

Jettatura

Theophile Gautier

Table of Contents

<u>Jettatura</u>	1
<u>Theophile Gautier</u>	1
<u>Chapter 1</u>	1
<u>Chapter Two</u>	4
<u>Chapter 3</u>	8
<u>Chapter 4</u>	10
<u>Chapter 5</u>	13
<u>Chapter 6</u>	16
<u>Chapter 7</u>	20
<u>Chapter 8</u>	22
<u>Chapter 9</u>	26
<u>Chapter 10</u>	29
<u>Chapter 11</u>	32
<u>Chapter 12</u>	37
<u>Chapter 13</u>	39
<u>Chapter 14</u>	42

Jettatura

Theophile Gautier

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Chapter 1

The "Leopold," a splendid Tuscan steamer plying between Marseilles and Naples, had just doubled Procida Point. The passengers, cured of their sea-sickness by the sight of land, most efficacious of all remedies, were all out on deck. On the part reserved for the first-class passengers, stood a number of Englishmen endeavoring to get away as far as possible from each other and to trace around themselves a circle none might venture to enter. Their splenetic faces were carefully shaven, their cravats had not a wrinkle, their shirt collars, white and stiff, looked like triangles of Bristol board, their hands were protected by brand-new Suede gloves, and their new boots shone with Lord Elliot's blacking. They looked as if they had just emerged from one of the compartments of their dressing-cases, for in their correct get-up there were visible none of the little disorders of dress which are the usual consequences of travel.

There were noblemen, members of Parliament, city merchants, tailors from Regent Street, and cutlers from Sheffield, all proper, grave, motionless, and bored. Nor were ladies wanting, for Englishwomen are not sedentary like the women of other lands, and the smallest pretext suffices to justify their leaving their island. By the side of the great ladies and of the wives of commoners, somewhat ripe beauties, with blotchy faces, bloomed, their faces half concealed by their blue veils, maidens with complexions of milk and roses, with shimmering golden tresses, and long white teeth, recalling the favourite types of "Keepsakes," and proving that English engravings are not so untrue to life as if often said. These lovely creatures repeated, each in turn, with the most delightful British accent, the obligatory "Vedi Napoli e poi mori;" perused their Murray or wrote down their impressions of travel upon their note-books, without paying the least attention to the glances of a number of would-be Don Juans from Paris who roamed about in their vicinity, while the angry mammas grumbled about French impropriety.

On the edge of the aristocratic quarter-deck, strolled, while smoking their cigars, three or four young fellows whose straw or felt hats, sack-coats with huge horn buttons, and duck trousers, made it easy to recognise as artists, a fact confirmed by the mustaches a la Rubens, or cropped short a la Paolo Veronese. Inspired by very different motives they also were tying, like the dandies, to catch a glimpse of the beauties whom their lack of wealth forbade their approaching more closely, and these efforts somewhat interfered with their enjoyment of the magnificent panorama outspread before them.

In the bows of the vessel, leaning against the bulwarks or seated on coils of rope, were grouped the third-class passengers, engaged in consuming the provisions uneaten on account of the sea-sickness, and casting not one glance upon the finest view in the world, for the feeling of nature is the privilege of cultivated minds which are not absorbed wholly by the material needs of life.

The weather was fine; the blue waves rolled broadly on with scarce power enough to efface the ship's wake. The smoke from the funnel, forming clouds in the glorious heavens, blew away softly in cottony flakes, and the paddle-wheels, revolving in an iridescent diamond spray, churned the water with joyous activity as if aware of the proximity of the harbour.

Already the purple lines of hills that, from Posilipo to Vesuvius, encircle the wondrous gulf at the upper end of which Naples lies like a sea-nymph resting and drying herself after her bath, were becoming more distinct and stood out more plainly against the brilliant azure of the heavens. Already a few white spots, showing on the darker background of the land, indicated the presence of towns scattered along the countryside. The sails of the

Jettatura

homeward-bound fishing-boats slipped along the smooth blue waters like swans' feathers blown by the breeze, and spoke of human activity upon the majestic solitude of the sea.

Very soon the Castle of Saint-Elmo and the Convent di San Martino came out distinctly on the crest of the mountain on which stands Naples, showing about the domes of the churches, the terraces of the hotels, the fronts of the palaces, and the verdure of the gardens, that were yet but faintly visible through a luminous haze. Then the Castello dell' Ovo, squatting on its foam-flecked reef, seemed to approach the steamer, and the pier with its lighthouse drew near like an arm holding a torch.

At the end of the bay, Vesuvius, now nearer, changed its blue tints, due to distance, for more vigorous and solid tones; its sides were seen to be furrowed with gullies and streams of lava grown cold, and from its truncated cone, as from the holes of a perfume-burner, plainly issued little jets of white smoke that wavered in the wind.

Chiatamone, Pizzo Falcone, the hotel-bordered quay of Santa Lucia, the Palazzo Nuovo, flanked with its balconied towers, the Arsenal, and ships of all nations, mingling their masts and spars like the trees of a leafless wood, were plainly to be seen, when there emerged from a cabin a passenger whose hand not shown up once during the whole trip, either because sea-sickness had kept him in confinement, or because his reserve prevented his mingling with his fellow-travellers, or again because the prospect, new to most of them, had long been a familiar sight to him and had ceased to excite his interest.

He was a young fellow of twenty-six, to twenty-eight years. At least such was the age one felt tempted to give him at the first glance, though when he was examined attentively he seemed to be either younger or older, than that, so curiously mingled were weariness and youthfulness upon his enigmatical countenance. His hair, of that dark fairness called auburn by the English, shone in the sunlight with coppery, metallic sheen, and in the shade seemed almost black. His profile was clear cut, his brow would have called forth the admiration of a phrenologist, thanks to its protuberances, his nose was nobly aquiline, his lips well formed, and his chin had that powerful roundness that recalls the medals of antiquity. Yet, these various features, individually handsome, did not form an agreeable whole. They lacked the mysterious harmony that softens contours and makes them melt one into another. There is a legend of an Italian painter who, seeking to represent the rebellious archangel, composed a face of dissimilar beauties and thus attained an effect of terror far beyond what is possible by the use of horns, arched eyebrows, and unholy grin. The stranger's face produced a similar impression. His eyes, in particular, were extraordinary. The black lashes that edged them contrasted with the pale gray colour of the pupils and the auburn shade of hair; the thinness of the nose caused them to look nearer each other than allowed by the rules of drawing, and as for their expression it was quite undefinable. When the young man's gaze did not consciously rest upon anything, it was moist with vague melancholy and soft tenderness, but if he looked at any one or anything, his brows bent, and formed a perpendicular wrinkle on this forehead; the pupils lost their gray colour and turned green, spotted with black spots and striated with yellow lines; his glance then flashed sharply, almost painfully, after which he would resume his former placidity, and from a Mephistophelian individual turn into a young man of the world -- member of the Jockey club, if you like -- on his way to spend the season in Naples, and glad to step on a lava floor less mobile than the "Leopold's" deck.

His dress was elegant and did not draw the eye by any striking details. He wore a dark blue frock coat, a black cravat with polka dots, which was tied in a way that avoided both carelessness and over carefulness; a waistcoat of the same pattern as the tie, a pair of light gray trousers, and neat boots. His gold watch chain was of the plainest pattern, and the cord of his eye-glasses was of silk, tressed flat. In his well-gloved hand he carried a slender cane, made of a twisted vine-stem, mounted in silver.

He took a few steps along the deck, his glance wandering idly over the shore, now drawing closer, and on which one could see the carriages driving along, the people crowding and the collecting of those groups of idlers to whom the arrival of a stage-coach or a steamer is an ever interesting and ever novel sight, even though they have gazed upon it a thousand times.

Jettatura

Already a flotilla of boats and other craft was starting for the quay, with the intention of boarding the "Leopold." They bore waiters, guides, facchini and other assorted samples of the rabble which is accustomed to look upon strangers as its natural prey. The various craft were rowing hard in order to be the first to reach the ship, and, as usual, the crews were exchanging insults in a loud tone of voice fit to terrify people unused to the manners and customs of the lower classes in Naples.

The auburn haired young man had, in order to grasp more readily the details of the prospect unrolled before him, put on his eye-glasses, but his attention, distracted from the sublime prospect of the bay by the concert of yells that rose from the flotilla, was drawn to the boats. No doubt he was annoyed at the noise, for his brows bent, the wrinkle on his brow became marked, and his gray eyes turned yellowish.

An unexpected billow, running in from sea, with a fringe of foam on its crest, passed under the steamer which it raised and let fall again heavily, broke on the quay in blinding spray, wetted the promenaders surprised by the suddenness of the douche, and with its backwash dashed the boats together so roughly that a number of facchini fell overboard. The accident had no serious consequences, for the rascals swam like fishes or marine deities, and reappeared a few seconds later, with the salt water running out of their mouths and their ears, their hair plastered against their temples, and assuredly as much astonished at the unexpected dive as was Telemachus, the son of Ulysses, when Minerva, under the guise of the sage Mentor, threw him into the sea from the top of a rock in order to withdraw him from the love of Eucharis.

At a respectful distance behind the strange traveler, there stood by a pile of trunks a small groom, a sort of old man of fifteen, a liveried gnome, who looked like one of the dwarfs whom the Chinese patiently bring up in porcelain jars to prevent their growing. His flat face, on which the nose scarcely showed, seemed to have been compressed in earliest childhood, and his protruding eyes had the sweetness of look which certain naturalists attribute to the toad's eye. Neither his chest nor his back was deformed, and though one would in vain have looked for a hump on him, he gave the impression of being a hunchback. In a word, he was a very proper groom, who might have ridden at Ascot or Chantilly without first going into training; his queer looks would have determined any gentleman-rider to engage him on the spot. He was repulsive, but irreproachable in his own way, like his master.

The passengers landed, and, with their luggage, fell a prey to the porters after the latter had exchanged insults that were more than Homeric, and proceeded to the various hotels with which Naples is abundantly provided.

The traveler with the eye-glasses and his groom went to the Hotel de Rome, followed by a numerous company of robust facchini who pretended to groan and sweat under the burden of a hat-box or a small parcel, guilelessly expecting a heavy tip, which four or five of their comrades, who exhibited muscles as powerful as those of the "Hercules" so much admired in the Studj, pushed a handcart on which had been placed two trunks of moderate size and equally moderate weight.

When the hotel was reached and the padron di casa had shown the newcomer to his apartment, the porters, although they had received about three times their legal fare, indulged in the most frantic gesticulations and in speeches in which supplications and threats were mingled in the most comical fashion, all shouting at one and the same time with terrific volubility, claiming additional pay and swearing by all that was holy that they had not been sufficiently rewarded for their exertions. Paddy, who had to face them alone, — for his master, unheeding the noise, had already gone upstairs — looked like a monkey surrounded by a pack of hounds. In order to still the tumult, he attempted to harangue in his mother tongue, that is, in English, but his speech proved unacceptable. Then, closing his fists and placing his arms breast high, he assumed, to the great hilarity of the facchini, a very correct boxing attitude, and with a blow straight from the shoulder, worthy of Adams or Tom Cribb, he landed on the breadbasket of the biggest fellow in the crowd, and sent him flying heels over head on the lava pavement.

Jettatura

This exploit put the rabble to flight; the hulking fellow picked himself up with difficulty, feeling very sore, and, without seeking to have his revenge on Paddy, went off with endless contortions, rubbing with his hand the blue-black mark that was already showing on his skin, and convinced that a devil must be hidden under the jacket of the monkey-like groom, who looked as if he were fit to ride nothing bigger than a dog and as if a breath of wind would blow him away.

The stranger, having summoned the padron di casa, asked him if any letters had come for Mr. Paul d'Aspremont. The hotel-keeper replied that a letter so addressed had been lying for a week in the letter-rack, and he hastened to fetch the epistle. The letter, enclosed in a thick envelope of blue cream laid paper, and sealed with aventurine sealing-wax, was addressed in a sloping, angular hand with cursive strokes, denoting a high aristocratic education, and common, too uniformly perhaps, to English young ladies of good family.

The contents of the note, which Mr. d'Aspremont opened with an eagerness due apparently to something more than mere curiosity, were as follows: —

"Dear Mr. Paul, — We reached Naples two months ago, travelling by short stages. Uncle complained bitterly of the heat, the mosquitoes, the wine, the butter, the beds. He swore he must have been crazy to leave his comfortable home near London, to travel on dusty roads lined with wretched inns, in which no decent English dog would consent to pass the night; but, for all his grumbling, he accompanied me and I could have taken him to the world's end. He is none the worse for his trip, and I am a great deal better. We have settled down on the sea-shore, in a whitewashed house hidden in a sort of virgin forest of orange, lime, myrtle, and rose laurel trees, and other exotic plants. From our terrace we have a wonderful view, and every afternoon you will find there a cup of tea or a glass of lemonade, whichever you may prefer. Uncle, whom you have fascinated, I know not how, will be delighted to see you again; and need I add that I shall not be sorry to do so either, although you did cut my fingers with your ring when you bade us good-bye on the pier at Folkstone?

"Alicia W."

Chapter Two

Paul d'Aspremont, after he had dined in his room called for a carriage. there are always plenty of them round the large hotels on the look-out for travellers, so that his wish was at once gratified. By the side of Neapolitan cab horse, Rosinante itself would seem in excellent condition; their skinny heads, their ribs showing like the hoops of a barrel, their protruding backbones, always raw, seem to implore as a kindness the knacker's knife, for the careless Southerner deems it a piece of needless attention to feed animals. The harness, usually broken, is mended with bits of cord, and when the coachman has gathered up his reins and calls on his horses to start, one feels sure that the horses will vanish into thin air and the vehicle disappear in smoke, after the manner of Cinderella's carriage when she returned from the ball after midnight, contrary to the fairy's orders. But it is not so; the poor brutes stiffen their limbs, and after a few struggles, start on a gallop which they keep up steadily. The coach man inspires them with his own ardour, and the lash of his whip brings out the last spark of life concealed within their skeleton frames. They prance, throw their heads up and down, try to look spirited, open their eyes and their nostrils, and go at a pace that the fastest English trotters could not equal. To what this phenomenon is due, and what is the mysterious power that enables dead animals to gallop at full speed, I cannot explain, but the fact is patent that this miracle is of daily occurrence in Naples and that no one is in the least surprised at it.

Mr. Paul d'Aspremont's carriage was flying through the dense crowd, shaving the citron-wreathed acquajoli shops, the open-air stalls of vendors of stews and macaroni, the fishmongers' stalls, and the heaps of water-melons ranged on the highway like piles of cannonballs in an artillery park. Scarcely did the lazzaroni, lying along the walls wrapped up in their mantles, deign to draw their legs out of the way of the equipages. From time to time a corricolo, with its great scarlet wheels, dashed past bearing a crowd of monks, nurses, facchini, and

Jettatura

ragamuffins, and scraping the wheels of d'Aspremont's carriage in the mist of a cloud of dust and noise. Corricoli are now proscribed, and it is forbidden to build any new ones, but it is permitted to put a new body on an old pair of wheels, or to fit new wheels to an old body, an ingenious method which will enable these quaint vehicles to last a long time yet, to the great delight of amateurs of local colour.

Our traveller, however, paid but scant attention to the animated and picturesque sights that would certainly have attracted any tourist who had not found awaiting him at the Hotel de rome a note addressed to him and signed "Alicia W." He looked with inattentive gaze at the blue, limpid sea, on which could be made out, in a brilliant light, and coloured by distance with amethyst and sapphire tints, the lovely isles scattered in the fan shape at the entrance of the bay: Capri, Ischia, Nisida, Procida, the harmonious names of which resound like Greek dactyls. But his soul was not there; it was flying away in the direction of Sorrento, towards the little white house nestling in the greenery, and spoken of by Alicia in her note.

At this moment d'Aspremont's face had not the indefinitely unpleasant expression it bore when some inward joy did not harmonise its dissonant perfections. It was positively handsome and sympathetic, as the Italians are fond of saying. The corners of his mouth were not drawn down disdainfully, and his quiet eyes were filled with tender light. It was easy to understand, on seeing him thus, the feelings from him apparently indicated by the half tender, half mocking words on the cream laid paper. His individuality, backed up by his high breeding, must have proved attractive to a young girl brought up with much freedom in the English fashion by an old and very indulgent uncle.

Thanks to the pace at which the coachman drove his horses, Chiaja and La Marinella were soon left behind, and the carriage drove through the open country on a road now replaced by a railway line. Black dust, like triturated coal, imparts a Plutonian aspect to the whole of this shore, over which shines a dazzling sky and which is laved by a sea of the loveliest azure. It is the soot of Vesuvius, sifted by the wind, that dusts the beach and makes the houses of Portici and Torre del Greco look like Birmingham factories. But d'Aspremont did not concern himself with the contrast between the ebon earth and the sapphire heavens; he was in too great a hurry to reach his destination. The finest roads are long when a Miss Alicia is waiting for one at the end of them, and when it is six months since one parted from her on the pier at Folkestone. The sky and the sea of Naples fail to work their spell under these circumstances.

The carriage left the highway, turned down a cross-road, and drew up in front of a gate formed of two whitewashed brick pillars, surmounted with vases in terra cotta, in which bloomed aloes with leaves like tin and sharp as daggers. It was closed by an open-work green-painted swinging gate, the angular stems of which had inextricably interlaced their thorny fronds. Above the hedge, three or four huge fig-trees spread out their broad metallic leaves in compact masses, growing vigorously like African vegetation. A great umbrella pine waved its crown of leaves, and one could scarcely make out, through the luxuriant growth, the white facade of the house gleaming in spots behind the thick curtain of foliage.

A dark-complexioned servant, with curling hair so thick that it would have broken a comb, hastened up at the sound of the wheels, opened the gate, and, walking in front of Mr. d'Aspremont down a rose laurel walk, the blooms of which caressed his cheeks, led him to the terrace where Miss Alicia was having tea with her uncle.

Yielding to a very justifiable caprice in a young lady, tired of comfort and elegance, and mayhap also to tease her uncle, whose commonplace tastes she made fun of, Miss Alicia had chosen, in preference to a more civilised dwelling, this villa, the owners of which were travelling, and which had remained uninhabited for a number of years. She found in this abandoned garden, that had almost returned to a state of nature, a wild poetry that pleased her; in the quickening Neapolitan climate everything had grown with prodigious activity. Orange trees and myrtles, pomegranates and lime trees had thoroughly enjoyed themselves, and not having the fear of the gardener's pruning-knife before their eyes, had clasped hands across the walk from one end to the other, or penetrated familiarly into the rooms wherever there was a broken pane. The place did not have the sad look of a

Jettatura

deserted Northern abode, but was marked by the mad joy and happy carelessness of Southern nature left to itself. In the owner's absence, the exuberant vegetation had indulged in the debauch of leaves, flowers, fruits, and scents, and re-conquered the ground man had deprived it of.

When the Commodore, for so Alicia familiarly called her uncle, saw the impenetrable thicket, through which a machete was needed to cut a way, he broke out into the liveliest remonstrances and swore his niece was crazy. But Alicia gravely promised to have cut from the entrance-door to the drawing-room and from the drawing-room to the terrace a passage wide enough for the bringing in of a butt of Malmsey wine, this being the only concession she would grant to her uncle's positivism. The Commodore had to give in, for he could never resist his niece, and at this very time he was on the terrace, seated opposite to her, sipping a big glass of rum, which he called tea.

The terrace, which had mainly attracted the young lady, was, in point of fact, very picturesque and merits the detailed description, for Paul d'Aspremont will often return to it, and one ought to paint the setting of the scenes one describes.

The terrace, the precipitous walls of which overhung a hollow road, was reached by steps formed of broad disjointed stones, between the interstices of which grew luxuriantly vigorous wild plants. Four broken pillars, brought from some antique ruin, their lost capitals replaced by square stones, support a trellis of poles intertwined and covered with vines. From the parapet fell in sheets and wreaths wall plants and wild vines. At the foot of the walls Indian figs, aloes, and arbutus grew in delightful disorder, while beyond a wood topped by a palm tree and three Italian pines, the view extended over rolling ground on which were scattered white villas, embrace the violet outlines of Vesuvius, or was prolonged over the blue distance of the sea.

When Paul d'Aspremont appeared at the top of the steps, Alicia rose with an exclamation of pleasure, and came forward to meet him. Paul shook hands with her in English fashion, but the young lady raised her prisoned hand to the lips of her friend with a motion full of youthful grace and ingenuous coquetry.

The Commodore tried to raise himself on his gouty legs, and managed to do so after a few grimaces due to pain, which contrasted comically with the look of delight that illumined his broad face. He approached, alertly enough for him, the two young people, and grasped Paul's hand in a way to crush his fingers against each other, which is the highest outward mark of good British cordiality.

Miss Alicia Ward belonged to that class of English brunettes who realise an ideal of the very conditions of which seem to be irreconcilable; that is a skin so dazzlingly fair as to make milk, snow, lilies, alabaster, virgin wax, and whatever poets use by way of comparisons of whiteness, look almost yellow by the side of it, cherry lips, and hair as black as the darkness of night on a raven's wing. The effect of this contrast is irresistible, and results in a singular loveliness which has no equivalent. It may be that some Circassians, brought up in the Seraglio from childhood possess the same wonderful complexion, but on this point I have no information to go by save the exaggerations of Oriental poetry and the water-colour painting by Lewis that represent the harems of Cairo. Alicia was assuredly the most perfect type of this style of beauty.

The long oval of her face, her incomparably pure complexion, her well-shaped, delicate, transparent nose, her dark blue eyes fringed with long lashes that fluttered on her rosy cheeks like black butterflies when she lowered her eyelids, her lips coloured with dazzling crimson, her hair falling in long, shimmering ringlets like satin ribbons on either side of her face and of her swan-like neck, testified in favour of the romantic female faces by Maclise which, at the Universal Exhibition, looked like delightful impostures.

She wore a flounced grenadine dress, the flounces themselves festooned and embroidered with red sprigs that harmonised wonderfully well with the small grained strings of coral that formed her head-dress, her necklace, and her bracelets. Five pendants, hung from a faceted coral pearl, quivered in each of her small, delicately

Jettatura

convoluted ears. If the reader feels like blaming this wealth of coral, let him remember that he is in Naples, where the fishermen come up out of the sea on purpose to present you with these branches that the air turns red.

I owe that reader of mine, were it but by way of contrast to the portrait of Alicia which I have just drawn, at the very least a Hogarthian caricature of her uncle.

The Commodore, who was some sixty years old, was noticeable for his uniformly crimson face, on which stood out his white eyebrows and mutton-chop whiskers, so that he looked like an old redskin tattooed with chalk. Sunstrokes, unavoidable on a trip to Italy, had added a few more layers to that ardent colouring. He was dressed from head to foot, jacket, waistcoat, trousers and gaiters, in a reddish-gray vicuna, which no doubt his tailor had assured him was the most fashionable shade and that most worn, wherein perchance he lied not. Yet, in spite of his brilliant complexion and his eccentric dress, the commodore looked by no means vulgar. His thorough cleanliness, his irreproachable neatness and his fine manner pointed him out as a perfect gentleman, even though he had more than one external resemblance to the Englishmen in farces which Hoffmann and Levassor are fond of parodying. As for his character, he adored his niece and drank much port and wine and Jamaica rum to keep up the humid root, after the manner of corporal Trim.

"See how well I am now, and how lovely! Look at my colour; I am not yet up to uncle, and I hope I shall never be. But I have roses here, real roses," said Alicia, as she drew across her cheek a slender finger tipped with a nail polished as agate. "I have grown stouter, too, and those horrid salt-cellars that caused me so much trouble when I went to balls have vanished. Now, must not a woman be a coquette to part with her lover for three months, so that at the end of the time he may find her blooming and splendid!"

As she spoke this tirade in the playful and sparkling tone familiar to her, Alicia stood before Paul as if to challenge him to examine her.

"She is as robust and full of health now," added the Commodore, "as those Procida girls who carry amphorae on their heads, is she not?"

"Unquestionably, Commodore," answered Paul; "it was impossible for Alicia to be more lovely, but she is plainly in better health than when, through coquetry, as she claims, she compelled me to endure a painful separation."

As he said this, his glance rested with strange fixity upon the young girl who stood before him. Suddenly the lovely rosy flush she had boasted of having acquired faded from Alicia's cheeks as the flush of evening fades from the snowy mountain slopes when the sun sinks in the west. Trembling all over, she put her hand to her heart, and her lovely lips paled and were contracted with pain.

Paul, much alarmed, rose, as did the Commodore. Alicia's bright colour had returned, though her smile still cost her an effort.

"I promised you a cup of tea or a sherbet, and, although I am English, I advise you to have the sherbet. Snow is better than hot water in this country, so near to Africa that the sirocco comes straight from it."

The three sat down round the stone table, under the vine-leaf bower. The sun had sunk into the sea, and the azure day, called night in Naples, followed the golden day. The moon scattered slivery spots upon the terrace through the interstices of the foliage; the sea rippled with kissing sound upon the beach, and from a distance came the sound of the tambourines that accompanied the tarantella.

By and by Paul had to take his leave. Vice, the dark-complexioned, wavy-haired maid, came with a lantern to show Paul his way through the mazes of the garden. While serving the sherbet and snow water, she had fixed [sic] upon the new-comer a glance in which curiosity was mingled with fear. Doubtless the result of this examination

had been unfavourable to Paul, for Vice's brow, already as brown as a cigar, had darkened still more, and as she accompanied the stranger, she directed towards him, but so that he should not notice it, her first and fourth fingers, while the other two, folded back under the palm met the thumb as if to form some cabalistic sign.

Chapter 3

Alicia's friend returned to the Hotel de Rome by the same road he had come. The night was incomparably beautiful; the bright, splendid moon cast upon the diaphanous blue waters a long trail of silvery spangles, the perpetual motion of which, due to the lipping of the wavelets, increased their brilliancy. In the offing, the fishing boats, each bearing in the bows an iron cradle filled with lighted tow, studded the sea with read stars and left ruddy wakes behind them. The smoke from Vesuvius, white by day, had changed into a pillar of fire and also cast its reflection upon the bay, that, at his moment, had that appearance which strikes Northern eyes as improbable, and which it has in those Italian water-colours, in the black frames, so widespread a few years ago, and which were more accurate than one would have supposed, judging by their crude exaggeration.

A few noctambulistic lazzaroni still mooned about the beach, unconsciously moved the the wondrous prospect, and looked out into the blue distance with their great black eyes. Others, seated on the rail of some boat hauled up on the shore, were singing the aria from "Lucia" or the then popular romance, "Ti voglio ben' assai," in a voice that many a highly paid tenor would have envied. Naples sits up late, like all southern cities, yet the lights in the windows were going out one by one, and only the lottery offices, with their coloured paper decorations, their favourite numbers, and their bright lights, remained open, ready to receive the money of capricious gambles who, as they wended homeward, might be seized with the fancy of wagering a few carlini or a few ducats upon some number they had dreamed of.

Paul turned in, drew the gauze mosquito-netting about his bed, and speedily fell asleep. As happens to travellers after a sea trip, his couch, though motionless, seemed to him to pitch, scend, and roll, just as if the Hotel de rome had been the "Leopold." This feeling caused him to dream that he was still at sea, and that on the pier he saw Alicia, looking very pale by the side of her red-faced uncle, signing to him not to land. The face of the young girl expressed deep grief, and she seemed, as she motioned him back, to be obeying much against her will some imperious fatality.

The dream, to which recent images lent extraordinary reality, so troubled the sleeper that he awoke, and he was glad to find himself in his room, in which quivered the opaline reflections of a night-light that illumined a small porcelain tube round which the mosquitoes buzzed and swarmed. In order not again to have such a painful dream, Paul struggled against sleep and began to think of the beginning of his acquaintance with Alicia, going over, one after another, the innocently charming scenes of first love.

He saw again the red brick house in Richmond, covered with rose and honeysuckle, where dwelt Alicia and her uncle, and to which he had gone, on his first visit to england, with one of those letter of introduction the sole result of which is usually and invitation to dinner. He recalled the white Indian muslin dress, with a single ribbon for sole ornament, which Alicia, who had just left boarding-school, wore on that day, and the spray of jasmine which twined in the wealth of her hair like a floweret from Ophelia's wreath borne away by the stream, her velvet blue eyes and her half opened mouth which allowed a glimpse of her pearly teeth, her slender neck that turned like that of a bird whose attention is awakened, and her sudden blush when the glance of the young French gentleman met hers.

The dark wainscotted sitting-room, hung with green cloth, and adorned with fox-hunting scenes and steeple-chasing incidents, coloured in the crude English way, came up in his mind as in a camera obscura. There was the piano with its row of keys like the set of teeth of some old dowager. Under the mantelpiece, round which grew a spray of ivy, shone the black-leaded grate; he could see the oaken arm-chairs, covered with morocco, the

Jettatura

carpet with its rose pattern, and Alicia, trembling like a leaf, singing in the most adorably out-of-tune voice, the romance from "Anna Bolena," "deb, non voler costringere," while he, not less moved than she, accompanied her, entirely out of time, and the Commodore, dozing in slow digestion, and redder than ever, let slip to the ground a bulky "Times" and its "Supplement."

Then the scene changed. Paul, who had been admitted to the intimacy of the family, was invited by the commodore to spend a few days in their Lincolnshire home. An old feudal castle, with crenelated towers and Gothic windows, half-covered with ivy, but arranged internally with all modern comforts, rose at the end of the lawn, the turf of which, carefully watered and rolled, was smooth as velvet. Round the sward ran a sanded walk, which served Alicia for a riding-ground, and on which she cantered on one of the wild-maned Scottish ponies, which Sir Edward Landseer love to pain, and to which he give an almost human glance. Paul, mounted on a bright bay lent him the Commodore, accompanied her on her circular ride; for the physician, who found her lungs rather weak, had ordered her to take exercise.

Or again a light boat glided over the pond, brushing aside the water lilies and sending the kingfishers scurrying away to the refuge of the silvery willows. Alicia rowed and Paul held the yoke-lines. How lovely she looked in the golden halo formed round her head by the sunbeams that shone through her straw hat! She pulled her oars well back, pressing the tip of her gray shoe against the thwart. Alicia's foot was not short and round like a smoothing iron, the Andalusian shape so much admired in Spain; she had a neatly turned ankle, a high instep, and if the sole of her shoe was a shade long, it was not two inches wide.

The Commodore remained on shore, -- not that his rank kept him there, but his weight, which would have proved too much for the light craft. He waited for his niece at the landing-place, and carefully wrapped her in a mantle, lest she should take cold; then the boat having been made fast to the mooring post, the trio returned to the castle to lunch. It was delightful to see Alicia, who usually ate no more than a wren, put her pearly teeth into a slice of York ham cut thin as paper, and make away with a roll without leaving a single crumb for the gold fish in the basin.

How swiftly pass away happy days! Every week Paul postponed his departure; the glorious foliage in the park began to wear the russet livery of autumn, and light white mists rose in the morning from the lake. In spite of the constant raking in which the gardener indulged, the dead leaves strewed the gravel of the drive; innumerable little pearls of frost glittered upon the sward of the bowling green, and in the evening the magpies might be seen squabbling in the tops of the leafless trees.

Paul's anxious gaze saw Alicia growing paler, and her colour diminish to two little spots on her cheeks. she often felt chilly, and the hottest coral fire failed to warm her. The doctor seemed anxious, and his last prescription was to the effect that Alicia must spend the winter in Pisa and the spring in Naples.

Paul had been recalled to France by family affairs; Alicia and the Commodore were on their way to Italy, and the party had separated at Folkestone. No word had been spoken, but Alicia looked on herself as engaged to Paul, and the Commodore had squeezed his hand in significant fashion. It is only a son-in-law's fingers that one squeezes so unmercifully.

Paul, compelled to wait six long months, which to his impatience seemed six centuries, had had the delight of finding Alicia freed from the languor from which she had been suffering, and radiant with health. The child had made way wholly to the maiden, and he thought with intoxicating happiness that the Commodore would raise no objection when he should ask for her hand.

Lulled by these pleasant thoughts, he fell asleep and slept until day. Naples was already beginning its riot of noise; the sellers of iced water were shouting their ware; the keepers of cook-shops held out to the passers-by meats stuck on poles; bending from their windows, the lazy housekeepers lowered with a string their market

Jettatura

baskets, which they drew up again laden with provisions, tomatoes, fish, and great pieces of pumpkin. The public scribes, in rusty black coats and a pen behind their ear, sat down at their tables; the money changers were arranging in little piles, on their boards, grani, carlini, and ducats; the coachmen drove their skeleton horses at a gallop in quest of early customers, and the bells in every belfry were joyously ringing out eh Angelus.

Paul, wrapped in his dressing-gown, leaned on the rail of the balcony. From his window he could see Santa Lucia Castello dell' Ove, and an immense stretch of sea as far as Mount Vesuvius and the blue promontory on which showed white the vast casini of Castellamare and the distant villas of Sorrento. The sky was free from clouds, save on light fleck that drew nearer the city, driven onwards by a faint breeze. Paul fixed upon it that strange glance to which I have before drawn attention. Forthwith other vapours united with the single cloudlet, and soon a dark pall of cloud stretched out over Castle Saint Elmo. Great drops of rain pattered down upon the lava pavement, and in a few minutes turned into one of the torrential rains which transform the streets of Naples into torrents, and sweep dogs, and even donkeys into the gutters. The surprised multitude of pedestrians scattered in search of shelter; the open-air stalls moved in haste, not without the loss of a part of their wares, and the rain, left in possession of the battle-field swept in white gusts upon the deserted quay of Santa Lucia.

The huge facchino whom Paddy had smitten with such vigour, and who as leaning under a balcony, somewhat sheltered by eh projection, had not joined the universal rout and gazed with deeply meditative glance upon the window whereon Paul d'Aspremont was leaning.

His thoughts found expression in words which he grumbled out with an angry look: —

"The skipper of the 'Leopold' would have done better to chuck that forestiere overboard."

And putting his hand into the opening of his coarse linen shirt, he touched the bag of amulets hung round his neck by a string.

Chapter 4

The weather speedily cleared, in a few minutes the bright sunshine had dried the last drips of the shower, and the multitude again swarmed joyously upon the quay. But Timberio, the porter, seemed not to change his opinion of the young Frenchman, and prudently transported his penates beyond the range of the hotel windows. When some lazzaroni of his friends expressed surprise at his giving up a good stand in favour of one much less advantageous, he replied, shaking his head with a look of mystery:—

"Whoever wants it can have it; I know what I know."

Paul breakfasted in his room either through reserve or disdain, for he did not care to mix with the public. Then he dressed, and while waiting until it was time for him to call on Miss Ward, he visited the Studj Museum. He admired rather inattentively the valuable collection of Campanian vases, the bronzes found in the ruins of Pompeii, the verdigrised brazen Greek helmet which still contains the head of the soldier that wore it, the piece of hardened mud that has preserved, like a mould, the imprint of the lovely torso of a young woman surprised by the eruption of Vesuvius in the country house of Arrius Diomedes, the Farnese of Hercules and his wonderful muscles, the Flora, the archaic Minerva, the two Balbi, and the magnificent statue of Aristides, the most perfect work perhaps that antiquity has handed down to us. But a lover is not one to appreciate very enthusiastically the monuments of art; to him, the least glimpse of the beloved head is worth more than all the marbles of Greece and Rome.

Having managed somehow to wear out two or three hours in the Studj, he sprang into a carriage and started for the country house where dwelt Miss Ward. The coachman, with the quick perception of love that is characteristic

Jettatura

of Southern natures, drove his Rosinantes at break-neck speed, and soon the carriage drew up in front of the pillars, surmounted by vases with aloes growing in them, that I have already described. The same servant came to open the gate; her hair still curled rebelliously, and, as before, her dress consisted simply of a coarse linen chemise with coloured thread embroideries on the sleeves and round the neck, and of a skirt of thick stuff, with transversal stripes, such as is worn by the women of Procida. Her legs, I must own were bare, and she trod the dust with feet that a sculptor would have admired. On her breast hung from a black cord a bundle of curiously shaped charms of horn and coral, on which, to Vice's evident satisfaction, Paul's glance rested.

Miss Alicia was on the terrace, that being her favourite spot. An Indian hammock, of red and blue cotton, ornamented with feathers, was suspended from two of the pillars that supported the vine-leaf roof, and in it was swinging the young girl, dressed in a light wrapper of ecru China silk, the accordion pleats of which she was pitilessly crushing. On her feet, the tips of which showed through the netting of the hammock, she wore slipper of aloe fibre, and her lovely bare arms were crossed above her head in the attitude of the Cleopatra of antiquity, for, although it was only the beginning of May, the heat was already extreme, and innumerable crickets were singing in shrill chorus in the neighbouring bushes.

The Commodore, in planter's dress, and seated on the cane arm-chair, pulled with great regularity the rope that set the hammock swinging, and the group was completed by a third personage, Count d'Altavilla, a young Neapolitan dandy, whose presence caused Paul's brows to contract in the fashion that gave him an expression of diabolical wickedness.

The Count, indeed, was one of those men whom one does not much care to see by the side of the woman one loves. He was of high stature and perfectly proportioned; his hair, as black as jet, and clustering thick masses, set off his smooth and well-shapen forehead; the brilliant Neapolitan sun sparkled in his eyes, and his large, strong teeth, clear as pearls, shone the brighter by contrast with his crimson lips and his olive complexion. The one objection which a person of fastidious taste could have made to the Count was that he was too handsome.

As for his clothes, d'Altavilla sent to London for them, and the severest dandy would have approved of his get-up. The one Italian touch in his whole dress was his shirt studs, which were too costly and showy, betraying the Southerner's love of jewelry. It may be also that anywhere but in Naples people might have thought it in bad taste for him to be wearing a collection of bifurcated branches of coral, of hands, in Vesuvius lava, with closed fingers or brandished dagger, of dogs lying down with outstretched paws, of bits of horn, black or white, and other similar trifles suspended from his watch chain by a ring but it needed only a turn down the Strada di Toledo (Via di Roma), or along the Villa Reale to ascertain that the wearing of these charms was not a mark of eccentricity on the Count's part.

When Paul d'Aspremont came up, the Count, as Miss Ward's urgent request was singing one of those exquisite Neapolitan popular airs, whose author is nameless, and a single one of which picked up by a composer, suffices to secure the success of an opera. Gordigiani's charming romances may give some idea of them to those who have not heard such airs sung by a lazzarone, a fisherman, or a trovatella on the Chiaja beach or on the pier. They are composed of the sigh of the breeze, a moonbeam, the scent of an orange tree and the beating of the heart.

Alicia, with her pretty English voice, which was not quite true, hummed the motive, that she wished to remember, and nodded in friendly fashion to Paul, who, annoyed at the presence of the handsome young man, looked at her with no very amiable glance.

One of the cords of the hammock broke, and Miss Ward slipped to the ground, through without hurting herself, and six hands were simultaneously outstretched towards her. The young lady was already up, blushing rosy red, for it is "improper" to fall when men are present. Yet not one of the chaste folds of her dress was disarranged.

"I do not understand it," said the Commodore; "I tested the ropes myself, and Alicia is light as a feather."

Jettatura

Count d'Altavilla shook his head in a mysterious fashion, and though it was plain that he attributed the breaking of the rope to a very different cause than Miss Ward's weight, he kept silence, like a well-bred man that he was, and contented himself with rattling the bunch of charms on his chain.

Like all men who turn sulky and cross when in the company of a rival they fear may prove dangerous, instead of becoming more gracious and amiable, Paul d'Aspremont, although well used to society, could not manage to conceal his ill-temper. He replied in monosyllables, let the conversation fall, and when he looked at d'Altavilla, his glance assumed its sinister expression, and the yellow streaks twisted and writhed under the gray transparency of his eyes like water-snakes in a spring.

Every time Paul looked at him in that way, the Count, with a gesture apparently mechanical, plucked a flower from the jardiniere that stood near him and threw it in such a way that it should cross the direction of the angry glance.

"What are you ravaging my jardiniere for?" exclaimed Miss Ward, who observed his action. "What harm have my poor flowers done to you that you should behead them?"

"Nothing, Miss Ward; it is purely a nervous affection," answered the Count as he nipped off a superb rose which he sent flying after the other blooms.

"You make me dreadfully nervous," said Alicia, "and without knowing it, you are shocking one of my fancies. I have never picked a single flower; a bouquet inspires me with a sort of terror; the blooms of which it is composed are dead flowers, the bodies of roses, vervain or periwinkles, and their scent has something sepulchral."

"By way of expiating the murders I have just committed," said the Count with a bow, "I shall send you a hundred baskets of living flowers."

Paul had risen, and was twisting the brim of his hat with a constrained look as though he intended to take leave.

"Surely you are not going already?" said Miss Ward.

"I have letters to write; important letters.

"That is a pretty thing to say," returned the young girl with a pout. "Are there any letters of importance save those you write to me?"

"Do stay, Paul," said the Commodore. "I have laid out a plan for the evening, subject to the approbation of my niece. I propose that we shall first go to drink a glass of water at the Santa Lucia fountain; it is true the water smells like rotten eggs, but it gives one an appetite. Then we shall go and eat a dozen or two of oysters, both white and red, at the fish house, and dine in some thoroughly Neapolitan osteria, under an arbour, and drink Falernium and Lacryma Christi, winding up with a visit to Signor Pulcinello. The Count could explain to us the fine points of the dialect."

Mr. D'Aspremont did not seem to be much taken with the plan, and he withdrew with a cold bow. D'Altavilla remained a few moments longer, but as Miss Ward, put out at Paul's departure, did not adopt the Commodore's proposal, he also took his leave.

Two hours later, Alicia received an immense number of pots of the rarest plants in bloom, and what surprised her much more, a huge pair of horns of the Sicilian ox, transparent as jasper, and polished as agate, fully three feet in length and ending in menacing black points. They were splendidly mounted in gilded bronze, so that they could be placed, tips up, on a mantelpiece, a bracket, or a cornice.

Vice, who had helped the porters to unpack both the flowers and the horns, seemed to understand the object of this curious gift, and placed the superb crescents, which might have been thought to have belonged to the divine bull that bore away Europa, full in sight of the stone table, and said:—

"Now we are properly protected."

"What do you mean, Vice?" asked Miss Ward.

"Nothing, except that the French signor has very queer eyes."

Chapter 5

The hour for meals had long since passed, and the coal fires that during the day turned the kitchen of the Hotel de Rome into a crater of Vesuvius, were slowly dying out in glowing embers under the sheet-iron extinguishers. The stew-pans had been hung on their respective nails and glittered like a row of bucklers on the rail of a trireme. A yellow brass lamp, like those found in the ruins of Pompeii, was suspended by a triple chain to the main beam in the ceiling, and with its three wicks dipping into the oil, lighted up the centre of the great kitchen, the corners of which remained in shadow.

The luminous beams falling from above illumined, with most picturesque play of light and shade, a group of characteristic figures collected around the thick wooden table, cut and slashed in every direction with knife marks, and that stood in the centre of the great hall whose walls the smoke of the cooking had turned to the dark brown so dear to the painters of Caravaggio's school. Unquestionable neither Spagnoletto nor Salvator Rosa, with their bold love of truth, would have disdained the models collected there by chance, or, to be more accurate, by nightly custom.

First, there was the chef, Virgilio Falsacappa, a very important personage, of colossal stature and tremendous size, who, had he but worn a Roman toga instead of a white duck jacket, might have passed for one of the guests of Vitellius. His strongly marked features formed a sort of serious caricature of the types of certain medals of antiquity; his eyes, cut like those in stage masks, were topped by bushy black eyebrows sticking out half an inch; an enormous nose over-shadowed a broad mouth apparently provided with three rows of teeth like a shark's. A dewlap, as deep as that of the Farnese bull, joined the chin — in which was a dimple fit to hold a fist — with a muscular neck, heavily veined and athletic-looking. Bushy whiskers, each of which would have sufficed to provide a sapper with a reasonable beard, framed in the face, which was marked with violet spots. His hair was black, curly, and shiny, mingled with a few silvery threads, and clustered on his head in short curls, while his bull neck, with its three deep wrinkles, overlapped the collar of his jacket. In the lobes of his ears, pushed up by the protuberances of a pair of jaws capable of chewing up and ox in the course of a day, glittered silver rings as large as the disc of the moon. Such was Master Virgilio Falsacappa, who, with his apron pulled up on the hip and his knife stuck in a wooden sheath, looked more like a torturer than a cook.

Next came Timberio, the porter, who, thanks to the exercise necessitated by his trade and the sobriety of his regimen, — consisting of a handful of half cooked macaroni, dusted over with *cacio-cavallo*, a slice of water-melon and a glass of snow-water, — was comparatively thin, but who, if well-fed, would certainly have been as stout as Falsacappa, so truly did his huge frame seem intended to uphold an enormous bulk of flesh. His dress consisted simply of a pair of drawers, a long brown stuff vest, and a coarse cloak thrown over his shoulder.

Striking also was the appearance of Scazziga, the coachman who drove *paul d'Aspremont*, who was leaning against the table. He had a clever face, but irregular features with an expression of simplicity and craftiness combined; a feigned smile flitted on his mocking lips, and his agreeable manners showed that he was constantly serving well bred people. His garments, purchased from a dealer in second-hand clothing, had a look of livery

Jettatura

about them of which he was particularly proud, and which, in his opinion, placed him a long way higher up the social scale than the rough Timberio. He sprinkled his talk with English and French words that did not always fit in with the meaning of his remarks, but which none the less excited the admiration of the kitchen maids and scullions, who were amazed at his wonderful knowledge.

Somewhat in the background stood two young maids whose features, though of course less noble, recalled the well known type of the heads on Syracusan coins: the low forehead, the nose running straight from the brow, the somewhat thick lips, and broad, full chin. The blackish blue hare as dressed in bandeaux, which met behind their head in heavy chignons, stuck with coral-headed pins, and triple necklaces of the same material were wound round their caryatid-like necks, the muscles of which were strengthened by their habit of carrying their burdens upon their heads. No doubt dandies would have looked with contempt at these poor girls in whose veins ran the untainted blood of the splendid races of fair Greece, but an artist, on seeing them, would at once have pulled out his sketch-book.

If my reader has ever seen that painted by Murillo in which angels are cooking, I need not describe the head heads of the three or four curly-headed scullions who completed the group.

The company was discussin a serious question which concerned Mr. Paul d'Aspremont, the French traveller who had come in the steamer. The kitchen was sitting in judgment upon the guest.

It was Timberio, the porter, who was speaking, and he paused between each of his remarks, like a popular orator, in order to allow his hearers to thoroughly grasp their full meaning, and to express assent or dissent.

"Follow me carefully," the orator was just then saying. "The 'Leopold' is an honest Tuscan steamer, against which there is nothing to be said, save that it carries round too many English heretics."

"English heretics spend their money freely," put in Scazziga, whom the receipt of tips rendered more tolerant.

"No doubt; the least a heretic can do when a Christian works for him, is to reward him handsomely, so as to diminish the humiliation."

"It does not humiliate me to drive a forestiere in my carriage. I do not follow the trade of beast of burden like you."

"Am I not just as good a Christian as you?" replied the porter, frowning and clenching his fists.

"Let Timberio have his say," chorused the rest of the company, afraid of seeing the interesting account turn into a dispute.

"You will allow," continued the orator, soothed by this, "that the weather was superb when the 'Leopold' entered the harbour."

"Certainly, Timberio," said the chef with majestic condescension.

"The sea was smooth as glass," continued the facchino; "yet a huge billow tossed Gennaro's boat so roughly that he fell overboard with two or three of this comrades. Is that no out of the way? For Gennaro is a seaman and could dance the tarantella on a yard without the help of a balancing-pole."

"Perhaps he had drunk a little too much Asprino," put in Scazziga, the rationalist of the company.

Jettatura

"He had not even had a glass of lemonade," went on Timberio. "But there was on board that steamer a gentleman who looked at him in a peculiar fashion. You take me?"

"Yes, indeed," replied the chorus, every one of them extending the first and fourth fingers together as if drilled to the business.

"Now that gentleman was no other than Mr. Paul d'Aspremont," added Timberio. "The one in number three," asked the chef, who has his dinner in his room?"

"The very same," replied the younger and prettier of the maids. "Never have I come across a sourer, more disagreeable and more conceited man; he never said a word to me or even looked at me, and yet I am well worth looking at, say all the gentlemen."

"You are worth a good deal more than that, my lovely Gelsornina," said Timberio gallantly; "but it is lucky for you that the stranger did not look at you."

"You are altogether too superstitious," interjected Scazziga, whose intercourse with foreigners had made him something of a sceptic.

"And by dint of frequenting heretics, you will end in not believing in Saint Januarius."

"Because Gennaro happened to tumble overboard, that is no reason for attributing an evil influence to Mr. Paul d'Aspremont," went on Scazziga, standing up for his customer.

"You want more proof, do you? Well, this morning I saw him at the window, looking at a cloudlet no larger than a down-flake out of a burst pillow, when at once black clouds collected and it rained so hard that the dogs could drink standing up."

But Scazziga was not yet convinced and shook his head incredulously.

"And the servant is no better than his master," went on Timberio. "The booted monkey must be in league with the devil, or he could never have knocked me out, when I could kill him with a flip of the finger."

"I am of Timberio's opinion," said the chef, majestically. "The stranger eats little; he sent down the stuffed zucchetti, the chicken stew, and the macaroni and tomatoes which I had myself prepared for him. There must be some reason for such sobriety. why should a rich man refuse tasty dishes and content himself with egg soup and a slice of cold meat?"

"He is red-haired," said Gelsomina, as she passed her hand through her own thick raven locks.

"And a bit goggle-eyed," added Pepita, the other maid.

"And his eyes are very close to his nose," went on Timberio.

"And the wrinkle between his eyebrows is in the shape of a horse-shoe," said, by way of completing the indictment, the huge Virgilio Falsacappa. "Therefore he is —"

"Do not say the word; there is no need of it," cried the chorus, saved and except the still incredulous Scazziga. "We shall be on our guard."

Jettatura

"And to think that I should get into trouble with the police," said Timberio, "if I were to let drop a three-hundred pound trunk on the head of that accursed forestiere."

"It is pretty risky in Scazziga to go about driving him," put in Gelsomina.

"I am on my box; he can see by back only, and his glance cannot cross mine at the right angle. Besides, I do not believe in the whole business."

"You are a heathen, Scazziga," said the huge Palforio, the Herculean cook. "You will come to a bad end."

While the servants were thus engaged in discussing him, Paul, whose temper had been upset by finding Count d'Altavilla with Miss Ward, hand gone for a walk at the Villa Reale, and more than once the wrinkle between his brows deepened and his glance became fixed. He thought he caught sight of alicia in a carriage with the Count, and he hurried to the carriage door, putting on his eye-glasses to make sure he was not mistaken. It was not Alicia, however, but a lady who, at a distance, resembled her. The horses, no doubt startled by Paul's rush, bolted.

Paul sat down to eat an ice at the Cafe de l'Europe, on the Palace Square. a number of person looked at him attentively, and then changed their seats, making a curious gesture at the same time.

He entered the Pulcinella Theatre, where a play tutto da ridere was being performed. The actor got confused in the middle of his comic improvisation and remained dub. He pulled himself together, however, but in the very middle of one of his by-plays, his black false nose came off and he found it impossible to replace it. By way of excusing himself he explained the cause of the accident by a rapid gesture, for Paul's glance, now fixed upon him, prevented his going on. The spectators nearest paul vanished on after another. He rose to go out, unconscious of the effect he was producing, and in the lobby he heard people whispering a strange word, and meaning of which he did not understand : --

"A jettatore! a jettatore!"

Chapter 6

THE day after he had sent her the horns, Count d'Altavilla paid Miss Ward a visit.. He found the young English lady drinking tea with her uncle, exactly as if she had been in a yellow brick house at Ramsgate, instead of in Naples upon a whitewashed terrace, and surrounded by fig trees, cacti, and aloes, for one of the distinguishing traits of the Anglo-Saxon race is the persistence of its habits, however contrary to the climate they may be. The Commodore was beaming. By means of artificial ice, manufactured with the aid of a chemical apparatusÑfor snow only is brought from the mountains behind CastellamareÑhe had succeeded in keeping the butter in a solid condition, and he was just then engaged in spreading a pat of it upon a thin slice of bread.

After the first commonplaces which form the preface of every conversation, and which resemble the preludes with which pianists try an instrument before they begin their performance, Alicia, suddenly breaking away from conventionalities, abruptly asked the young Neapolitan Count:Ñ

" What do you mean by the strange gift of a pair of horns that came with the flowers ? All I could get out of my maid Vice was that they are a preservative against the fascino."

' Vice is right," replied the Count d'Altavilla with a bow.

" But what is the fascino ? " went on the young lady. "I am not familiar with your superstitions your -- African notions, for no doubt it has to do with some popular belief."

Jettatura

" The fascino is the pernicious influence exercised by a person endowed, or afflicted rather, with the evil eye."

I am pretending to understand you, so that you will not have too low an opinion of my capacity if I confess that the meaning of your words escapes me" said Alicia. "You explain the unknown by the unknown, and evil eye is, so far as I am concerned, as unintelligible as the expression fascio. Like the character in the plays I understand Latin, but please speak as if I did not."

I shall explain myself as clearly as possible," replied d'Altavilla; "only pray do not, with British contempt, mistake me for a barbarian, and do not wonder whether under my clothes my skin is tattooed red and blue. I am a civilised man; I was educated in Paris; I speak both French and English; I have read Voltaire; I believe in steam engines, in railways, and in a double Chamber, just like Stendhal; I eat macaroni with a fork; in the morning I wear Suede gloves, coloured kid in the afternoon, and straw-coloured kid in the evening."

The Commodore, who was buttering a second slice of bread, was attracted by this strange preface, and he remained with his knife in the air, gazing at d'Altavilla with his Northern blue eyes, the shade of which contrasted so funnily with his brick-like complexion.

'Your account of yourself is quite reassuring," said Miss Ward with a smile, "and it would be very rude of me to suspect you of being a barbarian. But surely you must have something very dreadful to tell me, or else something very absurd, to indulge in such circumlocutions before coming; to the point."

"You are right; it is very terrible, very absurd, and even very ridiculous, which is worse," answered the Count; it and were I with you in London or Paris, I dare say I should laugh at it with you, but here in Naples"

" You will remain serious. Is not that what you were going to say ? "

" Exactly."

Well, let us get to the fascino," said Miss Ward, impressed, in spite of herself, by the Count's gravity.

" The belief is one that goes back to the farthest antiquity; it is alluded to in the Bible. Vergil mentions it as one who firmly believes in it; the bronze amulets found in Pompeii, Herculaneum, Stabiae, the protective signs drawn on the houses that have been cleared out, show how widespread that superstition was formerly." D'Altavilla slyly laid stress upon the word superstition. "The whole of the East still credits it to-day. Red or green hands are placed upon each front of Moorish houses in order to avert the evil influence. On the Gate of Judgment, in the Alhambra, there is a hand carved on the keystone, which is a proof that if the belief is not well grounded, it is at least very ancient. When an opinion has been held by millions of men for thousands of years, it is probable that it rests upon some positive facts, upon a long series of observations borne out by events. However well I may think of myself, I find it somewhat difficult to believe that so many persons, some of whom, unquestionably, were illustrious, enlightened, and learned, should have been so egregiously mistaken in the matter and that I alone should see it clearly."

"There is an obvious retort to your argument," broke in Miss Ward. " Was not polytheism the religion believed in by Hesiod, Homer, Aristotle, Plato, Socrates himself,—as witness his sacrificing a cock to Esculapius,—and numberless other men of undoubted genius ? "

" That is true; but no one nowadays sacrifices bulls to Jupiter."

" They are better made into beefsteaks and rump-steaks," sagely remarked the Commodore, who had always been shocked at the custom of burning the fat legs of victims upon coals, as related by Homer.

Jettatura

"I can understand that the ignorant multitude should fear such an influence," said Miss Ward; "but that a man of your rank and education should share the belief is what amazes me."

"Many who claim to be strong-minded," replied the Count, "hang horns in their windows, nail antlers above their door, and go about covered with amulets. For my part, I make no bones about it, and I am not ashamed to own that when I meet a jettatore, I prefer to cross over to the other side of the street, and that if I cannot avoid his glance, I do my best to conjure it by making the conventional sign; I do it just as readily as would a lazzarone, and I am the safer for it. Numerous misadventures have taught me not to disdain such precautions."

Miss Alicia Ward was a Protestant, brought up in great philosophical freedom of thought, and trained to admit nothing save after examination, so that her lucid reasoning powers rebelled against whatever could not be mathematically explained. The Count's remarks caused her surprise, and at first she assumed that he was merely trying to be amusing, but his calm and convinced manner showed her she was mistaken, though he failed to convince her.

"I grant you," she said, "that the prejudice exists and that it is very widespread; that you are sincerely afraid of the evil eye, and that you are not toying to play upon the credulity of a stranger. But you must give me some physical reason for the existence of this superstitious idea, for, even at the cost of being considered by you wholly devoid of poetic feeling, I am very incredulous. The fantastic, the mysterious, the occult, the inexplicable have very little hold upon me."

"You surely admit, Miss Ward," went on the Count, "the power of the human eye? The light of heaven mingles in it with the reflection of the soul; the pupil is a lens which concentrates the beams of life, and intellectual electricity gashes forth from that small opening. Does not a woman's glance pierce the hardest heart? Does not a hero's inspire a whole army? Does not the physician's look tame a madman as effectually as a cold douche? Does not a mother's glance repel lions?"

"You plead your cause eloquently," answered Miss Ward, shaking her pretty head. "But you must forgive me if I still entertain doubts."

"What of the bird, then, that, fluttering with terror and uttering pitiful cries, descends from the top of the tree whence it might fly away, to fall into the maw of the serpent that heard fascinates it? Is it impelled by a prejudice? Has it stories of jettatura told in the nests of the feathery gossips? Is not the cause of many an effect beyond the grasp of our organs? Are the miasmata of malaria, of plague, of cholera visible? No eye can see the electric fluid on the lightning rod, yet the electricity is drawn down it. why is it absurd to suppose that from the black, blue, or gray disc called the eye there issues a beam that may be beneficent or deadly? Why should not that effluvium be fortunate or unfortunate according to the mode of its emission and the angle at which it impinges upon the object it strikes?"

"It seems to me," said the Commodore, "that there is something to be said in favour of the Count's argument. For my part, I have never been able to look at a toad's yellow eyes without feeling intolerable heat in the stomach, just as if I had swallowed an emetic; yet the poor reptile had more reason to fear than I, since I could crush it with my heel."

"Ah! uncle," said Miss Ward, "if you are going to side with Count d'Altavilla, I shall have the worst of it. I am not fit to cope with the two of you. Although I might raise many an objection to that ocular electricity of which no physicist has spoken, I am willing, for the sake of argument, to admit its existence; but I do not perceive in what way the huge horns with which you have presented me can efficaciously protect one against its fatal effects."

"Just as the point of the lightning-rod diverts the lightning, so do the sharp points of the horns upon which the jettatore's glance falls divert the malevolent fluid and deprive it of its dangerous electricity. (Out-stretched fingers

Jettatura

and coral amulets perform the same service." "What you have been telling me, Count," returned Miss Ward, " is very mysterious, but so far as I can make it out, I am under the spell of a most dangerous jettatore, and you sent me the horns to protect me against him." " I fear that is the case," replied the Count, with an accent of deep conviction. "I should just like to see one of those squinting rascals trying to fascinate my niece," exclaimed the Commodore. " I am over sixty, but I have not yet forgotten how to strike straight from the shoulder."

And as he said this, he closed his fist pressing his thumb against the folded fingers.

"Two fingers are enough, sir," said d'Altavilla; at the same time placing the Commodore's fingers in the correct position. " Jettatura is usually an unconscious act, and is exercised unwittingly by those who possess the fatal gift. Often, indeed, jettatori deplore its effects more than any one else, once they have become aware of their deadly power. They should therefore be avoided, not ill treated. Besides, their influence may be neutralized or at least attenuated, by horns, outstretched fingers, or forked branches of coral."

"Very strange, in truth," said the Commodore, impressed in spite of himself by d'Altavilla's seriousness.

" I was not aware that I was so greatly haunted by jettatori. I scarcely ever leave the terrace, save, in the evening, to drive with my uncle along the Villa Reale, and I have never noticed anything that might justify your belief," said the young lady, whose curiosity was awakened, though she was as incredulous as ever.

They are not suspicions, Miss Ward; I am absolutely certain," replied the Neapolitan Count.

"Pray, then, reveal to us the name of the fatal being," returned Miss Ward, with a trace of mockery.

D'Altavilla remained silent.

"It is well to know whom we should be on our guard against," added the Commodore.

The young nobleman appeared to be thinking deeply; then rose, walked up to Miss Ward's uncle, bowed respectfully to him, and said:Ñ

" Sir, I have the honour to ask for your niece's hand in marriage.'

At this unexpected request, Alicia blushed rosy red and the Commodore's face turned scarlet, from red that it had been.

Undoubtedly Count d'Altavilla might be a suitor for Miss Ward's hand; he belonged to one of the oldest and noblest families in Naples; he was handsome, young, wealthy, and in favour at Court; he was thoroughly well bred, and irreproachable in demeanour. His request, therefore, was entirely proper, but it came so suddenly, so strangely, it had apparently so little to do with the conversation that had been going on, that the amazement of uncle and niece was justified. Nor did d'Altavilla appear either surprised or discouraged by it, and he awaited the reply with firm mien.

" My dear Count at last said the Commodore, when he had somewhat recovered from his surprise, " your request astonishes as well as honours me. The truth is that I do not know how to answer you; I have not consulted my niece. We were talking of fascino, jettatura, horns, amulets, open and closed hands, of all sorts of things that have nothing to do with marriage, and then all of a sudden you ask me for Alicia's hand ! That is not logical, and you must not be annoyed if I am somewhat mixed. The match would certainly be quite suitable, but I fancied my niece had other intentions. It is true, on the other hand, that an old seadog like me is not one to read fluently a young girl's heartÑ"

Jettatura

Alicia, perceiving that her uncle was floundering about, profited by his pausing for breath to put an end to a situation that was becoming embarrassing, and said to the Neapolitan:

"Count, when a gentleman loyally asks for an honest girl's hand, she has no right to take offense, but she may feel surprise at the strange manner in which the request is made. I was asking you to tell me the name of the jettatore whose influence, according to you, may prove fatal to me, and you suddenly prefer to my uncle a request the motive for which I do not clearly perceive."

"My reason is," answered d'Altavilla, "that a gentleman does not care to denounce another man, and that a husband alone has the right to defend his wife. But pray take some time before deciding. Until then the horns, placed in a sufficiently conspicuous place, will, I believe, avail to protect you against any unfortunate consequences."

Whereupon the Count rose, bowed low, and went out.

Vice, the crinkly-haired maid, who was coming to clear away the tea things, had heard the end of the conversation as she was slowly ascending the terrace steps. She nourished against Paul d'Aspremont the fullest aversion natural in an Abruzzi peasant, scarcely tamed by two or three years of domestic service, for a forestiere suspected of jettatura. Besides, she thought Count d'Altavilla a splendid man, and could not understand that Miss Ward should prefer to him a pale, meagre fellow whom she, Vice, would not have had anything to do with, even had he not had the fascino. Therefore, unappreciative of Count d'Altavilla's delicate methods, and desiring to withdraw her mistress, whom she loved, from a hurtful influence, Vice bent to Miss Ward's ear and said to her:

"I know the name that Count d'Altavilla will not tell you."

"And I forbid you to speak it, Vice, if you care to retain my favour," answered Alicia. "Such superstitions are positively shameful, and I shall brave them like a Christian girl who fears God alone." 7

Chapter 7

JETTATURA ! Jettatore! These words were certainly addressed to me, "said Paul d'Aspremont to himself, as he returned to his hotel. "What they mean I do not know, but they were evidently intended for an insult or a mockery. What is there strange, peculiar, or ridiculous about me that attracts such unpleasant attention? Though one is not a good judge of one's self, it seems to me that I am neither handsome nor ugly, neither tall nor short, neither stout nor thin, and that I ought to be able to go about without attracting notice. There is nothing eccentric in my dress; I am not adorned with a turban with lighted tapers, like Mr. Jourdain in the ceremonial scene in the Bourgeois gentilhomme; I do not wear a jacket with a sun embroidered in gold on the back; I do not go about with a negro in front of me playing on the cymbals. My personality, which, for the matter of that, is wholly unknown in Naples, is concealed under the ordinary dress, the domino of modern civilisation, and I am in every respect like the dandies who walk up and down the Strada di Toledo or on the Largo del Palazzo Reale, save that I have a rather quieter necktie, not so large a breastpin, a less gorgeously embroidered shirt-front, not so loud a waistcoat, not so many gold chains, and that my hair is very much less curled.

"That may be it! My hair is perhaps not curled enough. To-morrow I shall have it done up by the hair-dresser in the hotel.

"Yet the people here are used to seeing strangers, and a few slight differences in my dress do not account for the mysterious word and the strange gesture called out by my presence. Besides, I have noticed an expression of antipathy and terror on the faces of the people who drew out of my way. What can I possibly have done to them, since I have never met them before? Everywhere a traveller who is but a passing shadow that returns

Jettatura

not excites indifference only, unless he happens to come from some distant place and is of an unknown race; and every week the steamers land on the pier thousands of tourists in every respect like me. Nobody troubles about them, save the facchini, the hotel-keepers, and the guides. I have not killed my brother, nor I never had one; consequently I cannot be bearing about the brand of Cain upon my brow. yet men are startled at sight of me and move away. I do not remember having ever produced such an effect in Paris, London, Vienna, or in any of the towns where I have lived. I have been thought proud, disdainful, reserved at times. I have been told that I affected the English sneer, that I was aping Lord Byron, but everywhere I have been received as a gentleman should be, and my advances, though infrequent, have been all the more appreciated on that account. Surely the three days' trip from Marseilles to Naples cannot have altered me to the extent of having become odious or grotesque, for more than one woman has ere now singled me out, and I have won the heart of Alicia Ward, a charming girl, a heavenly creature, one of Thomas Moore's angels ! "

These reflections, undoubtedly quite sensible, somewhat calmed Paul d'Aspremont, and he succeeded in convincing himself that he had attached to the exaggerated pantomime of the Neapolitans, who gesticulate more than any other people, a wholly gratuitous meaning.

It was late. All the guests, save Paul, had retired to their rooms, and Gelsomina, one of the servants whose portrait I sketched in the account of the kitchen council presided over by Virgilio Falsacappa, was waiting to lock the doors as soon as Paul should have returned. Nanella, the other maid, whose turn it was to sit up, had begged her braver companion to take her place, as she herself desired to avoid the foresiere who was suspected of jettatura. Gelsomina, therefore, was armed at all points; a huge bunch of amulets bristled on her bosom; five little coral horns hung, instead of vine leaves, from the faceted pearls in her ears; her hand, ready outstretched, extended its fore and fourth fingers in a position so accurate that it would certainly have met with commendation from the reverend Father Andrea de Jorio, author of the *Mimieba degli antichi investigata Ned gestire napoletano*.

The brave Gelsomina, concealing her hand behind a fold of her skirt, handed the candlestick to Mr. d'Aspremont, and fixed upon him a sharp, steady, almost provocative glance, so singular in its expression that the young man cast down his eyes, a result that appeared to give remarkable pleasure to the handsome girl. As she stood there, motionless and erect, holding out the candlestick with a statuesque gesture, her profile brought out by the light, her glance fixed and nascent, she loomed as the Nemesis of antiquity overawing a criminal.

When d'Aspremont had ascended the stairs and the sound of his footsteps had died out, Gelsomina threw back her head with an air of triumph, and said:

"Well, I fairly looked him down, that ugly fellow, whom may Saint Januarius confound. I am sure no harm will come to me."

Paul had a bad night of it, and his slumbers were troubled by all sorts of strange, tormenting dreams connected with the thoughts that had filled his mind during the course of the evening. He seemed to be surrounded by monstrous, grimacing faces expressing hatred, anger, and terror; then these would vanish, and he saw himself threatened by long, lean, bony fingers, with knotty joints, that came out of the darkness, reddened by a light of Hell, and making cabalistic signs. The nails on these fingers, curved like tigers' claws and vultures' talons, came closer and closer to his face and appeared to seek to tear his eyes out. By a supreme effort he managed to brush aside these hands that were winged like bats, but the hands were followed by heads of bulls, buffaloes, and stags, the whitened skulls filled with a life that was death, and which goring him with horns or antlers, torced him to leap into the sea, where he tore his limbs upon a forest of coral with pointed or bifurcated branches. Then a billow would cast him ashore, worn out, broken, half dead, and, like Byron's Don Juan, he seemed to see, in his fainting condition, a lovely head bending down over him. It was that, not of Haidee, but of Alicia, more beautiful than the imaginary being created by the poet. The maiden strove in vain to draw up on the sand the body the sea endeavoured to snatch back, and called on Vice, the tawny maid, to help her, but the latter refused with ferocious laughter. Alicia's strength gave way, and Paul fell back into the waters.

Jettatura

These confused and terrifying fancies, horrible in their vagueness, and others still more vague, and re-calling the shapeless phantoms that half emerge from the dense shadows of Goya's aquatintas, tortured the dreamer until early dawn. His soul, freed by the exhaustion of the body, appeared to divine what his waking thought failed to understand, and strove to translate its presentiments into images in the camera obscura of dreams.

Paul rose tired out, uneasy, dimly conscious of some mystery in these nightmares, but not daring to sound it. He turned round and round the fatal secret, closing his eyes in order not to see, and closing his ears in order not to hear it. Never had he felt so depressed. He even lost faith in Alicia; the Count's air of satisfied conceit, the complaisant manner in which the young girl listened to him, the approving air of the Commodore, all these things recurred to him filled with painful particulars, filled his heart with bitterness, and deepened his melancholy.

Day has the power to dispel troubles caused by the visions of the night. When the dawn's golden shafts flashed into the room through the parted curtains, Smarra, annoyed, flees away flapping its bat-like wings. The sun was shining joyously, the sky was clear, and the blue sea sparkled with innumerable spangles. Little by little Paul grew calmer; he forgot his painful dreams and the strange impressions felt the evening before, or, when he did give a thought to them, he blamed himself for his folly in dwelling upon them.

He took a turn round Chiaja to enjoy the Neapolitan excitability. The dealers were crying their wares in queer musical phrases in a popular dialect unintelligible to Paul, who knew Italian only and with excited gestures and a fury of pantomime unknown in the North. But every time he stopped before a shop, the dealer looked alarmed, murmured an imprecation in a low voice, and stretched out his first and fourth fingers as if he were about to stab Paul with them. The women, bolder, overwhelmed him with insults and shook their fists in his face.

Chapter 8

On hearing himself insulted by the Chiaja people, Mr. d'Aspremont imagined that they were addressing to him the coarsely burlesque litanies to which fishwives treat well-dressed persons who happen to traverse the market, but the lively repulsion, the genuine terror visible on every face compelled him to seek some other explanation. He heard once more, but with a threatening accent, the word *jettatore*, which had already struck upon his ear at the San Carlo Theatre; he therefore slowly walked away without letting his glance, the cause of so much trouble, rest upon anything.

As he passed along the houses trying to escape attention, he came upon a second-hand book-stall. He stopped, turned over and opened some of the books, by way of pulling himself together. He thus turned his back upon the passers-by, and as he half-concealed his face within the pages of the volume, he avoided insult. He had for one moment thought of using his shoulders of the rabble, but an undefinable superstitious terror that was beginning to lay hold of him had restrained him. He remembered that once, having struck an insolent driver with a light switch, he had hit him on the temple and killed him on the spot, an involuntary murder he had never got over.

Having picked up and put back a number of books in the boxes, he came upon Signor Niccolo Valetta's treatise on *jettatura*, the title of which seemed to flash up before him, as if the book had been placed there by the hand of Fate. He threw it to the dealer, who was looking at him with a sarcastic expression of countenance, and rattling the three or four black horns that hung with other charms upon his watch-chain, the six or eight carlini he asked for the book, and hurried back to his hotel to begin the study which was to clear away the doubts which had worried him since his arrival in Naples.

Valetta's book is as widely read in Naples as the *Secrets of Albertus the Great*, *Etteila* or the *Key to Dreams* in Paris. Valetta gives a definition of *jettatur*, shows by what means it may be recognised, and what are the methods to be resorted to for protection. He divides *jettatori* into several classes, in accordance with their power for evil, and discusses every point in connection with this important subject.

Jettatura

If d'Aspremont had come across this book in Paris, he would have glanced carelessly through it as through an old almanac stuffed full of nonsensical tales, and have laughed at the serious manner in which the author treated d of such absurdities. But in his present condition away from his usual surroundings, prepared to credulity by numberless trifling incidents, he perused it with secret horror, like some profane person spelling out of a black-letter folio formula for the evocation of spirits and other cabalistic performances. Though he had not sought to penetrate them, the secrets of Hell were being revealed to him, and he was now aware of his fatal gift ; he was a jettatore ! He had own it to himself, for he possessed every one of the distinctive marks described by Valetta.

It sometimes happens that a man who believes himself to be enjoying the best of health, opens by chance a medical work and, on reading the pathological description of some disease, perceives that he is suffering from it. Enlightened by the dread knowledge, he feels, as he notes each symptom in the tale, some hidden portion of his organs, some concealed fibre, the play of which he was ignorant of, quiver with pain, and he turns pale at the thought that death, which he had fancied far distant, is near. Paul experienced just such a feeling.

He went to the mirror and looked at himself with terrifying intensity. The dissonant perfection of features, composed of beauties not usually found together, made him more than ever like the fallen archangel and gleamed with sinister fire out of the dark depths of the mirror. The rays in his pupils writhed like vipers; his eyebrows quivered like a bow from which the deadly shaft has just been shot; the white line in his forehead recalled a cicatrice due to a thunderbolt, and flames of Hell seemed to burn in his auburn hair, while the marble pallor of his complexion brought out more startlingly still each feature of his absolutely terrifying face. He was frightened at himself. It seemed to him that his glance, reflected by the mirror, returned to him like a poisoned arrow. Imagine Medusa looking at her own hideous, yet charming face in the ruddy reflection of a brazen shield !

It may be objected that it is difficult to believe that a young man of the world, educated in the truths of modern science, and who had lived in the very midst of a sceptical civilisation, could accept seriously a popular prejudice, and fancy himself endowed with a mysterious deadly power; but to that I answer that common belief exercises an irresistible power of magnetism which masters a man in spite of himself, and with which the individual will cannot always cope successfully. A man may arrive in Naples laughing jettatura to scorn, and end by surrounding himself with horned preventives and by fleeing from every individual whose glance he suspects of evil. But Paul d'Aspremont was in a much more serious situation : he was himself possessed of the fascino, and every one avoided him or made in his presence the protective signs recommended by Signor Valetta. His common-sense rebelled at the thought, yet he could not help acknowledging that he bore every mark characteristic of a jettatura. The human mind, even when most enlightened, has always some dark nook in which crouch the hideous monsters of credulity and where cling the bats of superstition. Ordinary life itself is so full of problems that cannot be solved that impossibility becomes probability. A man may deny everything or believe in everything; from a certain point of view dreams are as true as reality.

Profound melancholy overpowered Paul. He was a monster ! Though endowed with a most affectionate disposition and the kindest of hearts, he nevertheless bore misfortune wherever he went. His glance, unconsciously filled with venom, was fatal to those upon whom it rested, even when he looked kindly upon them. He suffered from the horrible privilege of collecting, concentrating, and distilling the morbid miasmas, the dangerous electricity, the fatal influences of the ambient air and scattered them around. A number of incidents in his life, which until now had been unintelligible to him and which he had attributed to chance, now stood out in hideous clearness. He remembered all manner of strange misadventures, of unexplained misfortunes, of causeless catastrophes the reason of which he now understood. Startling coincidences occurred to his mind and confirmed the unhappy opinion he now had of himself.

He went back over his life year by year. He recalled his mother who had died in giving him birth; the unfortunate fate of his young schoolfellows : the one he loved best had been killed by a fall from a tree while he, Paul, was watching him climb it. He recalled the boating excursion on which he had started

Jettatura

so joyously with two of his comrades, and from which he had returned alone, after making desperate efforts to drag from the weeds the bodies of the two poor lads drowned by the upsetting of the craft; the assault at arms in which his foil, the button of which had broken off and transformed the weapon into a sword, had so dangerously wounded his opponent, a young man whom he loved dearly. Unquestionably there could be no rational explanation of these events, although Paul had hitherto believed there was. Now, however, the apparently fortuitous and accidental character of these events appeared to him to depend upon another cause, which he had learned since he had read Valetta's book. The deadly influence, the fascino, the jettatura had evidently a share in these catastrophes. Such a persistent series of misfortunes in connection with one and the same individual was unnatural.

A still more recent circumstance recurred to his memory in all its horrible details, and contributed largely to strengthen his unhappy belief.

He often used to attend the performances at Her Majesty's Theatre, in London, having been struck by the grace of a young English ballet-dancer. Without being more taken with her than a man is with a charming

figure in a painting or an engraving, he had into the habit of following her with his eyes in midst of her companions in the ballet, through the wildering maze of the evolutions of the dance. He had got fond of her sad, gentle face, of her delicate pallor which the exertion of the dance never flushed, of her beautiful silky, shining fair locks, crowded, as the case might be, with stars or flowers, of her glance that lost itself in space, of her limbs that shyly lifted the clouds of gauze and shone under the silk like the marble limbs of some statue of antiquity. Every time she flashed past the footlights, he saluted her with a quiet, furtive sign of admiration, or put up glasses in order to see her better.

One night, in the circular flight of a waltz, the dancer swept closer to the dazzling line of fire that, in a theatre, separates the world of reality from the realm of fancy. Her airy sylph-like draperies fluttered like the wings of a dove about to take to flight, when a tongue of flame shot up, blue white, and reached the light stuff. In an instant the young girl was wrapped in flames; she danced on for a second like a will o' the wisp in the midst of a ruddy blaze, and then, terrified, rushed to the wings, crazed with fright and was burned alive in her blazing garments.

Paul had been deeply grieved by the accident, of which the newspapers of the day all spoke, and in which the name of the victim may be found by any one curious to know it. But his sorrow was unmixed with remorse, and he did not suppose he had in the least degree contributed to an accident which he regretted more than any one else. Now, however, he was convinced that his insistent habit of following her with his glance had had something to do with the death of the lovely girl. He looked on himself as her murderer; he felt a horror of himself and wished he had never been born.

This state of prostration was followed by a violent reaction. Paul broke into a nervous laugh, threw away Valetta's book, and exclaimed:—

"Upon my word, I am going crazy or turning into an idiot. The Naples sun must have affected my brain. What would the men at my club say if they knew that I have seriously discussed whether or not I am a jettatore?"

Paddy here knocked discreetly at the door. Paul opened, and the groom, conscientiously performing his duties, presented to him upon the shining leather of cap, a letter from Alicia, excusing himself the while for not having a silver salver.

D'Aspremont broke the seal and read as follows:

"Are you annoyed with me, Paul? You did not come last night, and your lemon sherbet melted sadly away on the table. I kept looking for you until nine o'clock, trying to make out the sound of your carriage wheels amid the din

Jettatura

of the cicalas and the rumbling of the tambourines. Then I gave up hope and quarrelled with the Commodore. Are not women wonderfully just? Pulcinella's black nose, Don Limon, and Donna Pangrazia must have a wonderful attraction for you, for I know by my secret police that you spent the evening at San Carlino. You did not write a single one of those letters you said were so important. Why do you not simply confess that you were stupidly jealous Count d'Altavilla? I thought you had more pride, and your modesty is touching. You need have no fear; Count d'Altavilla is too handsome, and I do not for Apollos that wear watch charms. I ought to treat you with haughty disdain, and inform you that I not notice your absence, but the truth is that the time hung very heavily on my hands, that I was in a very bad temper, very nervous, and that I nearly beat Vice who was laughing as if she were crazy, though what it was at, I have not the faintest idea.

„A. W.“

Paul completely recovered the feeling of real life on reading this playfully sarcastic letter. He dressed, ordered the carriage, and soon the incredulous Scazziga was cracking his whip at his horses that dashed at a gallop down the lava-paved street, through the crowd that is ever dense on the Santa Lucia quay.

"What is the matter with you, Scazziga?" asked Paul; "you will have a smash presently."

The coachman turned sharply round to reply, and Paul's angry glance fell full upon him. A stone he had not perceived forced up one of the fore wheels and the violence of the shock caused him to fall from his box, though he managed to keep hold of the reins. He clambered back as nimbly as a monkey, with a bump the size of a hen's egg on his forehead.

"The devil take me if I turn round again when you speak to me," he grumbled low. "Timberio, Falsacappa, and Gelsomina were right. He is a jettatore."

To-morrow I shall buy a pair of horns; it can do harm and may do good."

Paul was disturbed by the incident, for it brought him back within the magic circle he was trying escape from. Of course the fact that a stone hapenes to be struck by the wheel of a carriage and that the driver tumbles off his seat, is of daily occurrence, but the effect had followed so closely upon the cause, Scazziga's fall had coincided so exactly with the look he cast upon him, that all his fears returned.

"I have a great mind," he said to himself, "to leave this extravagant country to-morrow, for as long as I stay in it I feel my brain rattling around in my head like a dried nut in its shell. But if I were to acquaint Alicia with my fears, she would laugh at me, and the climate of Naples is beneficial to her. But, by the way, she was in excellent health before she made my acquaintance! Never had that swan's nest, England, floating on the waves, given birth to a fairer and rosier child. Life sparkled in her glorious eyes and bloomed upon her satiny fresh cheeks; a rich clean blood coursed in the azure veins under her transparent skin, and her beauty made itself felt under her grace and strength. But once my glance fell upon her, she grew pale, thin, and altered; her delicate hands became more slender; her brilliant eyes were circled with dark rings, and it seemed as though consumption had touched her with its bony fingers. During my absence, she quickly regained her lovely colour; her breath came freely from the lungs which the physician had sounded with anxiety. If she were freed freed from my fatal influence, she would live long. I believe I am killing her. The other evening, while I was there, she experienced such acute pain that her cheeks became pallid as though death had breathed upon her. I wonder whether I unknowingly cast jettatura upon her? Of course the whole thing may be explained in the most natural manner, for many English girls have a predisposition to consumption."

Paul d'Aspremont turned these thoughts over in his mind all the way. When he appeared on the terrace, where the Commodore and Alicia spent most of their time, the huge Sicilian ox-horns, given by Count d'Altavilla, outspread their jasper-like crescents in the most conspicuous place. The Commodore, observing Paul's glance fall

upon them, turned blue, which was his way of blushing. Less delicately minded than his niece, he had listened to Vice's confidences.

Alicia, with a gesture of profound disdain, signed the servant to remove the horns, and cast upon Paul adorable glance full of love, of courage, and of faith.

"Leave them where they are," said Paul to Vice. "They are very handsome."

Chapter 9

PAUL'S remark upon the horns presented by Count d'Altavilla appeared to give the Commodore pleasure. Vice smiled, exhibiting a row of teeth of which the canines, separate and sharp, shone with ferocious whiteness. Alicia's swift look asked of her friend a question that remained unanswered, and an awkward silence fell upon the company.

The first moments of a visit, even when it is cordial, familiar, and the repetition of a daily call, are usually embarrassing. During the time of absence, wven though it be of a few hours' duration only, an invisible atmosphere has gathered about each one and bars confidence. It is like a perfectly clear pane of lass through which one can see the landscape but that a fly cannot traverse. There is apparently nothing the matter, yet an obstacle makes itself felt.

An unspoken thought, kept well in the background, for all three were well seasoned people of the world, caused each member of the party to be more preoccupied than was the wont of persons usually so much at their ease. The Commodore was mechanically twiddling his thumbs ; d'Aspremont could not take his eyes off the black, polished points of the horns he had forbidden Vice to remove, studying them as though he were a naturalist seeking to classify some hitherto unknown species; Alicia was toying with the bow of the broad ribbon that she wore as a belt round her wrapper, and pretended to be refastening it.

She was the first to break the ice, with the playful freedom of English girls, who are, however, so modest and reserved once they are married.

"Really, Paul, you have not been very amiable of late. Is your love a cold-house plant which can bloom in England only, and the development of which the high temperature of this climate interferes with ? You were so attentive, so thoughtful, so ready to forestall my least wishes when you were with us at our Lincolnshire place. You presented yourself with smiling lips, your heart on your sleeve, your hair irreproachably curled, and ready to bend the knee before the goddess of your soul ; such, in a word, as lovers are depicted in the illustrations to novels."

And I still love you, Alicia," replied d'Aspremont, in a voice full of feeling, but without removing his eyes from the horns hanging on one of the antique pillars that supported the vine-leaf roof.

" You say it in so lugubrious a tone," returned Alicia, "that it taxes my self-conceit to believe it. I fancy that what you liked in me was pallor, my diaphaneity, my Ossianic and vaporous grace. My state of ill-health bestowed upon me a certain romantic charm that I have now lost."

"You were never lovelier, Alicia."

" Words, words, words, as Shakespeare says. I am so lovely that you do not condescend to look at me."

As a matter of fact d'Aspremont's eyes had not once rested upon the girl.

Jettatura

"Well," she said, with a comically exaggerated sigh, "I see plainly that I have turned into a stout, sturdy peasant girl, blooming, high-coloured and blowzy, without a trace of breeding, and unfit to appear at Almack's or in the 'Book of Beauty,' with a sheet of tissue paper between my portrait and a sonnet."

"Miss Ward, you take pleasure in gratuitously slandering yourself," said Paul with downcast glance.

"You had better own at once that you think horrid. It is your fault, Commodore," she went on. "You have been feeding me up on chicken wings, choice chops, fillet of beef and Canary wine, and with your rides on horseback, your sea-bathing and your gymnastic exercise, you have worked me up to state of rude country health that has scattered to the winds Mr. d'Aspremont's poetic illusions."

"You are teasing Mr. d'Aspremont and making of me," said the Commodore. "It is quite certain that fillet of beef is strengthening and that Canary wine never hurt any one."

"What a disappointment it must be for you, Paul, to have parted with a nixie, an elf, a willis, and come upon what physicians and parents call a healthy lass ! But since you have not the courage to look me, shudder with horror – I am seven ounces heavier than when I left England! "

"Eight ounces," proudly corrected the Commodore, who tended Alicia as carefully as the most ten mother could have done.

" Is it eight ounces exactly ? Oh, you dread uncle; you want to disenchant Mr. d'Aspremont for good."

While the young girl was thus rallying him with a coquetry she would not have permitted herself to indulge in had she not had serious reasons for doing so, d'Aspremont, a prey to his fixed notion and resolved not to harm Miss Ward with his deadly glance, kept his eyes resolutely upon the talismanic horns or let his gaze wander over the vast blue horizon visible from the terrace. He asked himself whether he was not in duty bound, even at the cost of passing for a man false to his word and to the dictates of honour, to flee from Alicia and to spend the rest of his life on some desert island where at least his jettatura would die out for lack of a human glance that could absorb it.

" I see," continued Alicia, keeping up her raillery, "what is making you so sombre and so grave. Our wedding is only a month hence, and you are startled at the thought of becoming the husband of a poor country girl who has lost all trace of elegance. I willingly give you back your plighted word, and you may marry my friend Sarah Templeton, who eats pickles and drinks vinegar in order to get thin."

And she laughed with the silvery, bright laughter of youth at the notion, Paul and the Commodore joining in heartily.

When the last burst of her nervous gaiety had spent itself, she went up to d'Aspremont, took him by the hand, led him to the piano placed in the corner the terrace, and opening a music book on the desk said: --

"My dear Paul, you evidently do not feel up to talking to-day, and what is not worth saying is sung. You shall therefore take your part in this duettino, the accompaniment of which is not difficult ; it consists chiefly of chords."

Paul sat down on the stool; Alicia stood behind in such a way as to read the song upon the score. The Commodore leaned back, stretched out his legs, and assumed a pose of anticipated beatitude, for he claimed to be somewhat of a dilettante and affirmed that he adored music. After the sixth bar, however, he slept the sleep of the just, and insisted, in spite his niece's sarcasms, in giving the name of ecstasy to his dozing, although he not infrequently snored, which is not a usual sign of ecstasy.

Jettatura

I

The duettino was a bright and lively air set to words by Metastasio, and in the taste of Cimarosa, which I can best liken to a butterfly flitting to fro in a sunbeam.

Music hath power to cause the evil spirits to depart. Paul had not been playing long before he had forgotten everything about conjuring fingers, magical horns, and coral amulets. He had forgotten Valetta's terrible work and all he had read about jettatura. His soul was rising joyously, borne on the accents of

Alicia's voice, into a pure and harmonious atmosphere. The cicadas were silent, as if listening, and the sea breeze, that had just risen, bore the notes away with the petals of the flowers that fell from the vases on the edge of the terrace.

"Uncle is as sound asleep as the Seven Sleepers in their grotto, and if it were not his habit, it might be painful to our self-love as artists. Shall we take a turn round the garden while he is resting? I have never yet shown you my Paradise."

So saying, Alicia took down from a nail driven into one of the pillars, on which it was hung by the long ribbons, a broad-brimmed Florentine straw hat.

In matters of horticulture Alicia held the most eccentric opinions ; she would not allow flowers to be picked or the shrubbery to be trimmed. It was, as I have said, the wild, uncultivated appearance of the garden that had attracted her. So the two young people had to make a way for themselves through dense bushes that immediately closed in behind them. Alicia went first and laughed to see the branches of the rose laurels which she displaced lash Paul's face, but hardly had she gone twenty steps when, as if to play a botanical practical joke, a green bough caught and lifted her hat so high that Paul was unable to recover it. Fortunately the foliage was thick and the sun cast scarce a few golden sequins upon the sand through the interstices of the branches.

"This is my favourite retreat," said Alicia, showing Paul a picturesquely broken rock protected by a dense growth of orange trees, lime trees, lentisks, and myrtles.

She sat down on a part of the rock cut to the shape of a seat, and signed to Paul to kneel down in front of her upon the dry moss that carpeted the foot of the rock.

"Put both your hands in mine, and look straight into my eyes," she said. "In another month I shall be your wife. Why does your glance avoid mine ?"

Paul, indeed, again a prey to his thoughts of jettatura, had looked away.

"Are you afraid of reading in it any rebellious or guilty thought ? You know my heart has been yours since the day you brought the letter of introduction to my uncle in our drawing-room at Richmond. I am of those Englishwomen who are tender, romantic, and proud, and who love in a moment with a lifelong love, a love more than lifelong, it may be, and she who can love can die too. Look straight into my eyes ; I insist upon it ; do not try to look down, or I shall be compelled to believe that a gentleman who ought to fear God alone allows himself to be frightened by wretched superstitions. Fix on me your eyes, which you fancy so dangerous and which are so sweet to me, for I read your love in them. Then tell me if you still think me pretty enough to drive with me, when we are married, in an open carriage in Hyde Park."

Paul, bewildered, looked long at Alicia with a glance filled with love and enthusiasm. Suddenly the girl turned deadly pale; a sharp pain shot through her heart like an arrow ; something seemed to give way in her breast, and she put her handkerchief quickly to her lips. A red drop stained the fine cambric, which Alicia swiftly concealed.

I thank you, Paul. You have made me very happy, for I believed you had ceased to love me."

Chapter 10

ALICIA'S gesture, as she strove to hide her handkerchief, had not, quick as it had been, escaped d'Aspremont's notice. He turned pale in his turn, for this was an unmistakable proof of his fatal power. His brain was filled with the most sinister thoughts, and for a second suicide occurred to him. Was it not, indeed, his duty to destroy himself as being a maleficent creature, and thus to remove the involuntary cause of so many misfortunes? He would willingly have endured the hardest trials and borne courageously the burden of life, but the thought of dealing death to the woman he loved best was horrible beyond expression.

The heroic girl had mastered the feeling of pain, the consequence of Paul's glance, and which coincided so strangely with the warning given her by Count d'Altavilla. A less strong-minded person might have been struck the result, which, if not supernatural, was at least difficult of explanation; but, as I have said, Alicia was religious and not superstitious. Her faith, unshakable in matters of belief, rejected as old women's tales every story of mysterious influences, and she laughed at the most deeply rooted popular beliefs. Besides, even had she admitted the existence of jettatura, and had she recognised in Paul its evident signs, she was too tender-hearted and too proud to hesitate for a moment. Paul had done nothing to which the most delicate susceptibility could take exception, and Miss Ward would rather have fallen dead—under his so-called fatal glance than have rejected a love she had accepted with her uncle's consent and which marriage was soon to crown. She resembled somewhat the chaste bold, virginly resolute heroines of Shakespeare, whose sudden love is none the less pure and true, and who unhesitatingly bind themselves for life. Her hand had pressed Paul's and no other man on earth was henceforth to hold it in his. She looked upon her life as linked to his, and her maidenly modesty would have revolted at the mere thought of any other hymen.

She therefore exhibited genuine happiness, or at least so admirably simulated it that the keenest observer would have been deceived, and raising Paul, still kneeling at her feet, she led him through the flower-tangled and shrub-obstructed walks of her wild garden to a where the vegetation, less dense, allowed the sea to show like an azure dream of the infinite. The luminous serenity dispelled Paul's dark thoughts. Alicia leaned upon his arm as if they were already man and wife, and in this mute and pure caress, meaningless in any other woman but decisive in her case, she gave him herself to him more formally still, reassured him, and gave him to understand how little she feared the dangers with which she was said to be threatened. Although she had at once imposed silence on Vice, and on her uncle, and although Count d'Altavilla had refused to name any one, she had quickly understood it was Paul d'Aspremont who was meant, for the mysterious remarks plainly pointed to him. She had noticed that Paul himself, sharing the prejudice so widespread in Naples that turns into a jettatore any man whose face is somewhat out of the common, had through incredible weakness on his part, to believe himself a victim of the fascino, and that he deliberately avoided looking at her in order not to hurt her by his glance. It was in order to react against this incipient mania that she had brought about the scene I have just described, but which had a result very different from that she had intended, since it confirmed, even more than before, Paul's sad conviction.

They returned to the terrace, where the Commodore, still under the influence of the music, was melodiously sleeping in his rattan arm-chair. Paul took leave, and Alicia, imitating the Neapolitan gesture of farewell, blew a kiss to him on her finger tips, and said, in a voice full of suave caresses, " Good-bye till to-morrow, Paul. You will be sure to come, will you not ? "

The Commodore, aroused by Paul's departure, was struck by Alicia's radiant, alarming, almost supernatural beauty. The whites of her eyes had a burnished silver tone in which flashed her pupils like luminous black stars; her cheeks were ideally rosy, and of a purity and warmth no painter ever knew ; her temples, transparent as agates, were veined with a network of delicate blue lines, while her flesh seemed to be interpenetrated by sunbeams, so that her soul appeared to be breaking out of her.

Jettatura

"How beautiful you are to-day, Alicia," said the Commodore.

"You flatter me, uncle. It is not your fault if I am not the most conceited girl in the United Kingdom. Happily I do not believe flatterers, even when disinterested."

"Beautiful, dangerously beautiful," went on Commodore, speaking to himself. "She is the living image of her poor mother, Nancy, who died at nineteen. Angels like them cannot remain on earth. A mere breath blows them away, and invisible wings seem to grow on their shoulders. They are too fair, too pure, too perfect ; they lack the red, coarse blood of life, and God, who lends them to this earth for few days, hastens to recall them to Himself. Her supreme brilliancy of beauty saddens me as though it were a farewell."

"Well, uncle," said Miss Ward, who noted darkening of her uncle's brow ; "if I am so pretty, is time I were married. The veil and orange wreath will become me."

"Marry! Are you in such a hurry to leave your old uncle ?"

"I shall not leave you, for it is agreed with Mr. d'Aspremont that we are to live all together. You know very well that I cannot do without you."

"Mr. d'Aspremont is all very well, but he is not your husband yet."

"Your word and mine are both pledged to him, and you have never broken yours."

"He has my pledged word, there is no doubt of that," replied the Commodore, somewhat embarrassed.

"And is it not some days since the six months' delay you wished for came to an end?" said Alicia, whose rosy checks became rosier yet.

"So you have been counting the months, my girl. Well, there is no trusting you demure ones."

"I love Mr. d'Aspremont," replied Alicia, gravely.

"There's the rub," jerked out Sir Joshua Ward, who, filled with the notions put into his head by Vice and Count d'Altavilla, did not at all care to have a jettatore for a son-in-law.

"I have but one heart," returned Alicia, "and but one love, even if, like my mother, I were to die at nineteen."

"Die!" exclaimed the Commodore; "pray do not utter such a horrible thing."

"Have you anything to urge against Mr. d'Aspremont ?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Has he shown himself dishonourable in any way ? His be once proved cowardly, vile, untruthful, or perfidious? Has he ever insulted a woman backed down before a man? Is there any secret stain upon his crest ? Would a girl, entering society as his wife, have to blush for him or cast her eyes down ?"

"Mr. Paul d'Aspremont is a perfect gentleman, and absolutely respectable."

"You may be sure, uncle, that, if he were not, I should at once give him up, and bury myself in some inaccessible retreat; but I shall not break my plighted word for any other reason. You understand me? said Miss Ward, gently

Jettatura

but firmly.

The Commodore was twiddling his thumbs, his recourse when bothered.

"Why are you so cool towards Paul nowadays?" went on Miss Ward. "You used to be so fond him; you could not do without him when we were in Lincolnshire; and when you shook hands with him, crushed his fingers in doing so, you said he was a fine fellow, to whom you would not hesitate to confide girl's happiness."

"Yes, indeed, I was very fond of him," said Commodore, moved by the remembrances called up niece. "But what is not so plain when shrouded in English fogs, is plain enough in the Neapolitan sunshine."

"What do you mean?" asked Alicia, whose bright colour suddenly faded away and who turned as white as an alabaster statue upon a tombstone, while her voice trembled.

"I mean that Paul is a jettatore."

"What, uncle! you, Sir Joshua Ward, a Christian gentleman and a subject of Her Majesty ; you, a retired naval officer, and an enlightened and civilised man, so often consulted on so many matters; you who have education and wisdom, and who daily read your Bible, you do not hesitate to accuse Paul of jettatura ? Oh ! I did not expect that from you."

"I may be all you say, my dear Alicia," replied the Commodore, "when your happiness is not at stake, but when a danger, even if imaginary only, threatens you, I become more superstitious than a peasant of the Abruzzi, a lazzaroni on the Mole, a Chiaja ostricajo, a maid servant of Terra di Lavoro, or even a Neapolitan Count. Paul may glare at me as much as he likes with his cross look ; I shall remain as cool as in front of a rapier point or a pistol barrel. Fascino can have no hold on me, who have been burned, tanned, and baked by every sun. It is only where you concerned, my dear, that I am credulous, and I confess that I feel a cold sweat all over me when that unfortunate fellow's glance rests upon you. I know very that he has no evil intentions and that he loves you better than his own life, but it seems to me that when he does look at you your features change, your color goes, and you strive to hide keen pain. Then I do feel like tearing out his eyes with the Count's horns."

"Poor dear uncle," said Alicia, moved by the Commodore's warmth. "Our lives are in God's hands. Not a prince dies on his state bed, not a sparrow under the slates, unless the appointed time has come. Fascino has nothing to do with it, and it is wicked to suppose that a more or less oblique glance can have any influence upon our fate. Come, nunky," continued she, using the term of familiar endearment of the jester in " King Lear, "you were not serious in what you just now. Your love for me biassed your judgment, usually so sound. I am sure you would never dare say to Paul that you cannot now give him your niece's hand and that you do not want him to marry into family because he is a jettatore."

"By Joshua, my namesake, who stopped the the sun, I shall not hesitate to speak my mind to your hand– some Paul," cried the Commodore. "What do I care whether I am ridiculous and absurd, or whether I break my word even, when it is a question of your health ? I pledged my word to a man, not to a jettatore. I have promised, it is true, and I shall simply not keep my promise , If he is not satisfied, I am ready to give him satisfaction."

And the exasperated Commodore lunged out without thinking of the gout that tortured him.

"Sir Joshua Ward, you will not do so," said Alicia, with calm dignity.

The Commodore fell back in his arm–chair quite out of breath, and remained silent.

Jettatura

"Granting that the shameful and stupid charge were true, uncle, is it a reason for dismissing Mr. d'Aspremont and turning his misfortune into a Crime ? You acknowledge yourself that the harm he may do is done unconsciously, and that no man was ever more loving, generous, and noble."

"One does not marry a vampire, however good his intentions may be," replied the Commodore.

"But that is all nonsense and extravagant superstition. The one bit of truth in the whole business is that Paul has taken it seriously, and is terrified under the spell of a hallucination. He has come believe in his fatal power, is afraid of himself, for every slight accident, unnoticed by him formerly, confirms his belief, for he now fancies it is caused by him. It is not my part, since I am his wife before God and shall be so before men, with your blessing, uncle dear, is it not my part, I say, to calm his over excited imagination, to drive away these vain shadows, to dispel, apparent and real trustfulness, his haggard anxiety, sister of monomania, and to save, by making him happy, his troubled soul and his imperilled mind ? "

"You are right, as usual, Alicia," answered Commodore, "and I am only an old fool. I do believe Vice is a witch, who has upset me with her stories. As for Count d'Altavilla, he strikes me at present, with his horns and his cabalistic gimcracks, as being very ridiculous. No doubt it was a trick to get Paul out of the way so that he might get you himself."

"It is possible that Count d'Altavilla has acted in good faith," said Miss Ward, smiling. "But now you were of his opinion."

"Do not hit a man when he is down, my dear. "Besides I might fall away again, for I have not quite got rid of my erroneous ideas. The best thing we can do is to leave Naples by the next steamer, and go quietly back to England. When Paul ceases to see around him bulls' horns, stags' heads, pointed fingers, coral amulets, and all the rest of these diabolical inventions, he will grow calmer, and I also shall forget the nonsense which nearly led me to break my word and to act as no gentleman should act. You shall marry Paul, since you have agreed to do so; you shall keep for me the sitting-room and bedroom on the ground-floor of our Richmond home, and the octagonal tower in our Lincolnshire castle, and we shall live happily together. If your health requires that you should go to a milder climate, we shall rent a country house near Tours, or else at Cannes, where Lord Brougham has a fine property, and where these damnable jettatura superstitions are unknown, thank God ! What say you to that, Alicia ? "

" You do not need my approval; am I not the most obedient of nieces ? "

"Yes, when you have your own way, you minx," said the Commodore with a smile as he retired to his own room.

Alicia remained a few moments longer on the terrace, but, whether the scene she had gone through had induced feverishness in her, or whether Paul really exercised over the young girl an influence such as the Commodore dreaded, she shivered with cold as the evening breeze blew upon her gauze-covered shoulders, and that night, feeling unwell, she begged Vice to spread over her feet, cold and white as marble, one of those Harlequin rugs that are manufactured in Venice.

Meanwhile the glow-worms sparkled in the grass, the cicadas were chirping, and the great golden moon rose in the heavens out of a haze of heat.

Chapter 11

THE next day, Alicia, who had had a bad night, scarcely touched the drink brought her by Vice, as was her daily habit, and she placed it languidly upon the table at her bedhead. She did not suffer from any pain in particular; it

Jettatura

was rather that she felt worn out, that she found it difficult to live; and she would have experienced some difficulty in stating the symptoms of her trouble to a physician.

She ordered Vice to bring her a mirror, for girls are more concerned with the change in their looks due to suffering than with suffering itself. She was extremely pale; two little spots only, like two rose leaves fallen upon a cup of milk, showed on her pallid cheeks. Her eyes shone with unaccustomed brilliancy, filled with the last flashes of fever, but her cherry lips had paled and, in order to restore their brightness, she bit them with her pearly teeth.

She rose, put on a white cashmere wrapper, twisted a gauze scarf around her head, for, in spite of the heat that kept the cicadas chirping, she felt shivery, and went out on the terrace at her accustomed time in order to avoid awaking the ever watchful solicitude of the Commodore. She barely tasted her breakfast, though she forced herself to do so, as the least symptom of illness would have been attributed by the Commodore to Paul's influence, and this Alicia desired above all things to avoid. Then, under pretext that the blinding light of day tired her, she withdrew to her room, after having several times repeated to her uncle, who was very suspicious in such matters, that she was particularly well that morning.

"Particularly well," said the Commodore to himself when she had gone; "I am not so sure of that. She had pearly tones round the eyes and a bright colour on her cheeks, exactly like her poor mother, who also used to insist that she had never felt better. What had I best do? If I were to make her break off her engagement to Paul, I should be merely killing her in another way. Best leave Nature to herself; Alicia is young yet. True, but it is the young that old Mob attacks; it is as jealous as a woman. I might send for a physician; but what can medicine do for an angel? Yet all the bad symptoms had disappeared. Ah! if it be indeed you, you cursed Paul, whose breath is withering that heavenly flower, I will strangle you with my own hands. But Nancy did not suffer from a jettatore's glance, and yet she died. Suppose Alicia were to die! No, no; it is impossible. What have I done that God should inflict such pain upon me? Long ere she dies I shall be under the sod, in the shadow of the church in my native place, with Sacred to the Memory of Sir Joshua Ward upon my tombstone. And Alicia will come and weep upon the gray stone over the old Commodore. I do not know what is the matter with me this morning; I am as low-spirited and dull as it is possible to be."

By way of dispelling these dark thoughts, the Commodore added a little Jamaica rum to his cup of tea, now grown cold, and called for his hookah, an innocent indulgence he allowed himself only when Alicia was absent, for her sensitiveness might have suffered even from that light-scented smoke.

He had already got the perfumed water bubbling and had puffed a few bluish wreaths of smoke, when Vice appeared and announced Count d'Altavilla.

"Sir Joshua," said the Count, after the exchange of the ordinary civilities, "have you thought over the request I had the honour of making of you the other day?"

"I have thought it over," replied the Commodore, "but, as you are aware, I am pledged to Mr. Paul d'Aspremont."

"I am aware of the fact. Yet there are cases in which a pledge may be withdrawn. For instance, when the person to whom it has been made turns out to be different from what he was believed to be."

"Speak more plainly, Count."

"I dislike speaking ill of a rival, but after the conversation we had, you cannot help understanding me. If you were to refuse Mr. Paul d'Aspremont's suit, would you allow me to come forward?"

Jettatura

"For my own part I can answer in the affirmative but it is not quite as sure that Miss Ward would approve of the change. She is very much in love with Paul, and it is somewhat my fault, for I favoured his suit myself before hearing all this nonsense. Pray forgive me, Count, for putting it in that way, but I am all upset."

"Do you want your niece to die ? " said d'Altavilla, in a tone of deep emotion.

"Blood and thunder! My niece die!" exclaimed the Commodore, springing from his arm-chair and dropping the morocco tube of his hookah, for he was very sensitive on this point. "Is she dangerously ill ?"

"Do not be so easily alarmed, sir. Miss Ward may live a long time yet." "I am glad to hear that; you terrified me."

"On one condition, however," continued Coun d'Altavilla, "that she shall cease to see Mr. Paul d'Aspremont."

"The jettatura again! Unfortunately, Miss Ward does not believe in it."

"Listen to me," said the Count quietly. "The first time I met Miss Alicia at the Prince of Syracuse's ball, and began to love her with a love as respectful as it was deep, I was struck at once by the brilliant health, the joy of life, and the bloom of strength which radiated from her. Her beauty was positively luminous and seemed to float in an atmosphere of well-being. She shone in that phosphorescence like a star ; Englishwomen, Russians, and Italians paled by her side. I could look at no one but her. To her English high-breeding she united the clean, strong grace of the goddesses of antiquity. Forgive my indulging in mythology, but I am descended from one of the Greek colonies."

"She was indeed splendid. Miss Edwina O'Hara, Lady Eleanor Lilly, Mrs. Jane Strangford, and Princess Vera Federeovna Bariatinski turned yellow with envy," returned the delighted Commodore.

" And now do you not notice that her beauty has become somewhat languid, that her features have acquired a morbid delicacy, that the veins on her hands show bluer than they should, and that the sound of her voice has a troubled vibration and a painful charm ? The earthly in her is vanishing and making way for the angelic. She is attaining an ethereal perfection that, at the cost of your thinking me too materialistic, I must own I do not care to see in the daughters of our earth."

The Count's words corresponded so accurately with the secret preoccupation of Sir Joshua Ward that the latter remained for some moments silent and apparently sunk in deep thought.

"I have not yet done," went on the Count. "Had Miss Ward's health caused you any anxiety previous to the arrival of Mr. d'Aspremont in England? "

"Never once. She was the brightest and most blooming girl in the kingdom."

"You see, then, that Mr. d'Aspremont's presence coincides with the periods of ill-health that are undermining Miss Ward's life. I do not ask you, a northerner, to credit implicitly a belief, a prejudice, a superstition, if you please, that prevails throughout our Southern lands, but you must confess that the facts are startling and deserve attention."

"May there not be a natural cause in her case?" said the Commodore, shaken by the Count's specious reasoning, but held back by his English conservatism from adopting the popular belief.

"Miss Ward is not ill; she is poisoned, as it were, by Mr. d'Aspremont's glance. If he is not a jettatore, he is at the least maleficent."

Jettatura

"But what can I do? She is in love with him, laughs at jettatura, and pretends that one cannot refuse an honourable man for such a reason."

"I have no right to interfere on behalf of your niece. I am neither her brother, her relative, nor her betrothed; but if I could get your consent, there is one thing I might try in order to withdraw her from that fatal influence. Do not be afraid; I shall not commit any extravagance. Young though I am, I am well aware that a woman must not be talked about. Permit me only not to reveal my plan to you and believe me when I say that it does not involve anything that the most punctiliously honourable man might not confess openly."

"You are very much in love with my niece, are you not ? " said the Commodore.

"I am, and my love is hopeless. But do you grant me leave to act ? "

"You are a terrible fellow, Count d'Altavilla. Well, try to save Alicia in your own way; not only do I not object, I approve."

The Count rose, bowed, got into his carriage, and ordered the coachman to drive to the Hotel de Rome.

Paul was leaning on the table, his head in his hands, plunged in the most painful reflections. He had caught sight of the two or three drops of blood on Alicia's handkerchief, and still under the spell of his conviction, he blamed himself for his deadly love and reproached himself for accepting the devotion of the lovely girl who was ready to die for him; and he was wondering what superhuman sacrifice he could accomplish that would repay such sublime unselfishness.

His groom Paddy interrupted his meditations as he brought in Count d'Altavilla's card.

"Count d'Altavilla ! What can he possibly want with me ? " said Paul, greatly surprised. "Show him in."

When the Neapolitan gentleman appeared at the door d'Aspremont had already masked his astonishment with the look of cold indifference under which men of the world conceal their feelings.

Sir," began the Count, while toying with the charms on his watch chain, "what I am about to say to you is so strange, so improper, so out of place, that you would be justified in throwing me out of the window. Spare yourself so brutal a proceeding, for I am ready to give you satisfaction as a gentleman."

"I am listening, sir ; reserving to myself the right of availing myself of your offer later, in the event of a your remarks proving unpleasant to me," replied Paul, steadfastly.

"You are a jettatore."

At these words d'Aspremont's face suddenly turned ashy green, and a red ring formed around his eyes; he bent his brows, the wrinkle in his forehead deepened, and a sulphurous light flashed from his eyes. He half rose, scoring with his nails the mahogany arms of his chair. It was so terrible that d'Altavilla, brave though he was, seized one of the tiny forked branches of coral hanging on his watch chain, and instinctively directed the points of it towards Paul.

By a supreme effort of the will, d'Aspremont sat down again and said:—

"You were right, sir ; I ought to throw you out of the window for your insult, but I shall have the patience to await another form of reparation."

Jettatura

"Believe me," went on the Count, "when I say that I should not offer such an insult, which blood alone can wash out, to a gentleman were I not impelled to it by the gravest of motives."

"What is that to me ? "

"It matters little to you, as you say, for you are fortunate in your love, but I, Don Felipe d'Altavilla, I forbid you to see Miss Alicia Ward again."

"I take no orders from you."

"I know that," answered the Neapolitan Count, "and I do not, therefore, expect that you will obey me."

"Then what is your reason for acting as you are doing ? "

"I am convinced that the fascination with which you are unfortunately endowed acts fatally upon Miss Alicia Ward. It is an absurd notion, a prejudice worthy of the Middle Ages, which no doubt strikes you as profoundly ridiculous. I do not propose to discuss that side of the question with you. Your eyes when turned upon Miss Ward cast upon her, in spite of yourself, a fatal glance which will be her death. I have no other means of preventing that sad result than picking an apparently causeless quarrel with you. In the sixteenth century I should have had you killed by one of my highland peasants, but that sort of thing is not good form nowadays. I did think of begging you to return to France, but it was too absurd. You would have laughed at a rival, who, under pretext of jettatura, requested you to depart and to leave him alone with your future bride."

While the Count was speaking, Paul d'Aspremont felt himself a prey to a secret horror. He, a Christian, was then really the plaything of the powers of Hell, and the Evil One in person looked out of his eyes ! Catastrophes followed in his train, and his love was deadly! For a moment his reason tottered on its throne, and madness fluttered in his brain.

"On your honour, Count, do you believe what you have just said to me? " he exclaimed after a few minutes' reflection during which the Neapolitan spoke no word.

"On my honour, I do believe it."

"Then it is true," murmured Paul, "and I am a murderer, a fiend, a vampire. I am killing that heavenly girl and driving that old man to despair."

He was on the point of promising the Count not again to see Alicia, but human respect and jealousy awaking in his heart kept back the words he was about to utter.

"I will not conceal from you, Count, that I am even now going to call on Miss Ward."

"I shall not take you by the scruff of the neck to prevent your doing so. You refrained from assaulting me a moment since, and I am grateful to you for that, but I shall be delighted to see you to-morrow, at six o'clock, in the ruins of Pompeii, let us say in the Thermx; it is a very suitable spot. What weapons do you prefer? You have the choice, as it is I who have insulted you. Shall it be rapiers, swords, or pistols ? "

"We shall fight with knives, blindfolded, and separated by the length of a handkerchief of which we shall each hold one end. We must even up the chances; I am a jettatore, and I should only have to look at you to kill you, Count."

And Paul laughed stridently, threw open a door, and disappeared.

Chapter 12

ALICIA had settled herself in a low room in the house, the walls of which were decorated with the landscapes in fresco, that, in Italy, take the place of wall-papers. The floor was covered with Manila matting. A table, on which was thrown a Turkish cloth, whereon lay volumes of verse, Coleridge, Shelley, Tennyson, and Longfellow, a mirror in an antique frame, and a few cane chairs formed the furniture. Blinds of China reeds, adorned with pagodas, rocks, willows, storks, and dragons, fitted to the openings and half drawn up, allowed a soft light to filter in. The branch of an orange tree' laden with flowers that the swelling fruit caused to fall, entered the room familiarly and spread like a garland above Alicia's head, scattering upon her its perfumed blooms.

The young girl, somewhat unwell, was lying upon a narrow sofa by the window, supported by two or three morocco cushions and her feet wrapped up in the Venetian rug. The book she had been reading had slipped from her hands; her eyes, under their long lashes, had a far-away look and seemed to be gazing into the world beyond. She was experiencing that almost voluptuous weariness that follows upon an attack of fever, and she was busy chewing the orange blossoms she picked up on her coverlet and of which she enjoyed the bitter savour. Schiavone has painted a Venus chewing roses, and a modern artist might have made a companion piece to the old Venetian master's painting by representing Alicia biting away at the orange blossoms.

She was thinking of Paul d'Aspremont, and wondering whether she would really live long enough to become his wife ; not that she believed in the influence of jettatura, but that she was, in spite of herself, a prey to the gloomiest presentiments. That very night she had had a dream the impression of which had not been dispelled by her waking.

In that dream she had seen herself lying down, but awake, and looking at the door of the room with the feeling that some one was about to enter. After a few moments of anxious waiting, she had perceived against the dark background of the door a slender white form which, transparent at first, and allowing the various objects to be seen through it as through a faint mist, had acquired greater consistency as it approached her.

The shade wore a muslin dress the long folds of which dragged on the ground; long black curls, half undone, hung mournfully down either side of her face, on the cheek-bones of which showed two bright red spots. The bosom and neck were so white that they could scarcely be distinguished from the dress, and it was impossible to say where the skin ended and where the stuff began. A very fine Venetian necklace circled the slender neck with its golden line, and in the delicate, blue-veined hand she held a tea-rose, the petals of which were falling to the ground like tears.

Alicia had never known her mother, who had died a year after giving birth to her, but she often gazed long at a faded miniature, the ivory tone and the almost vanished colouring of which, wan as the resemblance of the dead, made one think of the portrait of a shadow rather than of that of a living woman, and she understood that the woman who had entered the room was her mother, Nancy Ward. The white dress, the Venetian necklace, the flower in the hand, the black hair, the cheeks with their red spots, –nothing was lacking.

It was indeed the original of the miniature, taller and larger, moving in the reality of a dream.

Love and terror made Alicia's heart beat fast. She tried to hold her arms out to the shade, but they were heavy as lead and she could not raise them from the couch on which she lay. She strove to speak, but could only utter confused sounds.

Nancy, having placed the tea-rose upon the table, knelt by the bed and laid her cheek against Alici 's breast, listening to the working of the lungs and noting the beating of the heart. The shade's cold cheek felt like ice to the young girl, terrified by the silent auscultation.

Jettatura

The apparition rose, cast a sorrowful glance upon the maiden, and counting the petals of the rose, some of which had fallen since she had placed it on the table, said, "There is but one left." Then sleep had interposed its dark gauze between the sleeper and the shade, and night had swallowed up everything.

Had her mother's soul come to warn her and to fetch her ? What was the meaning of the mysterious words that had dropped from the shadowy lips, "There is but one left " ? Was the fading rose with the falling petals a symbol of her own life ? The strange dream, with its graceful terrors and its awesome charm, the lovely spectre draped in muslin and counting the petals of the flower had taken fast hold of the girl's imagination. A shadow of melancholy brooded upon her lovely brow, and the sombre wings of dread presentiments swept across her face.

Had not the orange branch that shook its blooms down upon her also a funereal meaning? Were the little virginal stars not to open under her bridal veil ? Sorrowful and preoccupied, Alicia withdrew from her lips the bloom she was biting; the bloom was already yellowed and faded!

It was nearly the hour when Paul d'Aspremont would call. Alicia pulled herself together, smoothed her face, curled her ringlets, arranged the folds of her somewhat ruffled gauze scarf, and picked up her book to give herself the air of being occupied.

Paul entered and Miss Ward welcomed him with a playful glance, for she did not wish him to feel any alarm at seeing her lying down, as he would infallibly have believed himself to have caused her illness. The scene with Count d'Altavilla had left on Paul's face a look of irritation and fierceness which led Vice to make the sign of protection, but Alicia's loving smile speedily dispelled the cloud on her lover's face.

"You are not seriously ill, I trust," he said as he sat down by her.

"It is nothing; I am a little over tired ; the African sirocco that was blowing yesterday wore me out, but you shall see how well I shall be when we get back to Lincolnshire. Now that I am strong again, we shall take turns in rowing upon the lake."

But even as she spoke, she could not keep back a fit of coughing. D'Aspremont turned pale and looked away, and for a few moments silence reigned in the room.

"I have never given you anything, Paul," went on Alicia, removing from her wasted finger a plain gold ring. "Take this ring and wear it in remembrance of me. I dare say it will go on your finger, for your hand is almost as small as a woman's. And now, good-bye ; I feel tired and I should like to try to sleep. Be sure to come to see me to-morrow."

Paul went away broken-hearted. Alicia had in vain tried to conceal her sufferings ; he loved her madly, and he was killing her. The very ring she had just given him, was it not the symbol of their betrothal in another life ?

He wandered along the beach, nearly out of his senses, planning flight, bethinking himself of entering a Trappist monastery and awaiting death seated on a coffin without ever raising the cowl of his frock. He called himself a coward and an ingrate for not having the strength to sacrifice his love, and taking a mean advantage of Alicia's love; for it was plain that she knew everything, that he was a jettatore, as Count d'Altavilla had said ; yet, full of angelic pity, she would not repel him.

"Yes," he said to himself, "that handsome Neapolitan, that Count whom she disdains, is really in love. His love shames mine, since, in order to save Alicia, he did not fear to attack and challenge me, a jettatore, that is, as he sees it, a being as much to be dreaded as the fiend himself. While he spoke to me, he was toying with his amulets, and the glance of that famous duellist who has slain three men fell before mine."

Jettatura

On his return to the Hotel de Rome, Paul wrote a few letters, drew up a will in which he left all he possessed, save a legacy to Paddy, to Miss Ward, and took the various precautions which a gentleman takes when about to engage in a duel to the death.

He opened the rose-wood cases in which he kept his weapons in compartments lined with green serge, turned over the rapiers, the pistols, and the hunting-knives, and at last came upon a couple of Corsican stilettoes, absolutely identical, which he had purchased with the intention of giving them to his friends. The blades were of pure steel, stout near the hilt, and double edged towards the point, damascened, curiously terrible, and carefully mounted. He also selected three silk handkerchiefs and made a bundle of the lot. Then he sent word to Scazziga to be ready very early in the morning for an excursion into the country.

"May the duel prove fatal to me," said he as he threw himself on the bed. "If I am only lucky enough to be killed, Alicia will live."

Chapter 13

POMPEII, the dead city, does not awake in the morning like living cities, and although it has partially thrown back the covering of ashes that has lain over it for so many centuries, it remains asleep on its funereal couch even when the night has passed away.

At that time the tourists of all nations who visit it during the day are still in their beds, worn out by their fatiguing excursions, and dawn, as it lights up the of the mummy-city, does not behold a single human face. The lizards alone, with quivering tails, crawl along the walls, skurry across the disjointed mosaics, heedless of the Cave canem inscribed on the threshold of the deserted houses, and joyously hail the beams of the rising sun. They are the dwellers who have taken the places of the former inhabitants, it seems as though Pompeii had been exhumed their special benefit.

Strange indeed is it to see in the rose and azure of morn the dead city that was surprised in the midst of its pleasures, of its work and its civilisation, and which has not undergone the slow decay of ordinary ruins. One cannot help thinking that the owners of the houses, preserved in their smallest parts, are about to issue forth clad in their Roman or Greek dresses; that the cars will presently be tearing along the ruts in the pavement made by them of old; that the toppers will in a moment enter the taverns on the counters of which the stains made by the drinking cups are still visible. One walks as in a dream amid the scenes of the past ; on the street corners may be seen the red letter posters advertising the shows of the day –only, the day has passed away more than seventeen centuries ago. In the early light of morn, the dancing girls painted on the walls seem to be clinking their crotalae, and with the tip of their white feet to raise the rosy, foam-like edge of their draperies, believing no doubt that the lamps are being relighted for the orgies in the triclinium. The Venuses and the satyrs, heroic or grotesque figures, animated by a sunbeam, attempt to take the place of the vanished inhabitants and to provide the dead city with a painted population. The coloured shadows tremble along the walls, and the mind may, for a few minutes, indulge in the fancy of an evocation of antiquity.

On that day, however, to the great dismay of the lizards, the matutinal serenity of Pompeii was broken by a strange visitor. A carriage drew up at the entrance to the Street of Tombs; Paul alighted, and walked on foot to the meeting-place.

He was early, and though he must have been thinking of anything but archaeology, he could not help noticing, as he went along, innumerable little details he probably would not have observed had he been in his usual frame of mind. When the brain relaxes its vigilance over the senses, these, acting for themselves, acquire occasionally singular lucidity. A man condemned to death and on his way to the scaffold, will mark a little flower blooming between the cracks of the pavement, the number on the button of a soldier's uniform, a misspelt word on a sign,

Jettatura

and many another trifling circumstance which becomes suddenly of enormous importance.

D'Aspremont passed by the Villa of Diomedes, Mamia's tomb, the funeral hemicycles, the antique gate of the city, the houses and the shops that line the Consular Way, almost without glancing at them, yet the coloured and brilliant images of these monuments reached his brain with wonderful clearness. He saw everything: the fluted pillars overlaid half-way up with red or yellow stucco, the fresco paintings, and the inscriptions traced on the walls. An advertisement of a house to rent had even engraved itself so deeply in his mind that he mechanically kept on repeating the Latin words without attaching any meaning to them.

Was it the thought of the approaching duel that thus absorbed Paul? By no means. He did not even dwell upon it; his mind was elsewhere –in the drawing–room at Richmond. He was presenting to the Commodore his letter of introduction, and Alicia was watching him. She had on a white dress and – asinine blossoms in her hair. How lovely, young, and strong she was then !

The old baths are at the end of the Consular Way, near the Street of Fortune, so that d'Aspremont had no difficulty in finding them. He entered the vaulted hall surrounded by a series of niches formed by terra–cotta Atlases, that upheld an architrave ornamented with foliage and figures of children. The marble overlaying, the mosaics, and the bronze tripods have disappeared. Of the former splendour nothing is left save the terra–cotta Atlases and the walls, bare as those of a tomb. A faint light, filtering through a little round window in which shows a disk of blue sky, shimmers on the broken slabs of the pavement.

Here it was that the women of Pompeii were wont to come, after the bath, to dry their lovely wet bodies, to dress their hair, to resume their tunics, and to smile at their own beauty in the burnished brass of the mirrors. A very different scene was about to take place there, and blood was about to flow on the ground formerly drenched with perfumes.

Presently Count d'Altavilla appeared, carrying a case of pistols in his hand and a couple of swords under his arm., for he had taken it for granted that d'Aspremont had not made his proposal seriously. He had merely looked upon it as a piece of Mephistophelian raillery, of infernal sarcasm.

"What do we want with those pistols and swords, Count?" said Paul when he perceived him. Did we not agree upon another mode of fighting ?

"Certainly, but it occurred to me that you might change your mind. No one ever fought a duel in that way."

"Even were we equally skilful, my position gives me too great an advantage over you," answered Paul, with a bitter smile. "I do not propose to avail myself of it. Here are stilettoes that I have brought with me. Examine them ; they are absolutely alike. Here are handkerchiefs with which to blindfold ourselves; they are thick, as you see, and my glance cannot pierce through them."

Count d'Altavilla bowed in acquiescence.

"We have no seconds," went on Paul, "and one of us must not emerge alive from this vault. Let, us, therefore, each write a note certifying that the fight was a fair one, and the victor shall place it on the breast of the dead."

"A good idea," replied the Count, with a smile, as he wrote a few lines on a leaf torn from Paul's book.

Paul did the same.

Then the two adversaries threw off their coats, blindfolded themselves, seized their stilettoes, and took hold each of one end of the handkerchief, the link between their respective hatreds.

Jettatura

"Are you ready?" asked d'Aspremont of Count d'Altavilla.

"Yes," replied the Neapolitan, in a perfectly cool voice.

Don Felipe d'Altavilla was a man of tried courage, who feared nothing on earth save jettatura, and this duel in the dark, that would have caused any other man to tremble with terror, did not in the least trouble him. He was simply staking his life on the issue, and he was saved the unpleasantness of seeing his opponent glare at him with his yellow eyes.

The two combatants brandished their knives, and the handkerchief which linked them in the thick darkness drew taut. Paul and the Count had instinctively thrown themselves back, that being the only parry possible in so strange a duel, and their arms fell back after a useless stab in the empty air.

This obscure struggle, in which each one felt death without being able to see it approach, was horrible. Grim and silent the two adversaries retreated, twisted around, sprang aside, struck against each other at times, missing their stroke, or sending it too far. There was no sound but that of the trampling of their feet and the panting of their breasts. Once d'Altavilla felt the point of his stiletto strike something. He stopped, thinking he had slain his rival, and listened for the fall of the body; but it was the wall he had struck.

"By Jove !" he said, as he fell on guard again. "I made sure I had run you through."

"Do not speak," answered Paul; "your voice guides me."

And the duel went on as before.

Suddenly the two opponents felt the taut handkerchief fall. A stroke of Paul's stiletto had severed it.

"A truce," cried the Neapolitan. "We are loose; the handkerchief is cut."

"No matter; let us go on," replied Paul.

A dead silence fell upon the scene. Like loyal adversaries that they were, neither d'Aspremont nor the Count wished to take advantage of the knowledge of the other man's position gained by the exchange of words. They therefore took a few steps to disconcert each other, and then began to grope for each other in the darkness.

D'Aspremont stumbled on a stone. The slight sound told the Neapolitan, who was brandishing his knife in space the direction in which he must go. Bending low in order to spring with greater force, he leaped forward like a tiger and struck full upon d'Aspremont's stiletto.

Paul felt the point of his weapon, and felt it wet. He heard staggering steps upon the pavement; heard a deep groan, and a body falling heavily to the earth.

Horrified, he snatched off the handkerchief and beheld Count d'Altavilla, pale and motionless, stretched on his back, and a great red stain on his shirt just above the heart. The handsome Neapolitan was dead !

Paul placed upon the Count's breast the note that certified to the fairness of the duel, and left the baths paler in the broad daylight than is in the moonlight the criminal whom Prud'hon has represented as pursued by the avenging Erinnyes.

Chapter 14

AT about two o'clock that afternoon, a company of English tourists, in charge of a cicerone, was visiting the ruins of Pompeii. The island tribe, composed of a father, a mother, three tall girls, two small boys, and a cousin, had already traversed with dull, lack-lustre eyes, in which could be read the profound weariness characteristic of the British race, the amphitheatre, the Tragic Theatre, and the Comic Theatre, so quaintly collocated, the military quarter, full of the caricatures sketched by the idle guardsmen, the Forum, destroyed while it was undergoing repairs, the Basilica, the Pantheon, the Temples of Venus and of Jupiter, and the shops which line them. They all followed silently in their "Murray" the prolix explanations of the guide, scarcely casting a look at the pillars, the fragments of statues, the mosaics, the frescoes, and the inscriptions.

They at last reached the Baths, discovered, as the guide pointed out, in 1824. "Here stood the vapour baths ; here was the furnace, and there the cooling room." These details, imparted in Neapolitan dialect, mingled with a few English terminations, did not appear to greatly interest the visitors, who had already turned round in order to go out, when Miss Ethelwina, the eldest of the young ladies, a maiden with tow-like fair hair, and a very much freckled complexion, started back, half-shocked, half-frightened, exclaiming:—

"There 's a man!"

"No doubt some workman employed in the work of digging, who thought this was a good place in which to enjoy a siesta, as it is cool and shady in this vault," answered the guide. "You need not be afraid, Miss." And he kicked the prone body. "Here, you fellow, wake up and let their ladyships pass."

But the supposed sleeper did not budge.

"He is not sleeping, he is dead," said one of the lads, who, owing to his smaller stature, could better make out the look of the body in the darkness.

The guide bent down to examine the body and started up quickly, his face full of terror.

"The man has been murdered " he cried.

"Oh ! how shocking to come upon such a thing," exclaimed Mrs. Bracebridge. " Come away, Ethelwina, Kitty, and Bess," she went on. "It is not proper for young ladies who have been well brought up to look at so unpleasant a sight. Is there no police in this country ? Why has not the coroner removed the body ? "

"Here is a paper," said the cousin, who was tall, stiff, and awkward as the Laird of Dumbiedikes in "The Heart of Midlothian."

"True," said the guide, picking up the note placed upon d'Altavilla's breast.

"Read it out," cried the islanders in a body, their curiosity fully awakened.

"Let no one be sought out or prosecuted on account of my death. If this note is found on my wound, I shall have fallen in a fair duel.

"FELIPE, COUNT D'ALTAVILLA."

"He was a man of rank. It is most sad," said Mrs. Bracebridge, impressed by the dead man's title.

Jettatura

"And handsome," whispered Miss Ethelwina the freckled.

"You cannot complain any longer of not meeting with anything startling on our trip," said Bess to Kitty, "for if we have not been stopped by brigands on the road from Terracina to Fondi, to come upon a young nobleman stabbed with a stiletto in the ruins of Pompeii is surely an adventure. There must have been some love affair at the bottom of it, and we shall now have something Italian, picturesque, and romantic to tell our friends. I shall make a sketch of the scene in my album, and you can add to it some mysterious stanzas in the Byronic style."

"All the same," said the guide, "the stroke was a good one, from below upwards, quite according to rule, and no mistake."

Such was the funeral discourse pronounced over the body of Count d'Altavilla.

Some workmen, summoned by the guide, proceeded to fetch the police, and poor d'Altavilla's remains were conveyed to his family seat near Salerno.

As for d'Aspremont, he had returned to his carriage with staring eyes, seeing no more than a somnambulist would have done. He looked like a statue walking along. Although the sight of the body had filled him with the religious awe inspired by death, he did not feel guilty and there was no remorse in his despair. Insulted in a way that admitted of no refusal, he had accepted the duel only in the hope of losing in it a life that was henceforth odious to him. Gifted with a deadly glance, he had insisted upon the blindfolding in order that fatality alone should bear the responsibility of the outcome. He had not even struck the blow; his foe had rushed upon the blade. He felt as sorry for d'Altavilla as if he had had nothing to do with his death.

"It was my stiletto that slew him," he said to himself. "Now, if I had looked at him in a ball-room, a chandelier would have fallen from the ceiling and broken his head. I am as innocent as the thunderbolt, the avalanche, the manchineel tree, as all destructive, unconscious forces. My will has never been maleficent, my heart is full of love and kindness, but I know that I am a harmful being. The thunderbolt does not know that it inflicts death, but I, who am a man, an intelligent creature, have I not a hard duty to fulfil towards myself? I am bound to summon myself to the bar of my own conscience and to examine myself. Have I the right to remain on this earth where I do nothing but work woe? Would God damn me if I were to kill myself for love of my fellow-creatures? It is a terrible and difficult question I dare not solve. Yet it seems to me that suicide is excusable in a man situated as I am. But if I am mistaken? Then throughout eternity I should be deprived of the sight of Alicia, whom then I could gaze upon without hurting her, for the eyes of the soul are free from the fascino. That is a risk I shall not run."

A sudden thought flashed through the brain of the unfortunate jettatore, breaking in upon his mental monologue. His features relaxed, and the peace that comes of a great resolution smoothed his pale brow. He had come to a supreme decision.

"Be ye condemned, ye eyes of mine, since ye are murderous. But before closing for ever, saturate yourselves with light, gaze upon the sun, the blue sky, the mighty sea, the green trees, the far horizons, the palace colonnades, the fishers' butts, the distant isles in the bay, the white sails flitting over the deep, Vesuvius and its plume of smoke; gaze upon all these lovely sights that you shall never again behold, so that you may remember them. Study every form and every tint, feast on them for the last time. To-day, whether ye be deadly or not, ye shall rest upon every thing and intoxicate yourselves with the glorious spectacle of creation. Come! look around, for the curtain is about to fall between you and this earthly scene!"

The carriage, at this moment, was driving along the shore. The azure bay glittered in the light; the sky seemed made of a single sapphire; a splendour of beauty was on all things. Paul ordered Scazziga to pull up; he alighted, sat down upon a rock, and looked long, long, long, as though he were striving to imbibe the infinite. His eyes

Jettatura

plunged into space and light, rolled as though in ecstasy, filled themselves with the colour, and absorbed the sunshine. The night that was about to fall upon him was to have no morrow.

Tearing himself away from his contemplation, d'Aspremont re-entered his carriage and had himself driven to Miss Ward's.

He found her, as on the previous day, lying upon her narrow couch in the lower room I have already described. Paul sat down opposite her, and this time he did not keep his eyes on the ground as was his habit since he had learned he was a jettatore.

Alicia's wondrously perfect beauty had become idealised through suffering ; the woman in her had almost disappeared and made way for the angel. Her flesh had become transparent, ethereal, luminous. Her soul shone through it as the flame through an alabaster lamp. Her eyes were filled with the infinity of the heavens and scintillated like stars ; scarce did the mark of life show in her crimson lips.

A heavenly smile, like a sunbeam in a rose, illumined those lips when she saw her lover's glance envelop her like a long caress. She thought Paul had at last got rid of his fancies and was returning to her happy and trustful as in the early days of their love. She held out to him her little white, slender hand, and he kept it in his own.

" So you are no longer afraid of me," she said with sweet raillery to Paul, who still kept his glance fixed upon her.

"Oh ! let me gaze upon you," replied d'Aspremont in a strange tone of voice as he knelt down by her. Let me drink in your ineffable beauty."

And he eagerly contemplated Alicia's lustrous black hair, her lovely brow as pure as that of a Greek statue, her eyes dusky blue as a lovely night, her delicately modelled nose, her mouth with the pearly teeth revealed by a languorous smile, her willowy, swan-like neck, and he seemed to note each detail, each perfection as might a painter preparing to draw a portrait from memory. He was sating himself with the sight of the beloved one, making a collection of remembrances, assuring himself of the outlines, going over the contours.

Under his burning gaze, Alicia, fascinated and charmed, experienced a voluptuously painful sensation, pleasantly deadly. Her life seemed to become more intense and to be leaving her; she blushed and paled, turned hot and cold by turns. In another moment her soul would have fled.

She put her hand on Paul's eyes, but his glance traversed the transparent and frail fingers like a flame.

Now my eyes may close for ever, for in my heart I shall see her for ever, said Paul to himself as he rose to his feet.

That night, after having looked at the sunset –the last he was to behold – he ordered, on his return to the Hotel de Rome, a brazier and charcoal.

"Does he propose to asphyxiate himself ? " wondered Virgilio Falsacappa, as he handed Paddy the required articles. "It is the best thing that cursed jettatore could do."

Alicia's betrothed opened the window, contrary to Falsacappa's expectation, lighted the coals, plunged the blade of a dagger into them, and waited until the steel had become red hot.

The thin blade soon showed white-hot in the burning coals. Paul, as if to bid himself farewell, leaned on the mantelpiece in front of a tall mirror that reflected the light of a candelabrum with a number of candles. He gazed with melancholy curiosity upon that sort of spectre that was himself, that envelope of his thought he was never

Jettatura

again to see.

"Farewell," he said, "farewell, pale phantom that for so many years I have dragged through life ; farewell, sinister failure in which beauty mingles with horror; mould of clay stamped on the brow with a fatal sign; contorted mask of a tender and gentle soul ! Thou art about to vanish for ever from my sight. Living, I plunge thee into eternal darkness, and soon I shall have forgotten thee as one forgets the dream of a night of storm. In vain shalt thou say, thou wretched body, to my inflexible will, 'Hubert, Hubert, my poor eyes!' Thou shalt not soften it. Come, let me to work, for I am both the victim and the executioner."

And he left the chimneypiece to seat himself on his bed.

He blew upon the coals in the brazier that stood on a table near by, and seized by the hilt the blade, from which flew with a crackling sound bright, white sparks.

At this crucial moment, firm as was his resolve, d'Aspremont felt himself turn faint ; a cold sweat bathed his temples; but he soon overcame this purely physical weakness and put the burning steel close to his eyes.

He nearly screamed as he felt a sharp, lancinating pain. It seemed to him that two jets of molten lead were entering his eyes and penetrating to his very brain. He let fall the dagger, which rolled to the floor and charred it.

A dense, opaque darkness, in comparison with which the deepest night is as brightest day, shrouded him in its black veils. He turned his head in the direction of the mantelpiece where the tapers must have been still burning, but met only profound, impenetrable obscurity, in which did not even show the faint gleams which seeing people behold when with closed eyes they find themselves in presence of a light. His sacrifice was accomplished.

"Now," said Paul, " thou noble and charming creature, I may become thy husband without becoming a murderer. No longer shalt thou waste away under my destructive glance; thou shalt regain thy health. Alas ! I shall see thee no more, but thy celestial image shall shine with immortal brilliancy in my memory; I shall behold thee with the eyes of the soul; I shall hear thy voice, more harmonious than the sweetest music; I shall feel the air displaced by thy motions; I shall notice the silken rustling of thy dress, the faint creaking of thy shoes ; I shall breathe the soft scent that emanates from thee, forming an atmosphere round thee. At times thou shalt leave thy hand in mine to make me feel thy presence; thou wilt deign to guide thy poor blind lover when his steps hesitate upon their dark way ; thou shalt read him the poets, and tell him of the paintings and the statues. Thy speech shall restore to him the vanished universe; thou shalt be his one thought, his one dream. Freed from the distraction of things and the dazzling light, his soul shall fly to thee on unwearied wings.

So I regret nothing, since thou art saved. What have I lost, indeed ? The monotonous spectacle of the seasons and the days ; of the more or less picturesque setting of the scenes in which the many differing acts of the sad human comedy are played, earth, heaven, waters, mountains, trees, and flowers : vain appearances, wearisome repetitions, unchanging forms. He who possesses love, possesses the true sunshine, the light that never fails."

Thus did the unfortunate Paul d'Aspremont commune with himself, a prey to lyrical excitement mingled with the delirium due to pain. Little by little the acute suffering was dulled, and he fell into dark sleep, brother of death and like it a consoler.

When daylight penetrated into the room, it did not wake him. Midnight and noon were henceforth the same to him, but the bells, ringing out the Angelus with joyous peals, sounded faint through his sleep and, gradually becoming more distinct, drew him from his condition of somnolence.

He opened his eyelids, and, ere his soul had recollected, experienced a horrible sensation. His eyes opened out upon the void, the darkness, the nothingness, as if, having been buried alive, he had awakened out of a trance and

Jettatura

found himself in his coffin. He soon recovered, however, for was it not to be always thus? Was he not, day by day, to pass from the darkness of sleep to the darkness of waking ?

He groped round for the bell-rope. Paddy hastened to answer his ring, and as he manifested surprise at seeing his master rise with the hesitating movements of a blind man, --

"I was imprudent enough to sleep with the window open," said Paul, in order to cut short all explanations, "and I think I have got amaurosis. I shall soon be better. Lead me to my arm-chair and put a glass of fresh water by my side."

Paddy, with true English discretion, made no comment, carried out his master's orders, and withdrew.

Left alone, Paul dipped his handkerchief in the cold water and held it to his eyes to deaden the inflammation due to the burning.

But let me leave d'Aspremont in his painful immobility, and let me turn to the other characters in my story.

The strange news of Count d'Altavilla's death had quickly spread through Naples and furnished food for innumerable conjectures, each more absurd than the others. The Count was famed for his skill as a swordsman; he had the reputation of being one of the most expert fencers of the Neapolitan school, so dangerous on the duelling-ground. He had killed three men and had grievously wounded five or six. His reputation in this respect was so well known that he was no longer called out ; the most insolent duellists saluted him respectfully, and, if he happened to look insultingly at them, avoided treading on his toes. Had one of these swashbucklers slain d'Altavilla, he would not have failed to brag of the victory.

There remained the possibility of murder, but that was removed by the paper found on the dead man's breast. The authenticity of the note was at first called in question, but the Count's handwriting was vouched for by persons who had received many letters from him. The fact that he had been blindfolded, for the body was found with a handkerchief fastened round the head, proved an insurmountable difficulty. Besides the stiletto driven into the Count's breast, a second one was found, which no doubt had fallen from his hand. On the other hand, if the duel had been fought with knives, what was the purpose of the swords and pistols which were recognised as having been the Count's property ? The coachman, on being questioned, stated that he had driven his master to Pompeii, and had been ordered to return home if the latter did not reappear within an hour. The mystery could not be solved.

The report of the death speedily reached the ears of Vice, who informed Sir Joshua Ward. The Commodore, who at once recollected his mysterious conversation with d'Altavilla about Alicia, suspected that some dark attempt, some horrible and desperate struggle had taken place between him and d'Aspremont, with or without the consent of the latter. As for Vice, she did not hesitate to attribute the death of the handsome Count to the atrocious jettatore, her hatred of the latter acting as second sight. Yet Mr. d'Aspremont had paid his visit to Miss Ward at the usual time, and his countenance did not betray the least sign of emotion after a terrible drama ; indeed, he appeared calmer than usual.

The fact of the death was concealed from Miss Ward, whose condition had become critical, though the English physician summoned by Sir Joshua could not perceive that she was suffering from any definite malady. Her life seemed to be ebbing away; her soul seemed to be fluttering its wings in an attempt to escape; she appeared to be suffocating, like a bird in a vacuum, rather than to be attacked by a real disease, capable of being treated by ordinary means. She looked like an angel kept back on earth and dying of home-sickness of heaven, --her loveliness so suave, so delicate, so diaphanous, so immaterial, that the coarse atmosphere of earth could no longer sustain her. One could only imagine her soaring in the golden light of Paradise, and the little lace pillow that supported her head shone like an aureole. As she lay on her bed, she resembled Schoorel's dainty Virgin, the most

delicate gem of Gothic art.

Mr. d'Aspremont did not call that day. In order to conceal his sacrifice, he had resolved not to appear with his eyelids inflamed, reserving to himself to explain his blindness by some other cause. But the next morning, the pain having ceased, he entered his carriage, guided by his groom Paddy.

The carriage drew up as usual at the open-work gate. The self-blinded man pushed it open, and feeling the ground with his foot, entered the well-known walk. Vice had not, as her custom was, hastened up on hearing the bell which was rung by the opening of the gate. None of the innumerable joyous sounds that form, as it were, the breathing of an inhabited house, reached Paul's attentive ear. A gloomy, deep, terrifying silence reigned in the dwelling, which might have been thought abandoned. This silence, sinister even to a seeing person, became still more dread in the darkness that surrounded the new-made blind man.

The branches, which he could no longer perceive, seemed to try to hold him back like the arms of suppliants and to prevent his going farther. The laurels barred his way; the rose-bushes caught at his clothing; the creepers clung to his limbs; the garden said to him in its mute voice: "Unfortunate man, what doest thou here? Do not force the obstacles that I oppose to thee; return, return!" But Paul did not listen, and tormented by dreadful presentiments, lurched into the foliage, pushed back the clumps of verdure, broke the branches, and kept on towards the house.

Torn and bruised by the angry shrubs, he at last reached the end of the walk. A gust of free air struck him on the face, and he continued on his way with outstretched hands. He came up against the wall, and found the door by groping for it.

He entered. No friendly voice welcomed him. Hearing no sound by which he might guide himself, he hesitated for a moment upon the threshold. A smell of ether, the perfume of aromatics, the odour of burning wax, all the faint scents of a room of death came to the blind man breathless with terror. A dreadful idea came into his mind, and he entered the room.

He had scarcely proceeded a few steps when he knocked up against something that fell with much noise. He bent down, and recognised by the feel a metal candlestick like those in churches, and fitted with a tall candle.

Bewildered, he went on his way through the darkness. He thought he heard a voice repeating prayers in a low tone. He took another step forward and his hands touched the edge of a couch. He bent over it, and his trembling fingers first came in contact with a motionless body lying stiff and stark under a fine tunic; then they felt a wreath of roses and a face as pure and cold as marble.

It was Alicia lying on her death-bed.

"Dead!" shrieked Paul in a choking voice. "Dead! And I have killed her!"

The horror-stricken Commodore had seen the blind phantom stagger in, grope his way about and stumble against Alicia's death-bed. He had understood at once, and the grandeur of the sacrifice, unfortunately useless, brought the tears to the reddened eyes of the old gentleman who had believed himself incapable of weeping again.

Paul threw himself on his knees by the bedside and covered Alicia's ice-cold hand with kisses, while convulsive sobs shook his frame. His grief softened the fierce Vice herself, as she stood silent and sombre by the wall, watching over her mistress' last sleep.

When his adieux were over, d'Aspremont rose and walked to the door, stiffly, like an automaton moved by springs. His sightless eyes, wide open and staring, had a supernatural expression, and though they were blinded they seemed still endowed with vision. He traversed the garden with the heavy tread of a marble statue, went out

Jettatura

into the country and walked on straight ahead, stumbling against the stones, staggering at times, listening intently as if to catch a distant sound, but ever advancing.

The sea's great voice sounded. more and more distinct. The billows, lashed by a storm wind, broke on the shore with mighty sobs, expressing unknown griefs, and under the foam fringe swelled their despairing breasts ; millions of bitter tears streamed upon the rocks, and the restless gulls uttered plaintive cries.

Presently Paul reached the edge of an overhanging rock. The roar of the waves, the salt spray torn from the billows by the gusts of wind and which lashed his face, should have warned him of his danger, but he heeded it not. A strange smile flitted over his blanched lips and he kept on his sinister walk, although he felt the void beneath his lifted foot.

He fell; a huge billow seized him, rolled him over and over for a moment and then swallowed him up.

Then the storm broke out in its fury; the waves swept up the shore in serried files, like soldiers storming a fort, and threw the spray of their crests fifty feet into the air. The black clouds were torn open as though they were the walls of hell, and through the fissures showed the burning furnace of the lightnings ; sulphurous, blinding flashes illumined space ; the summit of Vesuvius glowed, and its sable plume of smoke, beaten down by the wind, curled around the volcano's brow. The vessels at anchor collided with lugubrious sounds, and the tautened rigging moaned dolorously. Then the rain came down, its drops like driven bolts, and it seemed as though chaos were striving to reassert its supremacy over nature and once again to confound the elements.

All the efforts set on foot by the Commodore failed to bring about the recovery of Paul d'Aspremont's body.

A silver-mounted, satin-lined, ebony casket, like the one concerning which Clarissa Harlowe wrote so touchingly to Master Undertaker, was shipped on board a yacht under the Commodore's superintendence, and subsequently deposited in the family vault in the Lincolnshire seat. It contained the mortal remains of Alicia Ward, lovely even in death.

As for the Commodore, a great change has taken place in him. He is no longer stout, puts no rum in his tea, eats very little, talks less, and has lost his crimson and white look –for he has become pale.