

A Dangerous Prize.

PAUSILIPPO is a suburb of Naples, stretching along the western side of the beautiful bay, about which so much has been said and written. Along the steep banks that descended abruptly to the sea are many charming villas facing directly on the water, and reached from the main road by zigzag paths, through gardens rich in all the luxuriant growth of Southern Italy.

In one of the prettiest of these villas lived an English family; and at the time of the present story some tender passages were taking place between the eldest daughter of the house and Lord Ardley, whose yacht was in the harbor at Santa Lucia, whence it was his frequent custom to sail across in the dingy when the wind was favorable, both as a short cut, and to avoid the dust, jolting and evil odors along the Chiaja. The usual companion of these journeys was a lad of eighteen, an Englishman who, some few years previously, had been cast adrift at Naples by one of those strange chances which are liable to befall a young sailor who finds himself with a brutal captain and a drunken crew. After many shifts and much misery, by dint of sheer honesty and industry—virtues at a considerable premium in this city—and aided by a quick intelligence, he had acquired a fair knowledge of the language, and a decent position as guide, courier, commissionaire, as occasion offered. His name was Frank Lloyd. Lord Ardley had taken a fancy to him, and attached him to his special service during his stay in the neighborhood, finding him both useful and discreet.

Now it happened that adjoining the Villa Santangelo was an untenanted house, placed under the care of a gardener, named Baldelli, who occupied a small house close to the water's edge, which served for bathing apartments when the main building was tenanted. With old Baldelli, lived his niece Teresina, an exceptionally beautiful girl of fifteen, who had rather a hard time of it to make things comfortable for her surly and avaricious uncle, to whom the expenditure of every soldo for household necessities was agony. Teresina was a great favorite at the villa, where she was often required to assist the ladies with her needle; and there some of her happiest days were spent, much indeed to her own advantage; for, taking an interest in her, they had taught her habits and modes of life which raised her considerably above her countrywomen of the same class. Deprived of her early parents, she mixed little in the society of her own class; for Baldelli was strongly averse to anything in the nature of outings or junketings, as involving expense, and his miserly habits made him unpopular amongst his neighbors.

Teresina had been for some time attached to Frank Lloyd, much to the displeasure of old Baldelli, who hated him very cordially for the way in which Lloyd steadily set his face against the monstrous impositions attempted by the old man, though he frequently put little commissions in his way for flowers, fruits, poultry and the rest. Baldelli's son, Luigi, was also a thorn in the sides of the lovers. He was a typical specimen of "those Neapolitans," a term of contempt used specifically for a loafing set in Naples by the surrounding towns. Just a shade above the lazzaroni, who are fast disappearing, they are as idle and worthless a set of cubs as are to be found in Europe. Work is hateful to them; they would sooner fitch a shilling than earn ten any day; their time is spent around the doors of cafes, in the piazza, on board the bay steamers, in the gardens of the Chiaja; always in gangs, gambling, idling, smoking, singing, sometimes—but rarely—fighting, never working. Where they find means to dress their unclean bodies in the tawdry pseudo-respectable clothes they wear, and for the lavish display of collars and cuffs—the less said about their under attire the better—is a mystery.—Luigi had graduated highly in this set; but, having a notion to settle down into a less precarious mode of life, and thought that Teresina might prove a useful appendage, and, perhaps, by her cleverness and industry, supply him with means for his own particular pleasures.

Affairs thus stood when a stroke of fortune, which befel Teresina, gave rise to the trouble of which this story tells. Like many wiser and better people than herself, she occasionally dreamed dreams, and often threw away her small savings in the public lotteries upon some "lucky number" which was to make her fortune. One day, however, she found herself to be the one in a thousand on whom Fortune smiles. She was the winner of five hundred pounds. It is needless to say with what alacrity she presented herself at the *banco di lotto*, and her disappointment on finding it was impossible to pay the money over to her. She was too young. She must bring her parents or guardian. With a

heavy heart she returned to Pausilippo, no longer thinking of the joyful surprise she had in store for her darling Frank, when she should place the money in his hands; and tell him to take her with it; but with the presentiment of some misfortune that must arise from her uncle's greed and her cousin's envy. But she had been taught a courage and independence from her association with the English, which determined her to make a stand for her rights.

"Chut! What do you so late?" growled her uncle as she entered the house.

"I have been to the *banco di lotto*, my father.

"Lotto! what have you to do with lotto? O little devil! It is not enough that you should beggar me by giving macaroni to any blind beggar who passes, but you must play lotto, eh? while Luigi sleeps all day, and drinks anisette like a prince! Curse you both!"

"But I have gained, my father. And it was not with your money, but some that I earned from the English ladies."

"Gained! Humph! Nine or ten lira for your trenta centesime, I suppose.

"I have won twelve thousand five hundred francs."

Old Baldelli dropped his hands to his sides, fell back in his chair, and, with open mouth and staring eyes, seemed to have lost all power of utterance.

"It is true, Uncle Baldelli; and you are glad of my good fortune, are you not?"

"Twelve thousand! Why, we shall be rich, my little Teresina. But where is the money? Let me look at it, let me feel it;" and his lean fingers trembled with excitement.

"I have not yet received it. They said you must apply for it. But here is the ticket."

Old Baldelli seemed lost in thought.

"Yes, yes; I will apply for it," he said; "and then what gay doings, you shall have the brightest silk scarf in Naples, and a silver necklet worth forty francs, if I can't get it cheaper. And when you marry Luigi—"

"But I am not going to marry Luigi."

"Ah, but that will come in time.—And we will buy the little orchard on the hill above, and your old uncle—your loving old uncle—shall do all the work, and Luigi shall play at *moro* and go to the theatre, and the little Teresina shall look after the house and be as extravagant as she pleases." And the old man chuckled over this pleasant arrangement. But Teresina's spirit rose at this.

"I will never marry Luigi, uncle Baldelli, for I have plighted myself to Frank Lloyd."

Her uncle looked black at this; but any care about his niece's marriage was, at present, absorbed in thoughts about money. He saw no connection between the two at the time. He took it for granted that what was her's was his, and if she would not have Luigi—well, it was very desirable, certainly, but Luigi must look to himself.

"And you will take five thousand francs for yourself, uncle; for, although my father, I believe, left you sufficient for my support, I would not appear ungrateful. For the rest, I wish it to be given to my future husband."

Baldelli stopped in the middle of some calculation he was making, looked fixedly for a few moments at his niece, and over his face came a look that frightened her.

"Bah, little fool, you know not what you say! Will you sacrifice your family to this accursed fairfaced foreigner?"

"The foreigner loves me. My family's kindness is but small."

At this moment a servant from the Villa Santangelo appeared to request Teresina's presence at the house.

"Say no word of this to the English people," was her uncle's injunction as she left.

"I will say no word, but I will do as I have said;" and there was a determination in her voice and look that there was no mistaking.

Baldelli sat for a long time, never moving but to make a gesture of anger, or to utter an oath. Presently he went to a cupboard, took from it a bottle of wine that had laid there many a month, and drank it at a draught. And then, as the unaccustomed fumes mounted to his brain—for he rarely took stimulants—he paced the chamber to and fro, excited and restless.

It was late when Teresina returned, and it was with surprise she found herself accosted by her uncle in amiable tones.

"You have said nothing at the villa of your fortune, child?"

"Nothing my father."

"And you will not marry that poor Luigi, and you will give all this money to the Englishman?"

"It is only just, uncle Baldelli."

"And your poor uncle will remain in Pausilippo, and work, work for his plate of macaroni, and his dear little Teresina will be quite proud and ashamed of him!" and there was a sneer in the old man's tones, and a dark look in his

eyes, that belied the softness of his speech.

"No, no," replied his niece, "never that, I hope. But you will go about this for me to-morrow, will you not?"

"Yes, I will see to it. And now we will take a cup of wine in honor of my Teresina's good fortune. See here, it is ready;" and he took from the side table two tumblers already poured out.

"Ah, this is very kind of you, my father. But how bitter it is!"

"Finish it, finish it," he said fiercely; "a bumper to the lucky number!" and she, not caring to irritate him, complied. She shortly after retired to rest, drowsy and tired.

Half an hour afterward the old man crept toward her room, muttering.

"La Sonnambula! La Sonnambula! Luigi said that the opera at San Carlo was like real life. Sonnambulists do strange things."

And he passed into her room.

Frank Lloyd was sitting in a boat waiting for his employer at the foot of the steps of the Villa Santangelo. He was surprised to see a light burning in the gardener's house at so late an hour; but he knew that Teresina often sat up late after her uncle had retired; indeed, he had had many a sweet stolen interview with her at the window, when waiting as he waited now. At this moment he heard the voice of Lord Ardley, joined in a duet with his *fiancée* at the villa. "He won't come away just yet," said the sailor to himself; so, taking a clean jump over a strip of water that separated the two basements, he clambered up the gardener's window.

He placed his hands on the window-sill, and was drawing himself up, and about to give the usual signal, when, to his intense astonishment, he saw old Baldelli staggering from the opposite room, half dragging, half carrying his niece.—What could it mean? Was she ill? Was it fresh air she required? He had not much time for thought, for the window opened suddenly outward by Baldelli, struck his hands from their hold, and he had only time to drop lightly into the water beneath. As he came to the surface—great Heaven! he could neither shout nor prevent it—the slight form of his sweetheart was hurled from the window into the black water below; and the old man, not daring to look upon his handiwork, closed the window abruptly and disappeared. It was the work of a moment for the young sailor to reach the body of his sweetheart, and to place her in his boat under cover of a sail. But what was he now to do with his precious burden, which lay, safe but still unconscious, near him? He might indeed place her under the care of the ladies at the villa; but then he feared the chatter of the servants, nor did he know what power her uncle might have to claim her from them, for Italian courts are slow to recognize the interference of foreigners in domestic difficulties. While he was still in doubt he was joined by Lord Ardley, to whom he related his adventure. The nobleman listened to the agitated voice of the poor lad, making a shrewd guess at their relations, he said:

"Your sweetheart, eh, Lloyd?"

"Yes, sir; not a doubt of it."

"And you're going to marry her?"

"Now more than ever, sir. Ah my lord, you don't what difficulties we've had to fight against, nor yet how dear she is to me;" and then he told the whole story of his attachment as they rowed vigorously, each at an oar, toward Santa Lucia, where Teresina was placed on board the yacht.

On the following day Baldelli, haggard and anxious, at an early hour, presented himself at the *banco di lotto*.

"I have come as the guardian of my niece Teresina, to claim the money she has gained in the lottery."

"Very good signore. And first the ticket, if you please."

He eagerly presented it.

"All right and in order," said the clerk. "She presented herself here yesterday?"

"She did."

The clerk took out a large roll of notes which he began deliberately and without haste to count.

"What a stroke of fortune for one so young!"

Baldelli nodded his head impatiently. The clerk tied up a bundle of notes, and began to whistle "Addio! mia bella Napoli."

"Well, well," said the gardener sharply. "Am I to wait much longer?"

"But, signore, you seem to be in a greater hurry than the signora."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, we wait the arrival of Teresina Baldelli, of course." ("Stupid old imbecile!" muttered the clerk to himself.)

Baldelli looked aghast, and then blurted out:

"Don't I tell you she has told me to get the money? Have you not got the ticket? What more do you want? Am I not her guardian? Do you doubt that?"

"Not for a moment; but the money will be paid in her presence alone."

"But how can she come here? She is ill. The excitement was too much for her."

"Ah, then we must wait until she has recovered."

"But this is too much. Am I not a respectable citizen? Am I not—"

"Basta! That will do, signore;" and the clerk replaced the notes in his desk.

Old Baldelli fumed and swore, whined and entreated, with no effect.

"Give me back the ticket, then. I will report you to your superiors!"

"The ticket? Certainly. Here it is!"

And then the gardener left the office.

The clerk had seen a good number of strange things in his time, and was given to the observation of the countenances and emotions of his fellow-men; so he wrote a note to the chief office, where in due time Baldelli presented himself. And the official at this place was altogether polite and amiable, and much regretted that it was against the rules to comply with Baldelli's request; but if the signora was unable to attend, but still anxious for the settlement of her claim, why, he would accompany the gardener himself to the house for the purpose. To which the gardener objected strongly, and retired with a face so worn and anxious and frightened, that this amiable official thought it as well to send a detective officer to look after the old man, and if possible, to get to the bottom of the mystery—for queer things often happen with these letterlies.

The result was that nobody had seen or heard anything of Teresina, and old Baldelli was unable to account for her disappearance, and maintained a dogged silence on the subject, for the disappointment of his hopes and the consciousness of guilt had completely unnerved him. All the circumstances were so suspicious that the police felt justified in connecting him with her disappearance, and accordingly he was brought before the head of the police to answer for himself.

In the meantime, Teresina, having recovered consciousness, was gradually brought to by the assistance of the stewardess. On being questioned by Lord Ardley, she gave a truthful account of the events of the previous night, but said that, from the time she retired to her room, her mind was completely blank. She related with some blushing and hesitation her conversation with her uncle about the lottery ticket, not forgetting his unaccustomed liberality in giving her wine to drink to her good luck.

"Pretty clear, my lord, I think—drugged," said Lloyd.

"Very likely. Horrid old villain!—But what's to be done now?"

"With your permission sir I will go into Naples and see what is going on."

"By all means, Lloyd. And look here, I am going to be married in a few days, and if Teresina doesn't wish to return to that pleasant home of hers, I've no doubt she will make an excellent attendant on Lady Ardley in our coming cruise about the Greek Islands."

"Many thanks, my lord."

On going ashore, Lloyd learned that old Baldelli had been interrogated, with the result that he now suggested the possibility of her having drowned herself; that she occasionally walked in her sleep; that he had found her door and the window open on the morning of her disappearance. This was contrary to his statement at the office, nor could the body be found in the tideless water. He refused to say anything further, and was sent to jail to await his trial on suspicion.

Lloyd readily obtained permission to see him.

The old man filled with rage and remorse, cried to him to "begone!" but dare not look in his face.

"Assassin, I know all!"

Baldelli cowered in a corner, and said nothing.

"I know all, and I almost hesitate to relieve your villainous mind from the terror that agitates it. Under God's hand, but through no fault of yours, she lives."

"Lives," and his whole aspect changed. "Then why am I here? Curse their meddling! Who says I murdered her? And you, fair-faced fool, what do you bluster here for?"

"Gently, gently, old man. There is such a thing as attempt to murder, for which a considerable term in the galleys is not unfrequently given. Teresina lives, and so far as the crime of murder is concerned, you are not guilty, by an accident. Now I mean to make terms with you. Listen: I witnessed your dastardly attempt, and I saved her life. She will not return to you; she will become my wife; she will bid you farewell, and will not be told of your wickedness; and she will carry out her intention for your benefit, and give you the five thousand francs she promised you, though you more richly deserve five years at the galleys. If you consent to this, good—If you refuse, I at once proclaim you to

be the attempted murderer of your niece."

"*Maludetto!* May every evil—"

"Enough. You are no fool, though a great rascal."

The programme was carried out in its entirety. Baldelli was released on the appearance of Teresina, who, alive to some rascality on the part of her uncle, was satisfied to receive from him a scowling assent to her marriage with Frank Lloyd.

After some months in the Mediterranean with Lady Ardley, she went to England, her future home, as Mrs. Lloyd; and it was not till after the old man's death that she learned the true story of the tragical event that might have followed the winning of what came near proving a "Dangerous Prize."

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