TO HER ORTRAITHAT BROUGHT DE EATH State we to result the data and dated in the unclease of the state of the

A STREET TO STREET STREET

o the uncient city of Piss. I had not been AT COM

ture many weeks when I was met at the other of the Colonnade one morning by my friend, Prof. Schumann. We both spoke Italian, and it was in that language that he greeted me-"You are the man I want to meet." said he. "Have

you any particular engagement for this afternoon?" "I have none," I replied. "What is it that you want of me"

" I want you to come with me, in company with an Itallan gentleman, the young Count Assorli, to look at a picture in the Soffareno palace. It is called 'The Picture of the Curse.

Naturally struck by so strange a title 1 asked Herr Schumann to explain its meaning. He then gave me the following account, which I regret that my memory does not allow me to reproduce in his own words. There were many details, no doubt, which I have forgotten, but the outline is substantially correct.

"You know." he began by saying. "that the old and haughty house of Soffarono is represented now only by the young marchesa, who is at present lying at the point of death. Twenty years ago, however, when the old marquils was alive, the Soffareno were in the full sonith of prosperity and fortune. The Marquis Vincentio had married the fairest lady in Pisa, and she had brought him two lovely children, a boy-the one who died the other day-and a girk the young Marchesa Helena. Ever since the nuplials the palace had been given up to feasting and festivity. Every day the old marquis devised some fresh pleasure or some added luxury to gratify his wife, and she, on her part, threw herself into the tide of amusement with all the abandonment of her youth.

" Foremost among those who took part in the gatherings at the Soffareno palace was a young and handsome painter, by name Andrea Chiatto. He was not a native of Pisa nor, it seemed, of Tusenny. No one, in fact, could say from what part of Italy he came. But his talent as an artist was undoubted, and equally remericable were his powers in all that pertained to the kindred arts or sciences of design, of architecture, and even of mechanics. In addition, there was sold to be something mysterious in his studies, for a light was often seen burning in the topmost window of his solitary dwelling long after midnight, and even on to the hour of dawns. The rumor among the common people was that Chiatto was a magician.

To those who were intimate with him-if any could be said to be truly intimate with this reserved and singufar man-he admitted a certain leaning towards the occult arts. He professed belief in many of the marvels related of modern spiritualism, and was not unwilling at times to give illustrations of his own peculiar powers as a mesmerlst. Such was Andrea Chiatto.

'He had not been long in Pisa when old Soffareno sent for him to the palace to execute a portrait of his wife. The painter accepted the commission and a large sum was agreed upon to be paid on the completion of the picture. The marchesa was next approached, and she consented to appoint certain hours at which the artist might attend and pursue his labor. He came regularly and often, and for a month the picture made steady progress.

At the end of that time, however, a strange thing occurred. Chiatto suddenly declared himself dissatisfied with his work, and, tearing the canvas in pieces, demanded leave to begin all over again. The beautiful sitter, whether flattered by this humility, or secretly willing to prolong the series of meetings with Andrea for which his task gave occasion, made no difficulty, and the sittings went on for another period. But the same thing was to be repeated. When a sufficient number of weeks had slipped past, the artist again pronounced his efforts to be wholly unworthy of their lovely subject, and a third canvas was set upon the casel.

"But the ingenuity of Chiatto and the marchesa's complaisance began, by this time, to be the talk of Pisa. and it was in the inevitable course of things that it should come at last to the ears of the man whose honor was most interested. From this point conjecture as to what happened must, to some extent, supply the place of narrative. The marquis seems to have preferred to charge his wife alone and in private with the suspicious for which she had become a target, and to have satisfied himself from her confessions, or from her evasions, that she had merited the doom of faithlessness.

"To admit, by seeking revenge, that his honor had been sullied by a man of Chiatto's obscure rank he may have considered beneath his dignity. But the unhappy woman

my eyes swam, the picture grew obscure, and I got up and these observations. Herr Schumann led the way into the came away as best 1 could. There was absolutely nothing room. As we had expected, the first object that caught

steadily at the picture. That there is some occult power at work I am now convinced, and nothing shall make mebelieve otherwise. "He handed the key of the room to his sister with an

earnest injunction to let no mortal soul use it so long as he. remained alive. His orders were respected: He lingered on for nearly a week, refusing to see any physician, and at, last expired in his sister's arms.

I dare say you, in common with others, have remarked on the fatality of the beautiful Helena, herself being seized with illness immediately afterwards. The fact is that her keen anxiety to fathom the secret of the wonderful pleture overcame her dread of its powers. Accordingly she one day informed me of her intention to penetrate intothe chamber, and requested me to await her in the corridor. I did so. After an interval of time similar to that in the case of her brother, she emerged stricken in the same dreadful way, and fell into my arms. I locked the door and called for help, and we south had her in her own room. Then I sent for the ablest physician of Pisa, from whom I concealed nothing, and who immediately took the view ( had formed in Vincentio's case, that it was a question of nervous shock.

"However, at this juncture the count of Assoril came on the scene. He is the affianced lover of the marchesa, to brother's death left her the wealthlest helress in Tus- the chair back. cany. The count is a perfectly fearless man, the perfect type of a cavalier, but strongly imbued with religious notions, and therefore a triffe superstitions. To him, considering him as a member of the family, I explained my and some away. I have seen chough," own views.

"Count Assorli," I said, "I no longer agree with the the result of nervous shock. I cannot believe that two different individuals, of widely different temperaments. would be affected in this way by any subjective influence. On the contrary, the deduction that I draw now from the two cases, coupled with that of their father, the old marquis, is that these fatal results are produced by some real. outward agency."

' Do you mean, Herr Professor, that you think there is really some supernatural agency at work? replied the troubled, fearful air. count. And he crossed himself. At the risk of wounding his prejudices, 1 answered:

'I do not think about it. As a perfectly same man having my nerves under control and my constitution in sound working order. I know that these results, like all others, must have been produced by some natural, physical means, capable of explanation if sufficient evidence is forthcoming. What I propose to you to do is this. Let us try. by actual experiment, to ascertain what those means are and how they operate, in order to place ourselves in a posttion to deal, with some slight hope of success, with the mysterious malady which is now baffling the physician of the marchesi.

"The hope suggested in the last sentence must have wiped out the offense of the first, or else Count Assorll must have realized that he had said a foolish thing, for he at once agreed to assist me. We have no need to obtain the marchesa's consent 4 having retained the key of the chamber; and in a matter of life and death we neither of us deem it improper to proceed without her knowledge. Our plan is simply this. It is evident to me that the mechanism employed, and which undoubtedly points to the highest skill on the part of Chiatto, is of such a character that the ordinary action of a person entering the room and examining the picture is sufficient to set it in motion. Therefore, what is tequired is for some person of sufficient coolness and courage to go through the part, as it were, while capable observers watch closely for the faintest clew to the secret. Assoril, with a chivalrous disregard of consequences, has volunteered to take this dangerous part upon himself. I am to be one of the observers, and with his permission I was coming to usk you to be the other."

That was the story and the explanation of Prof. Schumann. I will not deny that my interest and curiosity had been roused to a high pitch by what, at this distance, appears a comparatively simple and unexciting narrative. The prospect of being present and assisting at the solution of a mystery of so dark a character was enticing. On the other hand, my natural diffidence made me hint to the ofessor that I was not likely to be of any great use as a

to cause my sensations beyond the mere act of looking our eyes as we passed beyond the door was the work of Andrea Chiatto. From that instant I paid no attention to my companion, but, after a hasty sinnee at the portrait, which was an extremely beautiful one. I took my stand against the wall and fixed my gage in the direction from which the count was to approach. Immediately the signal was given by the protestor, who had taken his position close to an old high backed chair, which stood in front of the plature and a few yards away from it.

Assoril walked into the chamber with a steady tread. His face was pale, but he showed no other sign of emotion. Taking a comprehensive glance around him, he at once caught sight of the object which was to absorb his attention, and he stepped deliberately over the floor in its direction. Noticing the chair as he approached, and seeing that it was placed conveniently for any one desiring to the point, and a little jet of the jar's contents instantly study the portrait, he took his seat in it and leaned back suffused the needle signifiest the padded custon of the antique frame. For several minutes 1 noticed nothing more.

Then, all at ours, ( thought I discerned a slight change in the attitude of the man I was watching. His cyclulls. all the time turned sleadily in the direction of the canvas appeared to me to be getting brighter and projecting somewhat from their sockets. Directly after a gray huc head sink slightly between his shoulders. He was now, I whom he was parsionately attached long before her noticed, sitting upright, having discarded the support of

my companion intervened.

"Rise," he pried in a strained, quick voice. "Rise

The Italian turned his head with a startled, involuntary movement, and then, in the act of springing to his yous soldier, had been immolated to glut the hatred of physician who is attending the murchesa that her illness is feel, seemed suddenly to realize that he was ill. The ashen tinge 1 had remarked had now deepened to a londen pallor, and he put his hand feebly on his head as the tery would have remained undrawn, and possibly yet professor took a step to his side, and, drawing the count's other victims would have shared the same appailing fate. arm within his own, assisted him out to the corridor. There we deposited him on a chair-for I had lent my help saving the lovely Helena and ber betrothed. In her case, as well-and then Herr Schumann beckoned me back into the chamber

"Did you notice that he leant against that red slik her to the tomb. cushion on the bar"

as H something had "ritated it?"

I had not perceived that action, nor should I perimpahave noted its significance if I had been watching it. I confessed as much.

"There hes the secret," he announced, advancing towards the chair. "In that action and in that alone is idly. Probably nothing could have saved him. After there the faintest clew to what has happened. Help me to twenty years it had lost some of its power, and had remlift this chair out of the room to where we can examine it at leisure

I followed his example on the opposite side: A simul-taneous cry of nervous horror broke from both of us. The cheir was firmly rooted to the floor!

I felt a cold shudder creeping through every yean as I began to disily guess at the nature of the diabolical contrivance by which two lives-perhaps four lives-had been sacrificed. As for my companion, the blood had literally Chiatto.

torsaken his face. But he quickly treavered biomelf, and drew out a sharp penknife, which he proceeded to open

"I will not leave this room still. I have fatherned this hellish mystery to the bottom," were his words, as he deliberately inserted the blade at the edge of the crimson silk and ripped it completely open.

To our tense game there was revealed a square stell case initedried in course wood and straw and resembling a clock without a face. Where the hands would have been in a clock, however, there projected a tiny needle. half an inch long and of extreme sharpness.

"That is what stabled him." muttered the professor-But how could that cause the symptoms we saw? We must open this condition

I centers I felt no slight reluctance to proceeding further. But I was ashaned to draw back, and I assisted to hold the steel tex in its place, while my companion pried If open with his knife blade. It was not so strongly made but it yielded to his efforts. The front fel down, leaving the needle in its place, and we then perceived that the latter was connected with a narrow jar or tube containing liquid. The scientist pressed his thamb nail against

At this sight his expression grew graver yet. He wrenched the vial away from its place and cautiously tested the ofor of the light. Clinching his testh, he set the vial down with a simile chilling word.

My flesh crept as I witnessed this gradual unearthing, at the distance of tweaty years, of Chiatto's infernal swept across his face, and, catching his breath, he let his scheme of vengeance. The contrivance was mechanically perfort. Human being after human being had come and sal down in the seal so invitingly places for them, had leant back in it had felt the faint prick which paved the Before I had time to draw any conclusions of my own way for the passage of the concentrated poison into their veins, and, failing to give it more than a passing thought, had attributed the subsequent paralysis of their faculties to some agency beyond the roach of science. The old man, the happy youth, the beautiful maiden, and now the chivalthe painter to the house of Soffareno. And but for the lynx-like sugarity of the foreign savant, the yell of mys-You will ask me whethow there was no possibility of shis! the discovery came too late, and she expired within the next few hours. Her lover might, perhaps, have been "What did you see?" he whispered to me, with a saved, but when he learned the fate of his mistress he refused the proffered antidote and voluntarily followed

One only explanation further 1 sought from the suc-"One nonnen) and you see him start upright again cessful lovestigator whose efforts had been so miserably at once and maxify using his right hand down his back robbed of their reward. I asked tim to account for the great difference in time between the operation of the poison in the case of Chiatto's first sletim and in those of the other three.

In the case of the old marquis." he answered, "the onite was freshly distilled, and did its work more rapodies been promptly applied if ath would, in my opinion, have been averted. But they believed in the supermatural As he spoke be laid his band on one of the arms, while - character of the attack, and resigned themselves without a struggle to its power."

Now the palace of the Soffareni is falling into rain, its treasures have been dispersed by the distant heirs, and only a few of the old friends of the race recognize in the "Portrait of a Lady." which amilies from the walls of a Roman gallery, the blood stained masterpiece of Andrea



t be allowed to live. Recourse was had to po No cry was heard, no warning given, but when next Audrea came to renew his Penelope-like labor he found dressed in the same robes and jewels, and sitting in the attitude he had chosen for the woman he loved, her frozen corpec.

"He utiered not a word, but came away, bearing his unfinished canvas. He made no report of the circumstances to the authorities, and the Marquis Soffareno procuyed a medical opinion that his marchesa had died from n overdose of some medicine prescribed to her a short time previously.

It was remarked that Andrea Chiatto lingered on in Pisa, although the houses of the nobility were no longer open to him, and he could scarcely hope to accomplish much in the way of his profession as a portrait painter after the catastrophe. He continued to keep his mysterious light burning through the unhallowed hours of darkness, and the belief in his magic powers, among the lower orders of the people, grew stronger every day. The popular interest in this strange character was at its height, when it became known that he had actually written to his enemy, Soffareno, offering him as a gift the completed portrait of the unhappy marchesa.

" By this time the feelings of the old man had undergone a certain change. The extreme tenderness he had formerly felt for his youthful bride revived over her grave, and if he did not wish his stern deed undone, he, at all events, began to let his memory dwell fondly on the time before his joy in her had been blasted by the touch of evil. Strange as it may seem, then, he closed with the offer of the painter, and submitted to the conditions by which it was accompanied.

"These conditions were far more extraordinary than the offer itself. Chiatto stipulated that a room should be set apart for the reception of the picture, and that he should be permitted to come at his own time and place it on the walls. He required the key of the room to be sent to him in advance, and insisted that no one should enter if till his work was accomplished. He would bring his own ladder and such other instruments as were necessary for the fixing of pictures, and no person was to question him, coming or going.

Having obtained these concessions the painter arrived at the palace one morning at the hour of dawn with a conveyance on which were two immense and unwieldy packages. Assisted by the driver of the wagon, Chlatto arried these to the appointed room and locked himself in alone. For the next ten or twenty minutes sounds of hammering were heard and the shifting of furniture from place to place. Finally, the artist summoned his driver, and, locking the door behind them, they carried back the bulkier of the two packages to the vehicle. The man then drove off, while Chiatto demanded to be brought before the lord of the palace.

The wondering servants obeyed, and the two enemtes were presently face to face. The marquis had been informed of the painter's arrival and his sccentric behavior. and had hastily risen and come out in his dressing gown, actuated partly by curiosity and partly by a desire to seize the earliest moment for gazing once more at the features of the once loved dead.

"The meeting was an embarrassing one, but the old nobleman, with the instincts of his caste, began to frame some words of acknowledgment of the artist's gift. Cittatto interrupted him.

"Bir.' he said. 'I did not come here for your thanks. There '-throwing it down upon the table with a crashis the key of your room. Go and see your picture as soon as you please, but know that I am not only a painter, I have the command of secrets you know not of, and I have invested that portrait with a curse that shall alight upon all who venture to behold it-and that curse is death.

" If old Soffareno was daunted for the moment by this threat he soon shook off his fears, and, affecting to regard it as the vaporing of a chariatan, he picked up the key and departed to the chamber of the portrait. Suddenly, at the end of two minutes, the marquis rushed out, looking ghastly pale and ill. The attendants hastened to him, and, after locking the door by his feebly muttered directions and withdrawing the key, they half assisted, half bore him to his hedroom. The little boy and girl were sent for, tooyoung to know what was passing around them, and their father bestowed on them his last caresses. The priest arrived next, and in his ear, and his alone, did the dying man confide the secrets of the accursed chamber. Within an hour he expired, his last injunction being that no memher of his family should ever attempt to look upon the portrait invested with so terrible and potent a curse.

From that time the ploture, concealed from all eyes,



241

1 2 4

received the name by which it is known to every intimate of the house of Soffareno, "The Picture of the Curse." 'For twenty years the dying command of the margula

was scrupulously obeyed, and no human foot intruded intothe chamber of the portrait. Indeed, no earthly inducement could have tempted any of the superstitious menibers of the bousehold to brave a warning which had been so swiftly and horribly fulfilled before their eyes. It was reserved for the old marguis' heir, now grown to n hood's estate, to brave for the second time the awful denunclation attached to the portrait of his mother.

"The Marchesa Helena tells me," continued the professor, "that it was against her remonstrance that her brother ventured on such a step. But young Vencentiowas bold to foolhardiness, and being, besides, a freethinker, he especially prided himself on his indifference to all terrors not of a physical and tangible kind. Some of his young companions, it would seem, started the idea in his mind by questioning him about the enchanted portrait, as they scoffingly called it. And partly to dissipute the effect of their joers, partly out of a natural and aminble desire to behold the features of his parent, the young marguis finally announced bis determination to explore the fictal spot. Having once fixed his intention, no angles to the principal flight, we proceeded along a spatpersuasions on the part of his sister could drive him from carrying it out. He discovered the key used by his father ong some old documents, and in the full tide of youth and health and energy he disappeared through the door- and the next moment the door stood open. way of the forbidden room.

"He was gone for about a quarter or an hour. I happened to be in the palace at the time. I had recently come to Pisa for a long rest from my studies, which have chieffy lain, as you know, in the direction of physics, chemistry, and the allied sciences, Among my introductions happened to be one to a great friend of Vincentio, and I rapidly became an intimate at the Soffareno palace.

Never have I witnessed such a change in any man as had taken place in my young friend when he staggered. rather than walked, into the room where we awaited him. Personally I had viewed the legendary terrors of the picture as the merest fables, and I am afraid I had not refrained from encouraging Soffareno to prosecute his adventure. Judge my surprise and consternation, therefore, when I saw him creep back, looking as if he had been fatally wounded. I asked him what had happened. He did not reply. Taking the hint, I withdrew, and it was not until after bis death that I glouned from his sister a meager account of what had taken place.

Meantime I began to consider that probably the shock which the young marquis had evidently received was merely the result of nervousness. My theory was: A young man of sanguine temperament goes into a room, invested with the most appalling traditions, to view a portrait of his mother, who, as he had heard, suffered a shocking and ghastly death. He enters in a high state of excitement, and, likely, the first object that meets his eye is a skull or a skeleton or some horrible object, above which hangs a partrait into whose expression the artist has concentrated all of frightful, all of loathsome, all of saturic that his art possessed. A nervous shudder runs through him. He mistakes this natural trembling for some occult visitation. Latent superstition lends its aid, and he finally issues from the apartment, deeply convinced that he is mortally stricken by some invisible power.

Reasoning thus I tried to permude the marchesa to take the same view, of her brother's case. She was not, 1 think, persuaded by me, but she thought it her duty to adopt any course that afforded the least hope, and pressed my views upon her brother. It was then that he told her his experiences.

When I went into that room I thought exactly as you and the professor do. I expected to find some such skull and cross bones arrangement and, therefore, if I had seen it. It would not have startled me in the least instead of that I saw at one end of the room a confused heap of furniture and pictures, while on the opposite wall was the only picture hung up in the room-an exquisitely painted portrait of a young and beautiful woman, richly dressed and adorned with gems, and in feature bearing an unmistakable likeness to yourself. I sat down in a chair facing the picture and fixed my eyes steadily upon it. Presently 1 felt something like a sharp pang in my heart, and by degrees a dreadful feeling of sickness crept over me

scientific detective. 'Pooh! pooh!" returned Herr Schumann, good natur-

"I will see to all that. What I want is a respectedly. able and trustworthy witness, whose word will command respect, and I know no American in Pisa but you."

It would have been affectation to make any reply, be cond an expression of willingness to attend, and we parted with the understanding that I should call at the Soffareno palace at 3 o'clock. It was a fine, hot afternoon in September. As I ascended the broad stone steps of the huge mansion, built in that large and stately style which only Italian architects employ, there was an otter stillness in the air, an almost oppressive calm. A sultry mist enshrouded the landscape, the trees drooped their branches, the flowers were sunk upon their stalks, the birds had censed to sing. A richly liveried servant proceeded me with cat like footfall through noble halls and up majestic stairways into a large, low soloon, draped and frescoed in the taste of the last generation of dilettantes. But I had no time to mark the details of the couches and bronzes and confusion of ornaments, for there were already present and only waiting my arrival the tall, swarthy Italian and his strangely contrasted companion, the bustling, beetlebrowed professor.

A rapid introduction to Count Assorli followed, and the three of us immediately set out for the chamber which contained "The Picture of the Curse.

We had not a long distance to traterse. Passing down a few broad, shallow stairs, which descended at right cious, well lit gallery, and halted at the third door. Our guide, the sayant, displayed the key which he had secured on the disastrous occasion described by him to me,

Looking through it. I perceived that it opened on the center of an oblong apartment. At the end to our left, as we stood at the entrance, was the jumble of tables and chairs. of paintings, vases, and other movable decorations which the iil fated young Soffareno had described to his sister. Then, immediately in front of us, was a bare space, and to the right, in which direction our view was intercepted by the open door, lay, without doubt, the object of our siarch.

There was a brief deliberation before we entered. The count desired to be the first across the threshold, conceiving that arrangement to be the one dictated by honor. But the German, whose manner was grave, convinced him that a different procedure was. advisable.

'Your part," he said, " is to enter the room in as ordinary a manner as you can command, and devote yourself to the one task of inspecting the portrait which you will find there.

We. on the other hand. must restrict ourselves to watching, not the picture, but you. To do this with complete effect we must take our stations advance, so as not to tose sight of a single movement of yours from the instant you come in sight of your object. We will, therefore, enter first, and at a signal from me you will follow, taking no notice whatever of our presence and endeavoring, above all things, to preserve the demeanor of one who is deeply interested in scanning the features of the portrait and who is oblivious of all besides.

Assorli having acquiesced in