

# BY THE TIBER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF  
"SIGNOR MONALDINI'S NIECE."

"CAINA ATTENDE."



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TO  
MR. J. C. HOOKER

*This Book*

IS GRATEFULLY DEDICATED BY THE AUTHOR.

*Rome, January, 1881.*

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## CHAPTER I.

### A FAIRY STORY.

ONCE upon a time, as a royal exile who was visiting Rome rode out with his friends to the chase, they passed a certain rude stone house set in a vineyard. This house had been a sepulchre in ancient times; but the dust of the dead was blown away, and the vase which had held it was set in a museum, and the marbles that had adorned it were torn off to ornament the palaces of the living, and over its crumbling foundations had been built a new house wherein dwelt Gigi, the vine-dresser, with his daughter Felicità and her step-mother, Nanna.

It was a rough place; but the poppies grew brilliantly all about its foundations, and wall-flowers nodded out of reach above, and an ivy-vine crept up, stone by stone, and draped itself around a small square window set close beside the only remaining skeleton window of the ruin. This window opened on a narrow road of the Agro Romano; and when the chase went by in the early morning, there was a face framed in its cornice of leaves. Felicità looked out at the horsemen, and laughed and blushed when they all looked up at her. When the prince took off his hat to her she only laughed and blushed the more, and no more thought of saluting him than she would

exhausted on the shore of life, only beginning to live again; and while, having detected and resisted their wish to take her to the Asylum, she had consented to go, and had been taken to Villa Barberini,— the people who, to use the Roman phrase, “interested themselves in her,” had been very busy.

This illness, and especially the delirium, could not have suited them better if they had themselves procured it.

It is impossible to commit one crime alone, unless the criminal is willing to suffer the consequences. The wrong-doer who wishes to be held respectable is driven, almost in his own despite, to whatever means may best hide his fault, even though, as might happen, he should have to commit a greater crime to hide the first. This necessity is the scourge of the arch-enemy. They have, therefore, the poor excuse of self-defence.

There is another class of persons who presumably have not this excuse. They may be correct enough in their own conduct, but they are very useful to those who are not correct. Foremost among this class in Valeria's affairs was Miss Cromo. Her warning on hearing the story confided to her had shown how perfectly she knew what would be the wishes of those involved, and she made haste to anticipate them. These wishes could not have been carried out if she had opposed them; with her assistance, they could easily be realized. She had, as she might have expressed it, the whip-hand in the affair. She had the doctor in her hands, and could decide who should be called in consultation. She had a great many acquaintances, and was one of the foreign centres of Roman gossip, and she could spread a report widely. From her came the first word which characterized Valeria's brief fever delirium as insanity.

Besides her willingness to do a harm to one who