

it does not do to give way to all her fancies you see, Signora. III! Cecco," he cried, as if struck by a sudden thought. "Cecco, come with me and hold the lamp; that big door takes two hands to open it."

Cecco leaning against the doorpost—a dark silhouette against the light within the cottage—laughed mockingly, and ejaculated "*Grazie!*" an Italian's more refined method of saying, "I'll be hanged if I do!"

Cecco's elder brother was not so obdurate; he was a solemn-looking fellow with large eyes, and a mouth which formed a horizontal line across his face, and which shut up with a peculiarly tight expression. Pietro rose, saying, "Poor Beppe! we won't let him go alone. I'll come, Beppe." And he went out into the darkness, overtaking the Englishman and his brother just as they reached an old gabled gateway, about twenty yards up the rough stony lane.

Beppe opened this, and they stumbled down some rude steps into a courtyard, where a sound of dropping water came through all the roaring wind, scrambled in the darkness over wet grass and pebbles, fell across a big stone table in the midst, and finally reached an old black oak doorway.

"Here, Pietro, you open this," said Beppe, handing the key to his brother, and the lamp and sheets to the traveler, then while Pietro struggled with the rusty lock he softly turned into the gloom and ran away.

Pietro's expression as he found himself left alone with the stranger on the black threshold of the old villa was a study. Terror and superstition struggled with indignation and anger, while the discomfited feeling of being a dupe predominated over all. He ran wildly out to the courtyard to call his brother, but the traveler, not wishing to be left alone outside his inhospitable shelter, detained him, saying, "What does it matter? you know the way as well as he does, I suppose," and so brought in the unwilling guide, who having ejaculated, "God save us," and crossed himself, let shrugs of the shoulder and lifting up of the eyes do the rest of the duty in expressing his overpowering feelings. He led the way into a large old room, with quaint oak furniture and faded portraits of the *cinque-cento* style on the walls. "H'm," thought the Englishman, "this looks like civilization at least, if not comfort. Are these family portraits?" he asked.

"Sì, Signore Inglese—yes, I will tell you of them tomorrow. Here is the bedroom, sir. I am sorry we have no comforts for you." He spoke in a hurried, gasping sort of voice, and hastily setting down the lamp, he commenced fussily to spread the coarse sheets he had brought from his mother's cottage. As he did so his eye fell on a chair placed carelessly in the middle of the room, as if it had been lately used.

"What are you staring at?" asked Arthur Mostyn.

"Oh, nothing, sir, nothing," ejaculated Pietro, crossing himself, and shutting his mouth till it became a long line dividing his face. He threw the coverlid all awry, and asked if the Signore wanted anything else; but, quite forgetting to wait a reply, with a hasty "Happy

night!" vanished into the darkness, slamming the heavy oak door with a reverberating clang.

Mr. Mostyn, who had several questions on his tongue, stood open-mouthed, gazing into space. As Pietro had done when left by his brother, so our hero did on being deserted in his turn, shrugged his shoulders, and ejaculated "Humph!" His English *sangue freddo*, as the Italians call it, stood him in good stead, and for want of an interlocutor he talked to himself. "This is queer—let us say unusual. With great difficulty I obtain refuge in a house large enough to shelter an army, but nobody is willing to accord it. An ancient crone mutters warnings, a boy threatens evils, two men refuse to enter, and a third is struck dumb at the sight of an empty chair and flies! It seems a quiet old house enough. Let us look round my room."

Holding aloft the lamp, he saw that the huge bedstead had antique yellow hangings and fringes, that the chairs were high-backed and of carved oak, an antique *predella* stood near the bed, and on the sides of the room were two huge oak chests, some ten feet long, which served as divans, but without cushions. These chests had feet like lions' claws, and curious old iron hasps. In the olden days every Italian family possessed such chests, and filled them with the hereditary store of linens and brocades. Every bride had one to hold her *corredo*. The Englishman put down the lamp. "Nothing very alarming on the outside, I must confess, unless the skeleton lives in that musty cupboard in the wall, or the ghost is shut up in one of those chests; perhaps the ghost of Griselda is there," and, half laughing, he opened the one on the left. The heavy lid lifted slowly. As he opened it he fancied he heard a sigh or some sound, but on holding the lamp lower to see well inside there was—*nothing*. "Black emptiness—no more," said Arthur Mostyn, "just what was to be expected, so I will waste no more time."

He left the lamp burning in case of need—for it flashed across his mind that he had no matches with him. In spite of the discomfort of a bed made by the hands of a frightened man, instead of a "neat-handed Phyllis," he was so tired that sleep soon came to him, or would have come, only that just as he was passing into oblivion a voice seemed to say, in good Tuscan, "*Chimè*, what shall I do?"

Starting up wideawake, he exclaimed, "Who's there?" Dead silence replied, or rather did not reply. He looked round the room, even shook out the heavy curtains at his side, and then returned to sleep again, saying reassuringly, "A dream—nothing more." Sleep tarried longer, but at last it approached again; Arthur Mostyn's regular breathing announced the fact. And now other sounds became audible. The lamp spluttered and flickered, cast wonderful shadows and fitful lights as the shades of darkness gathered about it—a hard breath, a half sigh, came from somewhere—not from the sleeper in the yellow-curtained bed. The chest on the right side creaked and opened slowly; something like the white face of a terrified girl peeped out. The sleeper turned uneasily. The