

self did not enter his head. He had just stepped behind an ancient, twisted pillar, when a spear of moonlight pierced the flying wrack of clouds, revealing the two men of Minor, who had accompanied the necromancer in last night's quest.

"Don Paolo told me all about the last time he tried," one of them was saying in an awed whisper. "They made the incantation, when a staircase appeared there on the right. It descended to a vault, where stood four statues of pure gold and heaps of precious stones, but before they could seize anything a tall man with a long beard issued forth and drove them away, saying in Hebrew that until they brought him a perfectly innocent soul they could touch nothing. Then he disappeared, a terrible serpent started out, and chased them away, while both stairs and treasure vanished." There was a pause as the two men seemed to catch their breath in superstitious terror. "But it'll be all right tonight," the fellow went on, "and the treasure can scarcely be calculated, Don Paolo said. There'll be a quarter for each of us—s-s-h."

In his excitement, Holstead leaned forward against the pillar which conduced him. To his surprise, it seemed to give way a little. He glanced swiftly up. A glint of moonlight showed him a strange thing—that this pillar, in the course of centuries, had become detached from its fellows by the disintegration of the mortar. It supported, indeed, on its capital, a part of the architrave; but threads of moonlight shining through the interstices of the stone showed that the pillar and its capital stood alone, and might be removed without imperilling the rest of the building.

At the instant this discovery made but a small impression on Holstead's mind, for suddenly, from some side room, appeared Don Paolo and the third man, supporting between them a slight figure all in white. It was the Princess. Cords bound her wrists, and a gag, cruelly thrust into her mouth, hid the lower part of her face, but her great eyes shone forth like stars.

Holstead's heart gave a wild throb. The impulse was strong upon him to leap out and snatch the girl from the sacrilegious hands that dared to hold her; but he checked himself. There must be no failure of his plans. He was one unarméd man against four ruffians with knives. He waited and watched, tingling in every nerve.

Don Paolo's eyes were looking into the Princess's with a hateful malice. "They seemed to say, 'You scorned me once; see what has come of it; are you not afraid?'" But she glanced past him to a curious flat stone in the centre of the court.

Towards this they pushed her; the others drew hesitatingly nearer. Paolo produced a roll of parchment, from which he began to read in a low, sonorous voice. It was an invocation of the Power of Evil, so blasphemous, so terrible, that the peasants trembled and the Princess made a pathetic gesture with her bound hands, as if she would stop her ears to shut out the awful words. As Paolo read on he suddenly drew from under his robe a long, gleaming knife, which he handed to the man nearest.

Then the full horror of the scene he was witnessing broke with a shock into Holstead's consciousness. He realised in a flash that the Princess was, even at that instant, in deadly peril; that Don Paolo had so roused the avarice of his dupes that they were ready to go to the length of murder; he understood now the awful meaning of the reference to an "innocent soul" that must be sacrificed to propitiate the infernal powers. He was witnessing a reversion to primeval cruelty and superstition that would be only possible in Italy, or among the black worshippers of Hood-oo; he understood in its whole, subtle viciousness the revenge that the "magician" hoped to take upon the girl who had slighted him, who was

supposed to prefer another—that, other, himself!

The incantation was nearly over. Now was the time to set upon the inspiration that had come to him. Holstead flung his arms round the pillar that sheltered him, and tugged at it with all his might. It wavered on its base. Alternately pushing and pulling, he set up a kind of pendulum motion in the column. The length of the vibrations increased under his terrific exertions. Absorbed in the scene at the altar stone, waiting for the climax when the knife must be plunged into the throat of the innocent victim, and Satan himself should appear to reveal the treasure, the men in the middle of the court did not notice the swaying of one of the pillars in the shadow.

Suddenly there was a tearing, a roar; the column was rent from its foundation, and with the great block that rested on it, clattered like a fall of rock upon the pavement of the court. A cry rose from the three peasants as a tall, black figure leaped lightly from the place where the pillar had stood, and dashed up to the altar. It was the answer to the incantation: a spirit had come. The sacrificial knife fell from a nerveless hand. The three men dropped upon their knees, jabbering with terror, and reverting in this moment of frenzy to their Christian faith, crossed themselves as fast as their fingers could move.

But instead of waving a wand to roll back the solid walls, or opening the ground to show the cellars crammed with jewels, the spirit seized the captive girl with a powerful arm, tore her from Don Paolo's grasp, and ran with her to the stairs that led to the upper ground. The peasants still knelt, gaping helplessly; but the magician, stooping swiftly to pick up the knife, was instantly in pursuit. Half way up the steps, Holstead set down the Princess, and wheeled in a flash to face his adversary.

Don Paolo was leaping after him, his black robe flying, the keen blade shining in his hand, upraised to strike. He was two steps below the Englishman, when Holstead's fist shot out like a catapult catching the Italian full on the point of the uplifted chin. With the violence of the blow, his head jerked backwards; he gasped; swayed an instant on the step with outstretched hands that groped at the air, the knife falling with a clatter on the stones; then pitched headlong backwards with a sickening crash, rolled down the stairs, and lay motionless on the floor of the courtyard.

"You credulous fools," called Holstead's scornful voice to the three peasants whose white faces he could see peering up at him from below out of the darkness, "thank God that he has allowed me to save you from a great crime! That wretch who lies there at your feet has imposed upon you, has played on your avarice, to make you commit a foul murder, the guilt of which he would have found ready means of fastening on your shoulders, while he went free. He would have had you, to satisfy his own spite and hate, kill your benefactor; the lady who had nursed your children and cared for your wives and mothers. Shame on you, for ignorant and cruel brutes!" He had untied the gag that closed the Princess's mouth; he had torn off the cords that held her wrists and ankles, and she stood by his side, leaping against his shoulder, her breast heaving as she drew in deep breaths. At Holstead's last words, the three ruffians had moved forward threateningly; they knew now that he was no spirit. He took one of the Princess's little hands in his, and urged her gently up the stairs.

"If you doubt me," he called down to them again, "go to the spot where you found the gold in the stream last night. Dig under the stunted tree marked with a cross—I marked it. There you will find the pickaxe with which that scoun-

drel at your feet made a hole to bury the money; you will find the very bag in which he carried it there the night before. Fools, to be duped by such a shallow trick! At any moment the carabinieri may be here, roused by the noise of the falling pillar. Go quietly, and I will not denounce you."

Half dazed still, their faith in Don Paolo broken, the men hesitated, staring down at the prostrate figure that had no power to save itself.

But Holstead did not wait for them to make up their minds. The brief flame of the girl's strength had died, and, even without looking in her face, he knew that she had fainted in the clasp of his strong arm. Catching her up once more, as if she had been a child, he was off and away, disappearing from the men's sight in the thick shadows.

He blessed his foresight now for having unlocked the gate, for there was no delay in passing through. The Princess was safe, and as for the fools who would have been the necromancer's catpaw, he cared not what they might do; but afterwards he was to learn that, in rage and disappointment, one had stabbed the unconscious Don Paolo to the heart with his own knife.

In the present, however, there was but one thought for him—the girl he loved. To fulfil his promise to Assunta, and take the Princess home, he must pass near his own hotel; and there, below the steps that led up to the house, were lights, and voices, and noise of horses' tramping hoofs. Someone called out to him.

"Good heavens, Jack—is that you! We came up to surprise you, and your mother's had a fright at finding you'd disappeared. For goodness' sake, what's that you're carrying?"

It was Lord Dartmoor, Jack's father; and from half way up the flight of steps Lady Dartmoor came hurrying down.

Holstead had paused, with his father's hand on his arm, and at sight of a girl's white face, and falling glory of hair tossed back over her son's shoulders, Lady Dartmoor gave a cry. "Who is she?"

"The Princess Immacolata della Marsa," said Holstead, "and—the lady I hope may consent to be my wife."

As it happened, only one day passed before that hope was fulfilled.

Proverbs Concerning Women.

DANISH.

A truth-telling woman finds few friends.

An ill-tempered woman is the devil's door-nail.

Judge a maiden at the kneading-pan, not at the dance.

Give your wife the short knife, keep the long one yourself.

A bad wife likes to see her husband's heels turned to the door.

He who marries a widow with three children marries four thieves.

One hair of a maiden's head pulls harder than ten yoke of oxen.

A cross-grained woman and a snappish dog take good care of the house.

ITALIAN.

The horn beauty is born betrothed.

Women and hens are lost by gadding.

When woman reigns the devil governs.

In craft woman can give points to the devil.

A woman's in pain, a woman's in woe, a woman is ill when she likes to be so.

A woman who loves to be at the window is like a bunch of grapes at the wayside.

A Summer Cold

Caught after over-exertion is to be dreaded. You don't give much heed to it, and think it will go away itself. However, it takes firm hold of the system, with untold suffering as the result. Keep a bottle of

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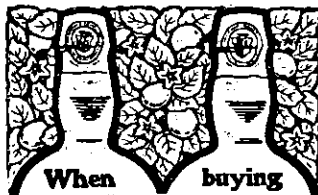
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