

# The Artist of Florence

A short story by James de Mille

IT was evening in Val d'Arno. The sun was sinking behind the horizon and twilight was descending upon the glorious vale. There lay the garden of Italy enclosed by mountains on either side, green and glowing in its verdant and luxuriant fertility, shaded by its groves of olive and cypress, with long avenues of stately trees. Flocks and herds grazed in the fields, vineyards flourished on the mountain declivities, and in the distance arose the summits of the wooded Apennines. The classic Arno flowed through the valley, bestowing gladness and plenty on every side, its waters rolling on in slow and most melodious motion. On every side, on the plain, on the sides and summits of the hills, everywhere appeared the white villas of the nobles, now hidden by the thick foliage of surrounding trees, and encircled by gardens where bloomed the most gorgeous and odoriferous flowers, now standing alone and lifting up their stately marble fronts surrounded by magnificent colonnades. In the midst of this lovely place, a queen over all around, lay Florence, the dearest and most charming city of the south-Florence, whose past glows with the brilliancy of splendid achievements in arms, arts and song, whose present state captivates the soul of every traveller, and binds around him a potent spell, making him linger long in dreamy pleasure by the gentle flow of the Arno's waters.

"Here," exclaimed Byron, in a rapture, as he looked down from a neighboring mountain upon this earthly paradise--"here--

"--the Etrurian Athens claims and keeps  
A softer feeling for her fairy halls.  
Girt by her theatre of bills she reaps  
Her corn and wine, and oil, and plenty leaps  
To laughing life from her redundant horn"

Twilight came on, and soon the moon arose, throwing a gentle glow upon the scene, and shedding around it a more bewitching influence. It was an

evening fitted for pleasing meditation, such meditation as the poet loves, and for the interview of lovers. The gardens of Boboli never appeared more beautiful than now, for the solemn shadow of the groves was relieved by the soft illumination of the broad paths; the sheets of water glistened in the quiet moonbeams, and every statue and every sculptured form was invested with a new and indescribable beauty. Upon the summit of a hill within these gardens, sat a youth and maiden engaged in most earnest conversation. The maiden was exceedingly beautiful, with a face which reminded one of the Madonna of Murillo, so gentle, so tender, and so bewitchingly lovely. The youth sat at her feet upon the green turf, and with his head turned back, gazing upon her, there was disclosed a noble and most handsome countenance. His long hair, black as night, fell from his forehead, and his eyes burnt like stars in the paleness of his face. There was an expression of genius stamped upon his lofty forehead, but there were care and anxiety in its frown. The stately form of the Palazzo Pitti was near at hand, and in the distance lay the city, with the stupendous dome of the cathedral, and the lofty form of the beautiful Campanile.

"Stella," he said, in deeply musical tones--"Stella, you know all my love and the desires of my soul. All are fixed upon you. Fame and glory I only wish for as the means of obtaining you. But O, hard is the task and difficult is it for an unknown artist to gain the hand of the proud Count Borelloni's daughter. I would not grieve you by taking you without his consent, even if I were able."

"Bless you! God bless you, my noble Mario for those noble words! Do not seek to draw me from him. Willingly would I give up all-wealth, and power and all-to live in obscurity with you. But my father loves me so fondly, that if I were to leave him, he would die. Let us wait, and perhaps he may overcome his prejudice toward you."

"He dislikes me because I am poor and unknown. But," exclaimed Mario, with a haughty glance, "the time may come and will come, when he will not be ashamed to acknowledge me. Art can ennoble the poor and obscure."

"I know you will become great, Mario. I know that your name will be spoken with honor, and that before long. When I first saw you here in Florence, when I afterwards heard you tell me your love as we walked by the waters of Lake Perugia, I knew that you would become famous."

"And then, if I ever gain fame and honor, all shall be laid at your feet, Stella."

"You can wait then, and seek for fame, Mario, to give you acceptance in my father's eyes. You can wait, for you know my constancy."

"I know it, and I would trust it always. I know your noble soul, Stella, its lofty qualities lead me captive, and I worship you as a divinity."

The impassioned youth bent down before her, but she prevented him, and suddenly asked:

"How do you proceed with your painting?"

"Well, I am proceeding well, for I am inspired by the thoughts of Stella."

"Then I inspire you, do I?"

"O Stella, you fill my soul with new conceptions of angelic beauty, and while your image dwells in my mind, I look back upon it and place every feature, every expression living upon the canvass! If this picture is completed, your father's love for art will make him respect the creator of this new piece."

"And he will honor you and love you."

"It must be completed in two or three months now. I seek new ideas of loveliness from you, Stella, and then my picture receives them."

"And suppose you fail, Mario." said Stella.

"Fail? O I cannot. But if I do, then will I despair? No, I will go to Rome and devote myself entirely to art. But it is late, Stella. We must go, and I will see you home before your father returns."

And the gardens of Boboli were empty.

What city is so delightful as Florence on the afternoon of a lovely day in early spring, when the sun glows above from an unclouded sky, and the Arno flows on through the midst of the city, amid its magnificent palaces, beneath its lovely bridges. Then beauty reigns everywhere. The Lung' Arno, the Casino, the Via Calziolajo are thronged with carriages, with horsemen and footmen, with offices and soldiers, men, women and children. Beautiful flower girls carry around their bouquets and bestow them on the stranger, expecting but never asking some little douceur in return. The gloomy palaces of the middle ages, the magnificent churches of early times, towers and colonnades, statues and fountains, arrest the eye and charm the beholder. All is joyousness and beauty.

Among the throngs of carriages which rode along the Lung' Arno and down to the Casino, none was more noticed than that of the Count Borelloni. It was a splendid equipage drawn by two fiery horses, to guide which the utmost skill of the coachman was needed. The old count was of a remarkable appearance. His countenance was noble and his air commanding. He was noted through Florence for his wealth and taste. Artists of every kind found in him a patron. It was at his palace that Mario Fostello had first attracted attention by his genius and the beauty his pictures. He had seen Stella, had loved her, and had spoken to the old count, telling him that he would seek after fame if he would bestow his daughter upon him. But the indignation and pride of Borelloni rose high, and he contemptuously ordered Mario to withdraw and never again to enter his house.

There was one feeling in the heart of the old count which far exceeded every other, and that was an intense love for his daughter. Beautiful, high-souled and accomplished, she was worthy of the highest station in the land, and such a station he desired for her.

They now rode in their carriage-father and daughter; an aged oak and a young and tender vine, one supported the other, which gave it beauty and attractiveness.

Stella attracted the gaze of all by her exquisite beauty, but there was one whom she saw walking swiftly past, the sight of whom sent a thrill through every vein-for well she knew the tall and stately figure of Mario.

"Stella," said her father, "there goes the ambitious painter-that is the man who had the unspeakable presumption to ask your hand of me. He, a paltry artist. See him as he walks along there."

Stella's blood rushed to her face, and her frame trembled with agitation. She turned away her head to hide her confusion.

"Look, do you see him?" said her father.

"Who?" said she.

"Why, Mario, the artist, but he is out of sight. What is the matter, Stella? Tell me my child, are you ill? Why are you so pale? You change color. You are sick, my daughter. We must go home."

"O no, father. Do not go home. It was but a passing faintness, I will soon get over it."

"You are very pale, my child."

"It is nothing, father. But look-what is the matter with the horses?"

The horses seemed fretful and impatient. They reared and kicked, they were unruly and troublesome. The coachman looked pale and anxious.

"The horses? Nothing!" said her father. "They are quiet enough. I like to have a little spirit in my animals."

Many of the passengers in the streets looked with alarm upon the animals whom the count dreaded so little.

"Good day, Borelloni," exclaimed a gentleman on horseback; "a most beautiful day!"

"Your servant, signor," answered the count. "It is a lovely day."

"Your horses seem vicious, they are very unruly, are they not!" said the gentleman.

"O no-they are a little excited-they will presently become calm. A very great number of people are out to-day."

"Yes, a large number," replied the gentleman, looking somewhat anxiously at the horses.

After a few moments he rode away.

"Your excellency?" said the coachman to the count.

"Well?" he replied.

"Your excellency's horses are unmanageable, or will be so soon. They are not used to these crowded streets."

"If they do not become so soon, they never will be," said Borelloni.

The horses began to plunge, and rear, and snort more violently, so much so, that all the people were terrified and got out of the way. The coachman seemed unable to control them.

Mario was in the Casino, walking beneath the shadow of the trees. The cool breeze from the mountains fanned his fevered brow, as he walked hurriedly along.

"I am poor. I am an artist, unknown, uncared for but by one, and that one is the noblest of her sex. I live only to gain her. When my picture is finished, I shall be no longer obscure. When my fame exceeds that of the

haughty count, I may well demand his daughter." Such were the thoughts that passed through his mind as he walked on.

"I heard his words," he proceeded. "I heard his contemptuous words as I passed the carriage, and know the scorn which he feels for me. But Count Borelloni," he exclaimed, raising his hand, "I will make you know that birth alone does not constitute greatness. I will make you know that a lofty soul can struggle upwards."

Suddenly, far away from the Lung' Arno, sounded a loud reverberation of many voices, an immense outcry mingled with the deep rumbling of carriage wheels, and the fierce neighing of horses. There were sounds like the rush of a great multitude, and cries of terror mingled with one another in appalling confusion.

Mario started, and turned back. Casting his eye toward the city, he saw far away in places where the trees did not intercept his view, numbers of men rushing to and fro.

He stood alone in the utmost perplexity, for no one was near to tell him the cause of that great uproar.

The clamor and rumbling of wheels came nearer and nearer, rattling over pavements, dashing against obstacles. It came nearer, and soon he saw a carriage dragged on with terrific speed by two furious horses, who, without driver or postilion, came on unrestrained. The carriage was knocked against trees and dashed violently against stones. In it there was an old man leaning back with a pale face, expressing intense agony, and close to him, clung the form of a young girl-her arms wound round him, and her dishevelled hair floating in the breeze.

"O God! Stella!" exclaimed Mario, in unspeakable horror. "Stella!-my God, she's lost!"

With one bound he rushed in the midst of the course taken by the infuriated horses. His cloak fell from him, his hair flew about his pale and fixed countenance, and like a rock in the centre of a torrent, he stood in the way of the horses!

He waved his hands wildly-he shouted to the steeds. On they came, lessening for a moment their speed-there was a bound forward. Mario clung at the reins with the grasp of a drowning man-there was a whirl of dust, a rush of the multitude who followed after, and then with a sound like the sudden peal of thunder, burst forth the acclamation of a thousand deep-toned voices:

"Saved, saved!"

They raised Mario up-they placed him in the carriage, and bore his insensible and much bruised form slowly to the palace of Borelloni. All Florence rung with the tidings of the deed--the name of Mario was spoken everywhere, and the city honored the performer of so bold an action.

"Now what will Borelloni do to reward the gallant preserver of his own life and his beloved daughter!"

"He will give him a thousand piastres," said one.

"He will enrich him for life," said another.

"He will do no such thing," said a third. "Mario is no mercenary man. He despises rewards of that kind. I will tell you. He loves the count's daughter."

"Ah," said all.

"And he deserves her. But for him she would not have lived to have his love, nor would Borelloni have been living to refuse."

"Does he refuse?" said they.

"Mario said nothing to the count. It is an old story. He has loved her long. But the count, who refused him once before, will not now retract his word, even to the preserver of his life."



Mario was cared for and soon recovered. He spake not a word about his love to Borelloni. He would not ask him now, for then he would seem to demand payment for his action, and such a thing he scorned-even though it should bestow upon him the hand of his beloved.

"I will wait," said he. "I will raise myself to an equality with her, and then Borelloni shall not refuse."

It was summer, and the sun glanced brightly, gloriously, over the silver waters of Thrasymene's lake, for such we love to call the lake which the Italians name Perugia. The wind blew softly over the plain, and the rich groves all covered with luxuriant foliage shaded the quiet fields beneath, which more than two thousand years before had resounded with the roar of battle. The hills encircled the plain on three sides, protecting it in winter from the cold blast and causing it to bloom with perennial verdure. The lake rippled on the shore of the other side, and stretched away-a sheet of molten silver, till it watered the bases of distant hills.

In this charming spot which every traveller loves to view, had the Count Borelloni reared a summer palace. It lay on the southern shore of the lake, half way up the mountains, and in from its roof a scene like one in fairy land burst upon the view, The cool winds which blew here were an alleviation to the heat of summer and Florence, with its noise and dust, was gladly exchanged for the quiet scenes of this enchanting spot.

There was a boat upon the lake, and the enjoyment of sailing formed a chief attraction to visitors, for Borelloni's villa was always open to his friends. Yet at times there was danger attending this pleasure, for tempests would arise and the waters would be converted into furious waves.

"How beautiful is this lovely place?" said the count to his daughter, as they walked upon the terrace! "What a scene is this for a painter. See where the sun is setting over yonder-those clouds tinged with myriad tints surrounding him in glory! See above us, how intensely blue the sky, how clear the atmosphere! Look at the opposite shore-how green, how glowing in fruits and flowers-all again appearing down in the depths of this unruffled lake! O Italy, my country, how beautiful thou art!"

"And father, look at these heights around us, and on the western shore-these bold rocks with their summits all covered with spreading trees. How grandly they set off the picture!"

"If I were a painter, I know no scene that I would choose to portray, rather than this."

"Since you respect and love art so highly, father, why did you not learn this?"

"I was too busy in my youth, Stella."

"Who of all you know is best in this art?"

"I know a great many excellent ones-many who excel in landscape painting-many who are good in historic pictures, but of all whom I know, the one is undoubtedly the greatest, the one who excels all others in mingled grandeur and loveliness of conception, and who approaches nearest to the grand old masters is he-the artist who saved us from death--Mario."

"Mario!"

"Yes, and if he had not been guilty of such great presumption, my palace and my esteem would have been thrown open to him always-first, because he is chief of artists, and especially because he saved my darling's life."

"Yet is he so presumptuous, my father?"

"My daughter! Stella Borelloni, can an obscure man aspire to the hand of the fairest in Tuscany?"

"He may not always be obscure."

"Why do you speak thus to me, Stella? Can it be possible that you-But no, it is not. I will not think of it nor speak of it."

And shortly afterwards they went within. Stella retired to her chamber, and thought of her father's words. They gave her hope. He no longer despised Mario. He could not. But he was angry at his presumption. Obscurity was Mario's greatest fault in his eyes.

"I will take courage," she thought. "Hope comes to me. Mario's greatness of genius has been confessed by my father. It will soon be confessed by the world."

Meantime, Mario had become wearied of the heat of Florence. He longed for quiet and seclusion. He wished to spend the sultry summer months in some cooler and more agreeable retreat.

"By the lake of Perugia," thought he--"Stella lives. If I go there I can see her as she walks or rides around. I can feast my eyes upon her, although I am resolved to remain unseen myself. I will take my picture there, and receive that inspiration which her angelic beauty always gives me."

He came to the lake and dwelt in a small house upon its banks, scarce half a mile away. Daily he would go to the top of a cliff near by, and when Stella walked out his eyes followed her, and she, always thinking of him, knew not that he was so near.

When she departed to ride along the borders of the lake, or for a sail upon its waters, he watched her, and sometimes encountered her dressed in disguise.

For two weeks he remained there, and kept his resolution of never making known his presence. But soon an occurrence took place which caused him to be discovered, yet in such a way that he rejoiced at the discovery.

It was a sultry morning, and desirous of coolness, Stella with a few other friends resolved to take a sail upon the lake. There was a threatening aspect about the horizon, but it was unnoticed by those who were intent on pleasure. Borelloni remained at home, being employed at some business.

Mario sat at his usual place on the summit of the rock, and watching the preparations, knew their object. An awning was placed above the boat—a high and broad awning, which could effectually keep off the hot rays of the sun.

Mario looked with anxiety upon the preparations, for he knew the signs of the weather, and feared the appearance of the sky. All was calm, oppressively calm, and fearful to one who knew how suddenly storms arise under such circumstances. He would have warned them, but he did not dare to, for fear of discovering himself. So he was compelled to sit in a state of inaction and watch with feverish anxiety the approaching excursion.

The party left the house, they were four in number, and the heart of Mario throbbed violently as he recognized the form and features of Stella among them. They went gaily to the boat which was now completely ready, and soon were seated beneath the awning. As there was no wind, sails were useless, so they were rowed out into the lake.

Two or three hours passed away, and still Mario sat gazing upon the boat which was carelessly lying still in the middle of the lake. Mario watched them with anxiety, and occasionally cast a troubled glance at the sky. He would have made signals, but they were too far away to notice them.

The sky became darker, and there came a peculiar thickness and oppressiveness to the atmosphere. Still the boat moved not.

"Can they be asleep? Can the rowers be insane?" thought Mario. "The sky is clouded, and they do not notice it. O heaven, what can they do! They cannot see the sky for the awning hides it."

His attention was now attracted by a sudden voice from Borelloni's villa. The old count appeared upon the terrace, pale and terrified, and waved his arms in the air, and screamed to those in the boat. The shout went across the water, followed immediately by the tolling of the great bell at the villa, which was now all in confusion. Borelloni rushed about like one

distracted, sending his servants after boats to go out and save his daughter.

"My daughter, my daughter," he cried, "my beautiful Stella. O my daughter!"

And with frantic gestures he rushed down to the water's edge, and shouted to the boat-at times gazing at the angry sky above.

Those in the boat had heard his voice and seen the confusion at the villa. Instantly the rowers put out their oars and turned the boat's head toward the shore. They rowed fast, for hope was trembling and preparing to take her flight from the souls of the endangered boatmen.

The deep tones of the bell, sounding loudly and fearfully, went over the country, arousing multitudes of men, who left their fields and came to see the cause of such unwonted noise.

Mario sat on the rock till the boat turned toward the shore. Then viewing the dark sky and the occasional flash of lightning, he descended with fear to the shore of the lake. A half hour passed, and but three miles had been passed over. One yet separated the boat from the shore. One mile-a short period of time would suffice for the passage, yet in that short time what might not happen!

But soon all suspense was over. There gleamed a sudden flash of lightning over the whole sky, intensely, terrifically bright, followed by torrents of rain. There was a short pause, and then with a crash-a roar that sounded like the wild rage of an earthquake, burst the awful peal of thunder-then peal on peal, roar on roar, rolled in long reverberations along the sky, round the rocky shores, and the heavens grew more intensely black! The storm had burst upon them! Down came the blast of the tempest's breath, in an overwhelming torrent of wind, and the whole surface of the lake rose in wild surges, foaming and tossing.

When the first horrible confusion had passed away, all eyes were strained to where the boat had been. It was nowhere to be seen. Amid the gloom a few dark objects were all that could be descried in the foam of the

upheaving billows. There came a scream from that aged man who had watched the boat so intently-a despairing cry, and with his white hair streaming behind him, he dashed forward to throw himself into the water. The servants seized him and prevented him.

"My daughter!" cried the old man. "O my daughter, she has perished! Let me go to her!"

"Look!" exclaimed a voice, pointing to the water. "I see a dark form amid the foam. I see it-it is a man, and he swims, bearing something with him."

All eyes turned there. The baron revived, and again looked hopefully at the water, where the brave swimmer so gallantly breasted the waves.

But could it be his daughter?

They came nearer-nearer, and now the face was seen, and the hair, as it fell and rose above the water. It was-it must be-yes, that long, dark hair and those lovely features belonged only to Stella!

The old man bowed down his head and wept.

Nearer, nearer, and now all fear was gone, for the bold swimmer still showed an unflinching strength and energy. But his face was unknown. None had seen it before. Yet Borelloni knew it-well he knew it. The same face had appeared amid the death struggle, the dust and wild prancing of maddened horses on the Casino.

And now Mario touched the land. And now he bore his senseless burden through the crowd to her father's arms.

"O take her Mario, to the house-carry her there, or else she dies."

But Mario laid her down at her father's feet, upon the grass, and voicelessly, nervelessly fell down beside her.

They carried them both to the villa. They cared for them, and soon Mario opened his eyes and asked eagerly for Stella.

"She is saved, and well. She is with her father."

"Saved? then I am happy."

He arose, and all dripping as he was, left the house, in spite of the eagerness of the attendants.

"No," he said, "my home is near by, and why should I remain here? I will go. Leave me."

And he arose and left the house.

"Where is the saviour of my child?" said Borelloni, on the following morning.

"Gone?" said his attendants.

"Gone? Fools! Why did you send him away thus?"

"He would not stay, your excellency. He said his home was near by."

"Then go, I tell you, and search the country far and wide, and bring him to me."

After their departure, the baron remained in deep thought for a long time.

"Strange," muttered he, "passing strange, how this painter seems to be my genius. A good genius too-near in moments of peril. How he looked as his face rose above the waves, while he bore my daughter to the shore. Yet how can I give her to him? I cannot."

The attendants returned at evening. Their search was unsuccessful. But one said that a tall, noble-looking man had departed in the diligence for Florence at early dawn.

"'Tis well," exclaimed Borelloni. "I fear to meet him. Better is it that he should go."

Summer with its heat had passed away, and mild September had now come, when Florence again becomes delightful. The villa at Thrasymene was now forsaken, and the palace of Borelloni at Florence again was all joyous and thronged with people as of yore. Again the carriage of the count rolled along the Lung' Arno, and he received the salutations of his friends.

Stella was lovely as before, but in her face there was a more pensive expression than usual, a sadness that was not customary. For she had not seen him whom she adored—the brave youth who had twice esteemed his own life as nothing, in order to snatch her from death. And what could move her father if this could not? He was more thoughtful than before, and never spoke of that scene. He had never even offered to express his gratitude to her deliverer.

Yet that evening she was again to go to the gardens of Boboli and meet her lover. Her heart bounded with joy at the anticipation of coming happiness; and the moments seemed like hours, as they slowly, slowly passed away.

Again the beautiful gardens were arrayed in loveliness, and beneath the solemn shade of the lofty trees Mario again sat beside his Stella. They could hardly speak their hearts were full.

"And so you were long by Thrasymene and never came to me, Mario," she at length said.

"I would not do so. It was enough for me to be near and watch you."

"But not enough for me," she cried, with tears in her eyes. "O Mario! I am doubly yours, for you have twice saved me from death."

"Speak not of that," he said. "I must soon know my fate. My picture is nearly finished. In two days it will hang in yonder palace," said he,



pointing to the Palazzo Pitti. "For-what do you think-the Grand Duke has visited my studio, and told me to bring it there."

"The Grand Duke! Was he pleased with it?"

"He praised it in unmeasured terms."

"I knew so, Mario."

Blissful was the interview, and sad were the lovers to separate. But they had to depart, and soon Stella was at home.

Mario, filled with pleasing hope, looked at the beauty of the scene, and went out for a walk. He wandered toward the southern gate, and went out up a long avenue, where trees overhanging formed a long and shadowy archway. It was a still and peaceful walk at evening. He sat down at length behind the trunk of one of the trees, and fell into a reverie.

Soon he was roused by the sound of approaching footsteps. He looked down the road, and saw two men stealthily approaching, armed, and conversing earnestly in low tones. They stopped not more than two yards from him and sat down. Mario could not be seen on account of his concealed position.

"Federigo," said one, "this is bad business."

"What!" said the other--"a bad business?"

"I mean not bad, but dangerous. Now if it were only to take a few piastres, I would not care; but to kill a man, coldly and without provocation, is rather bad."

"But we get two hundred, you know?"

"Ah, there you are right. They will jingle pleasantly, will they not?"

The sound of a horse's steps was heard coming down the road. The men crept into concealment and were silent. Mario also preserved silence, and clenching his stout stick more firmly, waited the issue.

"He is coming," said one in an earnest whisper. "It is he-Borelloni."

Mario's heart leaped within his bosom at the word. He almost determined to rush upon the villains. But it would be premature, and he would be attacked. He could save the life of Borelloni more easily by waiting.

The horseman drew nearer and nearer. He was walking his horse slowly down the road. He soon came up a few yards from the spot where these men and Mario sat concealed. There he paused for a moment.

"Will he stop, or go back?" whispered one.

"No-hush!" said the other.

Borelloni came on, he came abreast of them-then one fired a pistol, and both sprang out. One seized the horse, while the other dragged the baron to the ground, crying:

"Say your prayers, old man. You must die."

"Villains!" roared a loud voice behind them, and Mario, springing out, gave one bound and felled the wretch to the earth. The other, frightened and surprised, stood in speechless astonishment. Mario rushed up to him and raised his arm to strike. The man fired. His pistol was knocked aside by Mario, and the next moment he lay senseless on the ground.

Mario came to Borelloni and raised him from the ground.

"Are you hurt?" he inquired.

"Good God! Is it possible!"

"I am Mario. I thank Heaven I am here to prevent these ruffians from executing their design. Can I assist you to mount?"

He assisted the count to get on his horse again. By this time a troop of soldiers, alarmed by the pistol reports, had come to the place.

"Take those men with you," said Mario. "They have attempted the life of Count Borelloni. And accompany the count to the city. But what-you are wounded."

"No, the bullet only grazed my head. Mario you have saved my life. I am speechless. I feel more than I can utter now."

"Do not thank me. Thank Heaven who sent me here. Good-night, my lord." And turning, he was soon out of sight.

Stella sat in her chamber that night thinking upon her interview with Mario. She lost herself in conjectures about the future-so dark, so obscure, and yet it might be-so bright and happy. The noise below told her of her father's arrival home, and she ran down to welcome him.

"My father! How late you are! But what!" She started back in horror at the sight of his bloody forehead. "Are you hurt? are you wounded, father?"

"I was set upon by two ruffians, and would probably have been killed, if--"

"Attacked, wounded! O Heaven! You shall not go out alone, father, you must not. You are feeble, and cannot now defend yourself."

She made him sit down, and tenderly washed his wound, and stayed the blood till the doctor came. After the wound was dressed the doctor departed and Stella spoke.

"You said you were saved, but did not tell me how, nor did you tell me his name. Do you know him?"

"Yes, I know him well, and have reason to know him?"

"Who is he?"

"Mario."

"Mario again? Great Heaven!"

Two days afterward Count Borelloni sat in his study, musing upon the strange occurrences of the few past months. His thoughts dwelt upon Mario, who thrice had been his benefactor.

"I cannot account for it. How intense, how absorbing, how wonderful must be his love for my daughter. He has treated my scorn with kindness. When I forbade him the house, he never came here. I admire, I reverence so lofty a spirit!

"Where would I be now-where would my daughter be, if Mario had not been near to save us, if he, careless of his own life, had not been our preserver? I wondered before. Twice he had come before me-a genius-a preserver of myself and my child. Now he comes again and saves me. It is wonderful! I am overcome. Pride cannot resist such greatness of soul-such magnificent actions, and Stella adores him. I do not wonder at it. Shall I then refuse to make her happy? A few short years are all that remain of life to me. I wish to leave my child happiness as her best inheritance. I can make her happy now. I can make a return to Mario for his generous actions. I can make myself happy in the contemplation of their joy. All is over. Farewell pride. What is birth and wealth and pride, when compared to the glory of such illustrious actions?"

He sat down at his desk and wrote as follows:

"Mario, you have conquered. I have treated you with scorn and indignity. You have returned it with kindness. You have saved my own life twice, and twice have you saved the life of one for whose happiness I would die a thousand deaths. Mario, I reverence your lofty spirit. I admire such noble feeling-such bravery and generosity. Come to my home. It shall henceforth be yours also. Come to my heart, which is proud to love and honor you. Come, and Stella shall be the reward which you shall receive as the best and most priceless gift of the grateful BORELLONI."

He rose from his chair and called for Stella. She came to him speedily.

"Stella," said he, "I have at last found one to whom I can confide you, who will be your protector when I am gone. What do you say to that? You change color-you tremble."

"O father, why now? Why not wait for a time? I am young. I will not-I cannot leave you."

"You need not leave me. Your husband shall stay here, you both shall cheer my old age."

"Father, I--"

"Read this, my child."

Stella glanced at it, read it hurriedly, and in a transport of joy flung her arms about her father's neck and kissed him again and again, while the tears stood in his eyes as he embraced his daughter.

"Yes, Stella, all is over. I bow before him and do him honor. This shall go to him, and he will come here to receive his reward." He gave the letter to his servant, and again sat down to receive the thanks and witness the happiness of his daughter.

An hour passed away, and a messenger came from the duke bearing a letter to the Count Borelloni. It was a request that in an hour he should come to the Pitti Palace. "For," said he, "I have lately received as an accession to my paintings, a picture of such rare excellence, such exquisite beauty in conception, and wonderful skill in execution, that I set no bounds to my joy in obtaining it. Knowing your passion for art, I have sent to you this notice of its reception."

The count hastened to prepare for his departure. He wondered what was the nature of the piece of which the duke had spoken so highly.

"It must be a wonderful painting," said he, "for the duke is usually sparing in his praise. It is probably one of Raffaele or Guido. Well, I will soon see it."

Stella felt a joy which words could not utter. She recollected all that Mario had told her of his picture, and of the duke's visit, of his flattering words of commendation-and she believed at once that his picture was the one he spoke of.

The count went off, and at the expiration of the hour entered the palace. He was received by the duke. He was led through the long suite of rooms where the splendor of royal magnificence is all unnoticed amid the charms of priceless paintings, for there the Madonna of Raffaele tells of the boundless depths of a mother's love, and there Murillo's Madonna breathes forth virgin purity.

At length the duke stopped before a picture covered by a screen. He turned to the count, and saying, "Now Borelloni prepare for a surprise," drew aside the curtain which covered it.

The count started, for not among all the galleries of Italy, not among the priceless collections of Rome, had his eyes ever rested upon so wonderful, so living a picture! It was a living, a breathing form, which there, drawing aside a hanging, seemed to come forth to meet the gazer. Upon the countenance there was the perfection of ideal beauty. Loveliness, angelic, heavenly, was radiant upon the face, and that face was one well known to him, for Stella stood there, but Stella-glorified and immortal.

"Wonderful! Miraculous!" burst from his lips. "It is the creation of a god. It is not the work of man! Who is he? Where is he? The genius who formed this? How could it happen that it should be Stella, my daughter? Who is the artist?"

"He is here in the next apartment," said the duke, and going to the door he spoke to some one. He returned, leading the artist.

"This is he," said the duke. "Mario Fostello."

"Mario!" cried the count. "Mario, my preserver!" And he ran up to him and embraced him.

"Mario, is all forgotten? Forgive me. But I wrong you in asking it."

The duke looked on in wonder, and could not conceal his surprise. But the count begged him to excuse his emotion. "Would you know the cause of it?" said he.

"I am all curiosity."

The count then related all-told him of Mario's love for Stella, of his own pride, of Mario's actions. When it was ended, the duke, who had displayed the greatest emotion, arose and went to Mario.

"Never," he cried, "most noble youth-never have I heard of more generosity and greatness of soul. Happy is he who can call you his friend. But you shall not be neglected by me, for while I live, you will always have a friend. I honor your actions. I love your noble character."

Mario was overwhelmed by mingled emotions of happiness and confusion. Joy had rushed in upon him, like a torrent, and unable to speak, he could only express by his glance, the feelings of his soul.

"God bless you, my lord duke!" at length he cried. "God bless you, Count Borelloni! I am unworthy of such praise, but I can never forget your kindness to an obscure artist."

"An obscure artist? No, not so," answered the duke. "No longer obscure, you are the greatest in the land, and none shall call you otherwise. I name you count-and in a week your title shall be formally bestowed, so henceforth, Count Fostello, you may not be obscure."

A week afterward the palace of Borelloni was all festivity. Lights gleamed in dazzling rows within the long halls where all the flower of Tuscan nobility, and all the lords and barons and great men of other lands were assembled. For this was the day when the Count Fostello led to the altar the lovely Stella Borelloni. The Grand Duke condescended to be the head

groomsman. The magnificent form and features of the noble artist were the admiration of all, and only equalled by the beauty of his bride.

The story of his love and constancy, of his wonderful actions and splendid achievements in the realm of art, was told to all, and the city rung with his praise. All courted his friendship. All of noble nature loved him for himself, and the baser spirits were compelled to do him homage, for in him they saw the man whom the duke "delighted to honor."