

THE TORTURE OF FEAR.

A Thrilling Short Story by M. P. Shiel.

Harold Brand was an American of twenty-four, moneyed and cosmopolitan. The way in which he dashed away his hair, which draped from his forehead, was characteristic of him; his blue eyes were quite alert; his blood fresh and brisk. But woman, somehow, had hitherto engaged little of the interest of his free manhood. She, he guessed, would come, and meantime, the bustling world was a keen concern and pleasure to him. He visited Venice, and, on the third day of the carnival, he beheld a chin, white between the draperies of a gondola cabin, and this he followed.

Venice, the mysterious! By Martedi Grasso (Shrove Tuesday) he had already kissed the lips above the chin, and was told that he did it in peril of his life. That was a great carnival-night, the Venetians in wild fete, gliding eastward, he could hear the revelry from the Place of St. Mark, and at 11 was at the old Procurator palace, where a municipal masquerade was in full gala reel. By 12, he had left the roulette room, had descended a staircase, and walked on the tufted carpet of a dim corridor. He found himself alone with her.

Her torso heaved. Her eyes were mask-like, black moons behind her mask.

She was trembling. "We cannot speak here. These tassels may be ears." She paused.

To him it was incredible. He was unable to sympathize with her eagerness. "That chin, the emphasis of those tones could hardly appertain to one given over to fancies. She posed with one projected slipper, the other half supported by the toe of the shoe, admiring the dash and curve of her, the young full figure clasped in a trainless dress of amber silk. A talaria, of marbled black lace, descended from her head.

"But, Belvidera, I say, do not agitate yourself—with a tenderness new to his voice; what I had to say is passed, and you are not to be angry. Am I to go alone? Am I to go alone? You say, that is the more reason."

"Dance?" Her fan touched his arm—but not to mark avoid. It is for you I fear, dear. He does not hurt me, you see? His motives for wishing me dead are too evident, and there is law, isn't there? But you, you must guess Mauro Bellini's power—the number of his emissaries—"

"Dear love! what emissaries? He can have no power over me." She whispered, "They are members of the Banda! He looks upon himself as the last of the old nobility, and the design of his life has been the entombment of himself in the cemetery of the Doges. As it is, he is chief magistrate. Hence the league—it includes all classes; he knows that I know of it, and secretly fears my success. But you must not think that he will be lightly balked in his life-work—in his old age—by a whim, as he certainly considers our love—Harold—"

"But I am innocent of desire to balk this old boy in anything whatever! Personally I do not care a rap for him. It is all a question of money, you see? You know that my wealth is wonderful! Ah, you did not know! It is for myself only, is it not—good, you are! But it is in his hands, dear, that I marry. That by my father's will, you perceive? Meanwhile I am Mauro Bellini's niece and ward. My money is his power. The power is his, the money is mine. He will destroy a thousand lives, and he can, if they interfere with his dream."

"But the question is this, Belvidera; will you, in ten days, leave Venice, with or without the consent of this old gentleman?"

"Yes, if it is possible, without sacrificing your. Look there! did you see the tapestry str? You know the archway near the porch of Santa Maria della Salute—meet me there at 11. The tapestry parts, and I ignore an evening dress sauntered toward them. He bowed profusely. Belvidera held up a finger to Brand with a whispered "One," and walked after the stranger. As Brand ascended once more to the halls, the throng had formed a lane, down which paced an old man, gorgeous in velvet. The double line of chains and medals, the medals, like foliage before the wind. A neighbor whispered Brand that this was Mauro Bellini himself. The candle-light illustrated the thousand buckers of his skin, the mouth, whose lips had inrolled inward to a crevice; but the bald brow told of mental majesty. Some great priest he seemed more than a city dignitary. As he passed, his head deliberately turned and directed upon the rosy face of Brand a warning gaze. Brand, surprised, returned the look with a frown of coolest innocence. It was a challenge, and he answered.

Before the stroke of one, behind a turret of Santa Maria, two men waited. One, a Moor named Ali, a squat ox, with a head of black hair, the other was Ronaldo, the signore who had been behind the tapestry.

But Belvidera was looking in agonized concern for Brand. Despairing, she darted out, and reached the archway, where she reached the Merceria, down which she sped. In a lane she stopped and uttered a kind of yodel; a door opened, and a tall old woman, with a head of black hair, the other was Ronaldo, the signore who had been behind the tapestry.

"Credia! quick—but that lamp down! You must be at Santa Maria before 11." "Yes, signorina."

"The American—you know—is in danger. I told him to meet me there, and was overheard—I have found out—by Ronaldo. Something is brewing. I know, some plot, something. You must be there and watch for his coming. Say I cannot meet him tonight. Warn him away—force him away, good Brescia. Mauro Bellini has looked at me queerly this night. Go! And, Brescia, at the back with news. I will be here for you."

Brescia had puffed out the light. She covered her head with her skirt, and walked swiftly away. Northward to the Rialto she traversed the deserted city, turned then westward and southward. She reached Santa Maria before 11, and in the deep of the archway crouched.

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Two minutes afterwards Brand arrived. Had she come? He peered into the archway and saw nothing; heard, however, a groan; and tumbled upon his hands over Brescia. "What the mischief—" he began to say, then, realizing a chain upon his help, half-lifted the body toward the opening. There was no moon, but the vault was rich with glories. As he noticed the slit throat, he had at the same time noticed his bosom, his hands, all red. A measured tread started him. Glancing, he beheld three of a cordon of city sbirri, on their nightly rounds, approach. The quick thought of the blood on him, of Continental official flashed upon him, and with a "No, thank you," he gently posited the body and took to running.

The men were after him. Brand had no motion whither he went. The narrow call of Venice are slab-paved, without trottoirs; a runner resounds upon them, guiding his pursuer. They twist and double infinitely, with tiny bridges everywhere. Brand's heels were flying down every turning he met; his rage to be free grew into a very furore of action. But his pursuers, intimate with the labyrinth, were quite his equals. One especially gained surely on him. At last, on a low quay, hearing the near foot-beats round a corner, he pitched down three steps, and, seizing an iron ring in the wall, let himself into the water to the neck. Here was a patch of deepest

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poor woman he overburdened. I will carry the other myself." "This he proceeded to do, talking meanwhile to the woman in German, and paying no further attention to me. Was I charged? I was more disappointed than I can tell. When he returned he bowed to me with his pleasant, fatherly fashion, but to the German he bowed as if he were a king. "I have been much interested in your story. It has given me a new view of life. I thank you very much." "And I dare say," continued the young woman, "that he has just put her into a book of sermons by the Rev. White, wasn't it with the woman of the bundles?"

HOW THE FARMER HAD THE FUN.

Lovesick Youth Has the Tables Turned on Him.

Every man has to take his own lessons in acquiring the art of understanding the ways of women. Kipling's poem in which he winds up several verses explaining some adventures with a woman with the lines, "I learned about women from her, conveys the idea that women are widely different in their ways, and the experience of many men has led them to endorse Mr. Kipling's views in this matter. The last recruit to this Kipling cult is a somewhat bashful young man who has just returned from his vacation in the mountains. He receives a letter daily and writes one daily—but that is the story that is to be explained. This young man, as the old adage says, was not a natural genius, but his natural ability is screened behind a sense of modesty, and he is decidedly different from the average of his kind. He had the idea of getting a rest and indulging in surf baths. When he arrived at the hotel at the seaside resort, he found a young man, who was an eligible young man in the place, and there was a large and attractive array of young women who were waiting to be introduced to him. Under this benign countenance of affairs his diffidence wore off to a certain extent. He was not a natural genius, but his natural ability is screened behind a sense of modesty, and he is decidedly different from the average of his kind. He had the idea of getting a rest and indulging in surf baths. When he arrived at the hotel at the seaside resort, he found a young man, who was an eligible young man in the place, and there was a large and attractive array of young women who were waiting to be introduced to him. Under this benign countenance of affairs his diffidence wore off to a certain extent. He was not a natural genius, but his natural ability is screened behind a sense of modesty, and he is decidedly different from the average of his kind. He had the idea of getting a rest and indulging in surf baths. When he arrived at the hotel at the seaside resort, he found a young man, who was an eligible young man in the place, and there was a large and attractive array of young women who were waiting to be introduced to him. Under this benign countenance of affairs his diffidence wore off to a certain extent. He was not a natural genius, but his natural ability is screened behind a sense of modesty, and he is decidedly different from the average of his kind. He had the idea of getting a rest and indulging in surf baths. When he arrived at the hotel at the seaside resort, he found a young man, who was an eligible young man in the place, and there was a large and attractive array of young women who were waiting to be introduced to him. Under this benign countenance of affairs his diffidence wore off to a certain extent. He was not a natural genius, but his natural ability is screened behind a sense of modesty, and he is decidedly different from the average of his kind. He had the idea of getting a rest and indulging in surf baths. When he arrived at the hotel at the seaside resort, he found a young man, who was an eligible young man in the place, and there was a large and attractive array of young women who were waiting to be introduced to him. Under this benign countenance of affairs his diffidence wore off to a certain extent. He was not a natural genius, but his natural ability is screened behind a sense of modesty, and he is decidedly different from the average of his kind. He had the idea of getting a rest and indulging in surf baths.