The Evil Eye

Theophile Gautier

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CHAPTER I THE TRAVELER

The good ship *Leopold*, the large steamer which plies between Marseilles and Naples, had just doubled Cape Procida. The passengers were all on deck, suddenly cured of their sea−sickness by the sight of land, a more efficacious remedy than Malta pills and other recipes prescribed by physicians for this purpose.

A group of Englishmen were assembled on the upper deck, reserved for first−class passengers. They were all close−shaven, their cravats were tied with religious care, and their high, straight collars were as stiff as bristol−board; their hands were encased in Suede gloves; and the varnish on their boots shone brightly in the sun. This group was composed of lords, members of the House of Commons, great merchants, Regent Street tailors, and Sheffield cutlers—all very serious, very dignified, and unspeakably bored. There were women in profusion, too, as Englishwomen are not as sedentary as the females of other countries, and rarely miss an opportunity to get away from their little island. These charming persons murmured the sacramental phrase: *"Vedi Napolie poi mori,"* with the most delicious English accent, while they consulted their tourist guides or made notes of their impressions in their little memorandum−books, without paying the least attention to the tender glances cast upon them, *a la* don Juan, by a number of conceited Parisians who hovered about this bevy of loveliness, while the indignant mammas read long lectures to these fair misses on the impropriety of the French.

Three or four young men puffed away at their cigars as they walked up and down the quarter−deck, and eagerly noted the ever−changing panorama which was passing before their enchanted eyes. It was evident that these young men were artists, judging by their straw hats, their sack coats ornamented with huge horn buttons, and their wide duck trousers, without taking into consideration the fact that they wore their moustaches *a la* Van Dyck, and their hair either curled *& la* Rubens or cut straight *a la* Paul Veronese.

The third−class passengers were grouped in the bow of the steamer, leaning against the rigging or seated on coils of rope, munching away contentedly at the remnants of their provisions, and totally oblivious of the magnificence

of their surroundings.

It was a glorious day; the blue waves came in gentle ripples, having barely the strength to obliterate the foaming wake of the vessel; the vapor from the smoke−stack, which formed in clouds in the beautiful sky, gradually dissolved in snowy flakes, while the paddle−wheels, revolving in a shower of liquid gold, joyfully churned the waters as if conscious" of the proximity of a port.

The long line of hills extending from Pausilippi to Vesuvius which forms the wonderful gulf in which Naples lies like a nymph reposing on the banks of a stream after a bath, began to unfold itself in the distance in purple undulations, and stood out in bold relief against the azure sky; several little white specks on the dark background denoted the presence of villas, scattered here and there over the country. The sails of the fishing−smacks as they entered the harbor glided over the blue waters like the feathers of a swan scattered by the breeze, proving the activity of man even in the midst of the majestic solitude of the ocean.

A few more turns of the paddle−wheels and the ship comes in sight of the Chateau of Saint Elme and the Convent of St. Martin, which stand out prominently on the summit of the mountain at whose base Naples is situated, rising far above the church steeples, the house−tops, the terraces of the hotels, and the *facades* of the palaces. Before long the Chateau d'CEuf, crouching on its foam−washed reef, seemed to be advancing to meet the steamer, and the jetty, with its revolving light, stretched itself out like an arm holding a torch.

At the extremity of the bay, Vesuvius now changed the bluish tints which distance had lent it, for a more vigorous color; her sides were furrowed with ravines and streaks of congealed lava, and from her summit, pierced with little holes like a pepper−box, small jets of white smoke ascended every now and then.

Chiatamone, Pizzo−Falcone, the wharf of Santa Lucia, lined with hotels, the Palazzo−Real, with its myriads of balconies, the Palazzo−Nuovo, and the Arsenal were now in view, while the ships of all nations intermingled their masts and spars like a forest of leafless trees.

At this moment a passenger, who had not stirred out of his cabin during the entire trip, made his first appearance on deck. Whether he kept to himself on account of sea−sickness, or whether it was because he did not care to mingle with the other passengers, is not known; moreover, this spectacle, novel to the others, had lost all charms to him, as he had seen all these interesting points time and again.

He was between twenty−six and twenty−eight years old, at least a stranger would have formed such an opinion at first sight. His hair was of that peculiar dark brown which the English style auburn. In the sun it shone like a dull copper, while in the dark it was almost black; he had a forehead which would have delighted a phrenologist, an aquiline nose of noble curve, well−shaped lips, and a round and symmetrical chin; and yet all these features, regular though they were, did not form a pleasing *ensemble*. They lacked that mysterious harmony which softens the outlines and moulds them to perfection. There is a certain legend which tells of an Italian painter, who, wishing to represent the archangel, composed a mask of incongruous beauty, and in this manner gave his portrait a certain terrible expression without resorting to horns, inverted eyebrows and a contracted mouth. The stranger's countenance produced just such an effect. His eyes, especially, were extraordinary; his black eyelashes contrasted strangely with the peculiar pale gray of the pupils and with his dark brown hair; then, the thinness of the bones in his nose made them appear closer together than the principles of drawing permit them to be, and their expression was really indefinable. When they were not resting on something, a peculiar melancholy and languid look was depicted in the gleaming orbs; if they fixed themselves on any one, the eyebrows immediately contracted and frowned until they formed a perpendicular wrinkle in his forehead; from a pale gray, the pupils would turn green, tinged with little black spots, and streaked with yellow; the glance they emitted was sharp, almost painful; then, suddenly, everything acquired its former placidity, and this person of mephisto−phelic appearance once more assumed the bearing of a young man of the world, a member of the Jockey Club, who is about to spend the season in Naples, and is thoroughly contented to tread on a pavement of lava in preference to the unsteady deck of *The*

Leopold.

His attire was elegant, though not conspicuous: a frock−coat of dark blue, a polka−dotted tie carefully knotted, a waistcoat of the same pattern as the tie, light gray trousers, and a pair of fine patent−leather shoes completed his toilette; his watch−chain was of plain gold, and his eye−glasses dangled from a neat silk ribbon; his well−gloved hand twirled a hickory walking−stick, ornamented with a silver knob on which a coat−of−arms, was engraved.

He took a few steps on the deck, then, leaning over the taffrail, he permitted his eyes to wander toward the pier on which carriages were stationed and where a crowd of idlers had assembled looking anxiously forward to the arrival of the steamer.

A flotilla of small boats had already set out from the pier to storm *The Leopold*, loaded with hotel runners, servants seeking employment, facchini and other rascals of an assorted type who had long since learned to look upon strangers as their natural prey; each, rower was doing his utmost to reach the steamer first, and the oarsmen exchanged vile epithets and coarse oaths, calculated to frighten those not acquainted with the habits of the lower class of Neapolitans.

The young man with the auburn hair, in order to see better had placed his eyeglasses on his nose; but his attention, attracted by the concert of yells and shrieks which arose from the flotilla, concentrated itself on the boats; no doubt the noise annoyed him, for his brows contracted, the wrinkle in his forehead grew deeper, and the pupils of his eyes turned from gray to a greenish yellow.

Suddenly a huge, foam−crested wave, rolling in from the open sea, raised the steamer high in the air and rushed on towards the pier, where it dashed itself in its mad fury against the promenaders, who were completely taken by surprise with this unexpected shower−bath; then, rolling backward, it brought a number of the small boats into violent contact, upsetting three or four facchini, who fell headlong into the water. The accident was not serious, as these rascals all swim like fish, and a moment later they reappeared on the surface, their hair matted closely together, and spitting out the salt water by the mouthful. They seemed to be as surprised at this sudden immersion as was Telemachus, the son of Ulysses, when Minerva, in the guise of the wise Mentor, threw him headlong from the summit of a high cliff into the sea to tear him away from the love of Eucharis.

Behind this strange tourist, standing at a respectful distance, alongside a pile of luggage, was a little groom, a species of dried−up−old−man−of−fifteen, a veritable gnome in livery, resembling one of those dwarfs whom Chinese ingenuity alone can produce; his face was as flat as a board, and his nose was scarcely perceptible, looking as if it had been compressed in childhood, while his eyes had that docile expression which certain naturalists claim exists in the toad. No protuberance rounded his shoulders or bulged out his chest; and yet he gave one the impression that he was a hunchback, although it would have been a hard matter to find the hump. In a word, he was a model groom, and he might have presented himself at the Ascot races and at the spring meeting at Chantilly without fear of being too closely scrutinized; any gentleman rider would have accepted his services, notwithstanding his repulsive appearance. He was unattractive, but irreproachable in his way, like his master.

At last the steamer ran up alongside the pier and the passengers went ashore; the porters, after an exchange of gross insults, divided the passengers and the luggage between them, and took the road! to the different hotels with which Naples is plentifully supplied.

The traveller with the auburn hair and his groom started for the Hotel de Rome, followed by a phalanx of robust facchini who pretended to perspire and totter beneath the weight of a hat−box or a light parcel, in the hope of receiving an extra large *pourboire,* while four or five of their comrades brought all of their muscles into play as they pushed a wheelbarrow before them containing two ordinary−sized trunks.

When they reached the hotel and the *padron di casa* had designated his apartment to the new arrival, the porters, notwithstanding the fact that they had been paid thrice the value for their services, began to gesticulate wildly and cry out in a half−supplicating, half−threatening manner for a tip. They all talked together and swore by all the saints on the calendar that they had not been sufficiently rewarded for their labor. Paddy, who remained alone to listen to their recriminations—for his master, unheeding the demands and entreaties of the facchini, had already ascended the grand staircase—looked for all the world like a monkey surrounded by a pack of dogs. He attempted to quiet the porters by a bit of a harangue in his own tongue, but, as the English language failed to produce the desired effect, he clinched his fist and, assuming the attitude of a boxer, to the great amusement of the facchini, he suddenly let fly his right in a manner worthy of a Tom Cribbs or a Sawyer, and caught the gigantic leader of the gang full in the pit of the stomach, sending him to mother earth in the most approved fashion.

This exploit routed the rest of the band; the colossus pulled himself together with an effort and rose to his feet, considerably the worse for wear, and skulked away, without even vowing vengeance, rubbing his stomach and thoroughly satisfied that a veritable demon was concealed in the person of that little dog−faced groom whom he had thought he could have knocked over with a whiff of his breath.

The stranger, having sent for the landlord, inquired whether a letter addressed to M. Paul d'Aspremont had not been left at the office for him. The proprietor replied that a letter bearing this name had been awaiting his arrival for over a week, and hastened to bring it up.

The letter, enclosed in a heavy envelope, cream−lead in color, sealed with a bit of blue wax, was written in that peculiar and elegant style of handwriting which denotes the possessor of an excellent education, and which is used to a great extent among the young ladies of the English nobility.

The note, which M. d'Aspremont opened with a haste not prompted by curiosity alone, ran as follows:

"My Dear Monsieur d'Aspremont: −−We have been stopping in Naples for the past two months. During the voyage, which was made in short stages, my uncle complained bitterly of the heat, the mosquitoes, the wine, the butter and the beds; he declared that one must be really crazy to abandon a comfortable cottage, within a few miles of London, to travel over dusty roads on which only second−class taverns are to be found, taverns in which an honest English dog would be ashamed to pass a single night; but, in spite of his grumbling, he accompanied me here−−just as he would have followed me to the end of the world; he is none the worse for the trip and my health has greatly improved. We have taken up our quarters in a little whitewashed villa near the sea, in a sort of a virgin forest composed of citron and orange trees, myrtle, laurel and rose

bushes .and other exotic plants. From the summit of the bluff we have a delightful view of the surrounding country, and you will find a cup of tea or an iced lemonade awaiting you any evening you may call. My uncle, whom you have fascinated, I know not how, will be delighted to press your hand. Is it necessary for me to add that your devoted servant would not be sorry to do likewise, although you hurt her fingers with your ring when you bid her adieu on the jetty at Folkestone.

"Alicia W."

CHAPTER II A LOOK OF CURIOSITY

Paul d'Aspremont, after dining in his room, ordered a carriage. As there are always a number stationed near the hotels awaiting the call of tourists, Paul's wish was instantly gratified. The hack horses of Naples are so thin, that, if they were placed alongside the famous Parisian *rosse* the latter would be accused of *embonpoint;* their emaciated heads, their ribs looking for all the world like so many barrel staves, their projecting backbones which are always flayed and bleeding, seem to implore the butcher to use his knife to put an end to their torture, for it is

regarded as a crime by the Southern Jehu to feed his horses; the harness is considerably the worse for wear and is frequently pieced together with bits of rope, and when the driver gathers up his reins and cracks his whip one would really suppose that the horses would faint and the carriage disappear in smoke, like Cinderella's turnout when she returned from the ball after midnight, against the command of the good fairy. But such is not the case; the nags brace up on their legs, and, after a moment's hesitation, take up a gallop which they never relinquish: the coachman somehow or other imbues them with fresh energy, and he knows how to draw out by a vigorous application of his whip the last spark of life contained in their old carcasses. We will not attempt to explain how it is that these maimed brutes can equal in speed the fastest English trotters, for the feat is beyond our comprehension. But this miracle is of daily occurrence in Naples, and no one seems surprised by the fact.

M. Paul d'Aspremont's carriage dashed through the compact crowd, grazing the acquaiuloi, citron venders' stands, the open−air macaroni shops, and the bazaars in which citruls and other sea−fruits are for sale. The lazzaroni, enveloped in their long, hooded cloaks, dozed on the sidewalk heedless of the passing vehicles'. From time to time a carricolo, with its huge red wheels, would dash by, the box−seats occupied by a mass of monks, nurses, facchini and other rascals. The carricoli are almost obsolete at present, and it is against the law to build new ones, but one can put a new box on the old wheels or new wheels on an old box, and in this ingenious manner manage to keep these curious vehicles before the public.

Our traveller paid but little attention to this picturesque and ever−changing panorama, which certainly would have gladdened the heart of any other tourist, unless he, too, was so fortunate as to find a letter signed "Alicia W.," awaiting his arrival at the Hotel de Rome.

But M. d'Aspremont had no eye for all this. He glanced carelessly at the limpid sea with its myriads of islands−−even Capri, Ischia, Nisida and Procida failed to arouse his enthusiasm. His eyes were seeking that little white house, surrounded with shrubbery, in the environs of Sorrento, of which Alicia spoke in her letter. At this moment, M. d'Aspremont's countenance had nothing of that disagreeable expression which characterized it when he was displeased; it was really handsome and sympathetic. It was easy to understand that this person of distinction could not fail to please a young English miss, brought up by an indulgent old uncle.

As the driver urged his horses to do their utmost, it did not take long to pass Chiaja and Marinella, and the carriage soon entered the road which is now monopolized by the steam−cars. A thick, black dust, not unlike ground charcoal, gave an almost plutonic aspect to this part of the beach, which is washed by the blue waters of the gulf; it is the soot of Vesuvius, sifted by the wind, which gives this dusky appearance to the sand and causes the houses of Portici and Torre del Greco to resemble the factories of Birmingham. M. d'Aspremont heeded not the contrast between the ebony−hued beach and the sapphire−colored sky−−he was in a hurry to arrive at his destination. The most beautiful roads are tediously long when Miss Alicia is awaiting your coming, six months after saying good−bye on the jetty at Folkstone: the sky and the sea of Naples have lost their charm−−what are sky and sea to a man of the world, especially when the woman he loves awaits him at the end of the road.

Finally, the carriage enters the private road which leads to the little white house on the hill. A sunburnt servant, with closely matted hair, hurried to open the gate at the approach of the carriage, and, preceding M. d'Aspremont in. a path bordered on either side with laurel−rose bushes, conducted him to the terrace where Miss Alicia Ward and her uncle were sipping their afternoon tea.

Through mere caprice, a fault pardonable in a young girl who is *blase* of all the comforts and attractions of city life −−and possibly also to tease her uncle−− Miss Alicia had selected this villa in preference to any of the more modern dwellings offered for rent. Its owners were travelling and it had been unoccupied for several years. She found a sort of poetic wildness in this deserted garden, which had almost reverted to its original state, and which, owing to the warm climate, was entirely overrun with orange trees, myrtle, geraniums, and citrons. It was not like in the North, where a deserted house is the most dreary object imaginable, but the wild gaiety of the South left to herself; in the absence of the master, the exuberant vegetation was having a veritable debauch of leaves, flowers,

fruits and perfume.

When the Commodore−−it was thus that Alicia called her uncle−−first saw this impenetrable thicket through which it was impossible to effect a passage without a liberal application of the axe, as in the virgin forests of Central America, he raised his hands to Heaven in horror and declared that his niece had lost her senses. But Alicia promised to have an entrance made from the gate of the salon, and another passage, large enough to permit of the entrance of a barrel of malmsey wine, from the salon to the terrace−−but this was the only concession she would accord to her uncle. The Commodore, unable to resist the persuasions of his lovely niece, resigned himself to his fate, and at this moment he was seated opposite her on the terrace, contentedly sipping a big tumbler of rum, which the servants, in their innocence, mistook for English breakfast tea.

As M. d'Aspremont made his appearance on the terrace, Alicia sprang to her feet with a little cry of joyful surprise and ran up to meet him. Paul shook her warmly by the hand, but the young girl suddenly raised the imprisoned hand to the height of her friend's lips with a little movement which was full of playful coquetry.

After a desperate effort, the Commodore finally managed to raise himself on his gouty legs, but it was amusing to behold the expression of joy mingled with pain which spread o'er his countenance as he attempted to walk. However, the old sailor was not to be daunted.

Gritting his teeth, he stepped boldly forward, and approaching the young people, stretched forth his hand to Paul as he gave him a hearty welcome.

Miss Alicia Ward was one of those charming women in whom the commingling of the dark and blonde types produces an ideal beauty; her full lips were red as cherries, while her shining hair was dark as a raven's wing, in direct contrast with her complexion, which challenged comparison with that "whiteness of the lily, and clearness of alabaster" in which a poet delights when singing the praises of the mistress of his heart. The effect of this is irresistible, and produces a peculiar style of beauty not to be found elsewhere.

Perhaps the harems of the East contain fair Circassians of a like complexion, if we can believe the flowery extravagance of Eastern poets, or the aquarelles of Lewis, representing scenes in the seraglio.

Alicia was certainly a perfect type of this class of beauty. Her oval face, pure complexion, delicate nose and transparent nostrils, her deep blue eyes fringed with long, dark lashes which hovered on her cheeks like black butterflies when she lowered her eyes; her hair falling in brilliant masses like satin ribbons down her swan−like neck, and clinging about her face, proved the possibility of Maclise's romantic figures which are usually held to be but dreams.

She wore a dress of grenadine, embroidered with red palm−leaves, which accorded well with the strings of coral which were woven in her hair and encircled her throat and arms; from her delicate shell−like ears hung pendants formed of numerous small pieces of coral deftly strung together. If the reader blame this abuse of coral, remember that we are in Naples, where the fishermen go down to the bottom of the sea only to find these wonderful branches which blush like a maiden when exposed to the sunlight.

After the portrait of Miss Alicia Ward, we feel obliged to give, by way of contrast, a caricature, d *la* Hogarth, of her uncle, the Commodore. He was about sixty years old, and his face was a dark purple, contrasting strongly with his white eyebrows and mutton−chop whiskers, which were sharply defined, and gave him the appearance of an old Indian who had decorated his face with white paint. The warm Italian sun had still further deepened this violet color, and the Commodore made one think involuntarily of a large burnt almond packed in cotton. He was dressed from top to toe in a suit of grayish−brown tweed, with gaiters to match, which his tailor had assured him, on his word of honor, was the latest and most fashionable color, which probably was true. Notwithstanding his inflamed complexion and grotesque costume, the Commodore looked above the common herd. His scrupulous neatness,

noble bearing and courtly manners bespoke the perfect gentleman, although he certainly looked like one of the caricatures in Hoffman's or Levasser's comedies. His only occupation was to adore his niece and to drink an enormous quantity of Jamaica rum, to preserve the radical humidity, after the style of Corporal Trim.

"See how well I am looking and how pretty I am! Look at my rosy color−− I am not as red as uncle, it is true, but then I never touch Jamaica rum or old London Dock−−and yet my cheeks are red, most decidedly red," exclaimed Alicia, as she tapped her face with her tapering, well−shaped finger: "I have grown stout, too, and there are no longer any of those horrid circles under my eyes like there used to be when I wanted to look my prettiest at a ball. I say, Paul, I must be indeed a great coquette to deprive myself of the company of my *fiance* during three long months, so that he will find me looking all the fresher and prettier after the separation!"

And, as she gave vent to this little outburst of feeling, Alicia stood up on her tip−toes as if to provoke Paul and defy his examination.

"Isn't she as strong and hearty as those Procida girls who carry Grecian amphoras on their heads?" interrupted the Commodore.

"Pardon me, Commodore," answered Paul; "Miss Alicia has not grown prettier, that would be impossible; but' she is in decidedly better health than when she imposed this cruel separation upon me out of mere caprice−−or coquetry, as she pretends."

And he turned his eyes full upon the young girl who stood before him.

Suddenly, the rosy hue, of which but a moment before she seemed so proud, disappeared from Alicia's cheeks, and she carried her hand to her heart with a movement of pain.

Paul, thoroughly alarmed, rose to his feet; the Commodore did likewise. The bright color suddenly reappeared in Alicia's cheeks as she smilingly remarked :

"I promised you a cup of tea or a sorbet, and, although English, I recommend the sorbet. The snow is preferable to hot water in this clime, where the African sirocco visits us almost daily."

They seated themselves around the little stone table; the sun had sunk beneath the horizon, and the soft twilight of the Neapolitan night succeeded the glaring light of day. The rising moon gave a silvery tint to the surrounding foliage; the sea broke upon the pebbly beach with a gentle murmur, and in the distance the beating of drums could be plainly heard as the guards were relieved for the night.

At last they were obliged to part; Nice, the fawn−colored servant with the matted hair, conducted Paul to the gate, lighting the way with a torch. While she was serving the tea and the sorbets she had fastened a look of curiosity, mingled with fear, on the new arrival. No doubt the result of her examination was unfavorable to Paul, for Nice's brow, yellow as a cigar already, gathered itself up into innumerable wrinkles, and, as she accompanied the stranger, she secretly pointed her little finger at him, and crossed her three other fingers over her thumb, as if to form some cabalistic sign.

CHAPTER III PAUL'S DEPARTURE

Paul returned to the Hotel de Rome by the same road; the beauty of the night was incomparable; the moon reflected her silver rays on the waves, which, as they broke gently upon the beach, seemed to burst into myriads of glittering sparks. The fishing−smacks, carrying a lighted torch in the prow, skimmed over the surface of the sea, leaving a silvery trail in their wake; the smoke of Vesuvius, white in the daylight, was now a glistening column of fire which reflected strangely on the waters of the gulf.

A few strolling lazzaroni were reclining on the sands, deeply moved without knowing it at this magical spectacle, as they gazed long and earnestly into the limpid waters of the bay. Others, seated on the deck of a bark at anchor, were either singing an air from *Lucia* or the romanza so popular at the time: *"Ti voglio ben' assai,"* in a voice of which many a tenor might well be envious. Naples; like all other Southern cities, retires late; however, the lights in the windows gradually disappeared, one by one, but the lottery offices, with their garlands of paper flowers and their favorite numbers gaily illuminated, were still open in the hope that the few passers−by would come in and put a few carlins or a couple of ducats on some pet number on their way home.

Paul went right to bed, and, drawing the mosquito netting tightly about him, was soon fast asleep. Like most travellers after a sea voyage, his couch, although perfectly stationary, appeared to roll and plunge as if the Hotel de Rome had been the *Leopold.* Under this impression he dreamed that he was still at sea, and he saw Alicia standing on the jetty, pale as death, alongside of her red−faced uncle, who was making desperate signs for him not to come ashore; the young girl's face expressed profound grief, and in motioning him away she seemed to obey a mysterious impulse in spite of herself.

Paul now awoke with a start; this dream strangely affected him, and he was ashamed to find that he was in the hotel instead of at sea, with the *veilleuse* burning brightly alongside the bed and attracting all the mosquitoes in the room. In order not to fall back into this painful slumber, Paul struggled against the feeling of drowsiness which almost overpowered him, and began to recall his courtship of Alicia.

In his fancy he once more beheld the red−brick house, covered with vines of honeysuckle and lilac, which Alicia and her uncle inhabited in Richmond, when he met them on the occasion of his first trip to England, having presented one of those letters of introduction which invariably result in an invitation to dinner. He remembered the white India muslin dress, ornamented with a simple ribbon which Alicia, just home from boarding−school, wore that day, and the branch of jasmine which entwined itself in her coal−black hair like a flower in

Ophelia's crown; her beautiful blue eyes and partly opened lips, exposing a row of enamelled teeth. He recalled to mind the deep blush which rose to her cheeks when the young French gentleman's eyes met hers.

The parlor, draped in sombre green and decorated with engravings of foxhunts and steeple−chases, was reproduced in his mind as in a *camera obscura*. The piano stretched forth its row of keys like the teeth in the jaw of an alligator; the mantelpiece, decorated with a sprig of Irish shamrock, and its highly polished grate; the old oak armchairs, the carpet strewn with roses, and Miss Alicia, trembling like a leaf, singing the romanza from *Anna Bolena, "deh, non voler costringere,"* most delightfully out of tune, while Paul accompanied her on the piano, and the Commodore, overcome with an attack of indigestion and, if possible, more crimson than usual, dropped the colossal supplement of the London *Times* as he fell into a quiet doze.

Then the scene changed. Paul, now , on most intimate terms, had been invited by the Commodore to visit him at his country home in Lincolnshire−−an old, feudal castle, with crenellated turrets and ivy−colored Gothic windows, but furnished in the most approved modern style. It rose at the end of a large, well−kept lawn, surrounded by a gravel path serving as a riding school for Miss Alicia, who rode one of those little Shetland ponies with flowing mane, which Sir Edwin Landseer loves to paint. Paul, mounted on a gray hunter kindly loaned him by the Commodore, accompanied Miss Ward on her daily rides, as the doctor, finding her somewhat broken down in health, had recommended plenty of exercise.

Again, a little canoe was gliding along the lake, displacing the water−lilies, and making the kingfishers beat a hasty retreat. Alicia rowed while Paul held the tiller ropes. How beautiful she looked in her straw hat, the golden halo of the noonday sun surrounding her pretty head!

The Commodore remained on shore, not on account of his dignity, but owing to his weight, which would have caused the little boat to founder; he awaited the arrival of his niece on the embankment, and threw a wrap over her

shoulders, with almost motherly care, for fear she would take cold; then, after hauling the boat up high and dry, they would return to the cottage for luncheon. Alicia, who at other times ate no more than a bird, now thoroughly enjoyed a slice of York ham, cut thin as a wafer, while she munched away at her hot biscuits without ever giving a crumb to the gold−fishes which disported themselves in a huge globe suspended by a chain from the ceiling.

But those happy days could not last forever. Paul postponed his departure by several weeks, and already signs of fall were beginning to make their appearance.

Alicia grew pale under the anxious eye of her lover, and the only color she retained were two bright spots near the temples. She was subject to chills, and the biggest fire was not sufficient to warm her. The doctor finally decided, as a last resource, that Miss Ward should pass the winter at Pisa and the spring in Naples.

Important family affairs recalled Paul to France; Alicia and the Commodore were ready to start for Italy, and the separation took place at Folkestone. Not a word on the subject had been spoken, but Miss Ward looked upon Paul as her betrothed, and the Commodore had pressed the young man's hands significantly; one only squeezes the hand of a son−in−law in so forcible a manner.

After an absence of six months, Paul was overjoyed to find Alicia looking strong and healthy. The young girl was now a young woman, and he reasoned that the Commodore could not offer any objection when he asked for the hand of his niece in marriage.

Rocked to sleep with these pleasant thoughts he dropped off into a gentle slumber, from which he was aroused only at daybreak. Naples had already begun her noisy clatter: the venders of iced−water were crying out their wares for sale; the cooks offered the passers−by tempting morsels of roast beef for a mere song, while the lazy housewives were lowering down their baskets by the aid of a string, which they hauled up a moment later filled with tomatoes, fish, and large pieces of pumpkin. The notaries, dressed in seedy black, seated themselves at their stands as they placed their pen behind their ears; the money changers displayed little piles of gold and silver on their tables; while the coachmen galloped their living bone−yards, soliciting an early patronage as the bells in all the steeples merrily chimed out the *Angelas.*

Our traveller, enveloped in his dressing−gown, leaned out of the window; from where he could plainly see Santa−Lucia and the fortress of CEuf, while an immense stretch of sea, reaching from Vesuvius to the huge promontory of Castellamare and the villas of Sorrento, unrolled itself before his eyes.

The sky was clear, but a white cloud was rapidly approaching the city, impelled by a gentle breeze. As Paul fixed his eyes upon this cloud, that peculiar expression came over his face, and his eyebrows contracted as the frown grew more pronounced. Other vapors joined this single cloud, and soon a heavy curtain hung over the Chateau of Saint Elmo. Large drops began to fall on the lava pavement, and soon one of those terrific rain storms for which Naples is noted burst upon the city, carrying dogs and even, donkeys into the sewers before it. The crowd, taken by surprise, dispersed, seeking shelter wherever they could find it; the open−air stores shut up shop in no time, and the rain, now mistress of the situation, swept across the quay of Santa Lucia from end to end.

The gigantic facchino to whom Paddy had applied such a vigorous thrashing was leaning against the column of a building, directly opposite the window at which Paul d'Aspremont was standing.

As he caught sight of the face at the window the Neapolitan muttered in an irritated tone:

"The captain of the *Leopold* would have done well to throw that *unbeliever* overboard," and, passing his hand under his coarse linen blouse, he touched a bunch of amulets which was suspended around his neck.

CHAPTER IV AN ELEGANT NEAPOLITAN

The sun soon shone forth brightly, and it was not long before the streets were dry and filled with people. But

Timberio, the porter, nevertheless retained the opinion he had formed regarding the young Frenchman, and he prudently withdrew out of range of the window: some of the other lazzaroni evinced their surprise that he should abandon such an excellent station.

"Whoever wants the place is welcome to it," he replied, as he shook his head in a mysterious manner. "I know what I am talking about."

Paul breakfasted in his room; whether he was bashful, or whether it was because he disliked to be among strangers, he never took his meals in public. Then he dressed himself and, in awaiting the hour for his call on Miss Ward, he visited the Museum of Studj: in an absent−minded way he admired the precious collection of antique vases, bronzes unearthed among the ruins of Pompeii, the helmet of Grecian brass, all covered with verdigris, in which reposed the head of the soldier who wore it ages ago, the bit of hardened earth retaining, as in a cast, the impression of the figure of a young woman surprised by the eruption in the summer residence of Arrius Diomedes, and the beautiful statue of Aristides, the choicest and possibly the most perfect morsel left us of a forgotten era. But a lover is not an enthusiastic admirer of art; in. his eyes the profile of the adored one is worth more than all the Greek and Roman statues in the world.

After whiling away two or three hours at the Studj, he entered a carriage and directed the driver to proceed at once to the little villa near Sorrento where Miss Ward resided. The driver, with the intelligence which characterizes all Southern people, divined that the gentleman was in a hurry, so whipping up his tired horses he soon drove up to the villa. The same servant opened the gate. She was dressed as before, with the exception that her legs were entirely devoid of covering and that a little bunch of horns and coral charms was suspended around her neck.

Miss Alicia was reclining in an Indian hammock on the terrace, dressed in a light china−silk wrapper. Her feet, which were plainly visible through the netting of the hammock, were encased in a pair of loose sandals, and her bare arms were crossed above her head, in Cleopatra's favorite attitude.

The Commodore, dressed in a suit of white duck, was seated in a bamboo chair, and from time to time he pulled the rope which set the hammock in motion.

A third personage completed the group: it was the Comte d'Altavilla, a young and elegant Neapolitan, whose presence brought to Paul's face that peculiar contraction of the features which gave it such a diabolical expression.

In fact, the Comte was .one of those men one does not care to see beside his lady−love. He "was unusually tall, although splendidly proportioned; his hair was as black as jet, and was arranged in graceful curls around the temples; a spark of Southern fire scintillated in his eyes; and his large, white teeth appeared still whiter owing to his red lips and the dark olive color of his complexion. The only fault a critic could possibly have brought to bear against the Comte was that he was too handsome.

As to his clothes d'Altavilla had them all imported from London, and the most pronounced dandy would have approved of his attire. There was nothing at all Italian in his dress with the exception of his shirt−studs, which were of great value. Here the love of all sons of the South for jewelry betrayed itself. He also wore a little bunch of coral charms on his watch−chain, but a tour of inspection among the promenaders in the Rue de Tolede or at the Villa Reale would have sufficed to convince the most incredulous that there was nothing at all eccentric about him.

As Paul d'Aspremont entered, the Comte, at Miss Ward's urgent request, was singing some delightful Neapolitan melodies. Those who have not heard one of these charming romanzas of Gordigianisy as sung by a lazzarone at Chiaja, or a sailor on the jetty, as he returns from his work, have missed the breath of a lifetime. They are composed of a breath of air, of a ray of moonshine, of the perfume of an orange−grove, and of the throbbing of a heart.

Alicia, with her pretty English voice, a trifle out of tune, hummed the air which she wished to remember, as she nodded a welcome to Paul, who was looking at her in anything but a pleasant manner, being annoyed at the presence of this handsome young man.

One of the ropes of the hammock suddenly parted, and Miss Ward slipped to the ground, without injuring herself, however. Six ready hands were simultaneously extended toward her, but the young .girl was already on her feet, blushing furiously, for it is considered *improper* for a woman to fall in the presence of men.

"I can't understand it; I tried every one of those ropes myself," exclaimed the Commodore, "and Miss Ward doesn't weigh any more than a humming bird."

The Comte d'Altavilla shook his head in a mysterious manner: in the breaking of the rope he evidently saw another reason besides weight; but, man of the world as he was, he kept his opinion to himself, while he carelessly toyed with the charms on his watch chain.

Like all men who become surly and disagreeable in the presence of a rival whom they consider worthy of their steel, instead of assuming to be all grace and amiability, Paul d'Aspremont, although well versed in the customs of polite society, did not succeed in concealing his ill−humor; he only replied by monosyllables, permitting the conversation to drag, and whenever he glanced towards d'Altavilla his eyes assumed their peculiar expression; the yellow fibres shot forth beneath the gray transparency of his eyeballs like so many water−snakes in the bottom of a well.

Every time that Paul looked at him thus, the Comte, seemingly by a mechanical movement, plucked a flower from the *jardiniere* and flung it from him so as to ward off the magnetism of the former's angry glance.

"What ails you that you should vent your spite on my *jardiniere?"* exclaimed Miss Ward, as she suddenly noticed the number of plants the Comte had destroyed. "What have my flowers done to you that you should wage war upon them?"

"Oh! it is nothing, Miss Alicia; merely a nervous tic," replied d'Altavilla, as he decapitated a superb rose with his finger−nail and sent it to join the other flowers on the terrace.

"Well, then, you annoy me very much," said Alicia; "and without knowing it, you have upset one of my pet theories. I have never plucked a flower in all my life. Bouquets inspire me with a feeling of horror: to me they are dead flowers, mere cadavers of roses, full of worms and periwinkles, and the odor of which has something positively sepulchral."

"To atone for the murder I have just committed," said the Comte d'Altavilla, bowing politely, "I will send you a hundred baskets of flowers in full bloom."

Paul had risen; he toyed with his hat as if he contemplated taking his departure.

"What! going already?" exclaimed Miss Ward.

"I have some letters to write−−some very important letters."

"Oh! what a story!" remarked the young girl with a pretty pout; "how can you have important letters to write when I am here to listen to what you have to say in person?"

"Why don't you stay, Paul?" put in the Commodore; "I had arranged a little programme for this evening, and I only await the sanction of my niece to put it into execution: in the first place we would go to the fountain of Santa−Lucia, where we would have partaken of a glass of water which, smells of rotten eggs, but which is a great appetizer, nevertheless; then we would have eaten a dozen or two of white and pink oysters, at the fish−market, dined under a vine arbor in some Neapolitan tavern, drunk chianti and lacryma−christi, and wound up the evening with a visit to Seigneur Pulcinella. The Comte would have explained all the jokes and the native dialect."

This proposition evidently did not please M' d'Aspremont, and he retired after bowing coldly.

D'Altavilla remained a few moments longer: and as Miss Ward, vexed at Paul's sudden departure, did not enter into the spirit of the excursion proposed by the .Commodore, he also took his leave.

Two hours later Miss Alicia received a large number of rare plants, but what surprised her most was an enormous pair of Sicilian bull's horns, transparent as amber, and polished like agate, measuring at least three feet, and tipped at the ends with threatening black points. A magnificent gilt bronze shield accompanied the horns, evidently designed to support them.

Vicfe, who had assisted the porters to unpack the flowers and the horns, seemed to understand the motive which prompted the Comte to make such a strange gift.

She placed them on the stone 'table and, as they rested there, one might well have supposed that they had been torn from the front of the divine bull which carried Europa on his mighty head. Then, after a long and silent contemplation, she remarked:

"We are now prepared to defend ourselves at least."

"What do you mean, Vicfe?" questioned Miss Ward.

"Nothing−−but the French signer has very strange eyes!"

CHAPTER V THE FACCHINO

THE hour for dinner had long since passed, and the fires of hot coals, which, during the day, make a miniature Vesuvius in the kitchen of the Hotel de Rome, were slowly dying out; the pots and the pans had resumed their places on their respective nails, and shone in the semi−darkness like so many ancient breast−plates; a copper lamp, not unlike those unearthed at Pompeii, was suspended from the main rafter of the room by a triple chain, its three wicks lighting up the centre of the kitchen, the remainder being plunged in total darkness.

Its dull rays illuminated the countenances of an ill−assorted group−−a group which would have furnished plenty of material for the brushes of an Espagnolet or a Salvator Rosa as it sat there in the semi−darkness around the chopped−up table. In the first place there was the *chef,* Virgilio Falsacappa, a very important personage−−in his own estimation. He was of gigantic stature and formidable *embonpoint;* in fact, he might have passed for one of the guests at Vitellius' banquet, if he had been attired in a Roman toga instead of a white apron. His features were strongly marked and resembled the profile of those curious heads stamped on ancient coins; coarse, black eyebrows, half an inch thick, surmounted a pair of almond−shaped eyes; an enormous nose cast its shadow o'er a tremendous mouth, resembling the jaw of a shark with its double row of large teeth. Bunchy side−whiskers encircled his dark visage, while his glossy, black hair, tinged with a few silver threads, fell in short ringlets on his

colossal and bloated neck. His jaw seemed capable of crunching the bones of an ox, and the silver crescents he wore in his ears were as large as a new moon. This is master Virgilio Falsacappa, who, with his apron tucked under his belt, and his knife plunged in a wooden sheath, resembled an old−time *uictlmarius* far more than a modern *chef.*

Then there was Timberio, the porter, who was in a state of extreme emaciation, thanks to his gymnastic calling and to the frugal diet of a handful of half−cooked macaroni, seasoned with cacio−cavallo, a slice of watermelon and a glass of snow water, which were the only victuals his meagre purse would allow. Had he received proper nourishment there is no doubt he would have equalled in size, if not in *embonpoint,* Virgilio Falsacappa− The only garments he wore were a pair of linen drawers, a long calico waistcoat, and a coarse cloak which was thrown across his shoulders in a careless manner.

Scazziga, the proud owner of the carriage M. Paul d'Aspremont had hired to go to Sorrento, was leaning against the table; he, too, presented a striking appearance: his irregular features wore a cunning expression, and a sarcastic smile was constantly playing about his lips. It was easy to see that he had been thrown in contact with people of more or less distinction, for his every movement was an imitation of the gestures and mannerisms he had noted among his superiors. His clothing, purchased in some second−hand store, consisted of a semi−livery, semi−civilian attire, of which he was very proud, and which, in his opinion, was not to be compared with Timberio's cheap get−up; his conversation was replete with English and French words which at times failed to express the meaning of what he wished to convey, but which raised him high in the estimation of the kitchen maids and the pot−boys, who were surprised at such a wonderful display of knowledge.

Two young servants, whose features recalled that type of beauty so common on Syracusan moneys, were standing a little in the rear−−low forehead, commingling with the brow, rather thick lips, strong and well−defined, chin; the braids of bluish−black hair being fastened into a heavy coil, pierced with coral−mounted pins, while three rows of coral beads encircled their muscular necks. A dandy would have scorned to notice these poor girls whose red Grecian blood was free of all foreign taint, but an artist would have pulled 'out his sketch−book and sharpened his pencil with alacrity.

Have you ever seen that picture by Murillo in Marechal Soult's gallery, representing a group of little cupids as they disport themselves about the kitchen fire? For if you have, it will spare us the trouble of painting the heads of the three or four curly−headed pot−boys who completed the group.

This trio, surrounded by the pot−boys and the scullion maids, were discussing a serious question. They were talking of M. Paul d'Aspremont, the young French traveller, who had arrived by the last steamer. Those in the kitchen considered it their duty to criticize their betters.

Timberio had the floor, and he rested between every sentence to note the effect produced on his audience.

"Now I want you to carefully note what I have to say," began the orator; "the *Leopold* is an honest craft, flying the flag of Tuscany. The only fault to be found against her is that she transports too many English heretics−−"

"The English heretics pay well, however," interrupted Scazziga, who had received many a tip from the British tourists.

"Undoubtedly; but then the best thing a heretic can do is to pay a Christian liberally to compensate him for the disgrace of serving an unbeliever."

"I don't consider it a disgrace at all to drive a heretic in my carriage; I don't make a pack−horse of myself like you, Timberio, any way."

"Was I not baptized just the same as you?" retorted the porter, with an angry scowl as he doubled up his fists.

"Let Timberio have his say!" cried out the others *as,* in one voice, fearing that these personal recriminations would wind up in a scuffle.

"You will agree," continued the orator, thoroughly pacified as he knew popular favor was on his side, "that the weather was superb when the *Leopold* entered port?"

"We admit all that, Timberio," remarked the *chef,* as he waved his hand majestically in token of acquiescence.

"The sea was as smooth as glass," continued the facchino, "and yet an enormous wave suddenly came up and upset Gennaro's bark, spilling the captain and three of his men into the water. Now, I ask you, is this natural? Gennaro is a regular sea−dog; he could dance the tarentella on the crest of a wave without a balancing pole, and yet his bark is upset in a dead calm."

"He may have drunk a flask of asprimo too much," objected Scazziga, the rationalist of the assembly.

"Not even a glass of lemonade," Timberio hastened to reply; "but a gentleman on board the steamer looked at him in a peculiar manner−−do you hear?"

"Oh, perfectly!" replied the chorus, extending their middle and little fingers as if moved by a string.

"And this gentlemen," added Timberio, "was no other but M. Paul d'Aspremont."

"The guest who occupies number 3?" inquired the *chef;* "the one who takes his meals in his room?"

"Precisely," replied the youngest and the prettiest of the servants; "I have never seen such a disagreeable or such a surly traveller before; he would not even give me a look, or say a single word, and yet all the tourists who stop here say I deserve a compliment even if I do not deserve a tip."

"You deserve more than that, Gelsomina, my love," gallantly remarked Timberio; "but it is fortunate indeed that the stranger did not notice you."

"How superstitious you are, to be sure," objected Scazziga, whom constant association with foreigners had made more or less sceptical.

"If you keep on associating with heretics you will wind up by no longer believing in Saint Januarius himself."

"If Gennaro was so clumsy as to fall overboard, that is no reason why M. Paul d'Aspremont should possess the evil influence you attribute to him," continued Scazziga, defending his customer.

"I will give you other proof: this morning I saw him standing near the window, his eye fixed on. a little cloud no larger than Gelsomina's cap, and a moment later a mass of thick vapors gathered over the city and the rain came down so hard that the dogs could drink out of the gutter without stooping."

Scazziga was as doubtful as ever, and he shook his head as if to say that he didn't credit Timberio's idle fears in the least.

"Besides, the valet is not worth any more than the master," continued the latter; "and I am sure the little humpbacked monkey must be in league with the devil to be able to overthrow me−− Timberio−−who could knock him over with the flat of my hand!"

"I share Timberio's opinions," chimed in the *chef* in a patronizing sort of way; "the stranger eats but little; he sent back some −fried chicken and some macaroni I had prepared with my own hands! Some mysterious secret is hidden beneath this abstinence. Why should a rich man deprive himself of the good things of this world in order to partake of a bouillon and a slice of cold meat?"

"He has red hair," said Gelsomina, as she passed her hand through her long curls.

"And projecting eyes," added Pepina, the other servant.

"Very close to his nose," insisted Timberio.

"And the wrinkle which assumes the form of a horse−shoe between his eyeglasses," remarked the formidable Virgilio Falsacappa; "therefore he is a−−"

"Do not pronounce the name, it is unnecessary," they all exclaimed with the exception of Scazziga; "we will be on our guard."

"It makes my blood boil when I think that the police would arrest me if, by accident, I let a three−hundred−pound trunk fall on the head of this unbeliever −−of this forerunner of danger," raved Timberio, bringing his fist down upon the table in his rage.

"Scazziga must be plucky to drive him," now ventured Gelsomina.

"I am on my box, he can only see my back, so his eyes can't fix themselves upon mine in the right angle; Besides, I don't bother my head about all this humbug!"

"You have no faith, Scazziga," said Palforio, the colossal pastry−cook; "you will come to a bad end."

While he was thus being discussed in the kitchen of the Hotel de Rome, Paul, whom the presence of the Comte d'Altavilla at Miss Ward's had put in a bad humor, had gone for a stroll in the Villa Reale; and the wrinkle in his forehead grew larger and his eyes assumed their queer expression more than once as he walked up and down the lava pavement. At one moment he thought he saw Alicia and the Comte driving by in a carriage; he rushed up to the vehicle and peered through the open window, but it was not Alicia−−only a woman who resembled her slightly at a distance. However, the horses, taking fright at Paul's sudden appearance, ran off, almost upsetting the carriage.

Paul took an ice in the Cafe de 1'Europe: a number of persons examined him attentively and then changed their seats, nodding their heads in a knowing manner.

He entered the theatre of Pulcinella, where they were giving a *tutto da ridere.* The principal actor forgot his lines; after a moment's hesitation, however, he went on with his part; 'but in the last act of the pantomime his false nose fell off, and, when he attempted to apologize and explain the cause of his misfortunes his tongue suddenly refused to move, as Paul's eyes fastened themselves upon his and deprived him of the power of speech.

Those who were seated near Paul rose in a body and changed their stalls. M. d'Aspremont rose to go, without having noticed the strange effect his presence had produced; while in the lobby he heard the spectators whisper to one another as he passed by: "A jettatore! A jettatore!"

CHAPTER VI THE EVIL EYE

THE day after he had sent the horns, Comte d'Altavilla called upon Miss Ward. The young girl was− taking afternoon tea in company with her uncle, precisely as if she had been in a redbrick house at Ramsgate, instead of on a plastered terrace in Naples, surrounded by cactus, fig−trees and aloes. It is a characteristic peculiarity of the Saxon race, never to adapt its insular habits to novel surroundings.

The Commodore was in unusual good humor. By means of a chemical apparatus he had succeeded in turning out a cake of ice, and, in this manner, had continued to keep his butter solid. He was buttering a slice of bread with great gusto, preparatory to transforming it into a sandwich.

After the formalities of a first greeting, Alicia, unmindful of the abrupt manner in which it was done, suddenly changed the conversation, and turning towards the young Neapolitan Comte, asked:

"What is the significance of the strange gift which accompanied your flowers? Vicfe, my servant, pretends that it is a talisman against the *fascino;* but this is all the satisfaction she would give me."

"Vicfe is very sensible," replied the Comte Altavilla, bowing politely.

"But what is the *fascino?"* continued the young lady; "I am not very well acquainted with your African superstitions−−for I presume the word designates some popular belief?"

"The *fascino* is the pernicious influence exercised by those who possess−− or rather those who are afflicted−−with the evil eye."

"Pardon me," remarked Miss Ward, "but I really do not understand you; the meaning of *the evil eye* is as mysterious to me as that of *fascino."*

"I will attempt to explain to the best of my ability," replied d'Altavilla; "but, as you are sceptical like all Englishwomen, I presume you will at once jump at the conclusion that I am a savage and that my clothes conceal a skin tattooed in blue and red. I am, however, perfectly civilized; I was educated in Paris, and I speak both French and English; I have read Voltaire; I believe in telegraphy, electricity and railroads; I eat macaroni with a fork, and I wear three different pairs of gloves every day."

The Commodore, who was busily engaged in buttering his second sandwich, was now all attention, his curiosity having been aroused by d'Altavilla's strange introduction.

"Now that you have showed yourself in your true colors," laughingly remarked Miss Ward, "I would be sceptical indeed were I to suspect you of *barbarism.* But that which you wish to explain must indeed be either very terrible or very ridiculous or you would not beat about the bush in this way−−"

"Yes, it is very terrible, and, as you say very ridiculous," continued the Comte; "and if I were in Paris or London I might possibly share your mirth and laugh with you, but here, in Naples−−"

"It is far more serious; and, I suppose, you cannot even smile?"

"Precisely."

"Then kindly enlighten me as to the meaning of *fascino,"* said Miss Ward, who was impressed by the Neapolitan's determined manner.

"This superstition is as old as the world. It is alluded to in the Bible; Virgil speaks of it in most decided terms, and the bronze medals found at Pompeii and Herculaneum, and the unmistakable signs on the walls of the unearthed houses clearly prove how universal this *superstition* was. The people of the East still believe in it at the present day. Red and green bands are painted on the side of Moorish buildings in order to protect the inhabitants from the evil spirit. A sculptured hand is plainly seen on the door of Judgment of the Alhambra. All this certainly denotes the antiquity of the superstition, even if it has no foundation. When millions of men have shared this opinion during thousands of years, it stands to reason that such a general belief must be founded on actual facts and a succession of actual events. I scarcely imagine that the eminent *savants* who have written treatises on the subject, would have made known their opinions to the world unless they had positive facts with which to prove their assertions."

"Your argument is certainly open to criticism," interrupted Miss Ward; "for polytheism was Homer's, Plato's, Aristotle's and Socrates' religion. The latter even went so far as to sacrifice a rooster to Esculapius."

"I admit all that, but at the present time no one sacrifices bullocks to Jupiter."

"I should hope not!" interrupted the Commodore;" they are sensible enough to serve them up as rump and beefsteaks, instead of wasting them upon the desert air!"

"No one offers doves to Venus, peacocks to Juno, or goats to Bacchus; Christianity has replaced the poetic dreams of Greek mythology; truth has triumphed over superstition, and still there are thousands of people who dread the fatal effects of the *fascino,* or to give it the popular name, the *jettatura."*

"I can readily understand that people of low origin should permit themselves to be influenced by this idle superstition, but I cannot imagine how a man of your education and position can 'place faith in such nonsense," remarked Miss Ward.

"More than one man of high standing hangs a pair of horns over his window," continued the Comte, "and nails a sacrifice over his door, while he never ventures forth without being covered with amulets and charms; and I admit that, whenever I meet a *jettatore I* hurry across the street, and, if I cannot avoid his glance, I do not hesitate to make the sign of the cross, as any lazzarone would do; and I flatter myself that I have escaped their fatal influence, thanks to this precaution."

Miss Ward was a Protestant, brought up with liberal ideas, and she was not accustomed to believe anything which had not been explained to her entire satisfaction. The Comte's eloquence surprised her. At first she supposed he was only jesting, but his earnest manner and the calm conviction with which he spoke soon caused her to change her views.

"I will admit the existence of this superstition," she replied; "I also believe you are sincere in your fear of the evil eye and that you are not trying to work on the fears of a poor stranger; but kindly give me some positive proof of the existence of this superstition, for, though you may think me devoid of poetic feeling, I assure you that I am very incredulous, and whatever is mysterious, inexplicable, or occult impresses me very little."

"You will not deny, Miss Alicia," continued the Comte, "the power of the human eye; in it the light of heaven combines with the reflection of the soul; the eye−ball is a lens which concentrates the rays of life and the intellect reflects itself in it as in a mirror. A woman's loving glance softens the hardest heart; a hero's glance arouses the enthusiasm of an army, and the glance of a physician calms the madman like a shower of cold water. A mother's look will even make a lion recoil before her."

"You plead your cause with so much eloquence," interrupted Miss Ward, "that you must pardon me if I am still doubtful."

"And the bird, which, palpitating with fear and uttering plaintive cries, descends from the topmost branch of a tree, from whence it could easily have flown away, to throw itself into the open mouth of the serpent that has charmed it, is certainly not moved by superstition, as it is not probable that the mothers entertain their young with stories of the jettatura as they sit aloft in their little nests. Then, again, are the miasmas of typhoid fever, of that pest, cholera, visible? No mortal eye can perceive the electric fluid as it runs down the lightning−rod, and yet it attracts the lightning!"

"It strikes me that the Comte's theory is not so untenable after all," interrupted the Commodore; "I never could look at a toad's golden eyes without feeling revulsion; it acts on me exactly as if I had taken an emetic; and yet the miserable reptile had more to fear than I, who could have crushed it beneath the heel of my boot."

"Oh, uncle! if you take side with M. d'Altavilla I shall have to acknowledge myself defeated," exclaimed Miss Ward. "I am not strong enough to struggle against such opposition. Although I might have many objections to raise against this ocular electricity, on the grounds that no physician has ever mentioned it in his thesis, still I am willing to admit its existence; but will you please inform me what power the pair of horns you so kindly sent me, have to divert the fatal effects of the *fascino,* or *jettatura,* as you call it?"

"On the same principle that the point of the lightning−rod attracts the lightning," answered d'Altavilla; "the sharp points of the horns on which the *jettatore* fixes his eyes will divert the fatal fluid. An outstretched hand or a bunch of coral charms has the same effect."

"All this is very stupid, Monsieur le Comte," remarked Miss Ward; "you evidently desire to impress me with the idea that I am under the influence of some dangerous *fascino* or *jettatore,* and you have sent me the horns in order to divert their fatal influence."

"I fear you have guessed the truth, Miss Alicia," replied the Comte earnestly.

"I'd like to see one of those goggle−eyed fellows trying to charm my niece!" exclaimed the Commodore, bolting his third sandwich. "Although I have passed my sixtieth year, I haven't quite forgotten how to use my fists," and he doubled up his digits, firmly pressing his thumb against his doubled fingers.

"Two fingers are sufficient, my lord," said d'Altavilla, as he showed the Commodore how to keep away the evil spirit in the most approved Neapolitan style. "As a rule, the *jettatura* is practised involuntarily; it is only exercised by those who possess the fatal power, and frequently when the *jettatori* realize their terrible affliction, they deplore the effects even more than others; we should, therefore, avoid these unhappy beings, but not persecute them. Besides, one can neutralize their fatal influence with a pair of horns, outstretched fingers, or a bunch of coral charms."

"It is really very curious," said the Commodore, who was partly convinced by d'Altavilla's impressive calmness.

"I did not know that I came so constantly in contact with these *jettatori.* I rarely leave this terrace unless it is to take a drive along the Villa Reale with my uncle, and I have never noticed anything like what you have described," said the young girl, whose curiosity was now aroused, although she was still as doubtful as before. "Of whom are you suspicious?"

"I am not suspicious, Miss Ward; I am positive of what I assert," replied the young Neapolitan.

"Then, for pity's sake, tell us the name of this fatal being?" exclaimed Miss Ward, rather sarcastically.

But d'Altavilla was silent.

"It is always well to know whom to guard against," added the Commodore.

The young Comte reflected for a moment; then he rose, and' approaching the Commodore, he bowed politely and said:

"Milord Ward, I have the honor to ask the hand of your niece."

At this unexpected request Alicia blushed to the roots of her dark hair, and from red the Commodore turned to scarlet.

The Comte d'Altavilla certainly had a right to aspire to the hand of Miss Ward; he belonged to one of the oldest and most noble families in Naples; he was handsome, young, wealthy, in favor at court, highly educated, and of irreproachable manners. He was therefore perfectly justified in making this proposal; but it was the abrupt and unexpected manner in which it was made which took the Commodore and his niece by surprise. But d'Altavilla did not appear the least discouraged or disconcerted, although he awaited the answer with a palpitating heart.

After the Commodore had partly recovered from his surprise he turned to the Comte and said:

"My dear d'Altavilla, I must confess that while I am highly honored by your proposal, it has taken me by surprise. Upon my word, I don't know what to say; I have not even consulted my niece. You were speaking of *fascinos, jettaturi,* horns, charms, open and closed fingers, and of a host of other things which are in no wise connected with marriage, and the next moment you take my breath away by asking for Alicia's hand! All this appears very strange, and you must pardon me if I seem a little at sea. Such a union would be very proper, I am sure, but I imagine my niece has other intentions. It is true that such an old sea−dog as I am can't read a young girl's heart, but I think I'm about right, when−−"

At this moment, Alicia, seeing that her uncle was getting mixed up, came to his rescue and at the same time put an end to a scene which was becoming embarrassing.

"When an honest man asks for the hand of a young girl, Comte, she has no right to take offence, but she certainly has the right to be surprised at the strange manner in which the request is made. I requested you to disclose the name of this pretended *jettatore* whose fatal influence you claim is dangerous to me, and you suddenly change the subject by asking my uncle to honor you with the hand of his niece in marriage−−I really cannot understand your motive for so doing."

"It is because a nobleman does not care to turn informer," replied Altavilla, "and because a husband alone has the right to protect his wife. But take your time to make up your mind. I can afford to wait a few days for your answer, and, until then, the horns, if properly exposed, will protect you against all fatal influences."

And with a profound bow, the Comte took his departure.

Vicfe, the fawn−colored servant with the matted hair, who had come on the terrace to remove the tea−pot and the cups, had overheard the latter part of the conversation. She despised Paul d'Aspremont with all the aversion which a peasant of the Abruzzi, hardly civilized by two or three years of servitude, can have for an unbeliever suspected of *jettatura;* on the other hand, she looked upon the Comte d'Altavilla' as a sort of Adonis, and she could not understand how it was that Miss Ward preferred a pale and −sickly looking young man, whom she, Vicfe, would not have condescended to notice even if he had not had an evil eye. Besides, she could not conceive the delicate motives which prompted the Comte to act as he had done, and in the hope, of protecting her mistress, whom she dearly loved, from impending evil, Vicfe leaned over towards Miss Ward as she whispered in her ear:

"I can tell you the name the Comte d'Altavilla refused to disclose."

"I forbid you to mention it, Vicfe, if you care for me at all," replied Alicia. "Such superstition is positively disgraceful, and I will brave it like a Christian maiden who has nothing to fear but her God."

CHAPTER VII DREAMS TORMENTING

"JETTATORE! Jettatore! These words were certainly addressed to me," muttered Paul d'Aspremont to himself as he returned to the hotel. "I don't know what they mean, but they certainly mean something injurious or ridiculous. What is there about me to attract attention? I believe, even if I say it myself, that I am neither handsome nor ugly, neither tall nor short, thin nor stout, and that I could pass unnoticed in a crowd. There is nothing at all eccentric in my dress; I do not wear a turban illuminated with candles like M. Jourdain in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme;* neither do I wear a waistcoat embroidered with the rising sun; a nigger does not precede me with a pair of cymbals: my individuality, which is unknown in Naples, any way, is concealed beneath an ordinary suit, and I am not at all different in appearance from any of the swells who stroll along the Rue de Tolede, or on the largo of the palace, unless it be a little less cravat, a little less scarf−pin, a little less embroidered shirt−front, a little less waistcoat, a little less watch−chain, and considerably less curls.

"Perhaps my hair isn't properly frizzed! To−morrow I will have the barber do my hair up in crimps, as ladies do. And yet, strangers are not curiosities here, and a slight difference in dress would scarcely justify the mysterious word and the strange gesture my presence provokes. I have also noticed an expression of antipathy and fear, in the eyes of the people who recoil from me at my approach. How can I possibly have offended these persons, whom I have never met before? A passing tourist never excites any other feeling than that of indifference, unless he comes from a far−off clime or is a specimen of an unknown race; but the steamer unloads hundreds of just such tourists as I am every week, and who bothers his head about them except the facchini and the hotel−keepers? I have not killed my brother, since I never had a brother to kill, and therefore cannot bear the mark of Cain on my forehead−−and yet strong men tremble and recoil at my approach. I never produced such an effect either in Paris, London, Vienna or any of the cities I have visited; sometimes I have been accused of being too proud; I have been told that I affect the English *sneer,* and that I imitate Lord Byron, but I have always received the welcome accorded a gentleman, and my advances, although a rare occurrence, were invariably appreciated. A three−days sea voyage from Marseilles to Naples certainly cannot have changed my appearance so as to render me hideous or grotesque in the eyes of the ladies, who, I flatter myself, were always favorably impressed with me−−were it otherwise I never could have won the love of Alicia Ward, a charming young girl, a celestial creature−−one of Tom Moore's angels!"

It was very late. With the exception of Paul, all the other guests had already retired. Gelsomina, one of the servants who took part in the discussion in the kitchen of the hotel between Scazziga and Timberio, was awaiting his arrival to lock up for the night. Nanella, the other girl, whose night on it was, begged Gelsomina to take her place, as she was afraid to meet the man suspected of being a *jettatore.* Gelsomina was well prepared for the meeting−−an enormous bunch of charms was suspended around her neck, while two little coral horns dangled from her shapely ears, and the index of her right hand was pointed at the intruder in a manner which would undoubtedly have won the approbation of M. Andrea de Jorio, author of the *Mimica degli antichi investigata nel gestire napoletano.*

The courageous girl, concealing her right hand beneath a fold of her dress, presented a light to M. d'Aspremont with her left, while the piercing, almost defiant, look she directed upon him compelled the young man to lower his eyes, −−a victory which appeared to greatly please Gelsomina.

After the traveller had gone up−stairs, and the noise of his footsteps was no longer heard, Gelsomina raised her head with a triumphant air, as she said to herself: "I made him lower his eyes, all the same; may Saint Januarius con− found him, he is a bad man; but I am sure no harm will come to me now."

Paul slept badly; he was tormented with curious dreams relating to the strange events which had transpired during the past twenty−four hours: he imagined himself surrounded by a group of scowling, threatening faces, on which hatred, anger, and fear were plainly depicted; then the faces disappeared; long, skinny, bony fingers, with horny knuckles, were pointed at him in the darkness, threatening him with cabalistic gestures. The nails of these hands, resembling the talons of a vulture, seemed to menace the destruction of his eyesight. By a superhuman effort he succeeded in thrusting aside these hands; but they were immediately replaced by a heap of horned heads of different animals, which charged upon him and attempted to drive him into the sea, where his body was torn to shreds on a jagged coral reef; a wave carried him back to the shore, torn and disfigured and more dead than alive; and, like Byron's Don Juan, he perceived, while in a trance, the face, of a young woman leaning over him−−it was not Haidee, but Alicia, more beautiful even than the fair creature painted by the poet. The young girl was making desperate efforts to draw the inanimate body on the sands, and when she asked Vicfe, the dark−skinned servant, to lend her a helping hand, the latter refused with a coarse laugh: finally Alicia's arms were deprived of their strength, and a retreating wave washed him out to sea.

These frightful dreams tormented the sleeper until the break of day, and Paul arose with anxiety, as if some terrible secret had been revealed to him during his sleep. He closed his eyes to shut

out the truth; for the first time life seemed a burden to him. He even doubted Alicia; the Comte d'Altavilla's contented air, the attention with which the young girl listened to his song, the Commodore's approving smile,−−all this recurred to him, embellished with a hundred minute details, filling his heart with sorrow and adding still more to the feeling of melancholy which had taken possession of him.

The sunlight has the power to dispel all nocturnal visions, and the demon of darkness spread out his wings and disappeared with the first rays of the rising sun. It was soon shining brightly in the clear sky, reflecting its golden rays on the blue sea, which was as clear as crystal. Paul slowly recovered his equanimity; he soon forgot the frightful dreams and the curious impression caused by his appearance the night before, or, if he thought of them at all, it was with a smile at their extravagance.

He took a stroll to Chiaja to while away the time, and amused himself by gazing at the Neapolitans as they hurried to their work; the merchants were calling out their wares for sale in the quaint dialect of the country, unintelligible to Paul, who did not speak Italian, with those excited gestures which are unknown to the children of a Northern clime; but every time he halted in front of a shop, the proprietor, instead of appearing pleased at the prospect of disposing of some of his stock, assumed a terrified air, as he murmured an invocation in a low tone, and pointed his finger at the intruder; while the gossips and old hags who infest Chiaja were even still more rude in their actions, and showered the vilest epithets upon him as they shook their fists at him.

CHAPTER VIII ACCURSED!

ON hearing the jeers and curses of the people of Chiaja, M. d'Aspremont believed that he was the victim of the vulgar custom of ridiculing and *guying* well−dressed gentlemen who pass through the fish−market; but the disgust and fright they evinced was so marked that he soon realized that this was not the case; the word *jettatore,* which had already reached his ears in the theatre of San Carlino, was repeated here on every side, only this time those who pronounced it were more threatening in their manner; so he walked away slowly, carefully avoiding to fix eyes which were the cause of so much trouble, on any one. On his way, Paul passed a book−store; he halted before it, and began to fumble the leaves of the exposed volumes for want of something better to do; in this manner his back was turned upon the passing throng, and, with his eyes fixed upon the pages of the books, he avoided attracting its attention. At one moment he was tempted to charge upon the crowd and pay them for their insolence with a shower of blows with his carie, but he refrained from doing so, influenced by a vague, superstitious terror. He remembered how he once had struck an impudent coachman with his cane and had unhappily hit him on the temple, killing him instantly; this involuntary murder constantly haunted Paul and

warned him against violence.

After having examined a large number of books his eyes suddenly fell upon the *"Jettatura"* of Signor Nicolo Valetta; the title of the book shone in his eyes in letters of fire, and it seemed to him as if the volume had been placed there by the hand of fate; he flung the price of the book at the shopkeeper, who was gazing at him in evident terror and toyed with a bunch of coral charms on his watch−chain. Hurrying to the hotel d'Aspremont locked himself in his room in order not to be interrupted in his perusal of the book, which, he expected, would enlighten him as to the meaning of the curious events which had transpired since his sojourn in Naples.

Signor Valetta's treatise on the evil spirit is as well known in Naples as the *"Secrets du grand Albert," "I'Etteila,"* or *"La clef des Songes"* are in Paris. Valetta defines the jettatura, explains how it can be identified by certain marks, and by what means one can protect himself against its fatal influence: he divides the jettatori into several distinct classes, arranging them in regular order in accordance with the power they possess, and discusses at great length all details connected with this curious question.

If he had picked this book up in Paris, d'Aspremont would merely have glanced over it in that careless manner with which one fumbles the leaves of an old almanac, and he would have heartily laughed at the serious manner in which the author treated this nonsense ; but in his present frame of mind, agitated as he was by a number of curious incidents, he read the book over with a feeling of horror. Although he did not attempt to penetrate its meaning, the secrets of hell were plainly revealed to him; they were no longer a mystery to him, and he was now fully aware of the fatal power he possessed−− he was a jettatore! He was obliged to acknowledge it, for he had every symptom and mark by which Valetta identifies them.

It sometimes happens that a man who has always thought himself blessed with an iron constitution, accidentally opens a medical work, and, in reading the pathological description of a disease therein, suddenly recognizes the symptoms in his own system; thus enlightened he feels, at the discovery of each fresh symptom, new evidence of its existence within himself, and he trembles at the seeming approach of a death he never dreamed of. Paul experienced just such an impression.

He placed himself before a mirror, and gazed at himself in awe−stricken terror: the incongruity of his appearance, composed as it. was of perfect parts, which, as a rule, are not found in one person, made him look for all the world like the archangel after his expulsion from Paradise, and, as he stood there before the mirror, the fibres of his eyeballs wriggled like so many vipers; his eyebrows quivered like the bow which has just shot forth the poisoned arrow; the white furrow in his forehead resembled the white scar of a burn, while his auburn hair seemed to shed forth a reddish lustre not unlike the flames which are said to exist in hell, and the deadly pallor of his skin made every feature of his fiendish countenance stand out in bold relief.

Paul was afraid of himself. He imagined that the reflection of his eyes in the mirror was casting poisoned darts at him−−picture to yourself Medusa gazing at her charming but fearful countenance on the dull surface of a brass buckler.

Paul realized that he was a fiend in human form! Although endowed with noble and affectionate instincts, he carried misfortune wherever he went; his involuntary glance, charged with venom, brought suffering and misery to those on whom it rested. He possessed the fatal power to collect, concentrate and distil the dangerous electricity and morbid miasmas and other frightful infections of the atmosphere and hurl them broadcast upon those near him. A number of curious incidents in his past which he had always credited to chance alone were now clearly explained; he distinctly remembered all sorts of strange misadventures and accidents which he never could account for.

He recalled his life, year by year; he remembered his mother, who died in giving him birth; the sad fate of his schoolmates, the dearest of whom fell from a tree and was kilted while Paul encouraged him to steal some apples;

an excursion in a canoe which begun most auspiciously with two of his comrades, and from which he alone returned, after the most frantic efforts to recover the bodies of the unfortunate lads who had fallen overboard; the fencing bout in which his foil broke off, transforming the foil into a sword, and in which he dangerously wounded his dearest friend−−all these accidents were common enough, to be sure, and Paul had always looked upon them as such; but he knew differently since he had perused Valetta's work, and he reasoned that the fatal influence of the jettatura certainly had a hand in all these misfortunes. Such a continuous number of accidents in connection with one person was *unnatural*.

Another incident, and of more recent date, recurred to him in all its horrible reality, and in no little wise assisted in convincing him that he was undoubtedly accursed.

While in London, he frequently went to Her .Majesty's Theatre, where he was greatly impressed with the grace and talent of a young English *danseuse.* Without, however, being more infatuated with her than a man of the world is with one of the graceful figures contained in a painting or an engraving, he followed her movements, as she whirled about in the mazes of the ballet or charmed the spectators in a *pas seule;* it pleased him to gaze at the sad young face, which never flushed at the applause of the audience, her beautiful blonde hair, crowned with golden stars, the chaste white shoulders, which instinctively shivered under the opera−glasses which followed her movements, the shapely limbs which were plainly visible through the thin gauze skirt and which shone beneath their silken covering like the marble of an antique statue; each time she approached the footlights, he either loudly applauded her or raised his eyeglass in order to see the better.

One night, the *danseuse,* carried away by the momentum of the dance, came too near the glittering line of gas−jets which separated the ideal from the real world. Her slender draperies, fluttering like the wings of a dove about to take its flight, suddenly came in contact with a gas−jet, and the light material was soon ablaze. In a moment the flames enveloped the young girl, who ran about for a few seconds surrounded by a mass of fire; then, turning around, she rushed madly towards the wings, where she fell down−−another victim of that insatiable fiend, the fire king. Paul was deeply pained by this calamity, but he never felt any remorse, as he did not suppose he was in any way responsible for her death.

But he was now convinced that the obstinacy with which he had gazed at the *danseuse* had more or less to do with her untimely end. He looked upon himself as an assassin; he was afraid of himself, and he wished that he had never been born.

A violent reaction followed this prostration; he burst into a loud laugh and flung Valetta's book from him.

"Decidedly," he exclaimed, "I am either a madman or a fool! The hot sun of Naples has probably affected my brain. What would the members of my club say if they heard, that I was actually bothering my head with the absurd question−−whether I am, yes or no,−−a jettatore!"

Paddy knocked discreetly at the door. Paul drew the bolt, and the valet handed him a note with Miss Ward's compliments.

M. d'Aspremont broke the seal and read as follows:

"Are you angry with me, Paul?−−You did not call last evening, and your *sorbet au citron* melted in its cup while we waited for you. Until nine o'clock I listened attentively for the sound of your carriage−wheels; then I lost all hope, and I quarrelled with the Commodore. See how just women are! Undoubtedly, Pulcinella with his red nose, and Don Simon and Donna Pangrazia must be a great attraction, as my secret police have informed me that you passed last evening in the theatre at San Carlino. And you have not written a single one of those so−called *important* letters. Why not honestly confess that you are jealous of the Comte Altavilla? I thought you had more pride, and I am surprised at your modesty. You need have no fear, however. M. d'Altavilla is a great deal too

handsome, and I do not fancy this Apollo with his bunch of coral charms. If I did what is considered proper I would write to say that I have not even missed you; but, since I must tell the truth, let me add that the time passed slowly without you, and that I have been extremely nervous and ill−humored; I almost boxed Vicfe's ears; the girl was laughing away as if she had taken leave of her senses−−but I really cannot say what has caused this unusual levity. A. W."

This humorous and sarcastic epistle brought Paul to his senses. He dressed in hot haste, ordered a carriage, and soon the doubtful Scazziga was snapping his whip as his horses galloped over the lava pavement and through the ever varying crowd on the quai of Santa−Lucia.

"I say, Scazziga, why all this hurry? You will surely upset us!" called out M. d'Aspremont. The coachman turned around to reply, and met Paul's furious glance. A stone he had not seen struck one of the wheels, knocking him clean off the box. Active as a monkey, he sprang back in his seat, but there was a big lump, as large as a hen's egg, in the middle of his forehead.

"I'll be hanged if I turn around the next time you have anything to− say!" he grumbled: "Timberio and Falsacappa were right−−he is a jettatore! I will buy myself a pair of horns to−morrow−− they can't do any harm even if they don't do any good."

This little incident annoyed Paul; he added this last accident to the series of misfortunes with which he had been identified; it is no unusual occurrence for a carriage to run against a stone, and a clumsy coachman frequently loses his seat. There was therefore nothing so very wonderful in this, after all. And yet, the *eject* had followed the *cause* so promptly, Scazziga's fall coincided so exactly with the *glance* he had given him, that all his doubts returned.

"I have half a mind to get out of this wonderful country," he said to himself. "I can feel my brain rattling in my head like a dried nut in its shell. But if I confided my fears to Alicia she would simply laugh at me, and the climate is favorable to her health. Her health! why, she was strong and healthy when I first met her. And yet, before my very eyes, I have seen her growing thinner and thinner every day! How her bright eyes become dimmed in my presence, and her shapely hand has fallen away at my touch! One would suppose that consumption had already claimed her as its own. In my absence, she has regained her strength, the bloom has returned to her cheek, and her chest, which caused her physician no end of anxiety, has ceased to trouble her; delivered of my fatal presence, she would live for years. Am I not killing her? Have I not involuntarily cast the fascino's spell about her? But, after all, I can see no occasion for worriment, although she did have a bad spell the other evening; most English girls are subject to lung troubles."

These thoughts filled Paul's mind until the end of the journey. When he presented himself upon the terrace, the immense pair of Sicilian bull's horns presented by the Comte Altavilla was the first object to meet his view. Noticing that Paul had remarked them, the Commodore turned blue: that was his style of blushing, for, not so discreet as his niece, he had lent a friendly ear to Vicfe.

Alicia, with an imperative gesture, motioned to the domestic to remove the horns, and fixing her lovely eyes, filled with love and confidence, on Paul, gave him a kindly welcome.

"Let them remain where they are," said Paul to Vicfe; "they are very beautiful."

CHAPTER IX A BROKEN FIBRE

THE fact that Paul had condescended to notice the horns presented by the Comte Altavilla appeared to please the Commodore; while Vicfe smiled, showing her white fangs, and Alicia, with a rapid glance, seemed to question

Paul without eliciting a reply in return.

A painful silence followed.

The first minutes of a visit, no matter how frequent the visitor may call or how intimate he may be, are always embarrassing. The Commodore was playing with his thumbs; d'Aspremont gazed fixedly at the horns which he had forbidden Vicfe to remove, and Alicia pretended to tie the red bow of her white muslin wrapper.

It was Miss Ward who first broke the ice, with that freedom enjoyed by young English girls, so reserved and modest after marriage.

"Really, Paul, you have been anything but agreeable during the past few days. Is your gallantry a rare hothouse flower which blooms only on English soil, or does the hot sun of Naples retard its development? How devoted, how attentive you were in our little home in Lincolnshire! You approached me with your hand on your heart, and with words of love on your lips, always prepared to fall on your knees before the idol of your dreams−−in fact you were just such a model lover as one reads about in novels."

"I love you more than ever, Alicia," replied d'Aspremont in a voice full of emotion, although he did not remove his eyes from the horns which hung on one of the pillars of the terrace.

"You say it so mournfully that one must indeed be confident to believe it," continued Miss Ward; "I rather imagine that what pleased you most was my diaphanous complexion, my sylph−like form and ethereal appearance; my suffering gave me a certain romantic charm which I no longer possess."

"Alicia! You are lovelier now than ever before!"

"Words, words, idle words, as Shakespeare says. I am so beautiful, in fact, that you do not condescend to notice me."

And she spoke the truth; Paul had not fixed his eyes upon her during the entire conversation.

"Well," she said with a deep sigh, "I see that I have become a stout and awkward peasant, with a red, freckled face, without the slightest distinction, and totally unfit to figure at the county ball or in an album of celebrated beauties."

"Evidently, you delight in caluminating yourself, Miss Ward," remarked Paul, with his eyes still lowered upon the ground.

"You had much rather confess that I am horrible. And it is your fault, too, Commodore; with your chicken−wings, your cutlets, your *filets de boeuf*, your little glass of Madeira, your excursions on horseback, your salt water baths, and gymnastic exercises−−you have succeeded in dispelling M. d'Aspremont's poetical illusions by transforming me into a strong, healthy girl."

"You are tantalizing M. d'Aspremont and you are guying me," replied the Commodore; "but, at all events, my *filets de boeuf* are strengthening, and a good glass of Madeira has never harmed any one."

"How disappointed you must be, my dear fellow! you leave a skeleton behind you, and you are confronted a few months later with what the physicians term a strong, well−constituted woman! Now, listen to me, since you haven't the courage to look for yourself, and hold up your hands in terror−−I have gained seven pounds since I left England!"

"Eight pounds!" proudly interrupted the Commodore, who cared for Alicia with the tenderness of a mother.

"Are you quite sure that I have really gained as much as all that? I am sure you wish to disenchant M. d'Aspremont forever," remarked Alicia laughingly.

While the young girl was tantalizing him in this manner, Paul, who was now a firm believer in his fatal power, never permitted his eyes to rest upon her, and he either fixed them upon the talismanic horns or turned them upon the broad expanse of water which could plainly be seen from the terrace.

He asked himself whether it was not his duty to desert Alicia, even though he passed for a man devoid of honor and faith, to go and end his days on some desert island where, at least, his fatal power would not strike down those with whom he came in contact.

"I know why you are so serious," continued Alicia in the same jesting manner, "the date of our marriage has been arranged for next month; and you shudder at the thought of becoming the husband of a poor country girl, devoid of style or figure. Very well, then, I give you back your freedom−−you are now at liberty to wed my friend Sarah Templeton, who eats pickles and drinks vinegar all day long in order to get thin!"

Then she burst into a hearty laugh, while the Commodore and Paul joined her.

When she finally realized that her sarcasm had no effect on d'Aspremont, she took him by the hand, and leading him to the piano, which was situated in a little arbor on the terrace, she remarked while she opened her music:

"I see, my dear, that you are in no humor to talk to−day, so you will have to sing that which you cannot say. You will therefore accompany me in this duettino, the music of which is very easy."

Paul seated himself on the stool, while Miss Ward stood up beside him in order to follow the notes of the song. The Commodore threw back his head, stretched out his legs, and assumed the attitude of an attentive listener, as was his wont on the pretence that he was an ardent admirer of Beethoven and Chopin, but he invariably fell fast asleep before the last note on the first sheet was reached, accompanying the singer with a series of loud snorts and snores.

The duettino was a bright and pleasing melody composed by Cimarosa, with words by Metastase, and, as it is said that music has the power to soothe the savage beast, it no doubt dispels evil spirits as well. In a few moments, Paul no longer thought of magic horns, conjurer's fingers, or coral charms; he had completely forgotten Signor Valetta's book and all the superstitions of the jettatura. His mind was free from all such thoughts and his soul ascended lightly, together with Alicia's sweet voice, towards the bright sun.

The grasshoppers ceased their chirping in order to listen, while the brisk sea breeze carried away the notes together with the leaves of the flowers which had fallen from the vases on the terrace.

"My uncle sleeps as soundly as did the seven giants in the cave. If it was not an old habit, our pride as virtuosos might possibly be ruffled," remarked Alicia as she closed the piano. "While he is taking his *siesta,* will you take a stroll in the garden with me, Paul? I have not yet pointed out the charms of my Paradise to you."

And she took down a large straw hat from the nail on which it was hanging.

Alicia professed to be decidedly original in horticulture; she did not permit any one to pluck the flowers or trim the branches of the bushes; and that which charmed her most when she first inspected the villa was the natural and wild state of the vegetation.

The young people forced their way through the dense underbrush. Alicia walked ahead, and she laughed merrily whenever the branches of a laurel−rose bush, displaced by her, would fly back and swish Paul across the face.

"Here is−my favorite retreat, Paul," said Alicia, pointing to a clump of picturesque rocks, protected .by an overhanging mass of orange and myrtle leaves.

She seated herself on one of the rocks, and pointing to the moss−covered earth, she requested Paul to kneel there at her feet.

"Now place your two hands in mine and look me straight in the face. In a month's time I will be your wife. Why do your eyes avoid mine?"

At this moment, Paul, whose mind was again filled with thoughts of the jettatura, turned his head aside.

"Are you afraid to read a guilty thought in my eyes? You know my heart has been yours since the first day you presented yourself with that letter of introduction in our parlor in Richmond. I belong to that proud, romantic and loving English race which, in a moment, conceives the love of a lifetime, and those who love thus are never afraid to die. Gaze into my eyes, Paul, I command you; do not turn aside your glance, or I shall begin to believe that a gentleman who should fear no one but his God is afraid of a vile superstition. Now turn your eyes upon me and judge for yourself whether I am pretty enough to take for a drive, in an open carriage in Hyde Park, after we are married."

Paul, carried away by her enthusiasm, fixed his eyes upon Alicia in a glance full of passionate love. Suddenly the young girl's face assumed a deathly pallor; a sharp pain pierced her heart like an arrow; it seemed as if some fibre had parted in her bosom, and she raised her handkerchief to her lips. A drop of crimson blood stained the fine linen, but Alicia hastily folded the handkerchief as she murmured:

"Oh, thanks, Paul! You have made me so happy! I thought you no longer loved me!"

CHAPTER X HER DUTY

THE movement made by Alicia to conceal her handkerchief was not prompt enough, however, to escape M. d'Aspremont's notice; a frightful pallor spread o'er Paul's features, for in this he perceived an irrefutable proof of his fatal power, and all sorts of strange thoughts flitted through his mind. Was it not his duty to put an end to himself as a public malefactor, the unconscious perpetrator of so much misery? He would have willingly bent his form under the severest punishment and borne it without flinching, but the thought of depriving the one he loved above all else on earth of life, nearly made him frantic.

The brave girl had not given way to the painful sensation she experienced as Paul directed his eyes upon her−−although it coincided precisely with the Comte d'Altavilla's description. But, as we have said before, Alicia was not superstitious. Besides, were she convinced beyond all doubt of the existence of the *jasdno* in Paul she would not have recoiled, and Miss Ward would have preferred to be stricken dead by a glance from the man she loved, rather

than break her vow. Alicia resembled, in more ways than one, Shakespeare's determined heroines, whose love is pure and constant, and, when once pledged, is retained forever. She had pressed Paul's hand, and no other living man would ever hold her shapely hand in his. She considered herself pledged beyond recall, and would have shrunk from the idea of any other union.

Her gayety was, therefore, so natural or so well assumed, that she would have deceived the most attentive

observer, and, bidding Paul who was still kneeling at her feet, to rise, she took his arm and led him through the wild and dense shrubbery of the garden until they reached a clearing through which they perceived the blue sea stretching out before them its calm, endless expanse. This beautiful vision dispersed all of Paul's sombre thoughts; Alicia confidingly leaned upon his arm, as if she already considered herself his wife. The two lovers finally regained the terrace, where the Commodore, still under the spell cast upon him by the music, was fast asleep in his bamboo chair, Paul took his departure, and Alicia, imitating the gestures of the Neapolitans, sent him a kiss on the tips of her fingers as she remarked: "Until tomorrow, dear Paul," in a voice full of tenderness and love.

"How beautiful you are today, Alicia!" suddenly remarked the Commodore, awakened from his nap, as he noticed the glowing color on his niece's cheek.

"You spoil me, uncle; and if I am not the vainest girl in the three kingdoms it is certainly no fault of yours. Fortunately I do not believe in flattery, even if it is disinterested."

"You are beautiful, dangerously beautiful," continued the Commodore, speaking to himself. "She reminds me of her mother, poor Nancy, who died on her nineteenth birthday. Such angels are not destined for this earth; at any moment wings are likely to make their appearance on their shoulders; they are too white, too pure, too perfect, the red blood of life is missing in these ethereal beings. The Almighty, who blesses the earth with their presence for a few years, seems impatient to regain possession of them. This dazzling beauty saddens my heart; it seems almost like the final parting."

"Well then, uncle, since I am so pretty it is high time for me to marry," continued Miss Ward, who noticed the frown gathering on the Commodore's brow; "the veil and the orange−blossoms would become me well, I fancy."

"You wish to marry! Are you then so anxious to leave your old weather−beaten uncle, Alicia?"

"I will never leave you, since M. d'Aspremont agreed that we should all live together. You know perfectly well I could never bear to part from you."

"M. d'Aspremont! M. d'Aspremont!−−The wedding has not taken place, however−−"

"Has he not your word−−and mine? Sir Joshua Ward has never broken faith."

"I admit that he has my word; there is no use denying that," replied the Commodore, evidently embarrassed.

"And the six months' limit you stipulated has expired−−since a few days," continued Alicia, with increasing color.

"Ah! so you have counted the months, my girl; you had better not

place too much confidence in his discreet manner."

"I love M. d'Aspremont," replied the girl simply.

"This is the climax!" exclaimed Sir Joshua Ward, who imbued with Vicfe's and d'Altavilla's quaint notions, did not in the least like the idea of having a jettatore for a son−in−law. "Why can't you have somebody else!"

"I have not two hearts," answered Alicia, "and I can" have but one love, even though I were to die, like my mother, at nineteen."

"Don't talk such nonsense! the idea of mentioning death. I beg you to change the subject," implored the Commodore.

"Have you anything with which to reproach M. d'Aspremont?"

"Nothing−−decidedly nothing."

"Has he forfeited his honor in any possible way? Has he ever shown himself to be a coward or a liar? Has he ever insulted a woman or recoiled before a man? Is his coat−of−arms tarnished by any secret taint? Can not a young girl take his arm in public without having to blush or lower her eyes?"

"M. Paul d'Aspremont is a perfect gentleman; no one can reproach him on that score."

"Believe me, uncle, when I assure you that if any such reason existed I would renounce him without the slightest hesitation, and would bury myself in some inaccessible retreat; but for no other reason, do you hear, will I break my word," added Miss Ward, in a gentle though determined tone.

The Commodore toyed with his thumbs, an invariable habit of his when he was at a loss what to say.

"Why are you so cold to Paul?" continued Miss Ward; "formerly, you were so fond of him; why, you couldn't get along without him in your house at Lincolnshire, and you used to tell him, while you nearly squeezed his fingers into a jelly, that he was a worthy lad and that you would willingly confide the happiness of a young girl to his keeping."

"Why, of course, I loved Paul," said the Commodore, evidently moved by these recollections; "but that which is obscure in the English fog becomes as clear as daylight in the sun of Naples−−"

"What do you mean?" asked Alicia, trembling in spite of herself, while the color fled from her cheeks, leaving her white as marble.

"I mean that your Paul is possessed−− he is a jettatore."

"What! you! my uncle; you, Sir Joshua Ward, a nobleman, a Christian, a subject of Her British Majesty, a former officer in the English navy, an enlightened and civilized being, whom one would not hesitate to question on any subject−−you who are wise and highly educated, you who read the Bible and the Gospel every night−−you do not hesitate to accuse Paul of being a jettatore! Oh! I never expected this from *you!"*

"My dear Alicia," replied the Commodore, "as long as you are not concerned, I may be all you claim, but when a danger−−even an imaginary danger, do you understand−−threatens you, I become more superstitious than a peasant of the Abruzzes, a lazzarone of Chiaja, or even a Neapolitan comte. Paul can look at me as long as he has a mind to with his fatal eyes, I will remain as calm as if facing the point of a sword or the barrel of a pistol. The fascino won't take on my tough hide, tanned by all the suns of the universe. I am only credulous on your account, dear Alicia, and I confess that I feel a cold perspiration dampening my forehead every time the unfortunate lad turns his eyes upon you. He has no evil intentions, I know, and he loves you dearer than life itself, but it seems to me that, under his influence,, your features change, your color disappears, and that you attempt to conceal a terrible pain; and then I am seized with a furious desire to dig out the eyes of your Paul d'Aspremont with the point of the horns presented by d'Altavilla."

"My poor, dear uncle," said Alicia, deeply moved by this, sudden outburst on the part of the old Commodore; "our lives are in the hands of God; not a prince expires on his royal couch, not a beggar dies on his humble cot, but his time has been marked in heaven; the fascino is powerless to do bodily injury, and it is a crime for us to believe that a peculiar look can exert evil influence upon us. Now you know perfectly well, uncle, you were not speaking seriously a moment ago; your love for me, no doubt, affected your judgment. Am I not right? Now, you would not dare tell M. d'Aspremont that you would withdraw the hand of your niece after you had placed it within his, and

that you no longer desired him as a son−in−law, on the absurd plea that he was−−a jettatore!"

"By Joshua, my patron saint, who stopped the sun in its course!" exclaimed the Commodore; "I would not hurt the feelings of your pretty M. Paul for anything. But what matters it to me whether I appear ridiculous, absurd, or unloyal, when your health, your life perhaps, is at stake! I gave your hand in wedlock to a man, not to a charmer. I pledged my word; well, then, I will retract my promise−−that's all! and if he isn't satisfied, I will give him all the satisfaction he desires!"

And the Commodore, exasperated beyond measure, made an imaginary thrust, as if he was attacking an adversary, heedless of the fact that he was suffering from a severe attack of gout.

"Pardon me, Sir Joshua Ward, but you would never do that," calmly remarked Alicia.

The Commodore seated himself in his bamboo chair, all out of breath, and remained silent.

"Well then, uncle, even though this frightful accusation were true, would it be honorable to abandon M. d'Aspremont when he is guilty of a misfortune and not of a crime? Are you not aware that the harm he might cause would not be occasioned by his will, and that you have never seen a more noble, generous, or loving disposition in man before?"

"One does not marry a vampire−− no matter how good the brute's intentions may be," grumbled the Commodore.

"But all this is chimerical, absurd, and superstitious; what is worse, however, is that Paul has become alarmed at this superstition, and he is afraid of himself; he believes in his fatal power, and every little accident convinces him that he is correct in this supposition. Is it not my duty, I who am his wife in the eyes of Heaven,

and who will soon be his in the eyes of the world−−blessed by you, dear uncle−−to calm this excited imagination, to chase away these phantoms, to allay by kind words this wild anxiety, and thus save from destruction this noble soul?"

"You are always right, Alicia," replied the Commodore, "and I, whom you have just called wise, am only an old madman. I believe that this Vicfe is a witch, and that she has turned my head with all her nonsense. As to the Comte d'Altavilla, with his horns and his collection of coral charms, he strikes me as being a fool. No doubt, it was a stratagem on his part to get Paul out of the way in order to win you himself."

"It may be that the Comte d'Altavilla acted as he did in perfect good faith," remarked Alicia with a smile; "only a short time ago, you shared his opinions on the jettatura."

"Do not abuse your advantage, Miss Alicia; besides, I have not so fully recovered from my mistake that I may not err again. The wisest thing, in my estimation, would be to leave Naples by the first steamer and return quietly to England. When Paul will not have bull's horns, deer antlers, coral charms, extended fingers, and all those devilish arrangements constantly before him, he will recover his former peace of mind, while I will forget this unearthly business, which almost made me break my word and commit an action unworthy of a gentleman. Since it has been so arranged, you will marry Paul. You will reserve the parlor and the ground floor of the house in Richmond for me, and the left wing in the castle in Lincolnshire, and we will all live happily together in England. If your health requires a warmer climate, we will rent a country seat at Cannes, where Lord Brougham's beautiful place is situated, and where, thank Heaven! this superstition relating to the jettatura is unknown. What do you think of my plan, Alicia?"

"It does not require my approval; am I not the most obedient of nieces?"

"Yes−−−when I do what you want me to do, you little minx," laughingly remarked the Commodore as he entered the villa.

Alicia remained on the terrace a few minutes longer; but whether this scene had affected her to such a degree, or whether Paul had really exercised his fearful power on the young girl, the warm breeze chilled her through and through, and at night, as she was feeling uncomfortable, she requested Vicfe to wrap up her feet, which were as white and cold as marble, in one of those pretty knitted robes they make in Venice.

However, the glow−worms glittered among the shrubbery and the crickets chirped, while the yellow moon ascended the sky in a haze of light and heat.

CHAPTER XI THE RED AUREOLE

THE day following that on which the scene recorded above took place, Alicia, who had passed a miserable night, scarcely touched the potion Vicfe gave her every morning, and placed it carelessly on the stand by the "side of the bed. While she did not feel any pain in particular, she was completely worn out. She requested Vicfe to give her a hand−glass, for a young girl worries more about the alteration of her features caused by illness than about the malady itself. She was deathly pale, with the exception of two little red spots, however, looking for all the world like a couple of red rose−leaves in a bowl of milk. Her eyes shone with unwonted brilliancy, lighted by the remaining sparks of a burning fever; but the bright red of her lips was not as pronounced as usual, and, in order to restore their−accustomed color, she bit them with her white teeth.

She arose from her couch, and enveloped herself in a dressing−gown of white cashmere, winding the gauze scarf around her neck, for although the crickets chirped in the warmth outside, she felt chilly, and she made her appearance on the terrace at the accustomed hour in order not to arouse her uncle's suspicions. She partook of a slight repast, although she was not hungry at all, for the faintest indication of an indisposition would have been accredited to Paul's evil influence, and this was precisely what Alicia wished to avoid.

Then, excusing herself on the plea that the bright sun was too strong for her, she retired to her room, not, however, before assuring her uncle that she had never felt better in all her life.

"I hardly believe that," the Commodore muttered to himself after she had retired; "she has a couple of bright spots near the eyes, just like her mother, who always pretended to have never felt better in all her life. What's to be done? To get Paul out of the way would only hasten her death; I must let Nature have its way. Alicia is so young! But it is just such young people that grim Death craves for; he is as jealous as a woman. Possibly I had better send for a physician,−−although of what use is medicine to an angel? And yet, all the symptoms had disappeared. Ah! if it should be you, accursed Paul, whose breath thus destroys this divine flower, I would strangle you with my own hands. Nancy was not under the influence of the jettatore, and yet she died.−−What if Alicia should die! No, it is not possible. I have not offended the Almighty in any possible way that He should reserve such a terrible punishment for me. When that comes to pass, I shall have already been sleeping for many years in my native village under a stone inscribed, *Sacred to the memory of Sir Joshua Ward,* It is she who will go and pray on the moss−covered grave of the old Commodore. I don't know what's the matter with me, but I am as blue and melancholy as old Harry himself this morning!"

In order to dispel these unpleasant thoughts, the commodore added a little more Jamaica rum to his cold tea, and sent for his houka, an innocent recreation which he only permitted himself in the absence of Alicia, whose delicate constitution would not have supported even this light smoke mingled with perfumes.

He had already boiled the aromatic water, and had blown three or four bluish clouds towards the sky, when Vicfe announced the Comte d'Altavilla.

"Sir Joshua," said the Comte after the usual formalities, "have you thought over my request of the other day?"

"I have thought it over, Comte," replied the Commodore; "but you know my word is pledged to M. Paul d'Aspremont."

"That may be, and yet there are cases where promises have been retracted; for instance, when it is pledged to a man who subsequently turns out to be an altogether different personage from what he seemed to be at first."

"I beg of you, Comte, to speak plainer; I do not understand you."

"I dislike the idea of accusing a rival, but you must certainly understand what I have reference to from the hints I let fall at our last meeting. If you had M. Paul d'Aspremont out of the way, would you accept me for a son−in−law?"

"As far as I am concerned I would be delighted; but it is not at all likely that Miss Ward would like any such substitution. She is head over ears in love with this Paul; it is partly my fault, as I encouraged the lad before I got wind of these stories−−I beg your pardon, Comte, but I am hardly accountable for my words this morning."

"Then you really wish your niece to die?" demanded d'Altavilla, seriously.

"Thunder and lightning! my niece die!" exclaimed the Commodore, springing from his chair and hurling aside the morocco−covered tube of the houka. "Is she then dangerously ill?"

"Don't alarm yourself, milord; Miss Alicia may live, and live very long at that."

"Bravo! that's the way I like to hear you talk; you almost took my breath away−−you fairly struck me amidships."

"But on one condition," added the Comte d'Altavilla; "and that is, that she never again lays eyes on M. Paul d'Aspremont."

"Ah! the subject of the fascino is again cropping out! Unfortunately, Miss Ward does not believe in it."

"Listen to me," continued the Comte, not at all dismayed by the old Commodore's want of sympathy, "When I first met Miss Alicia at the ball given by the Prince of Syracuse, and I conceived this ardent passion for her, I was smitten by the healthy, robust appearance of your niece. Her beauty was fairly dazzling, and it eclipsed that of other English, Russian, and Italian belles. To the British air of distinction was added the noble grace of the ancient goddesses; pardon this mythology on the part Of a descendant of a Greek colony."

"She was indeed superb! Miss Edwina O'Herty, Lady Eleanor Lilly, Miss Jane Strangford, and the Princess Vera Fedorowna Bariatinski were so envious that they almost had an attack of jaundice," the Commodore approvingly remarked.

"And have you not noticed that her former beauty has been replaced by a jaded, worn−out appearance, that her features have lost some of their remarkable symmetry, and that the veins of her hand are plainly visible through her clear white skin, while her voice has a strange though, melodious vibration? The terrestrial appearance has been replaced by an angelic being. Miss Alicia is rapidly assuming that beautiful, though ethereal appearance I do not fancy in worldly beings."

What the Comte said agreed exactly with the Commodore's secret impressions, and he remained *as* if in a dream for some little time.

"All this is quite true; and although I frequently try to pretend that it is

a mere freak of my imagination, I Cannot dispute the truth of your assertion."

"Pardon me," interrupted the Comte, "but did you remark any of these symptoms previous to M. d'Aspremont's arrival in England?"

"Never! she was the heartiest and gayest lass in the three kingdoms."

"M. d'Aspremont's presence therefore tallies with the periodical attacks which have so affected Miss Ward's health. I do not ask you to place faith in the quaint superstition of our country, but you will certainly agree that these strange facts are deserving of your attention−−"

"But Alicia−−her illness may result from natural causes after all," said the Commodore, partly convinced by d'Altavilla's reasoning, although his English pride struggled against the popular Neapolitan belief.

"Miss Ward is not ill; she is being poisoned by M. d'Aspremont's glance, which, if it does not possess the fascino of the jettatore, is at all events fatal."

"What can I do? She loves Paul; she laughs at the superstition of the fascino, and claims that one cannot give such an excuse to a man of honor for refusal."

"I have no right to occupy myself with your niece's affairs; I am neither her brother, her cousin, nor her affianced husband; but, if I obtain your permission, I will make a desperate effort to save her from this fatal influence. Oh! do not be alarmed; I will do nothing rash; although I am quite young, I am old enough to realize the injustice of causing a scandal where a young' lady is concerned; but, I beg of you, don't question me as to the plan I propose to− pursue that is my secret. I trust, however, you have sufficient confidence in my honor to believe that I will act as discreetly and honorably as possible."

"Then you love my niece very much?" asked Sir Joshua.

"Yes, then, I love her, though I have no hope; but kindly grant me the right to act as I see fit in this affair."

"You are a terrible man, Comte. Very well! you have my permission to do as you see fit. Try to save Alicia−− that is all I ask you."

The Comte bowed politely, and, entering his carriage, he directed the coachman to drive to the Hotel de Rome.

Paul, with his elbows on the table, was plunged in deep thought; he had seen the drop of blood discolor Alicia's handkerchief, and was convinced that he alone was to blame. He reproached himself with his murderous love; he blamed himself for accepting the devotion of this beautiful young girl who was determined to die for him, and he asked himself by what superhuman sacrifice he could repay this sublime abnegation.

Paddy interrupted him in his reverie by presenting the Comte d'Altavilla's card.

"The Comte d'Altavilla! what brings him here?" questioned Paul, taken completely by surprise at this unexpected visit. "Show him in."

When the Neapolitan appeared on the threshold of the door, M. d’Aspremont had already assumed the mask of indifference under which men of the world conceal their impressions.

With marked politeness, he pointed to an arm−chair, while he seated himself on a lounge and waited patiently,

with his eyes fixed on the visitor, for the latter to begin.

"Monsieur," began the Comte as he played with the charms on his watch−chain, "what I have to say is so strange, so out of place, and so unbecoming that you have the right to throw me out of the window. I trust, however, you will spare me this brutal treatment, as I am prepared to render you reparation when and where you please."

"I am listening, monsieur, and accept the offer you make me in case your conversation displeases me," replied Paul, without moving a muscle of his face.

"You are a jettatore!"

At these words, a greenish tinge spread o'er Paul's countenance, a red aureole encircled his eyes; his eyebrows drew closer together, the furrow in his forehead grew larger, while his eyes darted forth flashes of lightning; he raised himself partly in his chair, tearing the lining away in his nervous grasp. The spectacle was so terrible that d'Altavilla, brave man though he was, seized one of the little coral branches on his chain and instinctively brought the sharp point to bear upon his *vis−a−vis*.

By a superhuman effort, M. d’Aspremont regained his self−possession and remarked:

"You were right, monsieur; you are entitled to the reward you spoke of for such an insult; but I will bide my time to obtain a more suitable reparation."

"Believe me," responded the Comte, "I would not have permitted myself to offer to a gentleman such an insult, which can only be wiped out in blood, unless I had a serious reason for so doing, I love Miss Alicia Ward."

"What matters this to me?"

"As you say, it matters very little to you, for she loves you; but I, Don Felipe d'Altavilla, forbid you to call upon Miss Ward again."

"I have no orders to receive from you."

"I know it," replied the Neapolitan; "And I certainly do not expect that you will obey me."

"Then what other motive has prompted you to speak thus?" asked Paul.

"I am convinced that the fascino by which you have involuntarily charmed Miss Ward has resulted most unfortunately for her. It is an absurd idea, a prejudice worthy of the dark ages−− I will not discuss this with you. In spite of yourself your eyes have directed themselves upon Miss Ward, and you are killing her with your fatal glance. There is no other way to avoid this sad catastrophe than by seeking a quarrel. If we had lived in the sixteenth century I would have ordered my tenants to strangle you in the mountains, but these customs are now out of date. At first I thought seriously of requesting you to return to France; but that was too simple; you would have laughed at a rival who would have thus coolly asked you to go away, leaving him alone with your fiancee, on the ground that you were a jettatore."

While the Comte d'Altavilla was speaking, Paul d'Aspremont was a victim of the most violent emotions. Was it really possible that he, a Christian, was in the devil's clutches, and that

the light of Hell shone from his eyes? That he planted the seeds of destruction along his path, and that his love for the dearest and purest woman on earth would eventually cause her death! For a moment his reason tottered, and his brain throbbed as if it would burst his cranium.

"Upon your honor, Comte, do you believe what you say to be true?" exclaimed d'Aspremont, after a short silence which the Neapolitan respected.

"Upon my honor, such is my belief."

"Oh, then it is true!" muttered Paul to himself. "I am therefore an assassin, a demon, a vampire! I am killing this sweet creature, breaking the old Commodore's heart!" and he was on the point of promising the Comte that he would not attempt to see Alicia again; but pride and jealousy asserted themselves and froze the words on his lips.

"Comte, I hereby warn you that I will call on Miss Ward the moment you have taken your departure."

"I will not seize you by the collar to prevent your going; however, I will be delighted to meet you tomorrow morning, at six o'clock, in the ruins of Pompeii, near the thermae, if you have no objection. What weapon do you prefer?−−you are the offended party−−the sword, sabre, or pistol?"

"We will fight with knives and blindfolded, separated by a handkerchief the ends of which we will hold in our left hands. We must equalize the chances−− I am a jettatore; I could kill you with a glance, monsieur le Comte!"

And Paul d'Aspremont, bursting into a harsh laugh, opened the door and disappeared.

CHAPTER XII TWO STILETTOS

ALICIA had taken up her quarters in one of the rooms on the ground floor of the villa, the walls of which were frescoed according to the style prevalent in Italy, where very little wall−paper is used. Manilla mats covered the floor; on a table, over which a piece of Turkish carpet was thrown, lay the poetical works of Coleridge, Shelley, Tennyson, and Longfellow; a mirror, set in an antique frame, and a few cane−bottomed chairs completed the furniture of the room. Window−shades of Chinese bamboo, on which were designed dragons, snakes, and all kinds of quaint birds, gave a soft light to the apartment.

The young girl, who was far from well, was reclining on a narrow lounge near the window; two or three Morocco cushions supported her; a Venetian cover was thrown over her feet, and thus prepared, she could receive Paul without in the least offending the rules of English etiquette.

The book she had been reading had dropped from her hand; her eyes wandered aimlessly beneath her long, silken lashes and seemed to be gazing into another world; she experienced that lassitude which always follows the fever, and was engaged in chewing the leaves of an orange−tree which stretched its fragrant branches, covered with blossoms, through the open window. Is there not a painting of Venus chewing rose−leaves? What a charming companion a modern artist could have painted to this old Venetian picture,

representing Alicia munching the orange−blossoms !

She was thinking of M. d'Aspremont, and she wondered whether she would live to see the day when she would be his wife; not that she dreaded the fatal influence of the fascino, but she felt herself giving way to strange presentiments: that very night she had a dream, and she had not yet recovered from its effects.

In her dream, she fancied herself lying in bed awake, her eyes riveted on the open door of her room, where she

momentarily expected *some one* to appear. After two or three minutes of anxious expectation a white and sylph−like form made its appearance, enveloped in a white cloud, gradually becoming more distinct as it approached the bed.

The apparition was clothed in a dress of white muslin, the folds of which trailed on the ground; long tresses of black hair fell about the pale, white face, while two little red spots were plainly visible on her cheeks. In her hand the apparition held a flower, a tea−rose, the petals of which, as they fell on the floor, resembled so many tears.

Alicia did not know her mother, who had died a year after her birth; but she had frequently stood in silent contemplation before a faded miniature of Nancy Ward, and from the resemblance she realized that it was her mother who stood before her now: the white dress, the black hair, the white cheeks tinted with pink, even the tea−rose were reproduced as she had seen them in the portrait−−only it was the miniature enlarged and developed to life−size, an animated, moving picture as one usually beholds in a dream.

A feeling of tenderness mingled with fear seized Alicia. She wanted to stretch her arms out to the phantom, but she was unable to move them, heavy as marble, from the pillow on which they were resting. She attempted to speak, but her tongue refused to articulate.

Nancy, after having placed the tea−rose on the table, kneeled beside the bed and laid her head on Alida's breast, listening to the respiration of the lungs and counting the heartbeats. The cold touch of the apparition gave the young girl, alarmed by this silent auscultation, the sensation of a piece of ice.

The apparition rose, and casting a loving passionate glance at the young girl, began to count the leaves of the rose, most of which had fallen out,−−then whispered: "There is only one more−−one more."

A heavy pall arose between the sleeper and the vision, and it disappeared in the darkness as Alicia dropped off to sleep.

Had her mother's spirit come to warn her? What significance was attached to the mysterious words, "There is only one more−−one more," as whispered by the apparition? Was this pale, drooping rose the symbol of her life? This strange dream, with its horrible yet charming details, this beautiful spectre draped in muslin which counted the petals of the faded flower, filled the young girl's breast with fear, a cloud of sadness gathered about her lovely forehead, and strange thoughts occupied her mind.

This orange−branch which shook out its blossoms in profusion about her had

something mournful about it as well. Were the little white stars therefore not destined to glisten on her bridal veil? With a movement of horror, Alicia withdrew the flower she was biting from her lips−−the blossom was already discolored and faded.

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The time for M. d'Aspremont's expected visit drew near. Miss Ward struggled bravely against the feeling that oppressed her; she passed her hand through her hair and readjusted the folds of her scarf, while she picked up the fallen book in order to appear engaged when the visitor should make his appearance.

Paul arrived at last, and Miss Ward welcomed him with a forced laugh, as she did not wish to alarm him for fear he would accuse himself as being the cause of her illness. The scene he had just had with the Comte d'Altavilla gave Paul a savage and irritated appearance, which caused Vicfe to make the cabalistic sign, but Alicia's loving smile soon dispelled the clouds which had gathered about his brow.

"I hope you are not seriously ill, Alicia," he said as he seated himself beside her.

"Oh, it is nothing, I assure you; I am a little tired, that is all: the sirocco, paid us a visit yesterday, and that African wind is always too much for me. Just you wait until we get back to Lincolnshire and you shall see how well I am! Now that I have recovered my strength, I will take my turn at the oars as we take our daily row on the lake!"

As she said this she could not restrain a convulsive cough.

M. d'Aspremont turned pale and lowered his eyes.

A long silence ensued. Alicia was the first to speak.

"I have never given you anything, Paul," she said as she removed a plain gold band from her wasted finger; "take this ring and wear it in memory of me; it will fit you, as your hand is no larger than a woman's. Good−bye! I don't feel well and I would like to sleep a little. Come and see me tomorrow."

Paul withdrew with a heavy heart; the efforts made by Alicia to conceal her suffering were useless; he loved Miss Ward to distraction, and yet he was killing her. Was not this ring she had just given him, a pledge that they would meet in the next world?

He walked up and down the beach like a madman, dreaming of flight. He contemplated entering a Trappist convent, there to await his death seated on his coffin, without ever raising the cowl of his frock. It seemed as if he was cowardly and ungrateful, not to sacrifice his love, and to cease this abuse of Alicia's heroism: for she knew everything, she was aware that he was a jettatore, as the Comte d'Altavilla had already proclaimed him to be, and, seized by an angelic desire to do good, she did not spurn his love!

"Yes," said he, "this Neapolitan, this handsome comte she scorns, really loves her. His passion is nobler than mine: to save Alicia, he has not feared to approach me in order to provoke me−− me, a jettatore, that is to say, in his opinion, a being to be dreaded as much as the devil himself. While speaking to me, he toyed with the charms on his watch−chain, and the eyes of this celebrated duelist, who has killed three

men in his time, lowered themselves before mine!"

On reaching the Hotel de Rome, Paul wrote a number of letters, and then made his will, in which he bequeathed to Miss Alicia Ward all his worldly possessions, with the exception of a legacy for Paddy.

Then he opened the oak chest in which he kept his weapons; it was separated into little compartments in which were placed swords, pistols, and hunting−knives. He selected two Corsican stilettos, of equal size, after due deliberation.

They were long, two−edged blades of finely−tempered Damascus steel, curious and terrible weapons in the hands of desperate men. Paul also selected three silk scarfs of equal length.

He then notified Scazzigo to be in readiness to drive him into the country early in the morning.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, throwing himself upon his bed, "may God will it that this combat proves fatal to me! For if I have the good fortune to be killed−−Alicia will live!"

CHAPTER XIII SKELETON OF A CITY

pompeii, the dead city, does not wake up at daybreak like the living cities, and although she has partly thrown aside the mantle of cinders which had covered her during so many centuries, she still sleeps on her funeral pyre long after the sun has risen in the heavens.

The tourists of all nations, who visit the city of the dead during the day, are still soundly sleeping in their beds, all worn out with the exertions of their excursions, and as the sun rises over the gigantic tomb it does not light up a single human entrance. The lizards, alone, wriggle their tails as they glide along the walls or over disjointed mosaics, without stopping to read the *cave canem* inscribed on the doors of the deserted houses. These are the inhabitants who have succeeded the ancient citizens, and it seems as if Pompeii had been exhumed solely for their benefit.

It is a strange sight to behold in the dim light of morning−−the skeleton of this city, which was destroyed in the midst of its pleasures, its work, and its civilization. One momentarily expects to see the proprietors of these deserted houses appear in the doorway attired in Greek or Roman costume, and the chariots, of which the tracks are plainly discernible on the flag−stones, to move; the tipplers enter the thermopoles, where the marks of the cups are still imprinted on the marble counter. One walks as in a dream through the past; the bill of the spectacle in red letters is posted on the walls−−only the spectacle has taken place more than seventeen centuries ago! In the uncertain light of the morning, the figures of the dancing girls, painted on the walls, seem to wave their crotalums as they raise the thin drapery with the tips of their toes, believing, no doubt, that the torch bearers would light up the triclinium for an orgie; the Yen−uses, the Satyrs, and the heroic or grotesque figures, animated by a ray of light, apparently replaced the dispersed inhabitants, as they gave an almost

realistic appearance to the deserted city. The colored shadows flicker on the walls, and for several minutes the mind willingly lends itself to this ancient phantasmagoria. But that morning, to the great surprise of the lizards, the usual matinal serenity of Pompeii was disturbed by a strange visitor: a carriage drove up to the former main entrance of the city, and Paul, alighting, directed his steps towards the rendezvous on foot.

He was 'so deeply absorbed, however, that he did not heed this city of fallen grandeur. Was it the thought of the impending combat which preoccupied him thus? Not at all. He was not even thinking of that; his thoughts were far away. In his mind he recalled his first meeting with Miss Ward in Richmond; she was dressed in white, and had a bunch of jasmine blossoms in her hair. How young, how beautiful and sprightly she had seemed to him then!

The ancient baths are at the end of the Consular quarter, near the residence of Diomedes and Mammia's sepulchre; M. d'Aspremont had no difficulty in finding them. It was here that the women of Pompeii used to come after the bath to dry their beautiful bodies, readjust their head−dresses, and resume their tunics and their stereotyped smiles in the polished brass mirrors of the period. Quite another scene was to be enacted in the thermae, and blood would stain the marble mosaics where perfumed waters once were wont to flow.

A few moments later Comte d'Altavilla appeared. He carried a pistol case in his hand, and two swords under his arm. He did not believe the conditions proposed by M. d'Aspremont to be serious; he looked upon them purely as a bit of mephistophelean sarcasm.

"What do you intend doing with these pistols and swords, Comte?" questioned Paul. "I thought we had fully agreed on the weapons we are to use?"

"Undoubtedly; but I thought it quite possible that you would change your mind. No one has ever fought such a duel as you propose."

"Even were we fully equal in skill, I would have an advantage over you," replied Paul with a bitter smile; "and I do not wish to abuse this advantage. Here are a couple of Corsican stilettos; pray examine them−−they are of equal weight and length−−and here a couple of silk scarfs with which to blindfold ourselves. See, they are very thick, and *my glance* will hardly pierce the material."

The Comte d'Altavilla nodded his head approvingly.

"We have no witnesses," continued Paul, "and one of us must never leave this vault alive. Let us each write a note, attesting the loyalty of the duel; the victor will pin it on the dead man's breast."

"A wise precaution," answered the Neapolitan with a smile, as he traced a few lines on a page of Paul's memorandum book, after which the latter went through the same formality.

This accomplished, the two adversaries, flinging aside their coats, proceeded to blindfold themselves, and, arming themselves with their stilettos, they each took a firm hold on the silk scarf.

"Are you ready?" asked M. d'Aspremont of the Comte d'Altavilla.

"Yes," replied the Neapolitan, who was perfectly composed.

Don Felipe d'Altavilla's bravery was not to be questioned; all he feared was the jettatura, and this blind combat, from which other men would have recoiled in horror, did not give him the slightest fear. He simply staked his life at head or tails, without being compelled to undergo the torture of having his foe's fatal glance directed upon him.

The duellists flourished their stilettos, and the scarf which linked them together was strained to its utmost tension. By an instinctive movement, both Paul and the Comte had thrown their bodies backward, the only attitude possible in such a duel; their arms circled through the empty air, and that was all.

This blind struggle, where each had a presentiment of death without seeing it coming, was indeed terrible. Silently and furiously the two foes retreated, sprang forward and retreated again, at times almost upsetting one another in the darkness, as they struck out again and again with their stilettos without injuring each other.

At one moment, d'Altavilla felt the point of his stiletto striking against something; he halted, supposing that he killed his rival, and waited for the sound of his falling body−−but he had only struck the wall!

"By Heaven! I thought I had run you through," he exclaimed, as he recovered his guard.

"Do not speak," said Paul, "your voice guides me."

And the combat recommenced.

Suddenly the rivals felt themselves detached from one another. A blow of Paul's stiletto had severed the scarf.

"A truce!" exclaimed the Neapolitan; "the scarf has parted!"

"What matters that? Let us continue," replied Paul.

A painful silence followed. Like honorable men that they were, neither M. d'Aspremont nor the Comte wished to take the advantage of the sound of the voice caused by this brief exchange of words, to precipitate the attack. They took a few paces to one side in order to throw each other off the track, then they retraced their steps and began hunting for each other in the darkness.

Paul displaced a little stone with his foot; this slight noise revealed to the Neapolitan the direction his foe was taking. Raising himself on his tiptoes in order to obtain more momentum, Altavilla bounded forward with the fury of a tiger, and brought up against M. d'Aspremont's stiletto.

Paul touched the point of his weapon −−it was wet−−unsteady steps resounded on the flag−stones; a heavy sigh was heard, followed by the noise of a falling body.

Terrified beyond measure, Paul tore the handkerchief from his eyes, and beheld the Comte d'Altavilla, pale and motionless, stretched out on his back, his shirt stained with his life−blood.

The handsome Neapolitan was dead! M. d'Aspremont placed the note d'Altavilla had written, attesting the loyalty of the combat, on his breast, and left the therms with a heavy heart, while Ms face was even whiter than that of the dead nobleman who was lying there on the cold marble slabs.

CHAPTER XIV USELESS SACRIFICE

TOWARDS two o'clock in the afternoon, a number of English tourists visited the ruins of Pompeii; the party, which was composed of the father, mother, three daughters, two little boys and a cousin, had already cast a careless look about the ruins, characteristic of the British *ennui,* almost without halting to admire the grandeur of the amphitheatre, and of the theatres, so curiously juxtaposed; of the military quarters, chalked with caricatures by the guards during their leisure moments; the forum, the temples of Venus and Jupiter, the basilica and the Pantheon. They silently studied their *Hurrays,* while the cicerone eloquently described the ruins, and they scarcely condescended to notice the broken columns, the fragments of statues, the mosaics, the frescoes, and the inscriptions.

They finally reached the ancient baths, discovered in 1824, as the guide saw fit to remark. "Here were the vapor baths, there the boiler in which the water was heated, and, further on, the drying room"; these details given in the Neapolitan *patois,* mixed with a few sentences in broken English, evidently did not interest the visitors, for they were going to take their departure, when suddenly Miss Ethelwina, the eldest of the daughters, a charming blonde with freckled face, started back, partly through fear and partly through modesty, as she cried out: "A man!"

"It is no doubt some workman employed by the government to unearth the ruins, who is taking his afternoon *siesta,* so don't be alarmed, my lady," said the guide, as he applied the tip of his boot to the inanimate body stretched out at full length on the ground. "Hola! I say there, wake up, you lazy clown, and permit their graces to pass."

But the sleeper did not stir.

"The man is not asleep−−he is dead," said one of the sons who was in advance of the party.

The cicerone stooped down, but he started back in horror as he exclaimed:

"The man has been murdered!"

"It is positively shocking that one is compelled to look upon such ghastly objects; Ethelwina, Kitty, Bessie, stand aside," remarked Mrs. Bracebridge; "it is not proper for young ladies to look at such a disgusting sight. Haven't they any police in this country? The coroner should have removed the body long ago."

"Ah! a paper!" laconically remarked the cousin, a long−legged, awkward fellow after the style of the Laird of Dumbiedike in "The Edinburgh Jail."

"So it is," added the guide, as he picked up the paper on d'Altavilla's breast; "and there is writing on it, too."

"Then read it," exclaimed the tourists as with one voice, their curiosity being aroused.

"It is useless to seek or annoy any one on account of my death. If this note is found on my wound I shall have fallen in a fair duel. *(Signed)* FELIPE, Comte d'Altavilla.

"He was a gentleman after all; what a pity!" sighed Mrs. Bracebridge, impressed by the title.

"And such a handsome man," murmured Miss Ethelwina, the young lady with the freckles.

"Surely, you can't complain now," whispered Bessie to Kitty; "you are always grumbling because we have had such an uninteresting voyage; we have not, it is true, been stopped by brigands on the road from Terracine to Fondi, but we have found a young nobleman, pierced through the heart by a blow from a stiletto in the ruins of Pompeii−−and that ought to be romantic enough, I'm sure. Some love affair is back of this, no doubt, and we will have something startling to tell our friends on our return. I will sketch the scene in my album, and you will add a few mournful verses, d *la* Byron."

"I don't care," interrupted the guide, "it was a fair blow−−he was struck square in the heart; there is no fault to be found."

Such was the funeral oration of the Comte d'Altavilla.

Some workmen, notified by the cicerone, hurried off to warn the authorities, and the body of the unfortunate Comte was carried to his chateau near Salerno.

As to M. d'Aspremont, he had regained his carriage, and, although his eyes were wide open, he could not see−− he walked like a somnambulist in his sleep. He was like an animated statue. Although he was inspired with religious horror at the sight of the dead man, still he did not consider himself guilty. Provoked by the Comte to fight, he had no other course to pursue than to accept, and yet he had only decided to fight in the hope that he would be the victim. Gifted with a fatal glance, he had insisted that both combatants be blindfolded so that fate alone should be responsible for the result. He had not even struck the blow; his enemy had impaled himself upon his weapon! He bemoaned the death of the Comte d'Altavilla precisely as he would have done had he not been accountable for his death. "It is my stiletto that killed him," he reasoned, "but if *1* had looked at him in a ball−room one of the chandeliers would have fallen on him from the ceiling and would have crushed him beneath its weight. I am as innocent as the lightning, the avalanche, or the machinel tree−−as unconscious, in fact, of the harm I occasion as any of these destructive powers. The lightning, however, is not aware that it kills, while I, an intelligent creature, know the fatal power I possess. It seems as if I had no right to linger on this earth where I cause so many misfortunes! Would God damn me forever if I committed suicide in order to save my fellow−beings from destruction? It seems as if this would be pardonable in the present case. But what if I should be mistaken? Then I could not even look upon Alicia in the next world, where the eyes of the souls are not accursed with the fatal fascino. This is a chance I don't propose to run."

A sudden thought flashed through the mind of the unfortunate jettatore and interrupted his reverie. His features seemed to grow softer, and they relaxed their severity as they assumed an expression of determination. He had taken a final resolution.

"A curse be on my eyes, since they are murderous! but, before closing forever, saturate yourselves with light, gaze on the sun, on the blue sky, the immense sea, and the chains of mountains: contemplate the green trees, the infinite horizon, the columns of the palace, the fisherman's hut; the far−off

islands of the gulf, the white sails which brighten the horizon, and Vesuvius with her smoking crater; gaze upon all these sights, and remember them well, for you will never feast upon this beautiful vision again; study every form, and every color−−treat yourselves to this gorgeous spectacle, intoxicate yourselves with the beauties of the earth−−for it is for the last time! Go on! enjoy yourselves! The curtain will soon fall between you and the picturesque scenery and the beauties of the universe!"

At this moment the carriage was following the beach; the beautiful bay was looking at its best, and the sky seemed to have been sculptured out of a single block of sapphire.

Paul asked the driver to stop, and, getting out of the carriage, he seated himself on a rock, from whence he gazed long and earnestly at the surroundings as if he wished to impress them upon his memory. His eyes bathed themselves in the light, and the sun, shining brighter than ever, seemed to impart some of its brilliancy to them! There would be no dawn to the night which was to follow!

Tearing himself away from this silent contemplation, M. d'Aspremont entered the carriage and directed Scazziga to drive to the white villa near Sorrento.

He found Alicia reclining on the lounge, exactly as he had left her the day before. Paul seated himself opposite to her, but this time he did not lower his eyes as he had been accustomed to do since he first acquired the knowledge of his fatal power.

Alicia's beauty was perfect even in her agony; the woman had almost disappeared, making way for the angelic being. Her skin was transparent, ethereal, and luminous; one could see her soul shining through the frail form like the light of an alabaster lamp. Her eyes had the tender blue of the sky in them, and scintillated like two bright stars; life scarcely placed its red signature upon the carnation of her lips.

A divine smile illuminated her mouth, like a ray of the sun about a rose, as her affianced husband turned his eyes lovingly upon her. She imagined that Paul had at last dismissed the thought that he was accursed from his mind, and she once more beheld the Paul of former days. She held out her pale, wan hand, which he eagerly clasped in his own.

"So you are no longer afraid of me?" she said with a sweet smile, as Paul continued to gaze upon her.

"Oh! let me look at you," answered M. d'Aspremont in a strange tone, kneeling beside the sofa; "let my eyes feast themselves upon your intoxicating beauty!" and he contemplated Alicia's raven−black hair, her white brow, which .was as pure as Grecian marble, her dark blue eyes, her finely shaped nose, her mouth with its two rows of pearls, and her swan−like neck; he seemed to make a note of every feature and every detail, like a painter who desires to retain a picture in his mind.

Alicia was fascinated by his burning glance, and experienced a painful, almost fatal sensation−−the dying embers of her life were fanned into a momentary flame; she turned red and white by turns, and from ice she suddenly turned to fire. Another moment, and her soul would have left her forever.

She placed her hands over Paul's eyes, but the young man's glance darted

through her transparent fingers like a flash of lightning.

"Now that I have seen her again, what care I for my eyesight? Her portrait is imprinted upon my heart," Paul muttered as he took his departure.

That night, after having gazed at the setting sun−−the last sunset he would ever behold−−M. d'Aspremont rang for a chafing−dish and some charcoal.

"I wonder if he is going to asphyxiate himself?" grumbled Virgilio Falsacappa as he handed Paddy the coal and the chafing−dish his master had sent for. "It's about the best thing the cursed jettatore could do!"

But such was not d'Aspremont's intention, for he opened the window and lighting the coals, plunged the blade of a stiletto into the flame.

The fine blade, embedded as it was in this incandescent heat, was soon red−hot. Paul leaned on the mantelpiece and gazed at himself in the mirror.

"Farewell, accursed features! this horrible mask will soon disappear forever! I am going to plunge you into the darkness of the night, and before long I shall have forgotten your fatal charm as completely as though it had never existed. It will be useless to cry out, 'Hubert, Hubert, my poor eyes! for that will not alter my determination. Now then, to work!" and casting one last, sweeping glance in the mirror he approached the lighted fire

He blew his breath upon the embers and took the dagger by the handle, the blade of which emitted little white sparks.

At this decisive moment, although fully determined to carry his plan into execution, M, d'Aspremont felt his heart sinking within him, while a cold sweat bathed his temples; but with a superhuman effort he recovered his self−possession, and passed the hot blade before his eyes.

A sharp, tearing, lacerating pain almost caused him to cry out; it seemed as if two drops of molten lead had been dropped in his eyes and, burning through his eyeballs, had forced their way to the back of his head; the dagger fell from his open hand and made a deep burn in the carpet.

A thick, compact darkness, compared with which the darkest night was as daylight, enveloped him in its black mantle; he turned his head in the direction of the mantelpiece, where the candles were still burning brightly, but an impenetrable, dense obscurity surrounded him on every side. The sacrifice was consummated!

"And now, sweet and noble creature," murmured Paul, "I can become your husband without the fear of becoming your assassin as well. You will no longer wilt away under the magic fascino of my fatal glance−−you will regain your health and former beauty. Alas! I can no longer see you, it is true, but your sainted image is forever imprinted on my heart; and although I will see you only in my fancy, still your sweet voice will reach my ear. Sometimes, too, you will let your hand linger in mine to assure me of your presence, you will condescend to lead your poor, blind husband when he falters in the darkness of an eternal night; you will read poetry and you will describe all the celebrated paintings and statues to him. Through the sound of your loving voice, you will restore to him the lost treasures of the world; you will be his one thought, his only dream; deprived of the sunlight and the enjoyment of the beauties of this earth, his soul will fly towards you for consolation!

"I do not regret my sacrifice, since you are saved−−and, after all, what have I lost? The monotonous spectacle of the different seasons, the sight of more or less picturesque places where the hundred different acts of the comedy of life are daily enacted for the edification of millions of souls. The earth, the sky, the sea, the mountains, the trees, the flowers−−a vulgar show, a repetition of the same old things day after day! When one is beloved, one possesses the real sun, the brightness of which is never dimmed by passing clouds!"

So spoke the unfortunate Paul d'Aspremont, feverish and delirious with pain and exaltation.

His suffering gradually diminished; then he dropped off into that heavy sleep which is the brother of death, and which, like death, brings consolation.

He was not aroused by the light of day which streamed through the open curtains of his room. Henceforth, midnight and noon would be alike to him; but the clocks chiming the Angelus rumbled in his ears, until, becoming gradually more distinct, they awoke him from his drowsiness.

He attempted to move his eyelids, and before he knew it the pain suddenly reminded him of his sacrifice. His eyes encountered nothing but darkness, and it seemed as if he had been buried alive; but he soon recovered his composure. For was it not destined that his life should be ever thus? Henceforth, the light of the morning and the darkness of the night would be alike to him.

He groped around in the darkness for the bell−rope, and Paddy made his appearance in answer to this summons.

"I foolishly slept with the window open," said Paul, in order to avoid an explanation, "and I believe I have caught the gutta serena, but it will soon pass away, I suppose. Kindly lead me to the basin and fill a tumbler with fresh water forthwith."

Paddy, with the discretion so becoming in an English valet, made no comment, and, after executing his master's commands, retired.

Left to himself, Paul dipped his handkerchief in the cold water and applied it to his eyes in order to cool the burn.

We will leave M. d'Aspremont, thus painfully occupied, while we will rejoin some of the other personages who have figured in this story.

The news of Comte d'Altavilla's strange death spread like wildfire through the city and was the subject of a thousand different conjectures. The Comte's ability as a swordsman was well known. d'Altavilla had the reputation of being one of the best fencers of the Neapolitan school; he had killed three men, and he had seriously wounded five or six more. The most celebrated duellists, therefore, took particular pains not to offend him. Now, if one of these swaggerers had killed d'Altavilla, he certainly would not have hesitated to proclaim his prowess. And yet the note found on his body diverted all thoughts of murder. At first the handwriting was questioned, but it was compared to some of his letters by experts, who pronounced the writing to be the same. Again, the handkerchief tied about his head could in no way be accounted for. Then, two stilettos were found in the ruins near the body, while a couple of swords and pistols were discovered a little further off.

The news of his death finally reached Vicfe's ears, and she lost no time in informing Sir Joshua Ward. The Commodore suddenly remembered his conversation with d'Altavilla, when the latter mysteriously hinted that he had a plan by which Alicia could be saved. In his imagination, he beheld the Comte and M. d'Aspremont engaged in the deadly struggle. As to Vicfe, she did not hesitate to attribute the death of the handsome Neapolitan to the fatal influence of the fascino. And yet, Paul had paid his respects to Miss Ward at the usual hour, and there was nothing in his appearance to betray the part he had acted in the terrible drama; on the contrary, he appeared even more gay than usual.

M. d'Aspremont did not call that day, and the news of the Comte's death was carefully withheld from Alicia.

Paul did not wish to present himself with his red eyes, as he proposed to attribute his sudden blindness to another cause. The following day, however, his eyes having ceased to pain him, he asked Paddy to accompany him for a drive.

The carriage stopped, as usual, before the terrace. The blind man kicked open the door with his foot, and was soon treading the well−known path. Vicfe had not hastened to meet him as was her wont when the bell, set in motion by the opening and closing of the door, notified her of the approach of a visitor; none of the joyful sounds which formerly burst upon his ear reached him now, but instead a frightful, death−like silence reigned supreme. This silence, which would have oppressed even a man who could see, struck apprehension and nameless fear to the heart of the poor, groping Paul.

The branches which he could no longer see appeared anxious to retain him; they stretched forth, like so many arms, attempting to bar his passage. The laurel−bushes got in his way, the rose−bushes fastened themselves on his clothes, the vines seized him about the legs, while the birds seemed to twitter, "Why do you come here, poor unfortunate? Do not attempt to force your way through the obstructions nature has placed in your path−−go away!" But Paul did not heed the warning, and, tormented by a terrible presentiment, he hurled himself against the opposing shrubbery−−heedless of the laurel and the rose bushes he destroyed in his mad onslaught−−while he continued to force his way toward the villa.

Torn and scratched by the overhanging branches, he finally reached the end of the arbor. A gust of fresh air struck him in the face, and he continued his way with his hands stretched out before him.

He found the wall, and finally the door, after a difficult search.

He entered; no kindly voice gave him a welcome. There was no sound to guide him. For a moment he stood, hesitating, in the doorway. An odor of ether, of wax in combustion, and the aromatic perfumes of a death−chamber reached the intruder's nostrils as he stood there, hesitating and trembling on the threshold; a frightful thought suddenly crossed his mind, and he entered the room.

He advanced a few steps−−then he struck against something which fell on the floor with a loud noise. Stooping down, he took it up: by its touch he recognized it to be a long metallic candlestick, similar to the ones used in churches.

With throbbing heart, he continued his way through the darkness. He seemed to hear a voice offering up a prayer to Heaven; he took another step forward, and his hands encountered the foot−board of a bed; he leaned over, and his fingers touched a motionless body at first; then a wreath of roses and a face as pure and cold as marble.

It was Alicia laid out in her funeral robes.

"Dead!" shrieked Paul, as he realized the truth at last; "dead! and it is I who have killed her!"

The Commodore, frozen with horror, had seen this spectre, with its sightless eyes, as it staggered across the room, and finally came to a standstill before the bed in which his niece was lying: he had understood.

The grandeur of this useless sacrifice caused the tears to rush to the old man's eyes.

Paul fell on his knees beside the bed, while he covered Alicia's cold hand with burning, passionate kisses; his body shook with emotion. His sorrow even moved the ferocious Vicfe, who stood respectfully by the side of the bed, watching her mistress's last sleep.

After he had bid his love farewell, M. d'Aspremont rose and, advancing towards the door, went out. His eyes, which were wide open, exposing the red scar caused by the burns, presented an unnatural expression; although he was blind, one would have believed he had the gift of sight. He crossed the terrace, without halting once, and walked out into the country, sometimes disturbing a stone with his foot, and sometimes stopping as if to catch a distant sound−−but he continued on his way.

The noise made by the waves as they washed ashore grew more distinct, while the sea−gulls uttered plaintive cries which sounded mournfully indeed as the sighing of the wind and the rush of the waters burst upon his ear.

Paul was soon standing on an overhanging rock. The rolling of the waves, and the salted rain which beat upon his face should have warned him of the danger he was running; but he heeded not the warning; a strange smile flitted across his pale lips, and he continued on his way, although he knew the gulf was beneath his feet.

Suddenly, he lost his balance and fell; a gigantic wave seized him in its embrace and carried him backwards in its mad rush.

Then the storm burst forth in all its fury; the waves beat upon the beach in rapid succession, like a phalanx of cavalry storming a fortress, while they cast the spray high into the air; the black clouds, tinged with fire, emitted sulphurous vapors; the crater of Vesuvius grew brighter, and a variegated cloud hovered over the volcano. The barks anchored off the shore collided together with a mournful sound, while their cables, strained to their utmost tension, creaked ominously. Then the rain began to fall in torrents, cutting the faces of the people like so much fine glass−−it seemed as if the chaos wished to conquer nature and once more confound the elements.

M. Paul d'Aspremont's body was never found, although the Commodore offered a large reward for its recovery.

An ebony coffin, with silver handles, lined with quilted satin−−in fact, just such a coffin as Clarissa Harlowe recommended to the care of "the carpenter,"−−was taken on board a yacht by the Commodore and carried to England, where it was placed in the family vault in Lincolnshire. It contained all that was earthly of Miss Alicia Ward, who was beautiful even in death.

A remarkable change has taken place in the Commodore. His superb *embonpoint* has completely disappeared. He no longer takes Jamaica rum in his tea, eats but little, and has very little to say; and the contrast between his white whiskers and his sunburnt face no longer exists−−the Commodore has forever lost his ruddy color.