



THE VILLA CLAUDIA



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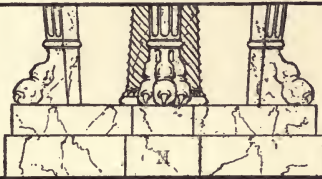
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THE VILLA CLAUDIA



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE LAST AMERICAN

AMOS JUDD

THAT FIRST AFFAIR

GLORIA VICTIS

THE PINES OF LORY

LIFE'S FAIRY TALES





THE VILLA CLAUDIA

By
John Ames Mitchell

ILLUSTRATIONS BY A. D. BLASHFIELD, BY THE
AUTHOR, AND FROM ANCIENT SOURCES



New York
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1904



“Not to weary you overmuch with tedious details.”

—HORACE.

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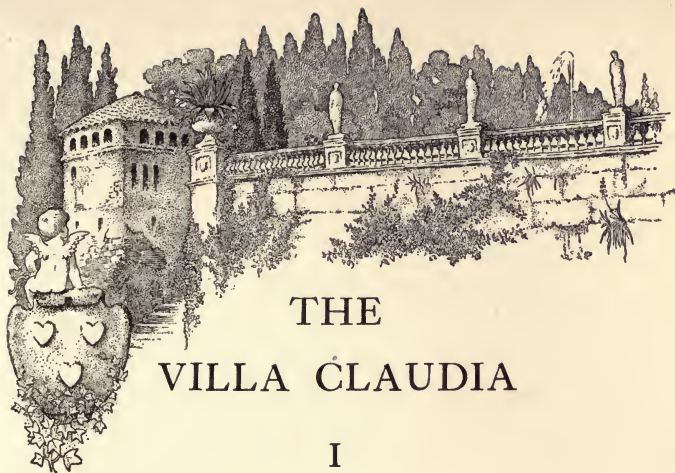
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THE VILLA CLAUDIA

I

ENGLISH SPOKEN

UPON Tivoli, the Tibur of the ancients, upon its cliffs, its water-falls, its cypresses and its ruined temples lay the mellow haze of an October sunset. Various poets, through the ages, have sung the beauties of the scene. Painters have striven to record its charm;—the charm of a wild but flowery hill where human hands, for nearly thirty centuries, have built, destroyed, embellished; where Nature softens their mistakes and gives the crowning glory to their triumphs.

High up the hill, and just below the town, a traveler from a young republic in the west stood leaning upon the parapet of a road that

The Villa Claudia

descended, in a tortuous line, to the world beneath. Across the Campagna his eyes followed the slowly changing light, to the dome of St. Peter's, sixteen miles away, now a purple dot on the long, straight line of the horizon. This young man was not so tall as the majority of his countrymen. And he showed a tendency to plumpness. A very short mouth intensified the juvenility of his boyish, tranquil face.

Just now he was in a reverie, with an absent, somewhat melancholy look; such a look as befitted a poet and philosopher amid these surroundings. For, in spite of youth, he was both these things. At the present moment, he saw not the shattered arches, the fallen columns and the ruins that lay about him—but the Tivoli of two thousand years ago, the “many-fountained Tibur” of Horace, where flocked, for summer pleasure, the power, the beauty and the wealth of Rome. He saw it glistening with villas, and white with marble temples: and Roman maidens were gazing across this same Campagna watching for belated youths. And he pictured Horace—his beloved Horace—seated in the gardens of the villa down below there, talking with

English Spoken

Mæcenas—perhaps reading a new poem.
Changed, indeed, was this hill since Horace
knew it!

The big red sun had sunk behind the distant
city when the American straightened up and re-
turned, with a sigh, to his own times. Observ-
ing, in the valley below, a group of homeward-
wending goats, he murmured, from an ancient
poet,

Amidst the mighty ruins play,
And frisk upon the tombs of kings.

Turning away, he walked slowly up the high-
road, in the direction of the town. But he had
barely started when he noticed, high above him,
along the top of a terrace wall beside the road, a
marble balustrade surmounted by four statues.
These statues, with a splendid contempt for the
world at large, stood with their backs to the
street. The traveller stopped and looked up, in
amused astonishment. Evidently there was a
garden the other side. He found himself re-
sented, gently, the complacent insolence mani-
fested by these four marble backs. At the same
time they filled him with a kind of admiration:
and they excited his curiosity.

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As he stood there, in contemplation, his face upturned, his hands behind him, three figures came down the road; a donkey with empty panniers, followed by a man and woman whose chatter and noisy merriment sounded, to the pensive youth, out of place among these silent marbles. The man raised his hat and saluted the traveller. The greeting was returned, and the traveller recognized, in the Italian, a linguacious guide whose friendship he had secured that afternoon by a few unworthy cigars. Also, the traveller remembered being deeply impressed by the man's delight at speaking English, and by his fluency; a fluency unchecked by any laws of grammar or pronunciation. But the unfailing good-nature of his square, brown face almost compensated for ambiguity of speech. A set of very white and very even teeth were now displayed as he said:

"Good-day, Mister. Ze day bello."

"Yes, a fine day. Can you tell me what that is, behind the wall, up there? Some villa?"

"Yaz. Zat ze Villa Claudia. It is to American high weeman."

"American highwaymen!"

"Yaz—high lady. Her sposo—what him in

English Spoken

English?—her sposo dead. She consúnta dal dolóre. O vera dôlente! She sorry to be dead. But afater he she marry—not afater her death.”

“She doesn’t marry after her death?”

“Yaz, she marry afater her death.”

“After *her own* death?”

“Yaz.”

“Well, that is unusual.”

The Italian shrugged his shoulders and said, with a wise look, “No, it is soma time custom. She marry to Mister Capodilista—Mister Al-lesandro Capodilista.”

“Oh! she married after her first husband’s death, perhaps.”

“Yaz.”

This local gossip proved of no special interest to the traveller. And so, with a parting look at the girl and the donkey who stood waiting, a few feet distant, he was about to turn away. But the Italian, after an upward glance toward the statues to assure himself there were no eavesdroppers, came a step nearer and said, in a lower voice and with an air of mystery:

“Zat villa is a ontaida.”

“A ontaida?”

“Yaz: grata ontaida.” Then detecting a

The Villa Claudia

want of comprehension on his listener's face, he opened his eyes very wide, pointed his ten fingers heavenward and wiggled them with a look of horror. "Spirito!—anima de morti. Spê-tro. You know: spirito. Ouse of spirito."

"Spirito? You mean spirits?"

"Yaz; yaz! Too mucha spirits."

"The lady drinks too much?"

"No! No! No! She gooda lady. It is on-taida ouse. Mister Capodilista he dead by not evera day—common. Someting stranga—not morire di morte naturále. No— Some tinga straordinario—orrêndo. Is it?"

"Very likely."

The cheerfulness with which the American received this news caused an obvious disappointment to the narrator, and the girl who was standing near by, with a hand upon the donkey, laughed aloud. The Italian looked at her, frowned, and shrugged his shoulders. Then, with great earnestness:

"The signore is well know his own language ze word Ontaida Ouse."

The traveller also frowned in his endeavor to grasp the meaning. "Ontaida Ouse? No. I really do not know it."

English Spoken

The Italian pointed to one or two buildings in sight, saying:

“Ouse, ouse.”

“House!” exclaimed the traveller.

“Yaz, ouse. And zis ouse is ontaida.”

“Ontaida.” And the American closed his eyes and drew a hand across his forehead in a final effort. “Ontaida,” he repeated. “Do you mean untidy?”

“Oonteedy? I do not know him.”

“I guess that’s what you mean. Untidy house. That is, a dirty house.”

“Dirty! Ah, no, no, no! Giammái! Zat word not. I know him. Zese oosa eleganta—pulíta—bêne pulíta.”

After a short pause of discouragement, and in a tone of mild remonstrance, he murmured, “It ees great astonish you know not ontaida.”

Holding up his left hand and tapping the point of a finger as each syllable was uttered, he said, slowly and with dramatic solemnity:

“In-fes-tá-ta degli spí-ri-ti. The signor comprehend? No?”

The American nodded. “Yes, I comprehend. Infested by spirits.”

“Yaz, zat ees! Ontaida.” He stepped back,

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hunched up his shoulders, and moving to and fro with a gliding motion, rolled his eyes and uttered sepulchral noises.

"I see!" exclaimed the spectator. "I was very stupid. It is a haunted house."

"Yaz, ontaida ouse." And the victor, in full enjoyment of his triumph, showed his white teeth and made a bow. Ill-flavored cigars were once more presented, and a moment later the traveller was again alone. But he could hear the laughter of the guide and girl as they joked and fooled, and scolded the donkey on their downward way.

While having no faith in haunted houses he studied, with renewed interest the four marble backs. These Italian peasants were superstitious. That he knew. "Haunted! How easy to give that reputation to a dwelling! Probably every town in Italy has its haunted house." And he smiled as he reflected on what a multitude of ghosts there would be among the ruins of Tivoli if her departed residents should return.

As he started leisurely up the hill he found, at the end of the wall that hid the Villa Claudia, a flight of stone steps leading to a sort of alley, or

English Spoken

very narrow street. This passage, although somewhat gloomy in the fading light, promised a shorter cut toward the centre of the town. He ascended the steps, a dozen or so in all, but had gone a very few feet along the alley when he paused before an opening in the wall at his side. A heavy wooden door had swung open, giving a view of the garden within—the garden of the Villa Claudia. Just beyond this doorway he noticed a man and woman in earnest conversation. The man was in his shirt-sleeves; he had round shoulders and a very small head. As the young American stood looking through this doorway he could see a statue of Cupid on a pedestal, and the dancing water of a fountain, both in clear relief against the sombre cypresses beyond. In this glimpse through the open doorway there was something irresistibly inviting. After a moment's hesitation the youth stepped within. He found himself in a spacious garden, the Villa Claudia on one hand, on the other a long balustrade with the four statues. This time they were facing him. He saw expanses of grass, broken here and there by dark masses of shrubbery and by beds of flowers. A broad, straight walk led

The Villa Claudia

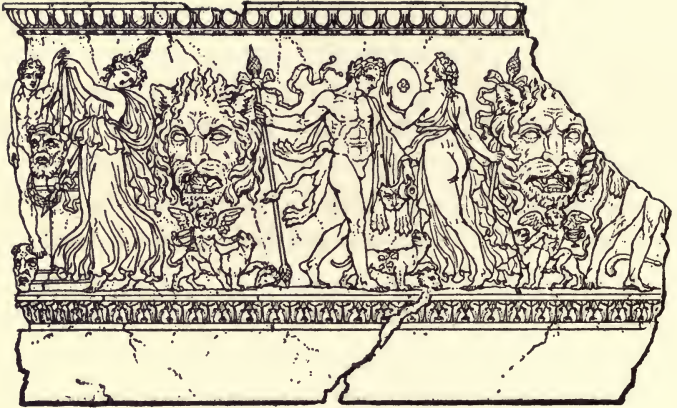
from the semicircular space near the four statues, where the fountain played, to a little terrace before the house. But what most impressed the intruder was the profusion of ancient marbles. Along the sides of the garden, at angles of beds and walks, in corners of shrubbery and against the walls of the villa were busts and statues, vases, pedestals and tablets.

He walked toward the four statues, prompted by a curiosity to see the fronts of these persons with whose backs he was already so familiar. They seemed to be goddesses—or the four seasons—so far as he could discover in the twilight. But when he looked off, toward the west, between these figures, he stood entranced. The only foreground was the bit of earth between himself and the balustrade; then, beyond, a bird's-eye view of the Campagna with nothing but the open country between himself and the horizon. The dome of St. Peter's had vanished in the gathering gloom, and above all was the same sky that he loved in the old Italian paintings—a deep, rich, greenish blue, growing lighter toward the horizon. To complete the picture, a silvery moon hovered midway in the western sky.

English Spoken

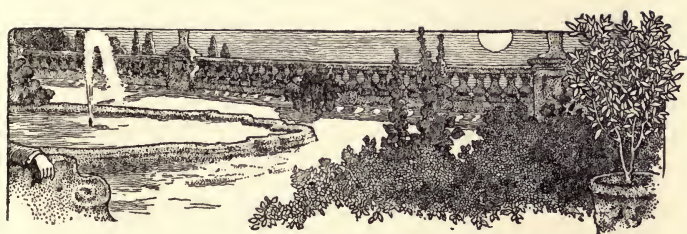
In a corner of one of the marble seats that formed a semicircle near the fountain, he established himself. And in so doing he drew a long, deep breath of comfort—of luxurious physical relaxation. The scene before him, with its almost supernatural beauty, seemed unreal. Laden with perfume was the air of the garden—of jessamine, and styrax, and of roses—all heavy in the night air. In a dreamy enchantment he gazed lazily at the fountain, at the moon, and at the four statues, now shadowy, mysterious masses, darkly outlined against the vivid blue. From somewhere down the hill, over beyond the wall, arose the plaintive utterings of a flute. It ceased at times: then seemed to be coming nearer.

The splashing of the fountain, the perfume of the flowers, the flute and the universal stillness, all were soothing: and his eyelids kept shutting out the moon.



O Sestius, happy Sestius! use the
Moments as they pass;

Horace.



II

II

A MOONLIT GARDEN

FROM the Villa Claudia, through a casement window that opened to the floor, a girl stepped out upon the terrace.

Slight of figure, short but very erect, with a dainty head and delicate features—her eyebrows so high above her eyes as to give a constant expression of mild astonishment—she moved jauntily toward the steps that descended to the gravel walk. On seeing the moon, now confronting her in the western sky, she stopped, wheeled rapidly about and smiled upon it, over her right shoulder. Again facing about, she courtesied three times to that resplendent luminary and stepped down into the garden. For an instant she paused in her walk, raising her chin, inhaling the perfumed air and regarding the moon through half-closed eyes. Then, slowly, she continued along the gravel path to the fountain. Here she paused again, merely

A Moonlit Garden

to enjoy the things about her—the odor of the flowers, the splashing of the water, the moonlight and the general calmness. In a moment, however, she became aware of a sleeping figure at her elbow—a man in gray, reclining comfortably on the marble bench.

Instinctively the maiden took a backward step, then regarded him at her leisure. She came nearer. Slowly, and with caution, she leaned forward, and was studying the boyish face on which the moon shone full and bright—her head within a yard of his own—when the closed eyes began to open, slowly at first, then wider with a start. The girl stepped back. The youth, in confusion, rose hastily to his feet.

“I beg your pardon. I—came in through the gate. It is—a—perhaps you speak English?”

The young lady nodded; and unless the moonlight deceived him, there was a smile on her face. His embarrassment increased. For there she stood in silence, like a vision, in her white dress—like something unreal in the silvery light; and he feared that before he was fully awake she might mingle with the statues,—or with the waters of the fountain—and

The Villa Claudia

vanish. For, as yet, he was none too sure of being awake.

At last she spoke.

“What is your name?”

Her voice, in a vague, indefinable way, stirred youthful memories in the young man’s brain. Vainly he tried to identify it—where he had heard it, and when. But he answered simply,

“Morris Lane.”

“I thought so.”

He moved a little nearer, more between the girl and the moon, for a better light on her face.

“Betty Farnham!”

She nodded and held forth her hands, which he seized in both his own. Laughingly, she said, “I recognized you, at once—fat little Morris Lane, as soon as I saw you!”

“But I had no idea you lived here in Tivoli!”

“Yes, we have been in Tivoli five years. We came here when mamma married Signor Capodilista.”

“But you have been in Italy longer than that?”

“Oh, thirteen years! I was only seven when

A Moonlit Garden

we came. Why, just think how long it is since we played together in Barrington!"

The youth heaved a long, deep sigh. "And what good times we did have!"

"Didn't we!"

"I supposed it would never end."

Then many questions were asked, and answered: questions regarding family and friends, and of her life in Italy, and of his affairs at home.

As they seated themselves upon the marble bench where Morris had taken his nap, he said, "And here we are; both grown up."

"Yes, I can hardly believe it. Time has stolen a march on us. It seems but a few years ago that the old express-wagon ran away with us down the hill, behind the Methodist church. I shall never forget it. I was frightened to death."

"So was I. But I didn't let on."

"Of course not, being a man!"

Then both laughed as if they still were children. But the young lady stopped suddenly and exclaimed, as if making a surprising discovery,

"Why, you have the same laugh—the same

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funny little chuckle as ever! I never heard anybody else laugh in such a way. But I like it!"

"Well, I am glad you like it."

"It's a very curious laugh, though. You must admit that."

"Well, I suppose it is."

"How I teased you about what old Dr. Perry said. You know he took us into his greenhouse one day, after Sunday-school, and gave us some grapes, and told us a funny story? And when you laughed at the funny story—he had never seen you before—he thought you were mocking him, with your absurd little sing-song chuckle. Do you remember that?"

"Sort of."

"Well, he was quite disgusted with you; but only for a moment. I explained to him that you always laughed that way."

Then, more seriously, "But how strange that you should turn up in this mysterious manner, Morris! And that you should be older and grown up surprises me. I supposed you would always remain a little boy—a fat, pleasant, comfortable, very nice little boy. You hated to be called 'Roly Poly.'"

A Moonlit Garden

"Oh, yes. I remember that!"

"And you were always exasperatingly serene and rather slow, and oh, how truthful! And you were always changing color. Do you do that still? I can't see in this moonlight."

"I am afraid I do."

"Well, so far as I can discover, you are just the same. And I am glad of it!"

Her words gave him pleasure. For to him, these unfamiliar, somewhat fairylike surroundings, with the mysterious girl beside him—the adored little girl of his boyhood now miraculously transformed into a woman—seemed of a different world; a world of sweet surprises—and not quite real. This feeling—a sense of exaltation, gentle, indefinable, was intensified by the ancient garden with its ghostly tenants—its moonlit gods and goddesses. In the notes of the distant flute, in the waters of the fountain—in the voice beside him—he found exquisite melodies.

The maiden, as if responding to his thoughts, but more to herself than to him, murmured gently,

"A heavenly night."

The young man straightened up a little and

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looked about. "I suppose you are accustomed to scenes like this, but to me it is like fairyland: like a scene in an opera, or an illustration to a poem. And what a moon! Is this the usual Italian night?"

"No. It is better than usual. And that must be an American moon. It is newer, brighter, bigger, than the others. I believe it must have followed you across the Atlantic."

"What a stanch American! But that moon was shining on this hill many centuries before America was discovered."

"Yes, but it was shining on America many centuries before this hill had risen from the sea."

"True."

With less animation, and rather sadly, she continued, "I hope you do not allow yourself to believe for an instant that the moon, or anything else in any other country, is to be compared with the corresponding article in America."

"Not in *your* presence."

"I am homesick for America—and always have been. But mamma loves Italy. She prefers Italian to English. She always calls me

A Moonlit Garden

Elizabetta, and I can't prevent it. But I call myself Elizabeth, for that is my name. I should like to go to America to-night—and stay there. I love all Americans."

"Not *all* Americans?"

"Yes, *all!*"

"Well," said the young man, in his low, smooth voice, "I am afraid you don't know us all."

"Yes, I do."

"Not the whole seventy millions!"

"I know their faults and virtues, and I love them all."

"I hope I am included."

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, better one seventy millionth of your heart than—none at all."

"You had the whole of it once—that is, you and Ginger between you."

"What became of Ginger?"

"He died of old age."

"A deserving dog. And my half was gradually transferred to him, I suppose?"

"All, except your seventy millionth."

He made no reply, and a silence followed. At last he said,

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"Thirteen years is a very long time."

"Indeed, it is!"

"And now that we meet again, it seems as if—as if they had not existed: as if nothing had happened in the meantime."

"Yes, so it seems to me."

Then, for a time they gazed in silence upon the calm, round moon. Both felt the beauty of the night, and its soothing influence. And those figures in the wall in front, seemed, in this silvery flood, four Olympian spirits that might awake if the silence were disturbed.

At last the maiden spoke. "You were a funny little boy. And rather bad, too. You got me into lots of scrapes."

"Oh!"

"You always looked so good—so round-faced and cherubic—that you deceived people. But you *were* bad. Oh, yes! You were so horribly truthful, too. You would never tell the least kind of a fib even to save the life of a friend. Yes, you were very exasperating at times. Perhaps you remember the raft we made for the duck pond."

"As if it were yesterday. Two barrels and an old door."

A Moonlit Garden

“And you made me go out on it with you.”

“It was you who made *me* go.”

“Well, perhaps it was: but you tipped us both over, anyway.”

The young man said nothing.

“Didn’t you?”

Very gently he replied, “You know I did not.”

She laughed. “Yes, I know you did not. But we both got an awful soaking and had to wade ashore.”

He chuckled. “I remember all that. And your mother came along and was very angry when—” he stopped, cleared his throat, but left the speech unfinished. He had remembered suddenly—and with a blush, invisible in the moonlight—that he and his little friend, in fear of punishment, had spread all their clothes on the grass to dry; and it being a warm day, he and she, clad only in their innocence, were sitting on the bank when an outraged parent hove in sight. Possibly Betty Farnham remembered too, for she appeared to lose interest in that episode. And she said, in a more serious tone,

“How splendid it is, Morris, that you should

The Villa Claudia

get on so well in your work! Only twenty-four, and Mr. Goddard has already given you an interest in the business.”

“Yes, I have been very lucky.”

“Lucky! Very clever, you mean. Very useful, reliable, intelligent, industrious, and all the other good things. I do like men who amount to something! I have heard all about it, and we have been proud of you.”

These words, to the youth, caused a joyful thrill; and Betty Farnham would have seen, by daylight, the flush of pleasure they brought into his face. While he hesitated for a reply, there came a sound of footsteps on the gravel walk behind them; then a woman’s voice, very gentle and somewhat plaintive,

“Are you there, Elizabetta?”



III



'Tis not Imperial Rome
But quiet Tibur that delights me now.

Horace.

III

FRA DIAVOLO'S FLUTE

THE girl arose and faced about. "Yes, mamma, and who do you think is here?"

As Morris stood up and regarded the approaching figure of a woman in a black velvet dress he recognized at once the dainty, graceful, and always somewhat fragile, Mrs. Farnham of his boyhood. But time had brought melancholy changes; more melancholy, perhaps, than either she or her daughter fully realized. The moon of course gave a pallor to all things, but this little lady seemed so slight, so frail—almost ethereal—that the young man was grateful to the darkness for concealing the surprise and pain that came into his face.

She looked searchingly at the new arrival, and came nearer.

"Don't you recognize him, mamma?"

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Madame Capodilista slowly shook her head. And the moon, as it illumined her face, also made clear to Morris that this mother was not pleased at finding her daughter alone in the garden with an unexpected guest.

“Speak to her!” cried Betty Farnham. “Say something, but don’t tell your name. See if she won’t guess.”

Now, to strike with dumbness an embarrassed youth, there is nothing more effective, perhaps, than a command to say something—and, above all, to a lady who is, apparently, disapproving of him. But Morris cleared his throat and tried hard to frame a sentence.

“Speak! Say something!” insisted the daughter. And she waved a hand to hurry him up.

Again he cleared his throat. “Your mother would—would hardly be likely to remember me after so many years.”

Morris Lane’s manner of speech had its peculiarities. His voice was low and very quiet: and he spoke slowly, as if choosing his words. And in his tone there was the same smooth, indefinable, half-musical quality that amused Betty Farnham every time he laughed—or rather chuckled.

Fra Diavolo's Flute

"Why, it is Morris Lane!" exclaimed the lady, extending a hand as she stepped nearer for a better look at his face. Betty Farnham was delighted.

"There! I knew you would guess! Yes, mamma, it's that fat little boy grown up. And not too much grown up, either."

Madame Capodilista gave him a cordial welcome. "Indeed, it is a pleasure to see you again, Morris. When did you come to Tivoli?"

"This morning, with a friend. We walked here from Hadrian's Villa."

"And how long do you stay?"

"Oh—a day or two. Just long enough to see the town and visit Horace's Farm."

"Well, you must come and stay with us, and prolong your visit: you and your friend."

"You are very kind, Mrs. Farnham, but my friend——"

"Of course you must come, Morris!" exclaimed the daughter. "The idea of your not coming! Insist upon it, mamma. Make him!"

"Yes, I insist," said Madame Capodilista. "You really must move over to-morrow morning."

"But my friend is not here. He was called

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back to Rome by a telegram, and when he returns he—might——”

“Think it a bore,” suggested the daughter.

“Oh, no!” said Morris.

“Or, think he was not wanted. But he *is* wanted if he is a friend of yours. Is he nice?”

“Oh, yes! He is a splendid fellow.”

“American?”

“He is an Englishman.”

“That’s bad.”

“Why, Elizabetta!” exclaimed the mother. “How silly you are! And how rude!”

“I only mean that Americans are the best; and that if he is not an American, it doesn’t matter much what he is.”

“You are very silly. What is his name, Morris?”

“Hollowell. Lydon Hollowell.”

“Well,” said Madame Capodilista, “you and your baggage must come to-morrow morning, Morris, and you can meet your friend at the station in the afternoon and bring him home with you.”

But Morris seemed in doubt. “Really, it is an imposition to quarter ourselves on you in that fashion.”

Fra Diavolo's Flute

Madame Capodilista raised a hand in protest. "Say no more about it. We should feel very much hurt if you denied us this pleasure."

"You are very kind, Mrs. Farnham——"

"Capodilista——" suggested the daughter.

"Of course!—I beg your pardon——"

"Don't mind her, Morris. She is a very forward little girl. But we must not stay too long in this night air. Come, let us go into the house, where we can get a better look at you."

As they turned away, the flute, which Morris had been hearing at intervals, suddenly raised its plaintive voice just beyond the garden wall, in the road below.

Betty stopped. "There's poor old Fra Diavolo."

"Fra Diavolo," repeated Morris. "So it is. I have been trying to remember what opera that air belongs to."

"But we call the old man himself 'Fra Diavolo' because it is the only air he plays. And he has no other name."

"He plays it mighty well," said Morris.

"I must give him something," said the girl.

Her mother restrained her. "No, let him go to-night. He could not find it in the dark."

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"But I have it done up in a piece of white paper, all ready."

"Then he is a regular thing," said Morris.

"Yes, he comes every night."

"He is one of Elizabetta's admirers," said Madame Capodilista.

"No, it is the villa and the garden he is in love with, not me. He never looks at me, nor even thanks me for my gifts."

"Love is surely blind," said Morris. "A wise beggar would encourage you."

"But Fra Diavolo is not a beggar."

Her mother protested. "Why, Elizabetta! What is he if not a beggar?"

"But a beggar begs, mamma. Fra Diavolo never asks for anything. If you toss him money he may forget to pick it up."

"Then his disguise is very clever."

Madame Capodilista and Morris Lane stood watching the benefactress while she ran back to the balustrade, took something white from her pocket and tossed it into the street below. As she rejoined them and they started again toward the house, Madame Capodilista in the centre, Betty continued her defence of the flutist. "Truly poor Fra Diavolo is not mercenary.

Fra Diavolo's Flute

He used to play here for months before we gave him a copper. That tune is the only one he seems to know. Yet he must have been a good musician before he lost his mind. Do you think it likely, Morris, that a man could play one piece so well and know no others?"

"I should think not. Was he a professional, originally?"

"Nobody knows. He is our Tivoli mystery. Most of the beggars here have grown up in the town, but this old man appeared a few years ago, and seemed to come from nowhere."

"That is a long journey," said Morris.

"But that is precisely where he comes from. No other town has ever had him. The Tivoli authorities tried hard to look up his past and send him home, but there is not a district in Italy that knows him."

"The Eternal City might lose him and be none the wiser."

"He was never seen in Rome."

"Rome is a big place."

"Indeed, it is! But between the police and the various charities no beggar escapes. And the city of Rome has no record of him."

"Were there no letters in his pockets, nor

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papers of any kind to identify him?" asked Morris.

"No. Signor Accoramboni says he had no coat on. That it was very hot weather—in midsummer—and that he may have thrown it aside for comfort, with his letters and papers in the pockets. You see his mind was gone."

"Pretty tough," said Morris. "But it does seem as if they might have identified him. Did no old man disappear about that time?"

"Nobody that resembled him in any way."

As Morris Lane surveyed the moonlit villa and the statues on every side, standing forth in ghostly relief against the shadows of the night, he said,

"But this unaccountable Fra Diavolo and his extraordinary history all harmonize with their surroundings. To me nothing would be surprising here in Tivoli. Your own house and grounds seem full of secrets. And, by the way," he added, "you may be interested to hear that your villa is haunted."

Madame Capodilista stopped and faced about. "Who told you that?" she exclaimed in a voice of suppressed excitement.

"One of the guides," he answered.

Fra Diavolo's Flute

"What did he say? Tell me just what he said!"

She spoke rapidly, with a note of alarm in her voice. Morris was a little taken aback by this effect of his words. And he was further embarrassed when Betty, who stood behind her mother, shook her head and raised a finger to her lips. The moonlight on her face revealed a frown of warning.

Although somewhat mystified by these emphatic signs, he answered, quietly, "I could not make out just what the man was trying to say, in his broken English. But it was some rigma-rolé, which he evidently did not believe himself. Almost every town in the world has at least one haunted house so I did not pay much attention to him."

"But you just said yourself that it looked as if there was something dreadful about it. What did you mean?"

"Oh! Did I say that?"

"Something very like it."

"No, mamma, Morris did not say there was anything *dreadful* about the villa."

"I only meant," said Morris, "that Tivoli is so very ancient—and so much has happened

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here in times gone by, that every spot of ground has its history. That this villa, like everything else in Italy, must have a romance of its own—that we might hear interesting things if it could only talk.”

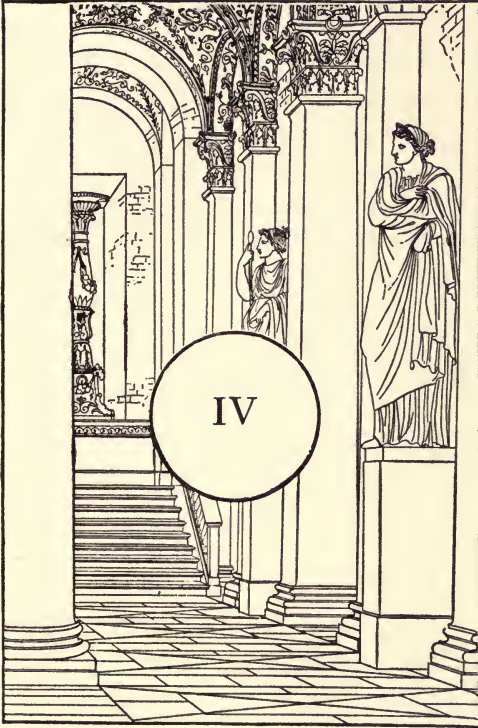
Betty put an arm about her mother's waist and said, in a gentle voice,

“We were speaking of Fra Diavolo, were we not?”

“Yes, I believe we were.” But in her mother's voice were still traces of irritation. “And a most disgusting old person he is. His tune becomes exceedingly monotonous.”

Then, with her two companions, she again moved leisurely toward the house, preceded by three elongated shadows—as from attenuated giants—grotesque and very dark against the moonlit walk.

The silence of the garden remained undisturbed save by the splashing of the fountain, and by the plaintive utterings of Fra Diavolo's flute.





Such idle themes no more can move,
Nor anything but what's of high import—
And what's of high import but love?

Horace.

IV

PARADISO

WHEN the sun, next morning, looked in on Morris Lane at his room in the Hotel Sibilla, its re-enforcement of warmth and cheer seemed superfluous and un-called for. The young man's heart was already warm; his soul aglow. Pleasant inward fires had been kindled the night before and now were blazing merrily. To him it mattered little whether the sun shone or the tempest howled. The Falls of Niagara would have made but slight effect upon the welcome conflagration that now devoured him.

While bathing he sang gently to himself. And the melodies he hummed were of a joyous nature. When he cut himself in shaving, and later burst a vital button-hole to his collar, still he murmured happy tunes, and with a radiant face. The Fra Diavolo air was always creep-

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ing in. It brought memories of a moonlit garden—and a woman's voice.

Morris was ever careless about his dress. So, when at last he cast a perfunctory and rapid glance into his mirror—more from habit than from interest—he smiled with blind approval upon a badly fitting collar and a clumsy tie. His untamed yellow hair with its crooked part—like the course of lightning through a cornfield—had never disturbed the owner. The full, round, boyish face with its tranquil eyes and its confiding honesty was almost handsome: and so kindly and unassuming the expression that guileful strangers often mistook its benevolence and simplicity for want of experience. Beggars instinctively marked him for their prey.

Having a genius for machinery, with an inventiveness and ingenuity unusual even in New England, he had already perfected several details of considerable importance to a certain cotton-mill in Massachusetts. These services had been appreciated, and his prospects were correspondingly brilliant. Change from work and relaxation he sought, whenever leisure allowed, in the study of art and music. He had even written verse that was not unreasonably

Paradiso

bad: and with the violin—as he himself had said—he could “hold his own with the poorest professional.”

Being a dreamer, he dreamed, that morning, more than usual. He dreamed through his breakfast, through his packing and his settling up; and he dreamed through the winding streets of Tivoli to the home of Betty Farnham. When he entered the Villa Claudia information was conveyed to him by a smiling servant—first in Italian, then by pantomime—that Madame Capodilista had not yet descended from her chamber; and that the Signorina Elizabetta was in the garden. So into the garden he went.

As he started down the gravel walk in search of the Signorina, he heard, from behind a mass of shrubbery on his left, the voice of the person he sought. She was speaking in Italian. Some words in a man's voice also came to him. Not knowing who might be with her, and fearing to intrude, he stood and looked about him. And as he did so, he drew a long, deep breath of pure delight. For, to a dreamer and a poet here was feasting for the senses.

Along the sides of the garden, from the villa to the terrace wall, and reaching high into the

The Villa Claudia

air, stood rows of gigantic cypresses, their dark-green, sombre foliage in striking contrast to the gorgeous coloring beneath—masses of white and crimson roses, and beds of purple violets. And scattered everywhere, in lavish profusion amid the shrubbery, all in restful harmony with the rich verdure of the acacias and Judas trees, were marble figures, busts, vases, columns, singly and in groups; their primal whiteness now softened by the passing centuries to an ivory yellow. They seemed a natural element of the garden—works of time and not of man. Over all was an air of antiquity and repose. These various statues and marble fragments, which were merely suggestions by moonlight, now stood forth in the glare of day as objects of exquisite beauty and of historic interest.

While Morris, in a sort of rapture, stood gazing upon these things, a thrush alighted upon a marble head of Trajan, close beside him, and proceeded to fill the garden with its song. The young man closed his eyes and slowly inhaled the quivering, languorous, flower-scented air. To him, already dazed with love, this orgy of art and color, of sunshine, of music and of heavenly hope was intoxicating. Creation had

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never been so joyful, so inspiring. Life was too good to be true.

And beyond the garden—beyond this blazing, sunlit mass of color—the air over the Campagna became soft, mysterious,—a golden haze. It invited one to repose, and dreams; and gave no suggestion of cotton-mills or any other human labor. It spoke—or rather, murmured in a lazy way—of things quite different from machinery. In this mellow glow that softened yet illumined all things, there was something inspiring, for to Morris all the world, just now, was radiant with

The light that lies
In woman's eyes.

During a little silence that occurred behind the shrubbery he heard a sound, as of someone spading earth. So, probably, the other person was the gardener. And when Morris ventured nearer he found this gardener to be the man he had seen the night before standing by the little door to the garden—the big man with the round shoulders and very small head who was talking with a woman. Now he was down upon his knees, scooping earth with a big trowel, the

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girl standing beside him in a white dress—a pleasant picture in the morning sunshine. Two wrestling cupids, in marble, served as background; and around about, on every side, were masses of gorgeous flowers.

He stood for a moment and closed his eyes: then opened them again for a fresh impression of the picture.

He stepped a little nearer.

“Good-morning, Signorina Elizabetta.”

The little lady turned about and her face lit up. Transferring a flower-pot from her right hand to her left she came eagerly toward him.

“Why, Morris! How nice to have you here again!” And, for an instant, she allowed her hand to rest in his, returning the pressure. The felicity of this contact and the warmth of her greeting caused a thrill of joy: and with Morris the outward manifestation of such a thrill was a rush of color to his face. She saw it and smiled: then, in mischievous delight, exclaimed,

“Ah, those same, old, funny little blushes! In the daytime I can see them; and I suppose they were going on all last evening. So, you haven’t changed a bit.”

Whereupon the color deepened, and he tried

Paradiso

to frown. She pointed a finger at him. "I should think you would be ashamed to blush that way; like a girl."

"I *am* ashamed."

Again she laughed, with irrepressible merriment. "But I love it! It takes me back to my childhood. You are the same cherubic, ingenuous Morris. And you always will be. You can't help it if you live to be a hundred. And I wouldn't have you different for the world!"

As she placed the flower-pot upon the ground and turned again toward him, a frown, a smile, and another blush, all crowded for supremacy in the young man's face. Slowly along the gravel walk they started toward the house. Although somewhat absorbed in a struggle to regain his self-possession, Morris had already discovered that the little person by his side, while interesting by moonlight, was ten times more so by the light of day. Her fresh color, the constant changes in her frank, sensitive face, all worked a spell which he made no effort to resist. He was amazed that any number of years could achieve such wonders. And it was hard to realize that this was the brown-faced, plump, irrepressible little hoyden with whom he had

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played and fought. Now she was matured and softened—a dazzling renaissance—with all the primitive graces in full blossom, and new ones added. In her low voice and rapid speech he found an ancient charm whose existence he had forgotten.

As for himself, he seemed to have entered, suddenly, upon a new career, all his previous life being a blank. In fact, a miraculous change had come over the universe within a very few hours. Colors were brighter; the air purer—more exhilarating. Had he so desired he could have drawn a long breath and floated upward into the Blue. But earth to-day was not a place to leave. No heaven—Christian, Buddhist, or Mohammedan—could compare with it. He agreed with Byron—

Yes, Love indeed is light from heaven,
A spark of that immortal fire
With Angels shared, by Alla given,——

With a mighty effort of his will, and in obedience to an instinct common to all human lovers, he looked carelessly about the garden to show his interest in other matters, and his in-

Paradiso

difference to the one thing in life worth living for. And he remarked, politely,

“What a beautiful garden!”

“Yes, it is. Signor Accoramboni calls it *Paradiso*. He says it comes very near his conception of heaven. So he tries to be good, as he wishes to have one like it, when he dies. But it is not *my* idea of heaven. I prefer your father’s old garden in Massachusetts.”

“Oh!” he protested. “As if there was any comparison!”

“Of course this is more beautiful in one way, but I have often sat here and closed my eyes and tried to think I was in that other garden with all the New England flowers.”

“What a persistent patriot! You may have more affection for the other, but, really, you are a little unfair to this one.” Then, as his eyes rested upon an ancient Roman chair, close at hand, elaborately carved with sphinxes’ wings for arms, “Were all these things here when you bought the place?”

“Yes, they were here, but all were not in sight. Many were dug up in the garden.”

“What luck!”

“Those two busts at the ends of the terrace,

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Juno and Servius, were found in cleaning the old well. And the reclining figure off there at the end of that path is Faustina. And where do you think we discovered *her*?"

"I could never guess."

"Behind a fireplace. She was broken into several pieces and built into one of the chimneys of the house."

"Think of it! Well, we don't find such things in New England houses. But what was this place originally? A sculptor's yard?"

"No. A queen's yard. You know Zenobia lived at Tivoli after she was brought to Rome."

"No. I did not know it."

"Well, she did. Aurelian gave her a villa here, but its location was never known until about a year ago. We were having new pipes put in for the fountain and the workmen dug up a bust of a woman, just off there by that bronze vase with the plant. And as several Syrian ornaments had already been discovered here, and coins with her husband's head on them—King Odenatus—the wise men concluded that the foundations of our villa were a part of Zenobia's house."

"Well, that is interesting!" exclaimed Mor-

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ris. "Mighty interesting! So Zenobia used to sit in this garden! She probably strolled about and bossed the gardener just as you do. And she bossed the very ancestors of your old man there, perhaps."

"Perhaps. I never thought of that."

"Why, the whole place is crammed with history. And think of all that has happened here since!"

"Yes, but much more happened before than since. Do you see that marble tablet over there, in a niche of the old wall?"

"With a split through the middle, and one end gone?"

"Yes. Well, the inscription on it is the record of a feast, or a celebration of some kind, that occurred on this very spot, about three hundred years before Zenobia came. There was a villa here then, a building with columns around the outside. The pedestals of some of the columns are still standing in a semicircle in our cellar, beneath the kitchen."

Morris listened with eager interest. "What does the inscription say?"

"It is a very brief account of a series of banquets, with the names of the two men who gave

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them, or presided,—or whatever. And who do you think those two men were?"

"I could never guess."

"Horace and Mæcenas."

"What, *the* Horace?"

"Yes."

"Gracious! That is exciting! So Horace, my own little Horace, used to come here. Very likely he sat on some of these marble seats."

"Very likely. But it may not have been a garden then." She smiled as she added, "Horace was quite modern—for us. Here in Tibur we look on Romulus and Remus as parvenues."

"Yes, I know Tivoli is older than Rome. But where was that inscription found?"

"Among the ruins of the columns, just beneath the kitchen."

"Oh, I must study it myself. And I shall prowl around your cellar. May I?"

"Of course you may. Prowl wherever you like."

"What a foundation for a kitchen!" murmured the young man. "The shades of Horace and Mæcenas may be down there now! I could believe anything of this place."

Paradiso

Betty stopped. Into her eyes came a look of trouble. Then, in a lower voice,

“The spirit of Horace? That would be a blessing in this—this horrid house.”

“Horrid! Why horrid?” After asking the question Morris recalled the dark insinuations of the guide. He also recalled Madame Capodilista’s annoyance when he alluded to them. But Betty, instead of explaining, glanced upward, to the open window of her mother’s chamber, and started forward again. In the same low tone she said,

“I will tell you later, perhaps. But don’t speak of it when mamma is about.”

Again, and with increasing interest, Morris regarded the smiling façade of the Villa Claudia. As an American he was unfamiliar with kitchen cellars that yielded Roman emperors and poets. The villa, while less ghostly than by moonlight, still suggested, even at noonday, the possession of secrets of its own:—and it still appeared a fit abode for any mystery. This effect was helped, perhaps, by its material—blocks of marble quarried when Rome was young, and serving originally for a temple to Bacchus—now mellowed by centuries of sun and storm. After an

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unknown period of oblivion these yellow blocks still glistened in the soft October air. To the young American there was eloquence in their silent faces. Surely these stones had much to tell!

Yet notwithstanding this impression of history withheld or history concealed—the Villa Claudia presented a cheerful exterior. The proportions were perfect; its details charming. Exquisite carvings wandered along its cornice and about the three arches in the centre. The two little oval niches with their busts, in the second story, were playful in design. To the artistic sense all was more than satisfying. Nevertheless, as Morris feasted upon these beauties he could not help feeling that the Villa Claudia, while polite, was laughing at him—and at all other temporary things. But this feeling, as he very well knew, owed its origin to the words of the garrulous guide. At all events, the villa with its gardens impressed him in a peculiar manner. He felt a strong desire to know them better. And this, perhaps, might be the natural thirst of the archæologist. For in archæology, that most scholarly of intoxicants, he had freely indulged. Moreover, of all the poets, Horace was his favorite.

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But Horace and the other poets combined—with art and literature and all history thrown in—were pitiful stuff to the living thing beside him. To all her words he listened with the keenest pleasure; and yet, no matter what she said, he found the personality of the speaker of still greater interest. But, withal, he experienced a vague uneasiness. His felicity was too exalted; too acute and too unfamiliar in its nature. Also, there were certain doubts accompanying. Countless cases were recorded—and well authenticated—in which man's affection had not been returned. In short, Morris was in full enjoyment of the "pleasure that is almost a pain." However, he murmured to himself these words of Hafiz the poet:

Whenas thou findest whom thou lovest
Bid farewell to the world and its cares.



What if our ancient love return
And bind us with a brazen yoke?

Horace.



V



63

V

INFERNO

ON the terrace, at the top of the steps, they turned and stood in silence, contemplating the garden and the many tinted Campagna that lay beyond. Far away, on the horizon, the dome of St. Peter's,—a luminous speck dimly visible through the noon-day haze,—marked the position of the Eternal City. And the thrush, perched upon the head of Trajan, continued to fill the air with melody.

With half-closed eyes Morris breathed a sigh, and with it a murmur of supreme content. "To me, this house and garden, and all that background with its splendid history, have a mighty fascination. I would ask nothing better than to quit the everlasting Yankee competition and live my life in such a place as this."

"O, Morris!" exclaimed Betty, straightening up and becoming severe. "What an ignoble

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thought! Do you mean to say you would abandon your country? give up the splendid fight for success and distinction?"

"And lucre?"

"Well, yes, lucre, if you wish. Better struggle for lucre than be a drone."

"You prefer a hustling money-grabber to a cultivated, entertaining drone?"

"Yes."

Morris shook his head. "A little art and pleasure are just what the hustling Yankee needs."

"But too much art and pleasure do lots of harm. The very struggle you speak of makes the man. Look at Fra Diavolo, for instance; it is the dissipated, weak old face of one who has lived only for pleasure. That is why I pity him—he is so utterly contemptible."

"Does Fra Diavolo, in his face, wear the insignia of drunkenness?"

"No—and yet, I suppose he does. He is repulsive in a way, but he has not the face of other drunkards. It is indescribable: more sensitive, with nothing brutish or animal."

"But is it any more contemptible than a face full of fuss and trouble?"

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"Yes: because fuss and trouble are great developers."

"Developers of what?"

"Of character."

"Art and pleasure do it better."

"No."

"But surely," said Morris, "we should be gainers if instead of seventy years of toil and worry, with little snatches of pleasure, we could omit all the fuss and wasted effort and take only the happy moments: say a dozen years of undiluted fun."

"Never! Never in the world!" exclaimed Betty. "Why, half the pleasure is in the reward of our own effort; of helping others, and the little triumphs of self-sacrifice."

"But my scheme would give them. You would have joys of every kind."

"No. You couldn't make it work, Morris."

"I don't see why. It is merely giving you the reward without the debasing scramble."

"The cake without the appetite. You know as well as I there is often a deeper satisfaction in the struggle than in the reward."

"Sometimes. But even your Fra Diavolo here, and other drunkards—they get lots of fun

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with no effort. Also people who inherit piles of money."

"Drunkards and spoiled children! You hit it exactly. That is just what your scheme would result in!" She closed her eyes and drew a hand across her temples. "How curious that you and I should get on to this subject! It seems like one of those grewsome repetitions—as if I had been all over it before in a previous existence— Oh, yes! I remember now. It was with Santovano. Fra Diavolo's face suggested it. There seems to be something in that old man's face—something, I can't tell what, that starts one thinking."

"I hope to meet this thought-inspiring drinker. But who is Santovano? Another miraculous beggar?"

"Santovano!" And in surprise she looked up into his face. "Didn't I mention him last night?"

"Perhaps you did, but I don't remember."

With a smile, and in the manner of one who gives news that is very old, she said, "Why, he is the man I am to marry, three weeks from to-morrow."

Into Morris's face came a look of stupefac-

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tion. Clearer than words it told of an overwhelming shock—of a dumb, pathetic protest. Into Betty's own eyes, as she read these things,—for in his boyish, honest face was no concealment—there came an expression of surprise, then of sympathy, both swiftly changing to alarm.

As she realized the full significance of her discovery the color flew to her cheeks. In confusion she lowered her eyes. With a backward step, looking first toward the house, then down the garden walk, at everything except the man before her, she said, at last, very gently, "I thought I spoke last night of my—of my wedding."

There was a little tremor in her voice. Morris, at that moment, was dazed by his own woe. Her words seemed to arouse him from a sort of stupor. "What did you say? I beg your pardon."

"I was only saying that I thought I had already mentioned Santovano."

"Perhaps you did. I suppose I didn't realize—I mean—I didn't hear it."

In silence Morris seated himself upon one of the marble benches. She took the place beside

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him, and her efforts at conversation became heroic. These efforts were fully appreciated and Morris tried to help. But his heart was heavy: his spirit gone. At last he arose and announced his intention of taking a stroll about the town. In an absent-minded way he began to button up his coat. His fingers, she noticed, were trying to attach his coat to a button of his vest. With a smile she very gently pushed away his hand and arranged it as it should be. Then she gave it a little tap and smoothed it down in a motherly fashion, and frowned as she said:

“Clumsy boy!”

He smiled. “Yes, I have always known that.”

She followed him to the front door and let him out. “Remember, déjeuner is at one o’clock.”

And she stood there for a moment, watching the juvenile figure in the suit of gray, until hidden by a neighboring corner.

After closing the door, she leaned wearily against it. For several moments she remained with closed eyes and drooping head. At last she straightened up and slowly moved away.

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At the head of the stairs she paused again. The door to her mother's chamber was half open, but Betty wished to be alone, for a time—and to think; and so, in the hope of being unobserved, she started quietly along the hall. But Madame Capodilista had good ears.

“Is that you, Elizabetta?”

“Yes, mamma.” And the daughter entered.

It was a spacious chamber, somewhat formal in design, its painted walls representing panels of colored marbles. Over the four doors were smaller panels, also painted in oil, in which cupids, goats and dolphins disported themselves amid a profusion of fruit and flowers and ruined temples. At present the blinds were lowered, giving a soothing half-light instead of the noon-day glare. The whole effect and atmosphere of the apartment were those of a chamber in some eighteenth-century palace. A faint odor of mignonette — Madame Capodilista's favorite perfume—hovered in the air.

In an easy-chair, with cushions at her back, and her eyes still closed, Madame Capodilista said, wearily,

“Who went out a few minutes ago, Elizabetta?”

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"It was Morris, mamma; he has gone for a stroll about the town."

"Why didn't you go with him? You might have shown him several things of interest that he will never see by himself."

Betty, still standing near the door, raised her eyebrows in amazement. "Wander about the streets alone with a young man? Why, mamma! You forget *les convenances*."

Her mother smiled. "I must have thought, from Morris being here, that we were still in America."

"I wish we were!" was on the daughter's lips, but she refrained. The too free expression of that sentiment annoyed her mother and often led to arguments. And arguments, the watchful daughter had discovered, were too exciting for this invalid. Involuntarily, however, she heaved a sigh. "What a different country this would be if all the men *were* Americans."

"The Italian women might object."

"No, mamma, they couldn't."

"Indeed, they could! The Italian men have far better manners than Americans."

"Their company manners, yes. But that means so little! For myself, I prefer the Amer-

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ican. He doesn't leave his manners at the front door as he enters his own home."

This was said in a gentle voice and with a good-humored smile, but her mother, with a frown, turned her face toward the window. "Really, Elizabetta, your wholesale admiration for everything American would be laughable if it were not so very monotonous. Morris, for instance, is a very good boy, but certainly nobody could call him a polished man of the world."

"Perhaps not. But he is young yet."

"No matter how long he lives he will never have the bearing of—of Santovano, for instance."

"Very likely he will not, mamma, but between Morris and Santovano there is a still greater difference, and in more important particulars."

"What do you mean, Elizabetta?"

With the same good-humored smile Betty shrugged her shoulders, almost imperceptibly. "You have never advised my strolling about the streets with Santovano. And imagine what your comments would have been had I sat out in the garden, alone, at night, with Santovano

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or with any other Italian. My reputation would have gone forever!"

"But you have known Morris all your life."

"If I had known Santovano all my life would there be less need of a chaperon? No; and that is just the difference. The more you know the American the more you trust him; and the more you know the foreigner the *less* you trust him."

"That is not true, Elizabetta."

"Not true?" repeated Betty. "Then why do American mothers trust their daughters alone with American men? Does any mother over here think of trusting her daughter alone with an Italian—or a Frenchman, or *any* of the disgusting things?"

At this, Madame Capodilista, with an exclamation of indignant protest, straightened up in her chair. Betty heard the exclamation, and saw the gesture, but she hurried on as if in spite of herself.

"And I don't see how men who are unfit for a girl's friendship can be matrimonial prizes. Why shouldn't I marry one of my own countrymen, and live for a purpose?—to strive with him and help him? Why must I marry one of

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these aristocratic good-for-nothings and be the wife of a title, of a man who never means to do anything more important than cultivate his surface manners? Manners! Yes, Santovano has good manners and he ought to have, with nothing else on his mind.”

“Elizabetta! Elizabetta! How can you speak in that way of the man you are to marry?”

“Why not, mamma? You know it is true. What business has he? None. Does he ever pretend to a day’s work?”

“But it is not expected of him in his position. He is a gentleman of leisure—by inheritance. Santovano is an aristocrat. His family is one of the highest in all Italy.”

“I don’t blame Santovano. He is the natural result of his ancestors. For generations they have probably been idle, dissolute rakes with polished easy manners and with no ambition beyond the gratification of their lowest appetites. No, I don’t blame Santovano. He comes by himself honestly. But why should not I, if I prefer it, have a husband with some purpose in life? some ambition beyond clothes and manners and the care of his own finger-nails?”

Betty, while speaking, had come nearer; and

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as Madame Capodilista looked into the girlish face and saw the light of battle there, she realized the awakening of a force beyond her own maternal control. For the last words were delivered with an unwonted emphasis and decision, quite different from Betty Farnham's usual manner when addressing her mother. Moreover, Betty's eyes looked steadily into her mother's, and although on the verge of tears, were almost threatening in their earnestness. Plainly, some newly awakened spirit was working a transformation in this usually obedient and self-forgetful maiden.

Madame Capodilista sank back among her cushions. "Elizabetta, what has happened to you? Do you realize what you are saying—and of the man you have promised to marry?"

"Yes, mamma, I do not forget him. And I realize now—I suddenly realize—how it has all come about. I have been kept away from Americans. I have seen only Italians. Tell me, why should I not marry one of my own countrymen if I prefer it?"

There was a silence. Her mother drew a long breath, and her delicate fingers picked nervously at an arm of her chair.

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"Tell me," repeated Betty, "why should I not marry one of my own countrymen?"

Madame Capodilista pressed a quivering hand against her forehead, and had Betty been in a calmer mood the two warning spots of color in her mother's cheeks would have brought a sudden end to all discussion. But the excitement of this revolt—the first in many years—obscured her vision.

Very quietly, but in a weaker voice, Madame Capodilista spoke. "Has Morris asked you to marry him?"

There was a rush of color to Betty's cheeks. "No, no, mamma! Of course he has not!"

"But he wishes to?"

"Oh! How do I know? But supposing he did! He is ten times the man that Santovano is."

"Morris! Morris Lane!"

"Yes, Morris Lane."

Madame Capodilista laughed; not the overflowing merriment of a joyful heart, but the laugh of a person of ordinary sense at an utterance of inconceivable foolishness.

"Poor Santovano! So he is less of a man than that fat, little, round-faced, awkward Mor-

Inferno

ris Lane, who hopes some day, perhaps to be a superintendent in a New England factory! Oh! delightful! Santovano's family — especially the duke and the two cardinals—would feel flattered.”

In Betty's eyes the light of battle shone clearer still; but she tried to be calm. “Yes, Morris is young, and he is fat, and he has a round face, and he changes color, and his manners are not easy—and all that—I grant all that. But as to real manliness and solid qualities, as to industry and perseverance, and moral sense and ambition, and all the things a girl wants in a husband—why, he is worth a hundred million Santovanos!”

Betty paused, merely to get her breath; but she was off again before her mother could speak.

“And, since you mention it, suppose I *did* marry Morris. I should live in America, for one thing, among our own people. And I should have an honest, high-minded husband, with a serious purpose in life. And we should struggle and work together. Whereas here—here—” For a brief instant she hesitated, then hurried on, “—here I should be the wife of a

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dissolute, arrogant, lazy, good-for-nothing idler—and doomed forever, to a useless career—empty, fashionable and degrading. I hate it—hate it, hate it! There!”

In Madame Capodilista’s face the varying expressions of amazement, contempt and indignation had suddenly changed to one of despair. In a voice perceptibly weaker, she said,

“Elizabetta, you have promised yourself to Santovano. The wedding day is fixed, the guests invited and the gifts are coming in. If you broke your faith with him now, it would kill me. I should——”

As she spoke, the two spots of color vanished from her cheeks, and with closed eyes her head fell back against the chair.

In an instant Betty was kneeling upon the floor at her mother’s side. “Oh, mamma, mamma! What have I done? Never mind what I said. I do not mean it—indeed, I do not!”

But there was no response. Betty, her own face grown suddenly pale, rang the bell for assistance, then flew into the adjoining room, snatched a bottle from a shelf, and at last succeeded in getting a spoonful of its contents between her mother’s lips.

Inferno

To the maid who came hurrying to the chamber, she cried, in Italian,

“Run, Anita, quick, for Dr. Olibrio! Tell him mamma has another of those attacks. Get him here at once. Quick! Quick!”

Before the doctor's arrival a little color came creeping back into the ashen lips. Then the eyes, as they slowly opened, remained fixed upon Betty's face with a look of distrust—and terror. This look, to the watching, agonized daughter, brought the sharpest remorse.

Again dropping to her knees at her mother's side, she held one of the slender hands in both her own, and tenderly stroked it.

“Oh, mamma, dearest mamma! forget what I said. Please forget. I was not myself. I don't know what possessed me—some sudden, horrid impulse. Oh, do say you forgive me”

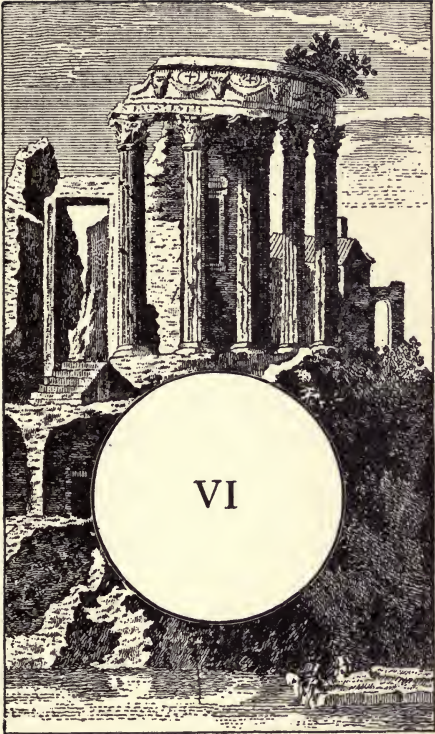
Madame Capodilista's voice was weak, and her words came with an effort. “Yes, darling. Of course I forgive you. But, Elizabetta, are you telling me the truth? You will not do what you threatened?”

“No! No! mamma! I promise you. Only live and get well again, and forget how thought-

Inferno

less I have been. I shall do just as you wish. Indeed, I shall. I promise you.”

When Dr. Olibrio came he found the invalid very weak, but out of danger. To the daughter, however, he repeated the familiar warning that another of these attacks might prove fatal: that they must be avoided at whatever cost.



The Temple of the Sybil at Tivoli?



quocirca vivite fortes
fortiaque adversis opponite pectora rebus.

Horace.

VI

FRA DIAVOLO'S FACE

WHEN he turned his back upon the girl at the open door, Morris Lane walked blindly through the streets of Tivoli. His look was vacant. His heart was numb. To be lifted into Paradise, to drink from the fountain of Hope, and then, without warning, to be hurled into Purgatory—is bitter.

Nearly an hour he walked, seeing nothing; for in spirit he was treading the sunless caverns of despair. Waterfalls, Roman ruins, the indescribable picturesqueness of the world about him, all were wasted. He neither saw, nor knew, nor cared.

Once he halted. With his back to a world-renowned view, he gazed absently at a blank wall. But he saw therein the face of a girl. And he looked deep into her eyes, trying hard, but trying vainly—and for the twentieth time—to find their meaning. For, surely, it was not

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a look of indifference, nor of dislike: more of trouble, of anxiety, or of some inward struggle. No, he did not believe that she disliked him. But, on the other hand, he must not forget the light-hearted manner in which she said, "He is the man I am to marry in a fortnight." And that man, Santovano, was in all human probability one of those——

A voice at his elbow brought him back, with a shock, from the girl and the garden.

Had the gentleman seen the temple of the Sybil, or La Madonna di Quintiliolo? And did he care to visit the villa of Mæcnas?

Morris gazed upon the man with a look of blank surprise.

Mæcnas! A person who lived hundreds of years before Betty Farnham was born—before history began! He turned away.

Onward he marched through the winding streets of Purgatory.

At last, his willing but unguided legs having brought him to an open square, where the little iron chairs and tables of a café stood along the pavement, he dropped into a seat. With his chin in his hands he sat, and brooded. His brooding, however, was disturbed by the voice

Fra Diavolo's Face

of a waiter at his side, asking politely in the language of the country what the signore would be pleased to consume. Morris wished for nothing, but he ordered a glass of Marsala. It was brought. Then, for a period, he sat with folded arms, gazing vacantly down upon the table. This table was painted white and blue to represent marble; now, in the rays of the sun, a dazzling surface. His reflections upon the carelessness, the cruelty, and the hideous errors of creation were continued.

Before him, across one side of the piazza, ran a balustrade, and beyond the balustrade lay a view such as Tivoli alone can offer—a wondrous blending of rocks and ruins and waterfalls; of mountains and of valleys, of foliage, of flowers, and of gorgeous color.

The green steep whence Anio leaps
In floods of snow-white foam.

But of this view the young American saw nothing. Earth is covered with views, but not with Betty Farnhams. As for himself, he realized, at last, the futility of his own existence: what a failure he was—how grotesquely unimportant.

The Villa Claudia

Santovano!

He repeated the name, for it gave him pleasure; the pleasure of exquisite self-torture. Perhaps this Santovano was dropping dead of heart disease at this very moment. Possibly Italians were given to heart disease. But, no, of course not! Perhaps Betty, since meeting *him*—Morris—might change her mind about Santovano. She might give up the man she had promised to marry. This idea, even as it entered his head, was so stupendously absurd as to become laughable—for Vanity and Morris were not companions. And then, for the first time since he had left the Villa Claudia, he smiled. But it was the smile of the stoic—of the North American Indian at the stake—all for effect—and partly, perhaps, to show himself that he could do it. For what is sweeter than to fool one's self?

And what kind of looking man was Santovano? Morris, being rather short himself, and plump, blond, boyish, and of benevolent aspect—evidently not the kind that Betty Farnham preferred—conceived a Santovano the reverse of all this—a man tall, dark and fierce, and of ravishing beauty. Now that he came to

Fra Diavolo's Face

think of it, how could a girl like Betty Farnham ever care for *him*, Morris Lane, even if this Santovano had failed to exist? No. Why should she? Fool, fool, fool to have hoped!

These helpful thoughts, which might have continued until nightfall, were interrupted in a manner that brought the dreamer sharply to himself. The other half dozen patrons of the café occupied seats beneath an awning. But Morris had not observed the awning. It mattered little, now, whether he was hot or cold; whether he languished in sunlight or in shadow. Down over his eyes he had pulled the brim of his hat, and he was gazing in silent desolation at the glass of amber liquid upon the little table before him. The Marsala caught the sunlight and shimmered like molten gold.

As he sat there, in spirit at the Villa Claudia, his eyes upon the glistening fluid, he became dimly conscious of a figure standing by his side. This fact, however, was not of sufficient interest to draw him from his woe. But when the shadow of a hand upon the table, followed by the hand itself—a wrinkled, bony, old man's hand—moved slowly within the radius of his vision, he awoke, and straightened up.

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Leisurely this hand approached the little glass of sunlit wine and, with trembling fingers, lifted it from the table. Then Morris raised his head. He did not care for the wine, but he resented the impertinence. The person who was doing the deed, an aged beggar, calmly poured the wine upon the ground, and as calmly replaced the empty glass before the astonished youth. Then Morris, as he looked up into the eyes that met his own, knew at once who stood before him.

Fra Diavolo was in beggar's garb, tall and slight of figure. At his chest, from a string about his neck, hung a flute. But it was not from the flute alone that Morris recognized him. It was more from the sudden recollection of Betty Farnham's words: from the girl's endeavor to describe a face whose character she could not divine. For he not only recognized the truth of her words, but he was startled by the accuracy of her description. A debauched old face without strength or character it certainly was: yet, that was not all. There was something more; something indefinably suggestive of a nobler past; and, as she had said, more pathetic than repulsive.

Fra Diavolo's Face

Calmly the old beggar's eyes gazed down into those of the young American when in angry surprise they met his own. But Morris's anger changed quickly to a succession of quite different emotions, as he realized the character—or rather found himself trying to divine the significance—of this peculiar countenance. The face was clean shaven, and it appeared, at first glance, an unqualified record of about seventy years of intemperance. As Morris looked more carefully, however, he detected in this visage the existence of contradictory things—something abnormal that aroused his curiosity: and quite different from the usual traces of debauch. The dark eyes had once been handsome. At present they were maudlin; but they were not the eyes of a common drunkard. A gentle expression—as of protest against existing conditions—a mingling of pride and helplessness, gave infinite melancholy to a face which was both repellent and engaging. And it seemed to Morris that Fra Diavolo's eyes, as they gazed serenely and somewhat vacantly into his own, were asking for aid or enlightenment—to be rescued from himself, perhaps.

The face was thin, the features good; the

The Villa Claudia

hair and eyebrows a silvery gray. The mouth, in spite of its feeble corners and its pendant lower lip, gave a distinct impression of having been—long years ago, perhaps—something very much better than at present: for it still retained traces of a character and refinement that even fifty years of self-indulgence could not entirely efface.

While attempting no analysis of these conflicting witnesses in Fra Diavolo's face, Morris experienced the identical sentiments that Betty Farnham had endeavored to define. He felt, above all, an absorbing curiosity to know its history; a desire to help the man. He felt also a keen compassion—something in the nature of a bond of sympathy between himself and this personification of human weakness—this many-sided, amiable, pathetic, almost disgusting old beggar. As Betty Farnham had said, it was a contemptible face. But as she had also said, it was very much more than that. Lines of old age, as lines of character, did not exist. In other faces those lines about the brow, the eyes and the mouth, those records of experience and mental processes, of mirth, of sorrow and of struggle, such lines were absent in Fra Diavolo's

Fra Diavolo's Face

face. And their absence produced a strange effect.

It seemed the face of an infant who had lived many years. The only lines were the accidental and meaningless wrinkles formed by receding tissues. There was no record of work or of trouble. And, as Morris studied Fra Diavolo, he agreed heartily with Betty—for, surely, a superabundance of pleasure was an awful thing if the penalty were a face like this. "Yes," he thought, "Betty is right: the everlasting struggle is a blessing in disguise—no man is a man without it."

His interest in this unaccountable old personage was quickened by a second look at his flute, an elaborate instrument, with silver mountings. For he remembered that he was also a cultivated musician.

To this scrutiny of his countenance Fra Diavolo gave little attention. It caused him no embarrassment. After calmly returning the young man's gaze for a moment, he pointed to the now empty glass, and in a thick, uneven, somewhat timorous tone—as of one who spoke so rarely as to become unfamiliar with his own voice—he uttered three or four words in Italian.

The Villa Claudia

At the same time he slowly shook his head, as if in disapproval or in warning.

Morris, not speaking Italian, made no reply. And none was needed. For the waiter, who had witnessed the episode from a distance, came hurrying forward with a bottle of Marsala in his hand. He shook a finger at Fra Diavolo and scolded him, in what seemed to Morris, a very friendly spirit; as an overindulgent parent might rebuke an infant. After which he refilled the empty glass.

Morris inquired, first in English, then in French, why the old man had spilled the wine. But neither of those languages was understood by the waiter. He amply expressed his feelings, however, by further Italian and by emphatic gestures of regret. While these apologies were under way another person joined the group: one who as a master of the English tongue, and as a friend of Morris, came forward to make everything clear, for all concerned. His smile was genial and his teeth were white as he raised his cap to the American, then rested a friendly hand upon Fra Diavolo's shoulder.

"He not bad spirito. No! oh, no! Juss olda boy, ancora—bambino—what." Then, tapping

Fra Diavolo's Face

his own forehead, "Verra littla inside—all ruina—as lika Tivoli. Everatings forget—dimentico—is it?"

Morris nodded. "Yes, I thought so. Is he not Fra Diavolo?"

"Yaze, Fra Diavolo. Zat peoples spik him—but he ees anonimo—not name. His name go out—dispear—perduto."

"Yes, too bad he cannot account for himself."

"He come not from ze world anyware—no. He nevar bambino—zat what who in English?"

"Baby."

"Gia, gia! Baby! He nevar baby. He born alla big—all olda first."

"Yes, so I hear. His coming has never been explained. But there must be people in Tivoli who know something about it."

Whether the garrulous guide misunderstood this speech, or whether he resented any doubts of Fra Diavolo's miraculous advent was not divulged. But he at once burst forth into a vehement harangue. So vehement that Morris at first thought the speaker was angry. He soon discovered, however, that this rapidity of utterance, the violent gestures and ferocity of glance, were merely temperamental—his natural manner

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of enforcing facts. And the impassioned orator soon showed his contempt for the English language as a medium of communication. For in this discourse the Italian tongue predominated. The frequent use of English words—always, however, with an Italian pronunciation—and of Italian words which happened to be the same in both languages, all clarified and enforced by a running accompaniment of dramatic gesture and explanatory pantomime, enabled the American to catch the drift of the argument.

Which was this: Fra Diavolo's advent, here in Tivoli, was miraculous—supernatural. How he came still remained a mystery. Not by railway did he come; neither did he walk, for no person had met him on the road. Through no other town had he passed. And in the fields no peasant had seen him. Did he come from heaven? Or from down below? Some people in Tivoli believe he is Orpheus because he plays the flute so well—just come to earth again. But, no: that belief is childish. Others say he is Bacchus—grown old. That his love for the Falernian wine—unquenchable even by death—drags him back to Tivoli, and like other drunkards he lingers by the vineyard. But, then, you

Fra Diavolo's Face

say, he never drinks. For answer, these believers point at his face, and say he drinks at night when the rest of us are sleeping. But that is a fairy-tale—not credible. These gods are dead and gone forever.

Parents, he has none—neither brother nor sister—not a relative in the whole of Italy. Nobody claims him, nor wants him—nor misses him; nor even knows about him.

So, what?

Morris, his elbows on the table, had been leaning forward in his effort to catch the meaning of the discourse. Now he straightened up and shook his head.

“Most remarkable. Very mysterious.”

“Lasta night I tell Mister ze Villa Claudia: ze ontaida Oosa—it. He remember?—sovvenire?”

“Yes, I remember. I know the Villa Claudia.”

“Bene! Fra Diavolo have vera like—yaze.”

“You say that he owns a villa very much like it?”

“Yaze—ze Villa Claudia—he vera likes—much.”

“You mean he likes it very much?”

“Yaze. He put evera day night what—sera.”

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Goes it." And the speaker, with lips and fingers played an imaginary flute.

"And he goes to it every day or night, and plays?"

"Yaze, night and also day—spesse volte. Butta, butta esteriore—notta in."

"Outside, yes."

"Yaze, outsida. He hava fool tummy."

"A fool tummy."

"Yaze."

"You mean he has a—a poor digestion?"

"Por di gessan? Zoze word I not. Butta peoples—soma peoples, tell his old spirito—what?—molesta zat villa—and drinka blood. Butta not—vera stolto—ridicolo."

"Yes, that is surely absurd. But how, in what way in the first place, did he turn up?"

"Ta nuppa?"

"Appear—how did he come? In what way? Who found him?"

When this question was once understood copious information followed: Signor Accoramboni returning home at two o'clock in the morning passed the temple of the Sibyl: and he heard from within the sound of a flute. He went nearer to discover who played so well and he

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saw a sight that caused the roots of his hair to tingle. For there, inside the little temple, encircled by the columns, sat a figure in the moonlight—radiant—all in white, as an angel, a prophet—or some holy spirit. Many men—many bold men—would have turned and fled—or fallen to the earth. But not the Signor Accoramboni. Being fearless, he approached the little temple and gazed upon the figure. And, lo! It was this old man—clad in a single garment.

“His night-shirt?”

“Nighta—shut, what?”

“And that was the first appearance, the very beginning of Fra Diavolo?”

“Yaze—he not befora—was. Zat hour befora—nevar.”

“He probably came from his bed—from a house somewhere in the neighborhood.”

“No! No! Giammai! Not oosa in Tivoli. Peoples know olla peoples in Tivoli. Impossibile!”

And it was emphatically explained that an official search throughout the town only deepened the mystery. No person here had ever seen him.

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This conversation had been closely followed by the fat waiter, and when the tale was finished, he hitched a shoulder, raised his eyebrows, and opened his hands, as if to say:

"Yes, wonderful, is it not?—and incredible, yet very true."

Fra Diavolo, in the meanwhile, stood gazing at nothing. But his eyes, at this point, in moving vacantly about, rested upon the sunlit wine-glass, now refilled with Marsala. He stepped forward with extended arm, again to take it. But the linguacious guide interposed a hand and gently pushed him back, away from the table.

"Does he want the wine?" Morris asked. "He can have it if he wishes."

"Ah, nevar zat! He wish again throw down. He nevar eats ze wine—drink— Ah! nevar, always nevar!"

"You say he never drinks wine—never wine of any kind?"

"No; it fright him—do him sick. Regard." And lifting the glass, with apologies to Morris, he proffered it to Fra Diavolo. Whereupon, with a look of fear in his drunken old face, Fra Diavolo held up his hands as if to avert a danger.

"He always lika zat from begin." Resting a

Fra Diavolo's Face

hand affectionately upon the old man's shoulder, he went on. "Alla peoples in Tivoli—everabodee—lova Fra Diavolo. He for notzing—inutile. Butta, he mak ze moozic, vera bene. Rich gentlemenz an' laddee givva money. Would ze signor be please him Fra Diavolo maka ze flute go—what?"

"Yes, ask him to play."

The guide raised the flute to its owner's lips, with a request in pantomime that he play upon it. And Fra Diavolo, obediently and with no change of expression, in a listless, vacant, almost unconscious manner, began to play. He played the same old air, but he did it extremely well; smoothly, and with the nicest feeling. He showed a perfect knowledge of his instrument. The guide and the little waiter watched Morris's face to see the effect. Morris had already heard this performance—the night before, at the Villa Claudia—but he expressed his pleasure. He also took a piece of silver from his pocket and held it toward the musician. The musician, however, took no notice of the offering but kept on with his playing until the guide, very gently, withdrew the instrument from his lips. In fact, the performer seemed almost unaware of the

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movement, and stood, with impassive features, looking vaguely at whatever person or object happened to attract his gaze.

But the piece of silver was taken by the guide, who dropped it into one of Fra Diavolo's pockets. "Him leetla bambino—bebe—notta great finanziere—what? Evera peoples can steal olda Diavolo."

But Fra Diavolo's flute had proclaimed his whereabouts. Two children came running into the square, crying, "Ecco! Ecco!"

Quietly, and with his usual indifference, yet always with a certain dignity, he suffered himself to be led away. And Morris saw him delivered by the children to a pleasant-faced woman who stood waiting at the corner of the street.

The guide smiled. "She promenade his dinner."

"She what?"

"She promenade—no? She walk him his dinner."

"She takes him for his dinner?"

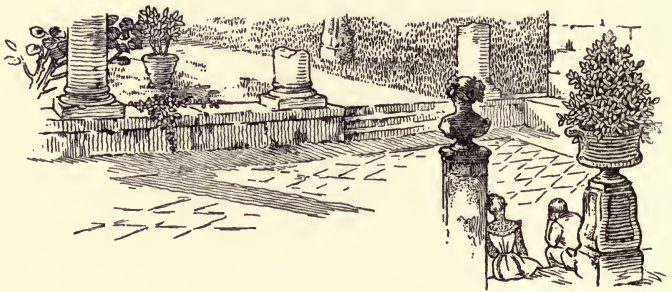
"Yaze. She good as madre. Woman tirty-fiva tak son seventee—ha!"

Then, lifting his cap and wishing Morris a long life under the protection of God, he also departed.



MÆCENAS

VII



Do you laugh at dreams, at magic terrors, prodigies, and witches,
at nightly ghosts and spells of Thessaly?

Horace.

VII

STRANGE STORIES

AT lunch that day, with Betty Farnham and her guest, sat grim Despair. There was food, but its rôle seemed unimportant.

Despite all efforts of the hostess and the best endeavors of her joyless visitor, this repast, to the end, was notable for a solemnity and constraint impervious to attack. The two young people, at intervals, gazed in silence through the windows that opened to the terrace; and they looked across the sunlit garden to the Campagna. This Campagna had appeared to Morris, in the morning, a cheerful thing. Now it was a dreary waste. According to Chateaubriand:

Une terre composée de la poussière des morts et des débris des empires.

And the round-faced guest observed, with the keenest sympathy, that since he had left the

The Villa Claudia

Villa Claudia two short hours ago a melancholy change had come in Betty Farnham's face. She was paler. Her youthful spirits had departed. Even to him, blinded as he was by his own dejection, it was plain that she had suffered, and that she was making a desperate effort to conceal it, and to entertain him. Against this effort he protested.

"I know your mother's illness alarms you, and that you would rather be with her. So please do not consider me. Let me meet Hollo-way at the station, and take him to the hotel, where we both belong."

To this she refused to listen. Her mother was out of danger. She might even be down to dinner. No, they would never forgive him if he cheated them out of his visit. He had given his word, and they should hold him to it.

Once, during a silence, their eyes met; and both smiled; and in Betty's smile there was a tenderness, almost tearful—so it seemed to Morris. And this so affected him that the color flew to his face; whereupon he was filled with shame. But she, instead of laughing at him as she had done in the morning, appeared embarrassed herself. Into her own face came a warmer color.

Strange Stories

This surprised the young man; and he wondered if she had guessed his secret. At this awful possibility he blushed again, and hotter than before. But she did not see it—at least, so he thought.

After the repast Betty went upstairs and remained with her mother for a time. And while she was away Morris sat in the drawing-room in deep—in very deep—reflection. And incidentally he strove to regret that he had entered the grounds of the Villa Claudia last night. But these efforts were futile. He was learning that certain interesting forms of sorrow are more satisfying than ordinary forms of contentment. The silence of these reflections was interrupted by a sound of footsteps on the stairs, and he supposed the doctor was coming from Madame Capodilista's chamber. The steps approached the drawing-room and a man came in. He was slight of figure, with a thin, clean-shaven face. His black hair was brushed smoothly down across his forehead, and he was dressed in black.

Morris, at first glance, thought he recognized a New England clergyman he once met in Boston, and he arose to greet him. He started to express his surprise at this coming together in the

The Villa Claudia

Villa Claudia. The stranger, however, seemed the least bit startled as this other man suddenly issued from a corner, and when he apologized in Italian for his intrusion Morris realized his own mistake. He also muttered words of apology, but in English; then the man in black bowed deferentially, took a letter from a desk, and departed. Again Morris heard his footsteps on the stairs, and he wondered who he was. Certainly he was no New England clergyman—and his general bearing was not that of a doctor.

Betty came down at last, and she and Morris went out into the garden. Down a side path, by the southerly wall, she took him, to the ruins of an ancient structure where still remained the fragments of six Ionic columns. The original floor, in marbles of different colors, was two or three feet below the level of the garden.

Morris studied this with a lively interest. "What is it—the remains of an ancient villa?"

"No, a little temple. Signor Capodilista, my stepfather, unearthed it. That head of Bacchus with the wreath of grapes he found just here, in the centre of this floor."

Morris studied the head. "Was it part of a statue?"

Strange Stories

"Yes, there was a body to fit it, originally, but only a few pieces were found."

"What fun he must have had, Mr. Capodilista! And what a garden to dig in!"

"Yes, he was tremendously interested. He found lots of things."

"And that," said Morris, pointing to a marble fragment against the wall, "is the inscription you told me about this morning. The record of the feast in which Horace and Mæcenas figured."

"Yes, that is it."

"Too bad those little drunken Cupids are broken. It must have been a portion of the frieze."

"No, both Signor Capodilista and Santovano thought it was inside the temple—a fragment of a slab that concealed a hiding place, or something of that sort."

"Then your stepfather took an interest in these things?"

"Oh, yes! He was an enthusiast." After a pause she added, "He died only a year ago. And his death was very mysterious."

"Mysterious?"

Her head moved solemnly up and down. "Yes, very, *very* mysterious. There is some-

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thing evil about this house—about one chamber in it, at least, that nobody can explain.”

“That must be what the guide was trying to tell me last night.”

“Very likely.”

“I am afraid I offended your mother in alluding to it.”

“That was no fault of yours. Mamma is terribly sensitive about such gossip. You see, she is rather superstitious, though she hates to admit it: and this villa had begun to have a peculiar reputation before we came here. But nobody ever told us. Signor Capodilista’s unexplainable death just upset poor mamma completely.”

“In what way was it unexplainable?”

They had stepped down upon the floor of the little temple, and Betty seated herself between two of the columns. Morris took a place at her side.

“It was unexplainable in every way: and *worse* than unexplainable. It was really so sudden and so extraordinary as to start afresh all the horrid stories of the room being haunted.”

“Was he murdered?”

“Oh, no! There were no signs of violence of any kind. Nobody had entered the room.”

Strange Stories

“A post-mortem examination might have solved the mystery.”

“There was a post-mortem examination, but it revealed nothing. The doctors said they had never met with such conditions.”

“He was found dead in the morning?”

“Yes.”

“Well,” said Morris, inclining his head to one side, and raising his eyebrows, “it is not for me to doubt those doctors, but for every death there is a cause. And when the doctors fail to find it, they generally attribute it to heart failure. That fits all cases, and is a safe solution.”

“They said nothing about heart failure.”

“Was nothing whatever discovered by the post-mortem—no apparent cause for his death?”

“Oh, yes—in a way. They found a most unnatural change: a sort of general decay, and a wasting away of all his tissues. They could only attribute his death to some sort of exhaustion—or a sudden and unaccountable extinction of vitality—a thing unknown in their experience.”

“That did explain his death, however.”

“But it satisfied nobody, not even the doctors. For Signor Capodilista was a man of exceptional

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health and vigor, and was in perfect health a few hours before. It only added to the mystery, in fact. It merely made clear that he had suddenly died from some shock, or other cause that the medical men could not discover.”

Morris saw that the little person beside him was much in earnest, and seriously disturbed. Although convinced, himself, that the doctors were the ones at fault, he meant to respect her belief, whatever it might be.

“To agree with the haunted-house theory, you should have found a look of terror in his face, or some indication of a shock.”

“On the contrary, his expression was most happy and contented. So much so that it startled us. We could not believe him dead.”

“Well, that is unusual,” murmured the youth. After a silence he said, “But why do you call it ‘worse than unexplainable’? It seems to me an ideal death.”

“Yes, one would think so: but if you had seen his face you would understand me better. I cannot describe its expression. It was quite a different face from the one we had known in life. For, in life, it was full of strength and character, while in death it was weak and almost foolish.”

Strange Stories

“Really?” and Morris turned toward her in surprise.

Betty inclined her head.

“That is most extraordinary,” he said. “Even the weakest face takes on a certain solemnity in death.”

“Yes, and it was all the more unnatural for that reason.”

During the silence that followed, Morris’s eyes moved slowly over the ruins of the little temple, then across the radiant garden, toward the portion of the Villa Claudia that was visible between the intervening masses of shrubbery. Its walls of glistening marble and its delightful carving were now, in the afternoon sunlight, a delicate shade of pink, all in exquisite harmony with the luxuriant masses of crimson, white and purple flowers.

“It seems unfair,” he said, “that such an event should injure the house itself. It might occur anywhere.”

“But that chamber had already a bad name—as a place to be avoided. According to the natives, the room was haunted. They say a curse is on it.”

“What started such an idea?”

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"Something horrid had happened there. Nobody knows exactly how. But the people of Tivoli tell tales of ghosts and evil spirits." And the little lady shrugged her shoulders contemptuously, as she said, "There are people in town—and very intelligent people, too—who insist upon it that they have seen, at midnight, a bloody hand at the windows of that chamber. Others have seen a flickering light—always at midnight, of course—with a white figure moving to and fro."

"I suppose no tale is too big for an Italian peasant, if it is really interesting, and once gets a hold on him."

"They believe anything. Why, one old servant we had here insisted on hanging a broom at the window to keep away witches. And they all believe in the *lupo-manaro*, a sort of supernatural wolf that comes on rainy nights."

Morris smiled and shook his head. "We are unpicturesque in America, and commonplace, so we don't allow ghosts to affect the price of real estate. But did the villa have this reputation before your stepfather's death?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Then why did your mother buy it?"

Strange Stories

"We never heard the stories until we had bought the house and were living in it."

"Well," said Morris, "I don't see why those old yarns need worry you much. There is probably nothing behind them."

"But there *is* something behind them."

Morris looked incredulous.

"Indeed, there is!" said Betty. "The death of the last owner, for instance, Alessandro di Forli."

"Did he die in the same room?"

"He went to bed in that chamber and he was never seen afterward."

"Never seen at all, either dead or alive, by anybody?"

"Never seen at all, nor even heard from: nor has there been any trace of him."

"Well, that *is* interesting."

"That chamber," said Betty, "had a bad name even then, and he knew it. But the house was full of guests and all the other beds taken, so Signor di Forli went in there to sleep. His servant bade him good-night and left him alone. Since that moment no trace of him has been discovered."

The puzzled expression on Morris's face

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gradually faded into a smile. "Well," he said, "that was mighty clever."

"Clever!"

"It was a successful disappearance, wasn't it?"

"It was certainly complete."

"When those things happen in America," said Morris, "we look for the woman in the case, or for a shortage in his accounts,—or for both. They often come together."

But Betty shook her head. "Not in this case. Signor di Forli was quite rich and out of business. And he left his affairs in excellent order. He had everything to live for—health, wealth, a host of friends—everything. And he was betrothed to a charming girl with whom he was thoroughly in love."

"Then it *is* a puzzle. Did he own the Villa Claudia?"

"Yes, we bought it of his heirs."

"Perhaps he was spirited away by brigands."

"Brigands! Here in Tivoli?"

Morris smiled. "I supposed you had everything that was picturesque here in Tivoli. But was nothing missing in the way of money or jewels, or valuables of any kind?"

"No, nothing went: not even his clothes."

Strange Stories

“Why!” exclaimed Morris, brightening up with a sudden thought, “you say he departed in his night-clothes?”

“Well—that is—all his other clothes were found in his room the next morning.”

And the girl experienced a mild amazement at finding herself conversing with a young man about these nocturnal habiliments:—and without a shock!

But Morris was absorbed in the excitement of an important discovery. “Did you know this man—this Signor di Forli?”

“Oh, yes. He had visited here.”

“Was he musical?”

“Yes, like many other Italians.”

“Did he play the flute?”

“I think so, and one or two other instruments. And he sang.”

“How long ago did he disappear?”

“About two years ago.”

“And when did Fra Diavolo appear?”

“About the same time.”

“Then,” said Morris, straightening up, “why should not your friend di Forli and Fra Diavolo be the same person?”

As he asked this question their eyes met. But

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Betty smiled, and shook her head. "Because Signor di Forli was a young man of twenty-six, while Fra Diavolo was over seventy."

"Oh," said Morris. "I didn't know this other man was so young." And then, from sympathy with his own discomfiture, his cheeks grew warmer. But the girl beside him was very merciful now, and she looked off into the garden as if nobody in her vicinity was changing color.

A silence followed. Morris, bending forward, his chin in his hand, gazed mournfully upon the ancient marbles at his feet. The little woman at his side, her head against the wall, was watching him askance, with half-closed, melancholy eyes.

It was she, at last, who broke the silence by a smothered exclamation. And it seemed to her companion that in her tone there was less of pleasure than surprise as she murmured:

"Why, there is Santovano! He must have come by the early train."



VIII



Quaff with the gods immortal wine.

Horace.

VIII

TWO LOVERS

MORRIS raised his eyes. Among the dazzling colors of the garden moved a gentleman of patrician aspect. He was apparelled in the style of Rome, not of England or America : for between English and Italian standards of men's attire a wide gulf exists. His high silk hat, of a pattern unfamiliar to Morris, his black coat, his pearl-gray trousers, his collar, his cravat, his lavender gloves and the cut of his hair were distinctly Italian.

Of medium height, erect and of graceful figure, he walked with easy confidence—the sort of confidence that showed an unaffected but wholesome gratification in being the very person that he was. At Betty's call he turned; then raised his hat and came toward them.

So this was Santovano! the presumptuous, interloping, superior, beloved, inexpressibly for-

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tunate and—by the American—thoroughly detested and many times accursed Santovano. Morris studied the approaching figure with melancholy interest, as he would have studied the approach of War, Pestilence and Famine.

The features of the accepted lover were good; his forehead wide, square and full, his hair dark. With the exception of a mustache that turned upward at the ends, his face was clean-shaven. There was nothing in his countenance to attract special notice, except, perhaps, his nose, which was large for Northern climes but not out of scale in Italy. It was pleasantly Roman. His dark eyes, his firm mouth and chin signified nothing unusual. But the whole *ensemble*—his carriage, his easy bearing and perfect self-possession—proclaimed him a “man of the world.” He also gave the impression of being a man of leisure. This impression was correct. Giulio di Lunigiani di Santovano had never been a victim of overwork: nor was he the victim of any such aspirations.

If the presence of Morris Lane—or the fact of his fiancée being alone with a man in this secluded corner—caused him any surprise, it was well concealed. As he stepped down upon

Two Lovers

the ancient pavement he held his hat by his side and bowed with a graceful dignity to the two people before him. Then, taking the lady's extended hand, he raised it toward his lips. But the hand was suddenly withdrawn. Santovano, as he straightened up, regarded its owner in a mild amazement. It was of short duration, however. Turning toward Morris, he favored that young man with a ceremonious bow. All of which, while simply done, reminded the American of similar performances he had seen upon the stage. Morris acknowledged this bow with one of his own—the perfunctory bow of New England, seemingly the outward manifestation of inward hostility; stiff and cold in itself, and further frosted by an hereditary and invincible self-consciousness—that cruel legacy of the Puritan. It is only fair to Morris, however, to state that the animosity of this ceremonial was tempered by the kindliness and good-nature which seemed to radiate from his boyish face. And these Heaven-born attributes, even at this trying moment, were not wholly submerged.

Betty presented the two gentlemen. “This is Morris Lane, Santovano,—an old friend of my childhood. He has just come from America.

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And America produces the very best of everything—in the way of men.”

Santovano smiled. And Morris noticed with regret that the smile rendered his face far more attractive than in repose. It was not only friendly and sympathetic, but it was most becoming to the owner. It gave to his countenance a most unusual charm as he replied, in perfect English:

“To be a product of the same country as the Signorina Farnham is an enviable distinction. Mr. Lane has my heartiest congratulations.”

Whereupon Morris discovered—also with regret—that Santovano’s voice had a peculiar fascination. It was rather deep and of a singular mellowness of tone: and so musical in quality, so impressive in its strength and calmness, so very gentle and so melodiously sympathetic as to create a belief in some hidden saintliness of character. Moreover, Santovano managed this heavenly gift with exquisite skill. Habitually, it was low in tone, persuasive, of a quality to disarm all possible antagonism and to win your confidence. There was even a tear in it when necessary. Or, if desired, it gained in force and commanded attention; or became thrilling in its

Two Lovers

dramatic intensity. And it was never overdone. All his words were pronounced with clearness and precision, and with a seductive modulation.

Morris exclaimed, impulsively:

“How well you speak English, sir!”

Santovano acknowledged this compliment with another graceful inclination. “You are very kind to say so, Mr. Lane.”

“Why shouldn’t he!” said Betty. “He had an English nurse when he was a child. But that makes no difference. He would have learned it anyway. He speaks every language in the world.”

“Oh, Signorina!” he protested, holding up a hand. “What are you saying? Do not willingly deceive your friend.”

“Well, how many languages is it?”

“Only a few.”

“Only a few!” and she turned toward Morris. “He calls a dozen a few.”

“No, no!” said Santovano. “Not a dozen!”

Whereupon the lady began counting upon her fingers. “You speak Latin, to begin with; and Italian, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian——”

“No, not Russian.”

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"But you read Russian: you know all those horrid letters."

"Yes, but I do not speak it."

"You speak French," she went on, "and German—three or four kinds of German—Turkish, Greek——"

"Oh, I beg, I beg!" he interrupted. "Please go no further! Mr. Lane will detest me for a prig. And, besides, some of those languages I speak very imperfectly."

"On the contrary, he speaks them all exceedingly well," she insisted, always addressing Morris. "But he deserves no credit. They came to him of their own accord. He breathes them in as you and I breathe air. Why, if you should whisk him through China in a fast express, with the windows closed, he would catch the language."

Santovano's eyebrows, and his shoulders, were elevated in mild denial. Betty leaned back and frowned. In another instant, however, and to Morris's surprise, she went on in a nervous, somewhat excited manner, and with a show of irritation very different from her good-natured gaiety of the morning:

"But, after all, why shouldn't he talk in every

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language? He has never had anything else to do."

For a short moment there was an awkward pause, but she hurried on, with a note of scorn in her voice. "And as for the Latin, why, he inherited that. He is descended, you know, from all the Roman Emperors. But they are incidental—merely blots on the Santovano escutcheon—the stain of the parvenus. The Santovanos were the leading family in Præneste. And Præneste, you know, was founded by a son of Vulcan, and became a mighty city before Romulus started on his travels."

Morris saw that the accepted lover was taken aback. But he seemed more surprised than annoyed. A perceptible flush, however, came slowly into his face. But he was not a man to be discomfited by trifles. With a pleasant smile, he asked Morris how long he had been in Italy.

"About a month."

"I hope you find it interesting."

"Indeed, I do! Even more interesting than I expected—and I expected the utmost."

"Have you been to Horace's farm?"

"Not yet."

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"You might find it worth while, especially if you happen to be a reader of Horace."

"Oh, yes, a persistent reader! I know every line he wrote about that farm. He had much fun with it."

"In spite of the last lines in the 'Invitation to Mæcenas':

'Compulsory virtue is the charm
Of life upon the Sabine Farm.'"

"So you, too, are an admirer?"

"Yes, indeed." And Santovano took from his pocket a little volume of the poet. "I read him in the cars."

"The Latin comes more naturally to you Italians than to us. We seldom master it without a painful effort."

"The Latin itself may come to us more easily, but you Anglo-Saxons seem to be his best friends. In fact, the peasants hereabouts think Horace was an Englishman—so many of them worship at his shrine."

"We go there to-morrow."

"You say we?" and he looked inquiringly at Betty. "Some friend goes with you?"

"Yes, a friend of mine who comes this afternoon." And Morris looked at his watch.

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"Must you go to the station for Mr. Hollowell?" Betty asked.

"No; I telegraphed him how to find the Villa Claudia, as he could not say which train he would take."

"Mr. Hollowell is an American?" inquired Santovano.

"No such luck for him!" said Betty. "He's an Englishman."

"Hollowell is not a common name," said Santovano. "I knew a Mr. Lydon Hollowell once."

"That is my friend's name," said Morris. "Was he rather stout, with a reddish face: very jolly and full of fun?"

Santovano with an affirmative nod acknowledged the accuracy of this description as applied to his own Lydon Hollowell. But Morris noticed an involuntary but quickly suppressed look of annoyance on the Italian's face. And he wondered, at the moment, how anybody could possibly object to Hollowell.

"This is a very little world," said Betty, "that you and Santovano should have a mutual friend. Perhaps Mr. Hollowell is the happy medium that unites the two extremes."

"Extremes of what?" said Morris, with a

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smile. "Extremes of vice and virtue, or ignorance and wisdom? It is bound to be hard on one of us."

"That question," said Santovano, "I pray, for my own sake, she may not answer. I am clearly in disgrace to-day."

The little lady frowned, looked down and tapped her foot upon the ancient pavement; but she made no reply.

"It is some years since I have seen Mr. Hollowell," said Santovano. "He may have forgotten me. He studied architecture, as I remember. But you will both enjoy Horace's farm, although there is really not much of the villa left."

"It is something of a sentimental journey. We are both lovers of the poet."

"So am I." Santovano stepped toward the drunken Cupids. "Did you happen to notice this tablet?"

"Now, Morris, you are in for it!" Betty exclaimed. "He will talk to you by the day or week if you once get him on archæology—and that slab in particular."

Morris laughed. "Well, I am ready to listen by the week or by the year. For I, also, am an enthusiast—a crank, or whatever you call us."

Two Lovers

“Well, you will find all human knowledge in Santovano.”

That gentleman shook his head. “As the Signorina is pleased to be ironical, you can easily divine my ignorance.”

“Not at all!” she exclaimed. “I am serious. The extent of your learning is almost offensive.”

Santovano smiled. “Now we are nearer the truth, I fear—except as to the learning. But one of your English poets says—John Selden, I think:

‘No man is the wiser for his learning : wit and wisdom are born with a man.’

Which, in my melancholy case, merely proves that it requires neither wit nor wisdom to become offensive.”

The Signorina made no reply. She merely looked away, with cold indifference. Morris, as he turned with Santovano toward the ancient inscription, wondered at woman’s ways. Why try so hard to conceal all affection for the man she had chosen to marry? But he could not help seeing that her words and her contemptuous manner were clearly a surprise to Santovano. However, that gentleman merely smiled politely; then,

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with a slight movement of the hands and eyebrows which seemed to say, "We must pardon everything," he gave his attention to the slab.

"The discovery of this marble, with its legend, created a lively interest. Its meaning we cannot decipher. It hints at the existence of something hereabouts that is yet undiscovered."

"Does not the inscription say what it is?" and Morris easily deciphered several of the words.

"It did say, once. Unfortunately the critical letters are among the few that are missing. There was a supplementary slab, but the words upon it were obliterated. The papyrus scroll was the thing that would have——"

"Oh, begin at the beginning," said Betty, "and lead up to the scroll. I know Morris would be interested."

"Indeed, I would! Unless, of course, it bores you."

Santovano smiled. "It is you, not I, who run that risk. For the Signorina Betty tells the simple truth when she says that I can talk of it by the day or week. However, if you go to sleep or walk away, no offence will be taken."

"Have no fears. I am good for a week, at least." And approaching the shattered inscrip-

Two Lovers

tion, Morris passed his hand along the drunken cupids, as if hoping the silent marble might answer to his touch. For it pleased him to imagine that between these infant revellers with their elusive legend and the fateful record of the Villa Claudia some bond existed.

Centuries of oblivion had brought to these marble children a warmth and mellowness of tone that suggested living flesh. And now the western sun gave deeper shadows and a yet rosier glow. Surely, had they intention ever to divulge their secret the time was ripe. During twenty centuries they had kept it well.

Two thousand years! And these boys to-day seemed as plump and young and drunk as when they started on their long career.



— Which stored in Grecian jar
By my own hand sealed.

Horace.



IX

IX

A TALE OF DISCOVERY

IN his calm, well-modulated voice, Santovano began:

“Before Signor Capodilista purchased this villa, it belonged to a friend of mine, Alessandro di Forli.”

“I have told Morris all about Signor di Forli,” said Betty, “also about the haunted room, and what has happened there. So you can go right on.”

Santovano acknowledged this information with a courteous inclination of the head, and continued: “I was visiting Signor di Forli about two years ago. The last morning of my visit, as we stepped out upon the terrace, his gardener told him a suitable stone had been found to replace some broken paving in the courtyard. He described it as a solid piece of marble but very old and discolored. He had just found it in digging a hole for transplanting a tree. So we

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came down into the garden to see it—here, on this spot. But at that time the level of the earth was two or three feet higher than the rest of the garden.

“He showed us the slab of marble, resting against the wall, just below where it is at present. It had, as he said, an even surface and seemed good enough for the purpose; that is, to patch the paving in the courtyard. So di Forli gave instructions to have it set in place. Then, as we were turning away, the mason happened to remark that the marble was very much thicker in some places than in others, and he must either chisel it down or dig out the concrete foundation to set it properly. This seemed an excuse for making a longer job of it, so di Forli took a look at the back side of the slab. You can imagine our surprise at seeing those two children.”

“Indeed, I can!”

“We were both quite excited over it.”

“I should think so!” And Morris, his round face all aglow with the keenest interest, turned to Betty and exclaimed, “We don’t unearth such things in New England, do we?”

“No. Those drunken Cupids and the Puritans could never have lived together.”

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The frown had left her face as Morris spoke, and her eyes met his with a sad but somewhat tender smile. This smile was so unlike her previous severity as to bring to her woeful compatriot an added pang. For, if she treated those she loved as she had just been treating her fiancé, and if frowns and snubs were reliable signs of her serious attachment; and if, consequently, kindness meant indifference, then he, Morris, was indeed unfortunate! And so the little lady's tender look he acknowledged with a perfunctory, joyless smile, which ended in a frown—and a mortifying blush. But the blush, thank heaven! was not seen by the Italian.

Santovano, unconscious of this silent drama, went on with his tale. "We lost no time in turning the marble about. Then we washed it off. We knew at once it was only a fragment, and that the other pieces were lying, probably, at the bottom of the same hole. To the great disgust of the gardener—the same old fellow that is here now—we had the newly planted tree uprooted. Then we began to dig."

"Why wasn't I here?" exclaimed Morris. "How I would have dug!"

"It is not too late now," said Betty. "Come

A Tale of Discovery

and be our gardener. You shall have the whole place to dig in. There are lots of good things left."

"Yes," said Santovano, "but not of such peculiar interest as this, I fear. However, there is no telling, here in Tivoli, what a spade may divulge. You already know, perhaps, that in excavating ancient villas hereabouts we dig down, as a rule, through three strata. So we first laid aside the upper layer of earth, formed by the decay, through the ages, of the ruins themselves; of trees and vegetable matter generally, of soil and dust deposited by wind and other agencies. In this upper stratum we expected nothing, and we found nothing. Then we came to the middle stratum. This consisted, as usual, of bricks and plaster, of blocks of stone, cement, and fragments of marble. Here we found bits of exquisite carving, but nothing of special value. We went slowly, however, and very carefully, for we saw, from the style of the fragments of colored marbles and from pieces of moulding and elaborately carved capitals, that we were in the ruins of a villa or temple of exceptional elegance. The first obstacle unearthed was a heavy fragment of one of these columns, of Greek marble, lying

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as it had fallen, centuries ago. It took us half a day to get it out. We had to have horses and a derrick. It was that one over there—the tall one.”

Morris turned and looked, his face aglow with enthusiasm.

“Just beneath the column,” Santovano continued, “we came to the lowest stratum, the one lying directly upon this marble pavement we are standing on. This stratum was, as is usually the case, made up of tiles and roofing materials; for the roof, in these ancient buildings, was always the first thing to fall. But we noticed, with some interest, that between this lower stratum and the one above it lay a bed of vegetable soil, showing the roof must have fallen a very long time—centuries perhaps—before the columns and the side walls came down. And there, just beneath the column, jammed down into the lowest layer of all, we found the other fragments of the tablet.”

“Too bad!” And Morris looked sadly at the shattered pieces.

“But the real excitement,” said Betty, “is yet to come. Go on, Giulio.”

Santovano obeyed. “The tablet had been im-

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bedded in the wall, just in front of that recess you see beneath it."

And Santovano pointed to a horizontal cavity in the wall below the tablet. This cavity was about four feet long, two and one-half feet high, and not more than two feet in depth. At present it was empty.

"The marble slab," said Santovano, "was evidently placed there to conceal the recess, but the column in falling had knocked it out of place and smashed it. The cavity was filled with the dirt and dust that had been drifting into it for centuries. But, as good luck would have it, the column happened to lie just in front of the opening, completely hiding it. Otherwise the place would have been rifled long ago. When the column was out of the way, di Forli and I got down upon our knees. Then, with our fingers, we removed—and very carefully—the dust and earth that filled the recess. We had hardly begun, however, when I uncovered the top of an amphora—a sort of vase-like jug for holding wine. You know them, perhaps."

"Yes, I know them."

"It was covered with a coating of pitch, originally, to keep the air out; but now all thickly

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encrusted with dust and dirt. A material that looked like lime, or cement, had settled upon it. We soon found there were three amphoræ originally, but of the other two only fragments were left. Also, we picked up, among the bits of broken pottery, three gold coins of the time of Augustus."

"Placed there and forgotten, perhaps."

"No. Di Forli and I—and others—think they were put there for luck—one for each amphora: a custom still observed, sometimes, here in Italy."

"And in America, too," said Morris. "But what did you find in the unbroken jar?"

"It was not opened—that is, not to my knowledge. I don't know what di Forli did with it."

"Gracious!" exclaimed the American. "I should think you would hunt it up! It may contain some precious secret—some treasure—some document or bit of history; the ashes of Horace himself, perhaps. Who knows?"

"Nothing of such interest, I fear. The other two—the broken ones—held wine originally. You can still see the stains upon the stone. They were filled as an offering to the gods, probably, or as part of a ceremony. The one that was

A Tale of Discovery

whole may also have contained wine. But any liquid would have dried up, or evaporated some hundreds of years ago."

"How long had the jar been there?"

Santovano laid a finger on the slab. "There is the date—736 A. U. C., that was eighteen years before Christ. Just nineteen hundred and twenty-one years ago."



Be wise; filter your wines, and abridge your hopes to
the shortness of your life.

Horace.



X

FORGOTTEN THINGS.

DURING the silence that followed Morris again stepped forward and examined the tablet. "Some interesting events have taken place between the hiding of that vase and your bringing it to light again."

"Yes. The Rome of Horace and Mæcenas has crumbled and faded away. Even its language is dead."

"And it's hard to realize," said Morris, turning toward the west, "how different the Campagna looked to Horace and Mæcenas as they stood upon this very spot. In those days, a panorama of villas and fertile farms."

"Now," said Betty, "a malarial waste."

Santovano heaved a sigh. "Even the sites of its cities forgotten. And this poor old town—this Tibur that Horace loved, where the wealthy Roman came for his summer pleasure—look at

Forgotten Things

it now! Its temples and splendid villas first looted by the barbarian, then scattered in the dust—and at last forgotten. Its thousands of priceless statues burned by the natives in mediæval lime-kilns. And for a crowning insolence, as if to wipe even its memory from the earth, its very name was changed.”

“When did that occur, by the way, that change of name, from Tibur to Tivoli?”

“In the eighth century.”

“And seven hundred years after that,” said Betty, “came the most important thing of all.”

Both men turned toward her. “And what was that, Signorina?”

“The discovery of a new continent in the west.”

“Do you mention that as one more calamity?” Morris inquired.

“Indeed, I do not!”

“Well, you know, Betty, it has been said that the mission of America is to vulgarize the world.”

“Morris Lane! How can you say such a thing? And you an American!”

“It’s no statement of mine. I only repeat the scandal.”

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"That's just as bad! I am ashamed of you, Morris!"

"The Signorina forgets," said Santovano, with a grave salutation, "that America—like any flower when deprived of the light of the sun for fourteen years, or more—may lose its charm."

"That is just what has happened!" said Morris.

But the lady herself drew back with a frown. Santovano did not conceal his surprise at this reception of his words. There was an awkward silence, but Morris came to the rescue.

"I should like to see that jar."

Santovano looked inquiringly at Betty. "Do you know where it is?"

"No, I have never seen it."

"Well, really, I am ashamed to say I have no idea myself where it is. Somewhere about the house, I suppose. Poor di Forli's tragic disappearance that very night drove it out of my mind."

"Why not hunt it up, just from curiosity? There might be an inscription on it."

"I am glad you spoke of it." Then, turning to Betty, "It may be in the cellar or in that store-

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room upstairs, with all those fragments of statues.”

“What color was it?”

“A reddish brown, with very dark patches—a sort of grimy terra-cotta, almost black in places. We might look for it to-morrow.”

“Yes, let’s do it,” said Morris. “Even dregs of wine, if put up by Horace, are entitled to respect.”

And then, as he recalled the many mysteries in which the place abounded, he added, “And who knows but it may contain the evil spirit that haunts the Villa Claudia.”

Santovano smiled. “No; it is too tightly corked. The spook could never get out. Besides, the bedevilment of the Villa Claudia is of a different nature.”

“Of what nature?”

The Italian raised his eyebrows, and with a slight movement of his hands and shoulders replied:

“Ah, that! If we only knew, we could find the cure—perhaps.”

“But you have a suspicion?”

“Not the slightest. We only know that it’s a wide-awake and enterprising curse.”

The Villa Claudia

"O Giulio!" Betty exclaimed, "don't speak in that way! It's too serious to joke about."

"I am not joking about it, my dear. I merely wished to say that this curse, or evil spirit, or combination of circumstances—or whatever we choose to call it—is too healthy and able-bodied to slumber peacefully in an empty wine-jug. But there is one consolation. Its baleful deeds are confined to a single room."

"Where is that room—in what part of the house?"

Santovano pointed to the drunken cupids. "Just behind that wall."

But all this, to Betty, was a disagreeable subject:

"When you hear about the scroll, Morris, you will be still more eager to see the jar. Go ahead, Santovano, and tell him."

Santovano went on. "Well, as we were scraping away, with our fingers, the very last of the dust and dirt that filled the niche, we found, beside the fragments of the broken jars, a papyrus scroll."

"Rolled up, or flat?"

"Flat—rolled up, originally, but the cord had rotted."

Forgotten Things

“Was it the usual Roman size—of an ordinary book with several leaves?”

“Yes, and the usual stick at the back to roll it on. We found it, as I say, and picked it up; and then we stood out here in the sunlight and committed the stupidest, most criminal act of our lives—or of any other lives; a thing to be atoned in blood and ashes—in everlasting purgatory.”

“Did you throw it away?”

“Worse than that, for we might have found it again.”

“Murder your companions in a struggle for the treasure?”

“Worse still; oh, infinitely worse! We opened the book, in our excitement, out here in the sunlight, and began to decipher it.”

“That seems an intelligent crime.”

But Santovano shook his head. “We can only guess—and nobody can ever know—the price of that folly. Di Forli believed—and I believe—that we held in our hands an unpublished poem of Horace, in his own handwriting.”

“Really!” And Morris’s round, boyish face became radiant with enthusiasm.

“We were sure of it. His name was there,

The Villa Claudia

on the first page—as it is also on the tablet. And the one verse we read, as we stood there together, was in exquisite Latin.”

“But what happened? Did you lose it—was it stolen before you read it?”

“No, we read the verse. There was but one. The other pages, only five or six in all, seemed given to some directions about the preservation of something or other. We barely glanced at them. But di Forli read the verse—more than once—and committed it to memory.”

“But wherein was your folly?”

“In not taking the book into the house at once and copying off the text. When we opened it again, an hour later, the pages were blank. Exposure to the air after twenty centuries of darkness must have wrought some chemical change in the ink. All the letters had faded away.”

“Oh! Completely disappeared?”

“Completely.”

“That’s awful.” And Morris closed his eyes in sorrow. He turned to Betty as he opened them, to see if she, also, was horror-stricken at the realization of this unspeakable calamity. But that melancholy maiden, who was somewhat

Forgotten Things

behind the two men, and leaning forward with her chin in her hand, gazing solemnly at Morris, seemed embarrassed by this sudden attention. The color came to her cheeks. For it so happened that she was thinking, at that instant, of her compatriot's peculiar little laugh—the half-suppressed boyish chuckle that recalled so vividly her childhood—and she realized that this sound had not been heard since she mentioned Santovano, some hours ago.

She smiled pleasantly—even tenderly—and straightened up; and she nodded in an absent way, as if a little more or less of Horace was immaterial. Other things, indeed, came nearer home just then! Absorbed and tortured by a matter of terrifying import, she knew she had reached a crisis in her life—and was helpless.

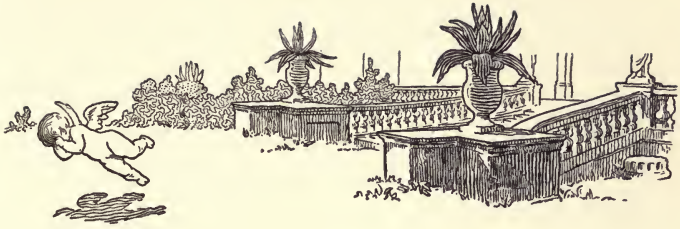
But she could not discuss it with these two gentlemen.

Heaven forbid!



If, as Mimnermus thinks, there's nought enjoyable unless with
love and mirth, then spend your years in love and mirth.

Horace.



XI



XI

MR. HOLLOWELL

SANTOVANO, happily ignorant of his fiancée's reflections, stood in silence for a moment, gazing thoughtfully upon the bibulous cupids.

"But I am very sure," he said at last, "that di Forli could repeat the verse. There were only six or eight lines."

"Then it's not lost, after all."

"Alas, yes! I was called to Rome the same day, and that very night poor di Forli disappeared."

"And Betty tells me," said Morris, "that nobody has seen him since."

"No, nor heard of him."

"Then it was the very night of your discovery that he vanished?"

"Yes, that very night."

"Could there be any connection between your adventure and his disappearance?"

"In what way?"

Mr. Hollowell

"Oh, I have no idea!" said Morris. "I merely suggested it, as both events were so remarkable—and so very close together."

"We have never connected them in any way."

The idea, however, seemed lodged in Morris's mind. "Perhaps," he added, "di Forli took the jar with him."

The Italian raised his eyebrows slightly and looked at Betty, who exclaimed, "Why, that might be!"

Santovano shrugged his shoulders. "It is possible, of course; that is, if nothing is impossible. But I cannot imagine how an empty jar could accomplish just such a miracle—the removal of a human being from the face of the earth—annihilate him, as it were, and leave no trace behind. And if the jar held treasure it was his already. He owned the property."

"Did the scroll go too?" Morris asked.

"No, the scroll is in the house. I will show it to you. But we are not sure that the jar is gone. It was never hunted up, that's all."

"Well," said Morris, "you are terribly blasé over here—to forget such a find as that. Why, it may have been placed there by Horace himself."

The Villa Claudia

"I think it was."

"And now lying in some rubbish-heap!"

"No, not quite so bad as that. It was merely overlooked in the excitement and confusion of di Forli's disappearance. Besides, you know, those amorphæ are not uncommon."

The conversation, at this point, suffered an interruption. Anita brought a card to Betty, and that little lady, after glancing at it, said a word or two in Italian and the servant departed. In reply to an inquiring look from Morris, Betty smiled and nodded.

"Yes, it is Mr. Hollowell."

And when Mr. Hollowell appeared, a few moments later, he proved the accuracy of his friend's brief description: "rather stout, with a reddish face; very jolly and full of fun." Such, in fact, he was. But that graphic summary failed to do him justice. In person he was somewhat peculiar. A mass of hair, not quite red and almost curly, covered a large but well-shaped head. Of neck there was none to speak of, as his head seemed to begin at his shoulders. Yet he was almost handsome. What gave his somewhat heavy face its claim to beauty was an expression of irresistible good-humor and of reckless jollity.

Mr. Hollowell

There were, to be sure, certain indications of a liberal indulgence in the good things of life, but they formed a comfortable harmony with his cheerful eyes, the pleasant lines about his mouth, and his ruddy complexion. One dominating feature in this gentleman's make-up was an extraordinary capacity—or genius—for snatching from all the details of life, and from each passing moment, every particle of pleasure they could possibly yield. Moreover, after the briefest period of his society, you felt you had known him from childhood—that is, if he liked you.

And he liked Betty Farnham.

While his greeting to Santovano was that of one old acquaintance to another, the formal handshake gave evidence of a conventional duty rather than an unexpected pleasure.

“Show me the door, Miss Farnham, if I am in the way,” he said, “and I shall bear no resentment. This is all Morris's doing, not mine, you know. These Americans—only the men, of course—are fearful pushers.”

“You are doubly welcome,” replied the lady, “not only as a friend of his, but also from the character he gave you.”

The Villa Claudia

"Oh, then I am undone—if he told the truth!"

"Are you so very bad?"

"Unspeakably bad! I am a man of leisure, a butterfly, a philosopher—all that's bad."

"And a drone," said Morris.

"Yes. I forgot that."

"And this lady despises drones," added Morris.

"Oh!"

"And she has a special contempt for all your pet opinions."

"Why, Morris! What do you mean?" she demanded.

"I was thinking of our conversation this morning. Hollowell goes further yet in preferring a life that is short and sweet."

"Oh, surely!" said Mr. Hollowell. "Let it be concise and delectable. I don't care how short you make it, so long as I get my measure of delight. Better one day of concentrated joy than seventy years of dilution."

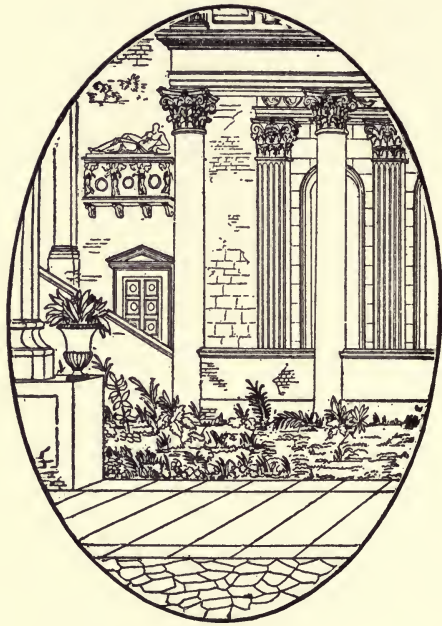
"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed Betty.

"Oh, yes, yes!" laughed Mr. Hollowell. "Indeed, yes! What is lovelier than love? What more uplifting than wine? What is duller

Mr. Hollowell

than temperance, or more stupid than woe? Why, Miss Farnham, this world will never be a cheerful place until poverty and sickness and work and worry are treated as crimes—and punished with death. Then—ah, then!—shall we all be happy—and good!”

Betty, with an exclamation of horror, threw up her hands, and then followed a conversation long remembered by two of the four persons present. Its significance was prophetic. The finger of Fate, it seemed, had already marked its victims.



Pauperis imunda domus procul absit.

Horace.



XII

XII

PROPHETIC

SANTOVANO turned toward Morris. "Our visitor, in his scheme of life, recalls the lost verse of Horace."

"No!" Betty exclaimed. "I don't believe Horace ever uttered such a sentiment!"

"I was just going to ask you about that verse," said Morris. "Can't you give us the substance?"

"I think so. It was about like this—but expressed, of course, in perfect form: Love and wine being the essence of life, it behooves Cupid and Bacchus to bestir themselves that the earth may contain nothing but happy lovers and the choicest grapes."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Hollowell. "My sentiments exactly. The perfect life knows nothing but love and wine. All else is abnormal, and a waste of time. Moreover, such was clearly the intention of the Almighty, but the scheme has suffered through man's perversity."

The lady shook her head in solemn disapproval. "You have not seen Fra Diavolo."

Prophetic

“Who is Fra Diavolo?”

“A living result of that philosophy, and, incidentally, a warning to drunkards. But what an uplifting career you advocate, Mr. Hollowell. All ambition to be drowned in grape-juice.”

Hollowell’s jovial smile became more jovial still as he replied, with triumphant good-humor,

“But ambition, according to every moralist of whatever school, is a curse. All the wise men are agreed on that. It is merely a disease.

“ I charge thee, fling away ambition.”

Love and wine, however, are natural tastes.”

Betty frowned and shook her head, with lips compressed. But Santovano, in his richest voice and in a calm, convincing tone, put in a word. “Mr. Hollowell’s argument is not only borne out by every principle of logic, but by Nature’s own example. Happiness is normal: misery a disease,—toil a degrading necessity. The promised reward and consolation of religion is not a hereafter of labor and sickness. It is a future of elegant leisure, with music and promiscuous joy.”

The Villa Claudia

"And surely," said Hollowell, "serenity is more elevating for the soul than worry."

The Italian smiled. "What philosopher ever prayed for trouble?"

"Not one," replied the smiling Briton. "Nobody seeks tribulation as a discipline for himself—nor do parents seek it for their own children. Oh, no! It is always others who need the chastening hand."

Santovano gravely nodded approval. "But tribulation is our heritage—the reward of folly. A German statistician has discovered that the amount of our adulterated happiness—that is, enjoyment with a string to it—averages twelve minutes out of every sixty: in other words, one-fifth of our waking hours. And that the average person, during the average year, attains an unalloyed delight of seven hours."

"Oh, it is more than that!" said Betty. "I had one hour of pure delight last evening at meeting Morris Lane again!"

Hollowell laughed. "Oh, well, these figures only apply to humans! Not to heavenly beings overladen with love and friendship." And he arose and bowed. But Betty shook her head.

"The pure delight, however, never continues

Prophetic

for a whole minute," Santovano added. "All the rest of life is toil and trouble, sickness and hope deferred, enlivened by patches of incomplete content and defective pleasure."

"But the agony," said Hollowell, "is pure. No adulteration there!"

"Moreover," continued Santovano, "a third of our brief career is wasted in sleep. Out of seventy years, we slumber twenty."

"Oh, no!" said Betty. "Not so much as that."

"Yes; more than seven hours out of every twenty-four."

Hollowell frowned. "Inexcusable! Simply inexcusable! And to think that out of that pitiful seventy we need twenty to get our growth—and the first glimmerings of sense. And the last fifteen are all downhill—a gradual, physical decay. So you see," he added, impressively, to Betty, "there only remain—let me see—to a good, long human life, but twenty-five years to be relied on—that are really ours."

"And only the favored few," said Santovano, "get that."

Still Betty shook her head. "But those years of sleep are not unhappy years."

Hollowell opened his hands in protestation.

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“No, but what a hideous waste of precious, irrevocable hours! Is it an unreasonable prayer—or demand—that our niggardly allowance of conscious hours should be enjoyable?”

“And the bad ones abbreviated,” said Santovano.

Again she shook her head in silence.

“The prayer of wisdom,” continued Santovano, “is for a life that is short, and sweet; not dull and long drawn out with agony and toil.”

Hollowell bowed his head. “Amen to that.”

Still Betty made no answer, but leaned back with a sigh, and for a moment closed her eyes. Her experiences, this day, had been exceptionally trying, almost more than she could bear with outward composure. Once, indeed, since she had been sitting here with Morris and Santovano tears of helpless misery had come into her eyes. And now, to be thus discomfited in an argument, when she felt herself in the right, seemed, in the present condition of her nerves, the final straw. Too weary to renew the argument, she lowered her eyes to conceal tears of vexation. Recalling their talk of the morning, she gave Morris a rapid but reproachful glance. In this glance he read distinctly,

Prophetic

"Et tu, Brute?"

He cleared his throat, and swallowed. Into his boyish face came a look of decision—as of sudden resolve. Then he addressed the little lady.

"What a joke upon these gentlemen if they should become victims of their own philosophy!"

"I don't know why," said Santovano. "I, for one, am ready."

"The philosophy is sound," said Hollowell.

"No," said Morris, in a gentle tone, and with his cherubic smile, "the philosophy is rotten. It is merely an antidote for the ten commandments. It is blear-eyed, spineless, and besotted. Moreover, you two gentlemen—like all other decent persons—would cut it dead if you met it in the daytime."

"Not I!" said Hollowell. "I should fall upon its neck and hug it."

Santovano nodded his indorsement.

"Which means," said Morris, "that to experience during the next few hours the concentrated joy of several years, you would consent to be found dead in your beds to-morrow morning."

Betty straightened up and regarded her countryman with grateful interest.

The Villa Claudia

“Dead in our beds the next morning?” repeated Hollowell. “Aren’t you hurrying us off a little?”

“No. You both say life cannot be too short if only it is sweet enough—that is, if you get your share of fun. And according to the figures of Mr. Santovano’s German you could get all that’s due you before to-morrow morning—and still have a comfortable margin for extras.”

Hollowell frowned and stroked his chin. “There is food for thought in that.”

Betty laughed, and pointed a finger at him. “Ha! You are backing down!”

“Not at all! Not at all! It would be an interesting experience, and I would gladly try it.”

Again Santovano nodded his head, always a little to one side. “And I should embrace the opportunity with a grateful heart.”

Morris turned to Betty. “How little we know our friends! Here is Hollowell, for the pleasure of one delirious debauch, one gluttonous satiety of every appetite and passion—in short, to die drunk with his front feet in the trough—is willing—”

“Oh, I say!”

Prophetic

“—To forget all friends and friendship, his home, parents, country, all that other men love, and fight, and die for.”

Hollowell waved a hand. “Look here! that’s another matter.”

“And the Signor Santovano,” Morris went on, in the same gentle voice and with the same cherubic smile, “to make sure of his own pleasure, and for the delights of a similar debauch,—which he admits appeal to him more strongly than any human ties,—is willing and eager to forego, among other details, the woman he thought of marrying.”

Santovano threw a hasty glance at Betty, and she, rising to her feet, met his look with one which he had not seen in her face before—a look difficult to define. But it bore no message of love.

Upon her champion, however, she smiled. “Thank you, Morris. Now to the house for tea. These philosophers may need refreshment.”

As she moved across the ancient pavement there came drifting in, among the perfumes of the garden, the melancholy notes of Fra Dia-

The Villa Claudia

volò's flute. They seemed to hover in the air like the breath of sorrow;—a plaintive harmony with the funereal cypresses that towered on either side.

Morris Lane, with half-closed eyes, drew a long, slow breath. He would fill his soul with the memories of this garden, with its odors and its music, and with the voice and figure of the girl before him—with all this intoxicating bitterness of life. For now the voice of the flute stirred within him a responsive chord—an indefinable pity for its unworded sorrow and for its melodious, despairing message. He understood, of a sudden, the sympathy between Betty and the pathetic monotony of the music. It seemed a bond, or rather the mockery of a bond, that brought him closer to this girl—of all women upon earth the only one he desired.

And after to-morrow they were to meet no more!

Unconsciously, he heaved a sigh, so emphatic, so laden with silent despair that she turned involuntarily and regarded him. Whereupon he tried to smile, and the color flew to his face. For the look in her eyes, as they met his own, although he was not sure of its meaning, caused

Prophetic

him a certain surprise and joy. But he thought, in his blindness, that she had not guessed his secret.

So, together, the blind fool and the all-seeing maiden moved slowly along among the flowers and the ancient marbles, toward the Villa Claudia.

Casually, she glanced behind her toward the little temple of Bacchus where the groom-elect seemed to be conversing somewhat earnestly with Mr. Hollowell. She said, with a smile, "This talk of ours recalls another occasion when you came to my rescue; but, oh! so long ago! Away back in a previous existence, many hundreds of years. There was deep snow, and runaway horses. You must remember."

But Morris shook his head.

"You were pushing me on a sled, toward the village, when, all of a sudden, around the church corner just in front of us, came a pair of runaway horses. Perhaps you remember now."

"No."

"Well, I screamed. Then you looked up and saw them, and away you scrambled through the snow to the sidewalk, and behind the nearest tree."

The Villa Claudia

"And left you alone in the middle of the road?"

Betty smiled. "Yes, that is just what you did. And I was fitted tight in a box that was nailed to the sled. I couldn't move."

"Oh! Awful! Awful! Was I really such a boy as that?"

"Who expects anything different of a boy eight years old?"

"But a boy only eight *months* old ought to stand by his girl."

Betty smiled. "You evidently had the same opinion then, for you had hardly reached the tree when back you floundered. You snatched the empty basket I was holding and stood between me and the coming horses."

"Ah, thank heaven!" And Morris gave a sigh of relief.

"Perhaps you begin to remember now."

"Yes—dimly."

"You swung the basket above your head and shouted your loudest—to scare away the danger. And I can see the horses now. They looked frightfully big and wild, coming straight upon us. They filled the whole landscape."

"Well? We are not killed, for here we are."

Prophetic

“No; because you did scare them, small as you were. At least, they turned out for us and went by. But gracious! it was awfully close!”

“Well, I am glad I redeemed myself, for my own sake as well as yours.”

“Andy Gibbs was going by—you remember Andy Gibbs?”

“Big, dark man with a deep voice?”

“Yes. He came out into the middle of the road, picked up your cap for you and said, ‘Good for you, Fatty! You are built of the right sort of stuff!’”

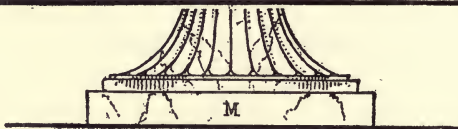
Betty laid a hand on his arm. With a look that gave him another pleasant thrill and deepened the color in his face, she said, “Your standard for eight-year-old boys is too high. Some very good boys are not heroes. And as for what you did that day—well, I know of riper warriors with whom I should not care to trust myself.”

And again she cast a backward glance. Mr. Hollowell and her future husband seemed in earnest conversation. Had the lady overheard that conversation she would have found it of surpassing interest.



For I have learned that gods enjoy untroubled life.

—Horace.



XIII



XIII

“YOU!”

WHEN Betty, followed by Morris and Mr. Hollowell, ascended the three marble steps into the garden, Santovano laid a hand upon the Englishman's sleeve.

“May I have a word with you?”

“Certainly.”

“And may I also ask a favor?”

Hollowell bowed. And after the brief silence that followed, he murmured,

“What a charming girl! Most exceptional.”

Santovano nodded. “Yes, I heartily agree with you.”

“What a jolly little couple they would make—those two Americans! Gad! do you think there's a chance of it?”

“I trust not.”

“Why? What's the objection?”

“Well, I hope to marry the lady myself, a fortnight from to-morrow.”

“You!”

Mr. Hollowell raised his eyebrows and took a backward step. He merely said,

“You!”

But the manner of its utterance had many meanings; so many and so various that the Italian could not repress a gesture of annoyance. “I hope to make the lady happy.”

Mr. Hollowell abstained from any immediate reply. He drew in his lips and looked away into the garden, up at the sky, down at the pavement, and, finally, at his companion. “Then your wife—is not living?”

“She is not living.”

“Does Miss Farnham know all about her?”

“Yes.”

“All the details?”

Santovano hesitated. “All the essential details.”

“You mean, I suppose, all that you consider essential for her peace of mind.”

“I mean that she knows all the principal facts.”

“Does she know that you refused to marry her and that your decision was accelerated by relatives of the lady?”

The Villa Claudia

Santovano shrugged his shoulders. "Yes. She knows all that."

"But it makes no difference?"

"No."

Mr. Hollowell whistled. "Gad! She is more—more philosophical—less fastidious, than I should have supposed. In fact, judging from my short acquaintance with her I should have said that she might have taken some of those details rather seriously. But she has no foolish sentiments?"

"So it appears."

"Well, Santovano, you are lucky to have found her. I know lots of women who would give your record the whole road if they saw it coming."

Santovano nodded politely.

"It is rather curious," continued the Englishman, "for Miss Farnham strikes me as a somewhat particular little person of devilish high standards. Just the girl who would scream and run from such a biography as yours, don't you know?"

As he spoke, he smiled pleasantly. His companion also smiled, as their eyes met, but his smile was limited, and perfunctory. "A

“You!”

man can reform. I was younger in those days.”

“Reform! You!” and Mr. Hollowell laughed aloud, in cheerful ridicule. “Why, Santovano, you and reform never entered the same town.”

“Not so bad as that.”

“Worse than that. Silenus and Don Juan were squeamish old virgins compared with you.”

“Thanks.”

“Why, she’s not the person for you—an inexperienced, sensitive, romantic, high-minded, pure little thing. Gad, no!”

“And why not?”

“Why not? Why, good God, man! it’s an unrighteous fraud! You ought to marry some divorcée with a spicy past; someone who could meet you on your own ground.”

“Yes?”

“But you spoke of asking a favor. What can I do for you?”

“I was going to ask you to say nothing to Mr. Lane of my old reputation, which I know was pretty bad. But all that is changed. Seriously, I have turned over a new leaf. In the future I shall lead a very different life. Mr. Lane, from an honest sense of duty, might give Miss Farn-

The Villa Claudia

ham what he considered a friendly warning and make her very unhappy. For these American women are given to quixotic sentiments in the way of matrimony."

"But what harm could Mr. Lane accomplish if she already knows everything?"

"So much depends on how the case is stated."

"And you think another person might not state the case as honestly as yourself?"

"I do not say that. I have merely given her extenuating facts of which a stranger would be ignorant."

"What were the extenuating facts at Woolwich?"

"At Woolwich?"

"Yes, when you were frozen out of the regiment by your brother officers because of that affair with the parson's daughter?"

"It is a long story."

"Did you tell that story to Miss Farnham?"

"That is not a story for a man to tell a young unmarried lady—as you know."

Hollowell's smile became mirthful. "I should say not! Did you tell her mother?"

"No."

"Wise man!"

“You!”

“Well, why should I deliberately blast my own hopes? That is all dead, buried and mostly forgotten. I am not the man I was then.”

“Oh, yes, you are, unless honest men are liars!”

A flush came over the Italian’s face, as he asked with outward calmness, “May I ask your meaning?”

“Certainly. Unless honest men are liars your recent—very recent—intimacy with a certain lady in Florence, for instance, seemed to bear some relation to her ruin and subsequent death—all within this very year.”

Santovano’s head inclined more to one side than usual. “I murdered her, perhaps?”

“No, for it was apparently a case of suicide. But the air in Florence to-day is laden with rumors that might startle your fiancée.”

“What rumors, if you please?”

“Are you asking for information?”

“I am.”

“Rumors that you not only ruined her in character but in purse.”

“That is a lie.”

“Of course! A wicked lie, told by bold, bad, naughty men.”

The Villa Claudia

“Do you mean that you believe it?”

“Are you still asking for facts, or for consolation?”

“For the truth.”

“Yes, I do believe it.”

“That I took her money?”

The smile on the Englishman's cheerful countenance became a degree less amiable. “Don't ask such awkward questions, Santovano.”

“Then you believe that I am a cad of the lowest possible description—a thieving blackguard.”

Hollowell drew a long breath and closed his eyes for a moment. “Those are not the epithets I should take pleasure in applying to a gentleman. But let us return to business. What you ask is, that I refrain from giving Mr. Lane certain facts that, if repeated to your fiancée or to her mother, might break off the marriage?”

“Precisely.”

“That is, that I join the conspiracy.”

Into the Italian's face came a harder look. “Your choice of words, my friend, is either thoughtless—or insulting.”

Mr. Hollowell took a backward step, and from his face the smile departed. “Look here, Santovano, I have neither time nor inclination for

“You!”

a quarrel. My words are chosen to express my thoughts. You ask me for truthful answers, and you get them. If I came home and found a sister of mine engaged to you—or to any man with your career—I would move heaven and earth to stop it. In this case if the girl and her mother knew certain facts they also would stop it. No one knows that better than yourself. Now, you ask me to withhold these facts. Is that fair to them?”

“It is fair to them because my future, not my past, is what at present concerns us. I am older now. My future is a different matter.”

“Your future is speculative. Let us stick to facts. The girl has no father nor brother. She is ignorant of your reputation among men. Consequently she is moving in the dark. I say give her a chance. Let her know these things, before she is married, and not learn them afterward. But I will do this: I will give Morris Lane the plain, unvarnished facts, with no exaggeration, and leave the rest to him. He is their nearest friend.”

Santovano smiled. “That is delightful! Nothing, my dear Hollowell, could display a finer, more exquisite humor.”

The Villa Claudia

"I am not trying to be humorous."

"Mr. Lane would like nothing better than to marry the lady himself. His selection as judge in this matter would make the angels smile."

"You are right. Then shall I, myself, interview the mother?"

"If you insist. But may I ask a very great favor—that you say nothing before to-morrow morning? Madame Capodilista is unwell to-night. She and I are the best of friends, and the news you bring might be dangerous to a lady in her present condition."

"Certainly. I will wait till to-morrow morning."

"Thank you."

Hollowell turned, and the two men walked in silence, between the flowers and the ancient marbles, toward the Villa Claudia.

The Englishman, as they proceeded, listened with unwonted gravity, and with an interest he could not have explained, to the utterings of a distant flute.

Upon the terrace, before entering the villa, Hollowell stopped and faced his companion.

"I should be sorry to have you think me a

“You!”

meddler in this business, or that I am doing it from an unfriendly motive.”

Santovano, whose eyes were on the ground, looked up as if startled—with an involuntary frown. He seemed taken by surprise; for, in fact, an absorbing train of thought of peculiar interest was interrupted. His face, to Hollowell, seemed paler; but that might be the reflection from the villa’s marble walls. With his usual composure, however, he replied, “No, I don’t think that.”

“On my honor, Santovano, I am thinking only of the girl. I have no grudge against you. It is no more than just that these women should know the facts.”

Santovano nodded, but made no reply.

“I give you my word that I will exaggerate nothing, nor falsely represent.” He smiled as he added, “And I promise, moreover, to handle your appalling reputation as tenderly as if it belonged to my own brother.”

The Italian looked into the honest, mirthful eyes of his companion, and he also smiled, a friendly, frank, forgiving smile—the smile that had warmed many hearts toward him, of both men and women. “That’s all right, old man.

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I appreciate and understand. That is where our reputations differ. I have known you too long and too well to doubt either your motives or your word. But you will do nothing before to-morrow morning?"

"Nothing."

"On that also you give me your word, and I may count upon it, absolutely?"

"Absolutely. I swear it."

"Thank you."

But on Santovano's face, as he stood aside for his friend to enter the drawing-room, there came a change of expression. The frank and friendly smile remained for an instant, then faded into something of another nature. The lips came firmly together, and the eyes, as they rested on the back of his companion's head, bore a look that could never harmonize with the forgiving smile. Its significance was clear. And Hollowell, had he seen it, might have been less easy in his mind.

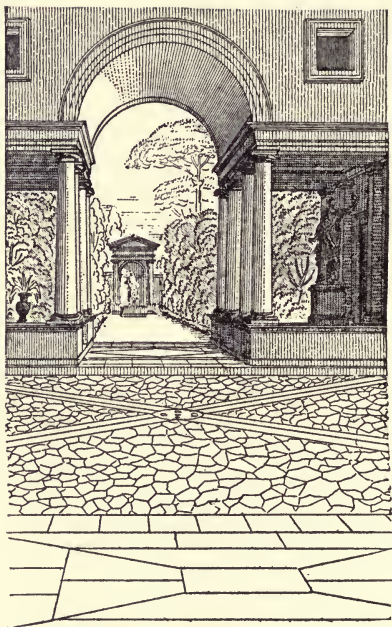


Do not for a year defer the sweets of life.

Horace.



M



XIV

FRIENDS OF FATE

IN the drawing-room, near one of the windows that opened to the floor, sat the youthful hostess, in front of her a little table with the tea-things. Morris Lane, sitting opposite, put a cup to his lips. He detested tea. That, however, was unimportant. The important thing was the girl in front of him: for, alas! the hours were few indeed in which they were to be together.

When her eyes met his, he was embarrassed; then his gaze for a period sought something else. Both he and she were ill at ease. But Betty, as hostess, maintained a cheerful front. And when Hollowell and Santovano entered she looked up with a smile and did her best to clarify an atmosphere already overcharged with animosity and revolt. The only member of the group who enjoyed a tranquil mind and cheerful spirit was

The Villa Claudia

Hollowell. He had no breaking heart to conceal, no fruitless love to smother, no all-consuming hate to hide.

Morris easily understood why Santovano should be an object of unusual interest to Betty Farnham. His clean-cut features, his dark eyes and melodious speech, seemed to give assurance of a gentle, yet forceful spirit—of heroism and romantic things. And just at present, as he stood in the golden glow from the western sky, he resembled the painted and sculptured heroes of his own fair land, the land of poetry and art and brilliant deeds, in which his own progenitors, from earliest ages, had held high place. As Morris studied this man, and envied his easy bearing, his graceful manners, his enchanting voice and winning smile, he wondered how a merciful Providence could have cast him in Betty Farnham's path. And it was painful to believe him in perfect health, with every promise of a long career. The American derived a feeble pleasure from the change of color in Santovano's cheeks. For he surely seemed paler now than when he stood in the ruins of the temple of Bacchus, a quarter of an hour ago.

After drinking his cup of tea, Santovano ex-

Friends of Fate

cused himself, gracefully of course, and withdrew. But illness was not the cause of this departure. Santovano's health was never better. The slight pallor in his cheeks came simply from a mental condition. He had made, somewhat suddenly, an important resolve.

Mounting thoughtfully the palatial staircase of the Villa Claudia, he entered his own chamber. This chamber, like all other rooms in the Villa Claudia, was spacious, with a lofty ceiling. The hangings of the bed and windows were of figured silk, now somewhat faded. In the centre of each of the six large panels of the room hung a portrait—George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry W. Longfellow and Abraham Lincoln. These faces were placed in Santovano's room by the daughter of the house, to "elevate his thoughts and to remind him of the greatest country in the world."

At the present moment, however, the portraits were inadequate. To and fro Santovano walked, a dozen times, his eyes half closed, gently pushing the fist of his right hand into the open palm of his left. Beside the mantel, and reaching to the cornice, hung an old-fashioned bell-cord with

The Villa Claudia

a heavy tassel. This he pulled, then resumed his walk. A gentle knock at the door, three minutes later, received no answer; and none was expected. The door opened and a man entered—the little man that Morris Lane had taken for a New England clergyman. His age was anywhere between thirty and fifty. A naturally alert and sensitive face had become, by constant schooling, stolid and impassive. He closed the door and stood beside it. Santovano, his head to one side and in a tone of sorrow, thus addressed him, in the language of the country:

“Gasparo, you may have observed the English gentleman who arrived this afternoon—the Signor Ollovell.”

“Yes, sir.”

“His presence in this house, Gasparo, is regrettable, for he is not a good man.”

“Ah!”

“He laughs much, to be sure, and is always merry. But what is worse than a false friend?”

“Nothing.”

“I have learned from his own lips, within an hour, that he means to break off my marriage with the Signorina Farnham.”

Into the valet’s face came a look that might

Friends of Fate

be fear, incredulity or horror, all imperfectly suppressed.

“But why should he do this thing?”

“Money. Unless I agree to pay him money, an enormous sum of money, he will poison her mind against me—and the mind of her mother.”

“But what can he tell? What does he know?”

“Lies. Anything. Perhaps a mixture of truth and falsehood. But he will succeed, Gasparo. He has a knowledge of facts combined with a rich invention. And whatever he says will be believed, for he is the trusted friend of the Signor Lane. To-morrow we may leave this house, you and I, never to return.”

The valet's face forgot its training and displayed a genuine alarm. His lips parted, but no sound came forth.

His master continued. “And so, instead of becoming a man of position and the head of a house, as my birth entitles me, I go back to the army and my debts,—a wandering bachelor.”

Gasparo's chin had sunk upon his breast. About his eyebrows and his mouth came the lines of despair.

Santovano lighted a cigarette, then dropped into a chair. “But this Englishman will say

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nothing until to-morrow. So, if anything serious should overtake him before the morning—anything to close his merry lips forever—then I would marry the woman I love; and mine would be a happier life. And a comfortable old age would fall to you, Gasparo.”

Gasparo, with his lips apart, slowly nodded his head.

“Is there no justice? A man so vile deserves the wrath of God.”

“Yes, you have spoken truly; the wrath of God. Yet I wish him no worse punishment than he deserves. But if the good God, in his wisdom, should see fit to end the Signor Ollovell’s sinful life before another sunrise it would cause me no anguish.”

“Certainly not! All good men should pray for it.”

“And if such was God’s purpose, I should not oppose the divine will.”

Upon the mantel stood a photograph of Alessandro di Forli—a handsome young face, rather long and narrow, with a scholarly brow, and calm, reflective eyes. Santovano regarded this portrait with a thoughtful air.

“It would be interesting, extremely interest-

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ing, and in accord with our ideas of heavenly justice, if this English gentleman were to disappear completely—to vanish, as it were, like my poor, dear friend. But my poor, dear friend deserved a better fate.”

There was a short silence, and the gentleman threw a seemingly careless glance toward the valet's face. The face, however, remained undisturbed. Santovano's smile grew more benevolent. In a tone of peculiar softness he added, “We can render the good God effective aid in this affair by permitting the Signor Ollovell to slumber in—in a certain chamber.”

Another seemingly careless glance toward his companion's face discovered the anticipated alteration.

“In that chamber!” gasped the valet; and, involuntarily, he took a step backward, with no attempt to hide his horror.

“Why not? Is he so virtuous that Fate should avoid him?”

Gasparo shook his head, with eyes still fixed upon his master's face. “That would be murder!” he whispered.

“Murder? Why, my dear Gasparo, would you accuse your Heavenly Father of murder?”

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For it is He, and He alone, who performs the miracles in that apartment."

"Yes, perhaps—without doubt;—but——"

"Listen, Gasparo. If you and I were to drop the Signor Ollovell into deep water, or over a precipice, that would be murder. But to lodge him in a comfortable chamber, in charge of his Creator,—that is a different matter. What happens to him in that case is no concern of ours. We shall never be held accountable, either upon earth or in heaven."

Gasparo drew a hand across his mouth and mastered his countenance. But his lips were dry.

"That is impossible!" he murmured.

"Why impossible?"

"Because no one is permitted to sleep in that room. The ladies would never forgive it."

"It will be entirely accidental."

"Accidental?"

"Yes. A lamentable mistake."

The servant's eyes rested uneasily upon his master's face.

"Listen, Gasparo. There is a new servant here, is there not? A girl who came from Rome this afternoon?"

Friends of Fate

"Yes, sir."

"She came through your recommendation—you brought her?"

"Yes, sir."

"And she knows nothing, as yet, of that chamber and its—its interesting history?"

"No, sir; not yet."

"Good! Our course—that is, the course of Providence, is clear."

Tossing the end of his cigarette into the fireplace, he inquired, in a gentle voice, "To what apartment is the Signor Ollovell assigned?"

"The chamber with the painted ceiling, of the four seasons, that looks upon the court—at the end of this corridor."

"Ah, yes! It has one large window, opening to the floor?"

Gasparo nodded.

"Now, Gasparo, pay attention to my words. While we are dining to-night, you will enter this chamber of the Signor Ollovell and carry with you two stones, each about the size of your fist. Those stones you will place upon the floor as if they had been thrown through the window. Then, with as little noise as possible, you will press in and break two panes of glass. And

The Villa Claudia

the fragments will be left upon the floor. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir. The two stones were thrown from the street."

"*Bene!* By the same bad boys who broke the windows of the Signora Ruspoli not long ago. Then, I will accompany the English gentleman as he comes up to bed and I will be present when the lamentable discovery is made. Of course, he must realize that nobody breathes the air of Tivoli at night: that a chamber with an open window is uninhabitable."

"Which is true."

"And which fact I shall emphasize, in the course of conversation, as we dine. But in the meantime, to avoid discussion, his baggage will already have been taken to that other apartment. You will attend to that."

Gasparo seemed on the point of making an objection, but no time was given him.

"The new servant, who must not fail to be on hand, will then conduct him to the more eventful chamber. That of course will be her error. Not knowing the house she will make a mistake in the room. It is she who will have transferred his things."

Friends of Fate

Gasparo nodded. "It can be arranged."

Santovano took from his pocket a gold piece of twenty lire. "As she might become talkative this evening with the other servants, you would do well to make sure of her silence. Give her this, now, and the promise of another twenty in the morning."

Gasparo smiled. "I know the girl. You may count upon her."

"Then I leave the rest to you. The plan is simple. And to-morrow morning, if the Signor Ollovell, the quencher of love, the wrecker of weddings, comes down to breakfast alive and well, no harm is done. If, on the other hand, a watchful Providence has fulfilled its obvious duty, why"—here the speaker's face became illumined by the winning smile—"we shall merely have facilitated the accomplishment of a divine purpose."

Gasparo also smiled. "The cause is surely just."

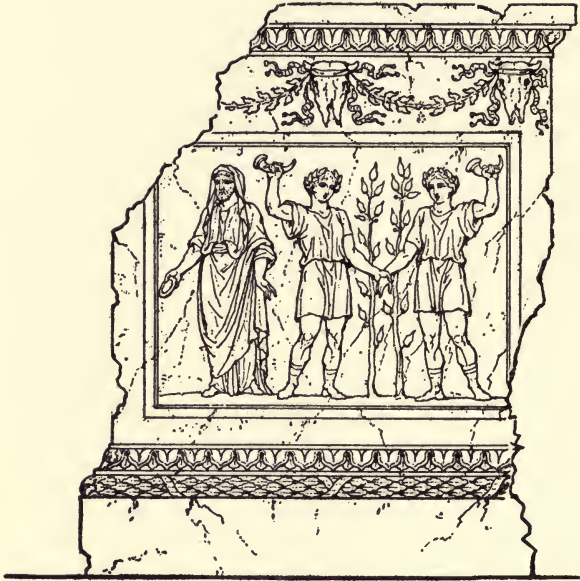
Santovano nodded and turned away.

The servant waited a moment.

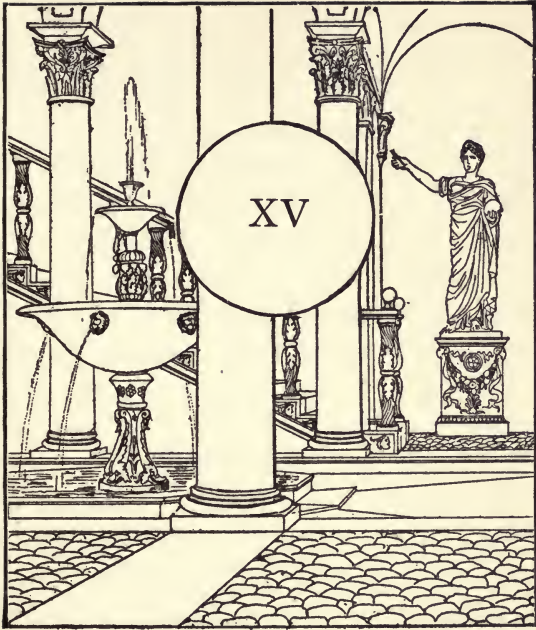
"Is there anything more, sir?"

"That's all."

Gasparo left the room, closing the door silently, as when he entered.



Debemur morti nos nostraque.
Horace.



XV

IN THE CHAMBER

ANOTHER morning.
The voices of singing birds, outside his chamber window, awakened Morris Lane. As his eyes wandered slowly around the spacious room in which he lay—upon a lofty bed with crimson hangings,—he recalled his humbler quarters of the day before, in the Hotel Sibilla. Reviewing his varied emotions since the previous morning, he seemed to have lived another and a longer life. And all in twenty-four hours!

While dressing, he remembered, sadly, the joyful spirit in which he attired himself the day before. Now, withered hopes were his. This morning there was no murmuring of happy tunes. Melodies of a joyous nature were not for him. He was far happier—in fact, quite happy and contented—before discovering this Villa Claudia and the grown-up Betty Farnham. And yet, had the choice been offered him, of the

In the Chamber

old contentment or the present misery, he would not have hesitated. "Better to have loved and lost—" Yes, a thousand times better! Her memory, through the empty years to come, should be as a ray of sunlight in a gloomy forest. A strain of sad but soothing music, and forever in his heart.

Among the many feminine efforts to mitigate the formality of this palatial chamber were several photographs scattered, with thoughtful irregularity, along the mantel. One of these, a portrait of a little girl, proved of interest to the present guest. The diminutive person in this picture had eyebrows high above her eyes, and she seemed to study the spectator—or the camera—in surprise and doubt. Her dark hair was drawn severely back, and held by a ribbon. On a pair of short, plump legs she stood, securely planted, as if defying the lightning. This photograph, in a leather frame, Morris took from the mantel for closer inspection. As he studied it, certain tender memories of early boyhood, certain recollections of long ago—the tragic, inconsolable grief of a cruel parting, she to cross the ocean, he to stay at home—came crowding over him. His eyes became wistful—and a

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trifle moist. Slowly, reverently, he raised the photograph to his lips. As he did so there was a knock at the door. He started like a guilty thing, and replaced the picture.

"Yes?"

"*Acqua calda, Signor.*"

"All right. Thanks."

So absent-minded, so absorbed by his priceless woe had he been this morning, that on glancing at his watch he found himself an hour ahead of time. They were to breakfast at eight. It was not yet seven. He would go out into the garden.

In a pensive mood he descended the stairs. In passing through the drawing-room to the garden, he happened to notice, at the end of a corridor to his left, an open window with a balcony. Beyond this balcony he could see, through the trees, the walls of another villa. Moved by a desire to take a peep into this neighbor's garden, he was walking toward it when Betty's voice, from a little room that opened upon the corridor, gave his heart a quicker movement, with added color to his boyish cheeks.

"What an early bird you are, Morris! I hope you are not down here because you dislike that

In the Chamber

great, unhomelike chamber. But I gave you the best in the house. Really, I did!"

"Oh, the chamber is all right—too good, if anything!" he protested. "I happened to wake up early, that's all."

"I hope you slept well."

"Yes, very well, thank you."

But in her smiling face there lingered traces of a sleepless night. As their eyes met, her own a little tired, but with an affectionate—and to him, bewitching smile, that made him happy and miserable—he looked away, anywhere, at anything. And as there happened to be a door, close beside him, with a little crucifix upon it, he asked, merely to turn attention from his own face, if that was the entrance to a private chapel—or to a hermit's cell.

"No, indeed," she answered. "I wish it were! That is the awful chamber I told you about yesterday. The little crucifix was put there by some servant, I suppose, to drive away evil spirits."

"Does it work?"

Betty shook her head. "I don't know. Nobody has slept there since my poor stepfather disappeared."

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"Was there a crucifix on the door at that time?"

"No. It has been placed there recently."

"May I go in," he asked, "and see the room?"

"Yes, of course, if you wish. But don't stay too long."

He smiled. "It surely must be safe by daylight."

"You may laugh, but it is a very solemn joke—grewsome and tragic. However, go in if you like. Only those who spend the night come to grief. The door is unlocked."

Morris turned the knob and opened the door. Betty shrank away.

"Aren't you coming?" he asked.

"No. I must go back. I have a horror of it. But really, Morris, it is an evil place. Promise you will not stay there long."

"All right. I promise. But I have a curiosity to see it."

Betty turned back; and Morris stepped within.

So deep was the darkness of the chamber in which Morris found himself that he stood a moment, his hand upon the door, until his eyes became accustomed to the gloom. At the farther

In the Chamber

end a narrow bar of light between the close-drawn curtains of a window merely illumined the floor in that vicinity. But, as he looked, he began to distinguish certain articles of furniture; a mantel with a portrait; and, in a corner, a high-post bed, with heavy hangings. When he moved toward the window to let in more light he heard the door, which he had purposely left open, close gently behind him. He stopped and turned about. While neither nervous nor really startled, he could not avoid the thought—owing, probably, to the tales he had heard—that unseen hands had moved it. But of this foolish thought he felt properly ashamed. For he knew that many doors swung shut or open of their own free will.

In drawing aside one of the heavy curtains by the window, there came a sense of disappointment as the room disclosed itself. The further corners, to be sure, remained dim and shadowy, but all else was cheerful and unsuspecting. The walls and draperies were a pleasant yellow, with pictures here and there.

The whole room, in short, told its own story, and told it, apparently, in a frank and friendly way. It had been the study and the chamber

The Villa Claudia

of a wealthy gentleman of artistic tastes, Signor di Forli. Then, after Signor di Forli's unaccountable vanishing, it became the study of another gentleman of antiquarian habits, Signor Capodilista. An Empire bookcase, a Louis XVI. dressing-table and library desk, various fragments of sculpture, a Gothic cabinet, and sundry objects of different epochs, showed this room to be the refuge for articles no longer required elsewhere in the villa. But the whole effect was harmonious, more homelike, in fact, and more inviting, than the more formal apartments.

Besides, it bore the marks of having been lived in and enjoyed. And as he surveyed the room with its cheerful coloring, its inviting chairs, and felt its general air of friendliness and comfort, he smiled in recalling the childish tales concerning it. He was amused that Betty, an American, should believe those stories of ghosts and witches, of supernatural wolves, of mysterious deaths and vanishings.

While he stood, in this way, holding back one of the heavy curtains of the window, and wondering how such a chamber should acquire its ill repute, he became conscious of a subtle odor.

In the Chamber

This odor, delicate and hardly perceptible, and somewhat in the nature of an essence or a drug—almost a perfume—caused him to close his eyes and try to inhale it in larger measure. It was unfamiliar. Yet, it recalled, or suggested—he could not say what—a flower, a fruit, or perhaps some long-forgotten fragrance, but its charm was insidious. In a mild, indefinite, dreamy way it stirred his imagination. He found it, however, too elusive and too mysterious for analysis.

When he opened his eyes, now more accustomed to the dimness of the room, certain objects, before unseen, arrested his attention. He noticed, with surprise, that the bed, a high, four-posted affair, seemed freshly made up, as if an occupant were expected. And he also noticed, upon the coverlid, a night-shirt, carefully folded.

Had this room remained untouched since the night of Signor Capodilista's mysterious death?

This seemed to Morris the only explanation of the bed with its clean, white sheets and pillows, and the folded night-shirt.

Then, as he looked away from the bed to a farther corner of the room, he started, straight-

The Villa Claudia

ened up, and held his breath. Along his spine and upward through his hair, he felt a thrill.

In the dusky light, among the deeper shadows, two pale, blue, human eyes were watching him.

Morris clutched the curtain with a tighter grip—and took a backward step. For a moment he stood without moving. The eyes that seemed fixed upon his own were also motionless. Other faces were near it, two painted portraits and a bust; but there was no deception. This face was human flesh. It stood out from the background, clear and real.

With a swift movement Morris drew the curtain wide open, and fastened it. Then, always keeping his eyes upon the face that continued to gaze impassively in his direction, he crossed the window and drew back the other curtain. In this stronger light the form of the other occupant of the chamber took clearer shape. It was the half-reclining figure of a man seated upon a lounge, one foot upon the floor, the other stretched out upon the seat beside him, the head against the back of the sofa. The light-blue eyes, while partly closed, were fixed upon Morris. But as the head and features, in this stronger

In the Chamber

light, became more distinct, Morris, in astonishment, started forward with an involuntary exclamation.

“Hollowell! You here!”

But as he approached the irresponsive figure, he stopped again: for, after all, the face was not the face of Hollowell. Instead of Hollowell's chestnut hair, this head was covered with a colorless growth; a dull, dead brown, and sprinkled with gray. And Morris, now that he was nearer, saw the face was older by many years. This man had a dissolute, weaker face, baggy beneath the eyes, with a pendent lower lip. In fact, Morris was surprised that he should have taken such a man for Lydon Hollowell. Mingling with his other emotions as he stood gazing into the lustreless eyes, came a morbid fascination, as he realized that the man was dead. To make sure, however, he stepped nearer, and was about to touch one of the hands, when he stopped and drew back: not from fear exactly, but from a kind of dread—something like horror—as he became more familiar with the abnormal weakness and debauchery depicted in this besotted countenance. But with his horror and his shrinking from the repellent face be-

The Villa Claudia

fore him, came the same pity that he had felt for the old beggar with the flute: for this man reminded him strangely of Fra Diavolo. There was the same hue and texture of the skin, the same pendent flesh upon the cheeks, the same want of character about the eyes and mouth. No records of thought or struggle were there—in short, no lines of character.

Certain facial lines are out of place in youth: but the face of maturity, without them, is abnormal. Abnormal was this face on which Morris gazed.

He felt profoundly thankful that this new victim of the Villa Claudia was not Lydon Hollowell. But his joy was brief. Near the body, on a chair, a valise was resting: and as his eyes moved carelessly over it, he straightened up with a shock;—this time a hideous fear,—a sense of being confronted by something beyond his understanding. On the bag were two familiar letters:

L. H.

And the bag itself was familiar.

With perspiration starting out upon his temples, he took a step or two backward, his eyes

In the Chamber

fixed upon the face before him. Who could it be if not Hollowell? And after all, it—the figure—might not be dead! It might be—not a ghost, of course! for Morris did not believe in ghosts—but it might be an illusion, an apparition of his own fancy. At all events the room had a sinister record, and Morris began to fear that the thing upon the sofa—corpse, ghost, or phantasma of his own imagination—might arise and do him harm. Already there had been a grewsome death in this room: and a disappearance still unexplained. A swift glance at the dressing-table increased his bewilderment—and his horror. Upon it lay Hollowell's silver brushes and oval hand-glass, his monogram on all.

Another glance at the night-shirt on the bed, now close beside him, and he recognized a garment that he and Hollowell had bought together, in a little shop in Verona. He remembered well the ridiculous embroidery on the collar and down the front.

Again, as he gazed with straining eyes upon the dead man's face, he whispered:

“Hollowell!”

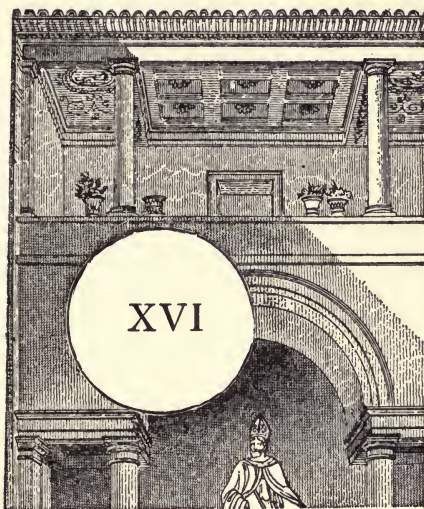
And again, at this greater distance, he saw the

The Villa Claudia

resemblance to his friend—the stiff hair about the brow, the square face and short neck, the light-blue eyes. Morris retreated a step, drawing a hand across his forehead. The very air of the room seemed to affect his nerves.

The barely perceptible perfume, odor, essence, or whatever it might be which he had forgotten for a moment, had gained in strength. Suspicious of all and everything, he was cool enough, however, to realize his own nervousness—that he was afraid to approach and touch the figure on the lounge; to ascertain, in fact, whether his companion was alive or dead. It seemed to be Hollowell. And yet—it could not be. In short, while utterly unlike, he still believed it must be his friend.

Without taking his eyes from this mysterious person, Morris moved toward the door—silently, almost stealthily. He felt for the knob, drew it slowly toward him, and then, after a final look upon the strange, yet half-familiar face, he stepped out into the hall.





No doubt 'tis useful to study wisdom.

Horace.

XVI

SANTOVANO'S VICTORY

THREE hours later, when the clocks of Tivoli were striking ten, certain people had assembled in the fateful chamber.

At a table in the centre, with his clerk beside him, sat a city official. The clerk was writing. Toward the end of the room, near the door, two men who spoke in whispers moved solemnly about the casket they were closing.

Against the wall, between Santovano and Morris Lane, sat Betty Farnham. This little lady, with downcast eyes, held a handkerchief to her lips. The sensitive face was paler than usual, and the handkerchief was there to aid in the suppression of an occasional sob. But the men on either side of her were not aware that she had passed a sleepless night—a night of mental anguish, followed by her resignation to a disheartening sacrifice. Now, all her thoughts were with Lydon Hollowell. She felt a keen

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remorse, and she exaggerated her own responsibility. Had she not urged Morris and his friend to come here? Mr. Hollowell, otherwise, would have been alive this morning and tramping gayly toward Horace's farm.

Similar thoughts, but with himself as the evildoer, filled Morris with a like remorse. Through him it was, and to be with him, that Hollowell came to the Villa Claudia.

Santovano's face also expressed affliction. But his inward sufferings were less acute. They were by no means unbearable. While sorry for the deceased, and while regretting that Mr. Hollowell's unfriendly behavior had forced this tragedy, he was consoled by the completeness of the triumph and by the manner of its achievement. It had been quiet, gentlemanly and artistic. There was also enjoyment in the prospect of a peaceable marriage with his promised wife. But of these consoling thoughts his face made no betrayal. Its sadness, on the contrary, excited the compassion of the youthful clerk, and the admiration of Gasparo.

The city official, an elderly man with a brown, thin face and gray mustache, turned to Santovano when his clerk had finished writing.

Santovano's Victory

"The identification of the body as that of the Englishman, the Signor Lydon Hollowell, is complete, is it not? The American gentleman is positive?"

Santovano translated the question to Morris, who bowed to the city official, saying in English,

"Yes, sir. I am positive."

The official bowed in return. Then to Santovano:

"The features, I understand, are greatly altered by this—this unusual, and, as yet, unexplained manner of his death. But he was identified, I am informed, by his clothing and by papers in his pockets?"

"Yes, sir. And by a peculiar joint in one of his fingers, that had once been broken. Also, by his watch and chain, a ring, and various other articles."

The clerk handed the paper on which those articles were mentioned to his chief, who, after looking it over, turned to Betty and said, with extreme politeness,

"We beg you to believe, Signorina, that in asking so many questions we are acting in accordance with an exacting duty—not from any prefer-

The Villa Claudia

ence of our own. We shall spare your feelings whenever possible, and the question I ask is not from suspicion, but to complete the investigation. You, as mistress of the house, do not believe this gentleman's death was due to any human agency—that is—to any personal violence?"

"No, sir."

"You do not believe any person in the house to be in any way responsible for it?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"You do not believe any person or persons in the house had any reason for desiring the death of the Signor Lydon Hollowell?"

"No, sir."

Then, turning to Santovano, "Will you kindly put that question to the American gentleman?"

Santovano put the question to Morris, who gave the same reply.

"And you, Signor Santovano, do you know of any person or persons, in this house or elsewhere, who could desire this man's death?"

"No, sir, I can think of no one. He had many friends, but no enemies to my knowledge."

"You also, then, agree with the Signorina

Santovano's Victory

Farnham and the Signor Lane in their belief that this death is in no way attributable to human agency, either intentional or by accident?"

"I do."

Again the clerk wrote. He was a young man with large black eyes and an immature but promising mustache. He made no concealment of his interest in Betty Farnham; and when not at work, his eyes were fixed upon her face in open adoration. "One more superfluous lover," thought Morris.

As the clerk wrote, Morris turned his head and looked through the open window to the garden. Above the sombre foliage of the cypresses was a patch of sky, intensely blue. Lower down he could see the tops of the marble columns of the old temple to Bacchus where Hollowell, yesterday afternoon, had sat and talked. Two quarrelling birds, as he looked, alighted on one of the marble shafts, and after a moment's chatter, flew off again, still quarrelling. Back into the room he turned his eyes, to a farther corner where a coffin held the body of his friend;—the jolly, pleasure-loving, but ever reliable friend. And he thought of their plans for the coming week—the little journey to Pæstum—and later

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on, to Sicily. He thought of the shock to the mother and sister in England who——

“Vuol ella avere la bonta di dirci, Signorina”—the voice of the city official arrested his wandering thoughts. “Will you be so good, Signorina, as to inform us where the deceased was last seen alive?”

“In this room.”

“And who was the person who last saw him?”

“Caterina Testi, a servant.”

“At what hour, Signorina?”

“About eleven o’clock, I think,” and she looked inquiringly at Santovano.

Santovano nodded. “Yes, about eleven o’clock.”

“Did she come to the chamber at his request—that is, did she come in answer to a call—a ring of the bell, or any summons of that nature?”

“I think not. She merely showed him to this room.”

“She brought him here instead of to the room you intended?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Entirely by mistake, you believe?”

“Oh, yes, sir! Entirely by mistake!”

Santovano's Victory

"I am happy, Signorina, that you can give me that assurance. Such is the history—and the reputation—of this chamber that if any person were suspected of having persuaded the English gentleman, in his ignorance, to sleep here, it would have the appearance of malicious intent; and the consequences might be serious. Will you be so good as to send for Caterina Testi?"

"She is no longer here."

"Not far away, I hope, as her testimony may be important."

"She has gone to Rome."

He raised his eyebrows. "Gone to Rome!"

"Yes."

The official leaned back in his chair and frowned.

Morris's eyes, at that moment, happened to be resting, in an absent way, upon another silent observer of these proceedings, a man who was standing in the background, away from the window. As these last words were uttered—Italian words, whose significance was lost to Morris, he noticed that this face, already somewhat striking from its pallor, became whiter still.

The man's eyes, of a sudden, were fixed in terror, first upon the city official, then upon San-

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tovano. As Morris had already been startled once that day by an unexpected face in this apartment, he straightened up and gave the keenest attention. And he recognized, in this pallid countenance, as he looked more closely, the person whom he had mistaken yesterday for a New England clergyman. And the thought occurred to Morris—suggested partly by the solemnity of the scene about him—that a guilty man would act in just that way when confronted with the proofs of his crime. He wished to know more of this anxious person, but the present moment was not the time for asking questions of Betty or Santovano.

“That was done,” said Santovano, in his quiet, full, well-modulated voice, “at my suggestion. Had the girl remained here after realizing the tragic consequences of her mistake, she might have become ill or hysterical; and anything like a disturbance would have reached the ears of Madame Capodilista, who, as you know, is lying ill upstairs. We are using every precaution to keep her from any knowledge of this affair. In her present condition the slightest excitement might have serious results. Therefore, I lost no time in getting this servant out of the house

Santovano's Victory

and off to her own home as quickly and as quietly as possible."

"Madame Capodilista's condition," said the city official, "should certainly be considered. It is regrettable, however, that there should be so much delay in procuring this servant's testimony."

"She could give no testimony that you would value. I took pains to question her this morning and found that she merely came to the door of this chamber with my friend, opened it for him to enter, and closed it after him."

"Did she happen to notice his appearance?"

"Yes. I questioned her very closely regarding it. She observed nothing unusual. She said he smiled pleasantly, and he said 'good-night' to her in Italian."

"Thanks. Your statement, Signor Santovano, saves us the delay of sending for the girl."

It was at this point that Morris saw a surprising change come over the face of the person he had mistaken for a New England clergyman. The look of terror gave way to an involuntary smile of relief, and Morris, as he watched the face, saw the color slowly return.

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When the clerk had inscribed this testimony, the city official turned to a gentleman at the other side of the room, a man of seventy, erect and well preserved, who stood with his hands behind him, paying close attention to the proceedings. His white hair and beard were cut close, and his expression, at first glance—with his heavy eyebrows and Roman nose—appeared somewhat ferocious. It was into this face that Betty Farnham, during the trying moments of the inquest, looked frequently for support. And the support was unailing. It came in various forms,—a slight movement of the head or eyebrows; a faint smile, or a barely perceptible shrug of the shoulders which might have any meaning. But he and Betty were old friends, and the understanding was complete.

“And now, Dr. Olibrio, may I request your statement as to the cause of the Signor Lydon Hollowell’s death? There are no outward signs of violence?”

“None whatever.”

“Nor traces of poison?”

“I believe not. If he died of poison it was a poison of whose action we have no knowledge.”

“Then what is your opinion?”

Santovano's Victory

Dr. Olibrio frowned. "The condition of the body is so abnormal that the immediate cause of death is somewhat speculative. A thorough examination is not permitted."

"Why not?"

"The gentleman leaves a sister and mother, and they would seriously object to it;—at least, so his American friend informs us."

"That is unfortunate."

"Possibly; but I think we should discover nothing we do not know already. The appearance of the body is precisely the same as in the case of Signor Capodilista, our lamented friend. And in his case we made a careful examination."

"Then be good enough to tell me what you consider the immediate reason for death, in both cases."

"Organic waste, and complete exhaustion of the system. A wearing away of all the tissues; a feeble condition of the blood with a surprising degeneration of certain vital organs, especially the heart, brain and kidneys; such a condition as exists in cases of death from old age. A wearing out of the machinery, in short."

"That is the only cause?"

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"No. A somewhat similar condition may result from excessive and prolonged intemperance."

Then, with a slight inclination of the head toward Betty, "But we all know that Signor Capodilista was a temperate man. And I am assured that this English gentleman was also temperate in his habits."

"Not intemperate," said Santovano.

"Could not this condition be produced in a single night by excessive indulgence?" asked the city official.

Dr. Olbrico smiled and shook his head. "There is no record of such a complete transformation, from the full vigor of manhood to extreme old age, in a single night."

The city official, after a moment's hesitation, put another question.

"Do you think it possible, doctor—I do not ask from any belief in the wild tales connected with this chamber—but do you think it possible the Signor Lydon Hollowell may have died from some shock—some sudden fright or horror that might affect the heart?"

"No. The face would have shown it. Whereas in this case there is a look of perfect

Santovano's Victory

contentment. As with Signor Capodilista the expression is so happy, so sensuously satisfied, as to be almost imbecile."

"But to what shall we attribute the immediate cause of this death?"

"In the absence of more positive knowledge I will pronounce it heart failure from extreme exhaustion, brought on by some cause to me unknown."

Dr. Olibrio's words were written down, and the inquest came to an end.

As Betty was leaving the room she turned to Santovano and said, in a low voice:

"Then you will take the next train to Rome and attend to that matter of sending the body to England, as you promised?"

"Certainly."

"You can do it so much better than Morris, as he speaks no Italian."

"And I do it with pleasure."

"When does the train go?"

"Not for an hour or more."

"Then will you please wait here, just a little, until these people are gone, and close the window and lock the door?"

"Certainly, if you wish."

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"I ask it because the servants are all afraid to come in here, now."

"I am delighted to be of any service, Elizabethta. Is that all I can do?"

"That is all, thank you," and she turned away, and left the room.

When Dr. Olibrio and the city official with his clerk had departed, Morris turned to Santovano and extended his hand.

"I appreciate all your kindness, and I thank you sincerely."

Santovano took the hand and returned the friendly pressure. "I am very glad, indeed, to be of any service, Mr. Lane. I was very fond of Hollowell. His death is a sad loss to all his friends—and a very hard thing for his mother and sister."

"Terrible!" said Morris. "I wrote them a long letter this morning. But tell me, what caused his death?"

Santovano raised his head. "I have no idea, Mr. Lane."

"I take it for granted that you do not believe in ghosts?"

"Certainly not."

"Nor in haunted rooms?"

Santovano's Victory

"Never."

"Then what killed Hollowell?"

Santovano looked searchingly into the American's eyes. But he saw no suspicion; only a desire for more light.

"I wish I could answer that question, Mr. Lane. The mystery, whatever it is, seems securely hidden."

For a moment the two men stood in silence, their eyes upon the coffin as it was borne from the apartment.

"Did you notice," said the Italian, in a lower tone, "the peculiar expression on poor Hollowell's face?"

"Yes. I hardly recognized him. It seemed another man."

"Did it recall to you in any way our conversation of yesterday?"

"Yes, it did! And you also thought of it?"

Santovano nodded solemnly. "And I could not help thinking that his wish had been granted; the wish he and I expressed for our share of pleasure in the briefest time."

"Perhaps. But at what a price!"

"The price we were willing to pay."

As Morris, with a melancholy face, walked

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out of the room, Santovano smiled: he glanced toward the spot where the coffin had been lying and he murmured in Italian:

“But to pay the price without the full reward, my precious Hollowell, is unwise. Such was never my own intention.”



From an ancient coin.

XVII



Where it hath slept full many a year.

Horace.

XVII

WORD FROM HORACE

ALONE in the room, Santovano turned and moved toward the window. At an unexpected sound he stooped and looked behind him. It was only the door, however, as it closed after the departing American. But it seemed to close of its own volition. The same sound had startled Morris; and, like Morris, Santovano was thereupon reminded of the sinister record of the room. Also, like Morris, he suspected, for an instant, the influence of some unseen power. Having no desire to be held a prisoner in so fateful a place, he preferred to assure himself that the lock had not been turned by somebody on the other side. So he stepped to the door and opened it. The hall was empty.

The spirit of Hollowell, perchance!

A shrug of contempt for a thought so puerile. Then, with firm steps, he walked to the win-

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dow and closed it. His hand was on one of the heavy curtains, to draw them together, when he paused, then loosened his hold. He folded his arms and surveyed the room. Santovano was neither timid nor sentimental. In the few serious matters of his life—as in archæology—he was capable of enthusiasm; but he was always logical.

“What is the trick?” he murmured. “How is it done? Come forward, ghost, and let us talk it over.”

Down the room he sauntered, scrutinizing the ceiling and the floor, and tapping the wall in places for a secret door.

“Come out into the daylight, O skilful curse, and show yourself. As a brother artist I wish to congratulate you.”

He paused, but nothing appeared. He leaned upon the sofa, where Hollowell had reclined, and he looked searchingly over that end of the chamber for some sign or token—some clew to its relentless mystery. On all things, however, lay an air of peace and innocence, the restful silence of a comfortable abode. Is there some poison in the air, he wondered, that kills the man who breathes it long enough? A deadly plant or

Word from Horace

flower hidden in some secret place,—between the leaves of a book or in a drawer? Does the ghost of some departed victim frighten men to death—or drive them from the world, never to be seen again—like poor di Forli?

No, not that!

Judging from the faces of the two latest victims, it is a pleasanter thing than fear that kills. Can it be some creature, divinely seductive—some Helen of Troy, Diane de Poitiers, or Ninon de l'Enclos?—or, more likely, a Cleopatra or Lucretia Borgia, whose love is death—a happy, sensuous death?

He held up his head and smiled.

“If so, come forth, O fair one, and touch your lips to mine! Kill me with love. I ask for nothing better.”

From the silent chamber there was no reply. The tinted walls, the furniture of various styles and epochs, the pictures and the Roman relics, all preserved their secret, and the general aspect of the room remained, as ever, harmless, homelike, and inviting.

Now, while at his end of the chamber, Santovano became conscious of a barely perceptible odor which he had noticed on a previous occasion.

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He remembered it, and he drew a long breath. Then, closing his eyes, he again inhaled, slowly and with a sense of pleasure. For this odor, aromatic and fragrant, subtle, yet definite, seemed to stir his imagination. He opened his eyes and moved slowly toward the corner to investigate the source of this mysterious exhalation. For, in that direction, it was more noticeable.

Of a sudden his face lit up, and he stopped, involuntarily. Before him, within his reach, stood an object that filled him with an unexpected rapture. From his face the bravado vanished. Into his eyes came a look of surprise—of incredulity; and from his lips an exclamation of delight. He seemed—and he was for the time—transformed from a reckless adventurer to a self-forgetful enthusiast. All thoughts of ghosts or haunted rooms were driven from his mind. The heart of the archæologist was once more aflame.

For here, before his eyes, on an old sarcophagus, stood one of the missing jars of Horace!

And he knew it well. There was no mistake. All was familiar—the size, the color, the Grecian shape, the incrustated surface. It stood about

Word from Horace

two feet in height, and might hold about half a gallon. And it came from Rhodes, originally. This he knew, as a connoisseur of ancient pottery; and from Rhodes came the best amphoræ. Kneeling before this treasure, he turned it slowly around, gently, lovingly, with the joy and the enthusiasm known only to the victorious antiquarian.

The ancient sealing of pitch and gypsum about the cork had been disturbed, but the jar itself was unbroken. The thought that this amphora with its contents had been the special care of Horace himself filled Santovano with a reverent ecstasy. He recalled the fact that the historian Procopius in 560 A.D., alluded to a little ceremony, or celebration, by Mæcenas and Horace at a temple of Bacchus in Tivoli. Both Santovano and di Forli had spoken of it on the day they discovered the amphoræ with the verse of Horace. And now, perhaps, he was again in touch with the poet!

As he caressed this priceless vessel he found, by a little coaxing of his fingers, that the deposit of centuries upon its surface—the grimy coating of lime and earth and ashes—came off in flakes. And his heart beat faster as he discovered that

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the removal of the crust toward the bottom of the jar revealed Roman letters upon the ancient surface. These letters, painted in a brownish black, were as sharp and clear upon the yellow clay as when first inscribed, more than nineteen centuries ago!

Further removal of this coating disclosed several lines in Latin, and a name that caused his eyes to brighten—

QUINTUS HORATIUS FLACCUS

Rapidly, yet with infinite care, Santovano uncovered the whole inscription. Then with greedy eyes, and with a perfect knowledge of the language, he read a message from the immortal poet. Roughly translated, the purport of the lines was this:

MARCUS LOLLIUS, CONSUL WITH Q. ÆMILIUS.

TO LOVERS YET UNBORN, QUINTUS HORATIUS FLACCUS SENDS GREETING WITH THIS JUG OF BEST FALERNIAN. CHOICEST WINE OF CHOICEST VINTAGE SHOULD FOREVER RIPEN AND IMPROVE. SO, FRIENDS, LET IT SLEEP IN PEACE DURING ONE HUNDRED YEARS FROM THIS SEPTEMBER, 736 A. U. C. THEN, HE

Word from Horace

WHO SIPS SHALL BE LIFTED TO OLYMPUS AND
TASTE THE JOY OF ALL IMAGININGS,
AND THOU, FALERNIAN, BRING GOOD FOR-
TUNE TO SOME HONEST LOVER.

Santovano, for a moment, stood motionless. In awe he gazed upon the vase.

"After one hundred years!" he murmured. "And now 'tis after *nineteen* hundred years! Not often does one meet with wine that counts its age by centuries!"

Carefully he took hold of the cork, thickly coated, originally, with pitch and gypsum, now loose in the neck of the jar. It came out easily. And as it came out he discovered the source of the subtle odor pervading the apartment. For now, holding his face over the amphora, he inhaled, instead of a subtle odor, a luscious, full-flavored aroma almost intoxicating in its strength. Again and again he inhaled it, in an ecstasy half sensuous, half antiquarian. With half-closed eyes he murmured,

"Falernian—old Falernian—from Horace and Mæcenas!"

Then, as he remembered the nineteen hundred years since those lines were written—since Horace had known this jar—he added, sadly,

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“Wine no longer—merely a crust of hardened dregs upon the bottom.”

But surely dregs alone could not give forth so fresh and full an odor—an odor as from richest wine. In spite of its many centuries there must be something more than dregs. No lifeless, dry deposit could so fill the nostrils and affect the brain.

Gently, yet with a sudden movement, he tipped the vessel and heard the unmistakable splashing of a liquid down within. Its seductive fragrance brought a yearning for deeper knowledge—for a closer acquaintance with this nectar of the ancients. In seeking some smaller vessel wherewith to taste it he detected, behind the jar itself, a wine-glass—placed there, it seemed, by a thoughtful providence—as if the gods were with him. Piously, with infinite care, he poured forth the precious liquid. It showed the rich, full yellow of the classic Falernian. And as Santovano held it aloft, between himself and the light, the contents of the little wine-glass shimmered like liquid gold.

“Bottled sunshine!” he mused, his eyes feasting upon the color. “Yes, the sunshine in the grapes of Tibur—of nineteen centuries ago.”

Word from Horace

But he noticed that the wine, while perfectly clear, was thicker than ordinary wine, more like a cordial in body. Like a cordial, too, its odor was pungent and aromatic. So strong, in fact, and so penetrating its exhalation that the fumes had already reached his brain, and he seemed to experience, in advance, certain pleasurable sensations: as of a gentle, but divine intoxication. With his eyes upon this cup of quivering sunlight he murmured,

“Your health, dear Horace. In the wine you loved and sang I drink to your happiness among your own gods. May all the pleasures of Olympus be forever yours.”

He put the glass to his lips.

With the first swallow, he felt the sudden exhilaration of a quickened life—of a fresher existence. Every nerve, from head to foot, tingled with a responsive thrill.

This mental exhilaration created a singular lightness of brain and body. He began to feel that by his own volition he could float upward and away—into higher worlds. No pleasure-loving mortal could resist another taste.

“Good fortune to some honest lover? Well, the young American needs cheering.”

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There was mockery in his smile as he added, "Here's one more sip to Mr. Lane—better luck to him another time."

Again the nectar passed his lips. The glass was still half full, yet never in his life had he enjoyed, in brain and body, a happiness so sudden and so complete.

In obedience to a craving yet unsatisfied he was raising the glass once more to his lips, when he paused; then, with a movement of decision, replaced it upon the top of the sarcophagus. His own wisdom—a wisdom acquired from much experience with wines—told him that a liquor so potent and so rapid in its effect was capable of mischief. But no previous experience of his own could tell him that this particular wine, in its journey through the ages, had not only attained its own perfection, but had gone far beyond; that while gaining in force and flavor it had become a deadly drug. Although feeling the ecstasy of a heavenly contentment stealing over him, Santovano was yet himself. Still in perfect control of all his faculties, he realized that with every beat of his heart he was becoming more serenely indifferent to the world about him. He had no thought of resistance—and no desire. With

Word from Horace

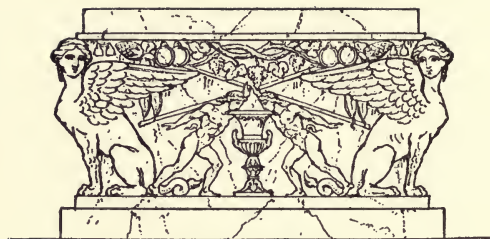
half-closed eyes and a smile upon his lips, he moved with extended hands—as a blind man gropes—toward the sofa, upon which he slowly sank, and there, at ease, reclined.

Into his brain came golden dreams, unfolding—and unfolding—into the unspeakable joys of an existence immeasurably happier, completer and more delectable than he had ever conceived. His wildest ambitions, his appetites, his passions, all were gratified. All human joys intensified a thousandfold pursued and overpowered him in these Elysian Fields. The women he had loved were his.

As he slumbered, with upturned face, the smile grew more and more like the smile on the lips of Hollowell when found upon this same divan.

For now, to Santovano, had come

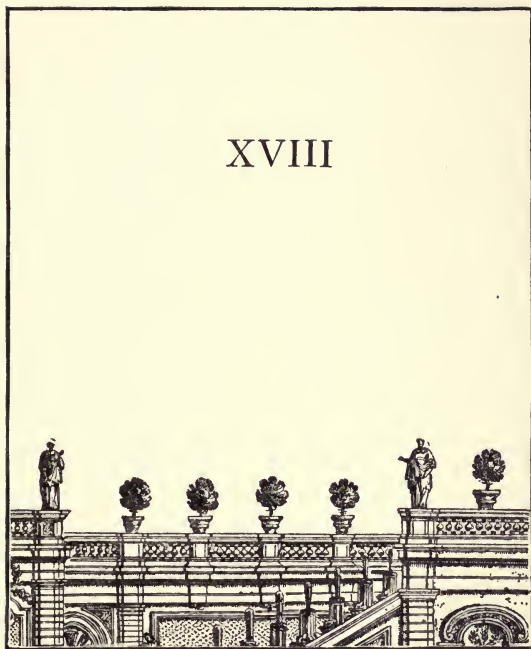
“THE JOY OF ALL IMAGININGS.”



O precious jar, whose summers date
Like mine, from Manlius' consulate,
I know not whether in your breast
Lie maudlin wail or merry jest,
Or fumes of soft' caressing sleep,
Or what more potent charms you keep;
But this I know, your ripened power
Befits some choicely festive hour!

Horace.

XVIII



XVIII

THE PRICE

THE smile still lingered upon his lips when Santovano returned to earth. Slowly he awoke, and with effort. For the joys of Olympus were enthralling, and not easily relinquished.

His eyes, as they moved about the chamber, brought no enlightenment to his brain—no remembrance of the past. The room and its contents were strangers to him. For a period of time he lay without moving. This unexpected entry into another life was bewildering. Had he been dreaming, and was he now awake? Or, was this a dream and the other rapturous career the real existence? His mind was like a splendid orchestra when the music ceases:—the silent air still throbbing with melody. But for Santovano the harmonies were forever gone. The orchestra had disbanded. The silence was for all time.

The Price

After closing his eyes during another period he made a fresh attempt toward some recognition of his whereabouts. He succeeded in recalling this chamber, vaguely, as a place which he had known of old. But how many years had passed since that nebulous epoch he had no conception. Through the large window at the end of the apartment he could see the tops of cypress-trees, dark masses against a deep-blue sky. And the sky was brighter toward the horizon. From the sunlight upon the wall, up near the ceiling, he guessed the time to be early morning, or late in the afternoon,—but of what day? of what year? He could remember nothing that had happened within an indefinite length of time.

The effort wearied him, and again he closed his eyes.

By summoning all his will power, he arose and stood up, with one hand, for support, upon the arm of the lounge; and he marvelled, in a dull way, at the irresponsiveness of his muscles and the stiffness of his joints. His back and legs might have belonged to another person—to some invalid, or baby. But the condition of his brain caused him greater alarm. Control over his own thoughts, over his memory and will, had

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forsaken him. With closed eyes and a weary frown he pressed a hand against his temples. Then, drawing a long breath, he straightened up; but his shoulders, the next moment, sank down and forward.

At the portals of his memory he knocked in vain. From its empty chambers came no response. Not an incident of his life could he recall.

His own identity eluded him. He became feebly conscious, however, of having visited this room some years ago. But just how long ago, or for what purpose, he strove in vain to remember. Now, standing in bewilderment, like a lost child, groping for a ray of light upon the past, he began to realize the presence of an odor, as of spirits—or a drug. Having once perceived its presence the odor seemed to increase in strength, and became oppressive. It created, in fact, a sense of nausea. More from instinct than from any exercise of will, he looked around him with a desire to escape it. Starting toward a door, he staggered and nearly fell: for he seemed to be learning the uses—and the limitations—of a pair of unfamiliar legs. And they were not the best. Communication between brain and limbs

The Price

seemed incomplete. When his trembling hand failed at first to grasp the door-knob Santovano smiled and murmured, "Somebody has been drinking, I fear."

The symptoms were not unfamiliar, particularly after a night of pleasure. But he opened the door and stepped out into a corridor. At once he felt the benefit of a purer air. His brain responded, and as he began to remember slowly, and with much uncertainty, a few disconnected incidents of his own career, it flashed upon him, of a sudden, that this was the villa of his betrothed. And he almost recalled her name. Turning his steps toward the center of the building, he approached a marble staircase in a more spacious hall—striving vainly as he walked, to recall the lady's name. Her appearance, however, he remembered—erect, and slight of figure; dark eyes with delicate eyebrows high above. A haughty little person, and extremely pretty; yes, more than pretty——

He stopped, and stared.

Ecco! The girl herself! Santovano blinked and strained his eyes for clearer vision. Yes, it was she! And her face, as he looked, seemed to dispel the clouds in his brain and to restore,

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for a period, fresher memories of an interesting epoch. Across the hall she was walking slowly, a young man at her side, both with downcast eyes, in a mournful study, apparently, of the marble floor. The young man's face, round and boyish, seemed familiar—but where had he seen him?

Through a large window that opened to the floor the afternoon sun, now low in the western sky, illumined the hall, and sent its rays, in golden patches, upon the stairs and marble pavement and upon the two young people. Santovano could see, outside the window, a terrace he had known of old; and beyond the terrace a gorgeous garden. As he gazed upon the maiden, his heart beat faster, for he remembered that she was all his own! But this happy sense of ownership suffered a relapse. The young couple, although they passed beyond his vision, remained clearly reflected in one of the mirrors of the hall as they stood by the door. And the words of parting came clearly to the listener's ears. Even through the mirror the changing color could be seen in the cheeks of the round-faced youth.

As they shook hands, at parting, the girl looked up earnestly into his face.

The Price

"You will write me from England, won't you, and tell me of that poor mother and sister?"

"Yes."

"Promise."

"Yes, I promise."

"And I shall write you, Morris, and tell you everything that can possibly interest you."

"Thank you, Betty."

The young man made a movement to withdraw his hand, and Santovano could see that she held it more tightly.

"And, little Morris, we will keep alive our old friendship, and never again let it be forgotten."

"Of course! Yes—of course!"

"And I shall write to you occasionally, and you will always answer, even if it is a bore."

"A bore! Of course—I mean—I shall be glad enough to get a letter! Well, good-by."

"Good-by, Morris."

The door closed and the blushing youth departed. But the girl, at the open door, stood looking after him until he was out of sight—a very long time, it seemed to Santovano. At last the door was closed and she buried her face in her hands and wept; not gently, but in convulsive sobs.

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Why should she weep? Was this young man—yes—dimly Santovano remembered him as another lover. But he also remembered that he, Santovano, was the affianced husband.

He stepped forth, out into the hall. At the sound of his feet upon the marble floor the little lady raised her face and hastily dried her eyes with a handkerchief. Then, slowly, she came toward him. With the changing color in her face, the glistening eyes, the startled air, and the effort, withal, to appear unmoved, she became yet more entrancing. But the affianced husband, with a formal inclination of the head, spoke coldly, and he addressed her in Italian.

“May I ask if that gentleman is a relative of yours?”

His voice seemed unfamiliar to himself; more uneven, thinner, and it came with an effort. She appeared surprised at the question, but answered, quietly,

“No, Signor.”

“Then am I permitted to inquire why his departure should cause you so deep a grief?”

She hesitated, frowned, and moved a step or two nearer the window for a better light upon his face. “He is a very old friend.”

The Price

“Not old in years, surely,—not an uncle or a grandfather?”

Her only response was a slight elevation of the eyebrows. Santovano smiled and advanced a step. “Come, let us not quarrel.”

She retreated a corresponding distance.

“I beg your pardon, Signor, but are you not making a mistake? Am I the person you wish to see?”

“You must really be angry to call me Signor, my dear—my dear—” But the name refused to come.

With an impatient gesture he frowned and snapped his fingers.

“Well, never mind! My wits are wandering to-day. Forgive me if I am not myself, just at present.” And he held out his hand.

But the haughty little lady became yet more erect, dropping all pretence of hiding her annoyance, and again retreated.

“Excuse me, Signor, but whom did you wish to see in this house?”

Santovano tried hard to smile.

“Really, you are doing it extremely well, Elizabetta.”

Elizabetta!—the name had come to him!

The Villa Claudia

And from fear of it again escaping, he repeated it, nodding his head, "Elizabetta, Elizabetta."

With a look of alarm she glanced toward the stairs.

"Oh, come!" he exclaimed. "Let us end this comedy! Are we meeting for the first time? Have you never seen me before? Am I so changed that——"

The words died upon his lips. For, as he spoke, he turned, in mockery, to the large mirror beside him. But the mocking smile melted suddenly away, and his jaw dropped. Motionless, the cold sweat upon his brow, he stared, then closed his eyes, and looked again—and yet again at the person in the mirror who was regarding him;—a besotted, maudlin old man—another Fra Diavolo, but more repulsive, more sensual and brutish. The flesh was pale, yet blotched with color; the hair an ashen gray. Bleared eyes with bags beneath; a purple nose and pendent lower lip all told together one ignoble, vicious tale.

No! It could not be he! This was some nightmare, some ghastly apparition that follows a debauch: some trick of nerves or brain. For a moment he dared not move—from fear this vile

The Price

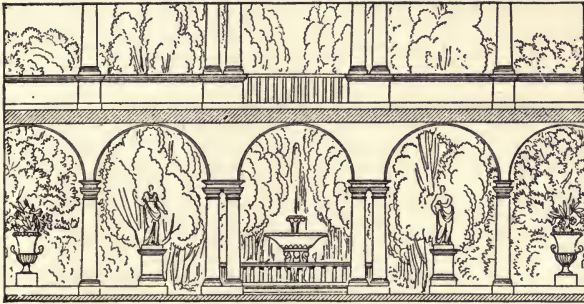
old man might do the same. Slowly, in the desperate hope that the object in the mirror might not respond, he began a gesture. But as his right hand moved stealthily upward the venerable drunkard moved his left—each watching the other with a look of dread. Then, quickly, Santovano jerked his head and lowered his hand. The stranger did likewise, and the motions were simultaneous.

As over Santovano's deadened senses, now quickened by terror, came the awful knowledge that this creature was himself, he closed his eyes and staggered toward the wall. Sinking upon a chair, he hid, with quivering fingers, his senile, sottish face.



Far-reaching hopes are not for us, the creatures of a day.

Horace.



XIX

XIX

THE LOST VERSE

ALTHOUGH dazed and crushed for a moment only, that moment, to Santovano, contained a world of self-abasement and of keenest shame. For the dominant trait in this gentleman's character was pride,—pride of ancestry and of intellect; pride in his force and courage; in his breeding, his presence, and his personal appearance—in short, an invincible pride in Giulio di Lunigiani di Santovano. And of this pride a living fragment still remained.

But even this, along with his memory, courage, will—all were slowly melting away.

He looked up, and saw the woman who once was his, regarding him with surprise—and contemptuous pity. Summoning, with a final effort, his fading energies, he arose from his chair. A glance at her face and he gathered courage, for, thank God! she had failed to recognize him.

The Lost Verse

Ceremoniously, he bowed. "Pardon me, Signorina," his voice came thinner and yet more uneven than heretofore. "I see I have made a mistake. This is not the house I was seeking. Please forgive the intrusion—and the inexcusable annoyance I have caused you."

His salutation was returned.

"Certainly, Signor."

Again he bowed and retreated toward the outer vestibule. He took a hat—his own hat—from the console in the hall, and opened the front door. But he saw, standing before the house, and directly in his path, two ladies of his acquaintance, and the Count d'Aquila. Their laughter reached his ears, the laughter of a merry conversation. At the thought of confronting these people, with the possibility of being recognized, every fibre of Santovano's ancient pride revolted. Shrinking back into the Villa Claudia, he closed the door.

Then he tried to think. His recent efforts in this field had not succeeded, but now he made another attempt to direct his thoughts; to reason, to decide on a course of action. As he stood in uncertainty, his hand upon the door-knob, he heard Betty Farnham's footsteps ascending the

The Villa Claudia

stairs to the floor above. Then, to his wandering senses, came an inspiration—to escape by the garden. For he understood that she, hearing the closing of the door, believed he had departed.

Silently across the hall he tiptoed, out upon the terrace; then slowly, with uncertain legs, down the marble steps to the gravel walk. He stopped for a moment, astonished at the dazzling colors of the garden. With childish delight he inhaled the perfumes. He was also astonished at the multiplicity of marbles; statues, busts, sculptured slabs, and vases in stone and bronze. Farther down the walk, a tall old man, now a somewhat indefinable figure against the setting sun, was coming toward the villa. This old man, in beggar's garb, walked slowly and seemed to stare about him as if in search of something. To avoid this stranger Santovano turned into a side path, and soon found himself at the ruins of a little temple. Here, descending three steps to an ancient pavement, he concealed himself behind a column. But the elderly beggar had also taken this side path, and he also came to the little temple, likewise descending to the ancient pavement.

The Lost Verse

Santovano, annoyed at being thus pursued, stepped forth and confronted the intruder. But the intruder gave him no attention except a careless glance. For the old beggar, whose foolish, empty face was indefinitely repugnant to Santovano, turned at once with fascinated eyes to an ancient marble slab on which were sculptured two drunken cupids. These cupids Santovano had seen before—but years ago, perhaps, and under circumstances of which he had no remembrance. Over the old beggar, however, they seemed to weave a spell. Ignoring the presence of Santovano, he fingered, with absent mind, a flute suspended from his neck, his eyes intently fixed upon the ancient tablet. Then, as if in a dream—or mistrusting his own senses—he went nearer and passed his hands over the sculptured marble.

Turning about, his drunkard's face illumined by a suddenly awakened memory, he recited, with half-closed eyes, some lines in Latin—lines whose beauty of language and charm of style are lost in translation.

And the old beggar recited them extremely well, with delicate emphasis and a scholarly appreciation.

The Villa Claudia

The very first words brought a singular transformation to Santovano's face.

Love and the Grape,
What waste of life all else !
And so, young wingèd god,
And joy-dispensing Bacchus,
Look to it, in years to come,
That vineyards thrive
And lovers meet,
To smother Time in kisses—
And old Falernian.

Santovano's look of annoyance had departed. His face lit up with an expression that bore a curious resemblance to that of the beggar while reciting the verse. There also came with the words a sudden clearing of his memory—a melting of the mists. With eager face and parted lips he moved nearer, and at the end, after a moment of mute astonishment, he exclaimed in Italian,

“That is the lost verse! The lost verse of Horace!”

But from the old man's face the light was already fading, and he regarded the speaker with a vacant, uncomprehending stare. Santovano repeated the verse as if to fix it in his memory; then with a look of perplexity:

The Lost Verse

“But when—how—how—did *you* get it?”

Fra Diavolo gazed in silence at his questioner, then looked away.

“Say something! Speak! Where did you get it? How came you to—know it?”

But there was no answer. With one hand Santovano removed his hat, passing the other against his forehead as if to calm his brain—or bring order out of chaos.

“Who else could know it? Nobody—nobody except he and I. It faded away, and di Forli, only di Forli, could repeat it.”

Then, with a sudden movement that startled his companion, he let fall his hat, took a forward step, and whispered, with a look of awe,

“Mother of God! Is it possible? Are *you*—are *you*—di Forli?”

Still no reply; merely a vacant stare into the speaker's excited face.

“No! No! Impossible! But say something! Who are you?”

Stepping nearer, Santovano tapped him on the chest and shook him.

“Who are you? Speak, you fool!”

Fra Diavolo, with the slightest possible shade of annoyance in his sodden old face, stepped

The Villa Claudia

away from the disturbing hands and toyed absently with his flute. But Santovano studied closely the old man's features and his figure.

"Yes, old friend, I see now. I understand. We look alike, you and I. And you, poor di Forli, you too, tasted the wine in the amphora. An amusing joke of Horace! Ha! Oh, an amusing joke! But Capodilista and Hollowell—their faces too—like ours. Why death for them? Why so much luckier than we?"

Nodding his head, he went on in a melancholy voice,

"Ah! I see—we drank less—we took one little glass. Two glasses meant the dream without the awakening. God! If I had only known!"

Then, with a gesture of impotent rage,

"We, poor fools, who had strength to resist—we live on to—to—to what? Justice of hell! my brain—is—is drunk— Yes, drunk."

He whirled about, stooped for his hat and put it on. Turning again to Fra Diavolo, "You a beggar, and all this garden yours!—this villa too! Why,—why, do you not—why—why do you——"

But the final flash of memory had died away.

The Lost Verse

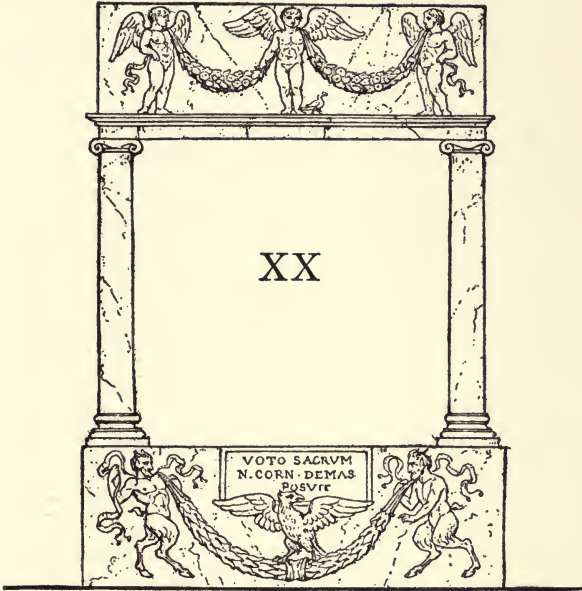
From its flickering embers came no light. With a glance at Fra Diavolo, of affection, of feeble resentment and of pity, he ascended the three steps and hurried away, down the garden path, repeating mechanically the verse he had just recovered. Through the doorway in the garden wall—by which Morris Lane, on a previous evening, made his fateful entrance—Santovano passed out into the twilight. Into a new life he entered, not as a high-born youth with splendid talents, but as a repugnant, half-witted old man; unknown and a pauper.

Di Forli, left alone at the little temple, put the flute to his lips and began his air from Fra Diavolo. As this gave warning of his presence the gardener—with the high shoulders and small head—moved at once in that direction. Gently he drew the instrument from the player's lips, looking reprovingly into the eyes of his former master, whose loss he sincerely mourned and for knowledge of whose whereabouts he would have given much. Leading him down the long path, beyond the fountain, a few pieces of copper were dropped into his pocket and di Forli was tenderly ejected from his own garden, and the door bolted behind him.



When time allows,
'Tis sweet the fool to play.

Horace.



XX

A POSTSCRIPT

WEST of the Villa Claudia, five thousand miles or more, snow was falling in the State of Massachusetts. It gathered in little drifts at the corners of Mr. Lane's garden, and against the old box hedges. The March wind, with stinging force, drove icy little flakes against the faces of its victims.

But on Mr. Elisha Goddard, who had survived seventy New England winters, this present flurry made no impression. He enjoyed the air. As he alighted from his carriage at Mr. Lane's garden, two passing citizens halted and deferentially gave him right of way across the sidewalk. And as he pushed open the garden gate and walked up the path with head erect and firm, long strides their eyes followed him with the special interest that accompanies an important personage. As the monarch of many

A Postscript

mills, the wealthiest man in a wealthy county and an erstwhile Senator, it was only natural that he should have the bearing of an important person. His appearance, moreover, was not only important but intimidating. Fierce eyebrows, snowy white, projected over a pair of searching eyes. A bony, overhanging nose intensified the severity of a long, tightly shut mouth. But at the corners of the mouth were certain wrinkles and movable curves that contradicted the threatening features above.

Upon the round-faced young man who came down the walk to meet him he frowned, and seemed to plant himself, with feet and cane, as if preparing for attack.

“Good-morning, Morris.”

“Good-morning, Mr. Goddard. Come into the house.”

“Can’t stop. I have just received a telegram from those Boston people. They will be here this forenoon at ten o’clock. I want you to go straight to the North factory, have our men ready, and superintend the adjustment of the new engines. Come right along with me.”

“Now? This morning?”

Upon the old man’s face came an ironical

The Villa Claudia

smile. "This morning! Oh, no! Any morning next summer."

Morris smiled. "I suppose it is pretty important, sir; isn't it?"

"The instalment of the new engines? Well, I should have said so!"

Morris seemed embarrassed. Flicking a bunch of snow from the hedge at his side, he cleared his throat. "I wanted very much to go to New York this morning."

"To New York?"

"Yes, sir."

As Morris had been to New York but twice in his life the announcement was unexpected. For a brief moment Mr. Goddard studied the young man's face. Then, with a frown in which the fierce eyebrows became fiercer than ever, he asked,

"Something urgent, I presume?"

"Oh, yes, sir! Very urgent!"

"What is her name?"

Morris started. And his face became red. "Why, how in the world did you—why do you think there is a *she*?"

Mr. Goddard tightened his lips and his head moved slowly up and down.

A Postscript

"I saw it in your face this morning, before you uttered a word. You have an exalted, foolish expression. Your feet have not touched the earth since I entered this garden."

Morris laughed. "Well, sir, I didn't suppose you would know it until I told you."

"Until you told me!" and the old gentleman tapped him on the shoulder with his cane. "Innocent lamb! You could not advertise it more completely if you had hired a military band and paraded the town with a banner, saying, 'I am in love.' "

"Oh!"

"How long has this been going on?"

"Ever since I went to Italy."

"Yes. Well, as soon as you got back I knew something was the matter. You have been floating around the works on wings. Your services to the cotton business have been worth about fifty cents a week. What kind of a person is it? Good looking?"

"Good looking! Why, Mr. Goddard, she is—she is—well, really, it is a kind of beauty that——"

"Yes, yes, I understand; plain but honest. And her disposition is probably angelic."

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"Angelic, yes. Perfect."

"Of course. An unbiassed opinion is always of value. A nasty temper, I have no doubt. How old is she—fifty?"

"Twenty-one."

"What's her name?"

"Farnham. Elizabetta—Elizabeth. Betty Farnham."

"Farnham Elizabetta Elizabeth Betty Farnham. A long name. And what is her nationality in all that?"

"Elizabeth Farnham is her name. She is pure American. You knew her once. She was your neighbor for several years."

"Farnham?—Farnham? You don't mean the little daughter of that pretty Mrs. Farnham?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you are going to marry *her*?"

"I hope so."

"But she is only that high." And Mr. Goddard held his cane horizontally a yard above the ground.

"Yes, about fifteen years ago she was that high."

"Poor wretches! And when are you to be married?"

A Postscript

"Oh, perhaps never!" Morris exclaimed.

"I don't know yet that she will take me!"

"Then this blissful condition of yours is all put on; a hollow mockery, based on nothing."

"No, sir! No! I wrote her last month telling her that I—asking her to—if she——"

"Well, out with it."

"—Would consider me."

"Well?"

"And last night I got this."

Morris drew a letter from an inner pocket and held it toward his friend. But the old gentleman frowned and shook his head. "Read it, if you must. I can't see without my glasses.

So the young man read:

PARIS, February twentieth.

"DEAR MORRIS :

"Your surprising letter was forwarded from Tivoli. We are here, on our way home to dear old America. Poor mamma, as you know, was completely prostrated by the unaccountable disappearance of Santovano."

"Disappearance of *what?*"

"Of Santovano. He was the man she was to marry. He disappeared about a fortnight before the wedding."

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“Good heavens, Morris! Is she so terrifying as that?”

Morris smiled and nodded.

“Well, well! And still you are not deterred by her effect upon others?”

“No, sir, not a bit.”

“And this Scanty Barno, how did he manage to escape?”

“Nobody knows. He was to meet me in Rome that afternoon, but he never turned up. His hat was gone, so he probably went to Rome; and the belief is that he met with foul play in the city.”

“Did they find the body?”

“No, sir.”

“Nor his watch—or money?”

“No, sir, nothing. No trace, whatever—not a clue.”

“He must have been desperate and thoroughly frightened. I do like a man who does a thing well. Many have shrunk from matrimony—very many do, but few in just that way. I suppose she has given up waiting for him?”

“Long ago.”

“And you are the next best thing.”

A Postscript

"That is what I am hoping."

"Did she land you easily?"

"Nothing could be easier! I swallowed the hook before it touched the water."

"Morris."

"Yes, sir."

"You are a fool."

"But I like it."

"Of course! Fools always do. But go on with your letter."

"An American doctor—heaven bless him!—tells mamma her own New England air will do her more good than anything in the world. So here we are on our way home. We sail from Havre next Wednesday on the Touraine.

Sincerely yours,

ELIZABETH FARNHAM."

Mr. Goddard's frown deepened. "I should hardly call that a love-letter."

"But there's this postscript":

"P.S.—I have not time at this moment to reply to all you say in your letter, but I may have something of interest to tell you if we should happen to meet in America."

At this Mr. Goddard made no effort to keep a sober face.

The Villa Claudia

"If you should happen to meet in America! Good! And when is the steamer due?"

"To-morrow morning."

"And you are going to wait all night on the wharf, if necessary, possibly in a snow-storm—to meet her?"

Morris nodded. "Yes, sir. A thousand nights, if necessary, and through any kind of weather."

"Well, it does look as if she might happen to meet you in America—quite by accident, of course, on your part."

The next instant, however, the habitual frown had returned.

"I have never known you to stay up all night in a snow-storm watching one of my factories."

"But I would if necessary."

The important personage shook his head and turned away in the direction of his carriage. Then, scowling upon the gravel walk, he said,

"Well, go to perdition if you must, but try and get back alive and to regular work within a year or so."

"Thank you, sir. But seriously, Mr. God-

A Postscript

dard, if you object to my leaving to-day I will postpone the trip and attend to those engines."

Mr. Goddard wheeled about, the bushy eyebrows drawn together.

"Give up the trip! Give up the real business of life for a couple of bloodless engines! Sooner perish the whole cotton industry of the United States!"

Then approaching Morris, he laid his cane on the young man's shoulder and emphasized his words by vigorous taps.

"Better those engines were strangled at their birth than come between you and this deluded girl. I was young once, and also a fool. It is the pleasantest memory I possess. No, No! You go to New York and insist upon your rights."

"My rights?"

"Yes, the right of every honest lover to become an unreasoning nuisance. Be as blissful and foolish as the law allows. Youth comes but once. And remember this: when you are married I shall double your interest in the business."

Morris gulped. His eyes moistened, his lips

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parted, but he could only stammer, "Thank you, Mr. Goddard, thank you."

But the senior partner shook his cane in warning.

"On one condition though: that you get the girl. If you fail after that postscript, I have no use for you."

Then he wheeled about and walked away.



XXI



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To-day is ours : the rest the gods command.

Horace.

XXI

A VERY OLD FRIEND

FOUR days later, on a tour of inspection in his new mill, Mr. Goddard paused before a half-open door. He stood for a moment in contemplation of a young man who sat within, a mechanical drawing stretched out upon the table before him, his eyes, however, gazing dreamily through the opposite window. Gently Mr. Goddard pushed open the door, and entered. But the humming of many looms, or the absorbing nature of the dreamer's thoughts, caused the new arrival to remain unnoticed. The wandering thoughts, however, were recalled to earth by a familiar voice.

"Machinery *is* interesting."

Rising hastily from his chair, a little color flying to his cheeks, Morris shook hands with the man of terrifying aspect. And the man of terrifying aspect studied him with frowning eyes.

"Well, I am glad you are back alive. Had a profitable visit?"

The Villa Claudia

"Indeed, I did!"

"And I judge from your beatified and somewhat maudlin expression a moment since that you were favorably impressed by New York and—and by its contents?"

Morris nodded.

"Yes, it does present objects of interest: the Hudson River; the Statue of Liberty; the Speedway; Grant's Tomb; the Flatiron Building. Things of beauty are joys forever."

"Yes, sir, and certain things above all others. Joys forever and more than beautiful. Full of spirit, yet gentle and lovable—oh! lovable to the last degree! And lots of character! Dark eyes, always changing; and a mouth——"

"Yes, yes, of course! You are speaking of Grant's Tomb, I suppose."

"Grant's Tomb! Yes, sir, and the Statue of Liberty, the Speedway, the City of New York, the whole world! That is how it all looks to me!"

"An observing young man!"

"And she sends you her love, sir."

"To me? How old do you say she is: forty-nine?"

"Twenty-one."

A Very Old Friend

“Impertinence! Inexcusable impertinence!” And the bushy eyebrows came together in a sinister frown. “When did your last letter go to her?”

“This morning.”

“Then you may not write her again until to-night.”

The lover laughed. “Well, yes, sir; to-night.”

Mr. Goddard took the carnation from his coat. “Put this in your letter. Tell her my love, my best wishes and my sincere congratulations go with it. I am sure you both will be very happy.” Then, before the young man could reply: “Sanderson tells me you are having trouble with the large engine. Come along. Let’s look at it.”

As they left the room Morris took an open letter that was lying on his table and put it in his pocket. It began:

“Darling Boy: Do you realize that three days have passed since I have seen you and that you have written me only four times? Shame!

“But this letter is merely a warning that you will receive a great big box to-morrow—a little surprise from somebody who thinks of you all the time and——”

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While the rest of the document was of no importance to any other cotton-miller, Morris had read and re-read it many times that morning, until he knew it by heart. As to the big box, he hurried home at noon in the hope of finding something, and lo! there it was, awaiting him in the woodshed; a huge case that might hold a small piano, or a sofa. After a hasty lunch he began with hammer and chisel to uncover the surprise, whatever it might be.

In raising the lid a peculiar, and not unfamiliar odor came forth. For a moment he could not recall his acquaintance with it. Gradually, however, it led him back to the Villa Claudia, to the fateful chamber. The relation once fixed he remembered it distinctly, and just how it affected him at the time. This box, with its straw and other packings, was full of it. As he bent over the case the odor increased in strength. It was not unpleasant, rather inviting than otherwise, but he felt that too much of it, as of any drug, or cordial—or even perfume—might prove overpowering.

But Morris was too much interested in his present work to be influenced by subtle analysis of odors.

A Very Old Friend

The first hard object he encountered proved to be the top of Trajan's head, a marble bust he had greatly admired in the gardens of the Villa Claudia. To lift it out he summoned Jared Flint, the hired man, and together they placed it, temporarily, on the top of a refrigerator. From which station the Roman emperor surveyed his new surroundings without surprise; feeling, perhaps, with Betty Farnham, that a spacious New England woodshed of the good old sort is fit for anybody. Next came a splendid garden vase in bronze, with its figures of Greek heroes: and, to Morris's inexpressible joy, the slab of the drunken cupids.

These he dusted off and rested with affectionate care upon a bench against the wall. They were in as good condition as when he had seen them at Tivoli; beautifully chiselled, full of expression, as happy and as drunk as ever. They, also, were not discouraged by their surroundings.

But the greatest surprise, the unique and priceless treasure, came last. In a box by itself, within the larger case, elaborately packed and protected with infinite care, it proclaimed its own importance. From this inner treasure-

The Villa Claudia

house Morris brought forth an ancient Roman amphora with an inscription on its surface in Augustan Latin. The inscription he translated easily.

Jared Flint, in his experience of forty years, had never seen a grown-up person so much elated over an ordinary looking piece of pottery; or, as he himself expressed it, "over a second-hand jug." But when the stopper was removed and Morris explained that this odor came from dregs of wine bottled by a Latin poet, nearly twenty centuries ago, then Jared took a livelier interest. Morris, with his nose over the jar, inhaled the odor and gave full play to his imagination.

Jared also inhaled. "Powerful hearty smell for its years! Why didn't it dry up in all that time? Must have been mightily well corked."

"With every possible care, probably. Things keep forever, they say, if no air gets in. You have heard of frogs and such things imbedded in rock and found in perfect preservation ages after."

"Yes, I've heard o' them. But this is old enough." Then, after a thoughtful pause,

A Very Old Friend

"I've been told them ancient Latin fellers didn't know this continent was here."

"No; no suspicion of us. Why, Jared, when Columbus was discovering America the wine had been lying in this jar more than fifteen hundred years!"

Jared nodded slowly, deeply impressed. Again he held his nose over the jar.

"Why, there's somethin' curious about this. If I was to smell it long enough, by Jiminy, I believe I'd be too drunk to git away! I'm feelin' kind o' good already. Try it!"

Morris laughed and tried it. "That's true. It does affect one in a curious way."

"Seems too bad," said Jared, "that the chap who took all the trouble can't come back for a few minutes and learn how it turned out;—cheered somebody up, I guess—or laid him low."

That evening in the library, as Morris sat in contemplation of the jar, he recalled these last words of Jared's and remembered what Betty had told him three days before: that this amphora, with the stopper lying beside it, and the wine evaporated, had been found in the "haunted room" by Dr. Olibrio after Santo-

The Villa Claudia

vano's disappearance. And Dr. Olibrio thought that possibly the contents of this jar bore some relation to the tragedies in that fateful chamber: believing wine, as certain Roman epicures perfected it, might gain in strength with passing centuries; and notwithstanding its chemical changes remain a tempting beverage, as this odor indicated—and become a drug whose potency would be purely speculative. Moreover, he believed its action upon a human victim might be such as to accomplish, in an hour, the same physical and mental results as years of intemperance.

At last Morris arose from his chair, repeating certain lines of the inscription.

“ THEN HE WHO SIPS SHALL BE
LIFTED TO OLYMPUS AND TASTE
THE JOY OF ALL IMAGININGS.
AND THOU, FALERNIAN, BRING
GOOD FORTUNE TO SOME HON-
EST LOVER.”

He laid a hand on the amphora, affectionately, as on the shoulder of a friend.

“For that last wish, dear Horace, my eternal thanks. Without your wine I should have lost the greatest of all treasures.”





I will enjoy myself.

Horace.

XXII

SI PARLA ITALIANO

“**T**HERE is nothing like June.”

And Betty, closing her eyes as she walked, inhaled the morning air with a long, deep breath.

“Nothing,” said Morris, “except yourself. Then it is always June.”

Her hat in her hand, the glow of exercise in her cheeks, with upturned face and half-closed eyes, Betty Farnham offered a picture of youth and health and perfect happiness, whose beauties were not wasted upon the man beside her.

This happens along a winding road, on one side thickly wooded; on the other, open fields and meadows sloping gently away to the Connecticut River. Softly against the pedestrians' faces came the breath of early summer, fragrant with wild flowers and new mown grass, and the many perfumes of New England June.

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"Morris, do you see that sky?—a deep, beautiful blue—impossibly blue—with the big white clouds?"

He looked up. "Yes; they are old friends of mine."

"Well, I love it all! And," stretching forth her hands, "I love these trees and fields, and that river. I love this air we are breathing, and *everything* American!"

"Do not forget that I, too, am American."

She turned her head, and smiled.

"Apropos of which, little Morris, when did you begin to take an interest in me?"

"When I was six years old. But the all-consuming passion, the divine agony, came upon me in the garden of the Villa Claudia."

"Ah! Really? Tell me when—at just what moment!"

"That first evening, when I opened my eyes on the marble bench and saw your face, in the moonlight, close to mine."

"Truly?"

"I awoke, at that moment, to a new existence; to realms of joy and torment of which I had no previous conception."

"That is very good! And I, too, at that mo-

Si Parla Italiano

ment took an interest—just a little, friendly, old time interest—in *you*.”

They stopped and faced each other. “Then yours,” said Morris, “did not come as suddenly as mine.”

“Not until you told me you were in love with me. But from that moment—I—I—well—I began to think about it.”

“But I never told you—over there—that I was in love with you!”

“Oh, yes, you did!”

“Why, Betty, my angel, excuse me, but I did not.”

“Darling Morris, do you happen to remember when you first heard of my engagement to Santovano?”

“Do I remember it! The blackest moment of my life! We stood on the terrace.”

“Yes. Well, it was then you told me.”

“Told you what?”

“That the news of my engagement to another man was a cruel blow.”

“On the contrary, I took especial care to keep my secret to myself.”

Betty smiled. “Simple boy! Your heart was an open page. Such misery in your eyes!

The Villa Claudia

such despair, and such resentment! No words were needed. Really, my heart went out to you."

"And I never suspected it! Then you did have a little pity for me?"

"More than pity. But with my promises to Santovano I felt very miserable and very wicked. And I still feel wicked—and very much ashamed. But it showed me that I had no real love for Santovano."

"Lucky Santovano!" Morris exclaimed. "Happy the man who loses his life instead of his girl!"

"Do you really think so?"

"I know it."

"Morris," said Betty, "you are fat with a round face—like a cherub. Your nose is too short and you are very presuming, and familiar; and your cravat is crooked—yet—I love you dearly."

Morris came nearer still and looked earnestly into her eyes. "And, as for you, your nose is a dream; you are perfect in every way, and by far the most desirable thing in creation—and yet—I love you dearly."

She was standing with her hands behind her,

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their smiling faces coming nearer, and still nearer, together. But Morris, before proceeding further, cast a rapid glance along the road behind them—where nobody was in sight; then another toward the village. With this second glance he drew back, somewhat hastily, and straightened up. Betty also looked in that direction.

“Why, what on earth is it?” she murmured.

“Two men,” said Morris, “and a—a what?”

“It’s a bear.”

“Why, of course!”

Starting on again, they met in another moment the three figures coming from the village: an organ-grinder, bending beneath the instrument on his back, followed by an old man, who led a bear. The grinder, a swarthy person with the blackest of beards, raised his hat and saluted, ceremoniously, the two Americans.

“Gooda-day, lady.”

“Good-day,” said Morris.

The organ-grinder bowed again, still smiling, and swung his organ around in front of him. In raising the faded green cloth that covered it he disclosed a scene upon the operatic

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stage, where a pasteboard Trovatore stood face to face with his pasteboard Leonora. As the grinder's hand touched the crank to set in motion these figures and their music, Betty restrained him with a gesture. In Italian she said:

"Thanks; but do not trouble yourself to play."

At these words in his own language the man's face showed an irrepressible joy.

"Ah! The Signorina speaks Italian! She is Italian herself, perhaps? Yes? Yes?"

"No, American; but I have lived a long time in your beautiful Italy."

"Where in Italy? Where, Signorina?"

"In Rome, principally, and in Tivoli."

"Ah! I also know Rome, a little: and I know Tivoli very well. I am from Vicovaro, and that is near Tivoli. Perhaps you know Vicovaro?"

"Oh, yes!" Turning to Morris, "He is from Vicovaro, near Horace's farm, you know."

"Yes, the place I never reached."

"Si! Si!" exclaimed the grinder, "la villa d'Orazio."

"Tell him," said Morris, "that we fear he

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will find Italy very cold and colorless after the sensuous splendors of Boston."

"I shall tell him no such thing!" But she said to him instead, "If you have lived in Tivoli perhaps you know Fra Diavolo?"

"Ah, yes, Signorina, everybody in Tivoli knew Fra Diavolo. He is dead now."

"Dead!" And Betty's face showed real sorrow. "Oh! Is Fra Diavolo dead?"

"Yes, Signorina. He was found one day in his usual place, sitting before the Villa Claudia, his soul away. Did you happen to know the Villa Claudia?"

"Yes."

"It is believed that some wicked spirit from that abode came forth in broad daylight—in the sunshine of the morning—and touched, with the finger of death, the old musician."

"They found him there in the morning?"

"At noon, Signorina. When little Taddeo Poggi, the boy who used to lead him home to dinner, went that day, as usual, and pulled his sleeve to wake him up, he found that he was dead, his flute in his hand."

"How long ago?"

"In the month of February."

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"Then you and your friend have not been long in this country."

"We came in March, Signorina."

All this was translated to Morris, who also expressed his sympathy for Fra Diavolo. "But I think the old fellow lost little pleasure by his dying."

"Yes, death could rob him of nothing that others value," said Betty. "But his life was so pathetic, so very empty and hopeless, that his death, in one way, is all the sadder."

"Signorina," said the grinder, "if you and your gentleman will grant me a moment you shall see the dancing of my bear. It is worth a short moment, even from the happiest people."

He turned to the old man, who seemed lost in sleepy admiration of the lady.

"Ola! Wake up, antico!"

With an imperative gesture toward the beast he turned the crank. At once the encircling air became filled with noise.

The old man, an unkempt, ragged, dusty figure, whose dirty white beard and frowzy hair covered most of his sunburnt visage, gave the rope a jerk. The bear rose slowly upon

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his hind legs. As the organ poured forth its impassioned strains from "Trovatore," the bear began to dance. He danced as all bears dance: a ponderous, leisurely, rhythmic motion, swaying to and fro with shaking sides, as if intoxicated—or convulsed with laughter. Both Betty and Morris were amused; and their enjoyment gratified the organ-grinder. The old man who held the rope, however, kept his dull eyes fixed upon the lady, as the bear, presumably, had ceased to amuse him. When the music reached its final notes, and expired in a long-drawn, melancholy gasp, the bear dropped to earth again, all in a matter-of-fact way, obviously bored by the comedy.

"Good!" exclaimed Betty, in Italian. "Very good, indeed! He is most diverting, your bear."

"Yes, Signorina. A useful bear."

"Did you bring him from Italy?"

"Oh, no! He is American."

"Where are you going now, to what town?"

"Toward the city of Springfield, Signorina. There we stay a few days."

"Where next?"

"Oh, I do not know." Then, with a shrug

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and a cheerful smile, "Where the good God may decide. It matters little."

"Poor things! Just think what a life! Give him some money, Morris."

Morris took out a quarter.

"Oh! More than that!"

"How much?"

"A few dollars at least."

"What! Dollars! The old chap seems feeble-minded, and the bear can't use it."

"Never mind."

Morris examined a little roll of bills. "I have nothing between a quarter and a five-dollar bill."

"Give him the five-dollar bill."

As Morris handed it to the grinder the old hat was again removed, and again the swarthy face became illumined by an expansive smile, of surprise and gratitude.

"Oh, Signorina! And Signor! Many thanks! We all thank you! The Old One has few wits and cannot speak for himself, but he shall have his share. Great happiness of all kinds to you, Signorina."

A moment later, Morris turned to Betty as

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they walked toward the town, and spoke of the organ-grinder's pleasure in hearing his own language. "And," he added, "you, also, must enjoy speaking it—a language of so many pleasant memories."

For a moment she walked on in silence. "Yes, perhaps. But the memories might have remained pleasanter if you had never appeared."

"Thanks."

She moved nearer and slid a hand into one of his. "What I mean, dearest Morris, is this: that your coming to Tivoli made me realize how much less happy I was than I had believed: that I was marrying Santovano because he and mamma wished it; not from love. Now I have discovered something—a heavenly, wonderful thing."

"And what is that, angel?"

"The true, uplifting, self-forgetful, never-dying kind."

"Of what?"

As they stopped and faced each other he read his answer in the eyes that met his own—two serious, very earnest eyes, but shining with the light of a supreme content.

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Without waiting, this time, for precautionary glances either to right or left, Morris encircled the little figure with his arms. Slowly and gently it was done, as if alone in a forest. Although not in a forest but on a highway, with open meadows in sight and the town not far away, no person saw them—save one.

The old man who held the bear was still standing in the road with his two companions; the Italian readjusting the strap to his organ; the bear looking sadly, with reminiscent gaze, into the woods near by. During the recent interview the old man's eyes had not moved from Betty Farnham's face. Now they followed her down the road.

As he stood and blinked in the sunshine, watching the little scene between the lovers, he murmured, in an ancient language unknown to the organ-grinder, words to this effect:

And so, in years to come,
Let vineyards thrive
And lovers meet,
To smother Time in kisses—
—And old Falernian.

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Beneath the brim of his faded hat the dull eyes were following, in stolid fascination, the receding figures of the two Americans. He saw them very close together, moving beneath the overhanging trees, now in shadow, now in sunlight. And it was clear, even to this old man, that they were finding in each other's presence,

The joy of all imaginings.

Recalled sharply to himself by a brief command as the grinder swung the organ upon his back, the old man turned about and again took up the unending tramp.

Trudging slowly along, his eyes upon the dusty heels of his leader, with frequent jerks of the rope to hasten the progress of the beast behind, he tried vainly to remember where he had seen the lady. The mist would lift for an instant—the mist between himself and his past, revealing—almost revealing—the meaning of her face. But the clouds, in another moment, would again close in, and she, with all else, become the fading vision of a dream.

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And her voice! Forgotten music—stirring within him a vague remembrance. It lingered in his ears, but growing fainter—fainter—until it died away, an echo from the silent ruins of his memory.

THE END

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