A Venetian June



Anna Fuller

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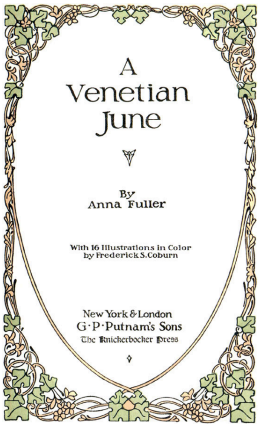
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A Venetian June
Peak and Prairie
Pratt Portraits
Later Pratt Portraits
One of the Pilgrims
Katherine Day
A Bookful of Girls

The Thunderhead Lady
By Anna Fuller and Brian Read



"May watched the yacht until it disappeared from sight"ToList

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A Venetian June

By
Anna Fuller

With 16 Illustrations in Color
by Frederick S. Coburn

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To

ELENA

If from the flower of
thy perfect gift
One drop of cordial
be distilled, 'tis
thine.

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I

Venice

I[ToC]

Venice

"Si, Signore!"

The gondola stirred gently, as with a long, quiet breath, and a moment later it had pushed its way out from among the thronging craft at the steps of the railway quay, and was gliding with its own leisurely motion across the sunlit expanse of the broad Canal. As the prow of the slender black bark entered a narrow side-canal and pursued its way between

frowning walls and under low arched bridges,—as the deep resonant cry of the gondolier rang out, and an answer came like an echo from the hidden recesses of a mysterious watery crossway, the spirit of Venice drew near to the three travellers, in whose minds its strange and exquisite suggestion was received with varying susceptibility.

To Pauline Beverly, sitting enthroned among the gondola cushions, this was the fulfilment of a dream, and she accepted it with unquestioning delight; her sister May, at the bar of whose youthful judgment each wonder of Europe was in turn a petitioner for approval, bestowed a far more critical attention upon the time-worn palaces and the darkly doubtful water at their base; while to Uncle Dan, sitting stiffly upright upon the little one-armed chair in front of them, Venice, though a regularly recurrent experience, was also a memory,—a memory fraught with some sort of emotion, if one might judge by the severe indifference which the old soldier brought to bear upon the situation.

Colonel Steele was never effusive, yet a careful observer might have detected in his voice and manner, as he gave his orders to the gondolier, the peculiar cut-and-dried quality which he affected when he was afraid of being found out. Careful observers are, however, rare, and we may be sure that on their first day in Venice his two companions had other things to think of than the unobtrusive moods of a life-long uncle.

Suddenly the gondola swung out again upon the Grand Canal, a little below the Rialto bridge, and again all was light and life and movement. Steamboats plied up and down with a great puffing and snorting and a swashing about of the water,

gondolas and smaller craft rising and falling upon their heaving wake; heavily laden barges, propelled by long poles whose wielders walked with bare brown feet up and down the gunwale in the performance of their labour, progressed slowly and stolidly, never yielding an inch in their course to the importunities of shouting gondolier or shrieking steam-whistle. Here the light shell of a yellow *sandolo* shot by, there a black-hooded gondola crept in and out among the more impetuous water-folk. Over yonder the stars-and-stripes floated from a slim black prow, a frank, outspoken note of colour that had its own part to play among the quieter yet richer hues of the scene. It was like an instantaneous transition from twilight to broad day, from the remote past to the busy present, whose children, even in Venice, must be fed and clothed and transported from place to place.



"Between frowning walls and low-arched bridges"ToList

"Yes, that is the Rialto," said Uncle Dan, rousing to

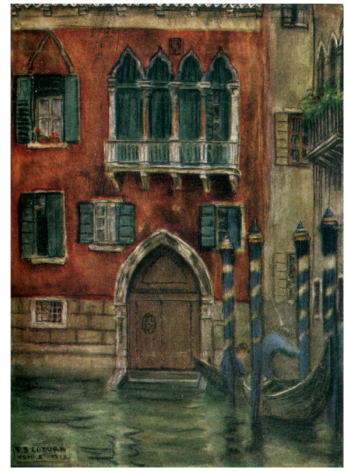
the contemplation of a good substantial fact. "It's everywhere in Venice. You're always coming out upon it, especially when you have been rowing straight away from it."

"What a pity it should be all built over on top!" said May, knitting her smooth young brow, as if, forsooth, wrinkles did not come fast enough without the aid of any gratuitous concern for the taste of a by-gone century.

"But just look at the glorious arch of it underneath!" cried Pauline. "Who cares what is on top? And besides," she declared, after a moment's reflection, "I like it all!"

"Has Venice changed much, Uncle Dan?" asked May.

"Venice?" Uncle Dan replied. "Venice doesn't change. It's the rest of us that do that!"—and just at that moment the gondola turned out of the Grand Canal into another narrow, shadowy water-way. Here and there, above the dark current, a bit of colour caught the eye; a pot of geranium on a window-ledge; a pair of wooden shutters painted pink; a blue apron hung out to dry. On a stone bridge, leaning against the iron railing, stood a woman in a sulphur shawl, gazing idly at the approaching gondola. Scarlet, pink, blue, sulphur—how these unrelated bits of colour were blended and absorbed in the pure poetry of the picture!



"Time-worn palaces, and the darkly doubtful water at their base"ToList

"How wonderful it is, when things come true!" Pauline exclaimed. "Things you have dreamed of all your life, till they have come to seem less real than the things you never dreamed of at all! I think I must have known that that woman in the sulphur shawl would be standing on that bridge, gazing upon us with her great tragic eyes; so that somehow it seems as if she might have been a mere apparition."

"I think it very likely, for I am sure she has always been there when I have passed," said Uncle Dan, with conviction.

"I didn't see anything tragic about her eyes," May objected. "I thought she looked rather stupid, as if she had forgotten what she came out for."

"Which was probably the case," Uncle Dan admitted. Whence it will be seen that Uncle Dan, gallant officer in the past and practical man of affairs to-day, was as wax in the hands of his nieces, equally

ready to agree with each.

Yet Colonel Steele had not the appearance of a man of wax. On the contrary, his spare, wiry figure was full of vigour, his glance was as keen and his speech as imperative as that of the veriest martinet. He had commanded men in his day; he had fought the stern persistent fight of a good soldier, and if, when the great cause was won, he had hung up his sword and sash and laid aside his uniform, he had yet never succeeded in looking the civilian, and his military title had clung to him through thirty years of practical life. Furthermore, if it must be admitted that he looked somewhat older than his sixty years, that fact was not to be accounted for by any acknowledged infirmity, unless, indeed, the stiff leg he had brought with him from his four years' service should be reckoned as such.

"But you like it, May?"

It was Pauline who asked, and she put the question as if she valued her sister's opinion.

"Yes," May answered, in her most judicial manner; "I like it. As you say, it is very much what one expected. But of course it is rather early to judge yet."



"On a stone bridge, leaning against the iron railing, stood a woman in a sulphur shawl"ToList

As if to refute this cautious statement, the gondola quietly glided out again upon the Grand Canal, in full face of a great white dome, rising superbly from a sculptured marble octagon against a radiant sky. Sky and dome and sculptured figure, each cast its image deep down in the tranquil waters at its base, where, as it chanced, no passing barge or steamboat was shivering it to fragments.

"Ah!" said Pauline, with inarticulate eloquence.

"That is the Salute," Uncle Dan remarked; while May wondered how she liked it.

Half-a-dozen strokes of the oar brought them in among the tall, shielding posts, close alongside the steps of the *Venezia*. As the hotel porter handed the young ladies from the gondola, the Colonel paused to have a word with the gondolier. The man was standing, hat in hand, keeping the oar in gentle motion to counteract the force of the tide, which was

setting strongly seaward.

"Si, Signore!" he answered.

"Why!" May exclaimed, "I had forgotten all about the man!"

II

A Venetian Thoroughfare

II[ToC]

A Venetian Thoroughfare

"To the bankers', Vittorio."

"Si, Signore. Will the Signore go by the Grand Canal?"

"By all means. And don't hurry. There is plenty of time."

"Si, Signore! The bank will wait!"

The little jest fell as soothingly familiar upon the ear of Vittorio's one passenger as the dip of the oar or the bell of San Giorgio Maggiore sounding across the harmonising water spaces. And yet the Colonel was only half aware that every word, every inflection of the little dialogue had passed between them on just such an afternoon in May five years ago, and again five years before that, if the truth must be told.

They were passing the charming little Gothic palace known as the House of Desdemona, and we may be pretty sure that the two little stone girls that keep watch there upon the corners of the balcony railing, were reminded by these words that another lustre had slipped by since last they heard them. If they were as observant as they should have been, considering that they had nothing to occupy them but the use of their eyes and ears, they must have noted the fact that while the soldierly figure of the old gentleman had not grown a whit less erect, the many wrinkles upon his clean-cut countenance were perceptibly deepened in the interval. A curious effect of years, those hard-headed little images must have thought. They could perceive no such change in one another's countenances, though they had witnessed the passage of several centuries. But then, the little stone girls had one marked advantage over people of flesh and blood, for they stopped short off at the shoulders. Their creator having made no provision for a heart in their constitutions, they could never grow old,—any more than they could ever have been

truly young.

The tide was still going out, and the gondola moved very slowly up stream. The Colonel was silent, as he had been silent during the passage of this particular part of the Canal once in five years since ever so long ago. Presently the gondola, in its leisurely progress, came opposite a pretty old palace with charming rose windows to give it distinction. There were flower-boxes in the balcony, and other signs of habitation, and the Colonel, quite as if he were rousing from a reverie, and casting about for something to say, turned half-way toward the gondolier and asked: "The Signora Daymond, is she here this season?"



"They were passing the charming little Gothic palace known as the House of Desdemona"ToList

"Si, Signore; and her Signor son is also in Venice."

This last statement formed a new departure, the "Signor son" having been absent on the occasion of the Colonel's more recent visits. The announcement

excited in him a curious and quite unfounded resentment. Indeed, so disturbing was it, not because of any inherent objectionableness, but because of its implication of a change, that the Colonel found himself quite thrown out of his accustomed line of procedure. That this was the case was made manifest by the fact that he did not adhere so far to established precedent as to wait until after they had passed under the iron bridge before looking quite round into Vittorio's face and asking: "All is well at the little red house? The wife and the children?"

"All well, Signore; only the mother died last winter."

"Your wife's mother, I think it was?"

"Si, Signore; she died in February."

One less mouth to feed, the Colonel thought to himself; and perhaps the thought was apparent to the quick perception of the gondolier, although the *padrone* only remarked: "An old woman she must have been."

For Vittorio's face grew wistful, and there was a tone of gentle reproach in his voice, as he said: "We should like well to have the mother with us again."

"Of course, of course!" the Colonel assented, eager to disclaim his unspoken disloyalty. "And Nanni? What do you hear from him?"

"He is paying us a visit, the first in three years. He does not forget the old life, and when the Milan doctors told him he must take a long rest, that he needed a change, he said: 'I know it; I need to feel an oar in my hand and the leap of the gondola under my feet.'"

"And does he row?"

"Si, Signore. He has an old tub of a gondola and he paddles about in it all day long and is content as the king. More content, for he is doing what he pleases, and the king,—it is said that he cannot always do as he pleases. If he could we should be better governed."

A puzzled scowl contracted the fine open brow of the gondolier. That a king should not do as he pleased was as puzzling as it was grievous.

"He is doing well, Nanni?"

"Si, Signore, *benissimo*; and yet he loves the gondola and the old life."

The Colonel drew his brows together as if the statement had not given him unmixed pleasure. "Do you think he is ever sorry for the education and the change?" he asked.

"Sorry? Oh, no! His profession is his life. Even here when he ought to rest, he goes again and again to the Scuola di San Marco, the great hospital, to see the sick people and talk with the doctors. Signore," and Vittorio's voice sank to a stage whisper: "Nanni is writing a book. It is about the sanitation of the houses."

The gondolier had stepped forward close behind the cushioned seat, and was stooping, with bended knee, his head almost on a level with the *padrone's*. Keeping the oar constantly in motion, and with an occasional deft turn of the wrist to avoid a collision, —for the Grand Canal was a crowded thoroughfare at this hour,—he nevertheless seemed to have eyes only for the erect figure and the grizzled head of his old friend.

"Our benefactor does not permit us to speak to him

of what is in our hearts," he said, in his stately Italian; and again his voice dropped, and this time to a wonderfully melodious tone: "But the Madonna listens to us every morning and every evening. We all remember the *padrone*, even the *piccolo Giovanni*, whom he has never seen."

A look of comical deprecation crossed the face of the passenger, and he said, rather abruptly: "I hope Nanni is good to the rest of you."

"Si, Signore; Nanni is a good brother; but we are many and he is not rich. *Ecco!* The gondola of the Signora Daymond. Will the Signore speak with her?"

"Not to-day," the Colonel answered, hastily; and in another instant, before the occupants of the other boat had looked in their direction, Vittorio had stepped back to his post at the stern, and had given a twist of the oar that sent the gondola straight across the prow of a steamboat coming down stream.

"*Lungo!*" he shouted, as peremptorily as if the great puffing interloper had been a tiny *sandolo*, and the big boat actually did slow up a bit, while Vittorio swiftly rounded it, thus placing its great hull between his own and the Signora's gondola.

"You're a good oarsman, Vittorio," the *padrone* remarked. "I always said that I should like to cross the ocean with you."

"I would rather the Signore stayed here," Vittorio exclaimed, while a flashing smile lit up his handsome face; "I would rather the Signore took a little palace and stayed here in Venice!"

Before the Signore had had time to give this time-honoured proposition the consideration which it merited, the gondola was lying alongside the steps at

the bankers' door, and his attention was distracted by a very ragged, but seraphically beautiful urchin, who was excitedly wriggling his body through the railing of the adjoining ferry-landing, with a view to pressing his services upon the foreign gentleman. His efforts were finally successful, and when, a few minutes later, the Colonel emerged from the doorway, he found his entry into the gondola relieved of all supposititious perils by the application of five very brown bare toes to the gunwale. As he placed his penny in the tattered hat of his small preserver, he bestowed upon him a smile so benignant that all the rival ragamuffins assembled upon the ferry-landing took heart of hope and shouted, as one boy: "*Un soldino, Signor! Un soldino!*"

Vittorio, with a look of superb scorn, calculated to convince the uninitiated that he himself had never been a Venetian ragamuffin, gave three long strokes of the oar, which sent the gondola far out upon the Canal, well beyond the reach of such importunities.

"To the hotel, Signore?"

"Yes; the young ladies will be ready to go out by this time. They are my nieces, Vittorio."

"And is it their first visit in Venice?"

"Yes; we have spent the winter in Italy, and we left the best for the last."

"The Signore still loves Venice?"

"Better than any spot in the world. We will take the short cut home, Vittorio."

Then Vittorio, with the deep joy which may hide in the hearts of other men, but never shines in full radiance upon any but an Italian face, turned the gondola into the same narrow *rio* through which he

had rowed his passengers from the station earlier in the day.

The Colonel had caught the flash in the dark face, and his own countenance had assumed an answering mobility. The tension of his first hours in Venice was apt to yield, though not usually as early as this. But then, he had never before had the pleasure of his two precious Pollys in anticipation. As the gondola drew near a certain stone bridge guarded by an iron railing, the sight of a woman in a sulphur shawl, lingering there to speak with a neighbour, gave him a reminiscent sense of amused gratification.

Presently they came round in front of the *Venezia*, and Uncle Dan looked up to a certain high balcony, whence his coming was hailed by a lively flutter of handkerchiefs.

"*Ecco*, my nieces!" he remarked to Vittorio, with ill-suppressed pride of ownership; a claim, be it observed, which the two Pollys would have been inclined to dispute; since, according to their own faith and practice, it was they who owned Uncle Dan!

III

A Pair of Pollys

III[ToC]

A Pair of Pollys

Five minutes later Uncle Dan and his two Pollys were once more afloat, a beatific company. Their graceful craft dipped and courtesied to the stroke of the oar as it glided swiftly with the out-going tide, past the gilt ball of the custom-house, past the royal gardens and the Piazzetta and the Doge's Palace, past the red tower of San Giorgio, on and on, far out upon the wide lagoons. Pauline, sitting beside her uncle among the cushions of state, was so absorbed in the mere joy of this gliding, rhythmic motion, that she scarcely paid due deference to the wonders of the Piazzetta, past which they fared so swiftly. Yes; there were the famous pillars of Saint and Lion, and there, beyond the Ducal Palace, was a passing glimpse of San Marco. It was as it should be, this delightful verification of travellers' tales; she could afford to hold all that in reserve. But just to-day, just at this moment, she only wanted to watch the slender prow, skimming the wonderful opaline waters, drawing ever nearer to those mystic islands floating over

yonder like a dream within a dream. She wondered vaguely at May's vivid alertness; for her sister, claiming the privilege of youth, was enjoying the freedom of the gondola, perching here and there as her fancy prompted, in the ample forward space, that nothing might escape her eager, critical attention.

"How queer of them to have put those two windows out of line!" May exclaimed, fixing upon the water-front of the Ducal Palace a glance of disapproval beneath which the stately old pile blushed rosy red. At least it was at that moment that she first observed the pinkness of its complexion. "But it's a lovely colour," she hastened to admit; "and those columns in the second story are perfectly dear."

"They have been a good deal admired," Uncle Dan observed dryly, yet with a friendly twinkle that flickered over into the crow's-feet which were such an important feature of his equipment as uncle. And May, nothing daunted, pursued her own train of thought with unflagging spirit.

"Vittorio, which way is the Lido?" she asked presently, in her crispest Italian. She was sitting on the carpeted steps at the prow, whence she had been regarding, with a quite impersonal interest, the swaying motion of the supple, picturesque figure at the oar. She was not sure that she altogether approved of the broad white straw hat, with fluttering ends of blue ribbon, nor of the blue woollen sash with its white fringe which waved back and forth as its wearer trod the deck; but these were minor details, and the total effect was undeniably good.

Vittorio, accustomed to that particular kind of attention which the tourist bestows impartially upon man or gondola, the *briccoli* whose clustering posts

mark the channels in the lagoon, or the towers of the mad-house rising from yonder island,—had continued his unswerving gaze straight over the head of the Signorina. At the sound of his name his bearing changed. Lifting his hat, he took a step forward, and, still plying the oar with his right hand, he said: "Over yonder is Sant' Elisabetta del Lido, where the tourists go. But the Lido reaches for miles between us and the sea,—as the Signore will tell you," he added, with the careful deference that the Colonel knew so well.

The familiar voice of the gondolier, striking across his meditations, had a singular effect upon the Colonel. It made him aware that this was a different Venice from the one which Vittorio had been wont to show him. What had become of the pensive quality of the atmosphere, the brooding melancholy of its impression upon him? Where, he wondered, half-resentfully, was the dim oppression, the subtle pain he had heretofore associated with these tranquil water spaces? What witch-work were those girls playing with the traditions of twenty-five years? He glanced from one to the other of their unconscious faces, each absorbed after its own fashion. After all, it was pleasant to look upon the world through young eyes. No fear but the old preoccupation would reassert itself in due time. But somehow his mind declined to concern itself with that just now, and with a half-humorous deprecation, he resumed his contemplation of his two Pollys.

His claim to such a unique possession formed in itself an achievement upon which the Colonel prided himself not a little. He often recalled his chagrin when his sister Mary,—Polly as he, and he alone had called her,—failed to give her eldest daughter her

own name. How could he, a totally inexperienced uncle, enter into satisfactory relations with a young person encumbered with the stately cognomen of Pauline? She was sure to be haughty and unapproachable. No wonder that she puckered up her face in hostile protest as often as he offered her a perfunctory salutation. He was becoming fairly afraid of the little month-old personage, when one day, he hit upon the reassuring device of turning Pauline, with all its conservative dignity, into Polly. If the testimony of a gentleman and an officer was to be relied upon, their good understanding dated from that hour. For Uncle Dan was willing to take his oath that the very day on which the two soft, ingratiating syllables fell upon the small pink ear, the small pink face relaxed into an expression of kindly tolerance, blossoming out a few days later into that ecstatic first smile which had sealed his subjugation.

Uncle Dan was perhaps not thinking of this circumstance, as he glanced to-day at the serenely blissful young face beside him, a face which had never in all these years begrudged him a smile. Yet such reminiscences were not wholly foreign to his thoughts, and they doubtless lent their own agreeable though unrecognised flavour to his meditations, as he looked upon the Venetian lagoons through the eyes of his Pollys.

In the course of time two other little maids had come upon the scene,—Susan and Isabella were their unsuggestive names. Married now, both of them, Uncle Dan was wont to state, parenthetically; and indeed, if the truth be known, he had always taken a parenthetical view of these unexceptionable little nieces. But when his Polly had remained for seven years without a rival in his affections, a fourth small

damsel had presented herself, and had been regarded by her parents as the logical candidate for her mother's name. From that time forth the Colonel was the happy possessor of two Pollys, and it would have been difficult to say which had the more complete ascendency over him. Big Polly and little Polly he called them, and before the little one was well out of long clothes he had formed the project of showing his Pollys the world.

The death of his sister having occurred some years since, his brother-in-law's second marriage, which took place after a due interval, left Uncle Dan with a free hand to carry out his project. He could not but feel indebted to Beverly for taking a step which rendered him independent of daughterly ministrations, though such a proceeding ran counter to one of the Colonel's most perverse and therefore most valued theories. That a woman should take a second husband had long seemed to him both natural and proper, but the reasons were obvious, to his mind at least, why a man should be more constant. Be that as it may, however, here they were, Uncle Dan and his Pollys, and to-day, of all days, the Colonel was little disposed to cavil at anything.

"What good manners this man has!" Pauline remarked, as Vittorio made his answer to the Signorina.

"Yes"; Uncle Dan replied. "He never slips up on that."

"Where does he get it?"

"A family trait. His father had it when he used to row me twenty-five years ago, and I've no doubt his forbears were all like that. It's a matter of race."

"A matter of race!" cried May. "Why, Uncle Dan,

when that Italian in the train the other day stared us out of countenance and we asked you to do something about it, you told us it was the custom of the country!"

"That's only Uncle Dan's way of shirking his responsibilities," Pauline explained. "It's lucky for you, May, that I'm getting on in life. I don't know what you would do if you hadn't any better chaperon than Uncle Dan."

"And yet, you don't seem so very old," May remarked, rather doubtfully, tilting her golden head at a critical angle. "I don't believe anybody would suspect you of being twenty-seven."

"That's a comfort," laughed Pauline, with a humorous appreciation that was like Uncle Dan's.

Pauline Beverly had not, like her sister, a reputation for beauty, yet she possessed undeniable charm. Her hair was of a sunny brown, and softly undulating; her eyes were of the same shade as her hair, and capable of a changing light, and, when she smiled, her face, soft and pure, but not brilliant in colouring, had somehow the look of a brook rippling over brown pebbles in a shady place, where the sunshine comes in threads and hints, rather than in an obliterating flood of light. The years, whose sum seemed to May so considerable, had performed their modelling very gently, conferring upon the countenance that winning quality which is the gift of those who habitually think more of others than of themselves.

They were coming in past the red sentinel-tower of San Giorgio, May still sitting on the low steps facing the stern of the gondola. As the young girl looked past her companions, across the silvery spaces of the

lagoon, her eyes grew dreamy and far-away. So marked was the phenomenon, that Uncle Dan was moved to exclaim: "A penny for your thoughts, Polly."

May started, for she was not often caught sentimentalising. Then, with the directness which characterised her, she said: "I was wondering whether one might not perhaps find a soul here in Venice."

"A soul? What kind of a soul?"

"Oh, any sort would do, I suppose. You know Signor Firenzo told me my voice was *bellissima*, but that I hadn't any soul."

"Perhaps Signor Firenzo is a better judge of voices than of souls," Pauline suggested, with a confident little smile.

"A young girl like you hasn't any business with a soul," Uncle Dan declared. "If you think you see one coming over the lagoon you had better turn round and look at the Lion of St. Mark's. He hasn't the sign of a soul, yet he's the best of good fellows, as anybody can see."

May promptly turned, and fixed her eyes upon the classic beast in question.

"I didn't know that lions had such long, straight tails," she remarked.

"The wings strike me as being more out of the common," Uncle Dan chuckled, much reassured by Polly's ready return to the judicial attitude.

"I should almost think," said Pauline, musingly, "that a lion that had wings and a taste for literature might perhaps have a soul after all!"

IV

A Reverie

IVToC

A Reverie

When Vittorio was told to come for them in the evening, he had cast a significant glance at a certain radiant white cloud, billowing in the West, and said: "*Speriamo*"; which, in the vocabulary of the gondolier means: "Let us hope for the best and prepare for the worst." Upon which the cloud had gradually taken on

more formidable proportions, until, just at dusk, it burst in a torrent of rain, which swept the Grand Canal clear of sight-seers, and sent the nightly serenaders, who usually act as magnets to the wandering gondolas, into the hotels for refuge. A band of them were established in the long, wide corridor of the *Venezia*, where their strong, crude voices and their twanging strings reverberated rather noisily.

Wondering how it must seem to have nerves young enough to sustain such rough treatment, the Colonel abandoned his nieces to their self-inflicted ordeal, and mounted the stairs to his own familiar quarters. And there, as he closed the door behind him, he ceased to speculate upon such ephemeral matters.

He had come up, ostensibly to write some letters, but instead of doing so, he lighted a cigar, and seated himself at the window, watching the swoop of the rain along the hurrying waters of the Canal. The tide was coming in and the wind was with it. One gondola at the ferry was struggling across the current, with difficulty held to its course by the efforts of its straining oarsman. The passengers had taken refuge under the *felze*, or gondola hood. Impatient of the slow progress of the boat, the Colonel looked down into the hotel-garden directly beneath his windows, which was drowned in a moist blur, that only seemed intensified where it focused about the electric lights. Over there again, across the Canal, stood the great Salute, showing ghostly and unreal in its massive whiteness, half obliterated by the driving rain. It would have seemed that the most perfunctory letter-writing might have been an improvement upon such a prospect as that. Yet the Colonel sat on, puffing in a desultory manner at his

excellent cigar, and reflecting that another five years had gone by.

A curious thing, he was thinking to himself, how inevitably he found himself in Venice once in five years. It was not in his plan to do so. He would have been just as ready to return after an interval of two years, or of three; but, for one reason or another, he never seemed able to arrange his affairs to that end until the fifth year had come round. Somebody was sure to die and leave him executor of his will; or this or that charity of which he was treasurer made a point of getting into a tight place. To-morrow was the twenty-ninth of the month;—to-morrow always was the twenty-ninth on his first arrival in Venice. Yet that, too, was the merest accident, as he assured himself with some heat. None of these things was premeditated.

He should call upon her to-morrow,—certainly. It would be a downright discourtesy to wait until they had met by chance. He wondered if she were expecting him. Probably not; she had other things to think of, especially now that her son was with her.

It would be a pleasure to see her,—her beautiful, friendly eyes, that enchanting smile, that wonderful turn of the head. As though she could ever have cared for a battered old wreck like him! And yet he knew, with an indubitable knowledge, that he should ask her again. And the answer would be the same as it had been twenty-five years ago, when she was but a three-years' widow.

He had been hasty, he had not sufficiently respected her past. He should have waited. And yet, when he came again, after five years, perhaps that, too, was an error of judgment. Perhaps his coming, after so long an interval, caused the revival of old

memories, caused a shock which might have been avoided if he had ventured sooner. And then, when another five years had passed, he had begun to age. A man who has seen field service has not the staying powers of other men. That London doctor knew all about it in a moment. Yes, he had already begun to age, fifteen years ago. And now!

The Colonel relighted his cigar, which had gone out. How the rain kept at it! He could hear the swish of it on the wall of the house across the garden. Even Venice could be dreary.

He had never seen her anywhere else. He did not ask himself why he had refrained from seeking her out in her own home, not five hundred miles from his own,—why he had always come to her here in Venice, where all her married life had been spent. After all, a man does what he must. And to-morrow he should ask her again! He did not wish to, he did not even intend to. He could resolve not to, here, in cold blood, with the disheartening rain blotting out the rose-bushes down below, and a disheartening conviction of failure blotting out his nerve and courage. But to-morrow she would rise to meet him, in her own gracious way; he should touch her beautiful, firm hand, where a single jewel shone. He thought if he could ever see another ring upon that hand, one which, having no significance of its own, might weaken the significance of that diamond, now grown old-fashioned in its low setting, there might be a chance for him. But, no; there would be but the one ring, and there would be no chance for him;—and yet he should ask her!

There was another gondola struggling across the Canal. Why should anyone be out in such weather? It must be a lover, or some such sanguine person, bent,

as like as not, upon a fruitless errand. The Colonel had but scant sympathy with lovers; they so rarely had any discrimination.

Yes, she would come forward, with extended hand, to meet him. He wondered whether the streak of grey on the right temple would have widened appreciably. Perhaps it would have spread itself, like a fine white film of lace, over the abundant hair. It would probably be very becoming. That was another curious thing; every time he saw her she had grown more beautiful. The years that had dealt so harshly with him had touched her only to an added grace and tenderness; experience had drawn only noble lines upon her face, and there was an ever-increasing warmth and graciousness of countenance which was infinitely finer than the bloom of youth. People made a great deal of youth, but really, when you came to think of it, what a meagre, paltry thing it was! A man hardly began to live before he was thirty-five!

"Uncle Dan, may we come in?"

The door flew open, and two young persons, with all the disabilities of youth upon their heads, came rustling in upon the old bachelor's misanthropic reverie. Instantly the atmosphere had changed.

"It was very good fun," May remarked, as she perched upon the arm of her uncle's chair. "They shrieked *Margherita* and *Santa Lucia* and a lot of opera airs, till we thought we should lose our tympanums, and so we came away."

"We were in quite as much danger of losing our manners," Pauline interposed. "We sat next a delicious English girl, pretty as a picture and unresponsive as a statue, and we simply dragged her into conversation. She took us for English and was

terribly shocked to find we were Americans, and not even Canadians at that. 'You don't mean to say that you come from the States!' she cried, quite forgetting that she was a statue. And then May got wicked, as she always does when her patriotism is touched."

"Nonsense!" May broke in; "it isn't patriotism; it's self-respect."

"And how did you work off your self-respect?" asked Uncle Dan, deeply interested.

"I told her I thought it was very strange that English people should mistake us. That we never mistook them; we knew at a glance a person from the Isles. She rose to it like a tennis-ball, and asked what isles I referred to. 'Why, the British Isles,' I answered, innocently. And then she looked mystified, and Pauline discovered that the noise was very fatiguing, and we came away."

For half-an-hour Uncle Dan listened, highly diverted, to the chatter of the girls, and it never once occurred to him to remember the meagreness and paltriness of their condition. After they had left him, he turned to the window, feeling that the dreariness without and within was a very transitory and inconsequent thing. And lo! a change had come. The influx of youth would appear to have put to flight other clouds than those of a morbid mind. The rain had altogether ceased. He could see the roses gleaming moistly in the circles of electric light. The serenaders were just pushing away in their big barge, with coloured lanterns swaying in the breeze. They were beginning to sing, and their voices sounded sweet and melodious in the open air. Above the Salute the clouds were breaking away, and there were stars gleaming in the deep blue clearing.

"Have you seen the stars, Uncle Dan?" came Pauline's voice through the key-hole. "We're going to have a glorious day to-morrow!"

V

The Signora

V[ToC]

The Signora

They had been spending an hour among the wonderful glooms and gleams of St. Mark's, and now they had mounted to the high gallery that spans the

space between pillar and pillar. The Colonel had looked twice at his watch, for he had an appointment with himself, so to speak, and he proposed to leave the girls to the study of the gold mosaics which they seemed inclined to take seriously. For the moment they were leaning upon the stone balustrade, looking down into the great dim spaces of the church.

"I wish I knew whether it was really good," said May, lifting her golden head in deprecation of a possibly misguided admiration. "It is so beautiful that I'm dreadfully afraid it is meretricious."

"It is really good," said a voice close at hand. "I think we may set our minds at rest about that."

The voice was its own passport and no one thought of taking the remark amiss. Uncle Dan who had been consulting his watch for the third time, looked up with a twinkle of good understanding, which the appearance of the speaker justified. The young man was possessed of a good figure and a good face, as well as of a good voice.

Somewhat startled, the girls turned and discovered that they had been obstructing the narrow passage.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" they both cried, as they retreated into an angle of the gallery. "You couldn't pass us by."

"I didn't particularly want to," the stranger replied, quite at his ease. "This is one of the best points of view," and it was much to his credit that he did not give the obvious turn to his remark by looking at the two girls as he made it, for neither the beauty of the youthful sceptic nor the quiet distinction of her sister was likely to have been lost upon a man of his stamp. That they were sisters, unlike as they were, could not have escaped the most casual observer.



"They had mounted to the high gallery that spans the space between pillar and pillar"ToList

"Then you know what is good," May remarked, in perfect good faith.

"I know this is good," he answered; "and I am sure it is much too good to be interrupted."

He was at the disadvantage of holding his hat in his hand, in deference to place, so that he was unable to indicate a deference to persons by lifting it. Yet he took his leave with so good a manner that the Colonel was moved to detain him. As the stranger made his way past him, the elder man remarked: "It must be worth while to be up on architecture in this part of the world."

"It's worth while to be up on architecture in any part of the world," the young man replied. "Where there is nothing to see there is all the more to do."

He paused a moment, as if St. Mark's were really more interesting than his own opinions. Then: "Have you travelled much in our own West?" he asked.

"No," was the Colonel's unblushing admission; for he was a New Englander of the New Englanders and valued his own limitations.

"There's good work going on out there; it's a great field."

"But surely you are not a Westerner!" the Colonel protested.

"No; but I sometimes wish I were. It's the thing to be."

There was no challenge in his voice, yet Colonel Steele was half inclined to take umbrage at the unprejudiced statement of fact. The ease, however, with which the young man again indicated a courteous leave-taking without the aid of a hat disarmed criticism, and as the Colonel watched the slowly retreating figure, he willingly accorded to the heresy the indulgence due to youthful vagaries. To be sure, he could not remember that an exaggerated estimate of the Great West had ever been a vagary of his own youth. But then, he supposed that the West had made advances since his day!

A glance at his watch changed the direction of his thoughts, and a few minutes later Vittorio was rowing him swiftly, with the tide, up the Grand Canal. Just as the noon gun roared out from the base of San Giorgio, the Colonel rang the bell of the Palazzo Darino.

She was sitting, the lady of his evening reverie, the lady of a life-long reverie, one might as truly say, just as he had hoped to find her, alone and disengaged. Two or three open letters lay upon the table beside her, but they lay there meekly, as if they knew that they must bide their time.

"Ah! Colonel Steele!"

She spoke his name as no one else had ever done, somehow as if it were a title of nobility, and as she came forward to meet him, the soft rustle of her garments filled him with content. He took the extended hand, and, bending above it, he noted the diamond, in its low, old-fashioned setting, gleaming there alone.

"I am glad you are faithful to Venice," she said. "I hoped you might come this year."

"And you still come every year?"

"Yes."

The white film had spread just as he had anticipated. He could see how complete it was, as she seated herself in the full light of the open window. The Colonel had sometimes been startled to find how his premonitions in regard to her had come true. One year he had said to himself: she will be paler than usual; I wonder if she has been ill. And he had found that she had been ill, and there was a fragility and pallor about her that seemed to him quite heart-breaking. Again he had said to himself: she will be wearing crape as in the old times; I wonder why. And when he had come to her she had told him of her mother's death a few months previous. So to-day he had known of that lace-like whiteness of the beautiful head, and of a certain deepening of the depression of the cheek and chin, which had not been there five years ago.

"Yes," she was saying. "I don't find Venice anywhere else, and so I come over every year. Happily, I like the voyage."

The Colonel did not like the voyage but that was a

painful fact which he had never felt called upon to admit.

"This year I have my boy with me," she added. "That is a great pleasure."

"And I have my nieces," he replied, deterred by a curious jealousy from pursuing the subject of the boy.

"How delightful! That is, I suppose you find it so, since you have brought them."

"Oh, yes; it makes quite a different thing of travelling. We came over in October. We have been wintering in Rome."

He wondered how he should put it this time. Five words usually sufficed,—five words that meant so much to him, and so little, so intolerably little to her.

"I am glad you have young people with you," she said. "We need them more and more as we grow older."

"Well, that depends," the Colonel demurred, too loyal to his Pollys, even here and now, to allow them to be regarded generically. "There are not many girls I should want to have on my hands. I think the Pollys are rather exceptional."

"What did you say the name was?"

"Polly—Polly Beverly."

"And what is the other one's name?"

"Same name. They are both Pollys. I named them myself," he added, with a quite unforeseen revival of that agreeable self-satisfaction which he never could conceal in this connection.

And then, to his own surprise, he found himself

entering with much gusto upon the story of their christening. By the time he had finished, he felt quite toned up and invigorated.

"Tell me some more about them," she begged.

She was leaning back in her seat, serenely receptive. The Colonel, sitting opposite to her in the straight-backed chair such as he always chose, noted, with a curiously disengaged pleasure, the wonderful opaline quality of the impression she made. The soft grey folds of her dress, the still more softened grey of the hair, and the deep grey of the beautiful eyes,—none of these quiet shades was dull and fixed. A delicate play of light and shadow made them vital, as the grey of the lagoons is vital, when there are clouds before the sun, and a strange, mystic luminousness traverses their tranquil spaces. She had always reminded him of the lagoons. The association only seemed to make each more exquisite and apart. And now, as he told her about his Pollys, it was with very much the same sense of perfect gratification with which he had taken them out upon the water the day before. There was also the same singular absence of the old, familiar pain and oppression.

"What are they interested in?" she asked, and there could be no doubt in the Colonel's mind that she really cared to know.

"Well; they are interested in pretty much everything, though in a different way. For instance, they are making short work of Italian. They speak better than I do, after all these years," he declared with delighted self-depreciation, "though perhaps that's not much to brag of. One of them has got the accent and the other the grammar, so they pull very well together. Then the younger one can sing like a bird."

The Colonel was warming to his subject, and the Signora, as he liked to call her, did not interrupt.

"She has been studying with Firenzo in Rome. He says she's got a tip-top voice and plenty of execution. Sketches, too,—not particularly well, though. Her things look right enough, but somehow they don't say much. Firenzo thinks that's the trouble with her singing. Good voice, you know, but it doesn't speak. Young, I suppose! That's it; eh?"

"Twenty years old, you say? Yes, I should call that young! And the other one? Tell me about her."

"Well, Polly hasn't much ambition. Nice contralto voice, not much cultivated. Rather a contralto little woman, don't you know? The kind that somehow warms the cockles of your heart. Lots of character, too. There's nothing weak about Polly. You'll like her."

"I'm sure I shall. And what has she been about all these years? Twenty-seven, did you say?"

"Well, family matters mostly. They've kept her pretty busy. She's the eldest, you know. She has married off three of them already."

"Three sisters?"

"No; two sisters and a father. There's nobody left now, but these two."

It was all very like that trip on the lagoons yesterday; only, in the one case, he had seen the lagoons through the eyes of his Pollys, while to-day he seemed to be seeing his Pollys through the eyes of the woman he loved. And he found that gracious sharing of his interest a balm to the old wound, and he was soothed and beguiled into a strange new acquiescence. It would come again, the importunate

trouble. He should, in a very few minutes, bring down upon himself that gentle refusal, more poignant in its kindness than scorn or misprision would have been.

As he sat there touching upon one characteristic and another of his Pollys, in the direct, soldierly fashion that cuts through ordinary modes of speech, clean and incisive as a sword-point, he vaguely felt that this was only a postponement, a respite. It could not last, this extraordinary, unaccountable resignation. He was not sure that he should approve of it if it did. But, meantime, he had not told her how the girls had enjoyed riding on the Campagna, and how they had followed the hunt one day, and not a bone broken! Nor how they had got to know their way about Rome like a book and how—really, the subject was quite inexhaustible!

The sun was shining like mad upon the palaces opposite, and as he looked across the flower-boxes in the window, he felt quite in sympathy with this high noon of light and color. A steamboat shrieked beneath the window, and the discordant sound hardly seemed an intrusion. And then, suddenly, taking him quite at unawares, a firm step resounded upon the hard, smooth conglomerate of the broad passage-way, and—"Here is Geof!" his mother announced. "You would hardly know him, Colonel!"

The Colonel rose to his feet and turned toward the door, guiltily conscious that he had evaded the subject of Geof. As his eye fell upon the lithe, vigorous figure coming toward him, he recognised the fact that evasion was no longer possible. An instant later he had recognised the young architect of Western proclivities whom he had taken such a liking to an hour ago.

"So you are Geof!" the Colonel exclaimed. "I might have known it, too, though I had quite forgotten that you were grown up."

"And you are Colonel Steele! Why, this is great! You used to be first-rate to me when I was a little chap. Were those your daughters in the gallery?"

"No, my nieces," said the Colonel, and his spirits went up like a cork. He knew the Signora was great friends with her son, but she evidently understood where to draw the line!

"And I may bring them to see you, Signora?"

"The sooner the better. Why not this afternoon? We can have tea early and get a couple of hours on the lagoon in the pretty light. I'm afraid you have an engagement, haven't you, Geof?"

"Oh, I don't mind throwing Kenwick over. He'll keep," and the young man stepped to the other window and flung it open.

Geoffry Daymond went down to the door with his mother's old friend, but he had the tact not to offer him a hand across the plank to the gondola; an act of forbearance which was not lost upon the Colonel.

"Not a bit like his mother," the Colonel was saying to himself. "Not a bit. Wonder if he takes after his father. The kind of man that would stick in a woman's memory, I should say."

And then, just as the gondola was passing the house where the little stone girls keep their uncomprehending outlook upon the world, a sharp pang took him, followed by a strange—was it a disloyal?—sense of relief, and he exclaimed, under his breath, "I never asked her!"

VI

A Festa

VI[ToC]

A Festa

"You didn't tell us what a beauty Mrs. Daymond was, Uncle Dan," said May, as they sat at dinner that evening.

They had a small table to themselves, close by one of the long glass doors opening out into the garden. It was a warm evening, and sweet, vagrant perfumes

came straying in at the open door, and in the momentary hush which sometimes falls upon the noisiest *table d'hôte*, pretty plashing sounds could be heard in the Canal beyond the garden.

"Not a very easy thing to do," said Uncle Dan, setting down his glass of claret, with a wry face. He felt sure that the wine had been kept on ice. Ugh!

"Have you known her a long time?"

"Yes, Polly; since before you were born."

"What an age!" cried May. "And you never told us a word about her!"

"Fact is," Uncle Dan explained, "I haven't seen her more than once in five or six years, and then only over here. You'll find people don't want to hear about your travels."

Really quite an ingenious turn, the Colonel flattered himself,—to account for the passion of a life-time as an incident of travel! He was so exhilarated over this feat that he was emboldened to pursue the subject. Besides, big Polly had not spoken, and he could not suffer any tribute to the lady of his allegiance to go by default.

"What did you think of her, Polly?" he asked.

"I can only say," Pauline declared, with an earnestness of conviction that was even more expressive than her sister's encomiums, "that if she had not invited us girls to go in her gondola it would have spoiled the afternoon."

"But the son is very nice; didn't you think so?" asked May, seized, in her turn, with the spirit of investigation. "He didn't even seem conceited, which clever people usually are."

"Yes, indeed! he is very nice; how did you like him, Uncle Dan?"

"Geof?" Uncle Dan repeated, rather absently; "How did I like Geof? Oh, I should say he was turning out very well. But I thought you girls had the best of it"; whence it may be gathered that Mrs. Daymond had not only borrowed the two girls, but had offered her son as compensation to the Colonel.

"How pretty the two gondolas will look going about together when we get our new flags," said May. "It will be a regular little flotilla."

"Aren't you expecting a good deal of Mrs. Daymond?" Pauline demurred.

"Why of course we shall go about together. She said she hoped to see a great deal of us while we were here."

The Colonel emptied his claret-glass, while a sense of warmth and well-being stole through his veins, that made him think he must have been mistaken about that ice.

"Are you going to fly the Stars and Stripes?" he asked. He had never considered the prow of a gondola a very fitting situation for the flag he had fought for,—but perhaps the Pollys knew best.

"No, indeed," said May. "We are going to have something ever so much prettier than that."

"Ah, Polly! There's nothing prettier than the Stars and Stripes," the Colonel protested.

"May means more original," said Pauline. "She has had one of her happy thoughts."

"You see, Uncle Dan," May explained, "there are such a lot of national flags on the gondolas, and it

seems so stupid not to have something different. So Mr. Daymond and I have concocted quite a new scheme,—or rather the idea was mine and he is going to paint them. We are going to have a sea-horse painted on red bunting, in tawny colors, golds and browns; and Mr. Daymond thinks he shall make one for their gondola on a dark blue ground. Shan't you feel proud to sail the Venetian lagoons with a sea-horse at the mast-head?"

"Proud as a peacock! And the young man is going to paint it for you?"

"Yes; isn't that good of him? And shan't we look pretty?"

"Never saw the time you didn't," Uncle Dan was tempted to say. But he flattered himself that he never spoiled his nieces, and so he remarked instead, with his most crafty grimace: "No, you'll probably look like frights"; which, if the girls had not been quite case-hardened against his thinly disguised compliments, might have had just the disastrous effect he wished to avoid.

Truth to tell, they were neither of them very susceptible to flattery, for neither of them was in the least self-centred. Even May, who was far from sharing her sister's mellow warmth of interest in other people,—even May, with all the crudities and shortcomings of youth still in the ascendant, was too much occupied with her rapidly acquired views of the phenomena about her, to pay much attention to the perhaps equally interesting phenomenon of her own personality. The impression left upon the two girls by their half hour's talk with Geoffry Daymond was characteristic of each. May approved of him because he had been interested in her ideas; and Pauline liked him because he had been interested in

her sister.

Whatever the young man's impressions may have been, it may as well be stated at once, that in the course of that tea-drinking he made up his mind that his mother really had a right to expect him to stay with her for the next week or two, and that he should tell Oliver Kenwick to-morrow, that he would have to get somebody else for that tramp through the Titian country. What did he care about the Titian country anyway? Here was Titian himself here in Venice, and lots besides. He would pitch into those flags to-morrow. That was really a very happy thought of the talkative one. He wondered if the quiet one would say more if she got a chance; she did not look stupid. And that reflection had struck him as so preposterous, that he had almost interrupted her sister in her expression of opinion on the subject of the famous bronze chargers that seem always on the point of plunging down from the front of San Marco into the Piazza, to the destruction of the babies and pigeons there assembled, to ask: "Miss Beverly what do you like best in Venice?"

"The gondola," said Pauline, after an instant's reflection—a little pause which proved to be one of her idiosyncrasies.

"The gondola?" he repeated, doubtfully. "The gondola isn't very much by itself."

"But the gondola never is by itself. It's the centre of everything. It's all Venice and a living creature besides—something like a person's heart. Of course I don't mean the gondolas on the souvenir spoons!" she added, with the little ripple, that was so much prettier than a definite smile. Decidedly, Miss Beverly was not stupid.

"You row, of course?" May had considered her question to be quite in line with the conversation. "Is it very difficult?"

"Not after you get the knack. That is, the forward oar gets going after a while. I rather think you would have to begin almost in long clothes as these gondoliers do to get anything like their skill in really handling the boat."

And now, in reply to Uncle Dan's artful substitute for a compliment, one of the prospective frights remarked: "Mr. Daymond says they have a lighter oar that he used to row with when he was a boy. He is going to get it out for us to-morrow, and then we must all learn to row."

"I think I should prefer to learn by observation," Uncle Dan demurred, as he pulled his stiff leg out from under the table. Upon which, dinner being over, the girls went off in search of their wraps, while the Colonel stepped out between the glass doors, and strolled down to the bottom of the garden, where the water lapped the stone parapet.

The dusk had gathered and the stars were coming out. The water was dotted with gondola-lights that twinkled here and there, like detached will-o'-the wisps, the black hulls of the boats not being clearly distinguishable in the shadow. Every gondola was out, excepting the few unlucky ones that were detained for ferry service; for there was to be a *festa* this evening, and the *forestieri*,—by which pretty woodsy name the tourist is designated in the most poetic of tongues,—could be counted upon to pay fancy prices.

The Colonel, secure in his possession of Vittorio, took no part in the bargaining that was going on at

the hotel steps, a few yards away, and all along the line of the garden wall. He was standing beside the iron railing, pulling at a contemplative cigar, and listening, with considerable relish, to the wrangling of the gondoliers, when he heard a voice just under the wall, saying: "*Buona sera*, Signore! It's Nanni."



"The gondola is the centre of everything; it is Venice and a living creature besides"ToList

The Colonel had not observed that one of the shadowy barks had glided close in under the wall at his feet.

"Why, Nanni!" he exclaimed; and reaching down over the railing he clasped a strong brown hand.

The man was standing at the stern of the gondola, steadying the oar with one hand. He had flung his hat to the floor of the boat, and as he stood there, bare-headed, the garden lights shining full upon his upturned face, he made a striking picture. His hair was absolutely black, and his face was of the pure Italian type, very dark, and cast in noble lines. About

the mouth and eyes, a touch of austere melancholy was discernible, even now, in the animation of the moment. He was like his brother, though his face lacked the sunlit quality which was his brother's chief charm of countenance. On the other hand, the intelligence of his brother's face was here developed into something higher and more serious,—higher and sadder, the Colonel thought, in the moment's pause that followed. He had not seen this protégé of his for ten years, and the years had left their impress upon him.

"Vittorio has met with a slight accident," Nanni was saying. "He has twisted his wrist, and if he rows this evening it will get worse. Will the Signore permit me to act as substitute?"

The Signore looked disturbed.

"I don't know, Nanni, how that would work," he said. "My nieces, you know. I'm afraid they would find you out."

"No fear of that, Signore. I'm as good a gondolier as ever I was, and I can hold my tongue."

The Colonel looked at him critically. To the initiated, there was a good deal both in the man's speech and bearing to rouse suspicion. A subtle difference that would hardly be defined as superiority; was it not rather something contradictory, not quite homogeneous, and in so far disadvantageous? The Colonel was not addicted to careful analysis of his impressions, and he felt himself cornered.

"I hope you won't misunderstand me, Nanni," he said, apologetically. "I'm immensely proud of you;—it isn't that. But,—well, it's not my way to talk about things. I suppose it's crochety, but somehow, I like to

keep things separate, you know. If you talk about a thing it usually spoils it."

It did not once occur to the Colonel that the man of education, and presumably of some social standing, would feel any aversion to a temporary relinquishment of these advantages. To the *padrone*, the skilled physician who owed to him his education, was still, first and foremost, the son of his old gondolier, in whom, when a bright boy of fifteen, a week in hospital with a broken arm had aroused a consuming ambition to be a doctor. The education, the profession, seemed to the Colonel—perhaps because it was primarily due to him,—accidental and extraneous. Fundamentally he was still the gondolier's son, the member of a caste too imperative and enduring in character to yield to circumstances.

And the really noteworthy feature of the situation was the fact that the gondolier's son fully shared the view of the *padrone*. Once in Venice, among his own people, Giovanni Scuro felt as thoroughly at home in the character of gondolier, as if he had never learned the meaning of the word science. Hence he could answer, with perfect sincerity: "Si, Signore; I understand. But you may trust me. And you will go out with me this evening?"

"Why, yes; I suppose we had better," said the Colonel, somewhat reassured.

"And to-morrow, if Vittorio is not able to row? Of course that is as the Signore wishes. Another gondolier can be had to-morrow for the asking; but to-night, the prices are appalling. They have no consciences, these men."

"We'll see how it works to-night. Ah! there are my nieces. We will meet you at the door. And, by the

way, Nanni, have you picked up any English?"

"No, Signore; only French."

As the gondola came up to the landing the party stepped aboard as quickly as might be, to clear the way for others who were waiting their turn, and it occurred to Uncle Dan that the girls might, after all, not notice the new man at the oar. But he had reckoned without May's observant eyes. The moment the boat was free of the crowd, she turned sharp about and looked at the *gondolier*.

"Why, Uncle Dan," she cried. "We've got a new man! Did you know it?"

"Yes; Vittorio has twisted his hand, and his brother has come to take his place."

"His brother? Oh, yes; he does look like him. We were lucky to get him, were we not?"

"What a pity Vittorio should have hurt his hand!" said Pauline. "I hope it's nothing serious. He was such a nice man."

"No," said the Colonel, incautiously. "His brother says it's nothing serious."

"But he can't know much about it," Pauline urged. "Don't you think he ought to see a doctor?"

"I rather think he will, to-morrow, unless it's all right again."

"If it's a sprain he can't be too careful with it," she insisted.

"What is Italian for sprain?" asked May. "I want to tell the man to have a doctor."

"I'm sure I don't know," said Uncle Dan, trembling for his guilty secret. "I'll tell him."

"How can you tell him, if you don't know how?" May argued. Then, turning abruptly, and glancing up into the intent, forward-looking face, just visible in the uncertain lights of the Canal: "Hasn't your brother seen a doctor?" she asked.

"Si, Signorina," Nanni replied, without an instant's hesitation.

"And what does he think is the trouble?"

"A slight sprain," said Nanni; "he hopes it is nothing serious!"

"That was very sensible of you," said May; "to send for a doctor at once. There, Uncle Dan, now we know the Italian for sprain. I believe in always trying to say everything!" in which startling statement the young girl admitted more than she had intended.

They were just passing the Palazzo Darino, where a gondola lurked in the shadow.

"We shall hardly see them in the crowd," Uncle Dan remarked. "What's your idea, Nanni? Think you can keep us out of the jam?"

"Si, Signore; I know a place where they won't crowd us."

"What a funny name that is for a man," May exclaimed.

"It's short for Giovanni. I got in the way of calling him that when he was a little shaver and used to row me about with his father."

The Canal was twinkling with gondola lights, and as they approached the broad arch of the Rialto the crowd became greater, obliging them to pause now and then, while the dip of multitudinous oars made itself heard, a delicious undertone to the shouts and

execrations of excited gondoliers. Presently, however, they had cleared the bridge, and a few strokes of the oar brought them into a quiet little haven formed by two big boats moored alongside the fish-market. As they came to a stop they could already hear the music floating round the great bend of the Canal. The hulls of the two fishing-boats loomed tall and dark at either end of the gondola, while the rays of a lamp in the arcade over yonder fell athwart the yellow-brown sail of one of them, reefed loosely about the mast. There were a good many people on the quay, but they were a quiet gathering. The more aggressive members of the Venetian populace are pretty sure to get afloat on such an occasion, and a dozen different kinds of irresponsible craft were being propelled, with more or less skill, and a distracting absence of etiquette, among the decorous gondolas, whose long-suffering masters shouted themselves hoarse in their efforts to enforce the conventional rules of the highway.

Presently one of the gondolas glided in alongside the Colonel's, and almost before their respective occupants could recognise one another the gunwales of the two boats had been securely lashed together.

"We're just in time," said Geoffry. "We could see the reflection of the lights around the bend, when we were in midstream. Ah, there it comes!"

As he spoke, a brilliant, variegated light fell upon the mass of gondolas a few rods up the Canal, and a moment later the huge structure of red, white, and green lamps, came drifting down-stream. It represented a great temple with dome-like roof topped by a crown of lights, glittering against the dark background of the night. As it drew nearer, the throng of boats in its path thinned a little, and

broken reflections of the gleaming lights danced between the gondolas, and sparkled in the oar-drops.

"What do you think of the architecture of it?" May asked, in her fresh young voice, that seemed to dissipate illusion, like a ray of plain daylight let in upon a stage scene.

Daymond laughed.

"I don't perceive any," he said. "Do you?"

"Well, I don't know; I supposed it was meant for a building."

"Oh, no!" said Pauline. "It's meant for a dream. Don't wake us up, May! See; they're stopping in front of the Ca' Doro."

The movement of the great barge had been so slow, that it had halted almost unawares in front of the beautiful palace, and straightway a rosy bengal light lit up the carvings of the fairy-like façade with a magical effect. The band, lurking melodramatically under the gleaming arches of the barge, struck up a prelude, and presently a soprano voice rose high and strong above the wind and stringed instruments, ringing superbly out across the water. The fantastic impression of the scene was so strong that it seemed as if the visible brilliance of the shining lights had entered into the voice itself, giving it a weird and uncanny splendour. The vast floating audience listened, motionless and silent, until the last note went out like a light suddenly extinguished. Then, after a gust of hand-clapping had subsided, the glittering barge moved forward once more, the dip of a hundred oars plashing softly in its wake.

When the mass of the attendant flotilla had passed the mouth of their little haven, the two friendly

gondolas glided out amid-stream, in time to see the crown of light lowered within the dome, for the passage under the bridge. The reflections played upon the face of the arch until the massive granite seemed hardly more real than the fairy-like temple of light itself; and then suddenly, the flickering colours vanished from the face of the bridge, and were shining upon the broad under-span of the arch. An instant later it was past and over, and May and Geoffry were comparing impressions with great earnestness on her part and undisguised relish on his.

"How pretty the light must be on the Virgin and the Angel on the other side of the bridge," said Pauline.

"Yes," Mrs. Daymond answered; "I was thinking of that."

Then came a mysterious gliding of the two gondolas, Indian-file, down dark, narrow canals, where were glimpses, through low passage-ways into dimly lighted squares. On one of the bridges, as they passed beneath it, a hollow footstep sounded, and as they looked back they could see a cloaked figure leaning upon the stone parapet. Now and then a chance gas-lamp cast upon the wall beside them the shadow of the gondolier's swaying figure, vanishing then in the black water like a stealthy suicide. Pauline looked round once or twice, involuntarily, to make sure that the man was still there, and once May said: "Nanni, could we get past if we were to meet any one?"

"Si, Signorina," the grave voice made answer; and Uncle Dan felt agreeably confirmed in his impression that Nanni was to be trusted.

Nearly two hours later, the girls were awakened

from their first sleep by the soft plashing sound of myriad oars. In a moment they were standing on the balcony in their pretty cashmere wrappers, leaning on the cushions of the stone balustrade. On came the gleaming colours of Italy, not a single light extinguished during the long, slow passage down the Canal; nor did the floating escort seem diminished by so much as a single boat.

A crimson bengal light was flushing the face of the Salute, as the luminous apparition halted before it, and a burst of music rose from the barge. Over yonder, beyond the long, low line of the Giudecca, a pensive old moon was coming up, slow and mist-obscured, as if reluctant to rise upon a world so well able to dispense with its light.

"The old moon always goes to your heart," said Pauline.

"Yes; but it will be young again in a week or two," May observed, consolingly; and at that instant an emerald light struck full upon the white façade of San Giorgio, and straightway the poor old moon was consigned to the oblivion it clearly coveted.

VII

Gathering Poppies

VII[ToC]

Gathering Poppies

"This is Vittorio's gondola, is it not, Nanni?" asked May, who had an eye for details and had instantly identified the boat.

"Si, Signorina."

They had spent the morning sight-seeing, and now they were, according to Uncle Dan, having their reward, coasting along the outer shore of the Giudecca, in the heavenly afternoon light. The Colonel much preferred the easy social conditions of the gondola to the restraint, not to say chill, of church and chapel, where a man must not wear his hat nor speak above a whisper.

May was sitting, as she liked to do, in the little gondola chair, whence she commanded every point of the compass; a position which had the further advantage of facilitating communication with the

gondolier.

"Why don't you use your own gondola?" she persisted.

For an instant Uncle Dan's loyalty wavered, and he wondered whether Polly were not perhaps a trifle forward for so young a girl. He had not been struck by it before, and even now he would have challenged such a heresy in another; but, really,—

"Because this is the better gondola," Nanni replied, in the grave, impersonal tone which was in such marked contrast with his brother's eager alacrity.

"I wish Vittorio would get well," May exclaimed, impatiently; "this man isn't half as nice."

"Don't you think so?" Pauline queried. "He is a perfect gondolier."

"Yes; but he is so unapproachable. One could never get confidential with him; one would never ask him about his wife and children, and think how delighted Vittorio was to tell us about each individual *bambino*!"

"It would not be of much use to ask him," Uncle Dan interposed hastily. "For he hasn't any."

"I have an idea he is poor," said Pauline. "Even poorer than the rest of them. I wonder what is the reason."

"So do I," said May. "Nanni, is your gondola a very old one?"

"Si, Signorina; very old."

"What a pity! It must be very bad for you. Which is your ferry?"

"I don't belong to any."

"But I thought every gondolier belonged to a ferry."

There was no reply.

"Isn't that so?" May insisted.

"Si, Signorina, but I am no longer a gondolier."

"Why, what are you?"

At this juncture Uncle Dan felt it imperatively necessary to interpose again.

"That's San Clemente," he observed, indicating an island half-a-mile away, composed, apparently, of red brick and window-glass.

"How lovely!" May exclaimed; and the indiscriminating response betrayed inattention.

"What are you?" she asked again.

"I do not live in Venice, Signorina; my home is in Milan."

"In Milan? What do you do there?"

"I am attached to a hospital."

There was something peculiarly provocative of curiosity in the laconic replies of the man. May wondered whether his reticence was due to modesty or to moroseness. Perhaps she could find out.

"What do you do at the hospital?" she asked.

For the first time his eyes met hers directly, as he said, with something almost like a challenge in his voice: "I am one of its servants, Signorina."

Yes, May thought, it was moroseness; he was unhappy, and no wonder.

"What a pity!" she cried, with very genuine compassion in her voice. "It can't be half so nice as

being a gondolier."

But Nanni was again intent upon his work, rowing with long, steady strokes, his eyes fixed upon the course of the gondola.

"Do you like it as well?" she asked, with a quite inexplicable sense of temerity. She felt herself on the verge of being overawed by the stately reticence of this hospital servant.

"It is my work," said Nanni, in a gentler tone. "A man's work is his life."

"But if you had a good gondola and a place at a *traghetto*, wouldn't you rather come back to Venice?"

"No, Signorina; I love my work."

"Polly, you ought to have been a lawyer," Uncle Dan remarked, highly amused at the insuccess of her catechising, which he by this time perceived to be harmless.

They had turned in to one of the canals of the Giudecca, that great crescent island whose curve follows the southern line of the city, as the outer arc of a rainbow follows the inner. Not a breath stirred the water of the canal, upon which theirs was the only moving craft. Moored close to the low, brick coping of the quay, which bordered one side of the *rio*, were two or three fishing-boats, their broad hulls black, their rudder arms rudely carved and gaily decorated. Here, a gorgeous red sail hung loose in the still air; there, a voluminous brown net, bordered with rings and bobbers, was stretched between two stout masts, drying in the sun. Curious great bulging baskets, dingy brown in colour and shaped like giant sea-urchins, depended from the gunwales, half immersed in water, the mortal remains of small,

crab-like creatures sticking to their sides. All this picturesqueness, and more besides, was reflected in the placid water. On the one hand was the quay, with its irregular row of houses done in delicious sun-baked colours, in front of which women in sulphur shawls and children in variegated rags were sunning themselves and passing the time of day. On the other side, a tumble-down wall of brick, that once was red, rose out of the water in such formless dilapidation that one could not tell where the reality merged into the reflection; while masses of verdure from a hidden garden tossed their heads above it, or tumbled over it as if enchanted to get a glimpse of themselves in the dark, cool water below. A wooden bridge spanned the canal, glassed perfectly in the still water, and somebody's wash, hung out to dry at one end of the rustic railing, blended acceptably in the quaint harmony of the picture.

Nanni had been rowing slowly, and just there, perceiving that the attention of his passengers was arrested, he stayed his oar. A bird, hidden somewhere among the foliage, in the garden, chose that moment for making a melodious observation to his mate, while a somewhat timid and tentative baby-voice from the quay lisped: "*Un soldino*," not with any business intention but merely by way of practice. The whole thing was so incredibly pretty that there was nothing to be said about it, and for a number of seconds no one spoke.

Then May exclaimed: "I'm so afraid somebody will say something!" upon which the others laughed, and instantly the oar was put in motion again, the gondola gliding forward under the bridge and past other ruinous, verdure-crowned walls.

"What a shame this man should not be a

gondolier," May cried, returning to the charge, with unabated interest. "It does seem as if we might perhaps do something about it."

She glanced up at the grave face, half inclined to press the subject further. The man was gazing straight over the prow of the gondola, not more intent than his brother often was, yet the young girl felt abashed and deterred from her purpose. If it were Vittorio, she told herself, she might be sure that the dark features would break into a flashing smile when she spoke to him. But this man could not be depended upon to look pleased at any casual notice bestowed upon him. She wondered why; she wondered why he was so different. Had he always been like that, or was it his life of exile and servitude? Nothing could convince her that he really liked his work in the hospital, far away from his beautiful Venice. There was some mystery about it, and she hated to be baffled.

"Yes, I always like poking about in the Giudecca," Uncle Dan was saying. "It's chock full of pretty bits, and then you keep coming out on the lagoon again, and like as not there are marsh-birds or people wading about after shell-fish. There's always something going on on the lagoons."

"Why, I should have said that the lagoon was the quietest place in the world," Pauline remarked.

"It is," Uncle Dan admitted. "That's why you are so sure to notice any little thing that happens to be going on!"

Meanwhile the gondolier had unconsciously suited his action to their word, and they had come out upon the lagoon again, and now they were skirting the pretty green Giudecca shore, where scarlet poppies

stood bright and motionless in the still sunshine.

"Oh, I want some of those poppies," cried May. "Nanni, could we go ashore and get some of those flowers? How do you call them?"

"They are *papaveri*, Signorina," he answered; "I will get you some."

"But I want to get them myself."

"That would not be possible, Signorina; it is difficult to land."

He rowed slowly for a few seconds more, and then he backed water and brought the gondola in toward the shore which rose several feet above the water and was formed of loose earth and stones. May, forced to admit that she could not herself land, seated herself on the gondola steps whence she could watch the proceedings. The gondola was creeping closer and closer to the shore, sidling in, for it was only here and there that the water was deep enough to carry the boat. Presently Nanni laid the blade of the oar flat upon the grass and so drew the boat gently in. Then, still keeping his hold upon the shore with the blade of the oar, he laid the other end across the stern, and, assuring himself that the balance was perfect, he found a foothold in the loose earth, and, with one long step, gained the top of the embankment. The gondola gave somewhat beneath his foot, and the stern rose as it righted itself, but the oar-blade did not yield its curiously tenacious hold.

"How nice of him, not to tell us to sit still," May exclaimed. "One does like to be treated like an intelligent being!"

She watched the tall figure moving here and there, stooping to pick half-a-dozen blossoms, giving an

occasional glance at the gondola meanwhile, to make sure that all was well. Presently the figure disappeared in the hollow.

"One feels quite abandoned," Pauline remarked. "What would become of us if the boat were to glide off?"

"We could wade ashore," May suggested. "It doesn't appear to be more than a foot deep anywhere."

"I rather think Nanni would have to do the wading," said Uncle Dan.

The tide was going out, slipping so quietly to the sea that here, at this remote anchorage, the receding of the water was imperceptible. The marsh had not yet begun to prick through the sinking tide, and as the eye wandered across the wide, unbroken stretches of the lagoon, it seemed like a vast sea of glass. The day was so clear and so still that the distant spires of Malamocco and Poveglia were mirrored in the lagoon. To the young eyes of the girls, the twin pictures, against their respective backgrounds of sky and water, were as clear-cut as an etching held in the hand.

"Are those real islands, Uncle Dan?" asked Pauline.

But before Uncle Dan could make a fitting rejoinder, May exclaimed: "Oh, look at the poppies!" and all eyes were turned to the shore.

Nanni had suddenly appeared, close above them, a perfect glory of scarlet poppies in his hand. The sun shone full upon them, till they fairly blazed with colour against the background of his dark figure. He dropped on one knee, reaching down to place the flowers in the Signorina's outstretched hand, and as she looked up brightly to thank him, the two figures,

with their sharply contrasted colouring, made a startlingly pretty picture in the exquisite setting of water and sky.

"*Lungo!*"

The voice rang out musically, as most sounds do, across the water, and, turning, May saw another gondola coming up astern. The curve of the shore had hidden it from view until that moment.

"Do stay just as you are for a minute," cried the same voice, descending to English. "We are out after effects, and we want those poppies."

"Of course you do," said May, "but you can't have them."

"Yes, we can, if you'll only hold them in your hand and let us pilfer with our brushes. You won't lose a single poppy and we shall have them all."

"If you had any artistic sense you would rather have those tilting about on the shore," said May; "but if you prefer an indiscriminate mass of colour you are welcome."

Geoffry Daymond's companion meanwhile was paying his respects to Pauline and the Colonel, who were old acquaintances.

"May, you have never met Mr. Kenwick, I think," said Pauline.

"Oh, yes, I have," May declared; "but it was ages ago and he never would take any notice of me."

"Do let me make up for it now," Kenwick begged, rapidly setting his palette, by way of elucidating his request.

"How long ago is ages ago?" asked Daymond.

"Four years ago last winter," was the unhesitating reply. "It was when I was fifteen and Mr. Kenwick used to come to see my sisters."

"My memory does not go back as far as that," said Kenwick. "I'm a child of the hour."

He was a man well on in the thirties, who looked as if he had lived hard; and since there was nothing in his chosen calling to account for such an impression, the observer was led to seek its origin in the realm of speculation. He had, to be sure, painted several good pictures, but that was ten years ago. Since then he had lived on his reputation, materially reinforced by a not inconsiderable income. As Pauline watched his face, it struck her that his smile, which she had always objected to, had grown positively glittering in its intensity. Uncle Dan, for his part, thought the young man seemed amusing, but he wished he had not happened to be old Stephen Kenwick's grandson.

"Then we may have you?" Geoffry was asking.

"I thought it was the poppies you wanted," said May, suspiciously.

"It is! it is!" cried Kenwick with fervour.

"But you make such a pretty setting," Daymond explained; "your dress, you know, and the general colour-scheme."

"What fun to be a colour-scheme," cried May. "Uncle Dan, do you think I might be a colour-scheme?"

"I don't know that you can help it," was Uncle Dan's rejoinder, intended to express a proper resignation, but betraying, quite unconsciously, an appreciation of more than the pale blue gown as a

background.

Then Nanni, having returned to his post, was directed to row out a little from shore, and presently the two artists were at work, rapidly sketching in the bright figure with the slim black prow for a foil, and the silvery reaches of the lagoon beyond.

Uncle Dan was sitting in the chair where he could watch the faces of the young men. There was something in Kenwick's manner that antagonised him; it was, somehow, too appreciative.

"I make a condition," the Colonel exclaimed abruptly, in his voice of martinet. "If there's a likeness the sketch is forfeited."

"I'm safe," Geoffry laughed. "I never got a likeness in my life."

"I will be as evasive as possible," said Kenwick, somewhat nettled; "but it's rather late to impose conditions."

"Am I holding the poppies right?" asked May, after what seemed to her a long interval of silence. "I'm afraid they will begin to droop pretty soon."

"The poppies are all right," Geoffry assured her.

"Does that mean the rest of it isn't? I posed for the girls in a studio once, and they said I did it very well."

"Girls usually pose well," Kenwick observed; upon which May concluded, most illogically, that he was conceited.

Pauline, meanwhile, had not turned toward the other gondola which lay astern of theirs. She was watching her sister and wishing she could sketch. She thought, if she could, she would rather do her as

she received the poppies from the hands of the gondolier. She had one of her prettiest looks then, and the little touch of action was more characteristic. There was something conventional, and therefore not quite natural in this passive pose; May was not in the habit of sitting still to be looked at.

"Would you like to see, Miss Beverly?"

The other gondola had glided up close alongside, and Daymond held out his sketch. Faithful to his bond, and to his professed disabilities, he had scarcely hinted at the face, but the pose was charmingly successful, and the scheme of colour was all he had promised. Bright as the poppies were, and well as they were indicated, without being individualised, in the sketchy handling, the really high light of the picture was caught in the golden hair, which gleamed against the silvery blending of water and sky, and was thrown into still brighter relief by the graceful black prow curving beyond it, but a little off the line.

"It is lovely," said Pauline, as she handed it to May.

"How pretty!" cried May; and then, recovering her presence of mind: "I don't see how you got such a good red."

Uncle Dan, meanwhile, was examining Kenwick's sketch.

"How the devil did you get that likeness?" he exclaimed, forgetting, for an instant, the condition he had made.

"Then the thing is forfeited," Kenwick remarked.

"That's a fact," the Colonel answered, turning up on the artist a glance of quick distrust. "What's to be done about it?"

"That is for you to say," Kenwick replied. "The sketch is yours."

The Colonel's face flushed. He had a very lively appreciation of a graceful act, and he was really delighted with the picture.

"Why, bless my soul!" he cried; "that's a present worth having! Eh, Polly?"

"Indeed it is!" Pauline agreed, cordially, taking the picture from her uncle's hand and studying it attentively.

"All the same," she said, as they were rowing towards home, half-an-hour later; "I should much rather have had Mr. Daymond's sketch. It is not a likeness, yet there's twice as much of May in it."

"Do you think so?" May queried, doubtfully. "Seems to me he didn't give me any nose."

"Oh, yes, he did; there was a little dot that did very well for a nose. And, besides, there isn't very much of you in your nose."

"I wish you had told me that my hat was tipped up on one side," May continued, reproachfully. She was examining Kenwick's sketch with much interest.

"It would have spoiled it if it hadn't been; your hair wouldn't have showed half as well."

"Perhaps not; and the hair does look pretty," May admitted. "Do you remember how pretty Mamma's hair was, Uncle Dan?"

"Of course I do. It was prettier than yours," the Colonel declared, cheerfully perjuring his soul in the cause of discipline.

"So I thought," said May. "There's always something better than ours. I wonder how it would

seem to have anything really superlative."

As the gondola came up to the steps of the *Venezia*, May turned, and looking back at the gondolier, said: "The *papaveri* are beautiful, Nanni."

She was delighted with her acquisition of a new word, and still more so with the flash of pleasure her thanks called forth.

"No, he is not morose," she assured herself, as she stood on the balcony, a few minutes later, and watched the gondola gliding away in the golden afternoon light. The man was rowing slowly, against the tide, but presently the long, slim boat, with the long, slim figure at the stern, rounded the bend of the Canal and vanished.

VIII

The Pulse of the Sea

VIIIToC

The Pulse of the Sea

By the end of another week the life in Venice had come to seem the only life in the world, and even May admitted that there was something mythical about wheels and tram-ways and such prosaic devices for getting about on dry land. Both she and

Pauline had acquired some little skill with the forward oar, for, as Uncle Dan justly observed, now that they sometimes succeeded in keeping the oar in the row-lock for twenty consecutive strokes, they were really very little hindrance to the progress of the boat! May declared that no person of a practical turn would ever take naturally to so unpractical an arrangement as that short-lipped makeshift, designed to eject an oar at the first stroke. Geoffry Daymond agreed with her in this, as in most of her opinions. He declared in confidence to his mother that her views must either be accepted or flatly contradicted, for they possessed no atmosphere, and they consequently afforded no debatable ground.

Kenwick, on the other hand, very rarely saw fit to agree with the positive young person who looked so pretty when she was crossed, or with any one else, for the matter of that. He told May that she would row better if she were not so wool-gathering, merely for the pleasure of hearing her scornful disclaimer; and when Pauline pointed out that she was herself the wool-gatherer, although her oar was quite as tractable as her sister's, he assured her that she was as much a child of the fleeting hour as himself.

It was Kenwick's method to talk to people about themselves, with a judicious linking together of his own peculiarities and theirs. He imagined that that sort of thing lent a piquancy to conversation. The aim of Oliver Kenwick's life was to be effective; his art had suffered from it, and even in social matters he sometimes had the misfortune to overshoot the mark.

"Uncle Dan," Pauline had asked, one day, after an hour spent in Kenwick's society, "what is the reason Mr. Kenwick makes so little impression?"

"Because he doesn't tally," May put in.

"Well," said Uncle Dan, scowling perplexedly; "I don't quite make him out. But we've always had a feeling in our family that some of the Kenwicks were not quite our own kind";—an expression of opinion on Uncle Dan's part which owed its careful moderation to the fact that he had accepted and still treasured the poppy sketch. For there was one thing that the Colonel deferred to even more than to his prejudices, and that was his sense of obligation.

He therefore submitted, with a very good grace, to seeing a good deal of the young man, and if it occasionally irked him to have Stephen Kenwick's grandson about, he found his account in the spirit and ease with which his two Pollys dealt with the situation.

Kenwick, of course, attached himself ostensibly to the Daymond party. He seemed to bear Geof no grudge because of his defection in the matter of the tramp among the Dolomites, which he himself, indeed, had appeared ready enough to relinquish. Without any preconcerted plan it usually happened that the two gondolas fell in with each other in the course of the afternoon, an arrangement which was much facilitated by the brilliant-hued banners floating at the respective prows.

"There's the flag-ship over by San Servolo," Geof would exclaim, seizing an oar and giving immediate chase; or they would cruise about in an aimless way until Kenwick dropped the remark that the Colonel had said something about a trip to Murano that day.

The casual nature of Kenwick's allusions to the Colonel's party afforded Geof no little amusement. His pleasure in Oliver's society had always partaken

somewhat of the admiring sentiment a plain man entertains for a clever comedian. Being himself incapable of dissimulation, even in a good cause, he was the more disposed to condone any harmless exercise of a gift which he could never hope to acquire.

"I'm afraid they won't catch up with us any more, now that we have two oars," said May, one afternoon, as the red banner sped swiftly past the Riva, bound for the Porto del Lido. The day was bright and warm, and the pretty linen awning with its crimson lining was spread above their heads, somewhat obstructing their view. "I wish I could see whether they were coming," she added, with outspoken solicitude. "It's so much more fun to be a flotilla!"

"I think they will find us," said Pauline, smiling to herself, as if she had pleasant thoughts. She would trust Geoffry Daymond to overtake them. Pauline was no matchmaker, but, as she told herself, it was the sort of thing that was always happening in the family, and Geof's liking for May was as obvious as it was natural.

"Do you think, Vittorio, that we can really go out on the Adriatic?" May asked.

Vittorio had been at the forward oar for a day or two, and to-morrow his brother was to be dismissed and he was to return to his post.

"Hardly out upon the Adriatic," he said, and, turning, he laid his oar flat across between the two gunwales and balanced himself upon it in order to look under the flaps of the awning into the face of the Signorina. Vittorio was of a pre-eminently social disposition, and he liked to be in visible touch with

his listeners. It was indeed refreshing to see his handsome face and brilliant smile once more. It quite flashed in upon them, being in full sunshine, as they looked out upon it from their shady covert.

"The new break-water runs out a very long distance into the open sea on either side," he explained; "and we shall hardly get to the end of it. But we can see over it, and there will be the bright sails such as the Signorina likes."

"How nice he is!" said May; "Now the other one would have said: 'No, Signorina,' and that would have been the end of it."

Yet, even as she spoke, a quick compunction seized her. She had never been able to rid her mind of a disquieting conviction that all was not well with this grave, taciturn being, whose personality was not less haunting than his bearing was unobtrusive. She did not remember that she had ever before felt so much concern for an indifferent person, and, being of an active temperament, she could not be content with a passive solicitude. It seemed to her that something must be done about it, and that it devolved upon her to solve the problem. Perhaps if she were to offer to give the man a gondola he would admit that he was miserable in that dreary hospital, and that he longed for the free life of the lagoons. The project appealed, indeed, so strongly, both to her imagination and to her judgment, that she had already made a mental readjustment of her finances to that end. There was a certain white silk trimmed with pale green *miroir* velvet that she had once dreamed of, which had somehow transformed itself in her mind into a slim black bark, fitted out in the most approved style with cushions and sea-horses, and tufted cords.

"I ought to be willing to dance in my tennis dress

the rest of my days," she told herself; "for the sake of changing the whole course of a poor man's life!"

"*Lungo!*"

The familiar call took her quite by surprise, and looking out from under the awning, she espied the Daymond sea-horse on its blue ground, already close upon them. Geof was at the oar and Kenwick was sitting beside Mrs. Daymond.

"What do you say to our making an exchange of prisoners, Colonel Steele?" asked Mrs. Daymond. "You shall have one of my young men if you will give me one of your girls."

"Oh, may I come to you?" Pauline begged, mindful of her little air-castle;—for the Colonel always managed, when he could, to get Geoffry into his own boat, and the young man was already engaged in an animated conversation with her sister.

"Do come," said Mrs. Daymond. "And Mr. Kenwick, I shall have to give you up, for I can't spare an oar."

"Doesn't Mr. Kenwick row?" asked May, lifting a pair of satirical eye-brows.

"Not for other people," Kenwick laughed. "I keep my strength for paddling my own canoe." And, having seen Pauline safely established beside Mrs. Daymond, he stepped into the Colonel's boat, quite unconscious of the scarcity of encouragement he had received.

The Colonel welcomed him the more hospitably perhaps, for a consciousness of having been somewhat remiss at the outset. He need have had no misgivings, however, for Kenwick was so happily constituted as to consider a slight to himself quite inconceivable.

"It was very sweet of you to come to us," said Mrs. Daymond, as the gondolas glided away from each other. "We particularly wanted you this afternoon."

"I am glad of that," said Pauline, with one of her still smiles that seemed to give out as much warmth as brightness.

They had passed the island of Santa Elena, and were upon the broad path of the sea-going vessels, which was deserted to-day, save for one yellow sail, yet a long way off, that stood out in full sunshine against the quiet northern sky. The tide was coming in, though not yet strongly, and they were avoiding the current by keeping in toward the shore of the Lido.

Geof was rowing, with power and precision, as his habit was. It struck Pauline that he would have been a capital gondolier; and then she remembered that when he got her Uncle Dan talking about the war the other day,—a feat, by the way, which few succeeded in accomplishing,—she had thought to herself, what a superb soldier he would have made. Presently her eye wandered from the rhythmically swaying figure at the oar to the wide reaches of the seaward path, where the yellow sail showed, clear and remote as a golden bugle-note, its reflection dropping like an echo, far, far down into the depths. The other gondola had fallen back a few lengths, as was apt to be the case.

"Did you ever wonder why your men give us the right of way?" Mrs. Daymond asked. Her voice fell in so naturally with the dip of the oars and the lapping of the tide against the prow, that Pauline suddenly became aware of those pleasant sounds, which had escaped her notice till then.

"I should suppose of course your gondola ought to go first," she answered.

"Oh, no," Mrs. Daymond laughed; "it is not out of deference to me. It is only because Pietro is an old man, and they don't like to hurry him. Isn't that a pretty trait?"

"Yes, indeed! Is Pietro very old?"

"He is sixty-four. He rows as well as ever, only he hasn't quite the endurance he used to have. He was my husband's gondolier."

"And you have had him all these years?"

"Yes; since before Geof was born. Geof is twenty-nine," she added thoughtfully; "just the age of his father when we first met. He is like his father, only happier."

"Happier?" Pauline repeated, wonderingly.

"Yes; my husband had peculiar sorrows."

They were close upon the bright sail now, and they found that it was striped with red and tipped with purple. The slight breeze had dropped and the sail hung loose, glowing in the sunshine as the boat floated homeward with the tide. Two men lay asleep in the shadow of the sail, and the man at the rudder had let his pipe go out. As the gondola came alongside the boat, a small yellow dog sprang up and barked sharply at them, his body, from tip to tail, violently agitated with the whirr of the internal machinery. The helmsman, thus roused, pulled out a match and lighted his pipe; the sunshine was so bright that the light of the match was obliterated. Mrs. Daymond and Pauline watched the little drama rather absently.

"There are more sails," Geof remarked, nodding his head toward the mouth of the port, where brilliant bits of colour hovered like butterflies in the sun. Pauline did not say how pretty they were, but Geof, stooping to look under the awning into her face, did not feel that she was unresponsive. He had discovered before this that she had other means of expression than audible speech.

They had come about the end of the Lido, and were following the line of the break-water, and presently Mrs. Daymond broke the silence:

"My husband was a Southern Unionist," she said. "The war was an inevitable tragedy to him."

Pauline felt instinctively that it was not often that Mrs. Daymond spoke in this way of her husband to one who had not known him. She listened with a sense of being singled out for a great honour.

"He would have given his life for his country," Mrs. Daymond was saying: "He would have given his life for the Union,—but he was bound hand and foot, and he came away."

They were far, far out now, still rowing toward the open sea. As Mrs. Daymond paused, they could hear the voice of the Colonel, speaking to Vittorio, in his peculiar Italian, only a shade less English than his own tongue.

"And your husband came to Venice?"

"Yes; it was here that we met. He had been gathering material in many places for a history of Venice, and he had come; here to write. We spent three years here, summer and winter. He was fond of rough weather, and we get plenty of that here. And he was fond of work."

She paused again, watching the measured stroke of her son's oar.

"One summer we went into the Tyrol for a few weeks, and while we were away there was a fire, and all my husband's notes and manuscripts were burnt."

"Burnt?" Pauline repeated, with a catch of consternation in her voice.

There was not a trace of bitterness in the speaker's face; on the contrary, its usual clear serenity seemed touched to something higher and deeper.

"Then it was," she said, "that my husband had his great opportunity. He began his work again from the beginning. His courage did not flag for a single instant."

"He was a brave soldier after all," said Pauline.

"Yes; and he fell on the field. There was a terrible epidemic of fever, and he went about among the people doing them inestimable service in many ways. I could not go with him because of Geof, and,—I saw the end from the beginning. As I was saying, Pietro used to row us as long ago as that. He has carried Geof in his arms many a time. Ah! Now we feel the swell!"

As she spoke, the long, slow roll of the sea lifted their light bark like a piece of drift-wood upon its sweeping crest, letting it sink again in a strange and solemn rhythm. The actual rise and fall of the water was so slight that it was scarcely apparent to the eye; yet it had the reach and significance of an elemental force, and the gondola rose and sank with a certain tremor, foreign to its usual graceful motion.

"Perhaps we had better turn back, Geof," said Mrs. Daymond.

"Very well; but not until Miss Beverly has seen the sails outside."

Pauline went forward and stood upon the upper step, steadying herself by the oarsman's proffered shoulder. The motion seemed stronger, now that she was on her feet.

"Hold harder," said Geof; "you won't enjoy it if you don't feel safe. There! That's right."

Over the line of the jetty was the deep blue Adriatic, sweeping to the horizon, its nearer reaches dotted with brilliant sails, shining in every shade of red and yellow and ruddy brown. The long, outer shore of the Lido, stretching far away to the tower of Malamocco, was edged with white, as the gentle curve of the waves broke with a toss of spray upon the sand.

"You like it?" Geof inquired, looking up into her face.

"It's as pretty as a tune," she said. "A tune with a lot of harmony to make it really sing. Do you know what I mean?"

"Perfectly," he answered.

Then, as she stepped down and went back to her seat: "I'm going home as passenger," he announced. "We shall have the tide with us and Pietro won't need my help."

"That's right," said Mrs. Daymond. "We want you over here."

The sun had got low enough to shine in under the flaps of the awning, and Geof lifted the canvas from its iron rods, and handed it over to Pietro, who stowed it away, rods and all, in the stern of the

gondola. The world seemed to open up immensely bright and big, and the sky struck them with the force of a revelation.

"There, I call this grand!" Geof cried, taking possession of the chair. "I've been feeling like an outcast or a galley-slave, or some such unlucky wretch, labouring away at the oar, with you two having the pick of everything inside."

"You seemed depressed!" his mother said, with amused appreciation of his lament.

They had turned toward home, and were just coming up with the Colonel's gondola. The men were resting on their oars, while the passengers stood up to survey the view beyond the jetty.

"You didn't come out far enough to get the swell," said Pauline.

"Yes, we did," May answered. "But we didn't like it; so we came back."

"Miss May was pretty badly frightened," Kenwick observed, with his most brilliant smile.

"Nonsense!" cried May; "I was no more frightened than anybody else! But I didn't like it. It felt so horribly big, and made us seem so little."

"And you were perfectly right, Polly," said Uncle Dan, placing his hand upon the small, gloveless one that lay on his arm. "The sea is no place for a gondola. I am sure Mrs. Daymond agrees with us."

"I think we both sympathize with May," she answered, glancing with interest at the charming young face, which was not quite clear of a certain puzzled disturbance.

Half-an-hour later they rounded the end of the

Lido and came in full sight of the city, its domes and towers grouping themselves in ever changing perspective against the western sky. They overtook two or three of the brilliant sails they had passed on their outward way, still drifting city-ward with the tide. The men had taken to their oars and were helping the boats along.

As they drew near the poor, denuded island of Santa Elena, where only the vine-grown Abbey remains, of all its ancient loveliness, a cascade of lark-notes came pouring down from the sky. They strained their eyes to catch a glimpse of the birds, lost to sight in the dazzling ether, and as they looked, one tiny creature, with wings outspread, came singing down to earth.

The gondolas were nearing home, when Geof asked abruptly: "How did you like it, Miss Beverly,—being caught in the ocean swell?"

"I agree with May that it was rather solemn and awful," she answered; and then, with a slightly deepening colour: "but—I liked it."

IX

By-ways of Venice

IX[ToC]

By-ways of Venice

"I say, Geof; isn't that Colonel Steele's gondola over there?"

"Why, yes!" Geof cried, with mock surprise; "how clever of you to see it! And, I say, Oliver, don't you think that looks a little like the tower of San Giorgio? Red, you know; rather marked, eh?"

The two young men were coming home from an early sketching-bout, as was evident from a glance at the gondola, which was distinctly in undress. Old Pietro knew better than to carry his best cushions and brasses on such occasions; nor did he display the long, black broadcloth,—the *strassino*—which gives such distinction to a gondola, falling in ample folds from the carved back of the seat, and hiding the rougher finish of the stern. Under the awning, on the very rusty and dilapidated cushions, sat Kenwick, and beside him, face up, was an oil-sketch of a half-grown boy, sitting at the prow of a fishing-boat, dangling his bare brown legs over the water, which

gave back a broken reflection of the bony members. A red sail, standing out in full sunshine, furnished the background to the figure, but somehow, the interest centred in the thin legs, which the boy himself was regarding with studious approval. The legs were so extremely well drawn that one did not wonder at their owner's satisfaction in them.

"Pity you can't paint as well as you can chaff," the artist observed, glancing from his own clever sketch to his friend's block, which was leaning, face inward, against the side of the boat.

Geof was lolling on the steps, his legs somewhat entangled among the easels, paint-boxes, and the like that cumbered the floor of the boat, one arm resting on the deck of the prow. Like many athletic men, he had a gift for looking outrageously lazy. At Kenwick's retort, he turned from the contemplation of San Giorgio, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and folding his hands behind his head, bestowed an amiable grin upon his astute friend. He wondered just why Kenwick found it worth while to dissemble.

"The best thing *you* ever did was that poppy sketch," he remarked, regarding his companion with half-closed, indolent eyes. "But then, you haven't often the wit to choose such a good subject. I wish you were not so confoundedly afraid of doing anything pretty."

"My dear fellow," Kenwick retorted, "you may be a very decent architect, but I'll be hanged if you have the first inkling of what art means."

From which interchange of amenities, the average listener might not have inferred, what was nevertheless true, that the two men had a high opinion of each other's talents. Happily, there was no

one to be misled, for Pietro, with all his advantages, had not yet mastered a word of English. The only feature of the situation intelligible to him, was, that Kenwick, too, discarded his pipe at this juncture, and the gondolier was, accordingly, obliged to stow away his own half-finished cigarette,—4th quality,—in the cavernous recesses of the stern. He had been counting upon smoking it out before arriving at the Palazzo Darino, though he had scented danger from the moment his eye fell upon Vittorio's gondola. A gondolier, however, is early schooled to study any whim rather than his own, and presently Pietro observed, rather than inquired: "To San Giorgio, Signore?"

"*Sicuro!*"

The red banner was hanging limp in the lee of the island, the prow of the boat being tied to a ring in the masonry, while Vittorio sat at the forward end, holding her off, lest a passing steamboat or outward bound coaster should drive her against the wall. Under the awning was a glimpse of light draperies, and, as Pietro's gondola drew near, the young men could hear a fresh, girlish voice reading aloud.

"We're not in visiting trim," Geof called, gathering himself together, as they came up; "but we must know what you are improving your minds upon."

"We are reading Ruskin," May replied, in her most edifying tone of voice.

"Oh, *St. Mark's Rest*," said Kenwick. "You're getting enlightened about the pillars."

"It's very interesting," Pauline declared. "You know he tells us to have our gondola moored over here, and read what he has to say. Doesn't everybody do it?"

"Well, I don't think you'll ever find San Giorgio fringed with gondolas," Kenwick mocked; "but I'm sure it shows a beautiful spirit in those who do come. I recognize Miss May's docility."

"You are quite right," said May, with dignity. "It was I who proposed it. Do you read Ruskin, Mr. Daymond?"

"Of course I do. One would be lost without him, here in Venice."

"We almost got lost with him the other day," she rejoined. "We poked about in the rain in search of a San Giorgio on the wall of a house, who was described as 'vigorous in disciplined career of accustomed conquest.' We found the right bridge, with an unpronounceable name, and we turned and looked back, just as we were bid, and never a San Giorgio did we find. Imagine our disappointment when a shop-keeper told us that San Giorgio was *partito*!"

"He was probably *partito* on his 'career of accustomed conquest,'" Pauline observed. "Is that what you two artists have been about?"

"We have been making a couple of daubs and abusing each other," said Geof.

"Yes," Kenwick declared; "Daymond spends his time washing in sails and clouds and watery wastes, and won't take the trouble to draw a figure."

"Oh, well," said Daymond, philosophically, "I know that if I should ever want to exhibit, which Heaven forbid! Kenwick could well afford to put in the figures at ten francs the dozen. I don't suppose you mind being interrupted," he added, tentatively.

"No, indeed," said May. "Our scene was in need of

figures, too. Even Uncle Dan failed us. He hates to be read to, and he wouldn't come and moor."

"Besides," said Pauline; "he wanted to go and sit at Florian's and watch the children feeding the pigeons. He says he shouldn't grow old if he lived in Venice."

"He had better, then," said Daymond. "Venice is very becoming to old things. Don't you want to come and see some of those Madonnas we were telling you about, with parasols over their heads?"

"Good," May agreed, promptly giving Ruskin the go-by. "And why don't you come in our gondola? You don't want all that clutter going about with you."

"I'm afraid if we don't go home and brush up, we shall have the appearance of a clutter in your boat," said Geof.

"Speak for yourself," Kenwick protested. He flattered himself that he was as well dressed in painting rig as under any other circumstances; and quite right he was, too. For Oliver Kenwick had no mannish contempt for appearances. He could not have done justice to the ragged shirt and begrimed legs of a model, if he had been wearing such a superannuated coat as Geoffry Daymond elected to paint in. Yet, as the two men stepped into Vittorio's gondola, it was he of the shabby apparel who seemed to give character to the group, while Oliver Kenwick would have made very little impression, if he had chosen to refrain from conversation. This he rarely did, however, and he lost no time in engaging May's attention.

"It's a pity we haven't time this morning to row out to St. George in the Seaweed," he said. "There's a Madonna there, on the angle of the wall, that's worth seeing. When we do go, you will have to guess whom

it is like."

"Probably Pauline," May ventured. "One keeps seeing her in the Madonnas and saints."

"No, it's not your sister," said Kenwick, with unmistakable meaning.

"You don't mean me!" May exclaimed. "No mortal artist could make a Madonna of me!"

"This may not have been done by a mortal artist. At any rate nobody knows who did it. But it's a lovely thing"; and Kenwick paused, with a view to doing full justice to the implication.

"Have you never painted Pietro?" Pauline was asking, as she watched the striking figure of the old gondolier, rowing homeward. He had rescued his cigarette, which he was smoking, with a dandified air, as he made leisurely progress across the basin. Pietro had been a handsome young blade in his day, and there were moments when he recalled the fact.

"Oh, no; I'm not up to that kind of thing," Geof answered; "you know I don't pretend to paint. My business is with bricks and mortar. It's only when I'm loafing that I dabble in colours."

"Yet I liked your sketch of my sister, particularly."

"You don't mean it," Geof exclaimed; "why, that's worth knowing!"

He looked thoughtfully at the graceful young creature in question, once more engaged in animated conversation. She was pretty,—no doubt of it,—preposterously pretty! The colouring of face and head was delicious, and there was nothing slip-shod about the modelling, either. All bright and clear and significant. She made him think of a perfectly cut

jewel. It was rather odd that it should have been possible to hit off anything so definite, so almost matter-of-fact, in a mere sketch.

"I suppose it was because I didn't try for too much," he said aloud. "The sketch was only a hint."

As he turned his eyes from May's face to that of her sister, it was hardly more than a glance he bestowed upon the latter. He was impressed with the fact that it was impossible to subject the nevertheless perfectly unconscious countenance, whose eyes met his so frankly, to the candid scrutiny he had given her sister.

"I'm afraid I shouldn't succeed as well with you," he remarked.

"I wouldn't try, if I were you," Pauline laughed; "I can't get even a photograph that my friends will accept. Have you any good portrait of your mother?"

"No; Kenwick tried her two years ago, but it wasn't a go."

"Of course not."

"Why, of course not?"

"Yes; why, of course not?" Kenwick demanded. The sound of his name had naturally attracted his attention, and, quite as naturally he was piqued by what he heard.

Pauline hesitated a moment, not disconcerted, but reflecting.

"Perhaps only because you're not an old master," she said; "Mrs. Daymond ought to have been painted three or four hundred years ago."



"Now and then they stopped at some doorway opening upon the water, where they landed"ToList

"And whom should you have chosen to do it?" Geoffry asked. It struck him that this was quite his own view, only he had never thought it out before.

"Let me think," said Pauline. "Not any of the great Venetians. They were too,—well, too gorgeous."

"Raphael?" May suggested.

"No, not Raphael. Ah! Now I know! Sodoma could have done it."

"That's true," said Geoffry. "It ought to have been Sodoma." Then, "I believe you feel about my mother something as I do," he added, as May and Kenwick entered upon a lively discussion of their views upon the Sienese painter, in which they seemed able to discover nothing in common beyond a great decision of opinion.

The gondola was making its way down narrow canals, whose placid water found the loveliest Gothic windows and hanging balconies to reflect, and under

innumerable bridges, each more delectable than the last. Now and then they stopped at some doorway opening upon the water, where they landed, and, passing through a ware-room golden with heaps of polenta, or dusky with bronzes and wrought iron, they came out into a court-yard embellished by an exquisite old stone staircase, with quaint carved balustrade and leisurely landings, where beauteous dames of by-gone centuries may have paused, as they descended, decked in rich brocades and costly jewels. Or again, an antique well-head, half-concealed by tools and lumber, kept its legend in faithful bronze or marble. The Madonnas, under their iron canopies looked down, serene and beneficent, standing, here, above a little frequented court; there, over the gateway of an old palace. There was one which Pauline was the first to espy, as they approached it under the arch of a bridge. The figure was upon the angle of a wall, glassed just where two canals met at her feet. Above her head was a square canopy, over the edge of which delicate green vines and tendrils waved, while in and out among them, tiny birds fluttered and chirped.

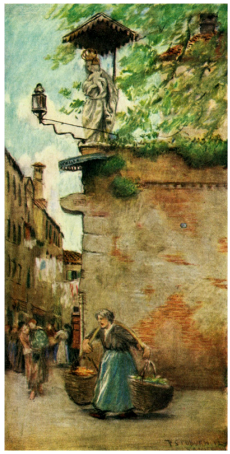


"A court-yard embellished by an exquisite old stone staircase"ToList

As Vittorio rested on his oar, Kenwick took pains to assure May that there were no longer any lights burned before these Madonnas, and Vittorio was called upon to account for the omission. While he eagerly claimed that the Madonna at his ferry was never left without a light, between sundown and sunrise;—*mai, mai!*—Pauline replied to a remark that Geoffry had made an hour previous.

"The feeling one has about your mother," she said, "almost makes a Catholic of one. You can see how natural it is for these poor fellows to worship the Madonna, and how much better it must make them."

"It is humanizing," Geoffry admitted. "There's no doubt of it"; and thereupon it struck him, for the first time, that there was a look of his mother in Pauline Beverly's face. Perhaps that accounted for something that had perplexed him of late.



"The Madonnas, under their iron canopies, looked down, serene and beneficent"ToList

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X

A Benediction

X[ToC]

A Benediction

The thing that had perplexed Geoffry Daymond was nothing less inexplicable than the persistency with which the face of Pauline Beverly had come to insinuate itself into his thoughts. When in her society, to be sure, he was not aware of regarding her with an exclusive interest. Indeed it was, more particularly, May who amused and occupied him, as often as Kenwick gave her the chance. The individuality of that surprisingly pretty young person was so sharp-cut and incisive that it fixed attention. It not infrequently happened that everybody present desisted from conversation, merely for the pleasure of a placid contemplation of her mental processes. These were simple, and to the point, and usually played about visible objects. The vital matter with May, in each and every experience, was to formulate a judgment and to compare it with that of other people. If others differed from her, all the better. Opposition is a sharpener of the wits; and she found Kenwick invaluable in his character of universal sceptic.

No one but Uncle Dan ever really took her down, and that he did so neatly, that she was never seriously disconcerted by it. Had it been otherwise, Uncle Dan would have held his peace, for he prized

the exuberance and unconsciousness of her egotism, which he recognized as the all too fleeting prerogative of youth, and he would not, for worlds, have really checked it.

When she informed him that the heroic age was past, and that this was a mercantile era, the old soldier, remembering the '60's, told her she had better look up era in the dictionary. When she announced, with all the zest of discovery, that Titian could not draw, it was Uncle Dan who observed that he could paint pretty well, which was the main thing.

Yes; she caught the attention, as the most distinct sound, the most obvious sight is pretty sure to do, when people are taking life easily, and seeking only amusement, and she was so refreshingly unconscious that one could look and listen one's fill, and no harm done.

Yet Geoffry Daymond discovered that when he was making believe paint pictures, in the first freshness of early morning, or when he was smoking his after-dinner cigar, in the lingering June twilight, the face that interfered with the one occupation and lent charm to the other, was not framed in golden hair, nor animated with the lively and bird-like intelligence which he found so amusing. And not only was it Pauline Beverly's face, with its softly blending colours, and its quiet, indwelling light, that floated before his mental vision, but he found that he remembered her words and even the tones of her voice, when the gay and occasionally witty talk of the others had gone the way of mortal breath. He somehow came to associate certain inflections of her voice with the sweet sounds that make the undertone of Venetian life; the plash of the oar, the cooing of

doves about the Salute, the bells of Murano, softened in the distance, the sound of the surf beating outside the Lido of a still evening, when one floats far out on the lagoon, and the familiar, every-day world seems farther away than those other worlds, shining overhead. He speculated a good deal over this new preoccupation, and more still over the sense of passive content that had come to be associated with it.

For Geof was of an active temperament and possessed of but scant talent for repose. This was his first real vacation in seven years, yet, in spite of his good resolve to idle away a month in Venice for his mother's sake, he had been on the point of finding an outlet for his surplus energies in that tramp in the Cadore, when,—just what was it that had deterred him from carrying out the plan? He believed, at the time, that it was merely the prospect of better acquaintance with the prettiest and brightest girl it had yet been vouchsafed him to meet. As he had since heard May remark,—for having once adopted an opinion, she was fond of testing it in more than one direction,—it is such a comfort to get hold of anything superlative! He was not aware that the elder sister, who certainly could not claim a single superlative quality, had played any part at all in that first impression; yet the thought of her had gradually come to be the hourly companion of his solitude. And now, for the first time in his life he found himself luxuriating, not only in solitude, but in idleness.

When he had been making a desultory sketch, away out toward Malamocco, or in among the *vignoli* in the northern lagoon, pausing perhaps, for a good five minutes, between grassy banks, to listen to the

whistle of the blackbird in the hedge, he felt no imperative call to seize an oar and double the rate of speed on the homeward way. On the contrary, he found it a perfectly congenial occupation to lounge among the cushions of the gondola and let Pietro row him home at his own leisurely rate, while the two good comrades had a meditative smoke.

It was because Geof was aware that this state of things was abnormal, that he found it perplexing, and because, much as he enjoyed the experience itself, he did not relish the sense of having somewhat lost his bearings, that he was glad to seize upon the clue which he had got hold of there at the foot of the stone Madonna. Miss Beverly was like his mother; that was all there was about it. Such a resemblance as that would make any face linger agreeably in his thoughts.

It had got to be the middle of June, when parish processions are the order of the day. They were rowing up the Grand Canal, one Sunday afternoon, Geof and his mother, on their way to the *festa*, which was timed for the latter part of the day. Pietro and the gondola were in gala costume, snow-white as to Pietro, and, as to the gondola, the new brussels carpet of dark blue, to match Pietro's sash and hat-ribbon and the sea-horse banner floating at the bow. As they passed under the Rialto, and swung round the great bend of the Canal, Geof observed, in an unconsciously weighty tone: "Mother, I have made a discovery."

"And that is?"

"Miss Beverly looks like you."

At this simple statement of fact, the face of Geof's listener underwent one of those subtle changes of

expression which the Colonel, in an inspired moment, had likened to the play of light upon the waters of the lagoon. For, being gifted with intuition, unhampered by the more laborious processes of the manly intellect, Mrs. Daymond instantly perceived that Geof had confessed more than he was himself aware.

She did not reply at once; to her, too, appeared the face of Pauline Beverly, as unlike her own, she thought, as well might be, and infinitely more attractive to her for that. Yes, there was only one thing that could possibly make them seem alike to Geof. She glanced at the face beside her, so sound, so vigorous, so magnanimous, as it seemed to her partial eyes. He was gazing straight ahead, with the direct look that his mother liked. He did not seem impatient for an answer; he had rather the appearance of being pleasantly absorbed in his own thoughts. It had evidently never once occurred to him to consider, in this connection, how often he had declared that he should never lose his heart until he had found a girl who was like his mother.

For a moment she was tempted to remind him of it,—but only for a moment. For Geof's mother was not the woman to take unfair advantage of a defenceless position, even where her own son was concerned. So she only said, after an interval of silence that Geof had scarcely noticed: "I am glad you think us alike, for I have never met a young girl who was as sympathetic to me as Pauline Beverly."

"Sympathetic! That's it; that hits her off exactly!" Geof declared; and then, with an accession of spirits which rendered him suddenly loquacious, "And I say, Mother!" he exclaimed, "what a jolly old boy the Colonel is! I just wish you could have heard him fire

up the other day, when Kenwick got off one of his cynicisms at the expense of Abraham Lincoln. Tell you what, the sparks flew! Oliver was up a tree like a cat!—Hullo! There's the flag-ship!" he interrupted his flow of words to announce, as they came in sight of San Geremia.

The procession, or the component parts of it, not yet reduced to order, was just issuing from the church; priests and choristers in their gay vestments, huge candles, flaring bravely in the face of the sun, brilliant banners and gaudy images, all in a confused mass, and the people crowding on the flagged *campo* before the church. Vittorio's gondola was disappearing down the broad Canareggio Canal, and Pietro needed no bidding to follow after. The crowd of boats of every kind, gondolas, sandolos, barchettas, batteias, and the score of floating things that only your true Venetian knows by name, became so closely packed in the more restricted limits of the Canareggio, that it was impossible for Pietro to get near the sea-horse on the red ground, floating so conspicuous, yet so aggravatingly unapproachable a few rods ahead. He did succeed, however, in forcing a passage after it, and he made his way to the three-arched bridge which spans the Canareggio, and under which he passed to a good point of view. Here they were obliged to tie to a totally uninteresting gondola, with the width of the closely packed canal between their own and the Colonel's boat. They had been carried somewhat farther along the canal than the others, but Pietro managed to turn his long bark about so that his *padroni* should face the bridge, which brought Vittorio's gondola also in their line of vision, and there were friendly wavings of hats and parasols between the two.

Presently the procession drew near, and crossed the bridge, banners waving, candles flaming, priests intoning. The band struck up, and the voices of the priests were drowned in the songs of the choristers.

The quay, on either hand, was crowded with people in gala dress, and from every window, the whole length of the canal, bright flags and stuffs depended, shawls and variegated quilts, table-cloths, and rugs, whatever would take on a festal air in the sunshine. Beautiful silken banners, too, waved from lines that spanned the canal, high above the heads of the floating populace, their painted Saints and Madonnas shot luminously through by the level rays of the sun.

As the procession passed on down the quay, and the high priest drew near, bearing the Host under its embroidered canopy, the throngs on the *fondamenta* dropped on their knees to catch the scattered blessing, rising again, an instant later, one group after another, which gave to the line of figures an undulating motion, as of a long, sinuous body, coiling and uncoiling.

The pleasure of Vittorio's passengers was not a little heightened by the proximity of Nanni's old gondola, which lay only one boat's width removed from their own, and was filled to overflowing with the wives and children of his two gondolier brothers. The Signorinas were by this time on terms of intimacy with Vittorio's family, their chief pet among the children being the smallest boy, always spoken of by his adoring parents as the *piccolo Giovanni*. "Pickle Johnny," Uncle Dan called him, and, being a specialist in names, the Colonel had no sooner invented one for this small and rather obstreperous manikin, than he took him into his particular favour.

The attention of the girls, meanwhile, was pretty evenly divided between the moving show upon the quay and the quite as active contingent in Nanni's gondola. Indeed there were about as many babies in the one as in the other, for it is a pretty and childlike fancy of the Venetians to dress up their children as saints and angels, and lead them, with a becoming reverence, not all untouched by vanity, in the wake of the holy men. Here were small Franciscans in their brown cowls, tiny St. Johns, clad in sheepskins and armed with crosses, little queens of heaven in trailing garments of blue tarleton, and toddling white angels, with spangled wings and hair tightly crimped.

As the last of these heavenly apparitions disappeared down a dark alley, "Pickle Johnny" set up a howl of disappointment, which his mother tried in vain to suppress. In vain did his father scowl upon him over the heads of his passengers in a semblance of terrible wrath, in vain did his uncle produce a row-lock for his delectation; "Pickle Johnny" mourned the loss of the last baby angel and would not be comforted.

May was looking on with an amusement that was not without relish, when, chancing to glance at the harassed face of Nanni, the most conspicuous victim of "Pickle Johnny's" ill-judged exhibition of feeling, she experienced a sudden change of mood, and came instantly to the rescue.

"Let me take the *bambino*," she begged. "I can make him good."

The mother, a stout, comely woman in a plain black gown, demurred decorously, but was glad enough to yield, and Nanni, taking the child in his arms, stepped across the intervening gondola, to which his own was tied, and deposited his

wondering burden in the arms of the Signorina who stood up to receive it. As he did so, that flash of grateful recognition which he was so chary of, crossed his grave face. Then, before "Pickle Johnny" could decide upon any definite line of action, the Signorina made haste to divert his mind by surrendering to him the cluster of silver trinkets which dangled from her belt. Pencil and penknife, scent-bottle, glove-buttoner, and, best of all, a tiny mirror, in which he viewed his still tearful countenance with undisguised satisfaction.

Uncle Dan looked on indulgently, and Pietro's passengers, over the way, found the scene worthy of attention, as did others of the floating audience. The golden head, bent over the swarthy little cherub, was a sight that would have attracted Oliver Kenwick's notice, for example, even if he had had no personal interest in the chief actor. He was with some New York friends, in a gondola three or four boat-lengths away, and so absorbed was he in the little drama, that, when a remark was addressed to him that called for a retort, his gift of repartee quite failed him.

Presently the sound of wind instruments again made itself heard, and again the procession emerged from the narrow by-ways where the blessing had been plentifully strewn, and moved up the quay toward the three-arched bridge. By this time the poor little saints and angels were pretty tired and draggled. The small St. John, in a very bad temper, was banging about him with his cross, while the queen of heaven, reduced to tears of anguished fatigue, had been picked up in the strong arms of her father, where she was on the point of dropping asleep. "Pickle Johnny," too, was getting fretful

again, having exhausted the charms of scent-bottle and toy looking-glass, and May was beginning to repent of her bargain.

"Give him to me," said Pauline. "He is sleepy, poor little tot!"

She took him in her arms, and in thirty seconds the little tot was fast asleep. Oliver Kenwick became once more available for social purposes. There was nothing picturesque, nothing effective about this; it would not have attracted attention, any more than the sight of a young mother, holding her sleeping child.

The gondola lay with its stern toward the bridge, which the procession was crossing, and Pauline sat facing the open lagoon, where the sunset light already showed warm and mellow. She turned a bit in her seat, to see the bright banners and the candle-flames cross the bridge, and presently the high priest with his attendants had paused upon the central arch. At the stroke of a bell the Host was lifted, and all the populace fell upon their knees. Vittorio, in his snowy costume, knelt at the stern of his boat, Nanni, darkly clad, inclined his head and bent his knee, while the little children in his gondola dropped like a flock of doves upon the floor, where they huddled together, heads down, and eyes peering out. Old fishermen in their blue blouses, aged women, stiff, and slow, managed somehow to get upon their knees. The Colonel stood, hat in hand, facing the bridge, while May glanced, with bright interest, from one picturesque figure to another, noting the fact, in passing, that Geoffry Daymond's hat was lifted, and Oliver Kenwick's was not.

Pauline sat with her head bent over the sleeping child. At the sound of the third bell, which was the

signal for all that multitude to cross themselves and rise to their feet, she lifted the chubby hand, and made the sign of the cross with it upon the little breast. She did it as simply and naturally as if she had been the best Catholic of them all.

A moment later, "Pickle Johnny," with the blessing upon his drowsy little person, had been handed back to his uncle, and Vittorio was skillfully making his way out among the thronging craft toward the lagoon, which was swimming in a golden mist.

Pietro rowed in the other direction, and there was a friendly exchange of greetings between the passing gondolas.

"Did you see that?" Geoffry asked, as they came out upon the broad bosom of the Grand Canal.

"Yes; I saw it, Geof," his mother answered; "I feel as if we had all received the benediction."

XI

At Torcello

XI[ToC]

At Torcello

For all the questionings and probings which May Beverly applied to the successive phenomena of the world about her, she had passed her twenty years as light of heart and as free of real perplexities as any fifteenth-century maiden in her turret chamber. Prosperous and sheltered as her youth had been, she had, up to this time, apprehended scarcely anything of the real drama of life.

Whether it was due to a seasonable and inevitable development, or to a quickening of the imagination caused by the potent loveliness of Venice, it was certainly true that the young girl was passing through a new and curiously stimulating experience. Many things had been revealed to her of late, which as yet she only half comprehended; for whereas she had formerly had an eye only for details, she was now beginning to combine and interpret; and having hitherto been chiefly occupied with the surface, she was learning to divine, if not to penetrate, the depths. It was doubtless due to this general rousing of the imagination, to which she perhaps owed her unalterable conviction that Vittorio's brother had, in

some mysterious way, been singled out by misfortune, that the thought of him had come to play so large a part in her consciousness.

It was quite true, as she declared, that neither she nor Pauline had ever succeeded in attaining to the easy and spontaneous footing with him which had been established with Vittorio from the very first. Vittorio was both gay and communicative, and none the less a perfect servant for that. He would row by the hour, without volunteering a remark, yet a friendly word never failed to elicit the flashing smile and ready response which conferred such grace upon him. A little diplomacy on the part of the girls had effected an entrance to his house, and to his confidence. They knew that he had married his Ninetta without a dowry because "she pleased him," and that their eldest child had died of a fever; that Constanza was the scholar of the family, and Giulia the caretaker. They knew that the eldest boy was named for one of his grandfathers, and the second for the other; that the third boy, Vittorio, wanted to be a soldier, and that the *piccolo Giovanni* was going to be the best gondolier of them all. They knew why a light was always burning, day and night, before the little image of the Madonna on the stairs, and why the whole family had made a pious pilgrimage to the church of San Antonio at Padua the previous year. They knew how severe the father of Vittorio and Nanni had been to his boys; how he had, on more than one occasion, pitched them overboard, straight into the canal, yet how he was, nevertheless, "a just man!" They were acquainted with Vittorio's harmlessly revolutionary views, and with his reasons for not voting. They were familiar with his simple creed, to hope all things and leave the rest to the Madonna. And of Nanni's experiences and beliefs

they knew nothing.

During the week when he had served them as gondolier he had never volunteered a remark and he had given only the shortest possible answers when addressed. Yet upon the mind of May, at least, his personality had made a strong impression. His tall, poorly clad figure, swaying at the oar, his sombre, almost tragic gaze, fixed straight before him, his deep, grave voice, not more musical, but more perfectly modulated than his brother's,—all went to form an enigma and an appeal.

Since his release from their service they had met him several times, rowing quite by himself in his shabby old gondola. Once they had come upon him out by St. George in the Seaweed where the loveliest of all the parasol Madonnas keeps guard over the still lagoon. He could have had no prosaic errand there. Was it because he loved the beauty of the scene, the grace and poetry of the dear young mother with the child, keeping their watch of centuries, above the old red wall where the lizards sun themselves? Or had he gone there to say an *Ave* as the pretty Catholic custom is?

Another time they had encountered Nanni's boat when they were rowing out towards San Clemente in the starlight. There were stars in the water as in the sky, and the city was hidden behind the Giudecca, but the great *campanile*, showing pale and mysterious in the lights of the Piazza, sent its white shaft far down into the water of the lagoon on the hither side of the dark Giudecca. As the shadowy gondola, with its tiny light, came stealing over the star-strewn water, May recognized the solitary oarsman. Something withheld her from commenting on the fact, and when, a few seconds later, Vittorio

exclaimed, "*Ecco, mio fratello!*" Uncle Dan had remarked what quick eyes these fellows have, and that nobody else could have recognized a man in the dark, like that. And May had said nothing, and the fact that she had kept silence gave her a curious pang of unwilling self-consciousness. So she began talking very fast of the Bellini Madonnas in the church of the Redentore, whose great dome towered black against the hovering reflection of the city lights, and of how they were not Bellinis after all, and since experts could make such bad blunders, whom were you to trust?



"Where the loveliest of all the parasol Madonnas keeps guard over the still lagoon"ToList

They had had no intercourse with Nanni since the day they had rowed out to the Porto del Lido, and May had protested against the ocean swell. She often thought of the sensation it had caused in her, and a curious longing had come over her to feel once more that strange, disconcerting thrill.

She wondered whether she should ever have a chance to speak to Nanni and make him the offer of a gondola; she wondered if his face would flash with pleasure and gratitude. Would he tell her why he had chosen exile from the life and occupation he loved so well? Would he tell her something about himself, give her the key to his strange melancholy and reserve? She had very little hope of such a consummation, but she was determined to make the attempt at the first opportunity.

And a few days after the Procession at the Canareggio, when he had so gratefully handed "Pickle Johnny" over to her care, the opportunity presented itself. For on that day the red and blue banners made the long-anticipated trip to Torcello, that ancient cradle of Venice that rocks on the bosom of the lagoon, miles away to the northward. An extra oar was requisite for each gondola, and Nanni was drafted for the occasion. Old Pietro brought with him a slender slip of a grandson, a boy of sixteen, Angelo by name, who made up in skill and elasticity for the robustness yet to come.

Kenwick was of the party, and in great spirits; but indeed there was not one of them all who was not sensible of that agreeable exhilaration which attends a propitious start. The morning was true Venetian, soft and fair as a dream. Sweet scents were wafted over the water, and no one thought to question whence they came. The men pulled with a will, for it was a long trip, and all too soon they found themselves thridding their way through low banked water-ways to the landing near the quaint old church of Santa Fosca, their coming hailed with joy by a rapidly recruited army of ragamuffins. Immediately upon landing, Vittorio and Angelo were despatched

to a neighbouring cottage in search of chairs and table, and presently the party were established at their luncheon under the beautiful colonnade of the Cathedral.

The ragamuffins, encouraged by a very ill-advised distribution of coppers which had taken place at their first onslaught, were collecting about the table with clamorous entreaties for *l'ultimo*. Uncle Dan had begun it by his inability to resist the supplicating eyes of a beatific midget who chewed the hem of her frock with the whitest of little teeth. Kenwick, taking his cue from the Colonel, had mischievously carried out the principle, by presenting a *soldo* to each one of the assembly having the slightest pretence to comeliness. Upon which the two Pollys, unable to tolerate such cruel discrimination, had offered prompt reparation to the feelings of the ugly ones. The consequence was, that Vittorio and Angelo passed a lively half-hour in the rôle of sheep-dogs, keeping the small and ravening wolves at bay while the meal was going forward, dodging about after them among the pillars of the colonnade, and conjuring them, with awful threats, to keep their distance, or else they should receive *niente, niente*!

Happily the supply of food was double the legitimate demand, and while the gondoliers returned the table and chairs the two young men amused themselves and the rest of the company, by feeding the little beggars. It was an engrossing sport for all concerned, and May, seeing her opportunity, slipped away to the landing.



"The morning was truly Venetian, soft and fair as a dream"ToList

She found the two gondolas moored a few rods down the *rio*, lying close to the shore in the shadow of the alder bushes that leaned sociably over the bank. Pietro was lying flat on the floor of his boat, fast asleep; Nanni, whose gondola was the first she came to, was sitting in the bow with a book in his hand, which he slipped into his pocket at the approach of the Signorina. His hat was lying on the floor, and the flickering shadows of the leaves on his face and figure made a peaceful impression of summer and happy ease.

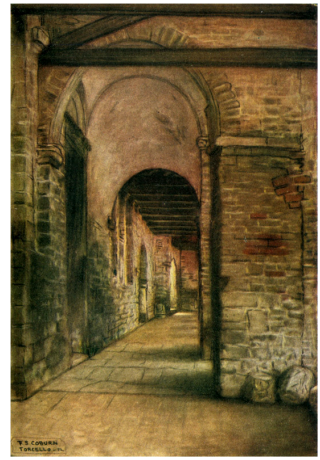
"Oh, Nanni; would you please hand me my sketch book?" May asked, as she came up, and stood on the bank above him. He was already on his feet, and he stooped for the book, which he handed to her with his curiously inexpressive manner.

The young girl hesitated a moment, half-abashed by the stillness and the solitude and the stately deference of this man whose life she was so desirous

of influencing. But she had too much spirit to retreat, and as Nanni stood before her, grave and respectful, she said, in her carefully correct, curiously unidiomatic Italian: "Nanni, I am not content to have you go back to Milan. You were born to be a gondolier. It cannot be that you do anything else as well, or that you like any other life, really. Wait," she commanded, as he seemed about to interpose. "You must let me finish. I want,—I want—" and a sudden confusion seized her; "I want to make you a present of a gondola."

She paused and looked down upon him, with earnest, supplicating eyes. She did so dearly long to gain her point; she was so sure, so touchingly sure that she knew best,—and then, the face before her,—what was it that it said? There was no grateful flash, only an increased dignity and reserve.

"Signorina," he said, very gently, with a high-bred restraint of manner that impressed her strangely, and increased her confusion, adding to it, indeed, a sense of insufficiency and incompetence that she had never before experienced: "Signorina,—you mistake me and my life. I am not at liberty to say what would surely set your mind at rest, but,—I have no wish to change my life, and,—I cannot accept your gift."



"Under the beautiful colonnade of the Cathedral"ToList

She had thought to press the matter, to represent to him his own short-sightedness, his misapprehension of his own best good; but she found it impossible to urge her case. She felt herself confronted with a will so much stronger than her own that she had not a word to say. She only murmured: "I am very sorry about it," and was turning dejectedly away, when Nanni's voice arrested her.

"Signorina," he cried, "Signorina, will you not forgive me?"

She turned, and there was a look of entreaty, a touch of real emotion in his face which startled her.

"Why, Nanni," she said; "there is nothing to forgive. You know best." She had not often said those three words in the easy self-confidence of her youth. "You know best," she said. "It is I who should beg pardon for thinking I knew."

She held out her hand to him, as naturally as she would have done to Geoffry Daymond, and Nanni, stooping, lifted it to his lips.

The child did not know that it was the universal custom of his class; that there was nothing else to be done when a gentlewoman extended her hand to a gondolier. She only knew it was the first time in her life that such a thing had happened to her, and she turned away in much perturbation.

She found herself face to face with Geoffry Daymond, who was coming along the bank in search of her.

"Ah, here you are," he cried gaily. "We thought we might have made a mistake and fed you to the populace! The little brutes have eaten every edible crumb we had, and seemed to want to try their appetites on the table-cloth. Now we are all going up the tower of the cathedral to have a look at things."

She wondered whether Daymond had seen that strange and rather dreadful thing that had happened. Had she known him better, she would have been sure that his burst of eloquence could have but one interpretation. He had seen and wondered; two facts which must be suppressed.

As May and Geof came up the path, Kenwick, who was sitting in the stone chair which is accredited to the ancient Attila, observed the look of slowly subsiding emotion in the young girl's face, and a sudden pang seized him, whether of friendly concern or of selfish annoyance, he would have been the last to inquire. That they should have passed him by, in his picturesque situation, without a word, thus cutting him off from the delivery of a witticism which he had concocted for their edification, was

certainly a grievance, and as he rose to his feet, unregarded, and followed after, it is perhaps not to be wondered at, if the thought crossed his mind, that it might be worth while to cut Geof out.

XII

A Promotion

XIIToC

A Promotion

Torcello offers a number of diversions besides that of camping under the colonnade, or sitting in the

chair of Attila, and May had soon found relief from her momentary discomfiture, in the somewhat arduous exercise of climbing to the top of the cathedral tower, and in readjusting her mistaken notions as to the relative position of the various islands in the northern lagoon. Venice, floating like a dream-city upon the brimming tide, was not at all in the direction in which May had expected to find it; indeed, so fixed was her idea of its proper whereabouts, that she was within an ace of becoming argumentative on the subject. Her amusingly irrational attitude gave rise to some lively sparring between herself and Kenwick, who was at even more pains than usual to monopolise her attention, both then and afterwards.

On their return to sea-level, it was he who pointed out to her each detail of the antique mosaics and other mediæval quaintnesses of the cathedral; it was he who gave her a rapid sketch of the history of the island,—recently gleaned from guide-books;—and when, presently, the whole party went for a stroll in a flower-strewn meadow, he took such decided possession of her, that the two were allowed to fall back, and discuss at their leisure one and another question of vital interest which he brought forward.

In the intervals of conversation Kenwick, watching the straggling group in front, found it curiously gratifying to observe that Daymond did not seem to have much to say for himself. Kenwick had not by any means made up his mind to cut Geof out, but the possibility of such a feat gave a new zest to his intercourse with May. He was one of those men who, in their admirations at least, unconsciously take their cue from others. His judgments were not spontaneous, and the value he placed upon any good

thing was greatly enhanced by the knowledge that it was an object of desire to other persons. Even in the pursuit of his art, he was governed less by a spirit of praiseworthy emulation than by the sentiment of rivalry.

Having, then, definitely conceived the idea, which had, indeed, been hovering in his mind for some time, that Geoffry Daymond was seriously interested in May Beverly, the situation had gained a piquancy which Kenwick found extremely seductive. He was far too wedded to his career of "free-lance,"—a title which he took no little pride in appropriating,—to have regarded with equanimity that awkward contingency which goes by the name of consequences, but he was fond of playing with fire, as over self-confident people are apt to be. It must also be admitted that he took a very real pleasure in the bright beauty and alert intellect of the young student of life who carried her golden head so high and free, and with so individual a grace.

That he could, if he would, gain an influence over this frankly impressionable nature, he did not for a moment doubt. Indeed, he had never doubted his ability to win the interest of any woman, and since he had never been so ill-advised as to put his fortunes to the touch, nothing had yet occurred to disturb his self-confidence.

To-day, as he sauntered beside May Beverly in the quiet green meadow, in shadow for the moment, only because a cloud had floated across the sun,—so recently, that the insects had not ceased to hum, and sweet odours still told how herbs and flowers had been steeped in sunshine but a moment since,—he experienced a relish of life such as had only occasionally fallen to his share. And when, presently,

the sun came out in full force, inducing the four more taciturn strollers to retrace their steps, Kenwick felt that blaze of light to be doubly inopportune.

A few minutes later the flotilla was again on its way, awnings spread, and flags flying. A breeze had sprung up, and when they were free of the Burano canals, they found the water delicately ruffled. It was the sweetest, gayest little breeze, and in sheer exuberance of shallow emotion, the tiny waves plashed about the prow.

May, who was sailing under the blue banner on this occasion, glanced now and then across the water, at the figure of Nanni, rowing the forward oar. She had not quite her usual vivacity, a fact which did not escape the attention of Kenwick in the other boat, and one upon which he was at liberty to put any interpretation he chose.

The tide was in their favour, and they were making such good speed that the oarsmen petitioned for a detour among the canals of San Erasmus, where are market-gardens and fields and hedges. It was here that Geof had listened to the whistle of the blackbird only the other day, as his boat lay moored to the bank, while he sketched the tiniest of little chapels, nestling modestly in the sparse shade of two dark cypresses. His mind recurred to that peaceful hour, as he chatted in desultory fashion with May, but those quiet musings seemed very far away and unreal in the clear, matter-of-fact atmosphere that that charming young person created about her, even in her quieter moods. Still further to deter him from sentimental reminiscences, two small curs rushed forward on the left bank of the tranquil water pathway—barking vigorously, and rousing to an equally noisy demonstration another pair of sentinels

on the opposite shore.

As the gondolas went their way, however, without evincing any intention of trespassing on dry land, the dogs subsided, and in the sudden lull that followed, other senses than that of hearing were quickened. May was just rousing to wonder what it was that smelt so sweet, when Angelo, unable to resist the occasion, turned, and touching his hat, remarked, with laconic eloquence: "Strawberries"; a suggestion which was not to be resisted.

They moored at a modest landing, in the shadow of an acacia tree, when Geof and Angelo were promptly dispatched upon a foraging expedition, the ambitious stripling, who had so boldly taken the initiative, beaming broadly at the success of his venture. May stepped forward and took her favourite seat on the gondola steps, and, as the other boat came up and tied to theirs, Kenwick was brought face to face with her.

"Strawberries?" he repeated, in reply to the joyful announcement; "my life is saved!" Then, in a low voice: "I have been simply starving ever since we left Torcello," he averred.

"You have?" May exclaimed, with discouraging literalness. "I suppose it is the breeze, or perhaps the walk in the meadows."

"Yes," Kenwick answered, and there was something so very like sincerity in his tone, that it did convey a dim impression of what was almost a genuine feeling; "it was the walk in the meadow!"

May laughed lightly, yet a trifle constrainedly, he pleased himself with fancying. "You shall starve no more," she said, "for here are the strawberries."

The two ambassadors were striding down a rural path, their hands laden with small baskets of diminutive scarlet strawberries. At their heels came three dogs and one cat, acting as vanguard to a woman and a young girl, who carried blue china plates of most æsthetic homeliness. A small and bashful boy was clinging to his mother's skirts, taking, perhaps, his first impressions of the great world.

"*Scusi, Signorina!*"

It was Nanni, stepping across Pietro's gondola to get ashore. May looked up and her eyes met those of the gondolier.

"*Prego*," she answered, and there was a gentle courtesy in her voice, and a kindness in her eyes, that would have been grateful to any man. As Nanni stepped ashore and joined his brother and old Pietro under the trees, it may be that he blessed her for them. But he had betrayed no pleasure, and once more a sense of the sadness of life stole like a shadow across the young girl's spirit.

To divert her thoughts, and to have an excuse for turning her back on Kenwick, she tried making friends with the bashful *bambino*, who had seated himself upon the grassy bank and was gazing furtively at her bright silk waist.

Kenwick took the little ruse kindly. He had noticed that she spoke to Nanni in a subdued tone, and he flattered himself that he had the key to her change of mood. He employed himself with handing plates about, while Geof dispensed the strawberries.

It was a pretty and peaceful scene. Kenwick had stepped into Mrs. Daymond's gondola, and was invited to take the seat beside her; Geof stood on the

shore talking with the men. Uncle Dan and Pauline, sitting side by side, found their attention about equally divided between the toothsome strawberries and the little drama going on between May and the *bambino*.

May had shared her fruit with the child, and now she was amusing herself with decorating his small, grimy toes with coppers. He was an unsophisticated little beggar, and evidently had no intelligent interest in the cool, round coins, which nevertheless tickled his brown toes agreeably. He looked up and smiled, showing a row of tiny white teeth, and with the movement all the coppers slid off into the grass.

The mother had been watching the little scene, and May had a comfortable assurance that that wealth of *soldi* would presently be restored to its legitimate function in the scheme of things. She turned from her pretty fooling, and Kenwick promptly remarked: "Are you aware that you have sown the seeds of mendicancy in the soul of that innocent child?"

"Oh, no; those were nothing but coppers," she retorted brightly, "and I have sown them in the grass."

They had spent half-an-hour at their picnicking, and now a new division of the party was proposed, according to which the four young people should row out a bit toward the Porto, leaving the elders, in Pietro's gondola, to take the more direct way home. And so it came about that presently the Colonel found himself, floating with the Signora down the quiet *rio* by which they had entered the *vignoli*. So elderly was the aspect of the gondola with its three gray heads to one black one, that the very dogs refrained from barking, and in the grateful hush,

broken only by the dip of the oar, and the not all unmelodious creak of Pietro's heavy boots, the liquid note of the blackbird sounded sweet and clear.

The reflection crossed the Colonel's mind that this was the first time, in all these weeks, that he had been alone with the Signora. He wondered, in a self-distrustful way, what would come of it. It was certainly very sweet to him to have her there beside him, quite to himself. He wondered whether it struck her that it was an intimate, confidential sort of situation. He was sitting a little forward, as his habit was, and as he glanced under the awning, at the pretty, rural bit of country that bordered the canal, it was easy to include her face in his survey from time to time.

They chatted for a while of this and that indifferent topic, but it was clear that they were both preoccupied and they soon fell silent. The Colonel indeed, was nervously sensible that fate was closing in about him, and that he might, at any moment, be betrayed into a false step. For, despite his practical, Yankee common-sense, the old soldier was something of a fatalist, and in the one most critical relation of his life, he had always felt himself subject to mysterious and irresistible influences.

Presently, as they came out upon the sparkling waters of the lagoon, the Signora spoke. There was something in her voice that caused the Colonel to turn, at the first word, and as he looked into her face, he pleased himself with noting a new animation, that seemed a direct reflex of the light that played upon the waters. Had he not long ago discovered that mystic kinship?

"Geof and I are very grateful to you," she was saying, "for bringing those charming girls of yours to

Venice."

"You like them!" he exclaimed. "I knew you would. Nice girls, both of them. It has been a great thing for them, having you here, and Geof. Geof's a capital fellow."

She turned upon her companion a questioning, yet on the whole a pretty confident look. "Colonel Steele," she asked, "should you greatly mind if one of your Pollys should find it in her heart to make my boy happy?"

"What's that?" the Colonel cried. "You don't mean?—Bless my soul, I never thought of such a thing!"

"It seems the most natural thing in the world to me," she said. "And yet,—supposing your Polly should fail us! I can't expect Geof to be as irresistible to other people as he is to me." She smiled, as if she were half in jest, yet there was real anxiety in her tone as she asked: "What do you think about it, Colonel Steele?"

"Why; I'm sure I don't know. It's something of a shock,—that sort of thing always is, you know. Young people do go into it so easily. Of course Geof's a fine fellow. You mean the little one?"

"Of course," said Mrs. Daymond; for though Pauline was far from little, she had not the height of her tall young sister.

"Of course, of course. Well, well! And you want to know what I think about it? I think she would be a lucky girl. That would make her your daughter, wouldn't it? Why, of course she'll say yes! Any girl would be a fool who didn't, and Polly's no fool. I only wish you had another son for the other one!"

"I'm afraid she won't take Geof for my sake," Mrs.

Daymond said, smiling, half sadly.

"Oh, yes, she will; I'm sure she will!" cried the Colonel. "But what I don't understand is—Geof. To be taken with a child like Polly, when,—" He turned sharp about, and looked into her face, and there was no mistaking his meaning. It was almost as if he had spoken the words she had so often heard from his lips.

A great tenderness and compunction swept over the Signora, and found expression in her face. Her beautiful grey eyes met the impassioned trouble of her old friend's gaze, with a gentle directness that in itself went far toward disarming and tranquillising him.

"I sometimes think," she said, "that perhaps this is what all our—trouble has meant, yours and mine."

There was something indescribably consoling in the community of sorrow the words seemed to imply. He had never thought before, that his life-long chagrin had awakened anything more than a momentary regret in her mind, that it had been a sorrow to her as well.

They were rowing past the cypresses of San Michele, and the Colonel lifted his hat and placed it on his knees, looking straight before him, with the slightest possible working of the muscles of his face. The voice he was listening to was sweet and low, the tender cadence of it seemed to inform the words she used with a spirit not inherent in them.

"I think," she was saying, "that I should be perfectly happy if I could know that the long misunderstanding that has caused us both so much pain, had had a meaning as sweet and acceptable to you as it would be to me."

The Colonel pulled out his pocket-handkerchief and wiped his forehead, surreptitiously including his eyes in the process.

"I've been a brute," he muttered, in rather a husky voice, scowling savagely into the crown of his hat, which he had lifted from his knees. As if displeased with its appearance, he put it on his head, where he planted it firmly.

She knew that she had all but won the day, and she ventured what she had not ventured before. For it had never been her way to prate of an impossible friendship; if she used the word she meant to honour it. And to-day something told her that at last she held control of the situation.

There was nothing in her voice to betray the intense exertion of will that she was conscious of making; on the contrary, her words sounded only wistful and entreating, as she said:

"What friends we should be!"

And because it was the first time she had made that appeal to him, and because these weeks of pleasant, normal companionship had subtly and surely changed their relation, the Colonel could meet her half-way, like the gallant fellow he was.

"What friends we *shall* be!" he cried, clasping the hand which she had involuntarily lifted. "And we won't let it depend upon those youngsters either!"

The gondola had entered one of the canals of the city, and presently they passed under a bridge and came out in front of the square of San Paolo and San Giovanni, where the superb statue of Coleoni on his magnificent charger stands clear-cut against the sky.

"Glorious thing, that," the Colonel remarked, as he

invariably did, as often as his eye fell upon it.

"Yes," she replied; "it is the very apotheosis of success. And yet,—one sometimes questions whether a perfectly successful man is as enviable as he seems. What do you think about it, Colonel?"

"Signora," the Colonel answered, with a flash of feeling in his rugged features that would have done credit to Vittorio's expressive face, "I have had my promotion, and I envy no man!"

XIII

Illuminations

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Illuminations

If Geoffry Daymond had known no more about Nanni than was known to May herself, the little incident which had caused such perturbation in the young girl's mind would not have made any special impression upon him. The scene itself, indeed, might have lingered in his mind as one of those charming surprises that lurk in the enchanted atmosphere of the lagoons. The striking beauty of Nanni's countenance is the possession of many an honest gondolier, nor would the glow of feeling which animated the face, have been anything unprecedented in a man of his class. Old Pietro himself, slumbering at that moment on the floor of his gondola, often exhibited a startling power of facial expression, which fairly transfigured his weather-worn features. No, in a simple gondolier both beauty of face and brilliancy and depth of expression are quite in the natural order. And if it is not often that one sees these advantages heightened by so admirable a foil as was provided on this occasion, it is simply because such vivid grace of the contrasting type is rare.

Geoffry's first sensation then, as he caught sight of the two figures, was one of gratification to his artistic sense; and even when May extended her hand, and Nanni, after the custom of the gondolier, raised it to his lips, it did not at once strike the young man as other than natural and fitting. In an instant, however, he recalled the fact, which he had learned of Pietro a month previous, that this was no mere gondolier, but a man of education and consequence in the world; a circumstance which, undeniably, put a different face upon the matter. It accounted too, perhaps, for the curiously appealing

impression of the man's personality. There was undoubtedly something pathetic in this son of a line of gondoliers, reaching back farther than many a titled family, this man with an innate love for the craft, a genuine passion for the lagoons, placed in the artificial environment of modern society, constrained to deal with the hard-and-fast exactions of modern science. No wonder that there was that about him that excited the imagination. Geof had himself felt it; his mother had spoken of it. Who could know how powerful the appeal might be to one who had not the key to the puzzle?

When, therefore, Geof came upon the little drama being enacted among the alders at Torcello, with a grace and fervour which was for an instant, but only for an instant captivating, he experienced a feeling of vague dissatisfaction, which was much accentuated by the sight of the young girl's evident emotion, as she turned and faced him unexpectedly.

He did a good deal of pondering in the course of that day and the next, and, as he was quite unable to justify, or even to formulate his anxieties, he wished that he might at least find out whether the truth in regard to the gondolier were known to May. That might throw some light upon the subject.

He was aware, to be sure, of the Colonel's studied secrecy in the matter, but secrets are ticklish things at the best, and no stray hint was likely to have been lost upon a girl of May's intelligence. He had a notion that, if he could get a word with Nanni himself, it would be easy to sound him on the point; a delusion that was destined to be early dissipated.

On the second morning following the Torcello trip, Geof was swimming in the Adriatic, far out beyond the line of bathers, shouting and splashing; in the

shallows. There, under a dazzling sky, with a strong wind blowing, and whitecaps careering about, he came face to face with the subject of his speculations. The incongruity of catechising a man of his countenance was instantly apparent.

"*Buon giorno, Signore*," said Nanni, and Daymond found himself returning the salutation with a courtesy that was little short of deferential. The two men had met upon a common footing,—if the watery deep may be said to furnish one,—and Geof had found himself at a disadvantage.

The incident did not altogether allay his friendly solicitude; on the contrary, he was abashed and confounded at this evidence of the power of the Italian's personality; and yet, he was more definitely conscious than he had hitherto been, of a certain racial nobility in the man which commanded confidence.

The wind, that had been a sportive, if somewhat riotous breeze in the morning, gained in force as the day went on. There were few gondolas out in the afternoon, and Geof went about on foot. He walked the length of the wind-swept Riva degli Schiavoni, and then he struck across the city, by narrow alleys and picturesque, out-of-the-way squares, and looked in at certain churches for which the guide-books recommend the afternoon light. Toward the end of the day he found his way back to the Piazza.

The great square was in holiday guise, in honour of some guest of the city. From the three famous flag-staffs in front of San Marco the colours of Italy were floating, rolling and unrolling upon the breeze, in gracefully undulating folds. Men were affixing additional gas-jets to the great candelabra, making ready for the evening illumination.

Just as Geof arrived upon the scene, a boy, with a paper of corn in each outstretched hand, came running down the length of the Piazza, followed by a fluttering swarm of pigeons, hundreds of them on the wing, in hot pursuit of the flying provender. The wings made a sound of multitudinous flapping that was singularly agreeable to the ear. Geof watched their laughing tormenter until he stopped for breath near the base of the *campanile*, and, in an instant, the pigeons were alighting on his arms and shoulders, and gathering in an eager, gurgling mass about his feet. The corn fell in a golden shower among them, and great was the jostling and gobbling and short was the duration of that golden shower.

Geof turned in at the open door of San Marco, and found his way to one of his favourite haunts, a certain dimly sumptuous side-chapel, where a hint of incense always hovers, and a whispered echo, as of long-past *aves* and *salves*, lingers on the air. Curious carvings are there, and bits of gleaming gold and silver, and, between the pillars, enchanting vistas open out into the transept, or down the mosaic-laid floor of the nave, polished smooth by the feet of generations of worshippers.

As he tarried there, the familiar sense of passive content which he had had of late stole upon him, and he was aware that a certain face and voice were again present with him. Why, he wondered, since it was of other things he had been thinking all day long,—why did that face and voice come to him? Was it merely a habit of mind, a trick of thought engendered by this idle, aimless Venetian life? Or was it a natural association of pure and lovely impressions?

And there, in the rich gloom of the great basilica,

traced out and accentuated, as it were, by long bars of light that made a golden pathway down from the high western windows, a light entered into his mind, and he knew what his mother had divined long ago.

There was no shock of surprise in the discovery, only a deep, vitalising satisfaction. It seemed as natural, as inevitable, that he should love Pauline Beverly, as that he should love his life. He knew that he had loved her from the hour of their first meeting; it seemed to him that he had loved her all his life. He was glad that the realisation of it had come to him here in the beautiful church where he had first seen her face. Yet, as he stood looking down the marvellous perspectives of the great sanctuary, only dimly seen in the veiled and brooding light, he felt that the time was past for idle musings, that it behooved him to bestir himself, to get out into the daylight and begin to live.

He walked down the nave, and out into the gay Piazza, where he was not surprised to find that the aspect of things had changed. The flags were still rising and falling on the breeze, unfolding their radiant colours to the declining sun; the deep-throated bell of the *campanile*, which has sounded so many a summons to great deeds, was solemnly tolling the hour; a Franciscan brother stepped across the pavement, bent doubtless upon an errand of mercy. The young man read a new suggestion in each of these familiar sights and sounds. He turned and looked back at San Marco, at the outline of its clustering domes, at its carvings and mosaics, gleaming in full sunshine. In his exalted frame of mind, all these things seemed translated into large and significant meanings; patriotism, philanthropy, art,—his own art, architecture. He wondered what

fine thing it would be vouchsafed him to do, to win the girl he loved.

Geoffry Daymond was by nature modest; the accident of worldly prosperity, of personal success, had not changed that; but he was equally by nature determined. Though he felt that something very tremendous would be required of him before he could enter into his kingdom, he never for an instant doubted that he should win. And so it happened, that, as he walked away across the Piazza, his step rang firmer and sharper than ever, and he held his head with the air of a man not easily daunted.

The wind did not go down with the sun, and, when evening came, Geof felt pretty sure that he should find Pauline in the Piazza. Accordingly, he went there in search of her; yet when he came upon her, sitting with May and the Colonel at a little round table in front of Florian's, he found very little to say for himself, in response to her friendly greeting. He joined them at their after-dinner coffee, but he said he had had his smoke, and when, presently, May expressed a laudable desire to go and see what the moon was about, he could do no less than offer to escort her.

"Won't you come, Miss Beverly?" he asked, but there was a constraint in his tone, which to Pauline's mind could have but one interpretation.

"Thank you, no," she said. "I will keep Uncle Dan company. We have not finished our coffee yet."

As they walked away, Uncle Dan looked after the two comely figures, with a newly acquired intelligence of observation. Presently he coughed discreetly, and asked, with a great effort at being merely conversational: "Did it ever strike you, Polly,

that young Daymond was getting—er—attentive?"

Pauline, too, had followed them with a look of affectionate goodwill, which deepened to a very sweet and wistful smile, as she answered: "Yes, Uncle Dan; I think he likes May. How could he help it?"

"Now that's odd," the Colonel exclaimed. "Do you know, I had never thought of such a thing. It was the Signora that put it into my head."

"And you are glad, are you not, Uncle Dan? You would like to have it happen?"

"Yes, yes; of course,—for his mother's sake."

Pauline was still watching May and her companion. They had walked on, easily distinguishable in the crowd by reason of their height, and now they were standing a little apart, near the base of the *campanile*, in the full light of the illumination. May was talking, her skirts and ribbons fluttering in the breeze. Geof stood beside her listening, his head bent slightly, with a certain chivalry of bearing which was characteristic of him. The wind made no more impression upon his firm, close-reefed figure, than upon the mighty shaft of the great bell-tower.

"I wish it for his own sake, Uncle Dan," Pauline said. "I do not know any one I should be more willing to trust."

"You don't say so! Well, he's his mother's son, and that is half the battle."

"Yes," Pauline admitted; "that is the way I felt too, at first. But now I know him better it is for himself I like him. He is so strong, and steady, and—good evening, Mr. Kenwick!"

"Ah, good evening! I was sure that unless you had blown away in the course of the day, I should find you in these classic precincts. No, thanks; I've had my coffee, or something answering remotely to that description. What has become of your sister, Miss Beverly? She is getting as chary of herself as an Italian pronoun."

"She was here a moment ago," Pauline replied; "she has gone with Mr. Daymond to pay her respects to the moon."

"Really," said Kenwick, with a hint of annoyance in his manner, to conceal which he continued talking volubly. "Now, I should have thought you would have been the one to go moon-gazing. I should not have associated your sister with the pale and melancholy orb."

"You are very penetrating, Mr. Kenwick. But I don't think you would find the moon especially pale or melancholy this evening. It seemed in high good humour as we caught a glimpse of it on our way over here."

"Mr. Kenwick's penetration is too subtle for a plain man's comprehension," Uncle Dan observed. The persistency with which the Colonel be-mistered Kenwick was an unmistakable sign of disapproval.

"Colonel Steele, I am guiltless of subtlety," Kenwick declared in his most humorous manner; "I, too, am a plain man. But, if you will pardon the platitude, we all know that there is one beauty of the sun, and another beauty of the moon, and it would be pure affectation to ignore the fact."

"Apropos of the heavenly bodies,—when is the *Urania* to sail?" Pauline asked. She feared that Kenwick might go in pursuit of Geof and May, who

had disappeared round the corner into the Piazzetta, and knowing that he liked to talk of his millionaire friends and their steam-yacht, she proceeded to draw him out upon the subject.

May and Geof, meanwhile, secure from interruption, thanks to Pauline's little strategy, were strolling in the Piazzetta, now facing the moon-lit, wind-swept lagoon, glittering beyond the pillars in a thousand broken reflections; now studying the figures of the four porphyry conspirators, engaged in their eternal task of mystification at the corner of San Marco. That all attempts should have failed to settle the character and social standing of those red-complexioned, rather dull-witted gentlemen, who clasped one another in such undecipherable opacity, was almost more than May could bear.

"Don't you think the archæologists are rather stupid to have given up the riddle?" she asked, as she and her escort turned away and stepped out again into the Piazza.

"I dare say they are," Geof laughed, "but I'm sure that those flat-nosed fellows are much more entertaining than they would be if they had been labelled. Jove! What a sight that is!"

He had suddenly turned and looked up at the front of San Marco, gleaming in the brilliant illumination, like a shrine studded with precious stones. In the concentrated light of hundreds of gas-jets, each exquisite detail, each shining gold mosaic and lavish carving stood out with marvellous distinctness. The golden-winged angels that mount a mystic stairway above the great central arch, the bronze horses prancing so harmlessly over the main portal, even the quaint bas-relief of St. George, sitting, with such unimpeachable dignity, upon his camp-stool,—each

and all were far more clearly enunciated than ever they are in the impartial splendour of daylight. Against the darkly luminous, unfathomable sky, the outline of the domes showed clear-cut and harmonious, and over yonder, above the great Palazzo, whose columns, for that evening at least, were surely carved in ivory and wrought with lace, a remote, half-grown moon looked wonderingly down.

"The moon is rather out of it, to-night," May observed, with the bright crispness that gave everything she said a flavour of originality. She had taken in the beauty of the scene with a completeness that would have astonished her companion; not a detail had been lost upon her. Yet it was clear that the total effect had not produced an overpowering impression. Geof, for his part, had been really stirred by it, but he had no intention of owning it.

"I don't think we need waste any sympathy on the moon," he replied. "It's usually cock of the walk here in Venice."

Having thus satisfactorily disposed of that subject, the young people turned their steps toward the clock-tower, Geof wondering resignedly why May made no motion to rejoin her family.

"I don't think I agree with you about mysteries," she said, presently; "I can't bear them. There's Nanni, now, the brother of our gondolier," she continued; and then, turning, and looking her companion full in the face: "Can you make him out?"

"What is it about him that puzzles you?" Geof asked, returning her glance with equal frankness.

"I don't know that I can explain it. He seems somehow—different. There is something wrong about him. I don't think he is happy."

"And what if he is not?" said Geof tentatively. "There need be no mystery about that. I don't suppose many men are really happy."

"You don't?" May exclaimed, in naïve surprise.

Geof, to whom happiness had come to seem almost incredible, since he had got a glimpse of what it might be, was himself rather taken aback at his own utterance.

"I rather think," he said, laughing uneasily, "that I only meant that not many people are superlatively happy. As for commonplace, every-day happiness, I suppose that depends upon temperament. Perhaps the man is of a melancholy temperament."

"Perhaps that is it," May answered, thoughtfully; and with one accord they turned into the quiet paved space north of San Marco, where they stood, a few moments, looking out into the brilliant Piazza.

"I suppose it was very silly of me," May went on, laying her hand upon the haunches of a great stone lion that crouches there, polished smooth with the passage of centuries; "but I had a notion that he was unhappy because he had to live in exile, a mere servant, you know, in a dreadful hospital in Milan. And so I went and offered to give him a gondola, and he wouldn't accept it. He was thanking me the other day, at Torcello, when you came up. I suppose that was why he was so—melodramatic," and she laughed a little forced laugh, and looked Geoffry straight in the face again.

He saw her embarrassment, and understood that she had been setting him right, and that it had cost her an effort to refer to the matter. And so he said the kindest thing possible under the circumstances.

"If you mean his kissing your hand," he replied, with an air of discussing a matter of no consequence, "there's nothing melodramatic in that, at least when a gondolier does it. It is the custom of their class. Old Pietro kisses mine and makes me feel like an ancient doge."

He could see that she was relieved.

"I wonder where the others are," she said. "Let us go and look them up. I didn't feel like anything so fine as a doge," she added, lightly, as they came out into the square again. "I felt like a very interfering and foolish kind of person. I don't think I shall do anything so silly again."

"There is nothing silly about a generous action," Geof protested, looking with great kindness at the young girl, to whom the garment of humility was not unbecoming. "I rather think, though, that the man is better off than you imagine. At any rate, I'm very sure he is better off for the goodwill you have shown him."

Then, with a return of his previous solicitude, somewhat stimulated by a new realisation of the unusual beauty of this experimenter in mysteries, he added:

"These Italians are impressionable fellows. They sometimes feel things more than we cold-blooded Northerners appreciate."

"Do they?" said May, in her most matter-of-fact voice, giving Geof a glance of quick intelligence, and putting herself instantly on the defensive; "I should have said it was rather touch and go with their feelings. Ah! There's Mr. Kenwick, pretending he doesn't see us!"

XIV

A Summer's Day

XIV

A Summer's Day

May had been quite correct in her surmise that Kenwick was shamming, though this was merely based on general theories. Not only did he see her as she emerged with Geoffry Daymond from the comparative obscurity of the stone lion's neighbourhood, but he had been for some moments

furtively watching them both, himself lost to view in the crowd about the band-stand. She would have been surprised indeed if she could have guessed the effect upon the sprightly cavalier of this new evidence of the confidential relations existing between herself and his friend; and indeed, when a moment later he met them, with a facetious sally, it is doubtful whether anything short of clairvoyance could have divined his true state of mind.

For Oliver Kenwick was experiencing something as closely resembling genuine feeling as was like to befall him in the course of his discreetly regulated career. He had played with fire once too often, and he had discovered, not without a slight accession of self-respect, that he was perceptibly scorched. He had supposed his interest in May Beverly to be purely impersonal; he had been mistaken. He had admired her in his character of connoisseur, as a man of the world he had found amusement and relaxation in her society. For May had the unique advantage of combining that degree of conventionality which is admissibly essential, with a refreshing lack of conventionality in non-essentials. She had repeatedly surprised and stimulated him, she had never yet offended his taste. And Kenwick was nothing if not fastidious. Her attraction had been undeniably heightened by his imagined discovery of Geoffry Daymond's interest in her; but quite independently of that artificial stimulus, she did exercise a strong fascination over him.

It was not in Oliver Kenwick's scheme of life to sacrifice his independence to any claim, even to that of his own unchastened fancies. He would not have known himself in any other rôle than that of free-lance, and life would indeed have lost its savour if he

had been betrayed into the purchase of an indulgence of feeling at the cost of his self-approval. He possessed an ideal of himself which he prized and guarded; if the ideal was a questionable one, judged by ordinary standards, he was at least consistent in its cultivation. If, impelled by a spirit of rivalry, if, goaded to something approaching rashness by the contemplation of Geof's quiet, masterful way of taking possession of the things he coveted, he resolved to retaliate where retaliation was peculiarly palatable, this indicated no change whatever in his ultimate intentions.

For a day or two after the little episode of the stone lion Kenwick succeeded in cutting Geof out, as he termed it, very neatly, by the simple device of interesting May in a certain sketch which she undertook at his suggestion. The subject was a common enough one in Venice; a tranquil *rio* between ruinous walls,—here, a bit of quaint mediæval sculpture,—there, a splash of verdure over the arch of a gateway,—a pointed church tower in remote perspective. The clever craftsman found no difficulty in inventing reasons why a similar combination of advantages was not to be found elsewhere. In his own mind he was perfectly well aware that he chose it because the proper point of view was only to be obtained by disembarking and planting the easels on a bit of quay that stopped abruptly in front of a deserted house. Here, in this isolated position, the two painted together for three successive afternoons, and Kenwick, by dint of a judicious combination of encouragement and criticism, which he, as a practised artist had always at command, succeeded in arousing in the young girl an enthusiasm for the work, and an appreciation of his own mastery of his craft, which could not but be

gratifying and stimulating to him. In truth she had never liked him so well, and, having on her part nothing to conceal, she was as outspoken in her gratitude as in all things else.

At the end of the third afternoon May had completed the best sketch she had ever done. Just as she was putting the finishing stroke to it, a gondola went gliding by, an old and shabby one, and in the tall figure at the stern she recognised Nanni. An indefinable shadow crept over the bright elation of a moment previous, and she stopped painting.

"That old tub of your Nanni's is about ready for the crematory," Kenwick observed, as he too began putting up his traps.

"The crematory?" she repeated, absently.

"Yes; when they are fairly on their last legs the gondolas are burnt in the glass-factories."

May watched the water-logged craft as it vanished under a distant bridge.

"I like that idea about the gondolas," she remarked, a few minutes later, as Pauline and Uncle Dan, who had been taking a turn in the Giudecca, came to pick them up. "The poor old things must be glad to breathe their dying breath into those exquisite flasks and vases."

"What's that about dying breaths?" Uncle Dan demanded, as he handed his niece into the gondola. "Yes; it is a happy fate to die in a good cause," he admitted, when the matter was explained to him,—and he wondered whether it could possibly be Kenwick who had put the child in a sentimental mood.

"But a happier fate to serve a good cause and live,"

Kenwick maintained; adding, lightly: "Miss May tells me I have taught her something, and I desire to live long to remember it."

"You probably will," the Colonel rejoined, curtly.

"You were wishing the other day for a short life and a merry one," Pauline observed, as the Colonel turned to speak to Vittorio.

"Perhaps things have changed since then," Kenwick replied, in a low voice, with so much seriousness and significance that May gave him a quick, amused look, while Pauline experienced an unreasonable resentment. What business had a stranger like Kenwick to be talking to them in riddles?

And yet, the next day, when the whole party took the trip by steamer, the long length of the lagoon to Chioggia, Pauline was shocked to find herself almost resigned to the pretensions of the stranger as exhibited toward May.

The morning was a glorious one, cooler and clearer than the usual Venice June. Across the lagoon to the west, the Euganean hills stood out, sharp-cut in their pointed outlines as if carved in stone,—as indeed they doubtless are,—while to the northward, looking back across the domes and spires of the receding city, could be seen the distant snow-capped range of the Tyrolese Alps, so gracious in its undulating curves, as to make an impression almost of warmth and tenderness.



"May watched the water-logged craft as it vanished under a distant bridge"ToList

From the start, Kenwick had succeeded in engaging May's attention, having resort to the same means which had already proved efficacious. At his suggestion they had each brought a sketchbook, and, during the trip of several hours, they jotted down desultory notes of the passing scene. Here, a boat laden with market produce, its gay, striped sail bulging to the breeze; there, the towers of Malamocco and Poveglia, with the pretty vista of the channel between. Again, a rude shrine erected on piles, or a group of boys diving off a tumble-down wharf in the distance. It was very delightful, this monopoly of the young girl's attention. The eager interest with which she listened to his suggestions, the quick intelligence with which she acted upon them.

And Pauline, sitting with Geof a little apart from the others, tried in vain to take herself to task for leaving Kenwick so entirely to his own devices. She supposed she understood her sister too well to have

any anxiety on her account. The ready interest of May's manner was precisely of the same sort as that with which she had listened to Nanni's instructions in rowing, or to Vittorio's lessons in the Italian tongue. Pauline remembered how, only the other day, Vittorio had made mention of a *piccola bestia* with whose name they were not familiar, and she smiled, as she recalled May's triumph when, at last, after a laboured description of its leading characteristics, it had dawned upon her that the small beast with a smooth coat, a pointed nose, a long tail, and—yes, that told the story!—*four legs*, was a mouse!

Nevertheless, though her conscience was easy with regard to her sister, Pauline told herself, severely, that Geof was being very hardly used, and that she, by her supineness, was as much to blame as Kenwick for the artist's unwarrantable behaviour. To be sure, Geof betrayed no dissatisfaction with the existing arrangement; he was far too well-bred for that,—and really, how fine he was, in this as in everything! One would have thought that he was deeply interested in telling her about the great sea-wall in which nature and man have gone into partnership, and upon the preservation of which depends the very existence of Venice. There it stretched for miles, the long, narrow strip of sand and masonry, and as the steamer plied the waters of the lagoon, hour after hour, in the bright June morning, they could hear the tread of the breakers on the beach outside, and realise something of the mighty forces that must be resisted in time of winter storms.

"That thing almost made an engineer of me," Geof observed.

"I don't wonder," said Pauline, with ready comprehension; "it appeals to one immensely," and

Geof knew that she was in sympathy with him, that not a word he had said, not a word he had left unsaid, had been lost upon her.

"When I am particularly out of conceit with myself," he continued,—and he liked to remember that there was no one else to whom he would have talked in this strain,—"I get to thinking that perhaps it was a mistake not to stick to that first notion. It's a fine thing to work for defence."

"Yes," said Pauline, after the little pause he knew so well, and which he had learned not to break in upon,—"but,—isn't it better still to build for shelter?"

The thoughtful words, fraught with so much delicate meaning, touched him with a sense as of home and of sweet human happiness; the friendly eyes, turned questioningly to his, thrilled him with a yet deeper feeling. A look came into his face which had surely never been seen there before, but he only said, in his deep, honest voice: "You have given a new grace to my bricks and mortar."

Then Pauline, usually so modest and so self-contained, was conscious of a reprehensible feeling of exultation, and, by a singular association of ideas, she found herself constrained to remember what Uncle Dan had said to her the other evening. She glanced at him, chatting, in pleasant good-fellowship, with the Signora, and she was glad to think that they too were to be made happy by this beautiful and wonderful thing which all agreed was in the air. And at this point in her meditations Pauline became possessed of such an irresistible, and certainly most illogical desire to give a little sob, that she rose abruptly to her feet, and went to look at her sister's sketches.

They were nearing the end of their voyage, and, a few minutes later, they had made the landing, and were strolling through the ancient town in search of luncheon. They found a little inn at the edge of the water, where they partook of omelette and native wine, served in a pretty loggia; after which they sauntered about the place, purchasing a piece of lace of one and another picturesque old hag, and picking up some quaint bits of pottery in a dingy shop under the arcades. Later, having done their duty by the sights, they chartered a big boat, propelled by two strapping oarsmen and a couple of very splendid sails, and voyaged peacefully down a sleepy canal, and out across a bit of quiet lagoon to the strip of beach known as Sotto Marina. There, on the shore, they came upon a solitary child in a red petticoat, with a small purple shawl crossed over her funny little person. She was apparently absorbed in watching the tiny wavelets at her feet, scarcely bestowing a glance upon the numberless brilliant sails, scattered like a field of Roman anemones upon the deep green of the sea.

As the strangers descended upon her, the little recluse payed them the tribute of a fascinated stare, and they, in return, did their best to instill into her mind the belief that they were creatures of another and a brighter sphere. Uncle Dan presented her with a peppermint lozenge, Mrs. Daymond held her broad, lace-trimmed parasol over the small black head, while May gave her a glimpse of the world through each end of her opera-glass. The child was a self-contained little person, and betrayed no special elation over these blandishments. When the time for parting came, Kenwick, with much ceremony, presented her with a bright piece of nickel, as a *ricordo* of the visit. She was something of a beauty, in

her small childish way, and he petitioned for a kiss in return. This the little maid politely but firmly refused; her favours were evidently not for sale.

"If you won't give me one," he said, trying not to look abashed at the rebuff, "go and kiss the lady you love best."

They were all standing about in the bright sunshine, deriving no little entertainment from Kenwick's discomfiture. The child took the proposition very seriously; but, after a moment's deliberation, she walked straight up to Pauline and lifted a small, pursed-up mouth to her.

"If that's not just Pauline's luck!" May exclaimed, as her sister stooped to receive the proffered salutation. "And she is the only one of us all who hasn't paid the little wretch the slightest attention!"

"Oh, yes, she has," Geof protested, in perfect good faith. "She has been smiling at her!" Upon which everybody laughed, and no one more heartily than Geof, at the way his remark had turned out.

Kenwick's merriment, however, was not quite sincere. A vague mistrust had crept over him and was working within him, subtly and surely, as the afternoon wore on. Had he been mistaken about Geof? The thought was too distasteful to be seriously entertained, and he rejected it summarily. Yet it had not been without effect. His vanity had taken alarm, and the instinct of self-preservation was roused in his mind.

Yes, he thought to himself, half-an-hour later, as they sailed before a light wind under the gay Chioggia canvas, out toward the open sea,—yes, he had been venturing upon deep waters, and it was time to come about. It was, of course, sheer nonsense

to suppose that Geof's taking May's defection so easily was an indication of any real indifference on his part. He was only too plaguey sure of himself to feel any anxiety. Geof had always had an irritating way of taking things for granted; but, when it came to the point, no one with eyes in his head could be really indifferent to that superb young creature. Kenwick glanced at the slender figure perched at the extreme prow of the boat, and straightway he experienced an awkward wrench somewhere in the neighbourhood of that organ to which is attributed so large a share in our emotional embarrassments. And it was at this juncture that Kenwick had recourse to a curious befooling of himself in which long practice had made him an adept.

A sail was just passing, a deep red one, bearing the design of globe and cross in crude outline of uncompromising black. As he regarded, absently, that primitive religious symbol, there awoke within him a certain phantom conscience, which was wont to play an effective part in his elaborate process of self-mystification. To-day this facile monitor hinted that if Geof did feel so sure of himself, it would hardly be the part of a friend to press his own advantage too far. Geof was a good fellow; he really had a great opinion of Oliver Kenwick's talent, and did not hesitate to say so on occasion. It would never do to play him any unhandsome tricks. The more unsuspicious he was, the more it behooved Kenwick to guard his interests. Yes; he would withdraw in Geof's favour, he would be hanged if he wouldn't!

And so it came about that by the time they were returning northward again in the Venice steamer, Kenwick had worked himself up to a really lofty pitch of self-sacrifice. He would go off in the

Stickneys' yacht with them to-morrow, by Jove he would! Luckily for him, he had left the invitation open, not from any intention of accepting it, but simply because he had never in his life burnt a bridge. A good principle that; he would always stick to it.

As the lovely sunset light grew and deepened, Venice came up like a vision out of the sea. The cloudless sky was tinged with yellow, and the water rippled in molten gold up to the very side of the boat. He turned to May, who chanced to be standing beside him, looking, with level gaze, straight into the serene heart of the sky. She had certainly a softer, gentler look than she used to wear. Would it deepen as he spoke?

"This is a charming ending to my visit here," he said, quietly.

"Ending?" May exclaimed, turning upon him that bright, straightforward look with which she met every statement of fact. "Ending? Why, you are not going away?"

"Yes; I am off with the Stickneys early to-morrow morning."

"In the *Urania*? You *are* in luck! But why didn't you tell us before?"

"I couldn't bear to speak of it," he averred, and at the moment he almost believed he was speaking the truth. "It costs me too much to go away."

"Well, I don't wonder," May declared; "there's nothing like Venice. Still, you live abroad half the time, and can come here whenever you please."

"Ah, Miss May!" he exclaimed, and this time he was absolutely sincere. "Venice will never be the

same to me again."

She could not altogether misunderstand his meaning, but it was impossible to take him very seriously, and, prompted by a not too lively curiosity, she asked: "Then why do you go?"

"Because it would be wrong for me to stay," he replied, with a subdued, almost convincing emphasis.

"Then of course you must go," she returned, with the youthful decision that rarely failed her; adding, consolingly, as her eyes wandered back to the sunset: "And I've no doubt you will enjoy the *Urania* quite as much as Venice."

XV

June Roses

XV[ToC]

June Roses

As Kenwick stood, the next morning, on the deck of the beautiful pleasure-boat for whose splendours he had betrayed so lively an appreciation, he looked back across the widening distance with a sense of regret more poignant than he was at all prepared to

deal with. Even when they were actually weighing anchor, he found himself considering the feasibility of a retreat, and now, as the screw turned, and the water, on whose tranquil bosom he had floated so peacefully, was churned into a seething froth, a sickening misgiving seized him. Had he paid too high a price to preserve the integrity of his scheme of life? —or rather,—he hastened to correct himself,—had he made too great a sacrifice to the claims of friendship? That was the more consoling view to take. He had done the handsome thing and he would not flinch,—especially since he could not now do so without making himself ridiculous.

Kenwick refrained from asking himself why he should consider Daymond's claim paramount to his own; he was not given to searching analysis of his own motives. The man who values his illusions soon learns the best way of preserving them, and the illusion in question was doubly valuable, since it bade fair, under judicious tending, to invest the mythical Oliver Kenwick, already so dear to his imagination, with a nimbus of romantic devotion most agreeable to contemplate.

His fellow-passengers were a talkative and somewhat egotistical company, and he was left more completely to himself, for the first few moments than, on ordinary occasions, he would have found quite to his mind. No one was likely to note the persistency with which his glance returned to one of the high, stone balconies of the Hotel *Venezia*.

There was one chance in ten that a certain tall, girlish figure might appear there, as it had so often done in the carelessly fleeting days that were already past and gone; there was one chance in twenty that it might appear for his sake, that a fluttering white

handkerchief might assure him of certain pleasant things. He strained his eyes to the last possible moment, in the hope of such a sight; but he was too mindful of appearances even in the stress and strain of painful emotion, to take out his opera-glass and turn it upon that point. He did, however, so far forget himself, as to sigh profoundly, and without that guarded look to right and left, which should always precede such an indulgence. That, in itself, was a very marked concession to feeling.

There remained to Kenwick one consolation besides that of having behaved handsomely to Daymond: he had left a fragrant, if not a lasting, memory behind him. Would she not be pleased, would she not be touched, when, presently, his roses were brought to her? She was to find them when she came up from breakfast; his directions to the porter on that head had been very explicit. And would not the roses, beautiful in themselves, gain a telling significance, by reason of the message they bore? On the reverse side of his card he had written, in his small, clear hand, the words:

"All June I bound the
rose in sheaves."

The line seemed to him extremely well chosen; it could hardly fail to stimulate the imagination. He, himself, felt its haunting quality, and he had repeated it, under his breath, as he followed the gardener about, urging him to cull his choicest roses.

As he mused upon these things, the yacht, rounding Santa Elena, steamed away to the Porto del Lido, and he suddenly became aware that Miss Hortense Stickney's inquisitive eyes were fixed upon

him. He was instantly on his guard.

"Well, that's the last of Venice," he exclaimed, "and I'm glad of it. One gets tired of dawdling about on a magnified frog-pond. One begins to long for the open sea." Miss Stickney looked gratified, and Kenwick felt himself once more in his element.

May Beverly, meanwhile, had been frankly delighted with the roses. So enchanting did she find them, indeed, that she had merely glanced at the card, and had tossed it into the waste-paper basket without looking at the reverse side.

"Just think of it, Pauline!" she had cried; "he must have been way over to the Giudecca this very morning to get them. I wonder if the *Urania* has sailed yet."

"Nine o'clock was the hour, was it not?" Pauline asked, taking up one of the roses and holding it to her face. "It must be after that."

"Yes, it's too late," said May, as she stepped out upon the balcony; "she's half-way to the Public Gardens. But I'm going to wave, all the same."

And so it chanced, by the perversity of fate, that if Kenwick had but risked using his opera-glass, he would not have looked in vain.

May watched the yacht until it disappeared from sight,—for she had not before seen the graceful craft in motion,—and then she returned to the contemplation of her roses. As she lifted them, one by one, and arranged them deftly in a broad-mouthed Chioggia jug, she was moved to exclaim: "I do think that was really kind of him! Do you know, Pauline, I'm afraid we didn't like him half enough."

It was but a passing compunction, however, and

the roses themselves were not destined to receive the attention which their beauty fairly entitled them to. It did not seem quite feasible to take them to San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, and even had they gone, they would soon have been forgotten in the delights which that modest little sanctuary offers. The sunshine of four hundred years ago that glows in mellow warmth upon Carpaccio's canvases, the vigour and the piety and the fun of that "wayward patchwork," are more vital and more absorbing than any mortal roses.

And if, in the morning, Kenwick's interests had been subordinated to Art, Nature proved no less exacting in the afternoon. For then it was that the red banner and the blue pursued together yet unexplored paths of the northern lagoon, returning whence, the city was seen in a new perspective, the great *campanile* in particular, taking up a position so contrary to all precedent, that May was half inclined to believe that it actually did "promenade," as Vittorio so picturesquely expressed it.

The evening again was a glorious one, and again the roses were left behind. When the Colonel and his Pollys appeared at the steps of the *Venezia*, Vittorio greeted them with a radiant "*bellissimo!*" The moon was all but full and not a breath of air stirred the wide reaches of the lagoon, visible beyond San Giorgio. One of the musicians' barges was drawn up in front of the hotel; the first song was in progress, and gondolas from the upper canal were approaching, with soft dip of oar, and gleaming tiny lights.

The singer was a woman. She was standing in the middle of the boat, one hand clinging, as if for support, to the shoulder of a violinist. The voice was

high and strained; painfully strained, it seemed, to Pauline's quick perception.

"How tired that woman's voice is!" she exclaimed. "Do let us give them something!"

Vittorio brought the gondola close alongside the barge, but before Pauline could make her offering, the strained voice broke, the figure swayed heavily to one side, and the woman sank to the floor, supported in the arms of one of the men. The big boat instantly moved away, and in another moment, the swinging paper lanterns, illumining but faintly the anxious group of musicians, had disappeared down a side canal.

The other gondolas had not yet come up, and Vittorio, without waiting for orders, rowed after the retreating barge, which he overtook with a few vigorous strokes of the oar. The men had stopped rowing, and someone was calling for a gondola. The Colonel's boat was promptly placed at their service.

The woman had already recovered consciousness, and was murmuring pitifully: "*A casa, a casa!*" Her husband helped her aboard the gondola, where Pauline took compassionate possession of her, ministering to her in gentle, discerning wise. May, usually so fertile in resource, found nothing to offer but her *vinaigrette*, which the patient did not take kindly to; while Uncle Dan, with misguided zeal, administered a severe rebuke to the unhappy husband, for allowing his wife to sing, when she was so manifestly unequal to the effort.

"Ah, Signore," the man replied, in a tone of dull discouragement, "you do not know poverty!" Whereupon the Colonel admitted that it was *vero*, and, becoming very penitent indeed, began grubbing

about his person in search of paper money, and calling himself names for having left his wallet in the pocket of his other coat.

Meanwhile, Vittorio was rowing them swiftly down narrow canals with many windings, where the water flowed black in the shadow, and gleamed weirdly in the light of a chance gas-lamp. The moon was not yet high enough to look down between those close-ranged walls, but, above them, the sky stretched, a luminous, deep blue ribbon, upon which only the brighter stars could hold their own.

News of the mishap had outstripped the gondola. Two turns of an alley-way, a couple of bridges, a dash across a square, and another alley-way, had brought a messenger to the house, while the gondola was still gliding on its tortuous way. A group of women awaited their arrival.

"I wish we might have gone in, to see how they live," May said, regretfully, as they pushed off, leaving the woman in the hands of her friends.

"It's probably a very poor way of living," Uncle Dan surmised. "The kind that makes a man feel like a scoundrel the next time he smokes a good cigar."

"Why, you're a regular socialist, Uncle Dan," cried May. "I didn't know that!"

"Neither did I, Polly," the Colonel replied, pulling viciously at his moustache. "I don't so much mind being better off than other folks," he added, thoughtfully; "but somehow, you do hate to have other folks worse off than you!"

They were retracing their way down one of the narrowest and darkest canals, when the warning cry, —"*premi-o!*"—echoing round an unsuspected corner

told them of an approaching gondola.

"*Ecco, mio fratello!*" Vittorio exclaimed, answering, then, with his own sonorous call; and an instant later, the prow of his brother's gondola came stealing out of the shadow.

As the boats passed one another, Vittorio said a few words in dialect, which were quite unintelligible to the foreigners. Yet May felt sure that Nanni was being sent to the house they had just left.

"Do you and Nanni know the singer?" she asked, as they came out into the full moonlight, above the Rialto bridge.

"Si, Signorina," the gondolier replied, with prompt exactitude; "her sister's brother-in-law was the nephew of our grandmother's niece by marriage."

"Oh!" May gasped, rendered, for once, inarticulate, by this surprising exhibition of genealogic lore.

They were late in coming in that evening, and, as the girls opened their chamber door, the perfume of the roses wafted to them conveyed a delicate hint of unmerited neglect.

"Poor things!" said Pauline; "it *was* a shame to leave them to themselves all day long, doing nobody any good!"

"I know it," May admitted; "it was a shame; but I didn't want to wear them, in all this heat, and I couldn't very well sit and tend them, all day! I know what we will do," she added, with quick decision; "we will take them round to the poor singer in the morning. Perhaps they may give her pleasure."

"I wonder how Mr. Kenwick would like that," queried Pauline, who, in spite of an inborn loyalty to

the absent, was not ill-pleased with the suggestion.

"I don't believe he would mind," said May, as she plunged the beautiful things up to their necks in the water-pitcher; "he has probably forgotten, by this time, that he ever sent them."

And Kenwick, stretched upon the deck of the *Urania* in the moonlight, after the others had gone below, was, at that very moment, murmuring softly to himself:

"All June I bound the
rose in sheaves."

XVI

A Surrender

XVI[ToC]

A Surrender

May Beverly was not given to the study of her own countenance. She knew, of course, that it was a creditable production of Nature, that she had good features and pretty colouring and that her fellow-creatures, as a rule, seemed to like her looks. Beauty had not stolen upon her unawares as the case is with so many young girls. She had always been pretty, with the unquestioned, outspoken prettiness of a graceful animal or a bright-hued flower. She took it for granted, as she did those other gifts, of health and youth, and, on the whole, she gave it very little thought.

It was therefore the more remarkable that she should have just been spending a good half-hour before the looking-glass. She had the room to herself this afternoon, for Pauline had gone again to Torcello, this time with a party of old friends who had recently made their appearance in Venice, and whose claims upon her sister May was somewhat inclined to question. To-day, however, their exactions fell in most opportunely with a certain plan of her own, which had come to her in the shape of a great inspiration. The Torcello party had started directly after luncheon and were to return by moonlight, and, Pauline being thus satisfactorily disposed of, there remained but one lion in the path, in the person, namely, of Uncle Dan.

As May stood before the dressing-table, upon

which were billows of bright silk handkerchiefs, each of which had in turn suffered rejection at her hands, she was arranging a large *fichu* of Spanish lace upon her head in such fashion as completely to cover her pretty hair. She tilted her head first at one angle and then at another, scowling fiercely in her effort to decide how great a change had been wrought in her appearance. Whether owing to the presence of the scowl, or to the absence of the yellow top-knot, the countenance certainly had a very unfamiliar look, and, well pleased with the effect, she turned away and stepped out upon the balcony.

The day was very warm, not a breath of air found its way under the broad, striped awning that cast its grateful shadow upon the balcony; the very water gleamed hot and desert, and the cooing of the Salute doves had the gurgling, simmering sound of a great tea-kettle. May leaned her arms upon the cushions of the stone balustrade and looked down and off toward San Giorgio. How beautiful it was, even at high noon, and how glorious it would be to-night, when the full moon came sailing up into the twilight sky, and the cool, sweet breath of evening was wafted over the waters! What an evening it would be! One to remember all her life, all that long, every-day kind of life that stretched so unendingly on into the future.

They had gone that morning, she and Pauline, to carry the roses to the Signora Canti. They had found the poor singer weak and ill and disheartened. The doctor had told her she must not sing for some days yet,—surely not this evening,—and to-night was full moon, when the tourists throng the Grand Canal, and before another full moon should come the heat would have driven the pleasure-seekers away. "They

fear the heat, the *forestieri!*"

There was no one to take her place, the woman said. Just the chorus singing would attract but few listeners; the other serenaders would get all the people. This was the harvest time and it must be wasted. Ah! The roses were *molto belle, bellissime*, Signorina,—but it was clear that they offered little consolation for real troubles.

And, sitting there in the tiny room where the shutters were close drawn against the morning sun, —which nevertheless pierced through a crack and lit up, with one straight beam, the pitiful, drawn face of the poor *cantatrice*, her great inspiration came to May. She had a voice and she could sing. Why should she not sing for this poor woman, sing in the moonlight and gather the gondolas about her? Oh, there would be no lack of a soul in her singing, out there in the moonlight. Signor Firenzo would not have lectured and entreated her in vain. She knew now what he meant. She had been longing to sing, many an evening on the starlit lagoons, and she had not dared.

A group of little children had come into their mother's room, and were huddling shyly in a corner, gazing wide-eyed and silent, at the strange ladies and the gorgeous roses, the like of which had never before found their way there. May hardly noticed the children, so preoccupied was she with her own thoughts, but the sight of them gave her sister courage. As they rose to go, Pauline drew money from her pocket, and, bending over the woman, she said, very gently: "Signora, we have never half thanked you for your singing. May we do so now?"

The woman's eyes shone, and a pretty colour went up the pale, gaunt cheek.

"Ah!" she said. "You have listened to my singing, and with pleasure? And it is truly for my singing that you give me this, and not because you are sorry for me?"

And Pauline, remembering how often the tired voice, strained to a high, uncertain pitch, sounding across the water like a cry for succour, had filled her with compassion, could say with truth; "Signora, your singing has touched our hearts."

As May stood upon the balcony, gazing far out over the lagoon, her young eyes undazzled by the intense mid-day light, she thought how sweet it would be to see again that look of grateful pleasure upon the worn face. Ah, she would sing! How she would sing! She would sing the heart into those people in the gondolas; she would sing the money out of their purses! The gondolas should gather about her till the water was black with them. She would sing till the night rang with the sound of her voice! A sense of power had come into her, which she had never felt before. She should take command of those musicians, she should take command of that mysterious, floating audience. No one would know her; she should not know herself. For one splendid hour she should be set free of herself.

It was the first time in her life that May Beverly had found herself mastered by an enthusiasm. The consciousness of it suddenly seized her and tilled her with a curious misgiving. She knelt down upon the floor of the balcony, and, leaning her forehead against the cushion of the balustrade, she tried to collect her thoughts, to regain her balance.

She wondered if she were very foolish, if it were a mere outbreak of shallow vanity that ought to be suppressed. She hoped not. Of course this thing that

she wanted to do was shockingly unconventional. Anywhere else, under any other circumstances, it would be out of character; but here in Venice everything was different. She tried to shut out the magic city from her thoughts,—to return to a perfectly normal state of mind.

The hour was very still, even the doves had fallen silent. For a few seconds, as she knelt with covered eyes in her high balcony, only one sound reached her ears; but that was the dip of an oar, the very heart-beat of Venice. It had the intimate, penetrating power of a whispered incantation; it touched and quickened the imagination more than peal of bells or chant of marching priests. And as she knelt and listened the young girl felt a scorn of the past and its limitations and its trivial satisfactions—its petty reference of everything to a small, personal standard. The great outer world was knocking at the door of her heart, the world of suffering, and the world of joy, the world of romance, and the world of real human experience.

She would sing to-night; she would let her own personality go, and be just a human creature doing a daring, inspiring thing for the sake of another human creature who was in need. With a sense of exultant self-surrender she lifted her face and looked up at the Salute. Its domes and pinnacles had been hidden by the low-hanging awning, but now, with her eyes on a level with the balustrade, she could see the lovely temple in all its gracious outlines.

"And I remember I used to wonder whether I liked it," she thought to herself, with a singular feeling, as if she had been recalling a past state of existence.

She rose to her feet and stepped inside. A pile of sheet music lay upon the table, and she stood a few

minutes beside it, turning over the leaves and humming softly to herself. There was a rap at the door, and Uncle Dan appeared.

At once her mood had changed. She was Polly, and here was Uncle Dan, to be cajoled and entreated and vanquished.

"Oh, Uncle Dan!" she cried, "I thought you never were coming! I want to talk to you."

"Why, Polly!" he exclaimed, "what are you up to? You look like a fright in that thing!"

"Which means, you never would have known me," Polly declared mischievously. "That's just what I wanted. Now come in like a dear and let me talk to you. No, sit in this chair,—it's much more comfortable. Have you had your cigar?"

"Of course I have. It's nearly an hour since luncheon."

"Don't you want another?"

"Polly! What are you driving at?"

"I only wanted to make you perfectly comfortable, so that you would enjoy having a little chat with me."

She had seated herself in a low chair opposite him, where she could look straight into his eyes. She pulled off the black lace and proceeded to fold it with great care and precision. There was a look in her face, calculated to make the old soldier call out all his reserves.

"Well, out with it, Polly!" he cried.

"It's about that poor singer, Uncle Dan; the woman we took home last night. You remember?"

"Remember? I'm not losing my faculties, Polly!"

"Yes; of course you remember! What was I thinking of? Well, you know we went to see her this morning, and took her those roses of Mr. Kenwick's. Uncle Dan,—they didn't seem to meet the case!" and May looked at her victim with the gravity of a secretary of the metropolitan board of charities.

"That was rather hard on those particular roses," Uncle Dan observed, with a certain grim satisfaction.

"Yes, I think it was. But,—Uncle Dan, I've thought of something much better than roses. I'm going to sing for her!"

"Will that meet the case?" asked the Colonel, doubtfully. He too had been wondering what could be done for the niece by marriage of Vittorio's grandmother's—what did he say she was?

"Yes; for you see I shall be a novelty, and I sing better than she does, and we shall take a lot of money."

"A lot of money, for singing to that woman? Polly, what are you talking about?"

And then it was that Polly took the field, and marshalled all her arguments, and did such valiant battle to the Colonel's dearest prejudices and most cherished theories, that he was fairly bewildered and demoralised.

She knew she could do it, she knew she could sing, and singing always sounded lovely on the water. She was in splendid voice,—she had been practising *pianissimo*, and it went like a charm. Not a soul would know her. She was going to wear a plain black skirt and a sulphur shawl,—she had always meant to buy a sulphur shawl,—and a lot of beads round her

neck. She was going to twist some black stuff about her hair, and then pin the Spanish lace on in the most artistic and Italian manner.

"And you know, Uncle Dan, my hair is the most noticeable thing about me. When that's covered up I am quite another person. And then the light will be very dim, and so many queer colours from the swinging lanterns that I shan't have the vestige of a complexion left!"

"But the promiscuous audience, the rough company on the barge!" the Colonel urged, struggling but feebly against a premonition of defeat. Already the old soldier quailed miserably before the enemy.

"They are not a rough company," Polly declared. "I asked Vittorio all about it. He knows nearly all the men, and he says they are *galant' uomini*. Signor Canti will be there, and he will take beautiful care of me. Signora Canti is to have all the proceeds beyond a certain sum that the others will agree upon."

"The thing seems pretty well settled between you and your *gallant hominies*," growled Uncle Dan, trying to be severe.

"No; it's all settled in my own mind, but I haven't breathed a word of it to anybody but you. And of course you have got to say yes, before I shall take any steps!"

Superficially regarded, this seemed like a concession; but the Colonel knew better. "You have got to say yes!" To his ears it sounded like the fiat of inexorable fate, and he only gazed, with a look of comical deprecation at the youthful orator who was gesticulating with the lace *fichu*, to the destruction of its carefully laid folds.

"Polly, your father would not listen to such a thing for a moment," he jerked out, getting very red in the face.

"But he won't have to; he never need know a word about it!" Alas, that was a line of reasoning that struck a responsive chord.

"But Polly would never consent."

"That's the beauty of it! She's safely out of the way."

"And Mrs. Daymond,—she would be shocked, I am sure," and his fine colour faded with consternation.

"Not if she never knows it!"

"But I shall know it," he protested, faintly. Then, gathering himself together for a last effort:

"No, Polly, I can never consent. Never! You understand! It's useless to talk about it!" and the Colonel got upon his feet and stepped out upon the balcony, breathing fire and slaughter to all revolutionary schemes. And then Polly knew that she had won the day. When Uncle Dan grew emphatic and peremptory it was a sure sign that he was weakening.

She followed him out upon the balcony, and slipped her hand within his arm.

"O, Uncle Dan," she said, in her most insinuating tone. "You haven't the least idea how I shall sing! You never heard anything so fine as it will be. I shall sing, so that all the gondolas will come gliding up to listen. And there will be the moon sailing up the sky, and the world will be so big and so dark that I can let my voice out without a thought of myself, and—O Uncle Dan! say yes!"

Then a slow, intense flush mounted in the sun-burnt cheek, while a light kindled in the eyes, set deep within the bushy eye-brows. And Uncle Dan looked into the ardent face beside him, and, before he could stop himself, he had exclaimed, half under his breath:

"Gad, Polly! But I should like to hear you!"

XVII

The Serenata

XVII[ToC]

The Serenata

From the moment when the Colonel made his fatal admission, his cause was lost and he knew it. He was too good a soldier to fight for the sake of fighting, but he was not a little shocked at the alacrity with which he went over to the enemy.

Yet the step was not an unprecedented one. It was not for nothing that he had been for years the willing slave of his Pollys, that his whole training as uncle had tended to cultivate in him the grace of obedience. "As the twig is bent the tree inclines," and he had been the merest twig of an uncle, if not in years, at least in experience, when he had yielded to the sunny persuasiveness of that first faint glimmering of a smile in the baby face of the original Polly. His subjugation, moreover, having hitherto proved beneficial in its results, he was the more excusable, to-day, for letting himself be swept along by the impetus of his tyrant's will.

There was little time for reflection; indeed, as it was, a young person of less executive ability than May could hardly have accomplished what she brought to pass in the few hours at her disposal. She flew from the *Venezia* to the Signora Canti for the first unfolding of her plan, from the almost speechless Signora to the Merceria in search of the sulphur shawl, and thence to the Signora Canti again, attended all the while by Uncle Dan, whose cane struck sharply on the pavement of the narrow, reverberating alley-ways. The business was all transacted on foot, that even Vittorio might be kept in ignorance of the great secret. Through the good offices of the Signor Canti the barge musicians were interviewed, and the details of the undertaking arranged. Even a small rehearsal was brought about

in the somewhat restricted quarters of the Canti apartment, and great was May's rejoicing, to find how many of her favourite songs were well known to the quartette of accompanists.

As the Colonel looked back upon the afternoon, he had a bewildered sense of having taken part in a general engagement, very brilliant in character, but with the conduct of which he, as private, had had no concern whatever. And now it was evening, and he was floating in the gondola out on the broad basin of St. Mark's, awaiting, with no little trepidation, the progress of events.

No, his nieces would not be with him, he had told Vittorio. One was gone to Torcello, and the other had an engagement for the evening,—which Vittorio thought *peccato*. The *padrone* proposed to float about in the moonlight for a while, and listen to the music, and this, at least, was *benissimo* and commanded the gondolier's warmest approval.

Scarcely had Vittorio been thus pacified than the barge with its dangling lanterns, beneath which the Colonel had seen his Polly safely ensconced but a few minutes since, came floating out from a narrow canal, and glided slowly along the Riva, past the Royal Gardens and the Piazzetta, to the outermost of the great hotels. Sitting among the "gallant hominies" was a figure in a sulphur shawl, with a cloud of Spanish lace about the head, so ingeniously disposed that the features were somewhat hidden, yet apparently with no intention of covering the face.

"That looks like the Canti barge, Vittorio," the Colonel remarked. "Let us go nearer and find out who is to do the singing. Do you know the woman?"

"No, Signore. It is a stranger," Vittorio declared. "It

is not a Venetian."

"What makes you think so?"

"I do not know her face."

The sunset glow had quite faded from the sky and the great disk of the moon hung like a luminous shield over beyond San Giorgio. Its wonderful light, liquid and silvery as the water of the lagoons, flooded their wide reaches, and touched with a soft splendour each sculptured façade and arching bridge of the Riva, and the masts and hulls and loose-reefed sails of a group of fishing boats lying close alongside the quay. Far up the canal, a tenor voice could be heard, strong and melodious, and stray gondolas were tending toward it.

Suddenly, more than one oar was stayed, and more than one face was turned toward the Canti barge. The music had begun, with a familiar Neapolitan melody, in which all the voices and instruments took part. But high above them all rose a clear soprano, only the sweeter and the richer for the dull rhythm of the lesser voices. One by one the receding gondolas turned and came nearer, one bright eye gleaming at each prow, as they stole like conspirators upon the gaily lanterned barge. And from farther away still, from the Grand Canal and from the waters of the Giudecca, black barks came floating, and silently joined the growing throng. The chorus had sung twice, thrice, four times,—always the popular airs, so familiar, yet to-night so new, by reason of the lift and brilliancy of the leading voice.



"The Serenata"ToList

One of the men stepped across the Colonel's gondola and on from one to another, hat in hand. "*Per la musica!*" he entreated, and a goodly shower of nickels and coppers and fluttering *lire* were gathered in. But still not a gondola moved away, and later comers had to tie on the outskirts, spreading now, fan-shaped, with twinkling eyes, far over toward San Giorgio.

Uncle Dan fell to counting the twinkling eyes, and his heart swelled within him. There must be close upon a hundred people here, drawn hither, held fast, by his little Polly. There she stood, in her sulphur shawl, unrecognisable, to be sure, but natural and self-possessed as if she had been singing in her own parlour.

Somebody called for Gordigiani's *O Santissima Vergine*,—a favourite song of "la Canti." The singer rose again to her feet. The low, pulsing accompaniment sounded on the strings, and presently the voice began, with a softly vibrating

tone, different from the resonant quality which had first attracted the listeners.

"*O Santissima Vergine Maria!*"

"I told you it was a trained voice," Uncle Dan heard someone say in a neighbouring gondola. "I believe she's a stage singer. Just listen to that!"

"Hush, don't talk!" the answer came. "It's the sweetest thing I ever heard."

And in truth a delicate, penetrating pathos had come into the fresh young voice, pleading so melodiously for the life of "*mio ben*."

"O Maria, O Maria," was the artless supplication; "I vow to give to thee the ring my mother bought for me four years ago, and the coral necklace, *tanto bello*!" And then, with simple fervour, the Madonna was assured that, would she but save *il poverino*, a candle should be burned to her every Saturday, —"*ogni Sabbato, Maria, Maria*!"

As the last note ceased, sweet and sad, on the night air, a burst of applause went up, and, "*encore, encore*," the forestieri shouted, "*encore*!" And other gondolas came gliding up, and the spreading fan stretched in ever widening compass, divided now, like the pinions of a great sable bird studded with dots of light. Then, while the flowing moonlight brightened, and a perfumed breeze came wafted over the water from the rose gardens of the Giudecca, the sweet voice again took up the simple and touching strain.

After that it was an ovation,—"an ovation, I tell you," Uncle Dan would declare, when bragging about it to the other Polly. "Why, the people were perfectly carried off their feet! When the hat went round they

didn't know what it was they pulled out of their pockets. A ten-franc piece seemed cheap as a copper. And all the time, Polly, standing there, singing her heart out! It was an ovation, I tell you,—an ovation!"

And as Polly sang on and on, light opera airs, rhythmical barcarolles, songs of the people, with their naïve, swinging cadence, a new, exultant sense of power seemed lifting her above her own level.

And presently an inspiration seized her, and, leaning forward, she said to Canti: "Make them row out on the lagoon, toward the Lido; I can sing better there."

Then the barge loosed itself from the clinging gondolas, and slowly glided out and away. And all the gondolas followed, with the soft plash of many oars, on and on, after the swinging lanterns and the syren voice.

To the young girl, borne out of herself into a strange, unimagined experience of beauty and harmony and power, into a newly awakened sympathy, too, with each dreamer and lover and mourner whose lay she sang, it was as if old things had passed away and all things were become new. And presently, as they drifted on in the flooding moonlight, leaving the lights of the city behind them, she could see the small, low glimmer of a gondola-lamp gliding from out the mysterious spaces of the lagoon.

At that moment Canti whispered a request that the Signorina would sing "*Patria*," Tito Mattei's beautiful song of exile. She consented, with a feeling of awe, as if acting in obedience to some higher compulsion. The barge had paused, and the multitudinous plash of oars was hushed as she began to sing:

"Al mio ciel m'ha tolto il fato."

["Fate has torn me from my own skies."]

The vagrant gondola had come nearer, and now it was drawn close up under the bow of the barge, just on the edge of the throng of boats. The Signorina scarcely needed to glance at the oarsman standing in the full light of the lanterns, to know that it was no other than the exile whose lament it had been given her to sing. Yet, as the song ceased for a moment, while the strings played an interlude in full, strongly vibrating chords, she looked involuntarily toward the figure whose identity she was already so curiously aware of. The man made a movement forward, resting on his oar, and, as their eyes met, she knew that he, too, had recognised her. She turned away, as the song recommenced, but the consciousness of what she had seen was vividly present with her. He knew her, he knew that she was singing for him, that she was singing the song of his exile.

A singular, almost fantastical exaltation took possession of the young girl, an exaltation such as might have possessed itself of a priestess of old, pouring a libation to the gods in behalf of some devout suppliant. He had known her, this mysterious, homeless being that had come floating across the waters to hear the song of his exile. A deep, thrilling emotion lifted her on its crest, as the long, slow, elemental rhythm of the ocean had lifted the frail shell of the gondola, far out at the Porto del Lido, such a life-time ago. But now she did not shrink from it, she was not disconcerted by it. She only sang

on, with growing passion and power. Everything small and personal seemed swept away. She felt herself a human creature, singing the needs and aspirations of another human creature. She was alive, she had come into her birthright. This man, whose personality had so haunted and harassed her, was no longer an enigma; she no longer commiserated him. What mattered poverty, suffering, exile? To be alive was enough; to have *la patria*, or any other great and high thought in the soul was infinitely more than any mere presence or possession.

All this was coursing through her mind, and the spirit of it was entering into her song, with an urgency and power that gave it a really extraordinary dramatic force. The last words

"Dolce patria è il cor con te,
Dolce patria è il cor con te!"

rang out with an impassioned brilliancy of tone that took the listeners by storm.

As the singer sank upon her seat, not spent by the effort, but rather absorbed with the new thoughts and emotions that were crowding upon her, the clapping of many hands sounded to her remote and meaningless, and she did not even notice that the solitary gondola had slipped away.

Canti feared that she was really exhausted. "It is enough, Signorina," he said; "we will go home."

As the barge turned, the gondolas made way for it, and then they pressed about it again, to offer more money and more. There was no longer any need of

passing the hat.

And May felt that she had finished, that it was enough. She sat very still, the folds of the black lace almost covering her face, as they rowed homeward to chorus after chorus of gay songs: "*La bella, Napoli*," "*Funicolì funicolà*," "*Margherita*." She experienced no painful reaction; she was filled with an uplifting sense of successful achievement. And her thoughts had turned almost immediately to the poor Signora in whose behalf all this had been done.

They must have taken a great deal of money, May thought,—a hundred francs,—perhaps more. Enough to purchase a long respite for the over-worked singer. Perhaps by the time the poor thing was obliged to sing again, she would have grown so strong and well, that her voice, too, would be fresh and pure, and she would have the unspeakable joy of singing because she could not help it.

May remembered the expression of the great Italian eyes, set in the haggard face, as the woman had said to her: "The Madonna will bless you, Signorina!" Yes, she had a soul, the poor Signora, hard-pressed and starved, but a soul, all the same. May smiled softly to herself, almost as Pauline might have done.

"*Funicolì funicolà!*" the chorus was singing—the coloured lanterns were bobbing with the stroke of the oars, and all the while the young girl was passing in review the people she knew, and wondering to discover how many of them were possessed of souls! There was Uncle Dan and Pauline and Mrs. Daymond, and, surely Vittorio, with his fine, manly spirit, and his childlike faith. They all had souls, each after his kind; they all had a comprehension of something not visible and material. What a

wonderful thing life was! She could not grasp it yet, but somehow, in some mysterious wise, the world was changed;—not the moon-lit world of romance alone, but the great day-lighted world, where people suffered and rejoiced and grew strong.

And just as the barge came opposite the glittering lights of the Piazzetta, beyond and above which the luminous shaft of the *campanile* rose straight and white, tipped with its golden angel, the men began to sing "*Santa Lucia*." And once more a voice rose above the others, fresh and clear as ever:

"*Sul mare luccica*
L'astro d'argento;
Placida è l'onda
Prospero il vento."

And, as the bobbing lanterns disappeared down a black side-canal, the ringing voice echoed still from out the darkness:

"*Santa Lucia, Santa*
Lucia!"

XVIII

Search-Lights

XVIII[ToC]

Search-Lights

"I should not so much mind if there should be no moon to-night," said May, dipping her hand over the side of the boat, to feel the cool, soft wash of the wave.

"Nothing could be lovelier than this," Pauline assented.

It was evening again and the girls had the gondola to themselves. They were skirting the low shore of the Lido, fragrant with the breath of new-mown hay, vocal with the chirp of crickets and the dull, rhythmic thud of the waves upon the beach. The sky was overcast and the water was dark, save just ahead, where the gondola light cast a pale reflection, wavering softly from side to side, with the motion of the courtesying prow. The twin towers of San Servolo, its massive buildings and sparse lights, had been left behind, and now the gondola was approaching San Lazzaro, wrapped in silence and shadow, like the good monks who pace its quiet

paths.

Neither of the girls had felt inclined to talk, yet their sense of mutual companionship was peculiarly near and intimate. Both had been absorbed in the memory of the same stirring scene, and though Pauline had only viewed it from the outskirts she had divined something of the nature of her sister's experience. She felt intuitively that it had been more to the young girl than a gratification of vanity, or even a revelation of her own power. And yet in their overt consideration of the great event, they had dwelt, hitherto, more particularly upon its practical aspects,—the reticence and courtesy of the band of musicians, the really considerable sum of money taken, the hundred-franc piece which had appeared in the receipts, and Uncle Dan's studied innocence in connection therewith. The fact that May had escaped recognition had also been regarded as cause for rejoicing.

May had been glad to find that, unknown to her, her sister had been among the audience. Her presence seemed, in retrospective wise, to sanction and sustain her action. If Pauline was there all was well.

As they glided tranquilly along the line of the fragrant shore, the regular dip of the oar marking the passage of the seconds, like the soft, lisping tick of certain pleasant old clocks, the nine-o'clock gun roared its admonition from the deck of the "guardian of the port," and the bells of San Lazzaro jangled sweetly on the night air. And then it was that May roused to the need of speech.

"And you knew me at once?" she asked,—not for the first time indeed, for that was a very vital question.

"Yes, I knew your voice, and when we came a little nearer I knew the way you held your head."

"And you didn't mind?"

"No; I think, myself, it's rather strange that I did not. But it seemed perfectly natural and right. I believe I took it all in from the first moment—just how you had undertaken it for the sake of the poor Signora, and how then you had forgotten the Signora and forgotten yourself."

They were silent again, while the gondola rounded San Lazzaro and turned toward home.

"Do you know what I thought of while I was listening to you?" Pauline asked, as the lights of the Riva appeared in their line of vision, glimmering remotely on the shore and in the water. "Especially when you were singing that glorious *Patria*? I thought of what Signor Firenzo said about your voice, and of what you said yourself, that first day in Venice,—about finding a soul here."

"You did?" May exclaimed; then, in a lower voice: "So did I!"

They had passed San Lazzaro, and San Servolo too was receding astern of them before May spoke again.

"Pauline," she queried, presently, "did you see Nanni's gondola come up from out the lagoon in front of us?"

"Yes, I saw it. How ghostly it was, with his solitary figure, and then that tragic face of his in the light of the lanterns!"

Suddenly, as she spoke, a broad beam of white light swept the long line of the Riva, and leapt to the point of the *campanile*, striking the golden angel into

instantaneous brilliancy.

"What's that?" cried Pauline, startled at the suddenness of the apparition.

"It's a search-light," May answered. "See! It comes from the man-of-war over by Sant' Elisabetta. There! Look there!"

The light had dropped from the *campanile*, and now it shone full upon the masts and rigging of an East Indiaman lying off San Giorgio Maggiore. Each rope and spar stood out in the intense white light, distinct as if cased in ice.

"*La luce elettrica*," Vittorio observed, unable to suppress his pride in this new sensation furnished for the delectation of his Signorinas.

"Pauline," said May, with grave emphasis; "Nanni knew me."

"You are sure?"

"Perfectly. I saw it in his face,—and, besides, that is all he could have meant by his message. You didn't hear that, did you?"

"No; and he left you a message?"

"Yes; when we landed at Quattro Fontane this morning, and found Mr. Daymond there—did you notice that he seemed to have something to say to me?"

"Yes;—I noticed."

"He wanted to tell me that he had been walking on the beach with Nanni, and that Nanni had gone back to Milan and had left a message for me."

"And the message?"

"The message was,—'*addio e grazie!*' Don't you see?

He was thanking me for the singing. I think he knew that I was singing for him."

The light had sprung to the tower of San Giorgio, whose straight shaft stood out in new intensity of martial red, its golden angel gleaming like a belated echo of the angel of the *campanile*.

"Singing for him?" Pauline repeated, yet as if she already half understood.

"Yes, the song of exile. It was just then that he came up. I'm sure he knew that I was thinking of him as I sang, for there was a look in his face that I shall never forget."

"Tell me why, dear."

"Yes; I will tell you why, though it's rather a long story," May answered, yielding to an imperative need of confession. "I can't quite account for it all, but, up to last night, I had always felt perplexed and disturbed about the man. He made me feel a great many things I had never felt before. It seemed to me as if I had never before known a single thing about—anything real,—about any human creature but myself. And yet I suppose the very reason why this haunted me so was because I did not understand. I felt always that there was a mystery, something I couldn't get hold of,—and you know how I do hate a mystery."

As May forced her thoughts to take shape, she felt that it was her own mind rather than Pauline's that was being enlightened. It was as if Pauline must understand,—as if it were Pauline who was making things clear to her. Yet Pauline did not say a word. She only listened, her head inclined a bit, her eyes intent and comprehending.

"I think," May went on, "I think it must have been something really high and fine in him that made the sordidness of it all seem so intolerable. I suppose it is as Uncle Dan says;—these things are a matter of race. I think Nanni must have more than his share of the family inheritance. Did you never feel it, Pauline?"

"Yes, there was certainly something impressive about him," Pauline admitted.

"I'm glad you thought so, too. Well, do you know, Pauline, it came to me last night like a revelation, that I had been all wrong and morbid about it. I remembered how he had said to me, one day when I was talking to him about coming back to Venice: 'You mistake me and my life, Signorina.' It did not impress me so much at the time—something drove it out of my head;—but, suddenly, as I saw his face last night, I seemed to understand what he meant."

They were passing near two fishing-boats moored to a cluster of piles, a single deck-light shining clear and steady, reflected in the water like a long yellow finger. The men had deserted the boats and were swimming somewhere out of sight in the darkness, their voices sounding curiously near and distinct across the water.

"I suppose it was the song that touched him," May was saying. "It is such a beautiful song, and the moment I began singing, I felt as if it had been written expressly for him. Pauline, he had a look such as a man might have who was facing a great renunciation, with the spirit of a hero. And it came to me like a flash, that a man who could look like that need not mind where he lived, or what his service was. And when I heard to-day that he had gone back to his work, I was not at all surprised, and

I was not even sorry for him, as I should have been yesterday. I felt as if I understood."

May had been speaking fast, with an eager, half questioning manner, as if everything depended upon Pauline's agreeing with her. Now she paused, and looked into her sister's face, close beside her in the dim light. And Pauline returned her look with one that set her heart at rest.

"I think you have discovered something very deep and true," she said, gently. "And it is one of those things that nobody can tell us, that we must discover for ourselves. But, May," she added, after a moment's reflection, "I don't believe we need think of the man's work as mean or sordid. I should think it might be a very valuable sort of service that he renders at the hospital. Do you remember that day, the first week we were here, when we were waiting for the sacristan at the Madonna del Orto, and a little girl on the quay fell down and hurt her arm?"

"Yes; I remember,—and how quickly Nanni sprang ashore and picked her up."

"Well;—do you know, May, there was something in the way he bent over the little thing and examined her arm to see if it were really hurt, that impressed me very much. His touch was so gentle, and there was so much intelligence in the way he did it, that I have thought, ever since, what a blessing it must be to have such a man about in a hospital."

"Yes," said May, thoughtfully,—"perhaps that is why he chooses that life. That would explain a great deal. I am glad you reminded me of it, Pauline,"—and again she reached her arm over the side of the boat, and let the cool water slip through her fingers, watching the little ripple they made upon the

surface. "Perhaps that was what Mr. Daymond meant when he said he had had a talk with Nanni, and he did not think that I need have any more anxiety about him,—that he was doing the work he could do best, and that he was happy in doing it."

"And you had told Mr. Daymond, before that, that you were disturbed about it?" Pauline asked, with a swift, uncontrollable contraction of the heart.

"Yes; we had a talk about Nanni the evening of the illumination. Pauline," May exclaimed, with a sudden change of tone, "what a waste it is that that nice fellow hasn't any sisters!"

"Who? Mr. Daymond?"

"Yes; he would make such a perfect brother. He is so dear, and good, and—*unromantic*!"

As the words fell, crisp and incisive on the still night air, their point and meaning piercing like finely tempered steel to Pauline's innermost consciousness, the search-light flashed out again, striking full upon the Salute. For a fleeting instant the glorious dome curved white and luminous against a lowering sky, vanishing again as the light was withdrawn. Pauline caught her breath, and the blood raced through her veins. She was startled, she assured herself, by the suddenness of the flash.

When she spoke, her voice was tranquil as ever, yet curiously shot through with feeling.

"If Geoffry Daymond told you that," she said, "I think you may feel satisfied."

"I do," May answered, noting with surprise that her sister had given Geoffry Daymond his full name;—it was not Pauline's way. "Yes, I do," she repeated, "it is a great relief."

It was only for a moment that Pauline's interest in her sister's story had wavered. She had listened, and with unerring comprehension, thanks to which she had not been misled as another might have been.

"There comes the moon out of the clouds," she exclaimed. "Take us where we can see the moon, Vittorio."

"Si, Signorina."

They had come opposite the Salute, and now the prow of the gondola turned in at the narrow *rio* that runs between the great church and the lovely old Abbazia of San Gregorio. There were deserted gondolas and other craft moored at one side of the little canal, and as they pushed their way past them, the oar lapped the water with the peculiar sound it makes in passing through a restricted passage. They glided under a low bridge, beyond which the moon appeared, just issuing from a bank of cloud, and, a moment later, they had floated out into the Giudecca, among the tall black hulls of the shipping lying there at anchor.

"How good and genuine the moon looks after those search-lights!" May exclaimed, with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Yes, but they were a wonderful sight," Pauline maintained.

"Perhaps so; but they were artificial, and one does like things to be natural."

They had rowed the length of the Giudecca, watching the moon's vicissitudes among the clouds, and now they had once more turned toward home, making their way through one of the prettiest *rios* of the Tolentini quarter.

"I suppose," Pauline remarked, as they came out upon the Grand Canal, "that, in a deep sense, artificial things,—of the good kind,—are just as natural as things we have no control over. I suppose we get our search-lights from Nature, only in a more round-about way."

"Perhaps we do," May replied; adding, with apparent irrelevance, "and I'm not sure that I should be willing to have missed it."

That same evening, in the fever ward of a Milan hospital, two figures were standing beside a narrow cot in earnest consultation. The patient was a child of ten. The little face had the look of many another little fever-stricken face, but the hair that lay tossed upon the pillow was of exceptional beauty.

"Can we save her, Signor Dottore?" It was the nun who spoke.

"We must," the doctor answered, with quiet emphasis.

He stooped and lifted in his hand one of the disordered tresses. It was neither blonde nor auburn, but pure gold, the lovely gold that sometimes shines in the heart of the sunset. Even the nun felt the beauty of it.

"Did you ever see such hair as that?" she asked.

He laid the tress back upon the pillow, very gently, and, looking into the quiet eyes of the Sister, he answered:

"*Never but once.*"

XIX

"Decus et Praesidium"

XIX[ToC]

"Decus et Praesidium"

The search-lights of that evening's talk had betrayed more to Pauline Beverly than the transitory trouble of her sister's mind. In vain did she try to dwell only upon what May had told her, upon the awakening of imagination and feeling that had been revealed in the clear depths of that singularly limpid

nature. Unlike as the sisters were, they were yet of closely kindred fibre, and no one but Pauline could have so clearly apprehended or so justly gauged the true significance of the experience which the young girl herself had found so perplexing. Yet because Pauline so well understood it, the thought of it did not wholly possess her mind, and she could not escape an unwilling cognizance of something deeper and far more disquieting, that she had caught a glimpse of in her own soul.

There was nothing of the repellent reserve in Pauline's character which makes itself evident to the chance acquaintance. If she was innately reticent, it was in a deep, still wise, to the exclusion sometimes of her own consciousness,—and it was this inner reticence that had been violated.

In the succeeding hours of the night, her mind recurred many times to that sudden vision of the Salute dome, flashing, white and luminous, upon a shadowy background. It had been the apparition of an instant, and yet it was so clearly imaged on her brain, even now, that every slightest detail stood out in her memory, distinct as in the light of day. And simultaneously with that, a search-light had flashed upon the hidden places of her own soul, and she had had a vision which she knew that no veil of reserve, impenetrable though it might be, could annul. The night had fallen upon the Salute and wrapped it from sight, but was it the less real for that?

In the first dawning light, she got up, and, throwing on a loose gown of soft, pink cashmere, she stepped out upon the balcony to get a breath of air. She did not look toward the Salute; something withheld her from doing so, as if it had involved a self-betrayal which she shrank from. She turned,

instead, to the east, where, rising pale, but distinct, against the faint rosy flush of the sky, was the tower and dome of San Pietro di Castello. A single star still pricked through the deepening colour, but, as she looked, it vanished. The dip of an oar, that sound that never ceases, night nor day, on the great thoroughfare of Venice, reached her ear, and a bird chirped in the garden. Each suggestion came to her, isolated and delicately individualised: the star, the oar-dip, the bird-note. She felt herself played upon, like a passive instrument, as if a light hand had just touched one vibrating string and another, careless of definite melody.

The colour in the east deepened to a wonderful rose, against which the tower and dome of San Pietro stood out in purest dove-colour, and more birds chirped, and one burst into a little gush of song. Pauline, standing on her high balcony, wrapped in the soft cashmere whose rosy colour seemed a reflection of the dawn, felt herself in some peculiar sense a partaker in that exquisite awakening; and, in truth, the surface of the water was not more sensitive to the growing wonder than the delicately expressive face, turned still to the east. Not until the sun had fairly risen, and swept the colour from the face of the sky, did she look toward the Salute. There it stood, beautiful and strong and invulnerable, but behind it were dark rain-clouds, heaped high and threatening.

Then Pauline moved away, with a feeling of assured strength and peace. She could not account for it, she could not have defined it; she only felt as if she had come face to face with a great experience, whether of joy or sorrow she could not tell,—but whatever its countenance she felt serenely ready to meet it.

She slept a deep, peaceful sleep after that, nor did her mind misgive her when she awoke again, to find that those threatening clouds had taken possession of the sky, and were drenching the world with rain.

They went to the Belle Arti that morning, Pauline and May and Uncle Dan, their faithful squire. Vittorio took them there in the hooded gondola, himself radiant in a new "impermeable" hat and coat, which gave him the appearance of a gigantic wet seal, swaying genially on its supple tail.

As they looked out from the shelter of the *felze*, more impermeable than many rubber coats, May observed that it was a terrible waste of opportunities to go about in a *felze* with a mere uncle and sister.

"What do you take it that a *felze* is for?" asked Uncle Dan, enchanted with her disparaging tone.

"I suppose it was originally invented for the accommodation of lovers," May replied, with her familiar air of scientific investigation, which caused Pauline to smile contentedly.

"Other kinds of conspirators are said to have found it convenient," Uncle Dan observed. "Thieves and cut-throats, for instance. But it strikes me as being a very good place for an uncle, especially in weather like this."

"And you, Pauline,—what is your vote?"

"I should think it was a very excellent place to be in with an uncle, or——"

"Or?"

"Or anyone else one thought particularly well of," and Pauline gave her sister an appreciative smile.

Then May, usually rather unsusceptible to such

quiet demonstrations of affection, put her hand in her sister's and said: "Pauline, you are a good deal of a dear!" and there was a certain bright sweetness in the young girl's face that caused Pauline to think of the dawn, and of what a perfect hour it was,—and that there was never any hurry about the sunrise.

They spent an hour, catalogue in hand, among the less important pictures, while Uncle Dan amused himself with some old engravings, and then, having earned their reward, the two girls strolled back to the great saloons, where nothing less splendid than Tintoretto and Veronese makes its appeal to the conscience of the sight-seer.

Pauline descended the steps to the main entrance hall, from which one has the best view of Titian's *Assumption*. She seated herself on the broad divan, and looked up through the arched doorway to the glorious soaring figure, that seems, not up-borne by the floating cloud of cherubs and angels, but rather drawing all that buoyant throng upward in its marvellous flight. Geoffry Daymond, pausing at the top of the short flight of steps a few minutes later, face to face with Pauline, fancied that he discovered a subtle kinship between her countenance and the pictured one; and then, as he turned to compare them, he unhesitatingly gave his preference to the girl of the nineteenth century, with the rare, sylvan face and the uplifted look. As she became aware of his approach a lovely colour stole into her face, and there was a welcome in her eyes which she was too sincere to deny.

"We wondered whether we should find you here this rainy morning," she said, as he came toward her down the steps; and she spoke with such quiet composure that a sudden leaping emotion that had

stirred him was checked midway.

"I was looking for you," he replied. "We came across the Colonel and he told us you were here."

"We always come here when it rains, because the light is so good," Pauline observed, wondering that she could think of nothing better to say.

"Yes; I know it. I passed your sister just now, standing with her back to the world at large, studying a Tintoretto portrait."

"May really understands a good deal about pictures," Pauline remarked, still wondering that nothing but platitudes would come to her lips. She had left her seat, and they were moving toward the steps.

"It seems an age since I have seen you," said Geof, neglecting to reply to her last observation, which, truth to tell, he had scarcely heard.

"It does seem a good while," she admitted. "Not since Quattro Fontane;" and then she laughed. "That was only yesterday morning, but one doesn't reckon time by clocks and calendars in Venice."

"If the clocks and calendars would only pay the old gentleman as little attention as we do," Geof rejoined, "how lucky we should be!"

"I wonder whether we should really want time to stand still,—even in Venice," said Pauline, as they passed up the steps into the room where May had last been seen.

"That would depend," Geoffry answered, and there was that indescribable something in his voice which she had heard more than once of late, and which she always found extremely discomposing. The passing

of that breath of feeling was still troubling the waters of her consciousness when, a moment later, they were met by the other three.

Mrs. Daymond came forward and took both Pauline's hands, and, straightway it seemed to Pauline as if a bountiful beneficent power had encompassed her round about.

"Geof," said his mother, turning to him, with the unfailing grace of tone and gesture which was a source of perennial delight to the Colonel; "I find that Colonel Steele's Venetian education is only half accomplished. He does not know San Simeone. Supposing we all go and see the old hero. It has stopped raining and the men must be longing to have us come out again."

"I'm always ready for St. Simon," Geof declared.

"I don't see how we ever overlooked him in the books," said May. "He sounds perfectly tremendous, with his hollow cheeks and his solemn dead face."

"Then we are all going?" and Mrs. Daymond looked questioningly at Pauline who had not spoken. It was as if the elder woman had divined something of the unwonted reluctance that had possessed itself of the young girl.

"Do you mind if I stay behind?" Pauline asked, hesitatingly; "I should like to stay on here for a little while, and then I should be glad of the walk home. So please take both the gondolas."

"Polly doesn't like sharp contrasts," the Colonel remarked, as he passed, with the others, out of the gallery and down the stairs. "She has probably got her mind going on some little private inspiration, and she doesn't take to the idea of a dead saint."

"No more do I!" Geof announced, with a reckless inconsistency, that took no thought of appearances; and, having seen the party safely ensconced under the *felze* of Pietro's gondola, he retraced his steps, his head slightly bent, his hands clasped behind him.

The rain had ceased, and a timid relenting had stolen into the west. Geof turned and glanced from the sky to Vittorio's gondola which still lay moored under the shelter of the bridge.

"If I only dared!" he said to himself; and then, flinging his head back, with a free, boyish gesture, he strode on to the entrance of the gallery.

Pauline had returned to her seat before the great Titian. She was the only person in the room at the moment. Geof came across the stone floor with a ringing step which caused her to turn, in startled certainty that it was he. There was something in the manner of his approach that affected her like a summons, and she rose to her feet.

He came up to her and, looking straight into her face, he said: "You must come out. The sun will be out before we know it, and one always wants to be out-of-doors when it clears."

"Are the others waiting?" she asked.

"No; Pietro has taken them off. But I think you are right; St. Simon is not what we want this morning. Supposing we make a call upon the Rezzonico Madonna."

"But I was going to walk home," Pauline demurred, quite sensible of her own futility.

"You can't. It's really very wet. Do come and take a look at the Madonna."

She turned, with neither protest nor assent, and walked with him down the room. She felt that she had relaxed her hold upon herself. What was it she was yielding to? Something imperative and masterful in him, or something still more masterful and imperative in her own soul? She did not know, she did not consider. She walked with him down the stairs, and out into the outer world, and she knew that she would have walked with him across the very waters of the Canal with the unquestioning faith of the pious little princess whom legend carries over dry-shod to her prayers.

Pauline spoke only once, and that was when her eyes fell upon the gondola coming to meet them.

"The *felze*!'" she exclaimed, under her breath. If Geof heard her, he was too wise to admit that he did.

"To the Madonna of the Palazzo Rezzonico," he commanded, quite as if Vittorio had been his own gondolier. It crossed his mind that he ought to apologise for his presumption, but he was not in the mood for apologies.

The *felze* was arranged for three, the little box-seats taken out, and the chair in place of them; Geof took the chair. And Vittorio rowed them swiftly with the tide, up the Canal, past the tiny striped church of San Vio, to which the pious little princess crosses, in the pretty legend, and on, to the stern and massive Palazzo Rezzonico. The gondola turned down the narrow *rio* that flows beneath the poet's memorial tablet, and a few strokes of the oar brought them to the feet of the Madonna.

Geoffry and Pauline stepped out of the *felze* and stood looking up at the lovely figure in its flowing garments, with hands clasped upon the breast, and

head bowed beneath its floating aureole of stars. Vittorio, too, stood with his eyes fixed upon the benignant face, and perhaps an *ave* in his heart if not on his lips.

Presently Pauline said, softly: "You were right."

"I was sure you would think so. It's only once in a while that one knows exactly what is good for one; but then,—*one knows*!"

"Did you ever notice the inscription on the pedestal?" he asked, after a moment. "Hardly anybody ever does."

"Yes; *Decus et praesidium*," Pauline read.

"For grace and protection," Geoffry translated. "Isn't that pretty?"

They went inside the *felze* again, without giving any directions to the gondolier, and Vittorio, delightedly equal to the occasion, rowed on, through intricate, winding ways, with many a challenging *sta-i!* and *premi-o!* and out across the Giudecca Canal. Neither Geoffry nor Pauline was disposed to talk, yet neither of them felt the silence oppressive. After a while they found themselves floating far out on the lagoon beyond San Giorgio. The steady pulse of the oar went on, and the light grew in sky and water.

"See how clear the Euganean hills are," Pauline said, looking out through the little window to those deep-blue pyramids, rising beyond the wide, opaline waters.

Geof, who was again sitting in the little chair, came down on one knee, to bring his eyes on a level with the window, and, steadying himself with his hand on the tufted cord, looked forth and saw the first ray of sunlight break through the clouds and

gild the waiting waters. And then he turned from that glistening light and looked into Pauline's face.

The gathering brightness of the world outside seemed only to deepen the shadow and the sheltering privacy of the low, arching roof above their heads; the rhythmic throb of the oar seemed to grow stronger and more imperative; the onward impulse of it seized and mastered him. He had meant to say so many things, to urge so many reasons, to make such humble entreaties. But, looking into that tender, gracious face, one thought alone possessed him, and he only said: "Pauline, I love you!"

Then a wonderful light came into the face he loved, and she answered, as simply as a little child: "I know it, Geoffry!"

"It seems as if the lagoons belonged to them, this evening, eh, Polly?"

Uncle Dan and May were standing in the balcony, watching the receding gondola. The stars were shining clear and high,—the lagoon would be strewn with them. Far away on the horizon, May could see a revolving light, coming and going, coming and going. She longed to be out.

"There's the Grand Canal," she suggested modestly.

"Yes; there's the Grand Canal. But, Polly, what do you say to making a call on the Signora?"

May turned her bright eyes to those of the old soldier, that gleamed questioningly, almost entreatingly, under the grizzly eye-brows.

"That would be very nice," she said, suppressing a little sigh of resignation.

"Good girl!" cried the Colonel. "And, look here, Polly, perhaps it's you who are to be the support of my old age, after all. Who knows?" and he cast a glance, half humorous, half reproachful, in the direction in which the gondola had disappeared. He was not yet quite reconciled to the trick fate had played him.



"It seems as if the lagoons belonged to them this evening"ToList

Then May slipped her hand inside his arm, in her own confiding way, and, looking affectionately into the seamed and seared old face, she said, with roguish sweetness: "I tell you what, Uncle Dan! We shall have to grow old together, you and I!"

THE END.

Transcriber's note:

Corrections made to text:

Page 97: changed Nannie to Nanni
Page 139: changed Siennese to Sienese

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A VENETIAN JUNE ***

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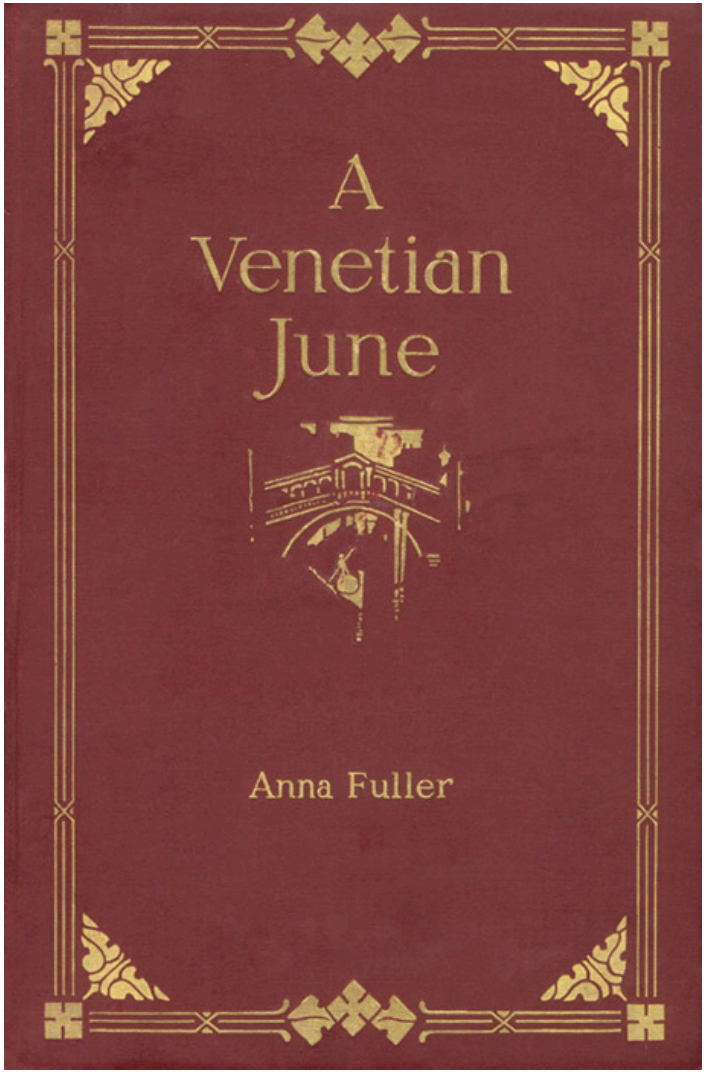
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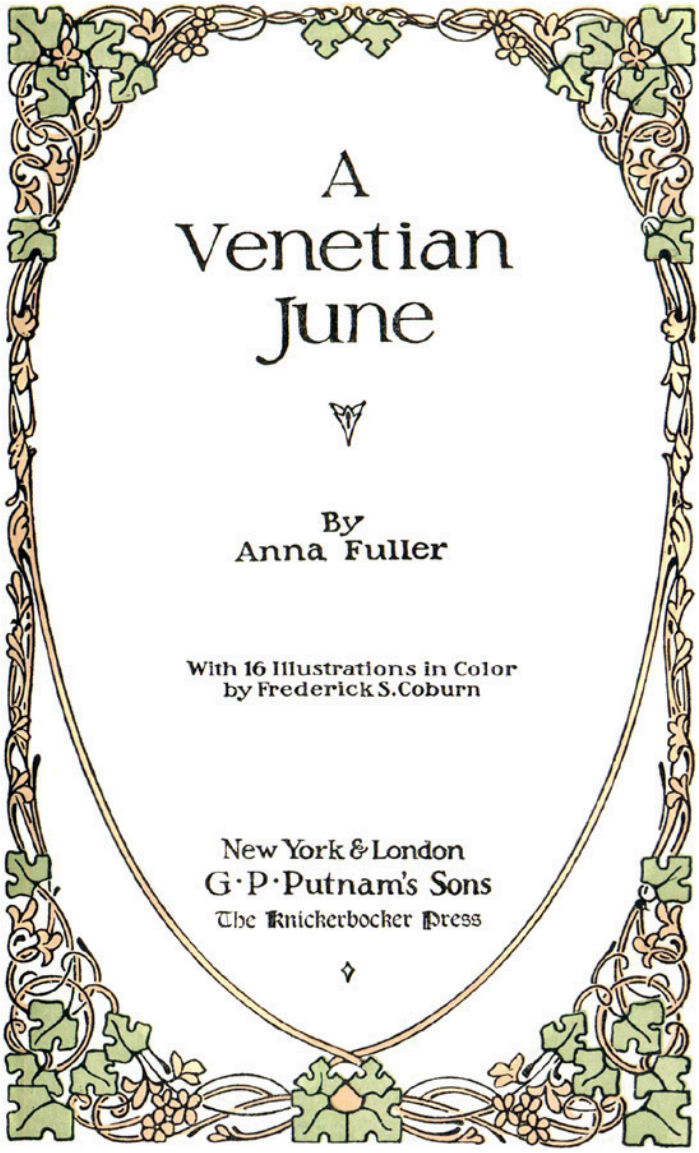
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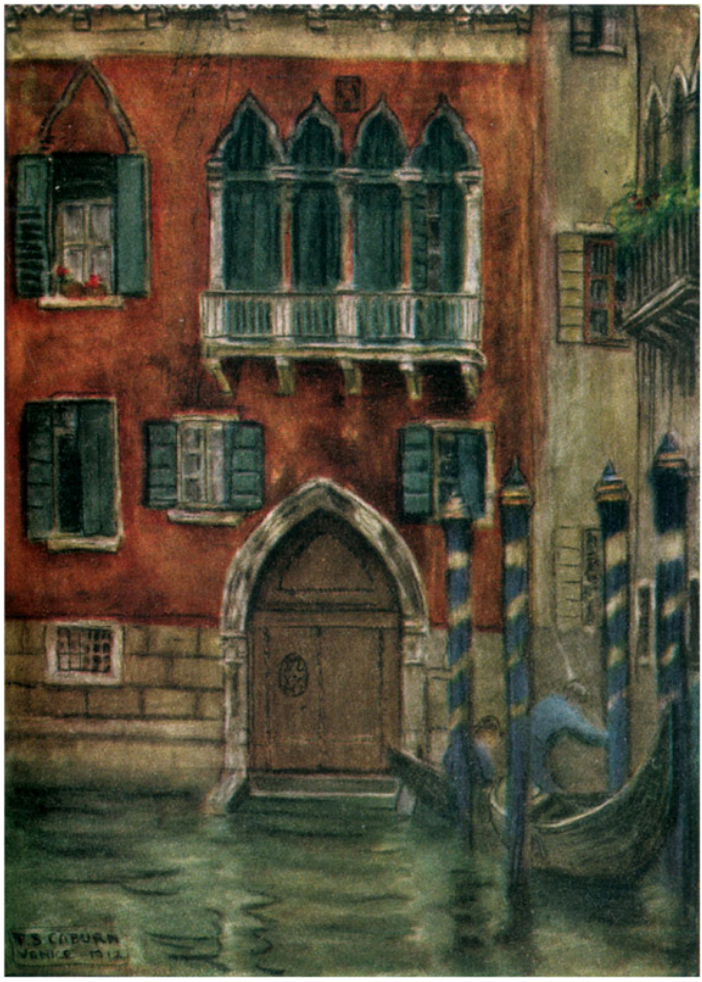
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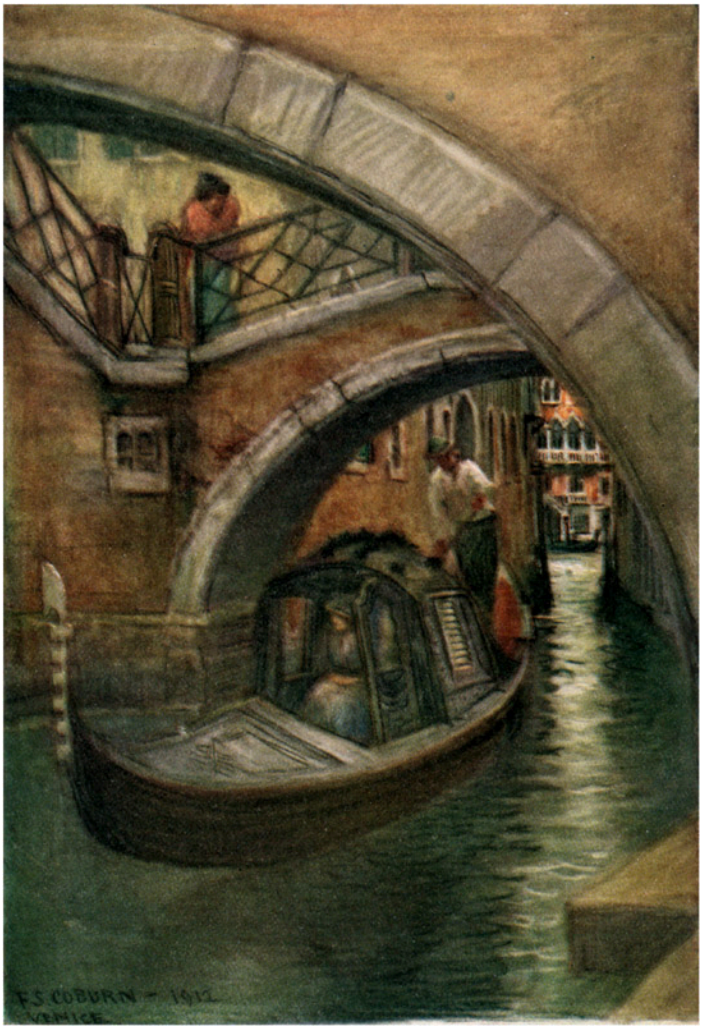
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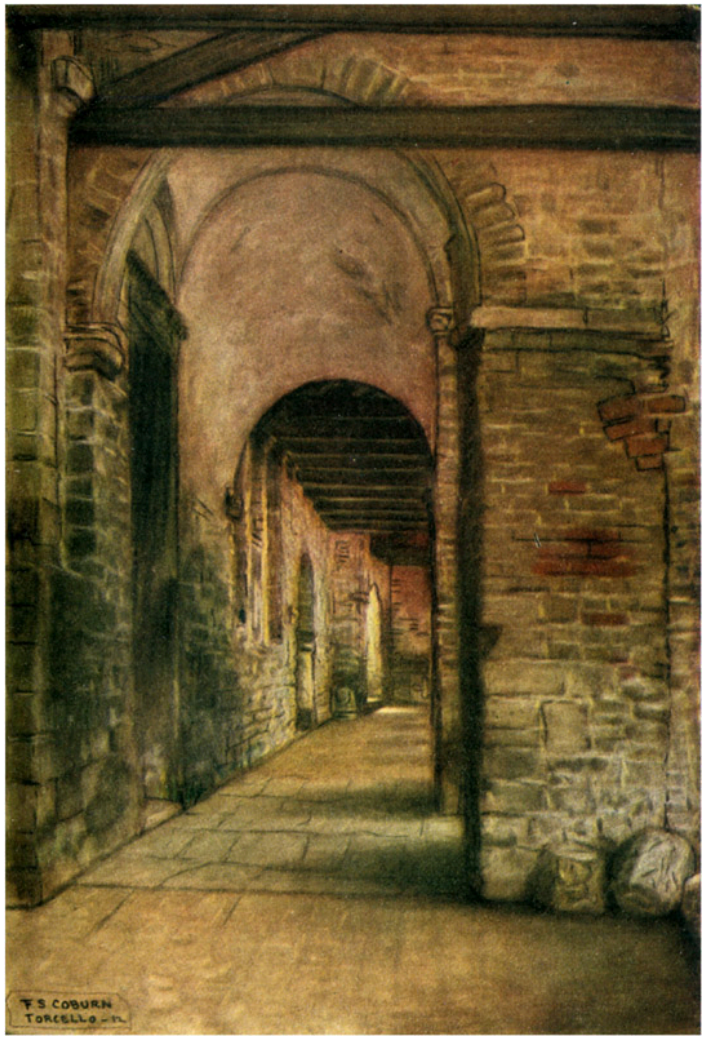
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