved him! and when I heard his voice it seemed as though an angel spoke to me," and Lisa turned away her head to hide her dim eyes and flushed face from her mother's searching gaze.

"He was a false, bad man, my child, and your greatest enemy. I hope that you have driven him entirely from your heart, and that you love him no more," said the Duchess, sternly.

"Ah! mamma, you know that I despise him now as much as I loved him once. But, can you blame me for trusting him then?"

"No, my Lisa, I cannot, for I once trusted him myself; and if he could deceive me, how much easier it was to gain a conquest over your innocence and youth, poor child! You knew so little of the world, you were so inexperienced and confiding, that his sin in deceiving you was greater than though you had been older and more worldly wise."

"Then you forgive me, mamma? I have always wanted to ask you to pardon me for the sin of deception, yet I dare not speak of it to you; but now I may know that you forgive me and trust me, may I not?"

"Yes, my darling, I forgave you long ago; for your fault was but the result of your inexperience, and I could not withhold my pardon from you when I had so much to blame myself for."

"Hush! mamma dear, I cannot allow you to find

and when I heard his angel spoke to me," and hide her dim eyes and searching gaze.

Oh, my child, and your you have driven him out that you love him no more.

But, can you blame me

I once trusted him myself, how much easier it our innocence and youth, of the world, you were g, that his sin in deceiv- ough you had been older

mamma? I have always me for the sin of decep- t to you; but now I may d trust me, may I not?"

e you long ago; for your your inexperience, and I on from you when I had "

cannot allow you to find

fault with yourself. Your goodness to me now more than atones for all errors of the past. God kept me safely for you, and my fortunate deliverance from a great danger has taught me to be always truthful and honest to those who have the right to my confidence."

"I am glad to hear these words, my child, for I have sometimes feared that you might keep your most sacred feelings hidden from me, that you might conceal some of your inner life from the eyes that would read your heart as an open book."

"Nay, mamma, there is nothing that I would keep from you."

"No regret for the past—no desire for the future?"

"Do you mean in regard to Count Nordiskoff? Ah! mamma, my only regret is that I ever saw him—that I was foolish enough to have loved him; but, believe me, it is all over, and I have no other desire for the future than to love you and to devote my life to you."

"Are you quite sure that, among all the handsome young nobles who would win your heart and hand, that there is none you care for?"

"None, mamma. They are all kind and good to me, because I am your daughter; they admire me, because I am a little like you; that is all; but I care no more for one than another."

"How is that, my Lisa? You are young, rich,

and lovely, and, during the two years that you have been under my care, you have worked so hard to improve yourself, that there are few girls of your age more accomplished and intelligent; therefore, you already have many suitors to whom I must give some reason for refusing. What can I say to them, pray?"

"Tell them that I love my mamma too well to leave her," returned the girl, laughing and clinging fondly to her mother's arm.

"Sweet flatterer! that is no reason at all. Your love for me will not prevent you from loving your husband."

"But I will have no husband," cried the girl with a startled look. "Oh, mamma, why must I think of such a thing, why cannot I remain with you and be happy?"

"You can, my sweet darling, if you wish to, and your mother, who has herself suffered so deeply, will never force you to wed against your inclination. But I have had a proposal for your hand, a written proposal; it came yesterday, a large important letter from Florence, and I must prepare to answer it. In fact, my dear, your Cousin Enrico comes this very day to receive the answer," and the Duchess fixed her eyes steadily on the face of her daughter.

"Cousin Enrico is coming for the answer! Why, what has he to do with it, pray?" said Lisa in a trem-

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ulous voice, while a flood of crimson swept over her
sweet face. "Oh, mamma, does he wish me to marry?"

"Yes, my child, your cousin wishes it; he thinks this
offer is in every way eligible. He is well acquainted
with the character of the gentleman who would win
your love, and he knows him to be good and noble,
worthy of you in every respect, and beside, my dear,
this suitor has loved you for a long time."

"How can that be, mamma? I know no one among
your friends who ever saw me until I came to live with
you, excepting Cousin Enrico. Then how is it possible
that this person has loved me for a long time, as you
say?"

"It is a romance, my Lisa; he saw you in church
and was so impressed with your beauty that he went
many times, and watched you unobserved, for he was
too noble and honorable to annoy you with attentions,
that in your position, at that time, could only have
been an injury to you."

"And you know him, mamma?"

"Yes, well, he is my best friend."

"And is it your wish that I should become his
wife?"

"It is, my darling."

"Oh, mamma, what can I do? I wish to obey you.
I should like to please Cousin Enrico, if he wishes
it; but I cannot, indeed, I cannot promise you to

marry a person I do not know nor love." And the girl's eyes filled with tears, while a sob choked her voice.

"My dear child, have I not said that you shall not marry him unless you love him? When you know him, and he has tried to win you, then you may decide, and whatever you wish, the mother who loves you will consent to; so wipe away your tears, and be happy, and we will think of some way to defer the answer to Cousin Enrico."

"Why does he send Cousin Enrico? Why does he not come himself? I did not think my cousin would wish me to marry. Oh, mamma, are you sure he wishes it?" asked Lisa with another sob.

"Quite sure," returned the Duchess, looking again earnestly into her daughter's grieved, tearful face; then, stooping, she drew her to her breast and said, in a voice of infinite tenderness: "My sweet child, did you not but just now tell me that your heart was like an open book before me? and yet you are keeping something hidden; you love some one, and you will not confess it to your mother."

"Oh! mamma, how can you say so?" cried Lisa, her face covered with vivid blushes. "Who could I love beside you? You make me unhappy when you doubt me."

"Ah! here comes Enrico," said the Duchess, look-

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' said the Duchess, look-

ing up from her daughter's agitated face, as the quick, eager steps of some one approaching sounded on her ear. "Go, Lisa, and meet him."

"Pray excuse me, mamma, and allow me to go to Signora Pia. I will return again in a few moments," and the girl darted away with averted face, just as Count Altimonti appeared from behind a clump of trees.

The Duchess looked after her daughter and smiled a little sadly, as she said, in a low voice: "Sweet child, she does not know her own heart; but I have probed it until I have discovered her secret. She loves the one who loves her, and she shall be happy." Then she turned, with a cordial greeting, to welcome her cousin.

"Ah! Enrico, you are here, and quite as impatient as a young lover."

"Yes, cousin, I am impatient, now that the time has come when I can speak. Have I not waited long enough, and have I not given the sweet child time to forget the past, and to become acquainted with her own heart?"

"I have no fault to find with you, Enrico; you have been very patient, and you certainly deserve your reward."

"Tell me, cousin, do you think she loves me?"

"I did not ask her the direct question, I thought

you would prefer to do that, yourself; but I have learned enough to give you hope."

"Ah, I need encouragement, Duchess, for I sometimes think it impossible that one so young and lovely can prefer a serious, elderly individual like myself, to younger and handsomer men."

"With false, base hearts!" returned the Duchess, bitterly. "If Lisa did not understand and appreciate your noble soul, she would be no daughter of mine, and I should not consider her worthy of your devotion."

"That you are willing to give your treasure into my keeping, is sufficient proof of your estimation of my character. I need not say how I shall strive to make her happy, how I shall devote my life to her."

"I have no fear for her future if you share it, Enrico. I love my child, and I am anxious that her happiness shall not be shipwrecked as mine was. Now, I live but for her, and next to her you are the dearest friend I have on earth; then, what can give me more happiness than to see her your wife? And, when this is accomplished, I shall devote my wealth and time to the work of our Blessed Saviour, to whom I vowed myself when I knelt by my unconscious child and implored Him for her life. I must redeem that vow, Enrico, and also make some atonement for my sinfully squandered years. There is much for me to do, and I

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would be about my Master's business. Then, take my
child, and may God deal with you as you deal with
her."

"Thank you, cousin, with all my soul; this is the
happiest day of my life," said Enrico, gratefully kiss-
ing the beautiful hand of the Duchess.

"Now let us speak of the practical. My Lisa will be
rich, for her right to her father's property in England
has been established, and she will have that, besides
what comes to her from my father's estate, but my
dower right to the Castellara wealth I shall reserve
for a work of charity. Enrico, I will tell you of my
dearest, most sacred wish, and I shall claim your assist-
ance in carrying it out. It is this: I desire to found
an asylum for deformed, friendless children. You
remember the ten thousand *scudi* that poor Hugo was
paid for the statue of Hebe, and which was found in
his studio after his death?"

"Yes, I remember it, and it was entrusted to Father
Ilario for some good work."

"Well, Father Ilario agrees with me that it cannot
be used for a more worthy charity than this of which
I speak, and I am sure if the unfortunate hunchback
could express a desire he would also consent to our
using it for such a noble purpose."

"And this is the good work to which you would
dedicate your wealth and the remainder of your life?"

Ah! my cousin, I knew you had a great and generous heart, and I will help you with all my soul."

"Enrico, if I devote all the future that God gives me on earth—all my means and energies in His service, and for the good of the poor and suffering, I cannot half atone for the folly and sin of my past. I know now how wrong it all was, my love for Valdimer Nordiskoff, my hate for my husband, and anger against my father. Ah! I would not have suffered so much had I forgiven him before he died, and received his blessing. But it is too late to regret. I trust in eternity we may be united as we never were on earth. In my bitterness and despair at the loss of Valdimer's love I almost cursed God. Now, I see how a Divine Providence was my friend through all, and how I was saved from a misery too great to think of without shuddering. There is one thing, my cousin, that I should like to ask you, before I dismiss this subject forever. Do you know aught of Count Nordiskoff?"

"He is in Paris. I heard of him quite accidentally, a few weeks ago; he is living a gay and reckless life among the heartless and fashionable, and he will never return to Italy; for I am told that he holds the country and the Italian people in horror, and turns quite pale and ill, if by chance he meets any one he formerly knew in Florence; and that no one can induce him even to visit the Italian opera, where he must hear

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the language that will remind him of an epoch in his life that he earnestly desires to forget—and no wonder, when he considers that he was the cause of the death of the Duke, and, as he thinks, the daughter of the unfortunate Hugo, for, as far as I can learn, he has never heard that Lisa is still living, and that your daughter and she are the same."

"And the statue of Hebe, what became of that?"

"It is in the D— palace; Nordiskoff presented it to his friend Connt D—, and he took possession of it shortly after the death of the unhappy artist."

"Did you ever notice, among the incomplete works in clay, in Hugo's studio, a statue of Nemesis?"

"Yes, and under the unmistakable character of the angry goddess, I recognized the face of the Duchess of Castellara."

"What did you do with it?"

"I caused it to be destroyed, knowing that you no longer wish to be represented in such a cruel impersonation."

"Thank you, Enrico; it was an insane freak of mine when I first began to suspect Valdimer's constancy; he had often expressed a wish for a portrait of me in marble, and I intended, if I proved that he had deceived me, to present him with that; but thank Heaven that the foolish intention was frustrated, and the work left unfinished, for, as you say, I have now no desire

for vengeance—my only and greatest need is for mercy.”

“Which you will have, dear cousin, and many years of peace and happiness in the love of your child, and in my friendship and devotion.”

“God grant that it may be so; now go to Lisa, and learn your fate from her own lips, and if she loves you as I think she does, there is nothing to prevent your union at once.”

Lisa sat alone in a little arbor under an orange tree, watching the pretty boats darting back and forth on the sunlit mirror of the lake, and wondered why her mother detained her cousin so long, and what could be the absorbing subject of their conversation.

“They are discussing this intended marriage,” she thought, “and it is useless for them to make their plans for my disposal, for I am determined, without seeing him, not to like this person whom they wish me to marry.”

At last Enrico came toward her with his firm, proud step, and his handsome face lit up with love and happiness, while she, trembling and blushing, and yet resolved to oppose him, held out her hand joyfully as she said:

“I thought you intended to talk all day with mamma, and that you had quite forgotten me.”

"Ah, no, my sweet cousin, you were not forgotten, for it was of you we were speaking."

"I suspected that, and you need not repeat what you were saying to her, for I am quite resolved not to listen to you."

"But I have a message from your mamma, and you cannot refuse to hear that."

"No, I suppose not; you may give it me, and if it is what I think, I shall regret your having brought it, for I like you always to be the bearer of pleasant tidings."

"I trust these are pleasant; may I tell you what your mamma wished me to ask you?"

"Yes, if I must hear it."

"These were her words, 'Ask Lisa yourself if she loves you, and tell her if she does that she has my consent to your marriage with her.'"

The girl turned pale and red alternately at Enrico's words, and then said, with eager joy in her voice, "Are you the one mamma wishes me to marry?"

"I am, my Lisa."

"And are you the one who has loved me so long?"

"I am. I have loved you ever since the night I rescued you from danger, for on that night I first saw you praying in the church, and my heart went to you and has remained with you ever since."

"Can it be possible that you love me? Oh! I did not dare to think of such happiness."

"And you, my darling, do you love me?"

"Come with me to mamma and I will answer you."

Taking Enrico's hand she led him to the spot where the Duchess was sitting, and putting her arm gently around her mother's neck she pressed her face close to hers and whispered: "Mamma, I am willing to obey you; I will marry the husband you have selected for me."

And so Enrico had his reward.

In an obscure street in Florence stands an old palace that travellers seldom visit; some years ago it belonged to the D—— family, but now it has passed into other hands. Among the few choice works of art that adorn its sombre gallery is an exquisite statue of Hebe. On the base is the single name,

Hugo,"

and on the reverse a line from Dante,

"Della bella persona, che mi fu tolta."

Who was Hugo?

THE END.

WARD.

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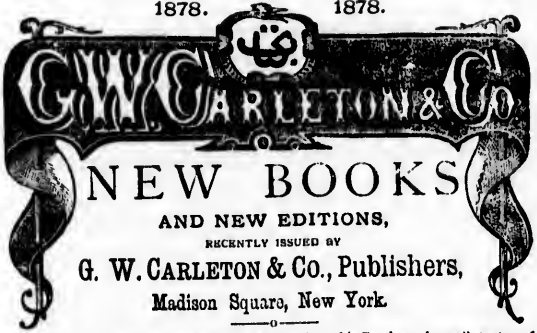
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Dante,

che mi fu tolta."

D.

1878. 1878.



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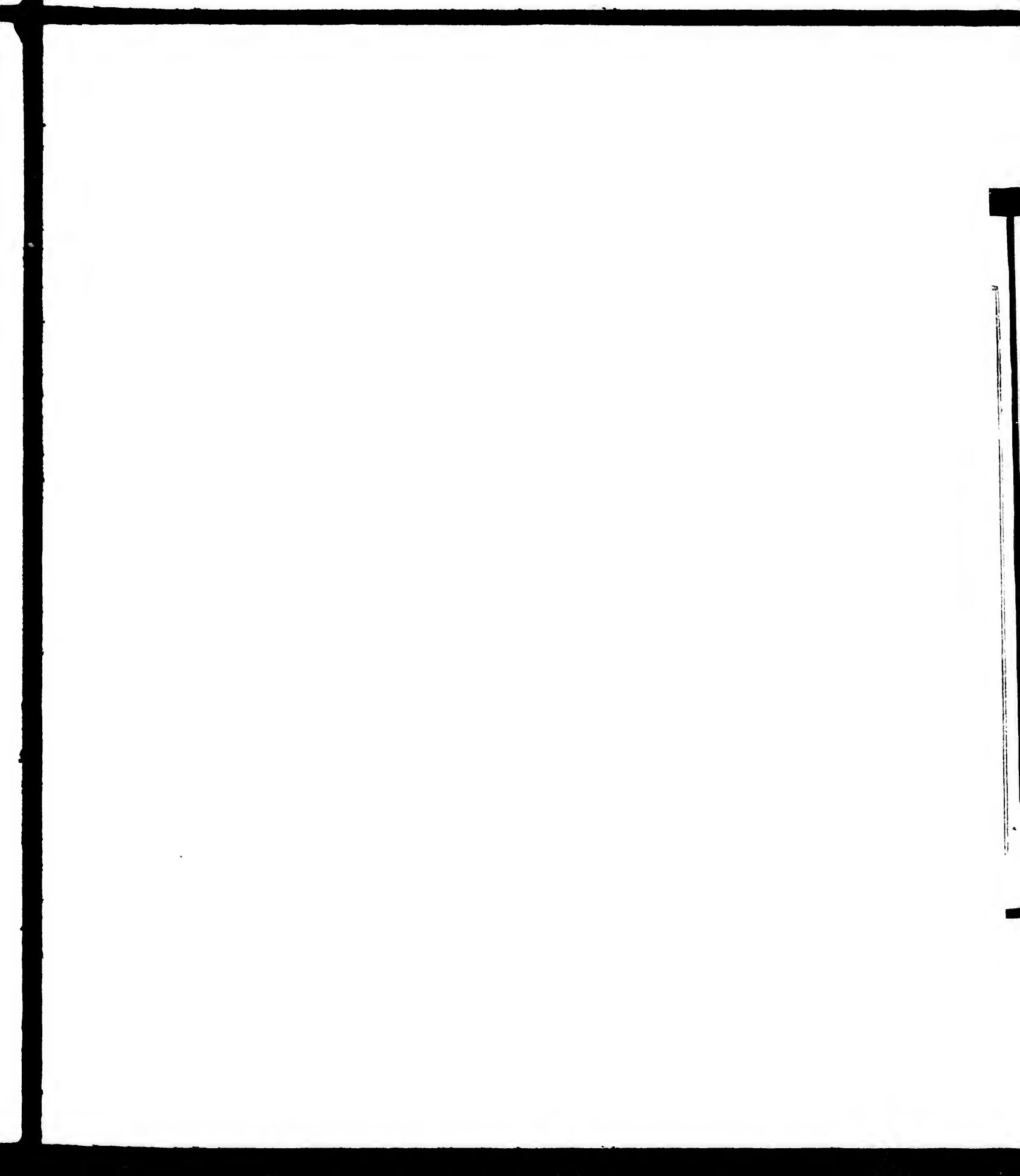
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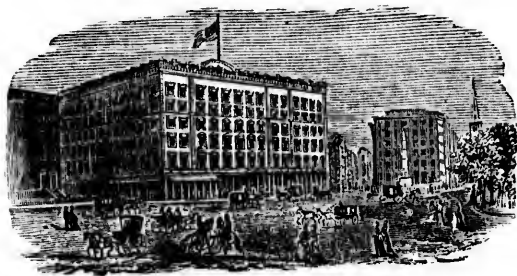
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Hon. Stephen H. Rhodes, Commissioner for Massachusetts, says:
"The United States Life is SOUND TO THE CORE and in a very
credible and flourishing condition. No life company in this coun-
try has ever been subjected to a more thorough and severe scrutiny.
Its books, accounts, and collaterals, its policy liabilities and agency
accounts, were gone into with a minute detail which left no room for
the slightest concealment or misapprehension. Its mortgages were
actually appraised, and notwithstanding the decline in the value
of real estate, were found to afford the most abundant security,
giving evidence of remarkable discernment and soundness of judg-
ment in selection from this class of securities. As the company is
perfectly sound, and can afford to challenge criticism, the effect of
the very thorough examination we have made will only be to increase
its popularity, and confirm the confidence now reposed in its man-
agement. The movement will only serve to advertise the company
and draw public attention to its solid condition."

Hon. Wm. Smyth, Insurance Superintendent of New York, states:
"The people may rely upon my report as a faithful and complete
statement of the truth. A fortnight was spent in the examination,
but the facilities afforded by the excellent system of the company
enabled the examiners to prosecute their labors with rapidity.
Everything was at hand, and nothing omitted or slighted. The
commissioners went into the most minute details, and every
particular was verified. The assets were rather under than
overestimated. Their investments are in the most compact form,
and unexceptionally good. All their mortgages were appraised,
and I was agreeably surprised to find that these securities had
suffered no depreciation in value. A masterly judgment seems
to have presided over these investments. I feel that I have
reason to congratulate the life insurance interest on the strictness
of the investigation, because it has demonstrated the integrity and
solid strength of this sterling old life corporation."

Office, Middle Dep't, Drexel Building, cor. Wall & Broad Sts. H. W. BALDWIN, Supt.

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THE INSURANCE CO.

NEW YORK.
263 Broadway, N. Y.

Surplus, \$800,000.00.

DEPARTMENT POLICIES ISSUED.

Claims due in 1878 will be
on presentation.

L. Pres't. T. H. BROSINAN, Sup't.

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INSURANCE COMMISSIONERS.

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26 Broad Sts. H. W. BALDWIN, Supl.

