

ZICCI - BOOK 1.

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ZICCI

A TALE.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

In the gardens at Naples, one summer evening in the last century, some four or five gentlemen were seated under a tree drinking their sherbet and listening, in the intervals of conversation, to the music which enlivened that gay and favorite resort of an indolent population. One of this little party was a young Englishman who had been the life of the whole group, but who for the last few moments had sunk into a gloomy and abstracted reverie. One of his countrymen observed this sudden gloom, and tapping him on the back, said, "Glyndon, why, what ails you? Are you ill? You have grown quite pale; you tremble: is it a sudden chill? You had better go home; these Italian nights are often dangerous to our English constitutions."

"No, I am well now,—it was but a passing shudder; I cannot account for it myself."

A man apparently of about thirty years of age, and of a mien and countenance strikingly superior to those around him, turned abruptly, and looked steadfastly at Glyndon.

"I think I understand what you mean," said he,—and perhaps," he added, with a grave smile, "I could explain it better than yourself." Here, turning to the others, he added, "You must often have felt, gentlemen,—each and all of you,—especially when sitting alone at night, a strange and unaccountable sensation of coldness and awe creep over you; your blood curdles, and the heart stands still; the limbs shiver, the hair bristles; you are afraid to look up, to turn your eyes to the darker corners of the room; you have a horrible fancy that something unearthly is at hand. Presently the whole spell, if I may so call it, passes

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away, and you are ready to laugh at your own weakness. Have you not often felt what I have thus imperfectly described? If so, you can understand what our young friend has just experienced, even amidst the delights of this magical scene, and amidst the balmy whispers of a July night."

"Sir," replied Glyndon, evidently much surprised, "you have defined exactly the nature of that shudder which came over me. But how could my manner be so faithful an index to my impressions?"

"I know the signs of the visitation," returned the stranger, gravely; "they are not to be mistaken by one of my experience."

All the gentlemen present then declared that they could comprehend, and had felt, what the stranger had described. "According to one of our national superstitions," said Merton, the Englishman who had first addressed Glyndon, "the moment you so feel your blood creep, and your hair stand on end, some one is walking over the spot which shall be your grave."

"There are in all lands different superstitions to account for so common an occurrence," replied the stranger; "one sect among the Arabians hold that at that instant God is deciding the hour either of your death or that of some one dear to you. The African savage, whose imagination is darkened by the hideous rites of his gloomy idolatry, believes that the Evil Spirit is pulling you towards him by the hair. So do the Grotesque and the Terrible mingle with each other."

"It is evidently a mere physical accident,—a derangement of the stomach; a chill of the blood," said a young Neapolitan.

"Then why is it always coupled, in all nations, with some superstitious presentiment or terror,—some connection between the material frame and the supposed world without us?" asked the stranger. "For my part, I think—"

"What do you think, sir?" asked Glyndon, curiously.

"I think," continued the stranger, "that it is the repugnance and horror of that which is human about us to something indeed invisible, but antipathetic to our own nature, and from a knowledge of which we are happily secured by the imperfection of our senses."

"You are a believer in spirits, then?" asked Merton, with an incredulous smile.

"Nay, I said not so. I can form no notion of a spirit, as the metaphysicians do, and certainly have no fear of one; but there may be forms of matter as invisible and impalpable to us as the animalculæ to which I have compared them. The monster that lives and dies in a drop

of water, carnivorous, insatiable, subsisting on the creatures minuter than himself, is not less deadly in his wrath, less ferocious in his nature, than the tiger of the desert. There may be things around us malignant and hostile to men, if Providence had not placed a wall between them and us, merely by different modifications of matter.”

”And could that wall never be removed?” asked young Glyndon, abruptly. ”Are the traditions of sorcerer and wizard, universal and immemorial as they are, merely fables?”

”Perhaps yes; perhaps no,” answered the stranger, indifferently. ”But who, in an age in which the reason has chosen its proper bounds, would be mad enough to break the partition that divides him from the boa and the lion, to repine at and rebel against the law of nature which confines the shark to the great deep? Enough of these idle speculations.”

Here the stranger rose, summoned the attendant, paid for his sherbet, and, bowing slightly to the company, soon disappeared among the trees.

”Who is that gentleman?” asked Glyndon, eagerly.

The rest looked at each other, without replying, for some moments.

”I never saw him before,” said Merton, at last.

”Nor I.”

”Nor I.”

”I have met him often,” said the Neapolitan, who was named Count Cetoxa; ”it was, if you remember, as my companion that he joined you. He has been some months at Naples; he is very rich,—indeed enormously so. Our acquaintance commenced in a strange way.”

”How was it?”

”I had been playing at a public gaming-house, and had lost considerably. I rose from the table, resolved no longer to tempt Fortune, when this gentleman, who had hitherto been a spectator, laying his hand on my arm, said with politeness, ’Sir, I see you enjoy play,—I dislike it; but I yet wish to have some interest in what is going on. Will you play this sum for me? The risk is mine,—the half-profits yours.’ I was startled, as you may suppose, at such an address; but the stranger had an air and tone with him it was impossible to resist. Besides, I was burning to recover my losses, and should not have risen had I had any money left about me. I told him I would accept his offer, provided we shared the risk as well as profits. ’As you will,’ said he, smiling, ’we need have no scruple, for you will be sure to win.’ I sat down, the stranger stood behind me; my luck rose, I invariably won. In fact, I

rose from the table a rich man.”

”There can be no foul play at the public tables, especially when foul play would make against the bank.”

”Certainly not,” replied the count. ”But our good fortune was indeed marvellous,—so extraordinary that a Sicilian (the Sicilians are all ill-bred, bad-tempered fellows) grew angry and insolent. ’Sir,’ said he, turning to my new friend, ’you have no business to stand so near to the table. I do not understand this; you have not acted fairly.’ The spectator replied, with great composure, that he had done nothing against the rules; that he was very sorry that one man could not win without another man losing; and that he could not act unfairly even if disposed to do so. The Sicilian took the stranger’s mildness for apprehension,—blustered more loudly, and at length fairly challenged him. ’I never seek a quarrel, and I never shun a danger,’ returned my partner; and six or seven of us adjourned to the garden behind the house. I was of course my partner’s second. He took me aside. ’This man will die,’ said he; ’see that he is buried privately in the church of St. Januario, by the side of his father.’

”’Did you know his family?’ I asked with great surprise. He made no answer, but drew his sword and walked deliberately to the spot we had selected. The Sicilian was a renowned swordsman; nevertheless, in the third pass he was run through the body. I went up to him; he could scarcely speak. ’Have you any request to make,—any affairs to settle?’ He shook his head. ’Where would you wish to be interred?’ He pointed towards the Sicilian coast. ’What!’ said I, in surprise, ’not by the side of your father?’ As I spoke, his face altered terribly, he uttered a piercing shriek; the blood gushed from his mouth, and he fell dead. The most strange part of the story is to come. We buried him in the church of St. Januario. In doing so, we took up his father’s coffin; the lid came off in moving it, and the skeleton was visible. In the hollow of the skull we found a very slender wire of sharp steel; this caused great surprise and inquiry. The father, who was rich and a miser, had died suddenly and been buried in haste, owing, it was said, to the heat of the weather. Suspicion once awakened, the examination became minute. The old man’s servant was questioned, and at last confessed that the son had murdered the sire. The contrivance was ingenious; the wire was so slender that it pierced to the brain and drew but one drop of blood, which the gray hairs concealed. The accomplice was executed.”

”And this stranger, did he give evidence? Did he account for—”

”No,” interrupted the count, ”he declared that he had by accident visited the church that morning; that he had observed the tombstone of the Count Salvolio; that his guide had told him the count’s son was in Naples,—a spendthrift and a gambler. While we were at play, he had heard the count mentioned by name at the table; and when the challenge

was given and accepted, it had occurred to him to name the place of burial, by an instinct he could not account for."

"A very lame story," said Merton.

"Yes, but we Italians are superstitious. The alleged instinct was regarded as the whisper of Providence; the stranger became an object of universal interest and curiosity. His wealth, his manner of living, his extraordinary personal beauty, have assisted also to make him the rage."

"What is his name?" asked Glyndon.

"Zicci. Signor Zicci."

"Is it not an Italian name? He speaks English like a native."

"So he does French and German, as well as Italian, to my knowledge. But he declares himself a Corsican by birth, though I cannot hear of any eminent Corsican family of that name. However, what matters his birth or parentage? He is rich, generous, and the best swordsman I ever saw in my life. Who would affront him?"

"Not I, certainly," said Merton, rising. "Come, Glyndon, shall we seek our hotel? It is almost daylight. Adieu, signor."

"What think you of this story?" said Glyndon as the young men walked homeward.

"Why, it is very clear that this Zicci is some impostor, some clever rogue; and the Neapolitan shares booty, and puffs him off with all the hackneyed charlatanism of the marvellous. An unknown adventurer gets into society by being made an object of awe and curiosity; he is devilish handsome; and the women are quite content to receive him without any other recommendation than his own face and Cetoxa's fables."

"I cannot agree with you. Cetoxa, though a gambler and a rake, is a nobleman of birth and high repute for courage and honor. Besides, this stranger, with his grand features and lofty air,—so calm, so unobtrusive,—has nothing in common with the forward garrulity of an impostor."

"My dear Glyndon, pardon me, but you have not yet acquired any knowledge of the world; the stranger makes the best of a fine person, and his grand air is but a trick of the trade. But to change the subject: how gets on the love affair?"

"Oh! Isabel could not see me to-night. The old woman gave me a note of excuse."

"You must not marry her; what would they all say at home?"

"Let us enjoy the present," said Glyndon, with vivacity; "we are young, rich, good-looking: let us not think of to-morrow."

"Bravo, Glyndon! Here we are at the hotel. Sleep sound, and don't dream of Signor Zicci."

CHAPTER II.

Clarence Glyndon was a young man of small but independent fortune. He had, early in life, evinced considerable promise in the art of painting, and rather from enthusiasm than the want of a profession, he had resolved to devote himself to a career which in England has been seldom entered upon by persons who can live on their own means. Without being a poet, Glyndon had also manifested a graceful faculty for verse, which had contributed to win his entry into society above his birth. Spoiled and flattered from his youth upward, his natural talents were in some measure relaxed by indolence and that worldly and selfish habit of thought which frivolous companionship often engenders, and which is withering alike to stern virtue and high genius. The luxuriance of his fancy was unabated; but the affections, which are the life of fancy, had grown languid and inactive. His youth, his vanity, and a restless daring and thirst of adventure had from time to time involved him in dangers and dilemmas, out of which, of late, he had always extricated himself with the ingenious felicity of a clever head and cool heart. He had left England for Rome with the avowed purpose and sincere resolution of studying the divine masterpieces of art; but pleasure had soon allured him from ambition, and he quitted the gloomy palaces of Rome for the gay shores and animated revelries of Naples. Here he had fallen in love—deeply in love, as he said and thought—with a young person celebrated at Naples, Isabel di Pisani. She was the only daughter of an Italian by an English mother. The father had known better days; in his prosperity he had travelled, and won in England the affections of a lady of some fortune. He had been induced to speculate; he lost his all; he settled at Naples, and taught languages and music. His wife died when Isabel, christened from her mother, was ten years old. At sixteen she came out on the stage; two years afterwards her father departed this life, and Isabel was an orphan.

Glyndon, a man of pleasure and a regular attendant at the theatre, had remarked the young actress behind the scenes; he fell in love with her, and he told her so. The girl listened to him, perhaps from vanity, perhaps from ambition, perhaps from coquetry; she listened, and allowed but few stolen interviews, in which she permitted no favor to the Englishman it was one reason why he loved her so much.

The day following that on which our story opens, Glyndon was riding alone by the shores of the Neapolitan sea, on the other side of the Cavern of Pausilippo. It was past noon; the sun had lost its early fervor, and a cool breeze sprang voluptuously from the sparkling sea. Bending over a fragment of stone near the roadside, he perceived the form of a man; and when he approached he recognized Zicci.

The Englishman saluted him courteously. "Have you discovered some antique?" said he, with a smile; "they are as common as pebbles on this road."

"No," replied Zicci; "it was but one of those antiques that have their date, indeed, from the beginning of the world, but which Nature eternally withers and renews." So saying, he showed Glyndon a small herb with a pale blue flower, and then placed it carefully in his bosom.

"You are an herbalist?"

"I am."

"It is, I am told, a study full of interest."

"To those who understand it, doubtless. But," continued Zicci, looking up with a slight and cold smile, "why do you linger on your way to converse with me on matters in which you neither have knowledge nor desire to obtain it? I read your heart, young Englishman: your curiosity is excited; you wish to know me, and not this humble herb. Pass on; your desire never can be satisfied."

"You have not the politeness of your countrymen," said Glyndon, somewhat discomposed. "Suppose I were desirous to cultivate your acquaintance, why should you reject my advances?"

"I reject no man's advances," answered Zicci. "I must know them, if they so desire; but me, in return, they can never comprehend. If you ask my acquaintance, it is yours; but I would warn you to shun me."

"And why are you then so dangerous?"

"Some have found me so; if I were to predict your fortune by the vain calculations of the astrologer, I should tell you, in their despicable jargon, that my planet sat darkly in your house of life. Cross me not, if you can avoid it. I warn you now for the first time and last."

"You despise the astrologers, yet you utter a jargon as mysterious as theirs. I neither gamble nor quarrel: why then should I fear you?"

"As you will; I have done."

"Let me speak frankly: your conversation last night interested and amused me."

"I know it; minds like yours are attracted by mystery."

Glyndon was piqued at those words, though in the tone in which they were spoken there was no contempt.

"I see you do not consider me worthy of your friendship be it so. Good day."

Zicci coldly replied to the salutation, and as the Englishman rode on, returned to his botanical employment.

The same night Glyndon went, as usual, to the theatre. He was standing behind the scenes watching Isabel, who was on the stage in one of her most brilliant parts. The house resounded with applause. Glyndon was transported with a young man's passion and a young man's pride. "This glorious creature," thought he, "may yet be mine."

He felt, while thus rapt in delicious revery, a slight touch upon his shoulder; he turned, and beheld Zicci. "You are in danger," said the latter. "Do not walk home to-night; or if you do, go not alone."

Before Glyndon recovered from his surprise, Zicci disappeared; and when the Englishman saw him again, he was in the box of one of the Neapolitan ministers, where Glyndon could not follow him.

Isabel now left the stage, and Glyndon accosted her with impassioned gallantry. The actress was surprisingly beautiful; of fair complexion and golden hair, her countenance was relieved from the tame and gentle loveliness which the Italians suppose to be the characteristics of English beauty, by the contrast of dark eyes and lashes, by a forehead of great height, to which the dark outline of the eyebrows gave some thing of majesty and command. In spite of the slightness of virgin youth, her proportions had the nobleness, blent with the delicacy, that belongs to the masterpieces of ancient sculpture; and there was a conscious pride in her step, and in the swanlike bend of her stately head, as she turned with an evident impatience from the address of her lover. Taking aside an old woman, who was her constant and confidential attendant at the theatre, she said, in an earnest whisper,—

"Oh, Gionetta, he is here again! I have seen him again! And again, he alone of the whole theatre withholds from me his applause. He scarcely seems to notice me; his indifference mortifies me to the soul,—I could weep for rage and sorrow."

"Which is he, my darling?" said the old woman, with fondness in her voice. "He must be dull,—not worth thy thoughts."

The actress drew Gionetta nearer to the stage, and pointed out to her a man in one of the nearer boxes, conspicuous amongst all else by the simplicity of his dress and the extraordinary beauty of his features.

"Not worth a thought, Gionetta," repeated Isabel,— "not worth a thought! Saw you ever one so noble, so godlike?"

"By the Holy Mother!" answered Gionetta, "he is a proper man, and has the air of a prince."

The prompter summoned the Signora Pisani. "Find out his name, Gionetta," said she, sweeping on to the stage, and passing by Glyndon, who gazed at her with a look of sorrowful reproach.

The scene on which the actress now entered was that of the final catastrophe, wherein all her remarkable powers of voice and art were pre-eminently called forth. The house hung on every word with breathless worship, but the eyes of Isabel sought only those of one calm and unmoved spectator; she exerted herself as if inspired. The stranger listened, and observed her with an attentive gaze, but no approval escaped his lips, no emotion changed the expression of his cold and half-disdainful aspect. Isabel, who was in the character of a jealous and abandoned mistress, never felt so acutely the part she played. Her tears were truthful; her passion that of nature: it was almost too terrible to behold. She was borne from the stage, exhausted and insensible, amidst such a tempest of admiring rapture as Continental audiences alone can raise. The crowd stood up, handkerchiefs waved, garlands and flowers were thrown on the stage, men wiped their eyes, and women sobbed aloud.

"By heavens!" said a Neapolitan of great rank, "she has fired me beyond endurance. To-night, this very night, she shall be mine! You have arranged all, Mascari?"

"All, signor. And if this young Englishman should accompany her home?"

"The presuming barbarian! At all events let him bleed for his folly. I hear that she admits him to secret interviews. I will have no rival."

"But an Englishman! There is always a search after the bodies of the English."

"Fool! Is not the sea deep enough, or the earth secret enough, to hide one dead man? Our ruffians are silent as the grave itself. And I,—who would dare to suspect, to arraign, the Prince di —? See to it,—let him be watched, and the fitting occasion taken. I trust him to you,—robbers murder him; you understand: the country swarms with them. Plunder and strip him. Take three men; the rest shall be my escort."

Mascari shrugged his shoulders, and bowed submissively. Meanwhile

Glyndon besought Isabel, who recovered but slowly, to return home in his carriage. (1) She had done so once or twice before, though she had never permitted him to accompany her. This time she refused, and with some petulance. Glyndon, offended, was retiring sullenly, when Gionetta stopped him. "Stay, signor," said she, coaxingly, "the dear signora is not well: do not be angry with her; I will make her accept your offer."

Glyndon stayed, and after a few moments spent in expostulation on the part of Gionetta, and resistance on that of Isabel, the offer was accepted; the actress, with a mixture of naivete and coquetry, gave her handy to her lover, who kissed it with delight. Gionetta and her charge entered the carriage, and Glyndon was left at the door of the theatre, to return home on foot. The mysterious warning of Zicci then suddenly occurred to him; he had forgotten it in the interest of his lover's quarrel with Isabel. He thought it now advisable to guard against danger foretold by lips so mysterious; he looked round for some one he knew. The theatre was disgorging its crowds, who hustled and jostled and pressed upon him; but he recognized no familiar countenances. While pausing irresolute, he heard Merton's voice calling on him, and to his great relief discovered his friend making his way through the throng.

"I have secured you a place in the Count Cetoxa's carriage," said he. "Come along, he is waiting for us."

"How kind in you! How did you find me out?"

"I met Zicci in the passage. 'Your friend is at the door of the theatre,' said he; 'do not let him go home alone to-night the streets of Naples are not always safe.' I immediately remembered that some of the Calabrian bravos had been busy within the city the last few weeks, and asked Cetoxa, who was with me, to accompany you."

Further explanation was forbidden, for they now joined the count. As Glyndon entered the carriage and drew up the glass, he saw four men standing apart by the pavement, who seemed to eye him with attention.

"Cospetto!" cried one; "ecco Inglese!" Glyndon imperfectly heard the exclamation as the carriage drove on. He reached home in safety.

"Have you discovered who he is?" asked the actress, as she was now alone in the carriage with Gionetta.

"Yes, he is the celebrated Signor Zicci, about whom the court has run mad. They say he is so rich,—oh, so much richer than any of the Inglese! But a bird in the hand, my angel, is better than—"

"Cease," interrupted the young actress. "Zicci! Speak of the Englishman no more."

The carriage was now entering that more lonely and remote part of the

city in which Isabel's house was situated, when it suddenly stopped.

Gionetta, in alarm, thrust her head out of window, and perceived by the pale light of the moon that the driver, torn from his seat, was already pinioned in the arms of two men; the next moment the door was opened violently, and a tall figure, masked and mantled, appeared.

"Fear not, fairest Pisani," said he, gently, "no ill shall befall you." As he spoke, he wound his arms round the form of the fair actress, and endeavored to lift her from the carriage. But the Signora Pisani was not an ordinary person; she had been before exposed to all the dangers to which the beauty of the low-born was subjected amongst a lawless and profligate nobility. She thrust back the assailant with a power that surprised him, and in the next moment the blade of a dagger gleamed before his eyes. "Touch me," said she, drawing herself to the farther end of the carriage, "and I strike!"

The mask drew back.

"By the body of Bacchus, a bold spirit!" said he, half laughing and half alarmed. "Here, Luigi, Giovanni! disarm and seize her. Harm her not."

The mask retired from the door, and another and yet taller form presented itself. "Be calm, Isabel di Pisani," said he, in a low voice; "with me you are indeed safe!" He lifted his mask as he spoke, and showed the noble features of Zicci. "Be calm, be hushed; I can save you." He vanished, leaving Isabel lost in surprise, agitation, and delight. There were in all nine masks: two were engaged with the driver; one stood at the head of the carriage-horses; a third guarded the well-trained steeds of the party; three others, besides Zicci and the one who had first accosted Isabel, stood apart by a carriage drawn to the side of the road. To these Zicci motioned: they advanced; he pointed towards the first mask, who was in fact the Prince di —, and to his unspeakable astonishment the Prince was suddenly seized from behind.

"Treason," he cried, "treason among my own men! What means this?"

"Place him in his carriage. If he resist, shoot him!" said Zicci, calmly.

He approached the men who had detained the coachman. "You are outnumbered and outwitted," said he. "Join your lord; you are three men,—we six, armed to the teeth. Thank our mercy that we spare your lives. Go!"

The men gave way, dismayed. The driver remounted. "Cut the traces of their carriage and the bridles of their horses," said Zicci, as he entered the vehicle containing Isabel, and which now drove on rapidly, leaving the discomfited ravisher in a state of rage and stupor impossible to describe.

"Allow me to explain this mystery to you," said Zicci. "I discovered the plot against you,—no matter how. I frustrated it thus: the head of this design is a nobleman who has long persecuted you in vain. He and two of his creatures watched you from the entrance of the theatre, having directed six others to await him on the spot where you were attacked; myself and five of my servants supplied their place, and were mistaken for his own followers. I had previously ridden alone to the spot where the men were waiting, and informed them that their master would not require their services that night. They believed me, for I showed them his signet-ring, and accordingly dispersed; I then joined my own band, whom I had left in the rear. You know all. We are at your door."

(1) At that time in Naples carriages were both cheaper to hire, and more necessary for strangers than they are now.

CHAPTER III.

Zicci was left alone with the young Italian. She had thrown aside her cloak and head-gear; her hair, somewhat dishevelled, fell down her ivory neck, which the dress partially displayed; she seemed, as she sat in that low and humble chamber, a very vision of light and glory.

Zicci gazed at her with an admiration mingled with compassion; he muttered a few words to himself, and then addressed her aloud:—

"Isabel di Pisani, I have saved you from a great peril,—not from dishonor only, but perhaps from death. The Prince di —, under the weak government of a royal child and a venal administration, is a man above the law. He is capable of every crime; but amongst his passions he has such prudence as belongs to ambition: if you were not to reconcile yourself to your shame, you would never enter the world again to tell your tale. The ravisher has no heart for repentance, but he has a hand that can murder. I have saved thee, Isabel di Pisani. Perhaps you would ask me wherefore?" Zicci paused, and smiled mournfully as he added: "My life is not that of others, but I am still human,—I know pity; and more, Isabel, I can feel gratitude for affection. You love me; it was my fate to fascinate your eye, to arouse your vanity, to inflame your imagination. It was to warn you from this folly that I consented for a few minutes to become your guest. The Englishman, Glyndon, loves thee well,—better than I can ever love; he may wed thee, he may bear thee to his own free and happy land,—the land of thy mother's kin. Forget me, teach thyself to return and to deserve his love; and I tell thee that thou wilt be honored and be happy."

Isabel listened with silent wonder and deep blushes to this strange address; and when the voice ceased, she covered her face with her hands and wept.

Zicci rose. "I have fulfilled my duty to you, and I depart. Remember that you are still in danger from the prince; be wary, and be cautious. Your best precaution is in flight; farewell."

"Oh, do not leave me yet! You have read a secret of which I myself was scarcely conscious: you despise me,—you, my preserver! Ah! do not misjudge me; I am better, higher than I seem. Since I saw thee I have been a new being." The poor girl clasped her hands passionately as she spoke, and her tears streamed down her cheeks.

"What would you that I should answer?" said Zicci, pausing, but with a cold severity in his eye.

"Say that you do not despise,—say that you do not think me light and shameless."

"Willingly, Isabel. I know your heart and your history you are capable of great virtues; you have the seeds of a rare and powerful genius. You may pass through the brief period of your human life with a proud step and a cheerful heart, if you listen to my advice. You have been neglected from your childhood; you have been thrown among nations at once frivolous and coarse; your nobler dispositions, your higher qualities, are not developed. You were pleased with the admiration of Glyndon; you thought that the passionate stranger might marry you, while others had only uttered the vows that dishonor. Poor child, it was the instinctive desire of right within thee that made thee listen to him; and if my fatal shadow had not crossed thy path, thou wouldst have loved him well enough, at least, for content. Return to that hope, and nurse again that innocent affection: this is my answer to thee. Art thou contented?"

"No! ah, no! Severe as thou art, I love better to hear thee than, than—What am I saying? And now you have saved me, I shall pray for you, bless you, think of you; and am I never to see you more? Alas! the moment you leave me, danger and dread will darken round me. Let me be your servant, your slave; with you I should have no fear."

A dark shade fell over Zicci's brow; he looked from the ground, on which his eyes had rested while she spoke, upon the earnest and imploring face of the beautiful creature that now knelt before him, with all the passions of an ardent and pure, but wholly untutored and half-savage, nature speaking from the tearful eyes and trembling lips. He looked at her with an aspect she could not interpret; in his eyes were kindness, sorrow, and even something, she thought, of love: yet the brow frowned, and the lip was stern.

"It is in vain that we struggle with our doom," said he, calmly; "listen to me yet. I am a man, Isabel, in whom there are some good impulses yet left, but whose life is, on the whole, devoted to a systematic and selfish desire to enjoy whatever life can afford. To me it is given to warn: the warning neglected, I interfere no more; I leave her victories to that Fate that I cannot baffle of her prey. You do not understand me; no matter: what I am now about to say will be more easy to comprehend. I tell thee to tear from thy heart all thought of me: thou hast yet the power. If thou wilt not obey me, thou must reap the seeds that thou wilt sow. Glyndon, if thou acceptest his homage, will love thee throughout life; I, too, can love thee."

"You, you—"

"But with a lukewarm and selfish love, and one that cannot last. Thou wilt be a flower in my path; I inhale thy sweetness and pass on, caring not what wind shall sup thee, or what step shall tread thee to the dust. Which is the love thou wouldst prefer?"

"But do you, can you love me,—you, you, Zicci,—even for an hour? Say it again."

"Yes, Isabel; I am not dead to beauty, and yours is that rarely given to the daughters of men. Yes, Isabel, I could love thee"

Isabel uttered a cry of joy, seized his hand, and kissed it through burning and impassioned tears. Zicci raised her in his arms and imprinted one kiss upon her forehead.

"Do not deceive thyself," he said; "consider well. I tell thee again that my love is subjected to the certain curse of change. For my part, I shall seek thee no more. Thy fate shall be thine own, and not mine. For the rest, fear not the Prince di—. At present, I can save thee from every harm." With these words he withdrew himself from her embrace, and had gained the outer door just as Gionetta came from the kitchen with her hands full of such cheer as she had managed to collect together. Zicci laid his hand on the old woman's arm.

"Signor Glyndon," said he, "loves Isabel; he may wed her. You love your mistress: plead for him. Disabuse her, if you can, of any caprice for me. I am a bird ever on the wing." He dropped a purse, heavy with gold, into Gionetta's bosom, and was gone.

CHAPTER IV.

The palace of Zicci was among the noblest in Naples. It still stands, though ruined and dismantled, in one of those antique streets from which the old races of the Norman and the Spaniard have long since vanished.

He ascended the vast staircase, and entered the rooms reserved for his private hours. They were no wise remarkable except for their luxury and splendor, and the absence of what men so learned as Zicci was reputed, generally prize, namely, books. Zicci seemed to know everything that books can teach; yet of books themselves he spoke and thought with the most profound contempt.

He threw himself on a sofa, and dismissed his attendants for the night; and here it may be observed that Zicci had no one servant who knew anything of his origin, birth, or history. Some of his attendants he had brought with him from other cities; the rest he had engaged at Naples. He hired those only whom wealth can make subservient. His expenditure was most lavish, his generosity, regal; but his orders were ever given as those of a general to his army. The least disobedience, the least hesitation, and the offender was at once dismissed. He was a man who sought tools, and never made confidants.

Zicci remained for a considerable time motionless and thoughtful. The hand of the clock before him pointed to the first hour of morning. The solemn voice of the timepiece aroused him from his revery.

"One sand more out of the mighty hour-glass," said he, rising; "one hour nearer to the last! I am weary of humanity. I will enter into one of the countless worlds around me." He lifted the arras that clothed the walls, and touching a strong iron door (then made visible) with a minute key which he wore in a ring, passed into an inner apartment lighted by a single lamp of extraordinary lustre. The room was small; a few phials and some dried herbs were ranged in shelves on the wall, which was hung with snow-white cloth of coarse texture. From the shelves Zicci selected one of the phials, and poured the contents into a crystal cup. The liquid was colorless, and sparkled rapidly up in bubbles of light; it almost seemed to evaporate ere it reached his lips. But when the strange beverage was quaffed, a sudden change was visible in the countenance of Zicci: his beauty became yet more dazzling, his eyes shone with intense fire, and his form seemed to grow more youthful and ethereal.

CHAPTER V.

The next day, Glyndon bent his steps towards Zicci's palace. The young man's imagination, naturally inflammable, was singularly excited by the little he had seen and heard of this strange being; a spell he could neither master nor account for, attracted him towards the stranger. Zicci's power seemed mysterious and great, his motives kindly and benevolent, yet his manners chilling and repellant. Why at one moment reject Glyndon's acquaintance, at another save him from danger? How had Zicci thus acquired the knowledge of enemies unknown to Glyndon himself? His interest was deeply roused, his gratitude appealed to; he resolved to make another effort to conciliate Zicci.

The signor was at home, and Glyndon was admitted into a lofty saloon, where in a few moments Zicci joined him.

"I am come to thank you for your warning last night," said he, "and to entreat you to complete my obligation by informing me of the quarter to which I may look for enmity and peril."

"You are a gallant, Mr. Glyndon," said Zicci, with a smile; "and do you know so little of the South as not to be aware that gallants have always rivals?"

"Are you serious?" said Glyndon, coloring.

"Most serious. You love Isabel di Pisani; you have for rival one of the most powerful and relentless of the Neapolitan princes. Your danger is indeed great."

"But, pardon me, how came it known to you?"

"I give no account of myself to mortal man," replied Zicci, haughtily; "and to me it matters not whether you regard or scorn my warning."

"Well, if I may not question you, be it so; but at least advise me what to do."

"You will not follow my advice."

"You wrong me! Why?"

"Because you are constitutionally brave; you are fond of excitement and mystery; you like to be the hero of a romance. I should advise you to leave Naples, and you will disdain to do so while Naples contains a foe to shun or a mistress to pursue."

"You are right," said the young Englishman, with energy; "and you cannot

reproach me for such a resolution.”

”No, there is another course left to you. Do you love Isabel di Pisani truly and fervently? If so, marry her, and take a bride to your native land.”

”Nay,” answered Glyndon, embarrassed. ”Isabel is not of my rank; her character is strange and self-willed; her education neglected. I am enslaved by her beauty, but I cannot wed her.”

Zicci frowned.

”Your love, then, is but selfish lust; and by that love you will be betrayed. Young man, Destiny is less inexorable than it appears. The resources of the great Ruler of the Universe are not so scanty and so stern as to deny to men the divine privilege of Free Will; all of us can carve out our own way, and God can make our very contradictions harmonize with His solemn ends. You have before you an option. Honorable and generous love may even now work out your happiness and effect your escape; a frantic and interested passion will but lead you to misery and doom.”

”Do you pretend, then, to read the Future?”

”I have said all that it pleases me to utter.”

”While you assume the moralist to me, Signor Zicci,” said Glyndon, with a smile, ”if report says true you do not yourself reject the allurements of unfettered love.”

”If it were necessary that practice square with precept,” said Zicci, with a sneer, ”our pulpits would be empty. Do you think it matters, in the great aggregate of human destinies, what one man’s conduct may be? Nothing,—not a grain of dust; but it matters much what are the sentiments he propagates. His acts are limited and momentary; his sentiments may pervade the universe, and inspire generations till the day of doom. All our virtues, all our laws, are drawn from books and maxims, which are sentiments, not from deeds. Our opinions, young Englishman, are the angel part of us; our acts the earthly.”

”You have reflected deeply, for an Italian,” said Glyndon.

”Who told you I was an Italian?”

”Are you not of Corsica?”

”Tush!” said Zicci, impatiently turning away. Then, after a pause, he resumed, in a mild voice: ”Glyndon, do you renounce Isabel di Pisani? Will you take three days to consider of what I have said?”

"Renounce her,—never!"

"Then you will marry her?"

"Impossible."

"Be it so; she will then renounce you. I tell you that you have rivals."

"Yes, the Prince di —; but I do not fear him."

"You have another, whom you will fear more."

"And who is he?"

"Myself."

Glyndon turned pale, and started from his seat.

"You, Signor Zicci, you,—and you dare to tell me so?"

"Dare! Alas! you know there is nothing on earth left me to fear!"

These words were not uttered arrogantly, but in a tone of the most mournful dejection. Glyndon was enraged, confounded, and yet awed. However, he had a brave English heart within his breast, and he recovered himself quickly.

"Signor," said he, calmly, "I am not to be duped by these solemn phrases and these mystical sympathies. You may have power which I cannot comprehend or emulate, or you may be but a keen impostor."

"Well, sir, your logical position is not ill-taken; proceed."

"I mean then," continued Glyndon, resolutely, though somewhat disconcerted, "I mean you to understand, that, though I am not to be persuaded or compelled by a stranger to marry Isabel di Pisani, I am not the less determined never tamely to yield her to another."

Zicci looked gravely at the young man, whose sparkling eyes and heightened color testified the spirit to support his words, and replied: "So bold! well, it becomes you. You have courage, then; I thought it. Perhaps it may be put to a sharper test than you dream of. But take my advice: wait three days, and tell me then if you will marry this young person."

"But if you love her, why, why—"

"Why am I anxious that she should wed another? To save her from myself! Listen to me. That girl, humble and uneducated though she be, has in

her the seeds of the most lofty qualities and virtues. She can be all to the man she loves,—all that man can desire in wife or mistress. Her soul, developed by affection, will elevate your own; it will influence your fortunes, exalt your destiny; you will become a great and prosperous man. If, on the contrary, she fall to me, I know not what may be her lot; but I know that few can pass the ordeal, and hitherto no woman has survived the struggle.”

As Zicci spoke, his face became livid, and there was something in his voice that froze the warm blood of his listener.

”What is this mystery which surrounds you?” exclaimed Glyndon, unable to repress his emotion. ”Are you, in truth, different from other men? Have you passed the boundary of lawful knowledge? Are you, as some declare, a sorcerer, only a—”

”Hush!” interrupted Zicci, gently, and with a smile of singular but melancholy sweetness: ”have you earned the right to ask me these questions? The clays of torture and persecution are over; and a man may live as he pleases, and talk as it suits him, without fear of the stake and the rack. Since I can defy persecution, pardon me if I do not succumb to curiosity.”

Glyndon blushed, and rose. In spite of his love for Isabel, and his natural terror of such a rival, he felt himself irresistibly drawn towards the very man he had most cause to suspect and dread. It was like the fascination of the basilisk. He held out his hand to Zicci, saying, ”Well, then, if we are to be rivals, our swords must settle our rights; till then I would fain be friends.”

”Friends! Pardon me, I like you too well to give you my friendship. You know not what you ask.”

”Enigmas again!”

”Enigmas!” cried Zicci, passionately, ”Nay: can you dare to solve them! Would you brave all that human heart can conceive of peril and of horror, so that you at last might stand separated from this visible universe side by side with me? When you can dare this, and when you are fit to dare it, I may give you my right hand and call you friend.”

”I could dare everything and all things for the attainment of superhuman wisdom,” said Glyndon; and his countenance was lighted up with wild and intense enthusiasm.

Zicci observed him in thoughtful silence.

”He may be worthy,” he muttered; ”he may, yet—” He broke off abruptly; then, speaking aloud, ”Go, Glyndon,” said he; ”in three days we shall

meet again.”

”Where?”

”Perhaps where you can least anticipate. In any case, we shall meet.”

CHAPTER VI.

Glyndon thought seriously and deeply over all that the mysterious Zicci had said to him relative to Isabel. His imagination was inflamed by the vague and splendid promises that were connected with his marriage with the poor actress. His fears, too, were naturally aroused by the threat that by marriage alone could he save himself from the rivalry of Zicci, —Zicci, born to dazzle and command; Zicci, who united to the apparent wealth of a monarch the beauty of a god; Zicci, whose eye seemed to foresee, whose hand to frustrate, every danger. What a rival, and what a foe!

But Glyndon’s pride, as well as jealousy, was aroused. He was brave *comme son epee*. Should he shrink from the power or the enmity of a man mortal as himself? And why should Zicci desire him to give his name and station to one of a calling so equivocal? Might there not be motives he could not fathom? Might not the actress and the Corsican be in league with each other? Might not all this jargon of prophecy—and menace be but artifices to dupe him,—the tool, perhaps, of a mountebank and his mistress! Mistress,—ah, no! If ever maidenhood wrote its modest characters externally, that pure eye, that noble forehead, that mien and manner so ingenuous even in their coquetry, their pride, assured him that Isabel was not the base and guilty thing he had dared for a moment to suspect her. Lost in a labyrinth of doubts and surmises, Glyndon turned on the practical sense of the sober Merton to assist and enlighten him.

As may be well supposed, his friend listened to his account of his interview with Zicci with a half-suppressed and ironical smile.

”Excellent, my dear friend! This Zicci is another Apollonius of Tyana, —nothing less will satisfy you. What! is it possible that you are the Clarence Glyndon of whose career such glowing hopes are entertained,—you the man whose genius has been extolled by all the graybeards? Not a boy turned out from a village school but would laugh you to scorn. And so because Signor Zicci tells you that you will be a marvellously great man if you revolt all your friends and blight all your prospects by marrying a Neapolitan actress, you begin already to think of—By Jupiter! I cannot talk patiently on the subject. Let the girl alone,—that would be the proper plan; or else—”

"You talk very sensibly," interrupted Glyndon, "but you distract me. I will go to Isabel's house; I will see her; I will judge for myself."

"That is certainly the best way to forget her," said Merton. Glyndon seized his hat and sword, and was gone.

CHAPTER VII.

She was seated outside her door, the young actress. The sea, which in that heavenly bay literally seems to sleep in the arms of the shore, bounded the view in front; while to the right, not far off, rose the dark and tangled crags to which the traveller of to-day is daily brought to gaze on the tomb of Virgil, or compare with the Cavern of Pausilippo the archway of Highgate Hill. There were a few fishermen loitering by the cliffs, on which their nets were hung up to dry; and, at a distance, the sound of some rustic pipe (more common at that day than in this), mingled now and then with the bells of the lazy mules, broke the voluptuous silence,—the silence of declining noon on the shores of Naples. Never till you have enjoyed it, never till you have felt its enervating but delicious charm, believe that you can comprehend all the meaning of the dolce far niente; and when that luxury has been known, when you have breathed the atmosphere of fairy land, then you will no longer wonder why the heart ripens with so sudden and wild a power beneath the rosy skies and amidst the glorious foliage of the South.

The young actress was seated by the door of her house; overhead a rude canvas awning sheltered her from the sun; on her lap lay the manuscript of a new part in which she was shortly to appear. By her side was the guitar on which she had been practising the airs that were to ravish the ears of the cognoscenti. But the guitar had been thrown aside in despair; her voice this morning did not obey her will. The manuscript lay unheeded, and the eyes of the actress were fixed on the broad, blue deep beyond. In the unwonted negligence of her dress might be traced the abstraction of her mind. Her beautiful hair was gathered up loosely, and partially bandaged by a kerchief, whose purple color seemed to deepen the golden hue of the tresses. A stray curl escaped, and fell down the graceful neck. A loose morning robe, girded by a sash, left the breeze that came ever and anon from the sea to die upon the bust half disclosed, and the tiny slipper, that Cinderella might have worn, seemed a world too wide for the tiny foot which it scarcely covered. It might be the heat of the day that deepened the soft bloom of the cheeks and gave an unwonted languor to the large dark eyes. In all the pomp of her stage attire, in all the flush of excitement before the intoxicating lamps, never had Isabel looked so lovely.

By the side of the actress, and filling up the threshold, stood Gionetta, with her hands thrust up to the elbow in two huge recesses on either side her gown,—pockets, indeed, they might be called by courtesy; such pockets as Beelzebub's grandmother might have shaped for herself, bottomless pits in miniature.

"But I assure you," said the nurse, in that sharp, quick, earsplitting tone in which the old women of the South are more than a match for those of the North,—but I assure you, my darling, that there is not a finer cavalier in all Naples, nor a more beautiful, than this Inglese; and I am told that all the Inglese are much richer than they seem. Though they have no trees in their country, poor people, and instead of twenty-four they have only twelve hours to the day, yet I hear, *cospetto!* that they shoe their horses with steak; and since they cannot (the poor heretics!) turn grapes into wine, for they have no grapes, they turn gold into physic, and take a glass or two of pistoles whenever they are troubled with the colic. But you don't hear me! Little pupil of my eyes, you don't hear me!"

"Gionetta, is he not god-like?"

"Sancta Maria! he is handsome, bellissimo; and when you are his wife,—for they say these English are never satisfied unless they marry—"

"Wife! English! Whom are you talking of?"

"Why, the young English signor, to be sure."

"Chut! I thought you spoke of Zicci."

"Oh! Signor Zicci is very rich and very generous; but he wants to be your cavalier, not your husband. I see that,—leave me alone. When you are married, then you will see how amiable Signor Zicci will be. Oh, *per fede!* but he will be as close to your husband as the yolk to the white; that he will.

"Silence, Gionetta! How wretched I am to have no one else to speak to—to advise me. Oh, beautiful sun!" and the girl pressed her hand to her heart with wild energy, "why do you light every spot but this? Dark, dark! And a little while ago I was so calm, so innocent, so gay. I did not hate you then, Gionetta, hateful as your talk was; I hate you now. Go in; leave me alone—leave me."

"And indeed it is time I should leave you, for the polenta will be spoiled, and you have eaten nothing all day. If you don't eat you will lose your beauty, my darling, and then nobody will care for you. Nobody cares for us when we grow ugly,—I know that; and then you must, like old Gionetta, get some Isabel of your own to spoil. I'll go and see to the polenta."

"Since I have known this man," said the actress, half aloud, "since his dark eyes have fascinated me, I am no longer the same. I long to escape from myself,—to glide with the sunbeam over the hill-tops; to become something that is not of earth. Is it, indeed, that he is a sorcerer, as I have heard? Phantoms float before me at night, and a fluttering like the wing of a bird within my heart seems as if the spirit were terrified, and would break its cage."

While murmuring these incoherent rhapsodies, a step that she did not hear approached the actress, and a light hand touched her arm.

"Isabella! carissima! Isabella!"

She turned, and saw Glyndon. The sight of his fair young face calmed her at once. She did not love him, yet his sight gave her pleasure. She had for him a kind and grateful feeling. Ah, if she had never beheld Zicci!

"Isabel," said the Englishman, drawing her again to the bench from which she had risen, and seating himself beside her, "you know how passionately I love thee. Hitherto thou hast played with my impatience and my ardor, thou hast sometimes smiled, sometimes frowned away my importunities for a reply to my suit; but this day—I know not how it is—I feel a more sustained and settled courage to address thee, and learn the happiest or the worst. I have rivals, I know,—rivals who are more powerful than the poor artist. Are they also more favored?"

Isabel blushed faintly, but her countenance was grave and distressed. Looking down, and marking some hieroglyphical figures in the dust with the point of her slipper, she said, with some hesitation and a vain attempt to be gay, "Signor, whoever wastes his thoughts on an actress must submit to have rivals. It is our unhappy destiny not to be sacred even to ourselves."

"But you have told me, Isabel, that you do not love this destiny, glittering though it seem,—that your heart is not in the vocation which your talents adorn."

"Ah, no!" said the actress, her eyes filling with tears, "it is a miserable lot to be slave to a multitude."

"Fly then with me," said the artist, passionately. "Quit forever the calling that divides that heart I would have all my own. Share my fate now and forever,—my pride, my delight, my ideal! Thou shalt inspire my canvas and my song, thy beauty shall be made at once holy and renowned. In the galleries of princes crowds shall gather round the effigy of a Venus or a saint, and a whisper shall break forth, 'It is Isabel di Pisani!' Ah! Isabel, I adore thee: tell me that I do not worship in vain."

"Thou art good and fair," said Isabel, gazing on her lover as he pressed his cheek nearer to hers, and clasped her hand in his. "But what should I give thee in return?"

"Love, love; only love!"

"A sister's love?"

"Ah, speak not with such cruel coldness!"

"It is all I have for thee. Listen to me, signor. When I look on your face, when I hear your voice, a certain serene and tranquil calm creeps over and lulls thoughts, oh, how feverish, how wild! When thou art gone, the day seems a shade more dark; but the shadow soon flies. I miss thee not, I think not of thee,—no, I love thee not; and I will give myself only where I love."

"But I would teach thee to love me,—fear it not. Nay, such love as thou now describest in our tranquil climates is the love of innocence and youth."

"And it is the innocence he would destroy," said Isabel, rather to herself than to him.

Glyndon drew back, conscience-stricken.

"No, it may not be!" she said, rising, and extricating her hand gently from his grasp. "Leave me, and forget me. You do not understand, you could not comprehend, the nature of her whom you think to love. From my childhood upward, I have felt as if I were marked out for some strange and preternatural doom; as if I were singled from my kind. This feeling (and, oh! at times it is one of delirious and vague delight, at others of the darkest gloom) deepens with me day by day. It is like the shadow of twilight, spreading slowly and solemnly round. My hour approaches; a little while, and it will be night!"

As she spoke, Glyndon listened with visible emotion and perturbation. "Isabell!" he exclaimed, as she ceased, "your words more than ever enchain me to you. As you feel, I feel. I, too, have been ever haunted with a chill and unearthly foreboding. Amidst the crowds of men I have felt alone. In all my pleasures, my toils, my pursuits, a warning voice has murmured in my ear, 'Time has a dark mystery in store for thy manhood.' When you spoke it was as the voice of my own soul."

Isabel gazed upon him in wonder and fear. Her countenance was as white as marble, and those features, so divine in their rare symmetry, might have served the Greek with a study for the Pythoness when, from the mystic cavern and the bubbling spring, she first hears the voice of the inspiring god. Gradually the rigor and tension of that wonderful face relaxed, the color returned, the pulse beat, the heart animated the

frame.

"Tell me," she said, turning partially aside, "tell me, have you seen, do you know, a stranger in this city,—one of whom wild stories are afloat?"

"You speak of Zicci. I have seen him; I know him! And you? Ah! he, too, would be my rival,—he, too, would bear thee from me!"

"You err," said Isabel, hastily and with a deep sigh,— "he pleads for you; he informed me of your love; he besought me not—not to reject it."

"Strange being, incomprehensible enigma, why did you name him?"

"Why? Ah! I would have asked whether, when you first saw him, the foreboding, the instinct, of which you spoke came on you more fearfully, more intelligibly than before; whether you felt at once repelled from him, yet attracted towards him; whether you felt [and the actress spoke with hurried animation] that with Him was connected the secret of your life!"

"All this I felt," answered Glyndon, in a trembling voice, "the first time I was in his presence. Though all around me was gay,—music, amidst lamp-lit trees, light converse near, and heaven without a cloud above,—my knees knocked together, my hair bristled, and my blood curdled like ice; since then he has divided my thoughts with thee."

"No more, no more," said Isabel, in a stifled tone; "there must be the hand of Fate in this. I can speak no more to you now; farewell."

She sprang past him into the house and closed the door. Glyndon did not dare to follow her, nor, strange as it may seem, was he so inclined. The thought and recollection of that moonlight hour in the gardens, of the strange address of Zicci, froze up all human passion; Isabel herself, if not forgotten, shrank back like a shadow into the recesses of his breast. He shivered as he stepped into the sunlight, and musingly retraced his steps into the more populous parts of that liveliest of Italian cities.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was a small cabinet; the walls were covered with pictures, one of which was worth more than the whole lineage of the owner of the palace. Is not Art a wonderful thing? A Venetian noble might be a fribble or an assassin, a scoundrel, or a dolt, worthless, or worse than worthless; yet he might have sat to Titian, and his portrait may be inestimable,—a

few inches of painted canvas a thousand times more valuable than a man with his veins and muscles, brain, will, heart, and intellect!

In this cabinet sat a man of about three and forty,—dark-eyed, sallow, with short, prominent features, a massive conformation of jaw, and thick, sensual, but resolute lips; this man was the Prince di—. His form, middle-sized, but rather inclined to corpulence, was clothed in a loose dressing-robe of rich brocade; on a table before him lay his sword and hat, a mask, dice and dice-box, a portfolio, and an inkstand of silver curiously carved.

”Well, Mascari,” said the Prince, looking up towards his parasite, who stood by the embrasure of the deep-set barricaded window, ”well, you cannot even guess who this insolent meddler was? A pretty person you to act the part of a Prince’s Ruffiano!”

”Am I to be blamed for dulness in not being able to conjecture who had the courage to thwart the projects of the Prince di—. As well blame me for not accounting for miracles.”

”I will tell thee who it was, most sapient Mascari.”

”Who, your Excellency?”

”Zicci.”

”Ah! he has the daring of the devil. But why does your Excellency feel so assured,—does he court the actress?”

”I know not; but there is a tone in that foreigner’s voice that I never can mistake,—so clear, and yet so hollow; when I hear it I almost fancy there is such a thing as conscience. However, we must rid ourselves of an impertinent. Mascari, Signor Zicci hath not yet honored our poor house with his presence. He is a distinguished stranger,—we must give a banquet in his honor.”

”Ah! and the cypress wine! The cypress is the proper emblem of the grave.”

”But this anon. I am superstitious; there are strange stories of his power and foresight,—remember the Sicilian quackery! But meanwhile the Pisani—”

”Your Excellency is infatuated. The actress has bewitched you.”

”Mascari,” said the Prince, with a haughty smile, ”through these veins rolls the blood of the old Visconti,—of those who boasted that no woman ever escaped their lust, and no man their resentment. The crown of my fathers has shrunk into a gewgaw and a toy,—their ambition and their spirit are undecayed. My honor is now enlisted in this pursuit: Isabel

must be mine.”

”Another ambushade?” said Mascari, inquiringly.

”Nay, why not enter the house itself? The situation is lonely, and the door is not made of iron.”

Before Mascari could reply, the gentleman of the chamber announced the Signor Zicci.

The Prince involuntarily laid his hand on the sword placed on the table; then, with a smile at his own impulse, rose, and met the foreigner at the threshold with all the profuse and respectful courtesy of Italian simulation.

”This is an honor highly prized,” said the Prince; ”I have long desired the friendship of one so distinguished—”

”And I have come to give you that friendship,” replied Zicci, in a sweet but chilling voice. ”To no man yet in Naples have I extended this hand: permit it, Prince, to grasp your own.”

The Neapolitan bowed over the hand he pressed; but as he touched it, a shiver came over him, and his heart stood still.

Zicci bent on him his dark, smiling eyes, and then seated himself with a familiar air.

”Thus it is signed and sealed,—I mean our friendship, noble Prince. And now I will tell you the object of my visit. I find, your Excellency, that, unconsciously perhaps, we are rivals. Can we not accommodate our pretensions? A girl of no moment, an actress, bah! it is not worth a quarrel. Shall we throw for her? He who casts the lowest shall resign his claim?”

Mascari opened his small eyes to their widest extent; the Prince, no less surprised, but far too well world-read even to show what he felt, laughed aloud.

”And were you, then, the cavalier who spoiled my night’s chase and robbed me of my white doe? By Bacchus, it was prettily done.”

”You must forgive me, my Prince; I knew not who it was, or my respect would have silenced my gallantry.”

”All stratagems fair in love, as in war. Of course you profited by my defeat, and did not content yourself with leaving the little actress at her threshold?”

"She is Diana for me," answered Zicci, lightly; "whoever wins the wreath will not find a flower faded."

"And now you would cast for her,—well; but they tell me you are ever a sure player."

"Let Signor Mascari cast for us."

"Be it so. Mascari, the dice."

Surprised and perplexed, the parasite took up the three dice, deposited them gravely in the box, and rattled them noisily, while Zicci threw himself back carelessly in his chair and said, "I give the first chance to your Excellency."

Mascari interchanged a glance with his patron and threw the numbers were sixteen.

"It is a high throw," said Zicci, calmly; "nevertheless, Signor Mascari, I do not despond."

Mascari gathered up the dice, shook the box, and rolled the contents once more upon the table; the number was the highest that can be thrown,—eighteen.

The Prince darted a glance of fire at his minion, who stood with gaping mouth staring at the dice, and shaking his head in puzzled wonder.

"I have won, you see," said Zicci: "may we be friends still?"

"Signor," said the Prince, obviously struggling with anger and confusion, "the victory is already yours. But, pardon me, you have spoken lightly of this young girl,—will anything tempt you to yield your claim?"

"Ah, do not think so ill of my gallantry."

"Enough," said the Prince, forcing a smile, "I yield. Let me prove that I do not yield ungraciously: will you honor me with your presence at a little feast I propose to give on the royal birthday?"

"It is indeed a happiness to hear one command of yours which I can obey."

Zicci then turned the conversation, talked lightly and gayly and soon afterwards departed.

"Villain," then exclaimed the Prince, grasping Mascari by the collar, "you have betrayed me!"

"I assure your Excellency that the dice were properly arranged,—he should have thrown twelve; but he is the Devil, and that's the end of it."

"There is no time to be lost," said the Prince, quitting hold of his parasite, who quietly resettled his cravat.

"My blood is up! I will win this girl, if I die for it. Who laughed? Mascari, didst thou laugh?"

"I, your Excellency,—I laugh?"

"It sounded behind me," said the Prince, gazing round.

CHAPTER IX.

It was the day on which Zicci had told Glyndon that he should ask for his decision in respect to Isabel,—the third day since their last meeting. The Englishman could not come to a resolution. Ambition, hitherto the leading passion of his soul, could not yet be silenced by love, and that love, such as it was, unreturned, beset by suspicions and doubts which vanished in the presence of Isabel, and returned when her bright face shone on his eyes no more, for *les absents ont toujours tort*. Perhaps had he been quite alone, his feelings of honor, of compassion, of virtue, might have triumphed, and he would have resolved either to fly from Isabel or to offer the love that has no shame. But Merton, cold, cautious, experienced, wary (such a nature has ever power over the imaginative and the impassioned), was at hand to ridicule the impression produced by Zicci, and the notion of delicacy and honor towards an Italian actress. It is true that Merton, who was no profligate, advised him to quit all pursuit of Isabel; but then the advice was precisely of that character which, if it deadens love, stimulates passion. By representing Isabel as one who sought to play a part with him, he excused to Glyndon his own selfishness,—he enlisted the Englishman's vanity and pride on the side of his pursuit. Why should not he beat an adventuress at her own weapons?

Glyndon not only felt indisposed on that day to meet Zicci, but he felt also a strong desire to defeat the mysterious prophecy that the meeting should take place. Into this wish Merton readily entered. The young men agreed to be absent from Naples that day. Early in the morning they mounted their horses and took the road to Baiae. Glyndon left word at his hotel that if Signor Zicci sought him, it was in the neighborhood of the once celebrated watering-place of the ancients that he should be found.

They passed by Isabel's house; but Glyndon resisted the temptation of pausing there, and threading the grotto of Pausilippo, they wound by a circuitous route back into the suburbs of the city, and took the opposite road, which conducts to Portici and Pompeii. It was late at noon when they arrived at the former of these places. Here they halted to dine; for Merton had heard much of the excellence of the macaroni at Portici, and Merton was a bon vivant.

They put up at an inn of very humble pretensions, and dined under an awning. Merton was more than usually gay; he pressed the lacryma upon his friend, and conversed gayly. "Well, my dear friend, we have foiled Signor Zicci in one of his predictions at least. You will have no faith in him hereafter."

"The Ides are come, not gone."

"Tush! if he is a soothsayer, you are not Caesar. It is your vanity that makes you credulous. Thank Heaven, I do not think myself of such importance that the operations of Nature should be changed in order to frighten me."

"But why should the operations of Nature be changed? There may be a deeper philosophy than we dream of,—a philosophy that discovers the secrets of Nature, but does not alter, by penetrating, its courses."

"Ah! you suppose Zicci to be a prophet,—a reader of the future; perhaps an associate of Genii and Spirits!"

"I know not what to conjecture; but I see no reason why he should seek, even if an impostor, to impose on me. An impostor must have some motive for deluding us,—either ambition or avarice. I am neither rich nor powerful; Zicci spends more in a week than I do in a year. Nay, a Neapolitan banker told me that the sums invested by Zicci in his hands, were enough to purchase half the lands of the Neapolitan noblesse."

"Grant this to be true: do you suppose the love to dazzle and mystify is not as strong with some natures as that of gold and power with others? Zicci has a moral ostentation; and the same character that makes him rival kings in expenditure makes him not disdain to be wondered at even by a humble Englishman."

Here the landlord, a little, fat, oily fellow, came up with a fresh bottle of lacryma. He hoped their Excellencies were pleased. He was most touched,—touched to the heart that they liked the macaroni. Were their Excellencies going to Vesuvius? There was a slight eruption; they could not see it where they were, but it was pretty, and would be prettier still after sunset.

"A capital idea," cried Merton. "What say you, Glyndon?"

"I have not yet seen an eruption; I should like it much."

"But is there no danger?" said the prudent Merton.

"Oh! not at all; the mountain is very civil at present. It only plays a little, just to amuse their Excellencies the English."

"Well, order the horses, and bring the bill; we will go before it is dark. Clarence, my friend, nunc est bibendum; but take care of the pede libero, which won't do for walking on lava!"

The bottle was finished, the bill paid, the gentlemen mounted, the landlord bowed, and they bent their way in the cool of the delightful evening towards Resina.

The wine animated Glyndon, whose unequal spirits were at times high and brilliant as those of a school-boy released; and the laughter of the Northern tourists sounded oft and merrily along the melancholy domains of buried cities.

Hesperus had lighted his lamp amidst the rosy skies as they arrived at Resina. Here they quitted their horses and took mules and a guide. As the sky grew darker and more dark, the Mountain Fire burned with an intense lustre. In various streaks and streamlets the fountain of flame rolled down the dark summit, then undiminished by the eruption of 1822, and the Englishmen began to feel increase upon them, as they ascended, that sensation of solemnity and awe which makes the very atmosphere that surrounds the giant of the Plains of the Antique Hades.

It was night when, leaving the mules, they ascended on foot, accompanied by their guide and a peasant, who bore a rude torch. Their guide was a conversable, garrulous fellow, like most of his country and his calling; and Merton, whose chief characteristics were a sociable temper and a hardy commonsense, loved to amuse or to instruct himself on every incidental occasion.

"Ah, Excellency," said the guide, "your countrymen have a strong passion for the volcano. Long life to them; they bring us plenty of money. If our fortunes depended on the Neapolitans, we should starve."

"True, they have no curiosity," said Merton. "Do you remember, Glyndon, the contempt with which that old count said to us, 'You will go to Vesuvius, I suppose. I have never been: why should I go? You have cold, you have hunger, you have fatigue, you have danger, and all for nothing but to see fire, which looks just as well in a brazier as a mountain.' Ha! ha! the old fellow was right."

"But, Excellency," said the guide, "that is not all: some cavaliers

think to ascend the mountain without our help. I am sure they deserve to tumble into the crater.”

”They must be bold fellows to go alone: you don’t often find such?”

”Sometimes among the French, signor. But the other night—I never was so frightened. I had been with an English party, and a lady had left a pocket-book on the mountain where she had been sketching. She offered me a handsome sum to return for it, and bring it to her at Naples; so I went in the evening. I found it sure enough, and was about to return, when I saw a figure that seemed to emerge from the crater itself. The air was so pestiferous that I could not have conceived a human creature could breathe it and live. I was so astounded that I stood as still as a stone, till the figure came over the hot ashes and stood before me face to face. Sancta Maria, what a head!”

”What, hideous?”

”No, so beautiful, but so terrible. It had nothing human in its aspect.”

”And what said the salamander?”

”Nothing! It did not even seem to perceive me, though I was as near as I am to you; but its eyes seemed prying into the air. It passed by me quickly, and, walking across a stream of burning lava, soon vanished on the other side of the mountain. I was curious and foolhardy, and resolved to see if I could bear the atmosphere which this visitor had left; but though I did not advance within thirty yards of the spot at which he had first appeared, I was driven back by a vapor that well-nigh stifled me. Cospetto! I have spit blood ever since.”

”It must be Zicci,” whispered Glyndon.

”I knew you would say so,” returned Merton, laughing.

The little party had now arrived nearly at the summit of the mountain; and unspeakably grand was the spectacle on which they gazed. From the crater arose a vapor, intensely dark, that overspread the whole background of the heavens, in the centre whereof rose a flame that assumed a form singularly beautiful. It might have been compared to a crest of gigantic feathers, the diadem of the mountain, high arched, and drooping downward, with the hues delicately shaded off, and the whole shifting and tremulous as the plumage on a warrior’s helm. The glare of the flame spread, luminous and crimson, over the dark and rugged ground on which they stood, and drew an innumerable variety of shadows from crag and hollow. An oppressive and sulphureous exhalation served to increase the gloomy and sublime terror of the place. But on turning from the mountain, and towards the distant and unseen ocean, the contrast was wonderfully great: the heavens serene and blue, the stars

still and calm as the eyes of Divine Love. It was as if the realms of the opposing principles of Evil and Good were brought in one view before the gaze of man! Glyndon—the enthusiast, the poet, the artist, the dreamer—was enchained and entranced by emotions vague and undefinable, half of delight and half of pain. Leaning on the shoulder of his friend, he gazed around him, and heard, with deepening awe, the rumbling of the earth below, the wheels and voices of the Ministry of Nature in her darkest and most inscrutable recess. Suddenly, as a bomb from a shell, a huge stone was flung hundreds of yards up from the jaws of the crater, and falling with a mighty crash upon the rock below, split into ten thousand fragments, which bounded down the sides of the mountain, sparkling and groaning as they went. One of these, the largest fragment, struck the narrow space of soil between the Englishman and the guide, not three feet from the spot where the former stood. Merton uttered an exclamation of terror, and Glyndon held his breath and shuddered. "Diavolo!" cried the guide; "descend, Excellencies, descend! We have not a moment to lose; follow me close."

So saying, the guide and the peasant fled with as much swiftness as they were able to bring to bear. Merton, ever more prompt and ready than his friend, imitated their example; and Glyndon, more confused than alarmed, followed close. But they had not gone many yards before, with a rushing and sudden blast, came from the crater an enormous volume of vapor. It pursued, it overtook, it overspread them; it swept the light from the heavens. All was abrupt and utter darkness, and through the gloom was heard the shout of the guide, already distant, and lost in an instant amidst the sound of the rushing gust and the groans of the earth beneath. Glyndon paused. He was separated from his friend, from the guide. He was alone with the Darkness and the Terror. The vapor rolled sullenly away; the form of the plumed fire was again dimly visible, and its struggling and perturbed reflection again shed a glow over the horrors of the path. Glyndon recovered himself, and sped onward. Below, he heard the voice of Merton calling on him, though he no longer saw his form. The sound served as a guide. Dizzy and breathless, he bounded forward, when hark! a sullen, slow, rolling sound in his ear! He halted, and turned back to gaze. The fire had overflowed its course; it had opened itself a channel amidst the furrows of the mountain. The stream pursued him fast, fast, and the hot breath of the chasing and preternatural foe came closer and closer upon his cheek. He turned aside; he climbed desperately, with hands and feet, upon a crag that, to the right, broke the scathed and blasted level of the soil. The stream rolled beside and beneath him, and then, taking a sudden wind round the spot on which he stood, interposed its liquid fire—a broad and impassable barrier—between his resting-place and escape. There he stood, cut off from descent, and with no alternative but to retrace his steps towards the crater, and thence seek—without guide or clew—some other pathway.

For a moment his courage left him; he cried in despair, and in that over-strained pitch of voice which is never heard afar off, to the

guide, to Merton, to return, to aid him.

No answer came; and the Englishman, thus abandoned solely to his own resources, felt his spirit and energy rise against the danger. He turned back, and ventured as far towards the crater as the noxious exhalation would permit; then, gazing below, carefully and deliberately he chalked out for himself a path, by which he trusted to shun the direction the fire-stream had taken, and trod firmly and quickly over the crumbling and heated strata.

He had proceeded about fifty yards when he halted abruptly: an unspeakable and unaccountable horror, not hitherto felt amidst all his peril, came over him. He shook in every limb; his muscles refused his will; he felt, as it were, palsied and death-stricken. The horror, I say, was unaccountable, for the path seemed clear and safe. The fire, above and behind, burned out clear and far; and beyond, the stars lent him their cheering guidance. No obstacle was visible, no danger seemed at hand. As thus, spell-bound and panic-stricken, he stood chained to the soil—his breast heaving, large drops rolling down his brow, and his eyes starting wildly from their sockets—he saw before him, at some distance, gradually shaping itself more and more distinctly to his gaze, a Colossal Shadow,—a shadow that seemed partially borrowed from the human shape, but immeasurably above the human stature, vague, dark, almost formless and differing—he could not tell where or why—not only from the proportions, but also from the limbs and outline of man.

The glare of the volcano, that seemed to shrink and collapse from this gigantic and appalling apparition, nevertheless threw its light, redly and steadily, upon another shape that stood beside, quiet and motionless; and it was perhaps the contrast of these two things—the Being and the Shadow—that impressed the beholder with the difference between them,—the Man and the Superhuman. It was but for a moment, nay, for the tenth part of a moment, that this sight was permitted to the wanderer. A second eddy of sulphureous vapors from the volcano, yet more rapidly, yet more densely than its predecessor, rolled over the mountain; and either the nature of the exhalation, or the excess of his own dread, was such that Glyndon, after one wild gasp for breath, fell senseless on the earth.