

**PIERO DA
CASTIGLIONE**

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Piero Da Castiglione by Stuart Sterne

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STUART STERNE

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BY

[STUART STERNE]

AUTHOR OF "ANGELO," "GIORGIO AND OTHER FORMS,"
"BEYOND THE SHADOW AND OTHER FORMS"

Blonde, blonde



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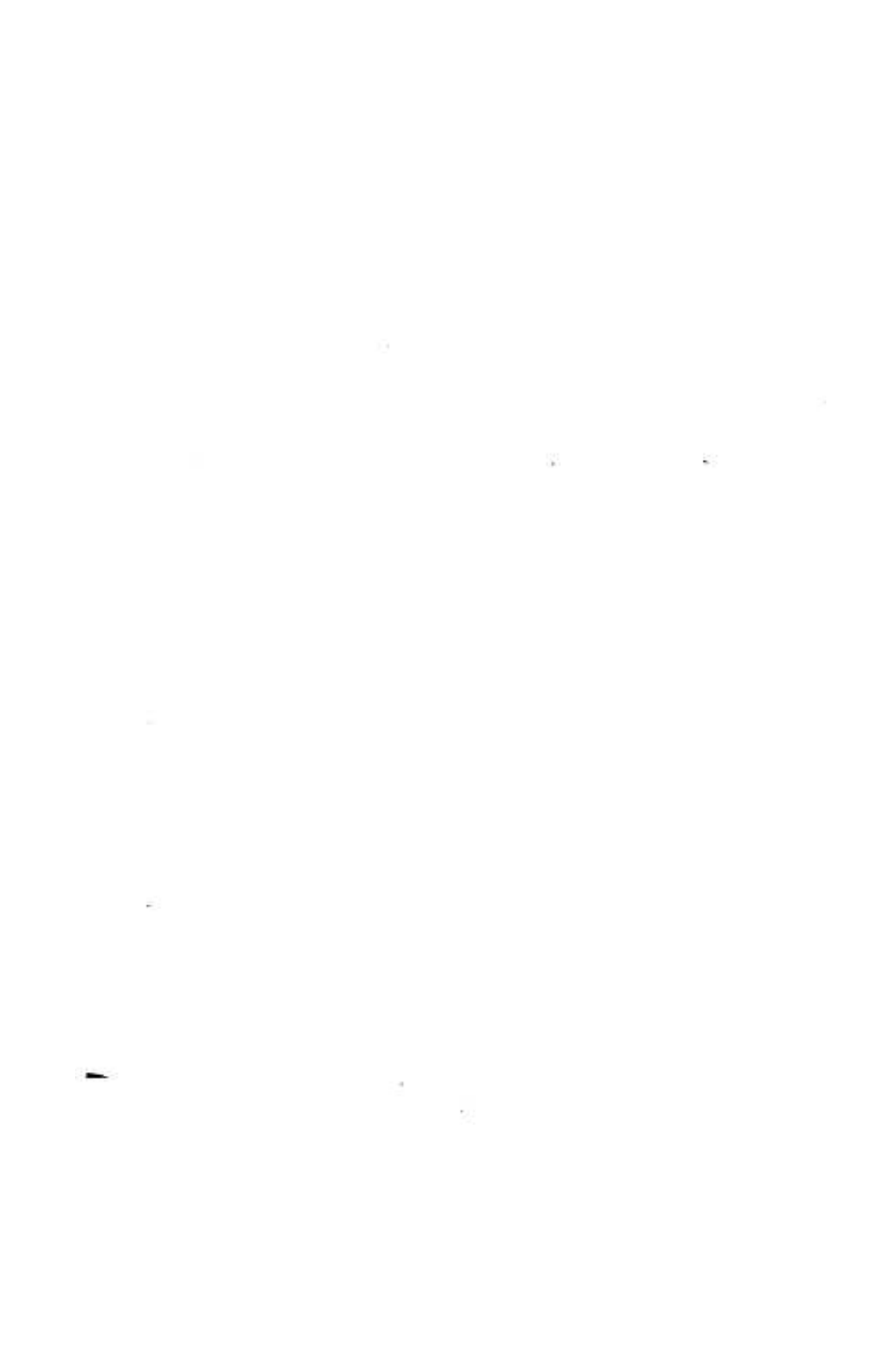
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To
VICTOR G. BLOEDE,
THE DEAR ONLY BROTHER, COUNSELOR, AND FRIEND,
WHOSE TRUE HEART AND STRONG ARM
HAVE NEVER BEEN FOUND WANTING, IN SUNSHINE OR IN SHADE,
His Labor of Love
IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED BY
S. S.

424202



PIERO DA CASTIGLIONE.

"NAY, are they true, — the strange, dark words
writ here? —

'To love, by heaven and earth, means soon or
late

To smart and suffer, — it is sure as death.'
To smart and suffer, — and must love be such,
Needs some time bring us agony and pain,
If it be perfect love? Yet ours has brought
But joy and untold happiness to us,
My Piero and myself. Ah, strange!"

And with

A puzzled shadow on the fair, white brow,
Maria raised her head, till now bent down
All eagerly above the ponderous tome
Held open on her knee, and let her eyes,
Questioning and as in search of answer, roam
About the wide apartment, still and empty
Save for herself, and even at noon half dim

With all its dusky splendor of carved woods
And wondrous gilded art and ornament,
Blent in a gorgeous whole, — where, rich on walls
And vaulted ceiling, some old master-hand
Had conjured forth amid blue, stainless skies
Young cherubs, linked by garlands of gay flowers
In never-ending dance, and where the light
From a stained window high above her head
Broke as through precious gems of many hues,
And slowly with the morning sun moved on
Across the marble floor.

“Ay, strange, most strange,”

She softly said again. “How can it be?
For ours methinks in truth is perfect love, —
Sweet Heaven! is not my whole soul bound in
him,

And his in mine? Yet, let me see once more.”
And, drawing close the cushion for her feet,
She let the slender finger trace again
The long black lines adown the yellowed page,
Where, like a gleam from out a ruby's heart,
Now fell a fleck of crimson, lighting up
The words she read, slow and attentively,
As if she pondered each: —

“Soul, art thou prepared to take upon thyself the
awful burden of Love for Love's sake alone, — for

thou needst hope for no other reward, — to know hunger and thirst without end, to be pricked with sharp thorn, and pierced by a sword of fire? Then art thou ready for Heaven, for thou shalt pass through Purgatory. They were a fair man and woman, who met half way upon the path of life. And a voice from heaven said: 'Ye shall be friends, but your portion shall not be equal. Thou, woman, shalt love and suffer most, shalt give and give, ten times and thousandfold, and receive but scant measure back from him. Wilt thou wear such a chaplet as that, set with pricking thorn?' A shadow came upon the woman's face, but she said, 'I will.' And the voice went on: 'In days of cloudless sunshine, he will share the light with thee, knowing nought of thy secret sorrows. But when grief touches him, thou shalt ever comfort, find one last drop of joy, one last flower of life, for him, — with bleeding feet kneel down to bind up his bruises, — lead him from darkness out to God. And he shall take and take, and never count the cost. Thinkest thou to bear the burden of such a cross as that?' The light had died out of the woman's eyes, but she said again, 'I will.' And the voice went on: 'And in the end he will turn from thee to a fairer face, and forget thee. Thou shalt walk on in thy desolate path alone, till God calls thee home to Him. Canst thou drain such a sharp cup of agony and death as that? Be-think thee well, — it means to be transfixed as with