

**PRINCE SARONI'S  
WIFE: AND THE PEARL-  
SHELL NECKLACE**

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Prince Saroni's Wife: And The Pearl-Shell Necklace by Julian Hawthorne

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**JULIAN HAWTHORNE**

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# PRINCE SARON'S WIFE

AND

## THE PEARL-SHELL NECKLACE

BY

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**PRINCE SARONT'S WIFE.**





## PRINCE SARONI'S WIFE.

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### I.

THE prince, when I first had the honor of knowing him, was a young man of about twenty-seven or eight ; a thorough Italian in nature and aspect, though he spoke correct English, and was accustomed to foreign manners and men. His face, when you examined it, was undeniably handsome ; but the type was so different from our Anglo-Saxon traditions of masculine beauty, that I fancy he usually produced the impression of something *bizarre* and noticeable, rather than of classic comeliness, on the ordinary beholder. I recollect his being presented, on one occasion, to one of the reigning beauties of the London season, a young lady who was certainly not deficient in familiarity with the ways and looks of the average male social animal ; but she turned pale as her eyes fell upon him, responded to his courteous advances incoherently and with manifest nervousness, and, within a few minutes, began to laugh hysterically, and had to be taken to her carriage. So far as I have ever been able to find out, the poor prince was not in the least to blame, and he was unquestionably not a little distressed by the incident. But Mrs. Fulvia, whenever his name was mentioned to her afterward, would shudder and turn away her lovely head. " He is hideous ! " she

would exclaim ; “ I felt as if I were being drawn into the power of a demon ! It seemed to me as if his eyes left a black mark upon me ! ” Saroni’s eyes were certainly very black, and so was his short, erect hair, which had a crisp curl through it, that inspired some one to say that it looked as if his head were encompassed with black flames. Black, also, and wiry was his untrimmed but not overgrown beard, which came down to a point below the chin, owing, perhaps, to his fondness for laying hold of it and letting it slip through his hand. His complexion was dark, but not sallow ; there were life and blood beneath it. On his temple, beneath the skin, a peculiar vein was discernible ; it lay in such curves as a serpent makes in swimming rapidly through the water. When the prince was in a serene mood, this strange little vein was scarcely seen ; but as soon as he became excited, or laughed, it started into prominence ; and if the testimony of Mrs. Fulvia is to be believed, actually wriggled ! I mention these things merely to give what color I can to Saroni’s portrait ; it would be vain to attempt to describe a man like him by the dry enumeration of physical details. He was lithe, and, at the same time, leisurely, in his movements, though his gesticulation was sometimes rapid and full of the picturesque suggestiveness natural to an Italian. “ Saroni is as natural as a dog,” a friend of his once said of him ; and the phrase expressed very well a certain innocent animation that characterized him. He was in such thorough good-humor with his body and its senses—he so enjoyed their services and companionship—and he uniformly alluded to that enjoyment with such ingenuous simplicity—that we sometimes found ourselves wondering how it was that we had forgotten to be scandalized. But the fact is, Saroni was what is termed a privileged person—

privileged by nature even more than by rank and position. Everybody liked him, except the few who (like Mrs. Fulvia) conceived an aversion for him at first sight, and everybody was content that he should behave like himself and not like other people. Of course, it must not be inferred that Saroni was a boor or a fool. He was an aristocrat and a gentleman; his social position was impregnable; he was never awkward and never dull. Nevertheless, underneath that refined surface, not interfering with it, but contriving to exist in apparent harmony with it, you might always discern the unconventional, unsophisticated, spontaneous animal; thoroughly at home and at ease in its human cage, and able to gratify all its instincts, without so much as rubbing against the bars.

But perhaps I am giving undue prominence to an aspect of Saroni's character which was not in reality the predominant one. He came to London as an attaché of the Italian Embassy; it was a post rather of honor than of emolument or diplomatic complexity; and to Saroni it meant, practically, little more than an introduction, under the best auspices, to the best London society. He availed himself of his opportunities, and pleased himself immensely with everything. The amount of downright hard work he could accomplish in the course of a London season was surprising; nothing could make him feel *blasé* or dull the poignancy of his satisfactions. It was a curious spectacle—that of a man essentially so close to the primitive creature, expanding himself without stint in one of the most stolidly artificial societies in the world. But Saroni always seemed less to accommodate himself to circumstances than to accommodate them to himself. I apprehend, also, that the germ at least of what was so luxuriant in him was present in much more