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IN MAREMMA BY OUIDA.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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IN MAREMMA

A STORY

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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I N M A R E M M A.

CHAPTER I.

"WHERE have you been?" said Este with anger and with doubt, when she returned as the afternoon shadows grew into the gloom of evening, and the Ave Maria was tolled or rung by all the belfries along the hills or coast.

"I have been to see him," said Musa wearily. "We had one of us to thank him, and you could not. I set out before dawn. It is a long way. Let me rest but a little and I will tell you all."

She went into her own chamber, made fast the stone door, bathed her face, changed her clothes heavy with dew, and sat a while in the solitude, thinking.

What she was called upon to do cost her all her courage.

When she had summoned up her strength, and rested a little her tired limbs, she approached Este.

He did not look up from the clay he worked on by the light of the oil wick. He was angered, irritated, suspicious.

She went to him and rested her hands on the slab of nenfro.

"I could not bear that he should think us thankless, so I went. He bade me give you a message from him. If you will, he is ready to buy or to hire a ship, and carry you over the sea. If you like, you can go. That is what he told me to tell you."

Este started violently and let fall the tool with which he worked.

He rose to his feet and breathed quickly.

"He—a stranger—would do this for me? Are you jesting? It is impossible!——"

"No; it is true," she said in the same measured, low, grave voice in which she had spoken the other words. "He will do all that, if you wish him. I am to go back and tell him what you answer tomorrow. He says that with gold all things can be done."

"*That* is true," said Este bitterly. "But why should he do this for me? Why?"

"I do not know. Because he is generous, or because——"

She hesitated; she remembered that Sanctis had said he would do this for her sake.

A sudden light of fell suspicion flashed on Este. His eyes lit up with it as a dark night is lit up by blue fire.

"And the price?" he said between his teeth.

"The price?"

She did not understand him.

"Do you not see? Are you so simple? He will aid me to escape because he will thus sever me from you. He is your lover, or would be so. You are the price that he will claim for freeing me."

A dark red flush came over her face.

"I do not think it is so," she said firmly. "He is a generous man; he is not a traitor. He will save you if you choose."

For the first moment his natural impulse had been one of rapturous acceptance of his liberty, of passionate ecstasy at the mere thought of feeling the winds of heaven upon him and beholding the width of the sea before his eyes.

Then in another moment that rapture passed, to be succeeded by the memory that he who offered him this possibility of escape was a stranger and an enemy; an enemy because a lover of Musa; one from whose hands he could not and would not take a benefit. A darker suspicion also came upon him. Was not this only the northerner's scheme to sever