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POET AND PEER BY HAMILTON AÏDÉ.

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CHAPTER I.

IT is now necessary that I should say a few words touching Lorenzaccio, who, about this time, was allowed by the doctor to rise from his bed, and hobble round the room on crutches. The long rest, the good food, the kindness, and the stimulants to his natural intelligence which he had received from books, had wrought a marvellous change in the boy. The pale, hollow cheeks were filled out, and almost ruddy; the eyes no longer burned at the further end of two blue caverns; the shadow of fear was fled, and the light of gladness had come into the young face at last; he was grown nearly two inches.

Miss Brabazon's daily visits had been discontinued ever since the drive to the Casa di Livia. She still went to see the boy occasionally, when she had reason to believe Lord Athelstone was not in the house, and she kept him supplied with books and prints; but, out of regard to her friend, she had scrupulously avoided putting herself voluntarily in Wilfred's way, until those words had passed between Lady Frances and herself

which I have recorded, and which left her free. And now, from a different motive, she rarely ventured to the house, unless she had positive assurance that Wilfred was not at hand. She felt sorry, for she knew her visits were of real use to the boy, and his delight at seeing her was touching; but it could not be helped. Marco, escorted by a servant, was her ambassador at other times, bearing a book in his mouth. Lorenzaccio and the poodle became great friends; the boy always saved some tit-bit from his dinner for his four-footed visitor, and whispered into his ear a message of humble devotion to her whom Marco was happy enough to call his mistress. The boy was intensely grateful to Athelstone; he would have died for his preserver; but for Sylvia he had a feeling which approached to adoration.

With the quick intuition of his nation in all matters connected with the heart, he had divined Wilfred's love. In his rich "bocca Romana" his enthusiasm and reverence for the divine lady sounded very delightful to Wilfred's ear. The intercourse between the man and the boy, however, though constant, was not very free, by reason of Athelstone's imperfect Italian. He was interested in watching Lorenzaccio's improvement and mental development, for the boy almost daily asked him questions relative to what he had been reading which Wilfred had some difficulty in answering; but there was, necessarily, a certain amount of restraint in their relations. With the dear lady of the heavenly eyes, on the other hand, he was completely at his ease. That these two benefactors should be united, and that he should serve them all his life long, was the dream upon which his imagination had fed during the last few days.

What was to become of him? The question to Athelstone was growing imminent. He had waved it aside for some weeks; but, now that the lad was on his legs again, the difficulty stared the young man in the face each time he saw his *protégé*. Lorenzaccio, when spoken to about his future, declared with a passionate burst of tears that he would die a thousand deaths rather than return under his step-father's roof. He would drown himself in the Tiber if Wilfred sent him back; of what good was his life to him, to be starved and beaten? The idea of apprenticing him to some trade occurred to Wilfred, but the boy seemed to have no turn for any; and Sylvia, when consulted, gave it as her opinion that, if properly trained, he would be best suited to domestic servitude. "He is intelligent, and, one sees, will be zealous. If we did not lead a wandering life, I would take him for my own page."

This decided Athelstone. He asked Lorenzaccio whether he would apply himself to learn English, and accompany him to England, and become his valet in the course of time, when he had mastered the duties of that calling. The lad, snatched from the brink of despair, was nearly beside himself with joy. One half of his dream was already fulfilled. That the other half would be accomplished ere long, and that he should serve the divine lady as his mistress, he never doubted. A man came daily, thenceforward, to give him English lessons, and Lorenzaccio, who was henceforward to be called Lorenzo, made rapid progress in his studies.

The Villa Albani is only shown on certain days. The concourse of visitors on a fine afternoon, therefore,