

**DESTROYING
ANGELS, AND
OTHER TALES**

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Destroying Angels, and Other Tales by Theo. Monro

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THEO. MONRO

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DESTROYING ANGELS,

And Other Tales,

BY

THEO. MONRO.



LONDON:

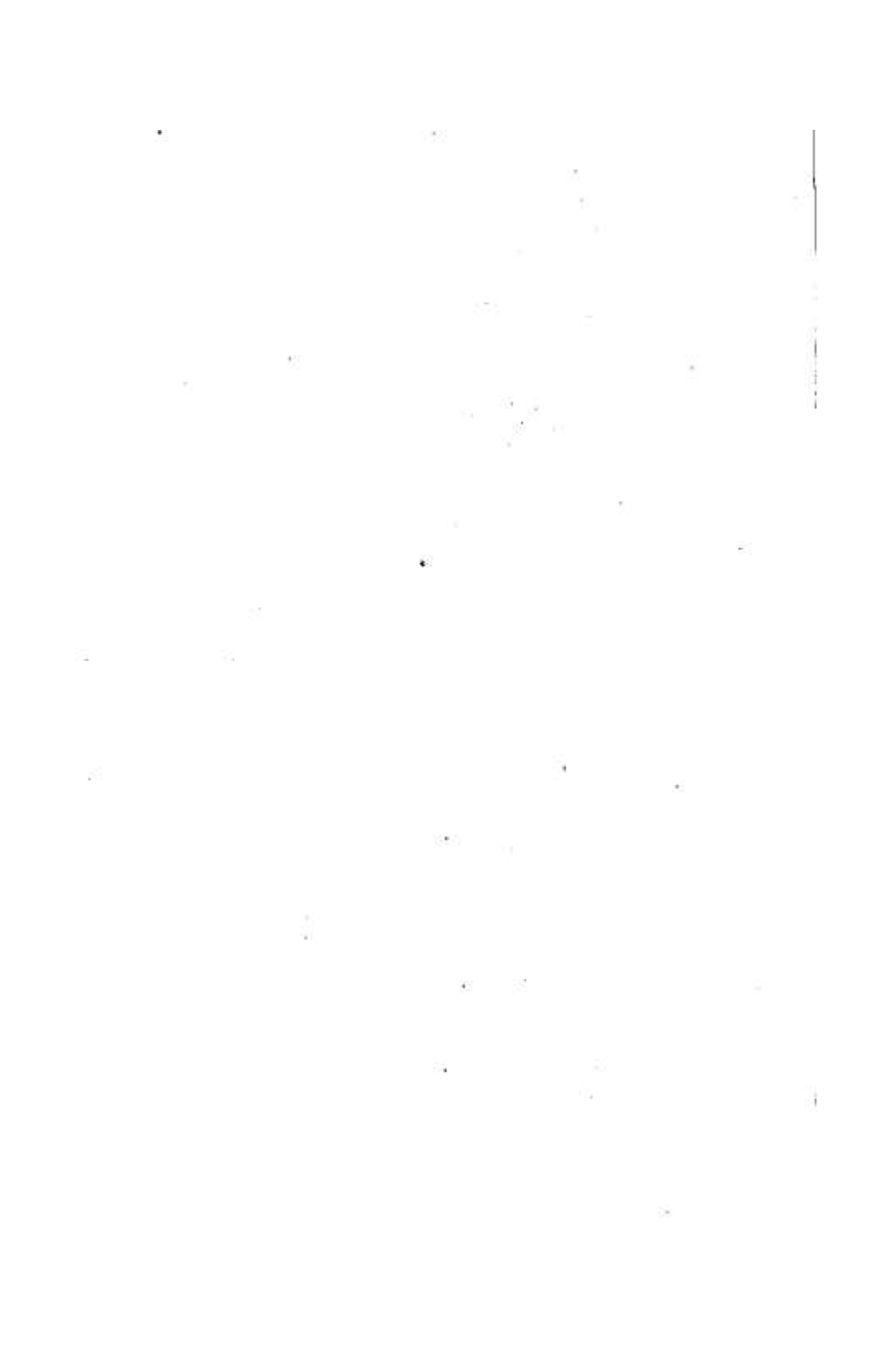
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PLYMOUTH:

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“DESTROYING ANGELS.”

THE Carnival was at its height in Rome.
* * * The ancient mistress of the world was holding high festival within her gates. The Imperial city was flooded with strangers from every quarter of the globe; English and Americans swarmed in the streets, in the balconies, in the carriages. Broad-shouldered, yellow-bearded Britons streamed along the Corso, the Condotti, the Babuino, only outnumbered by their heavily-moustachioed cousins from the other side of the Atlantic.

On a balcony on the first-floor of a house in the Corso, where the furious tide of humanity was surging in from the Via Condotti, stood a party of English and Italians,

all well provided with the munitions of war. A large trough, filled with confetti ran round the whole balcony, and this was perpetually replenished from inexhaustible stores within the house. Baskets full of bouquets lay just within the window, to be thrown to those favoured few in the seething crowd whom the ladies in that balcony might delight to honour. That these ladies were well-known in Rome was evident from the magnificent bouquets that were constantly aimed at them from the street: and from the desperate battles that were perpetually taking place between them and bands of the "haute noblesse" of Rome.

A dream of fair women truly was the scene in that balcony in the Corso. Every variety of beauty, blonde and brunette, lithe and undulating, or plump and rounded, was represented in that bevy of lovely girlhood, that pelted the youth of every nation congregated in the street below.

At the corner, where she could command both the Corso and the Condotti, stood

Olympia, Marchesa Roselli, the wife of the old and wealthy chief of an ancient Italian family. Her mother had been dead many years, and her father was supposed to have been drowned in the South Seas. The ship in which he had set sail from the Brazils, had never been heard of since her departure from Buenos Ayres, and several years had now elapsed since Olympia and a younger sister, Fiorella, had been left to the care of their father's mother, who was by birth an Englishwoman. This lady's rare beauty had attracted the notice of the Conte Spironi, a Neapolitan of high position, great personal attractions, and an utter absence of every kind of principle. This Conte Spironi, the Marchesa's grandfather, had been at no time a wealthy man. The troubles of 1848 in Italy entirely ruined him. His constitution, weakened by a life of profligacy, gave way under the strain of shame and poverty. He sank into an early grave, leaving his English widow and her son barely enough for their subsistence. The son, however, was nearly

fifteen years of age at the time of his father's death. His mother's English influence procured him a post in an English mercantile firm in Rome. He had married early, and lost his wife. He had been left a widower with two little girls—the Olympia and Fiorella of our tale—and having been sent by the firm to the Brazils on business connected with their trade, with a promise of partnership on his return, had, as was generally supposed, perished on his way home, leaving but a pittance behind him for his orphan children.

These girls had been brought up by their old English grandmother in all the miseries of sordid poverty. Money to such easily becomes the god of the imagination, and when the rich old Marchese offered Olympia his hand, his purse, and what remained of his withered old heart, she thought as little of refusing to be rich, even at such a price, as she did of throwing her loveliness into the tawny waves of the Tiber. If she loved not the Marchese, she loved none other, and thus her brightness knew as yet no shadow.

There in the balcony she stood, in all the dazzling brightness of her patrician beauty, the hot southern blood mantling in her cheeks, her great dark eyes sparkling with excitement and delight. Masses of rippling wavy hair shaded her broad, low brow ; long lashes fringed her eyes ; about her was a force, a power, a vitality that was infectious, magnetic and irresistible. It fired her eyes, it lurked in her hair, it rushed in furious currents through her nerves. She was never still. She was all motion, action, an endless wave of fire.

A wonderful contrast she formed to the English-women, on either side of her, her guests for the day. On her left, gazing sleepily into the Via Condotti, sat Mildred, Lady Morton ; a large, smooth, fair woman, a very type of Anglo-Saxon matronly beauty, a living embodiment of stately repose. On the other side of the Marchese stood Louise Eden, Lady Morton's younger sister, whose surpassing loveliness had been the one theme of all the youth of Rome since her arrival