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THE ROMANCE OF AGOSTINI.

A TRUE STORY OF MODERN ROME.

CHAPTER I.

"MAKE haste then, Teta. The child is mad. Must I call the other women because thou refusest to obey thy mother? What are my lady's secrets, if she has secrets—the blessed Madonna forbid I should say she had—to thee? Send for Mariuccia, I say. If her Excellency would gossip with her foster-sister, is it thy business? Go, child, you weary me. Send to Rocca for Mariuccia, and if there is anything to be told, she loves to talk; be sure she will tell it word for word."

"Ah, mamma mia, but what has Madame Margherita to do with my lady?" said the lively Teta, fixing upon her mother her inquisitive black eyes; "and why did you fetch her in such haste? and what is to be done with Mariuccia? She is but a *villana*, as all the world knows. My lady cares no more for her than I care for Chichina in the kitchen. A great lady like La Duchessa to gossip with her foster-sister!—ah, mother mine, do you think Teta believes it? And why, then, did you fetch Madame Margherita from Rome?"

"Madame Margherita is a wise woman: she knows what the English Forestieri do when they are sick," said the mother, gravely. "Nay, she only serves the English strangers, had it not been a great lady like ours. Thy aunt, Teta, who has been in England, went to seek her for my lady—thou knowest very well my lady has been ill. Send thou for Mariuccia, and hold thy peace—she will be better now."

"Ah, yes; so they say, 'she will be better now,'" said Teta, satirically; "but why do not the Duke and my lady make rejoicings and a great festa in Genzaro, as they did when Donna Anna was born? Nay, to be sure, you will not answer; but one talks in the Agostini palace, madre mia, and one thinks also. I will send for Mariuccia directly—and do you think she will not tell?"

So saying, the saucy Teta went briskly along the gallery, crossing the lines of sunshine from the great windows—for it was still spring, and the sun was bearable—with her white muslin apron fluttering, her long earrings glancing, her gloss of black hair shining under the light. The waiting-woman looked after her with a gleam of maternal vanity, and a sigh of more anxious feeling. She was not annoyed by Teta's curiosity, but it made her watch with a little trembling the progress of her full-developed Roman girl.

"Ah, Teta is clever!" said the mother to herself. "I am glad she did not go with Donna Anna. Send her a safe husband, Madonna mia santissima! for to be a cameriera in a great family, one must see all and say nothing, which would not do for my Teta; and Mariuccia, though my lady trusts her, is but a country-woman, and loves to talk. These peasants will talk of anything if their life were on it; but they are so far above us, these great ladies—how should the Duchessa know who best to trust?"

And sighing over a little disappointed excellence of her own, the Duchess Agostini's faithful maid went into her mistress's chamber. This room was somewhat mysterious at present to the other inmates of the house. The anteroom which led to it was hung close with heavy velvet curtains, covering the doors, the floor was thickly carpeted, the outer blinds closed over the windows. Coming into this close, noiseless, breathless apartment, out of the great corridor, with its marble pavement and cold statues, it was not wonderful that the servants of the house were curious about the secrets of the further apartments into which they were not admitted. Vincenza, or Cenci, as it was common to call her, coming in with familiar composure to this anteroom, suddenly arrested herself in a

pause of horror at the door, and with all the disgust and apprehension with which English nostrils recognise that bugbear of modern life, an evil smell, sniffed at the motionless air, which was weighted with a faint odour of a very different character. The alarmed waiting-maid sniffed about the walls in anxious search for the secret foe which thus betrayed itself. Then she got down on her knees, and hunted about the corners. At last, catching a glimpse of something green and white under a table, she pounced upon it triumphantly. "Eccola!" cried Cenci; "behold it!" It was but an innocent morsel of half-opened orange-blossom; but Cenci dashed aside the velvet curtain, and rushed to the open window in the gallery, from which she could throw it out, contemplating suspiciously all the time the offending flower. "An enemy has done it," said the anxious waiting-woman, "to discover our secret; or, alas, alas! perhaps Teta, my thoughtless child! If Madame Margherita should have smelt it!—but the Madonna be praised, she is English, and if the Duchessa does not know, it will do her no harm. I shall hold my peace." With which prudent resolution, Cenci returned through the velvet-deafened anteroom, and through another vacant, muffled apartment, into the citadel of the whole—the lady's chamber. A sharpwitted Italian, seeing that manœuvre of Cenci's, and knowing the horror which womankind in that country entertains of every kind of perfume, would speedily have divined the secret concealed there. The room was partially lighted, one little gleam of golden sunshine coming in through a slight opening in the green Persian blinds which sheltered the centre window outside, and was furnished with a cold splendour of marble and gilding which it needed that sun to endue with anything like comfort. The roof was painted with an allegorical picture, the walls were rich with festoons of stucco flowers, and vast snowy lace curtains drooped close over all the windows, subduing still further the light which came through the closed Persianis. That gleam of sunshine, however, illuminated the central object in the picture with a warmer light. On a vast bed, carved and gilt with all the splendours of rococo, nestled among white pillows and coverlets, and a world of lace, lay a pretty, languid, pale woman, with extreme ennui and a shade of vexation on her face. She was playing her pretty white hand over something which lay concealed among the coverings on the bed, and which an occasional snarl and spring betrayed to be a tiny spaniel. Now and then a sharp movement of the coverlet betrayed the impatience with which La Duchessa awaited her recovery. There was nothing visible of amusement or occupation about the bed—no books, none of those pretty safety-valves of fancy-work which suit the feminine subject—no chair for a chance visitor, or apparent possibility of any such delicious interlude of gossip. The poor Duchessa had nothing in the world to amuse her solitude but her waiting-woman and her dog.

Yet there was something else in the room which might have been supposed more interesting than either, but which, an unwelcome intruder condemning her to this reluctant retirement from the world, the Duchess Agostini looked upon with anything but love. Sturdily seated in an attitude of habit by the low wide fireplace, though there was no fire, was a little woman of a singular equality of dimensions, length and breadth being almost identical—a little woman with a broad bright face, full of importance, fun, and intelligence. This fat fairy was clothed in robes of grey Roman flannel, which neutral-coloured material could not confer any shadowy softening upon her unmistakable substance, and held upon her lap a silent bundle of white, from out of which sometimes flickered, more quietly than the tiny black paws of its triumphant rival on the bed, an infant's fitful little hand. Except that little hand, and the small mass of muslin from which it appeared, no trace of baby presence was in the room. All silently, and with the indignation of a nurse and a woman, Madame Margherita put the infant's tiny wardrobe, with all its accessories, out of sight when she had

made the noiseless creature's toilet; and the velvet curtains might have been looped aside at the Duchessa's pleasure, for any sound which that tiny atom of unwelcome flesh and blood ever made. Madame Margherita sat by the fireplace looking over the baby's head at the vexed and indifferent mother. The little woman had a woman's heart in her, and was touched with a special compassion for the child which could not draw its mother's attention from her pet spaniel, and curiously, with the instinct of a close unconscious observer, watched the lady on the bed. What kind of creature was she? A woman, one of those called the gentler portion of humanity, many a time named an angel by admiring lips—a mother, nay, almost a grandmother, young though she still was. There she lay, vexed at her seclusion, troubled at her burden, anxious to get out of her sight and hands the harmless helpless thing she had given birth to. Madame Margherita watched her narrowly over the baby's dozing sleep. She was a great lady; but the little Irishwoman resented deeply the secret birth at which she had been called to assist, and, thinking of what her innocent English ladies would think of her if they knew it, had no softening in her eyes to her patient. She watched her with a woman's contempt and indignation, not untinctured by professional disgust. To play with that ugly little cur, and never so much as to look at the child!

"Poverino!" said Cenci, coming up softly to the bundle of white muslin; "but will it live, think you? It is too good for a little child."

"It will live," said Madame Margherita, indignantly; "to be sure. If it were an heir and a darling, and the light of its mother's eyes, I might doubt of it, Cenci; but look you here, when death is wished for, it does not come."

"It is true," said Cenci, gravely; "but nobody wishes thee dead, thou little unhappy one! only safe, bello mio—safe, and out of the way."

"Ah, Cenci, San Lorenzo would be the safest nursery of all; and so my lady thinks," said the English nurse; "but I tell you the babe's well and likely. I must see this Mariuccia, however. Of course, she'll swaddle up the poor innocent and scorn to take a lesson from me; that *I* should have anything to do with a baby in swaddling-clothes! I am sorry to say it, Cenci, for I've a respect for you and your aunt Teta; but the most ignorant, prejudiced, bigoted people I ever set eyes on! Well, well, it does not matter; but you'll see this child will live."

"I daresay Mariuccia will do what you tell her," said Cenci; "she is only a *villana*—she knows nothing. We brought up Donna Anna in the *modo Inglese*, Madame Margherita; and my Teta, who is two years older, went to her grandmother, and was fastened up like a proper child till she was of due age. You are fantastic, you Forestieri; when you say a thing without knowing, then you will never be convinced. Has not my Teta straighter limbs and a better grace than Donna Anna herself, though she is married to a prince? But silence—not a word—the Duchessa will hear."

"If the Duchessa did hear, or the Holy Father himself, it was a scandalous business to entice me here," said Madame Margherita, "to assist at such a birth—I who am known to have nothing to do only with English ladies! I shall have nothing to say to your aunt Teta, Cenci, another time. The old hypocrite! to come to me with her tale of Jesu Nazzarino, till I thought it was a work of mercy, and not of sin!"

"What is that you say, Margherita?" asked the Duchessa's fretful voice from the bed.

"Only concerning Cenci's aunt Teta, my lady," said Madame Margherita, changing her tone with professional ease. "I was engaged with a lady when she came for me, and old Teta did not know where to go; so instead of seeking out my husband, she went home to the Jesu Nazzarino and said her prayers; then she took him down and set him on the table, and abused him well. 'Are you deaf because you're old?' says she. 'Ah, Jesu Nazzarino, can't ye hear me? or is it shamming ye are? Madame Margherita must

come to my lady—Madame Margherita must come to La Duchessa. Ah, shame on you, Jesu Nazzarino! If you do not bring me Madame Margherita, I will never pray to you any more.' Then she hung him up again, and went out to seek me; but Jesu Nazzarino was as deaf as ever. So Teta went back and took him down again, and set him on the table. 'Ah, Jesu Nazzarino,' says she, 'Madame Margherita must come to my lady. If you will send me Madame Margherita, I will offer you a candle as thick as my arm; and if you will not, I will take you down, you old deaf useless thing, and burn you in the fire.' So she went out again and found me; for you see, my lady, it is good to offer a candle to Jesu Nazzarino when you are in great need of him; then he does all you say."

"Ah, Teta is a charming old woman," cried the Duchessa; "why can't you have Teta here to amuse me, Cenci? You never think of anything. Send for her directly, do you hear? Ah, by the by, it is as well; we will have done with the child first. Has Mariuccia come?—go and see if she is come, and let her come up immediately to fetch the child. Why don't you go? Margherita, why will my servants never do what I tell them? Do *you* speak, for I must not be agitated, you know."

Saying which, the Duchessa controlled herself instantaneously, and nestled back among the pillows—she would not retard her own recovery for half an hour.

CHAPTER II.

That evening the wished-for Mariuccia made her appearance at the Agostini palace. She was in her gala dress, as became a woman called to the presence of so great a lady as the Duchessa; and it was difficult to believe that the brown middle-aged peasant woman, with her broad figure made still broader by the projecting boddice of her local costume, and the great white handkerchief folded over it, was the foster-sister and identical in age with the delicate and languid beauty secluded with so much precaution behind all these closed curtains and shut doors. Mariuccia was received by Cenci at the door of the anteroom, and mysteriously led into the next apartment, in ordinary times the Duchessa's dressing-room. Here the waiting-woman paused, making impressive Italian signs of silence; for it was necessary to inform the stranger of the business required of her, before admitting her to the great lady's room.

"Hush—there is a baby to be nursed and cared for. Thou must take it to thy house, and get a nurse for it, and bring it up," said Cenci. "Thou canst say it is thy Maria's child."

"A baby!" cried Mariuccia, with lively gestures of astonishment. "Where?—how? Santa Maria!—what luck has dropped such a windfall here?"

"Eh! what can one say?—there it is, the unhappy one," said Cenci, shrugging her shoulders. "La Duchessa will give thee her own instructions; and there is Madame Margherita, the English nurse, will have it dressed in the *modo Inglese*. These Forestieri are pleased with nothing that is not done in their own way."

"Nay, I will take the child if the Duchessa says so," said Mariuccia; "but I know nothing of your English fashion. The baby shall be like my own babies, if it comes with me. Do you think there is a woman in Rocca who would vex her spirit with your *modo Inglese*? And I am too old to learn. My mother, I will answer for her, put La Duchessa herself into swaddling-bands; and if it sufficed for her, it must suffice for her child. Why did she have the English nurse, Cenci? Is there not the Sora Caterina still living, who came to Genzaro when Donna Anna was born?"

"Ah, stupid," said Cenci; "Sora Caterina goes to all the great ladies in Rome—Madame Margherita is only with the English who come travelling when they ought to be at home; and she is not pleased to be here, I can tell you. But come, the

Duchessa will have no ease till the child is gone. Poverino! it is so good, the unhappy one; I think it will die."

"But, Cenci, a moment—it is a boy? then it is the heir? and why send it away?" asked Mariuccia: "why so secret? have they not wished for an heir? If it is great love for Donna Anna, it is the first time of showing it—for, to be sure, thou canst not mean any shame."

"Nay, to be sure," said Cenci, with grave satire; "only the sooner it is gone, the better the Duchessa will be pleased; and the better will it be for thee."

"Ah, Il Duca does not know," said Mariuccia.

"Bah, the Duke knows as well as you or I—come; it is the Duchessa's will," said Cenci, moving towards the invalid's guarded apartment. Mariuccia followed in a vague state of perplexity. The good woman was not so sharp-witted as Cenci, nor as Cenci's daughter, brought up among all the knowledges and scandals of a great house. Mariuccia was by no means so deeply shocked by her own suspicions as an English country woman in her position might have been, but still went doubtfully after the waiting-woman, quite unable to make out whether there was any real reason for all this secresy, or whether it was a mere caprice of the great lady, who had amused the world with a due share of caprices in her time.

The room and its inhabitants remained much as they had been in the earlier part of the day. The forlorn baby, who had no little dainty nest provided for its slumbers, and whose mother did not admit it to share her couch, lay sleeping still on Madame Margherita's knee, and the little spaniel still lurked among the white coverlids of the Duchessa's bed. The sun was now on the other side of the house, and the Persianis of the middle window had been thrown open. Monte Cavo, with a streak of snow upon his summit, and a faint cloud-cap all fringed and feathered with rosy touches of reflection from the setting sun, thrust his great shoulder across the breadth of sky, which calmly surveyed the seclusion of this room; and from the window you could look down upon the deep blue basin of the lake, with its metallic depth of colour, and across to the sweet grey of the olive woods, all tinged and brightened with livelier shades of green. The Duchessa, however, neither looked at the sky nor at Monte Cavo; her white hand darted now and then, in half-playful, half-angry onslaught at the spaniel, provoking the mimic rage of the spoilt creature; then she yawned and turned and appealed to Madame Margherita for some prevalent gossip about the English strangers who were wondered and laughed at, with a shade of bitterness and painful sense of the importance of these wandering strangers, among the noble folk of Rome. Madame Margherita was nothing loth; but, speaking of her country women and their babies, delivered many a thrust at her patient, which that languid lady was wholly unconscious of. They were thus engaged when Cenci and Mariuccia entered the room.

"You will take the child, Mariuccia," said the Duchessa, when she had received and snubbed the dutiful salutations and inquiries of the wondering woman, and had suffered her hand to be kissed with impatient grace, "and get a nurse—you will easily get a nurse in Rocca—and take care of the poor little creature; and you can let Cenci know now and then how it goes on. I will give you twelve scudi a-month, which is a great deal more than it will cost you; and now make haste—take it away."

"But, Eccellenza," said Mariuccia, "what shall I say? how shall I call the little Don?"

"You shall not call it Don at all," said the Duchessa, fretfully, with a momentary flush on her face; "say it is Maria's son, or what you will. It will never be the Duke Agostini, assure yourself of that. You can call it Francisco. Oh yes, it is baptised; and now, for the love of heaven, take it away!"

"But pardon, Eccellenza," said Madame Margherita, "while I instruct the good woman how to dress the dear little fellow. See here, Mariuccia, these are all his clothes—this goes on first, you perceive; and then the flannel, and then——"

"Eccellenza," said Mariuccia, solemnly, "I will take the child; but I will not take all these fantastical robes, nor be instructed at my age in the *modo Inglese*. Grazia a Dio, I know how to care for a child. I have had seven babies; and as the little Don is none of your Forestieri——"

"Take it away, for heaven's sake," cried the Duchessa; "I tell you it is no Don, and shall not be called so. Take the child away; do you know I must not be agitated, Margherita, inhuman? Do you know I must be well for the Princess Coromila's ball? Ah, cruel! do you mean to kill me? dress it as you will, Mariuccia mia; but for the love of heaven take it away!"

"At least, Madame, you will kiss the child," said Madame Margherita, holding up the voiceless infant with a stern solemnity which on her broad face and broader figure looked half ludicrous. The Duchessa laughed, but, conscious of the disapproval, frowned also; and, leaning carelessly forward, just touched her baby's cheek with her lips: it was the first and last mother's kiss which ever fell to the lot of the little Francisco. A few minutes after he was bundled up in a shawl, and concealed under another shawl belonging to Cenci, which she professed to lend to the countrywoman, because it was after the Ave Maria, and the sun had set. Thus burdened, Mariuccia went stealthily forth from the muffled anteroom. The quick twilight was already falling into darkness, and her son waited below with the donkey which was to carry his mother home; but the much-desired visitor was not to escape so easily. As she proceeded with caution along the gallery, Teta, with her fluttering muslin apron, her long earrings, and glossy braids of black hair, came suddenly out upon her from a neighbouring apartment. Mariuccia swerved aside in unconscious alarm, and a faint cry burst from the child—almost the first cry it had uttered in its stealthy little life. The new nurse was in dismay; unconsciously she betrayed the nature of her bundle by rocking it softly in her arms and whispering the "hush, hush," of an incipient lullaby over its little half-smothered head. Teta's quick eyes saw and understood. There could be very little doubt about the Duchessa's secret now.

"It is so late to go all the road to Rocca," she said, with affected sympathy: "are you not afraid of robbers, Mariuccia mia? and then the donkey is obstinate and pokes his nose among the hedges, and you have so great a bundle to carry; but you will give that to Gigi when you get below. Is that my mother's shawl she has lent you? What great luck you are in! for she would not lend it to me."

"My child, it is half an hour after the Ave Maria, and I have come down quickly from Rocca and heated myself," said Mariuccia, keeping as far off as possible from the inquisitive Teta. "Sora Cenci is an old friend; she would not have me to take the fever for want of a shawl."

"Ah, but I know you are in great favour," said Teta. "To think of being sent for, all the way to Rocca, to speak with the Duchessa! Is she fond of hearing how all the old women are in your village, Mariuccia mia? I will go up and visit you some day, and then perhaps the Duchessa will send for me."

"It is a troublesome road to our village," said Mariuccia, "and a great lady like the Duchessa does not stay long in Genzaro, I warrant you. Come when my Maria comes home from Subiaco, amore mia. She is going to send me her little son."

"Has Maria then a little son?" asked Teta, pressing still closer to Mariuccia's burdened arm, as she marched along the gallery with her firm slow Roman step by the peasant's side. "Then I daresay this is a bundle of things for the baby which the Duchessa has given you. Did I not say you were in favour? Come, Mariuccia, show them to me."

"Old robes, Teta mia. There is nothing worth looking at," cried the unfortunate Mariuccia, making a sudden start from Teta's side as the little morsel of humanity in her arms, provoked thereto by the fresh air and unusual locomotion, gave another momentary cry.

"Then you all thought you could cheat Teta," cried that triumphant maiden, clapping her hands; "as if

I did not know that all those curtains over the doors, and no one going in, and Madame Margherita from Rome, and Mariuccia from Rocca, must mean something! Show it to me this moment, Mariuccia, or I will go and tell my mother."

"Your mother will never forgive me—and oh, Madonna santissima! what will the Duchessa say?" cried the bewildered peasant in terror.

"Show me the baby directly," cried the authoritative Teta, "and I will swear to you that they never shall know."

Thus commanded, Mariuccia timidly lifted the corner of the shawl, and in the darkness, where it was almost impossible to see anything, exhibited the little bundle under it, from which flickered once more that fitful little hand. They could not see much of the baby, it was true, but the two women bent their heads together with a common instinct and cooed over the bundle. "Quanti bello!" said one, and "Quanti carina!" sighed the other, dropping visionary kisses on the shawl, as such female creatures do. Then Mariuccia quickened her pace with a kind of desperation, and Teta, much subdued, disappeared down a back staircase. The Duchessa's secret was now in the keeping of another, and both the parties concerned were a little afraid. Mariuccia made haste to mount her donkey, called Gigi imperatively from the game into which he had plunged for "divertimento" while he waited, and rode off in great haste. The good woman rode after a masculine fashion, it is to be confessed, and made rather a comical figure with the baby in her arm, the reins in her hand, her manful and steady seat, and the straightforward directness with which she looked before her, glancing neither to the right hand nor to the left, and suffering the wise animal which carried her to steer its own wary course. But though she rode *en cavalier*, her heart warmed womanfully to the forlorn baby in her arm. That very night it should be comfortably swaddled as an Italian bambino ought to be. That very night poor Antonia, who had lost her baby, should take the little outcast to her bosom. The quiet baby slept on through the darkness round the glimmering edge of the lake, and through the soft whirr and rustle of the olive woods, securely wrapped in its shawl, and knowing nothing of its transfer from the palace to the cottage, while Gigi rambled on, now in front, now in the rear, singing low to keep up his courage; and Mariuccia's donkey went steadily, now swinging down a slope, and now giving grave heed to an ascent. Save that they travelled so late, the boy, the woman, the donkey, and the baby, were a commonplace party enough on that country road; and nobody could have supposed that either mysterious secret or future romance was involved in that darkling progress up the steep side of Monte Cavo, to Mariuccia's village home.

CHAPTER III.

The daylight world of Rocca discovered next morning with some amazement the new inmate in Mariuccia's house, of which poor Antonia, the young mother who had lost her baby, and who had been sadly making up her mind to go into Rome and try her fortune as a nurse, had already taken willing charge. Mariuccia announced the baby to be the child of her daughter Maria who was settled in Subiaco, a convenient distance off, but nobody believed this fabulous story: however, the incident did not excite so much curiosity in that rocky little perch upon the side of Monte Cavo as it might have done in an English village. Somehow or other, through the investigations of Zia Marianna, who was of an inquiring mind, and devoted herself to the pursuit of knowledge, a vague connection between the Agostini palace and the little nursling in Mariuccia's house became an understood matter among the villagers; but even Zia Marianna could not make up her mind to determine whose child the infant was, and curiosity gradually calmed down into custom and acquaintance. Everybody learned to recognise the little Chichino as a child of the village, and

it was no longer possible to talk or make surmises touching the familiar little face, which belonged to Mariuccia, as much as if it had really been her daughter's child. So the noiseless baby lived and grew as Italian babies use. The flowing robes in which Madame Margherita had clothed the child, were laid up as curiosities to be exhibited to Mariuccia's most familiar gossips, to their great derision and amusement, when Mariuccia had herself forgotten the temporary fiction which made little Francisco her own grandchild, and the baby was inducted with due propriety into the national garb of babies, and henceforward looked over his nurse's arm stiff and motionless from the shoulders downward, a helpless little bundle, done up in yards of cotton bandages. On Sundays and other festas, when Mariuccia appeared in all the glories of local costume, with her scarlet jacket, her projecting *busto*, her neckerchief and headdress, and apron of flowing white trimmed with lace, and her long gold earrings and necklace of coral, the small bundle of cotton which contained the body and legs of the helpless little Chichino was covered with a kind of frock, open behind and trimmed with lace like his nurse's apron, while upon his poor little head he wore a cap gay with many-coloured ribbons and little bunches of artificial flowers. When the second stage of his babyhood arrived, the poor little outcast was put into stiff little stays, with long bands of cotton attached for leading-strings, like the rest of his small countrymen, and swung down upon the rough pavement, or tilted up, hanging by these same bands, or in extremity hung upon the handle of a door, according to the convenience of his guardian; and when Mariuccia knitted her stockings, or mended her linen, or laboured at her distaff, she first stuck her baby-charge into a kind of hencoop, where the creature could not fall despite its most convulsive efforts, and had its first lesson in the inevitable endurances. Then Mariuccia sung all manner of nursery rhymes to him, in which, though the language did not sound very sweetly from her uninstructed lips, the soft Italian vowels made possible any amount of jingle and rhyme. Mariuccia's house consisted of two dark rooms looking out upon the steep stony street of Rocca. A very rough floor partially tiled, a grated window high in the wall, a dark Madonna in a black frame, and a Saint Jerome with his lion—for Mariuccia's husband, Girolamo, honoured that austere personage as his patron saint—were the early surroundings of Chichino. The child knew nothing in the world of the princely chamber in which he was born, or the hosts of servants who might, save for some secret reason unknown, have tended his noble childhood. When the curious Teta came to see him, as that inquisitive young woman did from time to time, he called her Aunt Teta, and was mightily pleased with her confectionaries. Teta, a cameriera in a great house, scorned to appear—save at carnival—in anything that savoured of *costume*. She was no peasant, and did not mean to be taken for one. So she bound her full Roman shoulders into a French shawl, and covered her glossy locks, which Mariuccia's white kerchief would have become so much better, with a Parisian bonnet, made after the Duchessa's; and the villagers called her the Signorina Teresa, and little Chichino was as proud of her patronage as he was gratified by her biscuits. Teta did not tell her mother of these private visits, nor their object, but she entirely won the baby heart and affections of the little outcast boy.

It was thus that the child grew up whose history was to have so many features of romance. There was not much romance around him among the humble villagers of Rocca, to whom aunt Marianna's gossip was the most important news going; and who tended their vines and their olives as prosaically as though these poetic crops had been dull turnips and mangel-wurzel; and if Chichino's boyish imagination was impressed by the historic landscape visible all day long and every day from Mariuccia's door, he did not know it himself, and communicated his susceptibilities to none;—though it was a scene worth pausing upon. Far down at the foot of those soft Alban

hills, with their sprinkling of white towns and villas, and Pope Julius's fortifications standing out upon their mound, among a world of tender olives, how the low Campagna, all silent and sad, stretched away under its mists and sunsets to the other mountains, and stole forlorn and uninhabited to where the triumphant sea flashed up suddenly to the sunshine, a golden gleaming string to the bow of that brown coast! How San Pietro, mighty in the distance, rose up against the plain, regnant over that haze of scattered houses, the name of which is Rome! And then those broad sunsets, with their great calm circles of fervent colour, not cloudy and mountainous, but grand and great, mists of the earth, and blue of the sky, the sunsets of a plain! The little Chichino was very well used to the prospect; many a day he climbed up to the crest of Monte Cavo, and looked around upon a classic world, of which the boy knew nothing; but where his eye still sought with some unconscious presentiment the white front of the Agostini palace gleaming out from the trees on the further side of the Nemi lake. What had the little peasant, who knew no home but that of Mariuccia, to do with that princely house? The inquiring spirit of Zia Marianna, perhaps, recollected some vague link of connection once established between them, but the villagers had all but forgotten the tale, and Chichino had no knowledge of it whatever. Yet still the boy looked down from the height of Monte Cavo upon those two deep basins of shining blue metallic water, all secluded and solemn among the hills, and told Mariuccia that he could see the pomegranate burst and glow into clusters of blossom in the slope of the palace gardens.—"Will you not take me there one day, Nonna, to see the great elm-tree avenue, and that Madonna that Teta tells me of, and the beautiful Duchessa?" said the boy. "And he never asks to go anywhere else!" said Mariuccia to herself, clasping her hands with an appeal to the Madonna. "The Duchessa is no longer beautiful, my child; never think of her more; she is as old as I am: be content—one day thou shalt go to Rome."

CHAPTER IV.

Nearly twenty years after the time at which this story commences, a young painter, called Francisco Spoleto, bred and educated at the great Roman hospital of San Michele, took up his residence and began to labour for his bread in Rome. He had one little room at the top of a house in the Piazza di Trajano—which may be freely translated Trajan Square—where he had the felicity of looking down upon the crowd of grey broken pillars, a remnant dug up out of the historic soil of Trajan's Forum, which are curiously preserved and protected there in the heart of the modern city. He had a little capital to start with, partly San Michele's charitable contribution to his pupil's establishment in life, partly the savings of a little fund laid up for him by his peasant grandmother, or foster-mother; and on the strength of this had taken some pains to embellish his little apartment, though he spent but little time in it. He was not very clever, nor yet highly cultivated. He had never thought about the higher branches of his profession, not for want of ambition, so much as because nothing had suggested them to his mind; he made very good copies occasionally when he could get a commission, but had enough intelligence of his own to be rather impatient of that work, and to prefer the still homely but more personal occupation of portrait-painting. He had not a great deal to do, but got on very well as yet, living with Spartan frugality, as young Romans use, dining at a Trattoria, and spending the long evening, and sometimes no small part of the day, at the café. The café and the theatre, indeed, occupied a very large share in the life of the young artist, which it would, however, have been perfectly false and unjust to call a life of dissipation.

His harmless glass of lemonade, his cup of *café noir*, his draught of wine, were modest indulgences compatible with his means; he was young, and his spirits were high; he was possessed by no extreme appetite for work, and could dine on a melon and a dark-complexioned roll when it was needful; so that as long as his coat was irreproachable and his gloves clean, he was a highly independent man.

He had no father nor mother nor recognised relatives; long before this time he had come to know that the peasant woman whom he called Nonna or grandmother was no grandmother of his, and that his name, however he had acquired it, was not derived from her daughter at Subiaco. Perhaps the young man thus budding into such society as he could reach, was as well pleased to call the guardian of his childhood nurse, as to claim a more intimate relationship, but he went to see her notwithstanding when he could, and received her occasional visit with great good-nature. He had, besides, other visitors whom he remembered from his earliest years,—Teta, who had married a courier, and had a whole tall house in the Corso, which she let to the travelling English and other foreign visitors embraced under the generic name of Forestieri; Gigi, who was now the father of a host of little sunbrowned hill-folk, and who came to Francisco's door, on the rare occasions when he visited Rome, with a little basket of grapes or flask of oil as a present to the little Chichino of old times; and many another good-hearted villager remembered the forlorn little boy. Signore Francisco received their little presents with the utmost good-humour, suffered himself to be called Chichino and Chico, and made himself very agreeable, after a princely superior fashion, to those loyal tributaries. The good people, when they had been to see him, laid their heads together and called to mind the prelections of Zia Marianna. He was not a peasant's son, that was very evident. No born Contadino ever attained to such an air and presence except under the shadow of the Church and the sacred vestments. Who was he? Certainly Mariuccia was foster-sister to the Duchessa Agostini, but where could she find little Chichino? "Such plants do not grow by the roadside," they said to each other; and besides the Rocca people, not a few Roman gossips came to be aware that some unknown line of connection existed between the house of Agostini and a nameless young painter who had been bred at the great St Michael's hospital. Great changes in the mean time had come over that noble house; the Duke was dead, the Duchess was old; now that she could no longer be a beauty, she was a *dévote*, and bestowed all her cares upon her soul. But her husband, howsoever she might have treated him, had bestowed so much of his confidence upon her, as to leave the management of his property in a great measure in her hands. She had still the summer palace at Genzaro and the great house in Rome, and Donna Anna, sole daughter and heiress, had yet to wait for her mother's death before entering fully into her possessions. She was very rich and a great lady still, but she was no longer beautiful, the poor old Duchessa—nobody cared to flatter her nowadays; her fretful soul was falling into stagnant old age, and poor Cenci, who was growing old like her mistress, had enough to do to bear all her caprices. Even in Rome every week is not a holy week, and full of religious diversions. The Duchessa heard a great many masses, and went on some pilgrimages, but it was not because of any special sin which hung heavily upon her, as Cenci supposed; it was only to dispel the dread *ennui*, and produce a little excitement for her poor listless old soul.

As for Cenci, she had found out a long time before, in some little temporary gust of quarrel between the mother and daughter, all that Teta knew of the forsaken little child; and from the time when the boy left St Michele, Cenci had watched him as it were, over Teta's shoulder. She was profoundly interested in everything about him—his manners, his associates, his mode of life. "For who can tell what may happen?" said Cenci; "Donna Anna might die, and rather than suffer everything to pass

away to strangers, the Duchessa might ——or even if Donna Anna lives, the Duchessa some time or other may bethink herself—one can never tell. He was born on the blessed Resurrection Day, the feast of feasts, Teta mia: he has not died, nor any harm come to him, though he was a feeble baby. Surely he is a fortunate child: and who can tell what may happen before we die?"

"I know that I shall see him with my living eyes come to his own rights," said Teta; "I dreamt it thrice on the vigil of St John, which all the world knows is the truest night in the world for dreams."

"Rights!" said Cenci, with sorrowful satire. "Poverino! if he waits for his *rights!* but thou and I have no such cause to love Donna Anna that we should die for her inheritance, Teta mia. Did you really dream so on the vigil of St John? and he a Resurrection child! Well, no one can tell what may happen, and you must keep your eye upon the boy."

"For my part, I do not see why you should say anything against his rights," said Teta; "the Duchessa has a hard heart, though she is a great lady—she would not care, for her own pleasure, how much she injured any one. Say what you will, madre mia, I always call him Don Francisco in my heart."

"Hush, hush, *kush*, child!" cried Cenci, looking round in a fright; "why, how canst thou tell who may hear? and hast thou well considered what the Duchessa, if she heard even a whisper of such a boldness, would say to me?"

"She has not been such a very kind mistress, mother mine, that you need care what she says," exclaimed Teta; "and I have a pretty chamber for you, and a good welcome, whenever you please."

Cenci bestowed an embrace upon the daughter, who, though now a buxom Roman matron, did not differ so much in Cenci's eyes as in other people's from the wilful Teta of twenty years ago, and whose earrings were larger, and her black hair as glossy as ever.

"I have served the Duchessa nearly forty years," said Cenci. "I must not leave her now, my child, till one of us die; and say nothing about this unhappy one, Teta mia—only keep an eye upon the boy."

CHAPTER V.

While all these whispers went on around him, the young Francisco was the only person who knew nothing of them. None of his humble friends had courage yet to unfold the possible magnificence of his chances to the young man. Teta, who was the most daring among them, had been many times on the very verge of this astounding revelation, but had stayed the words on her lips with an instinctive compassion for his present youthful comfort and satisfaction with his lot. And Mariuccia, for her part, though she was not even a tenant of the Duchessa's, nor in any way within her power, had an involuntary horror of disobeying or thwarting the great lady whom she had looked up to all her life. No one had so entire an interest in the young painter as his faithful nurse; no one knew and remembered so emphatically his real origin; no one formed such ambitious dreams for his glory and elevation; but, notwithstanding, it was not till the gossip of the country began to whisper round her, and the vague discoveries and suggestions of revived curiosity stirred her faculties, that the possessor of this secret dreamt of confiding it to the person most intimately concerned. She, only, *knew* the truth—but somehow the truth gained strength and confirmation by the stir and whisper of others who only guessed—so Mariuccia one day arrayed herself as if for a *festa*, and with great intentions in her mind set out for Rome. The peasant woman had not come unharmed through these twenty years any more than the Duchess. Mariuccia's hair, once abundant as Teta's, was now sadly scanty, dry, and wiry, reducing into proportions somewhat too meagre for the flowing white kerchief which covered it, the

upper outline of her head; and the neck, fully revealed by the plaits pinned in the other white kerchief worn on her shoulders, was a much less agreeable object than it used to be, despite the great coral necklace which adorned it. But she still sat her donkey stoutly as she went down the steep winding roads, and took her seat in the *vettura*, where she had managed to secure a place, not without a pleasurable consciousness that if there was little beauty, competence and comfort were still distinguishable in the well-laced sleeve of her scarlet jacket and embroidered work of her kerchiefs and apron. She had a little basket of eggs and a vast bottle—not so picturesque as a flask, but bigger—of wine, the produce of her own vineyard, to carry to her nursling, and did not grudge the long, dusty, fatiguing journey down the steep hill-paths and over the brown Campagna, where the solemn quiet and long succession of ruins did not at all impress her familiar mind. She was more interested in making sure that the vettura went through the Piazza of Trajan than in observing anything she passed on the way. Mariuccia meant to stay with Teta all night, if that dignified matron would receive her, and to return in her son Gigi's cart next day. It was years since she had made so solemn a visitation—not since Chichino went to San Michele, and was taken out of her hands.

Francisco was in his room when Mariuccia arrived, and she went up, up, up that long staircase to the top floor, where the young painter's apartment opened upon a bit of balcony, where he could study at his ease the figure lifted high on Trajan's Column, or gaze down at the confusion of low broken grey pillars enclosed within that modern railing. Francisco was busy, for a wonder—he had a lovely little portrait almost finished on his easel, and was making a slight, rapid, half-stealthy copy of it. The portrait was lovely because it was like, not because it was a very exquisite work of art—for Francisco's powers were not miraculous. He blushed a little and put away his copy hurriedly when the old woman came in, though Mariuccia might have watched every line of this pretty piece of sentiment and self-indulgence without ever guessing that the copy was for himself.

Mariuccia, however, paused in wondering admiration before the picture. "Quanti bella!" she cried, with enthusiasm; "it is a face for a Madonna—and is it you who have made it, Chichino mio? Ah, did not I say you would be an honour to Rocca, when you were but a child? Is it for an angel, my son, or a saint?"

"Neither, my mother," said Francisco, laughing, "but only a picture of a young lady, one of the Forestieri—a Signorina Inglese, who lives in one of Teta's apartments. Teta, you know, is always my very good friend."

"She has reason," said Mariuccia, somewhat sharply; "yet why should I say so?" she added, in an under-tone fully intended to be audible. "Had it been Cenci indeed!—but Teta was not to blame—she was but a child; she heard the secret only from me."

"What secret?" asked Francisco, with some eagerness.

"Blessed Madonna! have I breathed it in his presence?" cried Mariuccia, with well-feigned horror. "Nay, nothing that concerns you, my son; that is to say, nothing that you would wish to hear—nothing to be pleased with, you understand—only some old tales that happened when you were a child; but the picture, amore mio? To be sure, they will give you a great deal of money for it, these rich Signori Inglese?"

"Never mind the picture," said Francisco, impatiently turning its face to the easel as he spoke, and with every sign of awakened curiosity; "let me hear this secret: if it is not important, it is amusing, perhaps—come, Mariuccia, let us hear."

"You call me Mariuccia now, though the other moment you said madre mia. How is that, my son?—when you were a child, you called me Nonna," said Mariuccia, skilfully drawing towards the disclosure she had to make.

"When I was a child I knew only what you told me—now I am a man," said Francisco, with all the dignity of twenty—"and I know very well, my

good Mariuccia, that you are not my grandmother—who I am I do not know, but I shall be something before I die."

"Ah, Eccellenza! it is the voice of nature," cried Mariuccia, clasping her hands.

Francisco grew very red—red over all his youthful face with a colour more intense than blushing. "What do you mean," he said, in a very low and slightly unsteady voice, "when you say Eccellenza to me?"

"To whom should I say Eccellenza, if not to you," cried Mariuccia, "though I have brought you up in my little house, and nursed you when you were a baby, and called you Chichino, that there might be no suspicions! But do you think there were no suspicions? Old Zia Marianna was a sharp-sighted old woman. When I said you were my Maria's son, she laughed loud in my face; for you never looked like a Contadino's baby, bello mio! When poor Antonia nursed you, no one ever said, 'Is it your own child?' Though you were dressed like all the other babies, you were always the little Don. Oh yes, I have kept the secret many a day, but now I can open my mind; for all the world says it is shame and sin to keep you, who are so handsome and so good, out of your own place. I am ashamed to see you on the fourth floor, Eccellenza; you ought to live in the piano nobile at least, if not in your own palace. I am ashamed to see you work and paint—though, to be sure, there is the Duke Sermoneta who does it for pleasure—but ah! Don Francisco, how the Forestieri will prize the picture if, after a while, they come to know who the painter is!"

Mariuccia ended breathless, by kissing the hand of her former nursling with affectionate reverence, though more disposed, in the flush of excitement and enthusiasm which had made her go so much farther in her revelation than she intended, to throw her arms round him as of old. The young man stood before her motionless, breathless—still more breathless than she was. Never before, in all Mariuccia's life, had any mortal ear hung, absorbed, entranced, fearing to lose a single syllable, upon her words; but it is not wonderful that the penniless, parentless young painter, suddenly addressed by such a title as Don, a name only applied to the sons of dukes, should stand thunderstruck, in an inexpressible silent excitement, gazing, nay, rather staring at her, his whole face suffused with a burning crimson colour, and the breath almost stopped between his parted lips. He could not speak for the first moment—he made an imperious gesture to her to go on, which Mariuccia, beginning to realise her own importance, and resolved henceforth to yield her treasures of knowledge more slowly, and by the dramatic process of question and answer, paid no attention to. She sank into her chair exhausted, and opened her fan. When she had the first burst over, she was quite content to coquette with her secret, and provoke the interest, too intense to be called curiosity, of her anxious listener. He, for his part, stood before her, dumb as an Englishman, but gesticulating like an Italian. "What *do* you mean?" burst from his lips at length. "Am I an orphan, bred at San Michele? Am I a villano of Rocca? Don! You mock me, I know; but, in the name of all the saints, what do you mean?"

"Mean?—that you should ask me so, like a mendacious woman!" said Mariuccia, with pretended offence. "I am your Excellency's oldest servant, Don Francisco—at least the next after Madame Margherita; and how should you remember Madame Margherita, when you were only a week old, poverino mio? I carried you under Cenci's shawl, and no one was the wiser—no one but Teta, who was always clever. You were so quiet, even Gigi did not know of it—though the boy did remember where we had been the night the baby came."

"And where had you been, Mariuccia mia?" asked the young man, with trembling lips.

"Ah! that is just the question: but if I tell you," said Mariuccia, slowly, "it will disturb your mind, and make you unsettled; and then it is possible nothing might come of it: and the other side is very strong—very strong, my son; and

she herself — Madonna Santissima, they are not like other women, these great ladies!—might appear against you, for anything I can tell: and if you failed, and were only Francisco Spoleto the painter after all, you would lose your heart, amore mio — you would never be happy again."

"Do you think I shall be happy now without knowing?—nay, Mariuccia, let us not talk of happiness," said Francisco—"that is not your business nor mine. Where were you that night the baby came?—whence did you bring me under Cenci's shawl? Ah! Cenci, Teta! another word, and I should know all. If you do not answer me, amica mia, I will go instantly and ask Gigi, who has come to the market. Now, where was it?—speak, or I go."

"It is his mother's blood," said Mariuccia, reflectively. "She is like the lightning — but strikes, strikes like the lightning, and would kill as well. Eccellenza," she continued, looking round stealthily, and sinking her voice almost to a whisper with a histrionic instinct—"I went to Genzaro to the Agostini palace—there you were born."

The young man, who was bending eagerly forward to listen, fell back upon the hard old arm-chair behind him, and hid his face in his hands. For the last few minutes, during which his own mind had been leaping with all the rapidity of thought by many an old link of association to these very words, he had expected this; but notwithstanding, the certainty came upon him with a violent shock that seemed to take the ground from under his feet. There he sat, his face in his hands, seeing nothing of a possible dukedom, nor the wealth, the rank, the lofty position which perhaps belonged to him—seeing only in his imagination, burning angry against a background of clouds, the face of that old Duchess Agostini, whom he had passed a thousand times in street and church, always with a certain curiosity and interest such as the supposed grandchild of her foster-sister might be expected to feel. With an extraordinary pang of nature he remembered now that old withered passion-wasted face; and perhaps the first sensation in his mind was a sickening sense of disgust and disappointment. That sour, haughty, witch-countenance of the old faded beauty—that was his mother's face! Bah! what was his mother's face to him, or his mother herself, but a means of fortune? He ran through a world of rapid thoughts during that momentary silence. She was his mother, and had cast him off—why?—and immediately a fierce impulse of shame, resentment, and reprisal took possession of Francisco. If he was her child, she had dropped him as coolly as one of the lower animals might have done: why should he care for her, but as a stepping-stone to his rights—his *rights*? He flung his hands away from his flushed face and stamped his foot in passion. Perhaps only one interpretation could be put upon this extraordinary treatment of an only son—but to thwart her, if nothing else, he should fight the battle out, and be Duke Agostini in spite of her! All this passed through Francisco's mind while Mariuccia stood looking at him, thinking him entirely overpowered with exultation and sudden joy. She did not understand the passionate face he raised out of his covering hands; but as his questions came now quick and breathless, Mariuccia, if she had been ever so skilled in the human heart, had no time to read it in this case. She had enough to do to speak fast enough and full enough for the impatient youth.

CHAPTER VI.

"And who is Madame Margherita?" asked Francisco.

"She is a foreigner, a nurse of the English Forestieri—imagine, bello mio," said Mariuccia, "she would have had thee dressed in the *modo Inglese*, and thou an Italian of the best blood!—but, believe me, I withstood the barbarity. Thee, amoroso, with thy little feet open to the winds, in a mountain village like Rocca! Savage that she was! But

they know no better, these Forestieri. Yet I blessed her for this—she caused the Duchessa to kiss thee before thou wert sent away."

"To kiss me!" came faintly from Francisco's lips. He grew red again, and looked haughtily abashed and discomfited. Unconsciously to himself, these wonderful news had made a difference upon him already. An hour ago he did not know how to look haughty; but he learned it with a rapid instinct when he began to regard himself as Don Francisco, and felt in his veins the fiery tingle of the Duchessa's blood.

"But pause a moment," said Mariuccia, suddenly feeling a touch of terror as she remembered that cold salutation, and the Duchessa's warnings against dignifying the baby with a title—"pause, I beseech you, Eccellenza. You are the Duchessa's son beyond any question; but, alas! alas! it is shame so much as to think upon it. How can any one tell, amoroso mio, whether you are an Agostini, and the heir of the Duke?"

Francisco's youthful face darkened over with such a cloud as had never fallen upon the countenance of the friendless young painter. Then a doubtful dark satirical smile curled his lip. "It is my duty to think well of my parents, Mariuccia; no one must suggest evil thoughts of them to me," he said, with significance. The woman drew back suddenly from the subject, without knowing how much this new look and tone scared her. She dared not say anything more. This half-hour's conversation had made another man of her nursling. He liked to command and see his own power like others of his age; and this sudden discovery of a right, real or imaginary, to exact respect and receive homage, acted upon him like a spell.

"You have reason, Don Francisco," said Mariuccia, feeling herself suddenly set down and her position changed. She was no longer the important possessor of the secret, doling it out a little at a time, as pleased her, but was in the hands of a person much more intimately concerned, who made a simple witness of her, and entirely deprived her of her superior place. Francisco accordingly went on with his questions, anxious, as was natural, to hear all the details, and quite unaware how much would serve him as legal evidence, and how much would not.

"And there were how many in the room? and you heard the Duchessa acknowledge me—own me—say I was her child? And I was baptised—by whom, then? and some one was there when I was born?" asked Francisco, with anxiety.

"Eccellenza, the Duchessa lay in her bedchamber," said Mariuccia; "the drawing-room and the anteroom had heavy winter curtains over the doors; everything was muffled over, so that none in the whole Palazzo could hear what went on within. Cenci received me when I came, Signore mio. She said, 'Whisper, Mariuccia; there is a baby, and you are to take it away.' I said, 'Madonna Santissima! does Il Duca know?' 'He knows as well as you or I,' said Cenci. And so we went to the other chamber, where the beautiful Duchessa lay. Ah, she was a great beauty, though you young people do not think it: her eyes were so bright, and her little teeth so white, and her cheek—there is no such lovely colour nowadays. She said, 'You shall have twelve scudi a-month, Mariuccia: make haste and take the child away.' So I took you away, amoroso mio; and you were so good a child, you did not cry all the way."

"Bah! Did she own me?—did she say, This is my child?" asked Francisco, impatiently.

"Eccellenza, you are a man," said Mariuccia, with respectful severity; "you ask questions according to your capacity. When a lady is ill, and there is a baby in the room, does one ask whose baby it is? or does one desire to know in words what Madame Margherita does there? Ask the others, then, Signore, if you are not satisfied with Mariuccia. I have nursed you, and carried you in my arms, and taken care of you; but can I say any more?"

"My good Mariuccia! are not you my best and oldest friend?" said the

young man, taking her hand. *She* was satisfied without much trouble; but he unconsciously stood upon a very different ground with regard to her than when she had entered the room, and he had called her madre mia. Francisco would henceforward call nobody by that title again. He called up before him, with a little artist-craft to aid his imagination, that scene in the Duchessa's room—the pretty fretful lady, the anxious waiting-woman, the honest bewildered peasant, and Monte Cavo looking in, and the pomegranates bursting into blossom, as he had so often watched them, with some vague thread of connection in his childish thoughts. And then it burst upon him in a blaze of wonder—that gleaming line of wall and window shining out among the trees, was that his future home?—those olive orchards, and vineyards, and rich hill-slopes, which all the world supposed to be the wealthy inheritance of Donna Anna, were they *his* instead? Was he in truth and reality the Duke Agostini, and not Francisco Spoleto the painter? His veins began to throb, and his head grew giddy. Mariuccia went on, after a little pause, into long details of his childhood, and the many signs by which it was perceptible that his blood was not that of the Rocca villano. But Francisco did not listen to her grandmotherly maunderings. He turned once more the picture on his easel, and gazed at it for a moment with a blushing, kindling face. If this wonderful fortune should come true! But, in the mean time, it was scarcely possible to think of it without too much intoxication, and he was only, so far as the present moment was concerned, Francisco the painter still. Francisco the painter, with one portrait to do, for which the young man did not expect a very high price, and which had procured for him all the early troubles and elations of a first falling in love, living in a room on the fourth piano in the Piazza of Trajan, and dining at the Trattoria for two pauls! yet at the same time, though nobody knew of it, the Duke Agostini, head of an old historic family — a wealthy, far-descended noble! It was not wonderful if the extraordinary contrast bewildered his brains a little, and he did not hear perfectly what Mariuccia said.

One thing, however, he did hear, and it arrested him in the full current of his thoughts. "But you have no money, Signore mio," said Mariuccia, piteously. "It is true — I have no money!" cried the young man, looking blankly at her. What a melancholy barrier of prose that was to all his expectations! The Duchessa, who had disowned him all her life, was not likely to go down upon her knees forthwith, in the sight of all the world, and say, "Behold my son, whom I have wronged! this is my husband's heir." Neither was it to be expected that Donna Anna should receive, with exuberant sisterly affection, the young intruder upon her inheritance, or Donna Anna's husband open his purse to his problematical brother-in-law. Up to this moment Francisco had been very happy when he could pay his rent and his tailor's bill, and manage his dinners, his cigars, and his café expenses upon the remaining stock in hand; but how to prosecute a great lawsuit, he who had no money, no friends, no influence—that was a very melancholy and doubtful side of the picture. "I must wait till I can work for it, Mariuccia," he said, plaintively, falling back upon the sympathy of his nurse—that sympathy which he was growing grandly superior to some ten minutes before.

"I will take my necklace and my earrings to the Monte, and Gigi shall mortgage the vineyard," cried Mariuccia, with enthusiasm, "ere thou shalt fail of thy rights, amore mio! for what are they worth if it is not to serve thee?"

"Ah, Mariuccia, a thousand thanks! but thy necklace and the vineyard together would not bring in enough for a great lawsuit," said Francisco, shaking his head with sad superiority; "we must wait."

Saying which the young man seized upon his palette and his brushes, and resumed his work as if for a wager, with some desperate idea of remaining there until he had accumulated all that was necessary for his great purpose. Mariuccia

lingered about him sorrowfully, much discomfited—was her great revelation, which she had meant to raise her nursling into another sphere instantly, with scarcely an interval—was nothing to come of it but increased labour to the young man who, now that she had actually called him Don Francisco, and informed him of his pretensions, seemed already to herself so very much greater a personage? Poor Mariuccia felt the disappointment keenly. She hovered behind him, watching his work, and trying to comfort herself with a "Quanti bella!" and superlative admiration of his powers. "And you will not then care to see Madame Margherita, and to ask her if she remembers, nor to talk to Teta, Signore mio?" she said, dolefully, Francisco all the time working as he had never worked before.

"To what good?" said the energetic painter: "we must wait—and there will be only too much time, my poor Mariuccia. We shall want I do not know how many thousand scudi; and one cannot go to find the gold pieces as one can find Teta or Madame Margherita. No; there will be enough of time."

"Then the Madonna bless thee, bello mio! I thought to bring thee great news, and I have only brought thee labour and trouble; but I am going to Teta's, if you want me, amoroso," said Mariuccia, returning to her old familiarity, as Francisco's first exultation fell—"where you will find me to-night; and Teta also, if you care to speak to her. A revederla, Eccellenza. The Madonna will send you good friends."

So saying, Mariuccia went sorrowfully down stairs, and Francisco gave himself a moment's relaxation, to draw breath, and think how hard his fate was. So near all these glories, and obliged to stop short for want of a few thousand scudi! It was very hard—and the young man, who was twenty and an Italian, and not of a temper to scorn delights and live laborious days, heartily echoed, in a fervent ejaculation, Mariuccia's parting wish. If the Madonna, careful mother, hard-worked as she is among these ejaculatory populations, would only send him good friends!

CHAPTER VII.

Teta's house was in the Corso, entering, however, from one of the narrow streets which cross that great thoroughfare of modern Rome. It was a tall house of four stories, with a famous balcony on the first floor, for the delights and profits of the Carnival, and three handsome sets of rooms, "Appartements meublés," one over the other, from which Teta, in the frequent absence of her husband, the courier, derived a very good income, and no small share of entertainment and variety. Teta herself inhabited the fourth story, where she lived and struggled with a Roman maid-of-all-work, as active mistresses with maids-of-all-work in all countries usually do. Her own sitting-room, high up in these elevated regions, opened like Francisco's on a balcony, from which, by rare good fortune, through a happy break in the intervening houses, you could see the green side of Monte Pincio, bound with a sunny ribbon of road, thrusting its trees against the sky, and hear the roll of carriages, and almost the chatter of the nurses, in their gleaming scarlet jackets, upon that famous promenade. Teta's rooms generally were furnished with that playful caprice which so much distinguishes the personal habitations of professional lodging-letters, crowded with articles too old, too faded, too large, or too small for the profitable portion of the house, and which, massed together without any great regard to congruity, gave a somewhat eccentric appearance to the place. This mixture of the grand and the homely was rather heightened in effect by the occupation in which Mariuccia found her friend engaged. It was still early in the season, the beginning of November, and Teta's apartments were not yet all let. She was moving quickly about her large round table, counting out and laying in order her stores of household linen, and the equivocal

article which goes under the name of Argenteria in the hapless lodgers' inventory. Sora Teta had developed into a somewhat large woman in these years. Her full Roman shoulders, always of ample dimensions, were now fuller than ever, and nothing was wanting to make her a personification of the national type of woman, but the white national kerchief folded over her breast, which would have given a homely dignity and stateliness to the famous poise of that bold Roman head. But Sora Teta was a woman of pretensions, and scorned (except at carnival) the dress of the Contadini. So she wore a gown like other people, and looked only a large woman, stout and strong, and not without a certain swarthy and dark-complexioned comeliness. She was counting out her napkins and tablecloths, which, like herself, were rather dark-complexioned, when the objectionable maid admitted Mariuccia. There were no sounds in the house but the fretful bark of a little dog, and Teta's own firm but heavy footstep—no children: a little Teta or Cenci in those silent passages might perhaps have made the Sora Costini more placable towards the unfortunate maid.

Mariuccia came in somewhat discomfited and despondent. Her hands fell listlessly over her white apron; her step was so much less assured and confident than usual, that the Sora Teta expected only a feeble English waiting-maid from her tenants on the first floor instead of the peasant woman, whose foot should have sounded so much different. Mariuccia dropped sadly upon the first seat that happened to be near her. "Ah, Teta, I have told him," she exclaimed, with a great sigh. Though there was no preface to connect this abrupt statement with any person in particular, Teta, with all her old sharpness, and with wits quickened by a world of gossip and much encounter with life, stopping short in her occupation, gazed at Mariuccia for a moment in surprise, and then leaped at the truth.

"You have told him!" she cried, with mingled pique and admiration—"*you*, Mariuccia! and I myself had not the courage! Well, that is news, amica mia. You have told him—benissimo! and what did he say?"

"Ah, Teta, if I had but thought of consulting with you first," said poor Mariuccia; "you were always so sensible! but, you see, I have been living all by myself at Rocca, thinking it over, and thinking it over. And one would come and say, 'Mariuccia mia, is not that boy Chichino of yours a noble born?' and another would whisper, 'You were at the Agostini palace, Mariuccia, *that* night;' and another, 'He is no villano, yonder Francisco—he has the air of a prince;' and even Gigi himself, though he does not trouble his brains too much, is always talking when he comes from Rome, saying, 'I remember very well, my mother, waiting for you with the donkey by the lake-side yonder at Genzaro the night that little Chichino came.' Madonna Santissima! one and another of them—they put me out of my head. I could get no rest with myself till I came to the child: for I said, 'Why should every one know or guess who he is, save himself?'"

"Oh, it was very well and very right," said Teta, still with a little pique to find herself forestalled; "and you, to be sure, knew best, and could tell him most; but, blessed Santa Theresa! how had you the courage? —*I* was afraid."

"But then I am not so clever as you are, amore mia," said Mariuccia, deprecatingly: "I did not think what would happen. I said it out of my unfortunate head, the Madonna forgive me; and to think now that it was all for nothing, and that all he has gained is harder work and a troubled heart. For to be sure he has no money for a great suit at law. *Thou* wouldest have thought of that, my Teta, if I had consulted with thee!"

"Money!" cried Teta, with a gesture of disdain—"then that is all! But what said he to the news? I am glad he knows, for my part. It is true that very few people know Francisco, but everybody seems to have learnt that there is some one at Rome who belongs to the Agostini family. There is Gaetano, for example. Gaetano came home last week on the day of All Souls, Mariuccia

mia. He is with a great English lord, and is going to Naples by-and-by; and what should Gaetano hear at his master's table where he was serving, but one of the Signori Forestieri talking of Donna Anna, and of some story of another heir who was lost. Gaetano knows nothing, to be sure, but he told it to me; and I desired him, 'Whatever thou hearest, amico mio, about the house of Agostini, tell it always to me'—and you would not believe, Mariuccia, how much I have heard since. And so you told him—benissimo! but what did our youth say?"

He asked me a great many things," said Mariuccia, with despondency, "but stopped when he remembered that there was no money. And there is no money, Teta, my beautiful! And do you suppose the Duchessa will yield, or Donna Anna give it all up to him? Madonna Santissima! to think that for want of a little money so handsome a young man should be kept out of his inheritance. Though Gigi would mortgage the vineyard and the garden, and even the little house, and I myself take my necklace to the Monte, if that were but half enough."

"Patienza!" said Teta, nodding her head; "have thou courage, my friend. Let this rumour spread, and who can tell what friends the blessed Madonna may call to him? There is the great English Milord down in the first piano; he has no one with him but his granddaughter, a pretty little piccola piccola Signorina. I have spoken to her now and then. See, Mariuccia, she is of this height, and her waist I could hold in my hand—a puff of wind off Monte Cavo would blow her away—and yet she has come travelling one cannot tell how many thousand miles. I have spoken of Francisco, and he is painting the little Signorina's portrait. The old Milord is very jealous of her, and will not let the child out of his sight; but trust her to talk with her eyes to our Francisco! I will tell the little one he is a prince in disguise. The Forestieri like it, Mariuccia mia: they think we Italians live as in an opera, these Signori Inglese. The Madonna and the blessed saints send we did! for a stab of a stiletto would not matter by times, if the olives always yielded and the vines had no blight. Is the vintage good with you in Rocca, Mariuccia? How the times are changing! One could get good wine the other day for two bajocchi the fogliett, and now it is five; and how much more it will be before all is done, who can tell?"

"Ah, Teta mia, the times of Gregory! these were the times!" said Mariuccia—"when no man troubled his head about anything but his vines and his olives, and wine was as plentiful as water, and the oil like honey; but in these days the Madonna alone knows what is coming to us. No one fasts; there is no respect to religion; the priest passes like the beggar, and no man salutes him. When religion fails, everything fails; the candles burn few on the altars, Teta mia, and the little *panetti* are a bajocco apiece."

"True enough about the *panetti*," said the better-instructed Roman matron, with a toss of her head; "but as for the *preti*, bah! One cannot go through the street without stumbling over a monk here and a priest there. You should hear what Gaetano says. In England there are no festas but Sundays; think of that, my friend! and one can get one's work done all the days of the week without help of St Martino and St Michele. There is that woman of mine, that Maria, she would go to mass every morning, and to Pincio every afternoon, if I was fool enough. She knows every festa a month off, and would I keep her from the holy function on the blessed San Martino's day? Holy Santa Theresa! the work must be done in spite of all the saints."

"Hush, hush, my beautiful. The Madonna forgive thee, Teta; wouldst thou speak a word against the Holy Saints?" said Mariuccia, in pious horror.

"They are very well in their own way," said the unscrupulous Teta. "I myself sent a candle as long as my arm to the shrine of my blessed patroness Santa Theresa, when Gaetano was last away, and I hope it pleased her. But why my chambers should stand unswept while that wo-

man Maria goes to mass on the festa, tell me, Mariuccia? Do you suppose Santa Theresa cares whether that creature goes to mass, or loves to see the broom standing in the corner? Bah! I am for the Holy Lord Jesu and the Madonna Immaculata. I do not believe so very much, I can tell you, in either the priests or the saints."

Mariuccia gave a little gasp, in the manner of one who would say a great deal, but swallows it in painful self-denial and says nothing, and gave a most emphatic shake of her head. "Thy mother thinks otherwise, Teta," she said, compassionately; "and see the Duchessa."

"Ah, yes, yes, see the Duchessa!" cried Teta, with a burst of laughter. "How devout she is! She fasts twice a-week, and gives tithes of all she has," continued this heretical critic, unconsciously adopting the words of Scripture, "and fears God, thinkest thou not, Mariuccia mia? Ah, what a good mother she has been to her son!"

"Teta, Teta, hold thy peace; some one will hear thee," cried Mariuccia, rising hastily to close the window, which overlooked the courtyard, a little square space, sinking deep, a well of air, in the centre of the tall house, and galleried round with other balconies beneath that of Teta, where any one listening might indeed have heard the Roman woman's unsubdued voice.

"Is it to Donna Anna, then, the Duchessa has been so good a mother?" said Teta, scornfully,—"keeping her inheritance so safe for her, that the heiress never sets foot within the palace of the Agostini either at Genzaro or in Rome?—or to him whom she sent away under thy shawl, Mariuccia?—but patienza! I had rather do my duty to my children than love the saints: I had rather help Francisco to his right than have three masses a-day. Yes, she is very devout, the good Duchessa, and such a mother to her son!"

Mariuccia made no answer; she was discomfited, and had nothing to reply, and indeed felt herself under great doubt for the moment, whether to defend the cause of religion in the person of the Duchessa, or to abandon that perplexing subject for the more personal one of Francisco. After a while she decided prudently on the latter course, and the two women were deep in the discussion of this important and difficult matter, when the young Francisco himself, whom curiosity and excitement had driven from his easel, entered the house.

dimentary deposits? My response again is, That as the two schools of geologists now named differ widely in their translation into geologic time of all phenomena of the kind here described, this question, like the preceding, does not admit, in the present state of the science, of a specific or quantitative answer.

In conclusion, then, of the whole inquiry, condensing into one expression my answer to the general question, Whether a remote prehistoric antiquity for the human race has been established from the recent discovery of specimens of man's handiwork in the so-called Diluvium, I maintain it is not proven, by no means asserting that it can be *disproved*, but insisting simply that it remains —*Not Proven*.

H. D. R.

THE ROMANCE OF AGOSTINI.

PART II.—CHAPTER VIII.

FRANCISCO came in with a singular expression in his face and looks. The wonderful disclosure he had heard so lately affected him mightily, as might be imagined, and he was conscious that it had affected him. The result was that he looked round him with a watchful and jealous observation, as a man might do who felt himself slightly intoxicated, and defied anybody else to notice it. With this instinctive desire to conceal the thoughts which kept up a continual turmoil within him, he eyed the two women severely, and addressed them with an austerity and seriousness quite unnatural to the young man. He was afraid they should see how his veins swelled and throbbed—how his figure dilated in spite of himself—and how a perfect fairyland of hopes crowded upon him. So, as he was too proud to discover the extent of his emotion to his humble companions, he had no refuge but in an artificial reserve, which was much more remarkable, and by no means so pleasant, as the warm excitement and agitation which it was meant to conceal. He made his salutations to Teta very briefly, and then, instead of asking any questions, made a step out upon the balcony, and, leaning over the railing, looked down upon the deep little court below, with its little fountain tinkling and shining in the cool shade. An hour before, a pretty little figure, in a flutter of light muslin flounces—for it was a true St Martin's summer that November—had been pensively flitting up and down with a book in its hand upon the loggia on the first floor; but it is to be doubted whether Francisco at that moment would have perceived even the Signorina Inglese. He stood leaning over Teta's balcony, turning round and round upon his finger a ring of somewhat questionable metal, set with a cameo-flora of small value, sometimes glancing up across the roofs at the green side of Pincio, with its carriages gleaming past in the sunshine, but oftener watching mechanically the flow of the pure bright water of the little fountain into its homely basin. The tinkle of that dropping satisfied his restlessness—it was a relief to him to string upon its monotonous cadence the broken beadroll of his own over-exciting thoughts.

The two women exchanged looks and telegraphic communications behind him. They managed a hurried consultation all in silence, while Teta continued busy with her table-linen. "Shall you speak to him?" asked Mariuccia with her eyes. "What do you think of him?—is it not strange he says nothing?"—"Patienza!" answered Teta, under her breath, casting watchful looks at him over the head of her companion. She went bustling about now, putting up her table-cloths and napkins—calling his attention without any words—saying nothing even to Mariuccia—only making demonstration of her presence by the sound of her firm lively footstep, and the

rustle of her dress. This unspoken call upon him recalled Francisco presently to himself. He came in from the balcony with an impatient step, hovered into the room, looking curiously, but without seeing, what Teta was about, and for a moment waiting in uneasy silence for some one else to begin the conversation. Teta, however, bustled about imperturbably putting up her linen. She gave him no assistance; and Mariuccia dealt only in wistful, pitiful, reverential glances, and did not speak.

"So, Sora Teta," said Francisco at last, in a little burst, "there is a story, it appears; and you have all known it, you good people, and only now, when it's dangerous, you tell it to me!"

This natural expression of petulance burst from him almost unawares, for by moments the young man did feel that to tell him this secret of his birth now, was in reality to do him an injury. What chance had he of overcoming all the difficulties before him, and establishing his position as Duke Agostini? and as Francisco the painter, what could he ever be again, but a discontented and repining man?

"Excellency," said Teta, suddenly facing round upon him with her armful of linen, "should Mariuccia have given you the news for a sweetmeat at Rocca, or put it in your Befana stocking at St Michael's, instead of your little gun and sword? Was it not better for you a great deal to wait till you were a man, and could do something? For to be sure there will be much to do, Don Francisco; your Excellency's enemies are not to be despised."

Francisco's face reddened in spite of himself—something of reality grew into the marvellous tale when another voice repeated that astonishing title. A thrill of renewed but pleasant excitement ran through his frame; his good-humour came back to him. He no longer reminded himself of the dread possibility of falling back again into the rank and place with which he had been so very well content when the sun rose on this miraculous morning. He was twenty, and might be one of the most notable nobles of Rome. Teta's address threw a veil over the Piazza Trajano and Francisco the painter. For the moment it was the Duke Agostini, grand in his newly-acquired glories, who threw himself, splendid yet blushing, into that very grand, very shabby old rococo chair, which was one of the special features of Teta's room.

"My enemies! I had not an enemy in the world this morning," said Francisco, his excitement running over in a little tremulous laughter. "Who are they? I have not considered that side of the question."

"Ah, Madonna Santissima! that thou *shouldst* have enemies, my innocent child!" said Mariuccia, in a fervent whisper, "and they such as should be thy dearest friends!"

"Eccellenza," said Teta, solemnly, standing with one arm thrust out from her side, and the other burdened with the last bundle of her linen; "first of all, there is the Duchessa."

Francisco's brow darkened; he did not say anything; he merely acknowledged her name with a slight, almost haughty gesture, half of shame, half of defiance.

"And after the Duchessa," continued Teta, with great unction and emphasis, "Donna Anna; and after Donna Anna, Don Angelo Lontoria, her husband, and all the *friends* they can make. You were *well to* be a man, Signore mio—you have enough of battles to fight."

As she stood there fronting him with her full figure, her bold head, her stately Roman bearing, Teta looked a buxom war-goddess, ready at least for any amount of battles which could be fought by word and gesture. Whatever the young hero's sentiments might be, Teta's spirit rose with the warmest impulse of pugnacity at thought of this contest. Donna Anna was somewhere near her own age, and had left reminiscences in the mind of Cenci's daughter, which did not dispose Teta to grieve over the heiress's possible downfall; and the Duchessa was the natural enemy of the high-spirited girl, who had been all but born in her service. On Francisco's behalf Teta would have exulted to confront both the ladies, and utter her

Roman mind freely in racy Italian, with an unlimited force of adjective; for Gaetano's gifts made his courier-ship a very independent personage; and Teta, when all her apartments were let, veiled her bonnet to nobody. She set her disengaged hand firmly on her waist, and thrust out her elbow like any English Bellona; —such natural and womanful sentiments being catholic, and beyond the narrow restraints of nationality. Francisco plucked his brown mustache and looked at her: he knew nothing of Donna Anna; he was calm, and destitute of that pleasant fervour of antagonism. With a vague sensation that to have such adversaries was the first splendid circumstance in his new fortune, he repeated their names composedly to himself.

"Donna Anna! Well," said Francisco, after a pause, "she is rich enough already—or her husband is; but I confess to you, my good Teta," he said, grandly, "that if the present possessors had, like myself, no other prospects, I should have hesitated to ruin another family for my own sole good."

"The blessed child!" cried Mariuccia, hastily snatching and kissing her nursling's hand.

"Don Francisco," said Teta, not without a little sarcasm, "your Excellency is too good to live. For my part, I am not so much concerned for Donna Anna: I know her, as it happens. Holy Santa Theresa, how well I know her! And as for the Duchessa——"

"Do me the pleasure to say nothing about the Duchessa," said Francisco, in a harsh, constrained voice.

Teta came to a dead stop, and considered whether she should be angry; but, looking at the young man, as he sat unconsciously plucking his mustache, with that cloud upon his face, Teta for the first time perceived, with a little awe and perturbation, a gleam of the Duchessa herself in that younger and more lovable countenance, which completely silenced her indignation. No one had ever seen the likeness before; but from that day, few looked at Francisco without more or less perceiving it. Nature still existed, though under those unnatural conditions. From the moment when he first knew of the relationship between them, it had been intolerable to the young man to hear the name of the woman who was his mother. She was his bitterest enemy, certain to stand out against his claims with the fiercest opposition. It was impossible that he could feel any tenderness for her; but he could not bear the mention of her name.

"Benissimo!" said Teta, drawing a long breath after an interval of silence, "I will do your Excellency that pleasure; but you must see my mother, if it is possible, and Madame Margherita. Madame Margherita is so much employed among the Forestieri, that it is hard to find her. See now, I will go and ask for her presently. You shall have a famous dish of maccaroni *con Sugo* for supper, Don Francisco. Return, if it please you, an hour after the Ave Maria, then there will be time to talk; and you can make an end of it, and know all that we women have to tell you. Unhappily, Signore mio, we are all women; for, to be sure, you were a baby, and fell into the hands of such; and we shall be all the less likely to trouble you when you gain your cause. Mariuccia is old; I have no children. We shall not tease you about all our people. I think, on the whole, Eccellenza, you will be fortunate with your witnesses. Blessed Santa Theresa! so many of us too!"

"Be sure I will remember my obligations to you all, Sora Teta," said Francisco, grandly, as he rose from his chair. Mariuccia could not restrain herself as he sauntered forth, superb in his young dignity. She was not affronted at the small notice he had taken of her. He was her own child and nursling, and to be pardoned seventy times seven offences. It was pride and exultation alone inspired her as she lost sight of him down the stairs.

"Madonna Santissima! Is not he a prince? There is not a beggar on the roadside but would know thee to be noble, bello mio!" cried Mariuccia. "Tell me, Teta, among all your rich Forestieri, have you ever seen so princely a man?"

"E Romano," said Teta, with careless pride; "he is a Roman." Then she closed her great cupboard, and locked it with an emphasis. "If it will amuse you, Mariuccia mia, you can look to the sugo while I seek Madame Margherita; for, believe me, I would not trust the supper for our young Don to the woman yonder in the kitchen. Ah," added Teta, with another long breath, "bella Duchessa, it will be hard work for thee to deny thine own face!"

CHAPTER IX.

It was drawing towards evening, and the Corso was thronged as usual, when Francisco descended the long stairs, and came out into the gay crowd. November—but the sky shining overhead with that deep steadfast imperturbable blue, which, further north, is the glory of summer days alone—and the passing carriages all brilliant with bright colours, the toilette of summer warmed with autumnal ribbons, and loose glories of unnecessary shawl and mantle. That idle current of life had left the sunny eminence of Pincio as the great arch of blue sky reddened over in magnificent circles of colour towards the west, for this final delight of Roman promenaders. Few scenes could have been supposed more unlike the solemn associations which unaccustomed travellers connect with the very name of the Eternal City. There is nothing eternal in the Rome of the Corso—in that narrow line of street full of bright shops, and houses let to the Forestieri, interrupted here and there by the stuccoed façade of a seventeenth-century church, or the blank front of a big palace: nothing solemn in the gay line of carriages, the pretty toilettes, nor in the preposterous children and red-jacketed nurses, who form an admiring chorus, and keep Roman flirtations in countenance. Neither is the crowd on foot of a seriously impressive character: these are not the graceful Italians of romance, with dark visionary countenance, lithe frame, and mysterious deportment; on the contrary, an unslender, unvisionary race, strong in nothing more than in gross flesh and blood, go gaily thronging along the pavement; peasant women among them with white handkerchiefs on their ample shoulders, carrying their heads like so many duchesses; Roman girls of full-developed form, with their glossy uncovered locks gleaming to the light, and little inferior in point of bearing to the Contadini; Roman men with heads that might do for a Hadrian or an Antonine—bull-necked, bullet-headed, substantial figures, neither poetical nor imaginative, but strong, gross, and forcible, like the coarse forcible Romans of an elder age. Francisco strayed along the pavement through the midst of that vociferous throng. Last night he had entered into all the humours of the crowd with the fervour of true local feeling, knowing himself one of them. To-day everything was changed; he set his hat over his eyes, and answered very briefly the passing salutations of his acquaintance. His looks wandered rather to the stream of carriages than to the flood of passengers on foot. He was looking, not with the universal admiration of youth for pretty faces passing, but with a scrutiny, haughty and earnest, for one or two faces which were not pretty,—for the old Duchessa, who drove every day through that ancient scene of her triumphs, with an old *dame de compagnie* as unlovely as herself, and a couple of tiny spaniels lost in the heap of wrappings which encumbered the front seat of the carriage; and for the pale countenance of Donna Anna, dissatisfied and complaining, with her nurses and children, grudging always, in the midst of wealth, the postponement of her own personal hopes and inheritance. His mother and his sister! Francisco found little solace in these names of tenderness. He looked eagerly to see them, with a strange unexplainable curiosity, wondering whether the change which had passed upon himself would perhaps change the aspect of these faces, and whether that weird old Duchess appeared to a stranger's passing

glance with a different look from that which she would bear to the more penetrating gaze of *her son*. But he did not see either of the ladies as he pushed onward through the busy Corso. Then he went rapidly with the same purpose up the winding ascent of the Pincian Hill, and loitered about there, looking into all the carriages, like many another idle young Roman. Far in the distance, the sun, just at setting, was burning upon a line of sea, visible over the head of that old solemn city, which from this height, heaving up darkly on its foundation of hills against that broad hemisphere of colour in the west, looked more worthy of its name. There sat Rome, with her dark crowd of modern houses, hiding somewhere among them the tawny line of the Tiber, and dominated by the big dome of St Peter's. Modern Rome—not that dumb heathen mother sitting voiceless on her Palatine—Rome astir with the tongues of strangers, the jests and din of her own holiday-making children. There lay that dark human problem, troublous puzzle of priests and men, in a doubtful precarious repose, like the old Albanian lake, with no Emissarium for its choke of rising waters, but with the tender country and quiet heights of hills beguiling the eye, beyond dark St Peter yonder, into a gentle idyll of attendant nature, sweet Monte Mario and his brethren rising wistful against those celestial blushes of warm reflection which glow over all that region of sky. Against that same flush of sunset the pines upon Pincio itself stand forth, all lined and traced in every delicate twig; and figures glide about with a noiseless motion, not because they are all impressed and quiet, but because the magic atmosphere has charmed the sound. Among these loiterers Francisco loitered in the new tumult of his fancies. The last carriage had lingered away out of this suddenly darkening, momentary, miraculous twilight. The Ave Maria had rung out from all the bells of Rome. Work was over everywhere, and the stir of amusement and relaxation quickened yonder in the hidden streets, though it was the quiet of night and rest that fell over that hill of Pleasure. The young painter lingered on the terraced road, playing with his own agitation and hopes, and slow to descend once more into discussion of that wonderful episode in his history that happened twenty years ago, when he was carried out of his princely birthplace under cover of Mariuccia's shawl. It suited him better to wander up and down, with the air blowing fresh in his face, mounting in imagination to the high topgallant of his sudden fortune. To do that by a leap; to glance into the ineffable future, gleaming grand with wealth and honours; to take imaginary possession of the Genzaro palace; to return, no longer a poor portrait-painter, but a Roman noble, to the Signorina Inglese, who had beguiled Francisco the painter out of his heart. It was more congenial to the young man's mind to walk about in the soft night-air, and see one by one these stars come gleaming over him, than to descend to the lighted Corso, with all its cafés open, and to climb Teta's long stair, and over the sugo and salad listen to the women and their recollections, and ascertain how far he could depend upon the testimony of Madame Margherita. Francisco roused himself, however, as the first hour of night rang from the Roman churches. He took his way slowly to the needful consultation, in spite of himself, somewhat contemptuous of Teta's upper room, and the society of the faithful peasant and the English nurse. And it was only twelve hours old, this wonderful grandeur and elevation!—but such hours as these are years.

CHAPTER X.

When Francisco entered at Teta's great door and began dreamily to ascend the stair, an accident befell him which warmed the half disguse he felt at the consultation before him into warm and angry eagerness.

There was a carriage at the door, though the young man in his excitement had not observed it, and half-way up the first flight of steps, Francisco, hitherto engrossed and unobservant, came suddenly upon Teta's distinguished lodgers, the English Milord and his little granddaughter. Francisco, much abashed and embarrassed by the sudden encounter, took off his hat and stood aside in the corner of the wall, while that radiant little apparition swept past him. A lovely little fairy, with sweet English complexion, light hair, too pale to be called golden, but still with an occasional gleam among the curls—for curls were positively *worn* in those days—and a tiny light figure singularly unlike the substantial Roman order of beauty. The young painter stood entranced when she made him a slight curtsey of recognition, as she floated past in all that cloud of white, delicately tinted with ribbons and flowers and ornaments. He had never seen her before in anything but her simple morning-dress, and he thought her a beautiful fairy gliding with her noiseless step down these dingy stairs.

By the little lady's side was the Milord, a tall old Englishman, reserved and suspicious. Though the encounter was momentary and entirely accidental, Francisco felt his harsh, cold, suspicious glance, full of disdainful inquiry. "Who are you, you foreign fellow?" asked as plainly as words that haughty look; and the flush grew higher on the young man's cheek. They had scarcely passed before the old gentleman began to question his grandchild. Of course he spoke in that arrogant mincing English, with all the cold freedom which these English use, in full security that nobody understands them. Certainly Francisco did not understand him—but he went up the remaining three flights of stairs, two steps at a time, in fiery indignation and eagerness. The opinion of the Forestieri in respect to any friendship between young English ladies and young Roman painters is not at all equivocal, but at all times clearly to be understood.

Francisco accordingly sprang up the stair with a certain vengeful impulse in his mind. Oh how differently that old Milord would look upon Duke Agostini! And Francisco, with the quick vehemence of his race and age, indulged himself in a momentary anticipation of the pleasure of revenge—how Duke Agostini might retaliate even at his own expense, and though it involved the loss of the Signorina! But after all, that would be poor satisfaction—so he rushed up the last dark steps to Teta's door, and plucked at the bell with a vehemence which brought the hapless Maria, Teta's woman-of-all-work, in a fright to the door. Thus the young man came in, a young whirlwind among the three women, who, with many a gesture and exclamation, were consulting over his fortunes. The table was spread, and everything ready for supper. In the centre, a tall brass lamp with four lights shone down upon the crisp endive leaves, which appeared like winter blossoms of pale yellow among the green herbage of the salad, and on the vast flask of wine, and endless quantity of brown-complexioned *panetti*, which Teta had provided for her guests. The three women were seated round the table, Mariuccia rather silent and extinguished, while Madame Margherita kept up the conversation with the mistress of the house. The poor peasant-woman had nothing to talk about but her baby, whom she had carried off from Genzaro under her shawl, and with a certain respectful awe listened to her two companions, who had interests in common, and were discussing the letting of their "apartments;" how many each had, and what were the prospects of the season, and whether the Forestieri were arriving in sufficient number. There is nothing in the world which can make up for the want of these Forestieri, these barbarous people, to the thinking of modern Rome.

"They tell me that the Pope means to proclaim a holy year," said Madame Margherita, shrugging her vast shoulders as Francisco came in. "Good news for us, Sora Teta, among all our other troubles. I was speaking of it the other day to one of the Frati, a monk of the Santi Apostoli. I am a British subject, you understand; I

always speak my mind. I said, 'The Pope, bless him! will ruin us, father—what with the failure of the wine and the dearness of the oil, and nothing to be had as it used to be, but we must needs have our pictures covered up, and our music stopped, and our theatres shut, and the Forestieri driven away!' 'Ah, Madama,' said the priest, 'but the spiritual good! You will come out of it in the same blessed condition that Adam was in before he fell.' 'Ah, capito!' I cried out; 'senza camicia!—I understand you, father—without a shirt!'"

At this joke, with the truest sympathetic feeling, Teta laughed long and loud, while Mariuccia, with a little forced giggle of complaisance, crossed herself secretly in pious horror. Then Madame Margherita, whose back, like the disc of a great ball, had been hitherto obscuring the group for Francisco, turned round on an exclamation from Teta of the young man's name. She could scarcely have been any rounder—she did not look much older than she had done twenty years ago. Unlike her Italian contemporaries, both lady and peasant, the little Irishwoman's brown hair, and white teeth, and lively eyes, had survived that dangerous interval. She had taken another husband the other day, a strapping Swiss of the Pope's guard, who was a highly economical lackey and most faithful attendant to Madame Margherita. She had let her principal apartment triumphantly before anybody else had more than a nibble, and altogether was in flourishing circumstances, and on good terms with all the world.

"It is the young Don," said Teta, exaggerating all the more her reverential tone because she could scarcely manage to be respectful enough in her own person to the youth whom she had known so familiarly—"and this is the English Madame Margherita, Eccellenza. She will tell you of the things we talked of this morning whilst I go to see after the maccaroni. Accommodate yourself, Signore mio, in the great chair."

Francisco seated himself once more carelessly in Teta's big rococo chair, which was a kind of throne in the dim little room. Sitting there, he could see, just over Madame Margherita's head, the sky and the stars gleaming in through the uncovered window, which was a door as well, and opened, with Italian Spartan indifference to fitting, directly upon the loggia, where the air was rather chill this November night. Finding himself the object of Madame Margherita's gaze, the youth kept his embarrassed eyes upon this clear spot in his dim surroundings. Madame Margherita made her examination very quietly, and when she had quite concluded, said, with as calm a tone, "Signor Don Francisco, you are like your mother."

Francisco started, taken by surprise, and reddened once more to his hair. "Then you too confirm the story, and she *is* my mother?" he exclaimed, almost losing his breath.

"If you are the baby whom Mariuccia there took away from the Duchessa's room—if you are the little boy whom she had brought up at San Michele, then it is I who brought you into the world," said Madame Margherita; "and I am ready to swear a hundred times, if that would do any good, that the Duchessa Agostini, and nobody else, is your mother. Per Bacco! who do you suppose but a great lady, and a great beauty, would go for to desert her child? It is wonderful to me why she did not bundle you into the basket at San Spirito, like the other unfortunate babes, and have done with you. I will swear she would have done it had she not been at Genzaro instead of Rome."

Here the English nurse, whose professional horror of the Duchessa's unmotherliness, which she had never ventured to unburden herself of before, returned to her mind in full force, now that her mouth was opened, made a pause for a reply; but receiving none, Francisco being fully occupied in the exercise of self-restraint, went on again with her personal sentiments.

"It was I who brought you into the world," said Madame Margherita; "and a great passion I was in when I knew why I had been called, and that it was a secret case, and the baby, after all my trouble, done up in swaddling-clothes, poor little

unfortunate soul! The Duchessa never took the least notice of you, Signore, no more than if you had been a little puppy dog; nor half as much, davvero! for I remember a filthy little spaniel that used to lie on her bed. Pah! do not speak to me of your great Italian ladies! who shut themselves up within doors and curtains, and have their babies in secret, and turn them off with scarce a look; not to say give the poor innocents over to be bound up in swaddling-clothes!"

"Madama! madama!" cried Mariuccia, who had been studying with dismay the changes of Francisco's countenance, and perceiving he was on the eve of an explosion, suffered her own natural indignation at this national censure to have its course. "You are mad, you Forestieri! you will hold with nothing but your own way. Do you suppose a woman of Rocca would dress a poor little child in your *modo Inglese*, which was never meant for our country? and where were there ever straighter limbs or an air noble like our young Don!"

"Mariuccia, my good woman, you know nothing about it," said Madame Margherita, "to think I should be called to such a case! I who have nothing to do, only with English ladies, as all Rome knows; and old Teta, Cenci's aunt, coming to seek me, the old hypocrite, with her Jesu Nazzarino! and not a word of what it was, till I was safe in Genzaro, and could not help myself; and then the Duchessa ——."

"Do me the pleasure," said Francisco, interposing hastily with a shrill tone in his voice, "to say nothing more of the Duchessa."

Madame Margherita, suddenly interrupted in her rapid flow of talk, and brought to a stand-still in the fulness of her eloquence by so unexpected an interference, stopped short with sheer amazement, and gazed at the young speaker as if she could hardly believe in his presumption; but catching, as Teta had done before her, that look on the young man's passionate face, so entirely new to the handsome young features —that sudden subtle unexpected resemblance, which recalled the Duchessa in her best and haughtiest days, the quickwitted little Irishwoman came to herself. She changed colour with a momentary flush of resentment, then acknowledged to herself that he was right, and then solaced her dignity by getting up from her chair and making him a solemn and sarcastic courtesy. "Signor Don Francisco," said Madame Margherita, with cutting irony, "I have the honour to assure you again that you are very like your mother!"

At this moment, fortunately, Teta entered, with her handmaiden behind her bearing the macaroni. The sugo had been elaborated under Mariuccia's anxious superintendence; —never before had she done such a feat of cookery;—and the rich brown gravy with its delicate flavour of tomatoes—or, more pleasant title, pomidori, apples of gold—lay tempting and savoury over the fantastic crimped ribbons of the macaroni in its lordly round dish. With the proud conviction that it was a dish for a prince, Teta stood imperatively by to see it placed upon the board; and as the whole party had dined about mid-day, and did not know what it was to indulge in intermediary libations of tea, the savour of the sugo penetrated, despite of excitement and passion, into their primitive sensations. Mariuccia, good woman, crossed herself with a murmured grace; even Francisco, with no ill-will, drew towards the table his rococo chair—other things could wait without harm, but delay would certainly spoil the macaroni: there was the truest philosophy in the thought.

CHAPTER XI.

It was still early when the young painter left the house of Teta; but he neither went to the theatre nor to his favourite café. His mind was rapt into another sphere, above dominoes, above gossip, even above the melodies of the opera. He strayed along through the Corso, where few

people now walked, but where all the cafés were thronged, and the rough pavement echoed to the stream of carriages, conveying beatific glimpses of buxom angels in full evening dress, across the vision of the passers-by. Then into the life, different, yet similar, which went on behind in the crooked Roman streets, in the genuine Roman quarters where there were no Forestieri. There, outside lights glared and flickered, and green boughs waved out from among the hams and cheeses of the Pizzicheria, and flat brown loaves ranged themselves by the baker's door; and dim lamps burned before undecipherable shrines, to which nobody vouchsafed a glance; and a loud and lively population, buying, joking, talking, smoking endless cigars, fluctuated among the narrow black windings of the streets between the two lines of high houses. The cafés in these erratic vicoli or lanes, as well as in the Corso, were all crowded to the door, and clouds of bearded Roman faces appeared over the narrow tables in a world of stormy talk, at strange contrast with the mild tipple in which they indulged themselves—stormy to the unaccustomed sight, but quite undangerous—the manner of the men. Francisco wandered through among them, scarcely seeing the passengers, on his way up to his little room, four stories high, in the Piazza of Trajan. When he had reached his lofty lodging he went out upon the little loggia, to which his room opened, and stood there leaning on the rails, letting his very cigar go out in the fullness of his thoughts. The moon was up and bright, whitely blazing upon the cold blue crowd of broken pillars far down in that historic area, and vainly attempting to silver over the dark shaft of that column where Trajan himself stood high into the night. This same morning, twelve hours ago, Francisco had smoked his cigar very cheerfully over these railings, looking down with amused and ready interest to see the country-people's carts, and the honest louts of contadini gazing in at the wonders of the iron-shops. In the dewy freshness and sweet sunshine of the morning, he had perhaps indulged in a momentary sentimental speculation and sigh over the hard fortune which had made the Signorina Inglese a great man's daughter, and put such a gulf between them; but, on the whole, had been very well pleased with his lodging and himself and things in general, philosophically leaving the morrow to provide for its own affairs. Now, what a change! Not more unlike was that white light, unreal and ghostly, which, catching a passing figure on the street, made it look so preternaturally distant and minute—that light which threw such portentous shadow on the other side of the way, and picked out every line of the two churches at the end of the square with a dead immovable illumination—not more unlike was that moonlight to the sunshine than the one Francisco was to the other. There he stood, with his cigar out, seeing nothing save a faint panorama of light and shade; seeing rather—now the gleaming front of the Genzaro palace, now Mariuccia's little house at Rocca, now the consultation in Teta's room; while through all his thoughts went gleaming, floating, that white fairy down the dark staircase, with the tender tints of half-visible colour about her, and the flowers in her pretty hair. If he had been slightly out of his wits that night it would not have been wonderful; and he inclined much more to muse outside there on the loggia, with no companions but the light and darkness, than to return to the little room where everything reminded him that his apartment was on the fourth piano in the Piazza of Trajan, and he himself only Francisco Spoleto the painter, on whom Milord frowned ominously, sternly disapproving of the Signorina's curtsy, and that momentary blush which reflected itself upon Francisco's face. Ah, you haughty Milord, if you but knew! if one could only some time hope to let you know that the Agostini Duke would disdain your alliance, if he did not love your daughter! But, alas! here we are, all untitled and unendowed, with that half-finished portrait on the easel, and some copies unframed and disposable upon the wall, and unhappily nothing else to depend upon for daily bread, wine, minestra, and cigars! Not the Duke Agos-

tini at all, only that unhappy Francisco, who never more, if he lived a hundred years, could be again the contented Francisco the painter who slept last night under that quiet roof. Francisco tossed the cigar, which had been out for an hour, impatiently from his hand, and watched it descending those luminous depths of air, with a hasty exclamation. It was drawing towards midnight, and echoes of song were rising out of the streets, fumes of the opera, evaporating from the young Roman brains as they came out of the theatres. With another impatient exclamation Francisco, who did the same thing himself last night, plunged in through his window, and closed it before the singers came near. He had no toleration for the fools and their music—he who had to think! Ah, hard, unusual exercise! He knew no more how to set about it, than he would have known how to build another St Peter's. He lighted two lights of his Roman lamp, turned the portrait with its face to the easel, and threw himself into the handiest chair. You suppose his mind busied itself about the ways and means of establishing his rights—how he should hire advocates and bring his cause before the legal courts, and first of all and most important, how he should get the money for these momentous uses? But, alas! Francisco understood nothing of the art of thinking! His fancy went wandering about that summer front of the Genzaro palace, about the English Signorina; about the Duchessa and Donna Anna with a darker fascination; and he pictured to himself Mariuccia's ride home through the olive woods, with himself a helpless unconscious bundle in her arms; and leaped forward from that scene in the past to the scene in the future, when all Rome, with acclamations, should hail the injured youth's restitution to his rights, and the English Milord should throw up his hands to heaven, in operatic delight, and place his pretty daughter in Francisco's arms. Under the influence of this last scene, the young man fell asleep, which was exactly the best thing he could have done under the circumstances. Thinking, had it lain in his way, would not have served him much in that emergency. He was only a gay young Roman, trained to no particular exercise of will or self-denial. His wild plan in the morning, of standing perpetually at his easel, painting impossible pictures, till he had earned enough for his suit, was as mad a notion as could have possessed any man, had it not been transitory as any other sudden flame. He was not of the race nor of the mettle to scorn delights and live laborious days.

CHAPTER XII.

It was with a beating heart that Francisco directed his steps next day towards Teta's house—not to see Teta this time, but to have his last sitting from the Signorina Inglese, who had so much complicated and bewildered the young man's thoughts. When he entered the little sitting-room where he had hitherto been received, Francisco found his fears fully confirmed. It was not the large form of Teta, nor the prim one of the English waiting-woman—safest of third parties, who knew no Italian—which presided over this sitting, but my lord himself, grand and cross, with the blackest of looks and haughtiest of salutations for the young painter. My lord was old, very attenuated, and without any genial appearances about him. He had a great wood-fire blazing in the little room, by the side of which he sat in an easy-chair, jealously on the watch, and not much more gracious to his grand-daughter than he was to Francisco. My lord had taken no notice hitherto of this portrait business; it was a private enterprise of Lucy's, for the gratification of some old governess at home—painter recommended by Madame Costini. "Very well, very well," said the fretful grandpapa, who was somewhat of an invalid, to do him justice, and over seventy, "I have no objection, so long as you don't trouble me." And they had not troubled him—nothing could be further from the

desires of these young people. They were neither of them in any special hurry to be done with the portrait—and perhaps the young lady liked the sitting almost as much as the artist did. It was such capital exercise, too, for her Italian!—for you see that good, faithful old maid of hers, who was the most comfortable of chaperones, knew no language in the world but her own; and it was of great importance for Lucy, if only for grandpapa's comfort, to increase her familiarity with "the language of the country." So, up to this time they had gone on very comfortably; but alas for Lucy's English honesty, and the sad explosion brought upon her by that unlucky curtsy on the stair!

In the first place, to Francisco's Spartan-Roman habits, the atmosphere of the room was stifling. A fire to him was no household institution, and scarcely at any time necessary to comfort. To-day, though it was November, the door-window of Teta's room, which was directly above this, stood open, and nothing in the shape of fire was in Teta's dominions, except the handful of glowing charcoal in the little kitchen, where the unhappy Maria stood cooking the minestra, and getting scolded; for, speak of the difference of climate as you may, there is no man who complains of cold, and feels it, like an Englishman, as there is, of course, no one so little disposed to endure, and so determined to make away with, the ill that troubles him. And, as if the fire had not been evil enough, there burned those suspicious eyes, out of the withered old countenance of my lord—eyes which pretended to read, but were vigilant to perceive every movement, nay, every look, of both the young victims before him. Lucy had been crying that morning, poor child. She was quite downcast, and sat with her eyes fixed on the ground—did not look up at all, indeed, till Francisco, taking courage, begged in desperation to remind her that her present attitude was quite unlike that of the portrait, and that it was perfectly necessary to alter her expression. Thus the sitting went dolefully on, a few faltering unfrequent words taking the place of the lively English-Italian with which Lucy's pretty lips were wont to overflow. My lord had the little picture submitted to him, and said "pshaw!" with delightful English ease and candour—for, of course, the foreign fellow could not tell what pshaw meant; and altogether, both painter and sitter were damped and out of heart, and the picture in a fair way to be irretrievably spoiled.

When, lo! suddenly and without warning, my lord was called out of the room to see some lofty personage, whom even he did not choose to send away. The old man gloomed round him with the ugliest displeasure. He called for Miss Lucy's maid, and left her in charge with plain-spoken instructions. "Let the fellow leave as soon as possible; and remember this is the last sitting you give him, Lucy," said my lord, looking Francisco full in the face as he spoke; "and you, Reynolds, see that there's no more talking than is necessary—do you hear?" with which words he went reluctantly away. The fellow, of course, did not know English; but if he did, what did it matter? certainly nothing to my lord.

He left the room, and left behind him a crisis, much precipitated by his precautions—a *situation* and emergency, for which a young Roman of Francisco's breeding was much better prepared than for more work-a-day problems. Francisco did not dash down his brushes and fly to Lucy's feet, but he stopped short picturesquely, in the most eloquent attitude of delight, sudden relief, and unexpected hope. "I have a thousand things to say—there is not a moment to lose," said the young man's eyes; but with a natural strategic genius, he did not betray, by so much as a tone, anything which the frightened Reynolds could feel her conscience burdened with. He only changed his position slightly, "for the advantage of the light," and managed to turn his back to that guardian of the public peace.

"I am unfortunate, doubly unfortunate," said Francisco, plaintively. "My lord forbids your gracious kindness to the poor painter. I see my fate. Ah, gentillissima Signorina!

and I longed so much to tell you the extraordinary romance which I heard yesterday—only yesterday! so that I scarcely knew what I was doing, till I met you in the stair."

"A romance! oh tell it to me still, Signore Francisco—grandpapa could have no objections," said Lucy eagerly, yet with trembling.

"Ah, Signorina! but my lord would have objections if he knew that I myself," said Francisco, with melancholy emphasis—"that I myself, who am not even to have leave to finish this picture——"

"Oh, do you know English? I am so sorry," said Lucy, in great dismay.

"I do not know English, but I know what means a voice—a tone; that I," resumed the young man, "am the hero of the romance I tell you of. Your grandpapa believes me a poor painter, Signorina, and so I am, painting your beautiful portrait for money; but would he believe, or would you believe, that there wants but a little more money to get justice, and put the poor painter at the head of one of the noblest houses in Rome?"

"Signore! do you mean that you are —that there is—that such a thing is possible?" said the English Lucy, colouring violently, and looking, doubtful and afraid, full in Francisco's face. Alas, this romantic story, instead of interesting, dismayed the English girl! Were not all foreign swindlers princes in disguise? She gave a little gasp of disgust and disappointment—for surely he was not a foreign swindler, this young Francisco; and yet, to hear such a story, what a laugh of mockery would come from the old lips of grandpapa!

"It is true," said Francisco, who had not the slightest clue to Lucy's feelings, and who rather imagined, if he thought on the subject at all, that the Forestieri were much addicted to social romances, and loved to hear of such—"it is true, though it does not look possible. When I came here last, I should have called it the most foolish fable! I was an orphan without any parents. I cared very little about it. I was a son of San Michele. Now, bella Signorina, everything is changed. Is it to my advantage, do you suppose? I was content—I am content no longer. My heart would have broken in silence when my lord's grand equipage carried you from Rome, for you were a star in the firmament, and I only a firefly among the bushes. Now it is different. I am noble as my lord. I may be rich as my lord, and I must speak if I should die!"

Ah, my lord! what a foolish, crafty, old Englishman you were, to think that in such a dilemma, the young Roman would be at any loss! Very different from the dilemma of last night which Francisco fell asleep upon. Here he was master of the ground. His very tone, full of passion and eloquence to Lucy, did not excite anything beyond an uneasy consciousness that there was rather too much talk going on, in the mind of the troubled Reynolds. His very pantomime, as he went on with his work—painting, just as usual, Reynolds thought—to Lucy's eyes making agitated touches unawares, and most likely spoiling the picture—was eloquent. Lucy coloured to her very hair, tried hard to draw herself up and look dignified, and said in a very unsteady, faltering tone, "Signore Francisco, you must not speak so to me! grandpapa would be much displeased;" but in heart Lucy was very anxious and eager to hear his story. For, to be sure, Italy *was* an exceptional country. Things *did* happen there which happened nowhere else—and what if it should turn out true?

"If you should care to hear the story, Signorina," said Francisco, languidly, with a great stroke of art, "my faithful Teta will tell it you. Teta has been in the secret all along. She saw me leave the palace of my mother an unconscious child—she has kept her eye upon me ever since. It was but yesterday I knew. Forgive me, Signorina gentillissima! I am exhausted by my emotions. I rose up a nameless painter—I lay down an Agostini—Visconti Agostini once almost royal—and the only heir. Do you find it wonderful that I lost my self-possession when I met you in the stair?"

"There was no need for self-possession, Signore," said Lucy, with sweet youthful severity; "I should

not have concealed that I knew you had grandpapa been ever so angry. You have no apology to make to me."

Here the situation somewhat altered, and Francisco ceased to know his ground. He had gone astray in that last touch, but scarcely saw how, nor could divine that, in Lucy's insular morals, it was no harm in the world to know the poor young painter, but grievous harm to pretend not to know him. Francisco staggered before the clear eye and the clearer tone. He thought she must of necessity mean a hundred times more than she appeared to mean. This single expression of hers confounded him much more than the wrath of my lord. *That* he understood well enough, but this was dark and undecipherable. Did she mean to check his presumption? What did she mean?

"I have offended you, Signorina," said Francisco, in his most pathetic tone.

"Not at all," said the young lady; "only perhaps you do not quite understand; and I am very sorry," she continued, blushing with a little mortification and shame, "but grandpapa does not wish you to come again, Signore. Oh, I beg your pardon!—I cannot help it. I think the picture will do very nicely. I am sure my old friend will be quite pleased. But I thought it better not to leave grandpapa's message to Antonio. Please do not feel affronted—grandpapa is often so strange."

"I am not surprised," said Francisco, "I knew it very well; and were I my lord, I should say the same. Pardon, Signorina. I would not have but one happy painter admitted to your presence; and as for me, I shall see you again, when I may throw myself at your feet without reproof from my lord."

Lucy was considerably agitated—she did not know what to answer. She looked on with a little trembling while the young painter covered up his little picture. Then suddenly perceiving that he meant to take it with him, in spite of what she had said, interfered with a faltering voice—

"You will leave the picture, will not you?" said Lucy; "I am sure, except just that it is too *nice*, nobody could find any fault with it. You are surely not going to take it away."

"Ah, Signorina! do you suppose my memory is so faint? do you imagine I cannot complete the picture?" said Francisco, with great significance; then, bold in usage and custom, kissed her hand, and throwing all the eloquence of which they were capable into his eyes, took his leave all the more hastily that sounds approached as of the return of my lord. Francisco escaped that formidable encounter; but Lucy, all agitated, blushing, and distressed, had to bear the full brunt of it;—alas, not without many a misgiving in her own innocent mind the while! Was he one of the foreign swindlers who were always princes in disguise? or was he true, and a hero of romance? Lucy's mind inclined far more strongly to the last opinion than she could have believed it would; and the Signorina Inglese longed as earnestly for the first moment's leisure, when she could fly to Sora Teta and demand the story from her, as Francisco could have desired.

CHAPTER XIII.

But Francisco could not work even at that portrait when he got home; and as love and ambition, even at their highest flight, must still dine, he sprang up the long staircase only to deposit the little picture in safety, and as quickly descended again, and turned his steps towards the Trattoria, where, except when the funds were at miraculous ebb, it was his custom to eat his dinner. On the way he encountered the good-natured Gigi, Mariuccia's son. Gigi, or Luigi, which was his proper name, was loitering about the place where he had put up his horse, and stood close by his cart, on which, like a sail, a piece of canvass, stretched upon three sticks in the form of a triangle, was erected, with the inten-

tion of defending the driver from the sun. Close by was the dark arched doorway of an osteria or wine-shop—an osteria con cucina—where many a humble wayfarer had his dinner, and where Gigi meditated eating his. The honest fellow did not know what revelations had been made to Francisco; did not even know anything approaching to the full grandeur of the tale itself; and consequently addressed the young man with his usual familiar homely, half-fatherly kindness. It is impossible to describe how this salutation for the first moment jarred upon Francisco. He coloured, he drew back, he felt angry in spite of himself. He could not help suspecting that some intention of insult lay under Gigi's frank accost, so far already had the spell worked upon him.

"Something ails you, Chichino mio," said the good-humoured peasant. "Do matters go badly then with the arts? Dost thou not thrive at thy painting, my son? Patienza! the Forestieri who, they tell me, are coming in crowds this year, will make thee amends. Come and dine with thy old friend in the Osteria; they cook the polenta here almost as well as they do it over in Trastevere. Come! though thou wearest a better coat, and art of the belle arti, thou wert once little Chichino in Rocca, and hast a heart for thy old friends."

"And what, then, do you suppose I am now?" escaped from Francisco, rather angrily, in the first burst of his youthful annoyance.

"What thou art now? Per Bacco! a little out of temper, my youth!" cried Gigi, with an honest laugh; "but come, let us dine, for I must go for my mother, who is with Sora Teta in the Corso, another of thy old friends, at two hours after noon. She came into Rome upon some business of her own, the old mother. The mezzogiorno has sounded some time since, Francisco mio! let us get our dinner, we can talk over the minestra as well as here."

After a little pause Francisco followed, not without reluctance, and a feeling that he descended greatly from his dignity. The Osteria was a wild, dark, barn-like erection, with a lofty vaulted roof and earthen floor, stretching back with picturesque savagery into a gloom which would have almost been that of a cave, but for an odd little chance window in the distant wall, which sent a miraculous golden arrow of sunshine through the darkness. In that region, however, there was neither furniture nor inhabitation, but a vast row of wine-barrels, and litter of various sorts, saddles and harness, a wandering hen with her chickens, and an earthy and uninhabited smell. Nearer the door, the cucina resolved itself into a great fireplace, where cooking of various kinds went on merrily. Gigi, followed by Francisco, seated himself at a table close to the door, from which they could still see the street without. There was but one small high grated window to assist the light which came from the great open doorway; and as the Osteria opened into a narrow street, the light was very imperfect. There, however, they sat down, on the rudest of wooden benches, at the most unadorned of tables, and had their soup or minestra—Francisco, perhaps, rather comforting himself with the lack of light, lest he should be seen in such a place eating with a Contadino! But after all, in his romantic and extraordinary position, what did it matter how any one thought!

"You do not know, then," said Francisco, "why Mariuccia came to Rome."

"That is true, I do not know," said Gigi. "It is some fancy she has, however; it is not for diversion merely; though an old woman like my mother, who has lived virtuously, has a right to her pleasure. For myself, I always tell her so."

"And she trusts to you, I am sure, Gigi," said the young man, with a novel patronage in his tone. "Did not you go with the good Mariuccia the night she carried me to Rocca? Is it not so, Luigi mio?" continued the youth, growing conciliatory; "and stood by while she went into the palace, and are aware how she brought me out an unconscious child?"

"Nay, Signore, halt there," cried Gigi with a touch of suspicion; "if you wish to know something which she will not tell, you may tear me to

pieces sooner; and as for carrying you, to be sure, you were there in the house when I woke from my first sleep; but how you got there, whether by Maria sending you from Subiaco, or San Girolamo out of the desert, or the blessed Madonna herself from heaven, I cannot tell; there you were, certainly; but it is needless to ask such questions of me."

"Ah, so I perceive," said Francisco; "but Mariuccia, good soul, has told me all. Say, was not that a dismal ride through the olive woods?"

"You forget that I did not ride," said Gigi, laughing; "my mother had the poor old donkey, the poverina! Ah, what a good old creature that was! Many a time has she carried you up the mountain, Chichino mio, when you were scarcely big enough to cling to the bridle. I have three donkeys now, my son; but I will never have any like that dear old friend of my youth."

"Bah! what matter about your donkeys?" cried Francisco, almost with passion, "when I tell you that Mariuccia has told me *all*. Is that the only thing you have to say?"

Gigi scratched in perplexity his honest head. "Ah, stupido!" he ejaculated, smiting himself on the breast with ready pantomime. "I was always a thickhead, Chichino mio; what is it I ought to say?"

"Do you know who I am?" asked Francisco, still more impatiently.

Gigi scratched his head again, but this time a smile awoke among the black tangles of his beard. "I know you came out of the palazzo, my son—at least my mother was there *that* night; and she carried something under her shawl, sicuro! and, to tell you the truth, it is spoken among the people that you belong somehow to the Agostini. That is all I know; and whether it will do thee any good, thou poor child—"

"Stay thy folly, Gigi, and understand me," said Francisco, loftily. "In short, I am the Duke Agostini; but whether it will do me good, as you say——"

"The Duke Agostini!" stammered Gigi, stumbling to his feet; then, after a bewildered pause, during which, the best way he could, he had been putting things together, the good fellow tremulously seized and kissed the young painter's hand. "The Duke Agostini!" he repeated. "I heard them say thou wert other than thou seemed, Chichino—I mean Eccellenza, noble Don! but to be Duke Agostini—Viva il Duca! Viva la Madonna Santissima! the heavens do not forget us after all. Duke Agostini! it will be the greatest festa at Rocca, greater than the fair. I will go myself to Frascati, to old Chico of the fireworks. Thou art the lord of Rocca, then, Chichino mio! Excuse me, Eccellenza, I do not know what I say."

"Mariuccia never told you, then," said Francisco, with calm dignity; "but be seated, my good Gigi, and help yourself to some polenta; the polenta is very good as you said. Mariuccia never said to you who the little Chichino was?"

"I cannot sit at the table with your Excellency," said Gigi, with a rueful face, looking at the polenta. "Your Excellency will excuse me, that I was so familiar before I knew who your Excellency was."

"Nay, Gigi, thou shalt not cheat thyself of thy polenta; we have sat at one table many a time before," said the young paladin, magnanimously; "and how couldst thou know, my good fellow, if thy mother never told thee! but thou wert along with me, in that first journey of mine, all the same?"

"I was waiting with the donkey, just on the pathway yonder above the lake. That dear old donkey, Chichino mio—Scusa, Eccellenza! I forgot myself," cried Gigi in alarm. "The good beast cropped the grass, and I played Mori with the lads of my own age. It was at the end of that great elm-tree avenue which you know, illustrissimo Signore, if you have ever been at Genzaro—though, indeed, I believe you never have. It was about the Ave Maria when we came, all the world wondering why my mother should travel through the woods so late. I thought nothing of it, because it did not come into my head, Signore; but after waiting long, when my mother came at last, she wore a shawl, that is certain, and carried beneath it something that moved, and said not a word to me

all the way unless it was 'presto —Gigi!' or 'go faster, thou beast of a donkey!' Alas, she never understood the virtues of that good creature! and when we reached Rocca, if you will believe me, I was sent to bed immediately; and in the morning there was the bambino; per Bacco! and thou art Duke Agostini, and it was thee!"

"It is strange, certainly," said Francisco, stopping the enthusiasm of his new partisan; "but we are far from the festa and the fireworks yet, my Gigi. It may be long enough before I can even bring my cause before the Tribunale; and, in the mean time, it will be much better that thou hold thy peace. But you would not fear to appear before the judges, Gigi, and say what you have said to me?"

Gigi grew red and then pale, and scratched his head once more.

"I do not like the name of the Tribunale, my son. They are not good sport for poor men. Ah, Eccellenza, scusa! I will never remember thou art not Chichino; and these Monsignori are such great people—they are confusing to a poor fellow like me; but to serve thy cause ——"

Here came an interruption grateful to poor Gigi, in the shape of a voice, calling outside the Osteria upon Luigi Baretti. "Ecco!" cried that honest fellow in evident relief. But it was only Mariuccia, who came in, immediately afterwards, in all the glory of her festal costume—her red jacket and embroidered apron making quite a dazzling show, as she stood in the great doorway of the Osteria, concentrating in her person all the light there was. Mariuccia came forward with such affectionate reverence to kiss her nurseling's hand, that Gigi's awe and wonder grew in just proportion. It was true, then. Somehow it is always more convincing to see that another person believes in a new and great discovery than to be ever so sure one's self of the proofs of it. When he heard his mother address her former charge as Don Francisco—when he saw the humility with which she kissed the young man's hand, poor Gigi's wonder and enthusiasm almost overwhelmed him. If he had not finished the polenta by this time, he might have missed his dinner. He could scarcely be convinced that it was necessary to go to the homely practical business before him—to get out his horse, and arrange the baskets and bundles which he and his mother had to take back with them to Rocca, or to leave Rome without seeing anything done towards the bringing about of that festa which should dazzle Monte Cavo. He could not see any difficulties in the way, the innocent Gigi. Were not he and his mother ready to face the very Monsignori themselves if that was necessary? and what could any Tribunale in the world, not to say in Rome, require more? His eagerness, his enthusiasm, and the blank face with which he yielded to the representations of Mariuccia, and reminded himself of the long road and early sunset, were quite exhilarating to Francisco. To be sure there were difficulties known to that hero, which had no weight with Gigi; but still, with witnesses so faithful, so devoted, and so unquestionable, what had the Duchessa's son to fear?

CHAPTER XIV.

Francisco wandered about all day long, vainly trying to put some heart into his old pursuits, and if he could not determine what step to take first for the establishment of his claims, at least to occupy or amuse himself in the interval. But vain was the attempt. It was as impossible to stroll comfortably into the café and talk of indifferent things, as it was to mount up to his little apartment and paint even the portrait of the English Signorina. All Rome, so full of acquaintances and interests for him a little time ago, contracted into a narrow circle of women now—women not attractive to a young man—Teta, to whom alone he could talk freely—Madame Margherita, whom it was important to keep on good terms with;—and very different, attracting him with

a strange horror and fascination, that pale old witch face, so dismal in its wasted beauty and exhausted passion, the woman who was his mother. The young man spent all the afternoon lounging languidly about Monte Pincio looking into the carriages. When at last he did see the Duchessa —and, stationing himself at one spot which her carriage passed, again and again, as it made the little round, fixed his eyes so fully and curiously upon her that her curiosity was aroused also—he thought he saw a little eagerness in the face glancing at him out of the carriage. He thought that some thrill of recognition looked out, startled and in trouble, from the haughty wonder of her eyes; and, with a quickened impulse in his own, stood and gazed fiercely, scarcely perceiving how the innocent English Lucy, in a guard of invincible English matrons, passed the same way. Roman as he was, he was accessible to other emotions than those of love-making. At that moment, he was no lover waiting for a smile. He was a man watching, courting the observation of one who was at once the nearest kindred of his blood, and the bitterest enemy of his life.

Lucy could see him, however, though he was all but unconscious of the encounter, and the interest of the English girl grew and increased. He had not come there merely to see herself; it was with a purpose that he stood under that tree, with his eager eyes, motionless, and keeping his post, while the carriages went round and round in their monotonous circle. Lucy leant back in her corner, losing herself in a pleasant youthful trance, while the trees and the people glided past—while Rome in the distance was now visible, now disappeared—while the music of the band sank and rose; as her chaperone's carriage went round and round the same course, she heard the voices running on in a lively strain—she heard the sound of the promenaders on foot—she saw that one face, eager and intent, so unlike the gay leisure of the rest; and dimly conscious of everything, but particularising nothing, felt herself borne along with a gentle motion both of person and of thought.

"Could any one suppose it," said the lady by Lucy's side, suddenly rousing her languid interest by the name. "Look at that old Duchessa Agostini—she was a great beauty in her time."

"I wonder who that young man is who stares at her so," said their companion. "There's the oddest story going, about some mysterious son of hers who was lost or stolen, or something—or put in the foundling hospital, or I can't tell you what. But they say there is a son, though nobody can tell where he is, or anything about him. Oh, she's a wicked old woman, that Duchessa! I should believe anything bad of her. Now we're just about coming to him. Look! I protest I think it must be the Duchessa's son?"

"Why, for all the world! what puts such an idea in your head?—what a romancer you are!" cried Lucy's friend. "I see nothing particular, for my part, about the man."

"Ah, I know Rome! I know the Italians! I know they don't look like that unless they mean something," said the other Englishwoman, "and I could swear he was like her, the old fury! Dear, what an interesting thing! I am positive it must be the Duchessa's son."

Lucy said nothing, but the conversation roused her effectually—in the first place, with a great sense of relief. He was no foreign swindler, that poor young Francisco!—that she should have done him so much injustice! and, to be sure, if he was Duke Agostini, it was very unlikely that grandpapa would object—that is to say, she meant that grandpapa would not be at all displeased to receive a visitor of that rank. It was nothing to Lucy; had she not bound herself, by a solemn promise to grandpapa—poor, selfish, forlorn, old man—that she would never leave him while he lived? It was nothing to Lucy; but she was glad to think that justice would be done to the young painter, in whom it was quite natural, surely, to take an interest. People could not help taking an interest in other people who were pleasant and kind, especially if there was any injury in the case. So Lucy concluded, with a little glow

of expectation and pleasure at her heart.

However, it was not till the second evening after, that Lucy found herself free from the perpetual inspection of my lord, or the chaperone he had provided for her. My lord was a wicked old *roué*, relapsed into compulsory virtuousness by reason of old age and failing health; consequently he had very little dependence to place now upon his innocent granddaughter, not having much knowledge, in his own experience, of what the quality of innocence was. All unlearned as well in filial obligations and natural piety, my lord, much to Lucy's disgust, had really made with her the bargain above mentioned. She was to stay with him until he died, however long he might live; and he was to leave her, in due reward, "a great fortune." He had, it appeared, a certain love for her, as an adjunct to his comfort; and but for that bargain, Lucy might have loved grandpapa quite sufficiently to cling to him in youthful pity and affection, at any cost to herself. As it was, this agreement made the tie much less agreeable than it might have been; and in some degree converted the natural fealty into the obedience of a treaty, which, so long as it keeps by the letter, may be indifferent enough to the spirit. She had no compunctions, accordingly, to mar the gleam of satisfaction with which she heard of a dinner engagement, which did not include herself, and the prospect of "a nice long evening" for her own pleasure. Lucy thought she would look over her expenses and balance her dainty accounts. And then there was that set of cameos for a bracelet, which she wanted other ornaments to correspond with. To be sure, Madame Costini—or Sora Teta, as Italian custom called the buxom mistress of the house—was much the best person to apply to on this subject. Lucy despatched Reynolds up-stairs instantly to beg a visit from their landlady, with rather a little secret satisfaction in the exceedingly plausible reason she had assigned to herself for seeking an interview with Sora Teta. She sat in a little inner room which, by means of her own taste and Teta's willing co-operation in hunting up various articles which Lucy fancied from her stock of old furniture, had been made into a kind of boudoir—a maidenly fantastic appendix to the drawing-room. She had a store of little jeweller's boxes round her, over and above the cameos, about which she was so very anxious to consult her visitor—presents from grandpapa to herself, and purchases of her own, which she meant to carry to her friends at home. She thought it would be pleasant to show them to Sora Teta, who was always so good-humoured and friendly; and besides, it was so much easier to ask questions when some other occupation was going on.

"The Signorina must tell me what designs she wishes," said Teta, examining the cameos, "and I will ask Civilotti to get some very fine ones for her; for the Signorina perceives that I know Civilotti very well, being brought up in the Duchessa Agostini's household; the Duchessa loved nothing so much as change; she would have her jewels reset over and over. Poor Duchessa!—don't you think it must be dreadful, Signorina mia, to turn from a great beauty into an ugly old woman?"

"Dreadful, indeed! and was she really a great beauty? and did you live with her when you were young? and what sort of a person is she?" asked Lucy, closing abruptly one of her jewel boxes, with an assumption of carelessness which betrayed her.

"Ah, Signorina, you good ladies of the Forestieri, who do not love too much distraction and divertimento—if you do not get as much pleasure in your youth," said the insinuating Teta, "at least you are not ugly when you grow old, like the poor Duchessa. She is a very great lady, but I never could love her. I do not think even my mother can love her, though she has been with her forty years. She is somehow antipatica, Signorina—I cannot explain it to you; and Donna Anna, her daughter, who is married to Don Angelo Lontoria, is very much the same. Donna Anna is the only daughter. That will be another great estate gone to the family Lontoria, who are nobodies, if all goes well."

"But then, Sora Teta," Lucy said, confidentially, "is not there another story? And the tale which Signore Francisco the painter told me, what does it mean?"

"Nay, Signorina, how can I know if you do not tell me?" cried Teta. Then changing her tone suddenly—"I can trust to you, Signorina mia; it is true, that strange tale—he is the Duke Agostini, if there is justice in the world. My mother saw him born, and I saw him carried away, my beautiful Signorina. You are sympatica—you understand him—how noble he is. Ah, such a princely young man! And he knew nothing, if you will believe me, Signorina, till the other day; nothing but that he was an orphan child, and the son of St Michele. And now to get his cause to the Tribunale, with advocates to take care of it, and fees, and the rest, drives him to the end of his wits, the dear youth; for you would not have him borrow, such a young man as he is; and for working as he says, that would destroy his health—and to what good, then, the dukedom and the estates? But I tell him, patienza! the blessed Madonna will raise him up friends."

"And do you think really," said Lucy, too much interested to conceal her interest—"do you really believe that this is all that he needs—only money to carry on a lawsuit with?—is that all?"

"That is all, Signorina mia; and I say to him, patienza! the Madonna will raise him up friends; that is all—that and the blessing of heaven," said the confident Teta. "For what would it avail the Duchessa to deny him? My beautiful Signorina, Madame Margherita brought him into the world, and my mother was there when he was born!"

After this conclusive and convincing statement, Teta proceeded to enlarge upon the childhood of the wonderful boy—details to which Lucy certainly gave ear, and did not refuse to be interested; but a half-conscious suggestion, which made the poor girl's face flush one moment, and the most horrorstricken paleness overspread it the next, but which, nevertheless, would not be entirely extinguished, ran parallel with all Lucy's thoughts. One day she herself should be rich—one day! but only when grandpapa was dead—and Lucy's heart smote her that she could for a moment speculate on such a possibility. She thought herself the most unnatural, the most ungrateful of children. Grandpapa, who was so good to her! But slurring over that thought with a shudder, still, independent of grandpapa, the suggestion would return—one day or other Lucy should be an heiress—should have more money than she knew what to do with: if Francisco was still only Francisco Spoleto *then!*

THE ROMANCE OF AGOSTINI.

PART III.—CHAPTER XV.

Two new and startling trains of thought were thus brought into exciting and tumultuous existence by the revelation of Mariuccia, and two young lives disturbed beyond any possibility of immediate pacification. There was no longer any rest for Francisco in his lofty nest in the Piazza of Trajan. He worked languidly and by fits when he could not help himself; for the severest savage Spartan existence demands still something to answer the claims of nature, and it was perfectly necessary, in the first place, that he should live. Except for this sharp spur of necessity, he would have done nothing but muse over the miraculous prospects which had opened before him, and make long dreamy excursions into that future, which—all but one initiatory step, which was very dark indeed, and obscured with a perpetual fog—blazed with the splendours of a fairy tale. His imagination, much confused and baffled when it endeavoured to penetrate into the darkness of that gloomy and uncertain interval which lay between him and his glory, at last learned to leap over the clouded threshold, and enjoy the unquestionable delights beyond; for, to be sure, if the young painter were but once proved to be the Duke Agostini, there was an end to all possible troubles and distresses. What had he further to fear? The young man mazed himself night and day with these dreams. He loitered upon his little loggia leaning over the railing, revelling in imagination in all the splendours of his new position. He avoided his old acquaintance, and found no more pleasure in the theatre or the café. He had not even the pleasant distraction of a sitting from the Signorina Ingless to disturb the solitude which he peopled with such dreams. He had lost an unspeakable amount of youthful comfort and amusement to start with. He was very lonely, very poor—lost in a world of indolent but exciting visions—by no means happy. For Francisco it was as yet anything but good news.

It was not much better news to the English Lucy. But for this the two would inevitably have forgotten each other; parted shyly, with their mutual shy liking undeveloped; with a little pang at the heart of each, and a soft recollection lasting perhaps throughout their lives. For was it not inevitable—a thing beyond resistance? How dared they so much as think of each other—these two, between whom fortune had drawn a line so rigid? But things were changed now. Francisco had ventured to speak and Lucy to hear. That which might have died away inarticulately had been spoken and could no longer be ignored; and a little money, a little more money, would make the young painter the equal, and more than the equal, of the little Englishwoman. Lucy could not save herself from the thrill of that intruding thought—"Some time I shall be rich"—any more than she could from the compunction rising immediately after it, which reminded her that ere she could be rich her grandfather must die. How wicked she thought herself!—how unnatural, how ungrateful, sometimes even how miserable she felt, like a traitor in the old man's house. But still she could not help the recurrence of that thought. Some time she too would be rich; and if Francisco was still Francisco, and wanted that money then to gain his rights, the money should be his. But Lucy too grew dreamy and loved solitude—her imagination was captivated perhaps even more than her heart.

It was still beautiful, warm, idlers' weather, and the life of an idler flourishes nowhere better than in Rome. Francisco did nothing that he could help except dream, living imaginary glorious years as Duke Agostini, and forgetting the necessary days which the painter Francisco had to live through in the mean time. For what could he do? No exertion

of his, so far as he could see, could hasten the fulfilment of his hopes. He had no money, and besides the advocates, who must be feed, public opinion in Rome was greatly disposed to believe that the very Tribunale itself was not proof against the eloquence of golden arguments. The young man was not an ideal hero, but a young Roman, brought up in the habits of his countrymen. If he had sometimes felt a passing enthusiasm for a special enterprise, he had never loved work, nor found a resource in it from other troubles. He had always been ready to make festa, like all his comrades. Perhaps few of us are deeply enamoured of our day's work when we are twenty—and an unsophisticated Italian mind does not comprehend the sentiment. To be sure, labour is a curse and not a blessing. But Francisco was not only idle—he was miserable, discontented, restless. Things that were very sufficient for the orphan of St Michele, did not at all answer the Duchessa's son. He felt the frank accost of his acquaintances almost as an insult, and chafed at all his surroundings. This wonderful secret might make him great, but it had not made him happy.

He was in this condition of mind when he received an unexpected visit from Gigi. Gigi had been pondering over the strange turn of affairs since ever he heard of this secret, and the good fellow had less patience than his coadjutors. He had set his whole heart upon that festa which should drive all Rocca out of its wits and illuminate the dark side of Monte Cavo. He was burning to set about this congenial business, to consult old Chico of Frascati about the fireworks, and to arrange a gigantic tombola. Such a glorious prospect was not to be postponed. Nevertheless Gigi, when he thought it over, acknowledged the difficulties. He could have brought himself, if not his wife, to consent to that mortgage of the vineyard which Mariuccia suggested. He could have screwed his resolution to the point of selling his donkeys—but, vast sum as these expedients must raise, would it do? At last Gigi came to a resolution which relieved his mind mightily. He slept soundly the night after that comfortable suggestion, and the next morning rose early, dressed himself carefully, and set out for Rome. When he had climbed with his heavy shoes up the long stairs, and, knocking at Francisco's door, asked "Permesso?" humbly outside, Francisco was, as usual, in the loggia, leaning over, and appearing to watch the passengers below. He came in reluctantly, with dreamy eyes, at that sound, and met the eager peasant with the excited languor of a lotus-eater, lost in his own intoxication, and impatient of any appeal from the world without.

"Don Francisco! Eccellenza! Signore mio!" cried Gigi, with a gasp of earnestness, "come out with me to Rocca, and speak to Monsignore! consult with Monsignore, noble Don! There is nobody like Monsignore for knowing everything—for telling one what it is best to do. My mind is at ease since I thought of it. Many a time has he asked after the little Chichino, and how it went with him. Come and consult Monsignore, illustrious Don!"

"Gigi, my good fellow, accommodate yourself and take breath," said Francisco, thrusting a chair towards him. "Did Monsignore send thee to me?"

"Nay, nay, per Bacco, it was the holy saints that sent me!" cried Gigi. "Yesterday we made a procession, as your Excellency will perhaps remember we had the usage of doing; and in the church, opposite the blessed image of St Francisco, with his stigmata made in gold, and rays round his head that might warm one in a cold day—which was set up by Monsignore himself, as thou well knowest—what should come into my head, Signore mio, as clear as though the holy saint, who is thy patron, had said it in my ear, but '*Send him to Monsignore.*' Eccellenza, believe me, I could no more say my prayers, nor even listen to the holy litanies. Every time my eyes turned to the blessed saint, thy patron, the words returned to me again, 'Send him to Monsignore!' And, to be sure, when one thinks of it, where could you go

so well to ask advice? There is not a frate in the convent so humble as Monsignore, nor a cardinal so wise in all the sacred college. There is never a quarrel in Rocca, nor even in Albano itself, but they carry it to Monsignore, and he decides what is to be done, and makes the peace. And he is a judge himself, as your Excellency knows. Come with me, Chichino mio—I should say, noble Don!—come with me! Monsignore is at Rocca, and will hear all thou hast to say."

Francisco took two or three rapid short promenades through his room. He was irritated and impatient at the interruption, but it roused him; and besides, if he had not been rather angry to think that the idea originated with Gigi, it was unquestionably a very good suggestion. The young man's pride, however, had received a stimulation too extraordinary to make him yield at once to so humble a counsellor. He stopped loftily when he came in front of his easel, took up his palette—to set which had been all his morning's work—and made a few energetic touches at a copy which he had been languidly dawdling over for some days. "I will think of it," said Francisco, putting his head on one side, and retiring a few steps to see the effect of his sudden exertion. "I will think of it," he repeated, after five minutes of such devoted work as he had not accomplished for some weeks past. Gigi made a step backwards, and, watching him—confounded by his coldness and overawed by his talents—the honest fellow was deeply impressed by the imposing indifference of his little Chichino. Those vague popular recollections—associations inseparable from a ritual which permits at least a semi-worship of a picture—wherein the old painters of Italy have a dim but universal immortality, came breathing across the unenlightened mind of the Contadino. Possibly his little Chichino was one of those great ones before whom even a Duke Agostini was nobody. Perhaps the painter knew his greatness secured, and did not care for his problematical "rights." Alas, poor honest Gigi! he did not know it was only a youthful flourish of trumpets, and that Francisco had a vast mind to toss palette and brushes out of the window, and set out across the Campagna without so much as waiting for his guide.

CHAPTER XVI.

Monsignore lived by himself, in a great square house of his own building, in the outskirts of the village of Rocca—lived by himself, yet not by himself, retaining an *entresol* for his own use, and dwelling in a kind of fatherly superintending neighbourship with the families to whom he had let his superfluity of rooms. He was a prelate, a judge of one of the inferior courts, a politician, trusted by the people, and, in emergencies, by the government. Partisans and admirers, to which class belonged nine-tenths of the people who knew him, fondly believed that they saw in him a dangerous opponent to, and possible successor of, Antonelli himself. Everybody knew that his own will alone prevented him from holding the rank of cardinal; and no man wore the purple stockings with an air more courtly than Monsignore could assume when he pleased. Nevertheless he was the village arbiter, the referee in all troubles, the umpire of disputes — everybody's friend, counsellor, and helper—such a priest as might reconcile the stoutest Protestant to priestdom. In his youth he had been "in the world," a soldier, and had served in some of the campaigns of the empire. In his age he was the most genial, the most gentle, the most mildly human of men: *mildly* human, not passionate nor tragical, though an Italian: a natural celibate, full of calm affections. In every Church there are such unmarried, childless, universal fathers. Monsignore was of the benignest type of such men.

This was the man to whom, by special interference of San Francisco, Gigi's thoughts had been directed, and on account of whom the good

fellow had made his breathless journey into Rome, to fetch, if possible, the young hero out with him; and it was to the Casa Fantini, the house of this good priest, that Francisco took his way next morning, after he had rested from his journey and refreshed himself. The young man made as grand a toilette as he could accomplish. He wanted to look worthy of his future dignities, and to impress the mind of Monsignore. Perhaps, too, he was anxious to recall as few recollections as might be of the little Chichino of Mariuccia's cottage. In this present state of transition and expectation, he did not care to remember too clearly, even in his own person, the peasant thoughts and peasant dress of that forlorn little boy who, nevertheless, then as now, was the Duchessa's son.

Monsignore was a little man, lively and benign, with a little, light footstep, a head small but sagacious, a face of homely features, overflowing with kindness. He was seated in his own special sitting-room, where the stock of books was moderate, but, supported by various scientific tools, looked respectable enough to uphold the learned character of the good prelate, who was past his student days. No state or circumstance surrounded this Italian ecclesiastic and possible statesman. The villagers had free access to that heterogeneous room, where the domino-box flanked the telescope on the table, and a gun leaned against the books in the corner. There was no carpet on the floor to make the new comer's entrance noiseless; no luxurious library-chair to comfort the good priest in his studies. Instead of the purple stockings appertaining to his dignity, Monsignore wore long boots drawn over his trousers and reaching to the knee—perhaps a reminiscence of his old profession—and was in common everyday secular dress, without any mark of priesthood except the small black skullcap which comforted that spot of ecclesiastical baldness on the top of his head. He was busy with compasses and pencils drawing out a new plan for his garden, which was a very important matter to Monsignore. He gave lingering touches to his sketch, and kept measuring it with his compasses as he listened to Francisco's story, which story did not much astonish the kind priest. He had known of it by rumour many years ago—perhaps had put the facts together in his own mind, and drawn a true conclusion—perhaps had heard it at first-hand under the dark shelter of the confessional—anyhow, he was not very much surprised.

"But does it not occur to you, figlio mio," said Monsignore, "that to send away the only son, if all had been just, is a thing extraordinary? I cannot understand it. Your mother would have been but too proud to give Il Duca an heir if all had been well."

"I know nothing whether it was ill or well," said the young man, with a momentary violent blush which faded instantly. "Perhaps they were not good friends; they were not angels, Monsignore, but they kept together; and the Duchessa either took an antipathy to me, or loved Donna Anna too well, who had been so long supposed the heir; or, it may be, took this means of punishing the Duke—can I tell? but I am the Duchessa Agostini's son."

"Yes, poverino!" said Monsignore, with a sigh, "you are that woman's son: but she who has been capable of deserting you; whom you suppose capable of wronging you to this extreme; of taking your rank and your rights and your very name from you; do you not think she is capable even of telling such a lie at the trial, if it ever come to a trial, as should make an end of your peace, my Francisco? She might say you were not Il Duca's son."

"Monsignore, she is my mother," said Francisco. Once more his colour rose violently, his heart heaved with a convulsive suspiration, and he drew himself to his full height with haughty resentment and impatience. The good priest raised his head from the garden-plan and looked at him. He was skilled in faces. He saw that this view was one which Francisco *would* not take; that natural feeling, ambition, self-regard, rose in arms against that degrading idea; but that still a passing consciousness of such an abominable possibility quickened the haughty impatience

with which the young man refused to hear a word said against the honour of the woman who was his mother. For another moment Monsignore bent over his compasses, very gently shaking his head, as though he made an inaudible protest under his breath. Then he asked quietly, "What then, my son, are you to do?"

"I came to ask the advice of Monsignore," said Francisco.

"Ah!" said the good priest, "I know what that means; you would have Monsignore advise you to do what you wish to do. You would have me, who spend my life in keeping peace among my neighbours, advise you to go to law. I love not the law, my son, though I have much to do with it; it is better to try private arrangement than to spend thy money before the Tribunale. All thy means——"

"Monsignore, pardon; I have no means," interrupted Francisco.

"And how then can you go to law, you foolish boy?" said Monsignore, raising his eyebrows. "But if you were Piombino himself, my son, I should counsel thee the same. Let us try what they will do in the first place. Perhaps the Duchessa repents and will do thee justice; perhaps Donna Anna, who is a good woman, though peevish, will not take her brother's inheritance. At the least, Francisco mio, it is thy duty to try."

"Try! Will the noble Duchessa admit such a one as I am?" said Francisco, reddening with bitter curiosity and eagerness at the thought. "Shall I submit to be called an impostor, or to see her hatred? No, Monsignore; she has cut me off from being her son. It is not by her help I will recover what is my right."

"One must not stand out too much for one's rights in this world," said Monsignore. "One must seek one's fortune in the way of peace, though it is not the pleasantest way; and you would not wish to have a triumph over your mother. Patienza! I remember thee the other day, little Chichino, saying thy catechism among the other children; and a good child, on the whole, when nobody crossed thee. I knew very well thou wert not a villanello, my son, but hadst good blood in thy veins, howsoever it came to thee. Leave me to think over this case of thine, and if I can help thee, va-bene! if not, thou art none the worse."

Obliged to be content with this, Francisco rose slowly to take his leave. He was going away very reluctantly, trying to find some expedient to lengthen the interview, and obtain some more decided promise of help, when the old man called him back. "Chichino mio," said Monsignore, in his most paternal tone, looking keenly at Francisco, and poising in his fingers his extended compasses, "imagine that I find means to make thy intentions known to the Duchessa; imagine that she acknowledges thee her son, but denies thy further rights—capito? and let us suppose that she offers thee a portion, an income, an estate, if thou remainest silent; what then, my Francisco, should thy representative say?"

"Monsignore! it is not you who should insult me! If I am anything I am Duke Agostini; not a bajocco! not a grosso! I cannot be silent! Would she pay me for my peasant childhood, my youth in St Michele, my content which I can never bring back again? Monsignore, no! I will have nothing but my right."

So, with a burst of passion which he could not control, Francisco ended abruptly the interview from which he had hoped so much. A few tranquillising words from the kind priest only proved to him that Monsignore sympathised in some degree with the torrent of excitement which had overpowered him for the moment, and was not offended by his violence. But Francisco found no further comfort in this conversation. He went away, indeed, more depressed by the look of compassion and sympathy with which Monsignore watched his departure than he would have been by a positive misfortune; and with that humiliating possibility—which, since the very first announcement of this secret, he had been able to ignore without much difficulty—gnawing again with a momentary but double

bitterness at his heart. Monsignore, full of interest and affectionate sympathy for the unfortunate boy whom he had known all the youth's lifetime; Monsignore, whose judgment was conclusive to every soul in Rocca —that kind paternal authority hailed Francisco's story with no exclamations of joyful surprise, no prophecies of coming splendour, no new title. The young man was nothing but little Chichino still to Monsignore, though he *was* the Duchessa's son; and Francisco left the house with a flood of bitterness and disappointment, inconceivable to his youthful experience a month ago, overflowing his heart. Monsignore, who knew the world, believed in that degrading, miserable alternative which it was shame to think of. Was this all his high expectations were to come to? and who could give him back his content?

CHAPTER XVII.

After his disheartening interview with Monsignore, Francisco had no inclination to linger in Rocca; nothing could bring him back his youthful good-temper, friendliness, and general social amiability. As Duke Agostini he would have taken in very good part the salutations of the villagers, but the Francisco who ought to be Duke Agostini was of less amiable disposition; and even Mariuccia's reverential affection and the enthusiasm of Gigi, who would not understand how Monsignore could have discouraged the young man, added a little to the heart-sickness of the unfortunate young aspirant. He said to himself that they mocked him with that empty title which he should never bear. He turned aside from their affectionate homage as from a sickening and dangerous dainty. Solacing his tumultuous feelings with a self-denial which certainly was not necessary, he set off on foot, scorning the help of the *vettura*. Because he could not have all he wanted, he went to the other extreme, and punished himself after the usual fashion of youth; and arrived at Rome long after the Ave Maria, when darkness had closed over the Eternal city, and when those streets, deserted of foot-passengers, with their stream of carriages, and the Babel of bearded faces to be seen through every café window, looked dry and withered with the chill of the night. Francisco went up his long stair footsore and exhausted, good for nothing but rest—such rest as was possible in the ferment of his new life. He had no fire to draw his chair to and smoke his cigar over. There was no provision for such a luxury in the little, bare, carpetless apartment. Instead, the young man lighted his lamp, put on his cloak, and placed his little table at the open window. There he supped dismally, yet not without appetite, on bread and wine and some small slices of *salami*. The moonlight was shining on the broken pillars far below him. It had been a festa that day, and there were still passengers in the Piazza where the lights shone in the shops. Life went on the same in spite of Francisco's dreams. The skies shone alike day after day, though he was at one time elated, and at another time discouraged. However matters went with one young suffering spirit or another, it made no visible difference either to heaven or earth.

The months of that winter passed in an incoherent, restless, unhappy fashion. Francisco did not know what he was doing. He painted some doleful copies of second-rate pictures, which somebody had commissioned from him, and lived with Spartan economy on the price of them. That warm young Roman nature of his was not self-denying, certainly — it did not run in the blood; but for a time, in token of hopeless spite and disgust against the world and his fortune, he could be an ascetic—that was possible enough to him and his race. He had no hope of gaining at his easel the means necessary to bring his cause before the proper tribunal; but if he could not do that he could starve and mortify himself, which was always some little consolation for the moment. His heart was so far out of his work, his imagination was so

busy always among the chances of the future, that the capacity of labour, never too largely developed in the youthful Italian, had almost died out of him. Then, as if that splendid misery of a hope was not enough, the other tantalising imp, with his bow and arrows, was busy in full career of mischief in the troubled heart of poor Francisco. He haunted that house in the Corso like an unquiet spirit. He paid Teta endless visits; a dozen times he had all but encountered the watchful presence of my lord. Nor did Francisco fail to discover that, somehow by instinct —for they had never met again, even in the stair—the English Signorina was aware of the shadow that hovered about her. To tell the truth, poor Lucy was driven day by day to more frequent and more perilous thoughts of the young Roman and his grand secret. My lord's suspicions flourished and increased so much without reason, that the lonely little girl was vehemently tempted to justify them, and procure herself some equivalent for the suffering which she had to bear in her innocence. That subtle charm of an unseen lover, delicately careful of her privacy and maidenly reserve, yet always near; and the coarser goad of my lord's suspicions, which would not permit her to forget the young painter had she been ever so much inclined, were almost too much for Lucy. Rome would have been inexpressibly distasteful to her, had it not began to grow tenderly dear, and full of unspoken, unspeakable associations. Somebody watched for her coming and going through those narrow streets—somebody lingered invisible in her traces, as though her steps left light behind them. Never lover spoke for himself so eloquently as does a young girl's shy, startled, sweet imaginations, while the unspoken enchantment grows upon her. Could Lucy help it? Nobody loved the poor child except that unseen young stranger, wronged and unfortunate, whom my lord would not permit her to forget.

However, it was an honest and unconcerted accident which brought about their first meeting. My lord himself had commissioned his granddaughter to bear some message to Sora Teta, who, to be sure, could not tell that Sora Teta's apartment was the constant haunt of the unfortunate Francisco. After that their encounters were not so unfrequent; and before Lucy knew, all was said, and the mischief irrevocably done and not to be mended; for when the passionate young Roman opened all his heart to her, could the poor child whom nobody else loved, tell a proper little fib to her lover and turn him away, and shut out that light of youth out of her heart? She was very much frightened and full of a hundred compunctions—but what could she do? Question pressed upon her with all the fervour of a first wooing—her heart in her face so much belying that first faltering "No," that the coldest spectator, let alone a Francisco, could put no faith in it. Poor Lucy, eighteen years old, could but confess to the truth.

But after that confession, and the first surprise of it, the little English girl recovered herself. It was a sadly unnatural position for an English girl, but it was necessary now to make the best of what was inevitable. She shook the tears off her pretty eyelashes, and raised her little drooping head. Ah, if all went well, what a sweet Duchessa! one with roses that would grow old without withering—a face that passion could not waste! but she would hear no more, droop no longer. It was Lucy's turn to speak.

"Now, Signore Francisco," said the little Englishwoman, with a spark in her blue eye that Francisco wist not of, "we are not to meet again. We —we—understand each other. But it must not go any further. We must not meet again."

Here Francisco fell at her feet in a passion of amazed reproaches and entreaties. Not meet again! Why not, in the name of everything wonderful? Meeting was no longer a matter of will—it was a necessity—love demanded it. Not meet again! say rather every hour, every day!

But Lucy stood firm in her propriety, and was not to be moved. "Grandpapa is the only friend I have, and we cannot tell him," said Lucy. "Oh that I should do anything I dare not tell! but I—am—

not sorry; do not look so reproachful. If you cannot trust me after what you have made me say, why then we had better try to forget each other; for I am resolved and determined, if it should kill me, I *will not* meet you again."

"Ah Lucia mia! it is because you care nothing for me," cried Francisco, in a lamentable tone.

"Oh, if you think so, very well! *I* do not mind," said the little affronted princess. The baffled lover came to her feet once more. Lucy would a great deal rather he had stood up facing her without so much adoration; but still the *abandon* had its charm.

"Now listen to me," said Lucy after an interval, with a deep and somewhat painful blush, "I never will leave grandpapa. I have promised never to leave him while he lives; and I pray God send him long life, Francisco—I do, with all my heart!" cried the poor little girl with tears, clasping her innocent hands; "but then—oh, I hope God will forgive me!—then I shall have money; I will be rich. If you have not gained your rights before, I promise to come to you—to bring what I have to you—to win your cause. I promise you, Francisco; although in the mean time I do not see you, nor hear from you, nor know whether you care for me still; and if before that time you are Duke Agostini, you shall come and ask my grandfather for me; but we are not to meet again. I will make this engagement if you choose—but I will not make any other. I don't want to part with you. Do you think I shall not feel it? but already—oh we have both been very wrong!"

After a great deal of protest and remonstrance, Francisco, finding that he could not help himself, submitted, and the bargain was made accordingly; a strange, wild, youthful compact, which both of them, notwithstanding, entered into undoubting, not afraid of its vast demand upon their steadfastness. Francisco, perhaps, had as little dread of his own constancy as Lucy, but he did not understand that punctilio of honour, nor why they should so deny themselves. He made a very doleful countenance as she prepared to leave him. "And what, then, are we to do in the mean time?" said the satisfied but disappointed lover. Lucy turned round upon him once more, brightly indignant, with that spark of spirit in her blue eye.

"Trust each other!" cried the steadfast little English girl, clasping her hands with a pretty gesture of impatience. Then she disappeared down the long dark stair—the deep black well of a staircase which looked so dark when she was gone; and Francisco heard her voice no more.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Lucy kept her word. Before long, indeed, Francisco learned to know that any attempt to contravert her decision was vain, and that his best policy was to accept honestly the bargain which had been made between them, the conditions of which he had vainly hoped Lucy herself, as the days went on, might be tempted to break. But Lucy was steadfast; she had pledged her faith and her life, and the thing having happened, could neither disguise nor deny her honest sentiments; but she would not carry on a clandestine correspondence. She could not persuade herself to be sorry that Francisco and she had tied that silken knot, and bound each other, as they said, for ever—and she had all a girl's satisfaction in that romantic and visionary compact; but to maintain, with her eyes open, a secret correspondence, was something impossible to Lucy. She was, on the contrary, rigidly exact to her own conditions. She would rarely descend the stair without sending Reynolds to reconnoitre; and when she encountered by chance, from the carriage window, the eyes of Francisco, he could scarcely venture to put to his own credit the passing flush of colour and momentary drooping, so resolute was the little Englishwoman in her proprieties. Francisco, of course, lost none of his opportuni-

ties. He lingered about Monte Pincio in the golden wintry afternoons, to catch a glimpse of the lady of his love, as she went submissively through the orthodox "airing." Every Sunday morning, regular as the day, he was to be detected somewhere about the Piazza del Popolo, watching the carriages as they drew up in the mud outside the gate, before the modest church of the English. To be sure, in both places there were plenty of young Romans like himself to bear him company. It was "a good season;" the English church was crowded, and the wintry sunshine across the wide piazza sparkled upon streams of carriages winding weekly to the further side of that gate. Young Rome loved nothing better than to lounge about the square after its own brief mass, and watch, with many comments, the young English ladies, so shy and so bold. Francisco had no eyes but for the carriage of my lord, with Lucy dim and unresponsive in the corner; Lucy, who, all unresponsive as she was, still somehow never failed to see him, though he changed his position a dozen times; but there was always an abundant brotherhood of young men not unlike himself to keep him in countenance. He was always sure of seeing Lucy on Sunday—it was the one certain opportunity never to be lost.

Meantime the year slid round from autumn into spring. The winter vanished like a dream, unperceived by the unfortunate young painter, whose mind was bewildered by two of the most confusing influences which can mystify a young man's life. It is scarcely possible even to say that the success of his wooing consoled him. Success more tantalising and unsatisfactory never perplexed the soul of youth. One prefers to jump at conclusions when one is twenty, and the art of patience is not commonly learned so early in life. But here was poor Francisco, with his dazzling impossible fortune hanging over his head, perhaps to fall into his hands to-day, perhaps never to fall into his hands; and his love postponed into dim regions of equal uncertainty, all present comfort of it being ruthlessly snatched from him. No wonder that he passed the Christmas in indifferent spirits, and, refusing the few invitations which were offered him to join in the New-Year family feasts, despondently haunted that corner of the Corso, and o' nights leaned over the railing of his balcony, as though good advice or consolation of some kind might perhaps be had of old silent Trajan on his column, or of the unconcerned and steadfast stars.

By-and-by the fairy link which bound the two young people together changed its character. Watching in the dim street at early morning, Francisco, warned by Teta of the approaching calamity, saw my lord's travelling carriage brought to the door, witnessed the callous servants strapping the imperials to the roof, and looked on, grimly observant, at all the luxuries of travel which were to make the journey bearable to my lord. Then Lucy came down, all alone but for the attendance of her maid—rather pale, with a thick veil hanging over her pretty face. The young man ventured to come nearer in the passion of the moment. Perhaps she did it on purpose, the poor little girl; perhaps it was not all pure grace and favour, but a private yearning of her own heart as well. My lord had not yet descended; Reynolds was busy about the boxes, between the door of the house and that of the carriage; the servants about were only temporary servants, who did not accompany the Forestieri; and Lucy, with her white cheeks and her black veil, leaned out at the other window, where only Francisco could see the tears in her eyes. She said "Farewell!" and held out her hand to him; then she said "Remember!" with a faint smile and blush, holding up an imperative little finger; and then, almost before the unfortunate young lover could retire from the side of the carriage, my lord came stumbling forth with an angry face and a lecture to Lucy. Why had she come down first? when she knew his taste so well, and was quite aware that he detested stumbling into a carriage over a woman's skirts! Lucy made humble apologies, and tripped out again to let grandpapa arrange himself at his pleasure, her

black veil dropping over her face as she got up from her corner; and in the mean time Francisco hastened away to post himself at the gate through which they must pass, and doubtless be detained for a few minutes. There once more they ventured to look at each other; then it was all over; was it all over? and nothing remaining to Francisco but the "Remember!" and the "Farewell!"

The same night, however, a little consolation came to the young man in the shape of a letter from Monsignore, the very superscription of which, addressed as it was to the *Illustrissimo Signore, il Signore Francisco*, without the addition of the name of Spoleto, which had become mightily distasteful to him, raised a little flutter of hope in the breast of Francisco. Monsignore's letter, however, was very guarded and cautious, containing nothing beyond a certain vague inferential encouragement. The good priest himself had seen the Duchessa, but had gained nothing from her; and Francisco grew white with a bitter secret rage when he heard that this woman, who was his mother, had disowned him in a frenzy of passion, and forbidden any one, priest or friend, to name in her presence the name of the outcast whom she could not deny to be her son. The young man ground his teeth together as he read. She was his mother—an unspeakable fascination drew him towards her, though not in love. He watched her, when by chance he crossed her path, with the strangest eagerness and interest, and to read the report of her very words made his heart beat; but he could not bless, and would not curse her. He held his breath when he came to her name. Of one thing, if of but one thing only, he was certain in his extraordinary life—*she* was his mother; and Nature, with a certain wild rage and passion, started up fierce in his heart at the sound of her name, forbidding words. She had no nature in her heart, that weird woman; and Francisco ground his teeth, but was silent, in the bitterness of his heart.

There was, however, more than this in Monsignore's letter—a postscript seemingly unimportant, like the proverbial postscript of a woman. It said, "One of my friends, Rospigliosi, an advocate, is in the café of the Scacchi, in the Corso, towards mezzogiorno, many of these days. If thou shouldest see him, my son—it is he who has the pretty Cæsaretti villa near the Albano lake—do not hesitate to speak; he is of thy friends."

This brief hint, it may be supposed, set Francisco's veins tingling. He could scarcely help getting up with a sudden impulse to seek out instantly, without a moment's delay, this unknown friend. The sudden possibility of doing something, if only of telling his tale over again, inspired the young man. His despondency and listlessness gave place to all the eager desire and speculation of his years. By sight and name he knew Rospigliosi well enough. But did Rospigliosi know him? and how? and in what position? A ferment of thoughts and questions rose within the young man's mind. He went out, and, only half aware of where he was going, took his way to the Scacchi café, and sauntered, with vague but eager curiosity, through its gossipers and chess-players, to the furthest end, where he sat by himself in a corner, and drank his coffee, inspecting as well as he could the groups before him. When it suddenly became visible and evident to Francisco that the observation was not on his side alone—that a whisper went about, as those strange Italian telegraphic communications do, noiselessly, eyebrows and fingers doing the greater part of them—and that more than one head was raised from the chess-table as he passed; his heart quickened, his face flushed; he was no longer Francisco the painter, nameless, parentless, and poor; it was the dawn of a new world.

CHAPTER XIX.

With excitement rather increased than lessened by the night's musing, Francisco sought the café of the Scacchi at noon of the next day. He

was quite right in supposing himself to be an object of general interest, but not equally correct in the idea that this interest had sprung up suddenly, and was the result of some new event yet unknown to him. For some time past, rumours of a new claimant to the Agostini dukedom had buzzed about Rome—no one knew where or how they originated, but the whisper came upon every breeze. Donna Anna was not a popular personage—her husband belonged to one of the very few families of plebeian origin who have struggled into wealth and honours in that unprogressive and stereotyped society, and she herself was a somewhat peevish good woman, careful and troubled about many things—a domestic person, always attended by nurses and children, not at all the type of great lady which commended itself most to the Roman appreciation. Then the Duchessa, a totally different woman, was regarded with that mingled disgust and dislike with which the world always, sooner or later, visits its worn-out ministers in the unloveliness of their old age; and Rome was very ready to believe an evil story of the sharp and sour old woman who had once bloomed among its most famous beauties and leaders of fashion. So that the story passed from lip to lip, and naturally increased on its way. Curiosity, and that warm human inclination to be wiser than our neighbours, which prevails at more places than Rome, had suggested two or three independent inquiries into this romance of the day, and the investigators found little difficulty in tracing from Rome to San Michele the injured child, and identifying that young hero with Francisco the painter. For many days past, though he had not hitherto noticed it, the men in the cafés had bestowed their attention on Francisco, and the women in the streets paused to look after him. That strange social influence which represents in Rome what we call public opinion, had taken his story in hand, although he, absorbed in his own thoughts—the love that was so unpropitious, and the hope that seemed so visionary—had gone about, unconscious of it all, like a man in a dream.

When Francisco entered the Scacchi café, one of the first persons he saw was the Avvocato Rospigliosi, a stout bull-necked Roman of middle age—stout, gross, somewhat sensual, carrying his bullet-head and putting forth his full limbs with a certain bold animal force and freedom very characteristic of his nation. Though his linen was unexceptionable, and his dress perfectly well brushed and orderly, there was none of the dainty cleanliness of an English gentleman in the black-bearded Roman, whose beard, perpetually seized upon in the fervour of conversation by his large soft unctuous hand, bore a certain aroma of soup and cigars inseparable from that manly ornament. He had a large glass of milky fluid before him, an infinitesimal mouthful of absinthe to a large supply of water, and was engaged in noisy conversation with some one who sipped a mysterious Rosolio, pink and sugary, at the same table. But despite of this talk, which was eager and animated enough, judging by appearances, Rospigliosi, under his black eyebrows, saw the entrance of the new-comer; saw him, noted him, sent him a quick glance of intelligence; watched intently, but without observation, how Francisco, at a white fever-heat of excitement, stumbled among the tables, at this time in the day but sparely occupied, and seated himself far back in the darkest corner, in the shade of one of the pillars. It was now May, and the fervid summer of Rome was about beginning; that refuge in the depths of the great cool room refreshed Francisco after the glare and heat, mental and bodily, of the streets and his thoughts. Unaware what he was doing, seeing before him the busy Corso glimmer through the door in crowds of passing figures, and between himself and that spot of light the few scattered groups, which at once terminated and culminated in the burly Avvocato, at present the centre of all his hopes—the young man swallowed glass after glass of the innocent Roman lemonade, and sat in a tremor of expectation and impatience indescribable, till that conversation which went on so loudly should come to a pause. Fran-

cisco thought these two men, whose talk was carried on in too high a tone to be important, must have been talking for a whole hour before they bethought themselves of the necessity of stopping short somewhere; but at last the conversation, like everything else, came to an end. The Rosolio-drinker went briskly out with a "Buon giorno, Ser Antonio;" and the Advocate sat alone, stretching out his stout limbs, pulling his black beard, and selecting out of a fat well-used cigar-case his sixth or seventh cigar. Perhaps this interval of poor Francisco's suspense was hardest of all to bear. He looked on from his dark corner, feeling that Rospigliosi had watched him take his place there, had recognised him, and was not to be intruded upon; it was necessary to wait for his notice. But what if some other acquaintance should come in to prolong this torture a little? what if the Advocate himself, repenting, should go away without any recognition of the poor young painter? What if——but wait. Now he is getting up at last—stretching himself—shaking all his joints free: how they swing through the air, those vast plump arms, with the large soft rather greasy hands at the ends of them, and all those creases in the sleeves! Then there ensues a fizz and tiny flash, and the cigar is lighted; then——is he going away—is he about to speak?—trembling moment of suspense for Francisco! when at last he saunters up through the large dim room, and hails afar off the young man in his corner—"Buon giorno, Signore. If I am not too bold to match myself with such a player, what say you to a game of chess?"

Francisco rose with an eager disclaimer of any skill in chess, but was silenced by a look, and by the unconcerned and dauntless manner in which his new acquaintance went on—

"Here is an agreeable corner. I have heard of your skill, my friend. I sometimes play a game with Monsignore Fantini, who reports marvels of you, Ser Francisco; but I am older than you, as you perceive, and heaven knows how much older than Monsignore, who is of the angels. I know a move or two which are miracles for a checkmate. Accommodate yourself, and let us try our fate."

Francisco dropped into the chair offered to him, following the example of his companion, and with a troubled and doubtful curiosity waited for what was to come next. Rospigliosi was by this time busy arranging the chessmen, bending over the table, and under cover of this occupation went on in a lower tone—

"When you have anything private to consult about," said the Avvocato, "always do it in broad daylight and in the middle of the *salone*. Walls have ears, and pillars end in conductors. Say what thou hast to say as if all the world might hear, and the world will no longer take the trouble to listen. Rosso o bianco, amico mio?"

"I will choose the red," said Francisco, with a thrill of renewed excitement.

"Ah, because red is a colour of hope—e vero?" said the Advocate, smiling. "Well, well! at your age we are all hopeful. And so they say you are an Agostini—is it true?"

"If you know so much of me, you must know that it is true," said the young man, with an outburst of involuntary impatience.

"Ah, well, well! it may be so," said Rospigliosi, with a burst of hearty laughter. "I knew your mother of old, and I would willingly serve you for her sake—ha, ha! I think she will thank me for my good services. I was once infatuated with her—she was a beauty to wonder at, that woman, though you young men do not think so. And for gratitude, when I think how she used me, I figure to myself, my youth, how I shall be able to serve *you*."

These words changed the young listener in a moment; he was no longer a poor youth, hoping everything from this powerful assistant; he flushed at once to the same spell which had moved him before. "Pardon!" said Francisco, haughtily, half-rising from the table. "We shall either conclude this conversation, or you will do me the pleasure to say nothing more of the Duchessa."

There was a momentary pause; perhaps, before the moment was

over, Francisco, in his own consciousness, had relapsed into the nameless young painter, forfeiting his sole apparent prospect of success by reason of the strange half-hating regard he had for the mother who hated him, and growing more bitter than ever against her in his heart, as he saw this hope glide away and disappear from him. But the effect on his companion was totally different. Rospigliosi, much startled by this ebullition, was at the same time distinctly impressed by it. He hesitated and coloured under the eye of the Duchessa's son. Even the bold identification of his mother which Francisco made by this name, had its effect upon the Advocate. He had heard the entire story from Monsignore, and had privately received in his villa in the hills the concurring testimony of Mariuccia and her son; yet had never been so completely convinced of the truth of the tale as when the young man started up indignant in his sight, and refused to hear anything said of the Duchessa. It was one of those subtle moral proofs transcending all evidence, of which the Avvocato knew the power.

"Pardon me—I should have been wiser," said Rospigliosi; "but have the complacency to take your seat again, and we shall mend the game. I aim at your castle in the first place, Signore. Do you know who is the proprietor of that casinetto of mine —that little Cæsaretti villa on the hill?"

"No," said Francisco, entirely bewildered by the sudden change of subject.

"Wait a moment—you shall see the connection," said Rospigliosi, answering the young man's look. "Listen — that is the apple of my paradise; and it is forbidden, you may be sure, or I should not long for it. The house is but let to me, you understand, and the amiable Donna of the august Lontoria house desires it for a nursery; and my villa, which I love, is to be taken from me when *they* succeed — you understand? Thus, you see, I have my interests at stake as well as yourself. Let us speak plainly: it is the best policy in daylight and in the middle of a room where there are no listeners. Give me the Cæsaretti villa when you come into possession of your estates, and I will immediately take upon me the whole burden of the suit. I am not rich, but I have credit. I shall ask you for nothing until you are established and unassailable. I will provide the expenses and conduct the suit—only you shall promise to repay me what I spend for you, and give me the Cæsaretti villa for my fee."

As he warmed in the subject, the Avvocato forgot his own caution, and spoke, though low, rapidly, and with considerable vehemence and excitement. As for Francisco, totally taken by surprise and unprepared, he had neither breath nor words to answer. For the moment he looked helplessly in Rospigliosi's face, struck silent by the sudden nearness of that vague fairy fortune and unbelievable splendour which had hitherto been such mere dreams to him. He was too much startled to answer by anything but a mere gasp of breathless interest —a faltering "*Come?*"—"How?"—to which the Advocate answered by repeating, himself rising to an answering climax of excitement, the singular proposal he had just made. Francisco had heard it all, every word, the first time; but he gained a moment's breath in the repetition, and managed now to believe in his own senses. It was not a delusion or romance, but a simple compact of business — an agreement between a lawyer and his client — a matter equally interesting to the man who expected the Cæsaretti villa, as to him before whose eyes glittered the astonishing glory of the Agostini dukedom and estates. It was hard work to assume quietly the decorum and gravity necessary for an answer to this proposal. Francisco could hardly help bursting into questions: "Do you think it possible, then?—likely?" or into incredulous bursts of half-hysterical laughter. To assume the matter by such an act as the cession, even by promise, of a portion of the estate, seemed to bring the whole prospect so overwhelmingly near him, that, like a blind man suddenly enlightened, he felt disposed to put up his hand and thrust away

the dazzling object which pressed so close upon his vision. But it is wonderful how rapidly and swiftly some lessons are learned. By the time his companion, enlarging somewhat more than at first, had come to the end of what he had to say, Francisco had found his voice and his wits, and was able to make quite a dignified and proper answer. He accepted the proposal, to be sure, with great seriousness and decorum, and entered into the matter with an aspect of sobriety which much astonished and considerably impressed the voluble Avvocato. Young Romans of Francisco's age are not much given to concealment of their feelings. Such reticence gave Ser Antonio an extremely high opinion of the young man; but when Francisco, after putting his actual hand and pen to the agreement, by which, in event of success in his plea, he ceded the villa Cæsaretti to his legal champion, returned to his little room up aloft in the Piazza of Trajan, you may be sure the events of the morning rather overcame that wonderful composure of his, and that the old bronze emperor and the discreet stars were witness to many an outburst of incredulous, amazed laughter, and to a few youthful tears.

CHAPTER XX.

Nor was Francisco permitted to forget his bargain. For several days thereafter the Advocate kept him in occupation, reading to him the evidence of Mariuccia and Gigi which he had already taken down, and amazing the youth with all the legal evidences necessary to identify himself, and to prove that the infant who had been carried from the Agostini palace, the child who had been placed in San Michele, and the young painter on the fourth piano in the Piazza of Trajan, were the same person. "To what purpose is all this?" said the wondering Francisco; "am not I here in my own person to prove it?" But the Avvocato only laughed, and went on with his investigations. Of course, a return to the easel was impossible to the young man under his extraordinary circumstances; he could not, bursting with the hopes which seemed now to approach realisation, take up a stoical position opposite to that copy he was making—copy of which, you may be sure, he was heartily sick, like all the rest of his craft in Rome, lovely though the picture may be in itself—of the Beatrice Cenci, and spend the livelong glowing day within those four small walls, with the little balcony hanging forth in that world of ecstatic air and sunshine, and all the rest of the world living out of doors. He was not of stoical character at all, nor bred to self-denial; Spartan, like all his countrymen, so far as the ability to bear cold, to dispense with comfort, to live sparely, while that was inevitable and could not be avoided, made him so, Francisco, like his countrymen, was intoxicated by the sunshine, and was not trained to command the impulses of his nature. To tell the truth, it is not easy, with the excitement of suspense in one's mind, and the possibility that to-day's business will be made an end of upon to-morrow, to go on steadily notwithstanding with the present duty; virtuous people there are to be found who can do it; but it is very difficult at twenty, and Francisco did not try.

One of his favourite resorts was the house of Teta, where he was drawn by many attractions; to her alone he could speak of Lucy, no longer the Signorina Inglese, but called by a much dearer and more familiar title; and to her he could communicate something of his own restless excitement in the prospect of the approaching trial, at which she herself would be a valuable witness. Lastly, there were to be found in a closet in Teta's sitting-room a little store of English books, left behind her with an injunction to her lover to learn her language, by Lucy. That fervid, glorious, glowing May of Rome (not this troubled exceptional season, dear reader), was little more *sympatica* with the dry toil of a beginner learning a lan-

guage, than was the disturbed and restless condition of Francisco's mind —so that he did very little good at it, you may believe; but still it afforded him another inducement to haunt that little lofty room of Teta's, with its little loggia swung over the deep well of the courtyard, and its view of Monte Pincio over the housetops. In the shade there, it was pleasant to see the sun glare upon the white scorched houses and winding lines of road along the side of the hill, and to hear down below in the cool court the tinkle of the little fountain; and there by the side of the open window, Teta, buxom Roman matron, with her black curls and long gold ear-rings, her full shoulders and ample white apron, would stand for an hour at a stretch talking, not without full accompaniment of gesture and pantomime, to her young visitor, in whose presence that stout partisan of Don Francisco had made up her mind never to sit down.

"Thanks to the Madonna and the Forestieri," said Teta, "I have no need to fear appearing before any Tribunale. If Mariuccia, who fears the Duchessa as she fear the devil—Scusa, Eccellenza!—is not afraid to come forward for your Excellency's rights, it is not to be supposed that I, who have always stood up for them, even against my mother, should draw back at the last; and as for my poor mother, it would not grieve me, Signore mio, if the Duchessa withdrew her favour to-morrow, and sent the good old woman to take shelter with Teta. When all the Forestieri are gone, and Gaetano with them, I am lonely by myself up here. Gaetano will be gone all the summer, travelling among the Swiss mountains with his family; for you should see how helpless they are without him, Don Francisco. Milord and Milady repose themselves upon Gaetano; Benissimo! I am well content—it is life—it is necessity; one must not give up one's profession, even if one has enough to live upon; but what, then, have I to do, does your Excellency suppose? Go into villeggiatura, to be sure, and perhaps take the sea-baths at Porto d'Anzio where the Santo Padre himself is going by-and-by. But then I am all alone. I have nobody to pet me or to fatigue me; such a thing is very necessary when one would enjoy one's self: and I should be very well content, Signore mio, to have my mother."

"Why, then, does not Sora Cenci come to you?" asked Francisco, languidly, from his big rococo chair.

"Eh, who can tell? She will no more leave the Duchessa than I would Gaetano," said Teta, laughing; "but I promise your Excellency she will not escape the Signore Avvocato. Such a man! I remember him when I was in my first youth; he used to be a visitor at Genzaro, at the villa Agostini, where your Excellency was born. Even when the Duca was there he would come, that Rospigliosi; and your—your gracious *father*, Don Francisco, was pleased with the young man. Did I not say patienza? See what friends the blessed Madonna has brought to you. Good Monsignore, who, everybody knows, is one of the saints already; though I do not believe the Pope would canonise him if he died to-morrow; for we love him too well, we Romans!—a father, your Excellency understands, must not yield too much to his children. And then an avvocato so clever and so lucky as Ser Antonio—a man who never loses a cause!—not to speak of your Excellency's beautiful good fortune with the bella piccola milady, which, to be sure, was the beginning. Quanta bella! quanta buona! She said often to me, with her little heart trembling at her mouth, 'One day, Sora Teta, I shall be rich'—and so she shall, the little beauty! Holy Santa Theresa, what a sweet Duchessa!—and your Excellency will be all the better for having an English wife. One may laugh, or mock, or push them aside as one will, but one cannot overcome these Forestieri. Gaetano tells me it is always the same; when other people would stand still in despair, they put on their look of stone, these English. Ah! and she has it also, for all her sweet eyes! I have seen it, Signore mio—as sweet as a child till she came *so far*, you perceive, Eccellenza; but further not a step if she were to

die. Ah, it is grand, that look of stone!"

"You love the English, Teta," said Francisco, "and I, you perceive, love Lucy—it makes a difference. If all goes well, according to you and Ser Antonio, I see no need my wife will have for any stony looks; and, for my part, I prefer the smiles."

Teta hesitated somewhat in her reply. "Your Excellency has a noble spirit, as becomes you," she said at last, with a slight falter, as if afraid of betraying something below; "but it is necessary your Excellency should remember that all is not done when you have won your cause. There are all the princes and great houses in Rome, Don Francisco. Perhaps they will take Donna Anna's side, who is of their order, and known to them. Perhaps they will believe what the Duchessa may choose to say. Perhaps—ah! your Excellency may still have your troubles, for a time. I pray your Excellency not to think all is over when your suit is gained."

"Enough," said Francisco, haughtily; "I understand, and there is enough said. They will remember that I was bred at San Michele, and lived on the fourth piano, and copied pictures for the Forestieri. Va bene! it is true."

"Eccellenza, the Duchessa will say worse," said Teta, in a low tone, "for her own defence, and that they may not call her a monster and unnatural. Eccellenza, she will say things harder to bear."

"Again I understand you," said the young man, rising up and growing now red, now pale, with restrained passion; "it is a subject I will not discuss, Sora Teta; if I rise to my rights, I will rise—and if I fail, I shall fail. It is of little importance to any one but me."

So saying, the youth left her hastily, with that sting, which he had felt the momentary anguish of two or three times before, struck once more into his heart. True, he could not, would not believe in the dark ignominy it pointed to; true, he could defeat any temporary influence it might have by those ingenious sophisms by which we all manage to ward off and cover up disagreeable objects; but still it stung him—stung him like a secret snake every time he entered upon this subject, as he said to himself in his haste. Everybody suggested it to him, in the first blush of the narrative of which this hideous inference was so easy and so vile an expositor; and the bitterness of these moments seemed, while they lasted, to do more than counterbalance the splendours of his less transitory hope.

While Teta stood at her door listening to his hasty impatient footsteps as they rang down the stair—that long staircase in which had disappeared from Francisco's eager gaze the little troth-plighted maiden who had given him her heart and her promise, but would not see him again—"Benissimo!" said Teta, "it is very well to be proud, Chichino mio, and I love you for it, my friend; but for all that, I am very glad that you will have for your wife that little Signorina, with her tender little heart and her English look of stone."

CHAPTER XXI.

In the mean time Francisco had yet another trial to bear—a trial which, under other circumstances, the innocent young painter would have accepted heartily as an excellent piece of good fortune, and without any consciousness of pride endangered; but this young man, moved so entirely out of the position to which he had been bred, and brought into such a conflicting world of new facts and emotions, had learned, among other things, a sharper and bitterer appreciation of things that were unworthy of him, or proposals which compromised his honour. Perhaps the lover of the English Lucy must have owned that influence, even if there had been no other to move him, but the stimulating remembrance of his distant love was seconded on all sides by other motives. He learned to restrain his anxieties, to bear with the suspense which nothing occurred to lighten; to hide all feeling in his own breast

when he heard any speculations concerning the Duchessa's line of defence. What that line of defence would be, nobody seemed to doubt. Francisco shut his eyes, and set his teeth against it with the haughtiest resistance. He said nothing now in reply, but Rospigliosi himself had been daunted by those haughty black eyes of the Duchessa gleaming in passionate reserve and silence, unknown to *her*, out of her son's face.

The Avvocato was proceeding with his evidence, collecting slowly every kind of corroborative proof, and wasting those summer days, Francisco thought, with unnecessary and elaborate verifications. For it was summer in Rome, villeggiatura had not yet begun, and now that the reality of the sun, and the chimera, bigger than reality, of the fever, had driven away the Forestieri, Rome felt herself mistress of her own streets, and demeaned herself accordingly. A few languid figures, driven by necessity, crept along the blazing streets in the day, but when the evening came the Corso was alive with the most brilliant faces and toilettes, the gayest equipages, the brightest groups imaginable. Perhaps a gleam of national arrogance, which sits well on the descendants of an imperial race, perhaps only the natural relief of a vast household at finding itself relieved, after long endurance, of an incubus of visitors, gives at that period of the year a certain exhilaration and *abandon* to the Roman crowd; perhaps only the delicious brightness of that crowning glory of the Italian year; but whatever may be the cause, it is certain that Rome never looks so gayly and joyously Roman as in that early glorious summer after the strangers are gone. And the Avvocato Rospigliosi and all his men were mortal, and of Roman blood, and so were all the official persons who had to do with suits at law; and so even were Teta and Madame Margherita, and all the people in San Michele whose evidence was necessary to Francisco's cause; so that the business was noways advanced, according to the young man's impatient thoughts, when the great summer festival came round, and Rome brightened up to keep its pyrotechnic vigil before St Peter's Day.

It was on that eve that Francisco met with another great awakening in his life. That eve, its crimson sunset dying afar in ineffable circles of colour, ever sweeter and fainter as they fled through the magical ring of that rapid twilight; with the green outspreading boughs and trees upon Pincio flinging their outlines so doubly, brightly, ecstatically green, against that crimson and pink and orange, then blackening slowly into solemn types of trees as the quick darkness fell. And over Monte Mario and his brethren a serene sweet sky appearing out of the clouds, green-blue with its tender twinkles of dilating stars; and the darkness gathering and falling over these irregular heights between, hiding big San Pietro and his lamps, as Time hides a great event, till its hour has come; and nothing clear to be seen here from the top of Pincio but the reluctant crimson lingering out over the distant sea, the green break, towards the east, of that ineffable serenity of sky, and close by the weird trees and indistinct figures and huge angles of houses down in the piazza, rising black into the atmosphere, which, even in its darkness, preserved a tint of the sunset red. Here Francisco was waiting languidly among the moving crowd to see the world-famous illumination, when it chanced to him to encounter Monsignore, not in top-boots, as at Rocca, but in the full glory of his purple stockings, with an attendant in livery behind him. They had not met again since their interview in the good prelate's study, and the young man was about to pass with a respectful salutation. Catching sight of him, however, Monsignore extended his hand with a lively exclamation. "Figlio mio," said the good man, "turn and walk with me if you are alone. I have a great deal to say to you; I should have come to seek you to-morrow if I had not seen you here."

Much flattered by an address which was audible enough to attract much observation to himself, and to cause, though Francisco did not observe it, many whispers among

the crowd, the young man turned at Monsignore's bidding. The good priest took a paternal hold upon the youth's arm, and led him along with him, to the admiration of the by-standers, who, if they did not, like the good people of Rocca, make a tutelar divinity of Monsignore, still knew him well and liked him heartily, partly for his natural goodness, partly that he was in obvious disfavour with Antonelli, and little beloved by the Pope.

"I hear from Ser Antonio what progress he makes," said Monsignore; "he tells me of his witnesses and pleadings, and I am glad; but, my son, there is still something more important—what of thee?"

Francisco's conscience smote him; nothing but youthful passions, weariness, and musing, could be told of *him*, and he blushed a little as he met Monsignore's mild eyes turned towards him: they could scarcely see each other's faces, and the churches lying below them in the darkness were telling out, with a liberal margin for differences of opinion, dropping the warning into the air in irregular succession, the hour of nine. A few moments more, and San Pietro, invisible yonder, would leap forth into the darkness, every line and column of him, dome, cross, and gallery, a living miracle of light. It was a fortunate diversion for Francisco. They turned towards the front of the terrace, the crowd giving way before Monsignore; and the young man's answer, such as it was, was lost in the hush and tremor of the bystanders waiting for the event.

Francisco waited too with a thrill of excitement. His mind, in its over-stimulated condition, was at the present moment sensitive to everything. His life rushed past him like a flying shadow as he stood there on the threshold of his loftier hopes, with Monsignore's fatherly hand upon his arm. What might have happened to him when next time San Pietro rose shining beneath these stars? That would be on the eve of holy Easter, the earliest sweetness of spring; and eyes of many an English girl would brighten at that spectacle from this same terrace. Should Lucy be there, and he beside her? Should he have claimed her ere that time, and offered one of the proudest titles of Italy to the little English Signorina? Monsignore knew nothing of that sad complication and double romance in the entangled affairs of the young hero, nor how those two invisible fairies rent the youth's heart between them; and it was with a little surprise that the good priest turned his eye from the blazing outline of the great Basilica, and saw indistinctly through the darkness how much emotion was in the young man's face.

"Coraggio!" said Monsignore, "and patienza! my son; there is need of both; and this—let us go out of the crowd a little—is what I would speak to thee of. How dost thou live in the mean time, poverino? Thinking of what shall be, my Chichino, we must not forget what is."

"I live as I have always done, Monsignore," said the young man. "I do not complain."

"I see it, my son; you do not complain, nor make haste to waste thy estate beforehand, as so many young men would do; and it pleases me," said Monsignore. "Believe me, there is nothing better for you than to continue Francisco the painter until the greater title comes; but in the mean time thy painting is hard work for thee, I do not doubt, and thy thoughts run faster than thy brushes can follow; so that I mean to propose to you, my friend, to keep a few scudi, till I want them, for me."

"Monsignore, for you!" exclaimed Francisco.

"For me, truly. I have not a great deal," said the priest, "but it is at thy disposal, Francisco, or any friend's."

"It is holy coin," cried Francisco, almost thrusting the kind ecclesiastic from him in his fervor. "Pardon, Monsignore, I should as soon take the consecrated wafer for daily bread; it is the money of the orphans and the poor—it is not for such as me."

"And art not thou an orphan, poverino?" said the good Monsignore; "and besides, can always render it back to the poor and the orphans when thou wilt, with as much increase as pleases thee. Figlio mio,

suspense is hard at thy age. I am concerned for *thee* now."

Francisco stood still for a moment among the darkling crowd. It seemed to him as though a white apparition of the English Lucy floated between him and those noisy Italian groups, shaking a tiny hand in his face, exclaiming, "You will take Monsignore's money—you! Then think of me no more!"—with all the indignation and defiance possible to that positive little maid. The young Roman broke into tears and warm exclamations of gratitude and admiration, according to the fashion of his nation. He kissed Monsignore's pale hand as he had kissed it when he was little Chichino. He behaved himself, with a total disregard of all reserves and reticences, in a manner which almost attracted the notice of the crowd, well accustomed as that crowd was to "scenes." Francisco on his part did not know what it was to have an objection to "a scene." He did and said what came into his head exuberantly under the cover of that darkness, with San Pietro silently blazing in the distance—all its lights yellowing over into the final golden glory. Francisco, transported, had forgotten all about San Pietro when he kissed Monsignore's hand.

"But no!" cried the young man. "I am an orphan for your love, padre mio! but I am a man, and can work if I were twenty times the son of a duke. No. I will go back to my pictures that I have neglected. I will return to my work, Monsignore; and you who are a saint out of heaven will help me with your prayers."

"My prayers are for the service of all my children," said Monsignore; "but thou shouldst remember, Chichino mio, that the blessed Angelico painted on his knees, and made pictures that it is like a prayer to look at. And wherefore not thou?"

"The blessed Angelico did not copy the Beatrice, my father," said Francisco, meekly. "However, this is certain: I will neither take Monsignore's money, nor starve, nor live on a loaf and a slice of cocomero as I have been doing. Let the Avvocato and his witnesses do as they will, henceforward I will work and live."

With which resolution, Francisco, all a-glow with youthful pride and shame, tears in his eyes, a flush on his cheeks, and his whole person moved with the exaltation of excited feeling, left Monsignore among the crowd in his purple stockings, and hurried down the hill. As he gained the foot of Pincio, he came suddenly upon a carriage, where the poor old Duchessa, on her way to see the girandola in the Piazza, leant back with her old *dame de compagnie* beside her, enveloped, soft as the June air was, in a world of shawls. Life seems to grow precious in proportion to the dying-out of everything more valuable. The Duchessa had outlived love and honour, if she ever had them; but she was more careful than ever before of that poor thread of existence which was all that remained to her. As they met, the eyes of the two encountered each other; the son's warm with noble youthful sentiment and resolution, the mother's cold, cruel, and eager, incapable of any passions but those of hatred and rage. Francisco passed on, after he had seen her, with a cloud of graver thoughts subduing but strengthening the resolution in his face. But the Duchessa leant out of her carriage to look after him, holding the shawls close over her withered breast. She scolded all the way to the Piazza—scolded through the fizz of the girandola—drove Cenci almost crazy when she went home. Perhaps in that moment she had recognised the hapless baby—the forgotten life that rose up so bold and strong among those dews of youth to confront her, and had seen all her plans defeated and all her precautions useless. She was a very poor old woman, that splendid beautiful Duchessa who had sent the child away; and whether it was unnatural cruelty or a certain savage virtue in vice which prompted it, her sin had been fatally a failure. Here was this boy, her son, with her own eyes; and what could she do against his young vigour, the power and passion which *she* could see in his face?

THE ROMANCE OF AGOSTINI.

CONCLUSION.—CHAPTER XXII.

FRANCISCO'S plans were changed after that St Peter's Eve. The kindness of Monsignore moved him as such kindness should, but does not always do. He whom the English Lucy had bound her bright young life to, and who had been able to awake so much affectionate interest in the breast of that saintly old man, was not to fall into alms-receiving because his expectations were so great. Surely no! This incident touched a spirit, in which there was no lack of generous impulses, with that spur of gold which finds out the mettle of the steed. Francisco went to his work next morning, though all the world was making holiday. He finished his Beatrice, though he was sick of her. He made haste with all the other incomplete works he had, which were commissioned from him by the picture-dealer or copy-dealer who specially patronised Francisco, and carried them home to the dingy shop in the Babuino, where they were destined to be hung up among the other Beatrices and Auroras of all sizes and manners, which baited that trap for the Forestieri, and took home with him some other commissions, to which he set himself without delay. His fever was over; he saw Rospigliosi only when he could not help it; went much less frequently to Teta's; lived and contained himself in his little apartment four stories high. If sometimes his thoughts, which he could not withdraw with his person, strayed to that great subject; if in imagination he went over the trial, its witnesses, its pleadings, its adversaries, till the hot occupation of his thoughts made his hand tremble, he gave battle bravely to these overpowering thoughts, and if he could not overcome, at least resisted them, and kept on with a resolution which had little to aid it in anything he could see around him at his everyday labours. Thus he worked through the fervid July, when every window in the Piazza but his own was elaborately closed, shutting out the hot air and sunshine, and when only in the green half-light stealing through the Persiani existence seemed tolerable to his neighbours. When he could endure it no longer, Francisco shut up his little apartment, took his canvasses and colours, and set off to the hills, where Mariuccia's spare chamber—spare in more senses than one—dark, cool, neutral-coloured apartment, with its red tiles growing grey with the dust of years, its dim grated window, its rustling lofty mattresses of maize, and its dark Madonna on the wall—was most reverently and joyfully got ready for him. Mariuccia spread her best coperta, soft warm cover, quilted with cotton, and splendid with Chinese vignettes in red and yellow on a blue ground, upon the bed, and did everything that it was possible to do in the way of ornament. To be sure, it did not occur to her to clean the window, but neither did it occur to Francisco, who had found an attic with a roof-light where he could paint. He painted Mariuccia in full costume to please that good woman; and he painted a pretty daughter of Gigi, who did more credit to the scarlet jacket and pretty headdress, and who, moreover, if needful, with her smooth black hair, and bright eyes, and olive cheeks, rosy with the mountain air, made a picture which the dealer in the Babuino would not scorn. Francisco, if he pleased, might have gone often enough to that Cæsaretti villa, where the Advocate lived in villeggiatura; and did spend many an evening with Monsignore, who took him up to the roof of his house, and showed him the stars through that great telescope which was the wonder of Rocca, and told the dreaming youth, whose mind was a hundred miles away—or perhaps more like two thousand, wandering after his English Lucy—about suns and systems which, to be sure, the young man knew nothing about, and cared still less for. Monsignore's society, however, was good for Francisco; though the pursuits of the old

priest, who was fond of a gentle kind of science, and amused his placid days with his garden and his telescope, had but small attraction to the young painter with that splendid but agitating light upon his horizon. The two spent many an hour together. Monsignore, always ready to hear and soothe the perturbation of Francisco's thoughts, and Francisco proving at other times an excellent listener, as young people will who have their own visions at hand to escape to, and who have still the faculty of keeping up two threads of interest, and dropping in an answer now and then as if they heard, though their hearts are ever so far away.

In the village Francisco's steps were watched with a secret half-stealthy affectionate reverence, which, it may be supposed, in the depths of his heart, was very flattering to him. Of all nations in the civilised world—partly, heaven help them, by dint of long service under strangers, and government of unloving rulers, from whom the heart behoved to conceal itself—there is none so quick at the art of communicating its sentiments without words as the Italians. Rocca, in mute gossip, had concluded with itself upon Francisco's rights; mutely they made their obeisances to him, kissed his hand, did him all the honours of the village. They called him Don Francisco invariably, and Illustrissimo, addressed him only in the third person, and conducted themselves like a delighted clique of innocent conspirators, all of whom were in the secret, which only by-and-by, after due preparation, was to burst upon the rest of the world. This secret homage, which had in it something of affection and familiarity as well, brought the young man acquainted with the honours to which he began, with less wonder and more composure, to look forward. Perhaps it was Monsignore's refining society; perhaps it was the simple adoration of these villagers; but, however it came about, it is certain that Francisco changed, even to himself, day by day. He had made no advance whatever in education, none in wealth; in personal comfort, ease, and light-heartedness, the very reverse of improvement; yet nobody could have seen him now among the crowd of young Romans on Pincio or the Corso, and supposed him simply one of them. Without any help of training from society, a certain distinction of look and manner had fallen upon the young man. The few strangers travelling in the heat of summer among these hills—and they were very few—when by chance a passing party of them encountered him on Monte Cavo, where he went often, never failed to ask who he was; and as he sat there, looking with the eye of a painter over that wide and solemn panorama, the Campagna falling off into long wistful stretches of purple mist, and San Pietro all alone, Rome disappearing in the distance, standing out upon the plain like the magnificent plaything of some giant's child—thoughts new and strange to him began to rise in the thoughtless young heart, which up to this time had neither political creed nor settled opinions. He went to gaze down upon Nemi, with its sparkles of villages, its sweet olive-woods, and that white palace-front where he was born; perhaps to dream over other scenes than that one already so deeply stamped on his memory—that miserable picture of drawn curtains, and closed doors, and whispering women, through the midst of which comes the peasant in her scarlet jacket, with the outcast baby concealed under Cenci's shawl; perhaps to think of a sweeter Duchessa, who will need no curtains nor confidants. But as he sat and mused, other thoughts visited Francisco. He himself was perhaps to be a power and influence in this sad, lovely, silent country—silent, still untouched by the fiery breath of revolution, but with many a thought in its heart. Would it be better or worse for him that he was a son of San Michele, a villano of Rocca? or should he fall into just such a Duke Agostini as all the Dukes Agostini had been? These thoughts came grave and memorable over his youth; and the change grew and increased day by day, when the young painter laid his brushes by, and spent his summer leisure upon far-seeing Cavo in the silence of the hills.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The days and the months, however, went on languidly in spite of Francisco and his thoughts. The Duchessa still lived, and was like to live, in the unloveliness of her old age; and there was no immediate prospect that Donna Anna, who wanted Rospiglioso's villa for her nursery, would come soon into her kingdom; therefore the Avvocato had no immediate spur of haste to quicken him out of the ordinary routine of law, slow everywhere, and no way ameliorated, as one may suppose, by recognising for supreme authority a bench of bishops, and adding a certain ecclesiastical confusion and intricacy to its natural tedium. All Rome was in possession of the evidence to be given long before it came before the Tribunale; and if the good Monsignore, and his still more powerful invisible little English ally, had not so early taken possession of the field, it is like enough that, in the curiosity, interest, and flattery of the cafés, the young hero might have lost himself. As it was, Francisco held fast by his pictures. If he did not improve in his art as such devotion to it merited, it was most probably because his mind was agitated by the uncertainty and suspense of his position. He added two or three more Beatrices to the stock in the Babuino before that winter was over. He began to have rather a *specialité* for Beatrices, perhaps because he had done so many that his hand moved freely, without much help from his mind, upon these accustomed traits. The winter passed like other winters; the Forestieri came and crowded out the Romans from those tall houses in the strangers' quarter; murmurs of English, chatters of French, placid growls of German, diversified the sounds on Pincio in those cheerful afternoons; —but there was no Lucy to refresh the eyes of the young painter. Perhaps she was gay in some other gay capital, forgetting her strange, secret troth-plight—perhaps in that wonderful big London, of which the fame had reached Francisco's ears; for the young man was not aware, in his simplicity, that the English barbarians chose wintry weather for *their* villeggiatura. It was now a full year since Lucy had said "Farewell" and "Remember" out of the carriage window. He had need of all the excitement of his position to keep up in his mind the visionary bond of that betrothal. Yet who could tell? Any day, according to their fantastic youthful agreement—any moment, while the Avvocato tediously dawdled through his preparations, Lucy herself might come to the rescue of her lover with her English fortune in her hand.

The spring was so far advanced again that Teta's tall house was half emptied of its annual guests, when Teta's mother, released by special grace for the day, came to pay a visit to her daughter. Climbing up that long stair was somewhat hard work nowadays to Cenci. She reposed herself, breathless, in the rococo chair, when she had received the salutations of the mistress of the house, and took off her bonnet to enjoy the air more freely from the open window. The hair was very scanty on that old uncovered grey head, on which Cenci, according to the custom of her country, wore no cap; but her life had been a more innocent and virtuous life than that of her mistress, and her face had fared better than the Duchessa's. Nevertheless, with her gay shawl and her heavy earrings, and her thin locks gathered up into a scanty knot on the top of her head, Cenci, in her old age, was not so pleasant a figure to look at as the ample Teta in her Roman fulness. In Italy the old women have not reached to that sweet art of cleanness and whiteness, and sober apparel, which contributes so much to the beauty of age.

"I rejoice myself that thou hast had a good season, my child," said Cenci; "but it has been otherwise in the Palazzo. Ever since this unfortunate young man has been talked of, the Duchessa has done nothing but rage and scold. Holy Madonna!

one can do nothing to please her," cried poor Cenci, loosening her heavy mosaic brooch out of her gay shawl with a great sigh.

"This unfortunate! and why should you call by such a name our noble young Don Francisco, madre mia?" cried Teta; "a youth who would do honour to any house, if it were a king's. Ah, you should see him! out of a hundred you could tell which was he."

"Hush, my child; I have seen him," said Cenci, still sighing: "if we are to suffer for him, one might as well have it to say that one has seen the cause of one's dolours. Yes, he has sufficiently the air noble, I confess it; but what will that serve him, the unhappy one? The Duchessa wills it otherwise; and who can help him, the poverino! against the Duchessa?"

"My mother, you have lived so long in the palace that you think the Duchessa can do anything," said Teta, with a little pity of her mother's limited experience. "Do you think the Tribunale will listen to the Duchessa? do you think even in Rome, where everything goes by favour, and where the idle frati count themselves better than the galantuomini who work for their children—do you think even here that your Duchessa can corrupt all the judges, and keep Don Francisco out of his right? Holy Santa Theresa! if it was possible, the very women would pull the prelates from their seats."

"You think you know better than your mother, Teta mia," said Cenci; "you know the world and the Forestieri; but I, my child, know *life;* I know it is the great one who gains, and the poor one goes to the wall. Where has he money, this unfortunate, to resist the Duchessa? and, besides, she no longer cares for her reputation; she has done so much for the good of the Church that the Santo Padre himself would command her but an easy penance. She will come to the trial—if it comes to be a trial—and tell the Tribunale that he has no rights, this unhappy one. Ah, figlia mia! the Duchessa is very bold when it is necessary. She will overwhelm him with shame, even though she shames herself in doing it. You call him Don, you others; yet even in her own bedchamber, as Mariuccia well remembers, the Duchessa forbade us to call the infant Don; and hard as it seems, Teta mia, she was kinder to the child than you. You call him Don, you kiss his hand, but when he has fallen out of these great hopes, he will hate to see you; he will think you have wronged him. These are flatteries, my child—nothing more."

"Madre mia, the Duchessa scolds so much that you have the pain at the heart," said Teta. "When one feels bad at the heart, one believes in nothing except what is miserable. Here is your chamber always ready, and why will you still remain a cameriera, to go and come at the pleasure of an ingrate like the Duchessa? When she dies, you must leave her, my mother. Grazia a Dio, thou hast had thy purgatory in thy lifetime! and yet for love of her, who does nothing but scold, you leave your Teta alone in this great house when all the Forestieri are away. Figure to yourself that I make an indiscretion, my mother? I am not so old or so ugly that it should be impossible. Gaetano is gone half of the time, and my mother will not come to take care of me. Yes, Teta poverina! thy mother loves the Duchessa better than thee!"

"Hush, bella mia," said the old woman, "you were always wise till you met with Gaetano; and though I thought it a very poor marriage for my daughter, I am very well contented now, and so I know art thou; so away with thy indiscretion; I do not believe in it. Ah, but it is hard servitude to serve the Duchessa! That is true. Indeed, it is true; only thou knowest I have been her cameriera since she was a bride."

"If it is hard now, what will it be when the Signore Avvocato Rospigliosi," said Teta, dwelling on the name as though some spell lay in its long syllables, "brings thee before the Tribunale, and thou art obliged to tell what happened within those curtains in the Genzaro villa? It will be necessary, my mother, that you tell it before all the world."

"What!—I?" cried Cenci; "me! the child is mad! Madonna Santissima, the Duchessa would kill me!"

"I believe it well," said Teta, calmly; "put poison in thy coffee, my poor mother, as they did to the Banchini the other day; and yet you will willingly procure me this sorrow, and stay to be killed rather than come to the house of your only child!"

Cenci did not immediately answer to this moving argument. She put away the little bonnet which lay on the table, and took off and folded her shawl with hands that trembled a little—"Do not you eat maigre to-day?—it is a fast, Teta mia—yet I smell something," said the old woman, making a nervous diversion from the conversation which pressed her too close—"ah, my child, I fear you forget the duty you owe to God and the Holy Saints."

"Benissimo! I need that you should be here to watch over my soul," said the bold Teta; "for see, mamma mia, I hold it for certain that an umido badly cooked—and it is necessary I go to look to it, for that woman Maria cooks everything badly—makes evil to the stomach, but not evil to the soul; that is my opinion! You have left me too much to myself."

"Ah, child, thou art too much among the Forestieri," said Cenci, with a sigh—"these strangers, I have never loved them, for my part; and there is that Madame Margherita, Teta, who put fantastic robes upon the unhappy babe whom you call Don Francisco. You will perhaps tell me that before this Tribunale of thine—she is to be there?"

"Sicuro!" answered Teta, promptly.

"Blessed Madonna! she! And what do you suppose she knows of the Duchessa?" cried Cenci, touched in the tenderest point—"she who never saw my lady, except perhaps for a moment in the chamber of some Signora Inglese, who ought to have been in her own country at such a time—never saw her, I tell thee, till she came to Genzaro when the Duchessa was ill, and then stayed but some ten days or so, troubling our souls with her modo Inglese, and thinking of nothing but the child! What can *she* have to tell, do you suppose? It is true, I am only thy mother, and not one of these English who turn thy head — but see, Teta mia, for one word that Madame Margherita could say I can tell thee three!"

"Do not I know it?" cried Teta, "Madame Margherita may be good, but thou art three times better; and the Signore Avvocato knows it also, and will no more dispense with thee than I would dispense with pomi-d'ori when I make the sugo. It is necessary that you should be there—that you should tell your tale: but I would have you consider well, my mother, whether after that you can go back to the Palazzo, and how long time you imagine the Duchessa would give you to repent."

"Thou art too hard upon thy mother, Teta mia," said Cenci, wiping a tear tremulously from her eye, "if I knew how to leave my padrona; but enough—enough, we will speak of it another time. If thou hast to look to thy umido, go, I will set myself in this great chair. It is easy to a marvel, this great chair. Ah, anything is pleasant that is one's own! and to rest at one's ease where there is nobody to ring a bell or to pierce one's ear with a 'Cenci!' like the stab of a stiletto — this is sweet, Davvero!—this is sweet!"

"My poor mother!" said Teta, stooping to kiss the old woman as she left the room, "and thou art too old to eat maigre. Bisogna that you have to-day such an umido as you never tasted since you were born!"

And perhaps, not unmindful of this umido, the fragrant flavour of which stole through the house, Cenci sat all alone in the big rococo chair, looking out across the house-tops upon Pincio in the sunshine, and soothed unawares by the tinkle of the little fountain in the courtyard—soothed out of her fatigue and harassment, till, secure in the safe shelter of her daughter's roof, she dropped to sleep in an exquisite and unusual calm. Poor worn-out faithful old slave of an ungrateful bondage! how strange the contrast between the present occupant of the big rococo chair

and the fiery young man full of hopes, who had put it to the use of his dreams so often!—how strange the great throbbing world of life, with young Lucy and Francisco at one side, and this old Cenci, in her grateful moment of repose, at the other, which could revolve within the narrow walls of Teta's little room!

CHAPTER XXIV.

The time of the trial had at last arrived; another summer and autumn had brought Rome to the beginning of another "season," and it was in the midst of the quickened traffic and gaiety occasioned by this annual infusion of new blood into the veins of the old city that decision was to be made of Francisco's hopes. The young man all this time had kept like a hero to his pictures, though latterly it had been with some sickness of heart that he smoked his silent cigar upon his little loggia when light failed him, and when nobody shared his thoughts but silent Trajan on his column. Perhaps even more painfully exciting than the impatience with which he looked forward to the decision of the Tribunale, was that with which he examined the weekly list of arrivals, and waded through crowds of barbarous names of unknown Forestieri, to see if perhaps Milord was among the arrivals, bringing back the English Signorina to see the conclusion of her lover's dreams. Perhaps it was well for Francisco that the bond which united him to the distant lady of his love was of so entirely visionary and imaginative a character. Most likely the young Roman could have very ill sustained the test of a year and a half's letter-writing. But in his present circumstances this engagement was entirely congenial to his feelings; his heart kept its warmth after this long interval, as if it had been only yesterday that the little white figure, tiny but indomitable, had disappeared down Teta's stair. But Lucy's name did not appear in these lists. Lucy remained in the silence which had never been broken since she left Rome, lost out of all cognisance. He did not know where to seek her, if he had been free to offer her his suit to-morrow. He had learned a little of her language for the love of Lucy; but that was the only thing which had any way tended, by help of outside circumstances, to keep his little Signorina Inglese before his eyes.

However, the day came for the hearing of Francisco's case. Before this time, so well known had the case become that Francisco no longer needed to be wholly indebted to Rospigliosi. The chances appeared so strongly in his favour, and the property at stake was so great—not to speak of the less amiable motive of dislike to the family of Lontoria, into which Donna Anna had married, and which was by no means popular in Rome — that Francisco might have found friends and backers by the dozen, had he cared to forsake his first resolution. To withhold himself from a ready acceptance of these obliging offers, and to remain simply Francisco the painter until the matter was decided, was no small trial to the young man; but, Roman as he was, and quite unaccustomed to resist the pleasant seductions of ease and gaiety, Francisco remained faithful to his fourth-floor lodging, to his Beatrice—one is afraid to count how many Beatrices went to the Babuino that year from the Piazza of Trajan!—and to Rospigliosi. Now the end of this long interval of sickening uncertainty had come. The suit began prosperously —the case was well stated—the first witnesses delivered their testimony steadfastly and with credit. Romans of all degrees pressed to hear the evidence, or to report it. A crowd kept about the Palazzo in which the Tribunale sat. When Francisco was visible, going or coming—as the young man did frequently, with a natural restlessness — the whole crowd uncovered to him with a cheering recognition. Whatever might happen afterwards, at this moment he was a popular hero. The very Carbonari — Carbonari literal,

and not figurative, Roman "roughs" of the first water—exhibited a gleam of white teeth in their black faces as they threw down their rustling sacks of charcoal and hailed the son of San Michele. With something of a pang Francisco turned away from these salutations. What if, after all, he should fail? What if, out of all this sympathy and support, he should drop down lower than any of these humble sympathisers, disgraced and nameless — no man's son, and the heir only of shame? The vile possibility crossed him by moments like the forewarning chill of fever. He kept out of the way as much as he could—he was afraid of the kind salutations of the crowd.

The last person to be examined was Cenci, who had been kept behind, partly because she was very nervous, and deeply afraid of the Duchessa, from an assault by whom Teta carefully guarded her mother, who had yielded to her solicitations, and left the service of her old mistress some time before; and partly because she was of all others the most important witness. Francisco had followed the different portions of her faltering testimony with such breathless interest as may be imagined, especially the tremulous descriptions which she gave of Il Duca, whom the young man longed to hear of, but whom everybody had slurred over hitherto. Il Duca had increased in importance now. As Cenci proceeded, all a-tremble, to tell how the Duchessa and he were very good friends, though they went each their several way of pleasure-seeking with a bland tolerance of each other's foibles; when she certified her knowledge that the Duke was perfectly aware of the existence of the unlucky infant, whose fate as a man was now to be decided; and when she gave her testimony that the Duchessa remained on good terms with her husband till his death—was with him during some part of his last illness, and was left by him with almost more than the ordinary amount of trust reposed in a wife, the bearded face of Rospigliosi grew radiant with content and satisfaction, and even the judges of the Tribunale exchanged glances which would have been very satisfactory to the young hero of the day, could he have noticed or understood them. As it was, Francisco neither looked, nor saw, nor perhaps cared. His heart beat too high with the force of nature. Were those his parents who had abandoned him, of whom that faltering voice was telling? Those old scenes which passed so many years ago, were they passing dimly now, a gliding panorama, before the dim eyes of that old woman, who had seen his own birth, and who must know the truth? When Cenci's evidence was ended, the young man, unable to control his excitement, went out to draw breath in the fresh air, and calm himself down. His thoughts went wandering and yearning about that dead man, who lived in Cenci's memory—his father! It was something to have a parent thus hidden in the pious mists of death, whom one could suppose it was possible to have loved or been loved by. So he thought, taking a refuge from himself in that filial idea. As he came into the street, his attention was attracted by the rapid approach of a carriage, which came at unusual speed toward the great door which he had just left, and darted under the arch of the gateway, almost running him over. It was the carriage of the Duchessa; and inside was the witch-face of the Duchessa herself, accompanied not this time by her *dame de compagnie*, but by an old priest, almost as wrinkled as she. Francisco stood still in a kind of stupor as they alighted. He watched them enter; he stood still there under the arch, as if all power of motion had been taken from him, close to the wall where the carriage of the Duchessa had driven him. Some of the loungers about, waiting to hear how the trial was going on, accosted him, but he did not hear them. Some others, ancient acquaintances of his own, cried "Viva il Duca!" close by his ear. "Il Duca is dead!" cried Francisco, unconsciously, in the fever of his mind. Dead, oh so many years ago!—dead beyond all power of knowing now what was *his* mind. The young man groaned at the thought, in the bitterness of his heart; perhaps the only filial tribute,

the only yearning of nature, that had ever existed for the dead Duke Agostini, was in that groan.

The slow moments went on as they go in a fever, while Francisco stood by that wall: he could not tell whether they were minutes or hours. While his heart beat loud with feverish anxiety, his limbs refused to move, and his mind refused to re-enter by those doors of fate. She must do what she had come to do, that woman who was his mother; she must do her will if it were to ruin and disgrace him. When he had roused himself gradually from the stupefying shock which her face had given him, he went forward to the door, and stood there waiting in a proud silence. The very extremity of his excitement delivered him from its usual bonds; his passion of highly-wrought feeling raised him above all practical results for the moment. He stood with a smile on his pale lips, waiting for his fate. He could almost have fancied that he heard voices, highly raised, and an unusual commotion above, though he knew at the same moment that to hear anything down that echoing staircase, and through these long corridors, was next to impossible; but perhaps even his ears were quickened by the indescribable tumult in his heart. Even the bystanders drew aside, and left him with an instinctive appreciation of the crisis. The courtyard of the Palazzo was cleared of all but one or two motionless figures; the very crowd outside grew silent. Now and then somebody came softly under the arch of the great doorway to see if anything had happened. They had an eye for a situation, these inquisitive Romans. They recognised with universal common intelligence the dramatic elements of the scene.

After a while—a short time, endless as it seemed to Francisco, there came sounds really audible from the Hall of the Tribunale. The doors were thrown open, voices and steps came out upon the stairs; voices, one shrill and high-pitched, one round, unctuous, and bland, the well-known voice of Rospigliosi. Francisco's heart beat so loud in his ears that he could not catch the sense of those violent and sharp exclamations with which the Duchessa made her way down the stair; but it was impossible to mistake the tone of disappointment, rage, and mortification. She had failed in her purpose, whatever that purpose might be. And, coming out of the hall enraged and discomfited, had caught at the arm which the Avvocato offered to support her, without either observing or caring that it was the champion of her son who afforded her that necessary help. People had ceased to contend for the honour of attending her to her carriage nowadays, the poor old Duchessa! As she came in sight, descending the stair with the aid of the Avvocato's arm, Rospigliosi's round big voice was heard in reply. He had wrongs of his own to avenge upon the faded beauty, and he did not lose the opportunity when it came.

"Bella Duchessa," said the bland lawyer, "you complain of the laws, but see how necessary they are. Every one knows how entirely you women have us in your hands. You can do—what can you not do, conquerors as you are! But it is necessary that we put some limit to the powers of your bel sesso. If the bella Duchessa had not been so influential with the illustrious Duke, then she might have said what she would to the Tribunale; but your Signoria must perceive that the prelates up there cannot comprehend how a man should be so great a fool as you know you have made him. There is something, still something, which a woman cannot do, most revered Signora. One cannot, were one the most lovely of one's sex, persuade the law out of its dogmas; one cannot——"

"It is enough, Signore Rospigliosi," cried Francisco, his voice sharp with indignation and excitement, as, springing forward with the noiseless rapidity of extreme emotion, he thrust the astonished Avvocato away. "The Duchessa has no further occasion for your services; Madame, I pray you to permit this honour to me."

The ghastly old woman stared at him as he took her hand; she made a gasp as if to speak, but could say nothing, and fell trembling with a

sudden weakness, incomprehensible to herself. He did not look at her, this young man who was her son. He led her, his face white and rigid with a passion more lofty than she knew anything of, his head held high in involuntary sympathy with his mind, and his nostril dilated, to the door of her carriage. The whole proceeding was so rapid, so noiseless, so strange—for Francisco's strong excitement influenced the others unawares, and made even the footman, who sprang from his lounge by the stairs to open the carriage-door, do his business with a speed and silence entirely against the usage of that splendid functionary—that the effect upon the Duchessa was much that of being seized upon by some strong wind of youthful passion, and carried off to a great incalculable distance by the sudden impetus. She had only walked half-a-dozen steps by Francisco's side, but it might have been miles so far as the sensation was concerned. And he did not look at her, as he led her like a young prince, indignant and magnanimous! Not poor old Cenci before the prelates on their seat of judgment trembled more than did the Duchessa at the touch of this incomprehensible boy. He put her into her carriage with a certain angry tenderness of care, bowed his head over her gloved hand, and kissed it as he let it go; then himself shut the door, and waved his hand with an imperative gesture to the coachman. The priest, who was following slowly behind, ran forward in dismay as the carriage dashed off under the influence and authority of Francisco's sustained and silent passion; but nobody in or about that equipage had time to think of the priest, or durst wait for him. The startled coachman drove at full speed through the arch, and took the homeward direction as fast as his horses would carry them; the startled footman sat by his side in dead silence, shaken out of half his wits. Inside, upon her soft cushions the poor old Duchessa sobbed and trembled: he had not looked at her—the blessed Madonna pity her!—and he was her son.

Francisco took no notice of the old priest, who scowled at him from under the loops of his heavy beaver-hat, and would fain have remonstrated, ere he took his discomfited way on foot through the gateway. He took no notice of Rospigliosi, who lingered ere he returned to the hall of the Tribunale, very willing to inform him of what had happened, though somewhat affronted by the usage he himself had met with. The young man could not have spoken to any one; he paced up and down the courtyard for a time, ineffectually trying to calm himself and recover his composure: then he went home. With the impulse of his strong excitement strong upon him, he went back to his Beatrice, glad of the impossibility of working at it, which he had to contend against, and did, holding a sheaf of ineffectual brushes in his hand. But he would do something; he would spoil the little picture, and that was some relief to the whirl and flood of his own feelings. All was quiet in the Piazza of Trajan; nobody there stopped to consider how the prelates pondered on the bench, and the Avvocato waited for the judgment; nobody collected under that wintry sunshine to hear the decision. All Rome, seen from this point, was calm as Trajan upon his column, while elsewhere they were deciding a man's life and fortune; and here Francisco stood speechless, in a voluntary haughty defiance of himself, with his sheaf of brushes in his hand, and a tempest in his heart.

CHAPTER XXV.

All that evening, and all the next day, Francisco remained in his own apartment. He had been disgusted in the middle of his hopes: into the deep eagerness which possessed his soul a poisonous drop had fallen, making it bitter. He was of a race to which asceticism has always been easier than moderation. He could not wait steadily in full command of himself for the decision, whether adverse or favourable. He was too

proud to show all his anxiety in the fever of disgust which had taken possession of him; accordingly, he turned his back upon the whole subject, shut his ears to it, kept far away from the Tribunale, asked for no news; but remained devoured by anxiety, which he endeavoured to conceal even from himself, working night and day, to the entire destruction of the Beatrice, at that vain and unavailing work.

Late in the evening of the next day, when the Ave Maria had just sounded, and workmen of all sorts were going home, some commotion in the Piazza attracted the notice of Francisco; he would not hear it, yet he did, with faculties miraculously sharpened by the recent excitement which devoured him: he distinguished Gigi's voice sounding loud and triumphant, and he heard a carriage draw up below. Not for a kingdom would Francisco have looked out. He stood there in his young perversity, touching with a hand that trembled more and more at the face of that unfortunate Beatrice, one cheek of which was rosy red and the other grim-pale, and somewhat ghastly to look at in the light of the lamp. His little room was on the fourth piano. Three floors-full of respectability lived beneath him. How was it likely that these visitors were for him?—much more probable that the Signora Antonietta on the primo piano was returning from her drive; or that Ser Giovanni, the doctor, was called out to some sudden patient. Nevertheless, the noise increased, and drew nearer, as though these steps were ascending his own stair; and again chuckles of Gigi's voice from the Piazza seemed to ring in Francisco's ears. After a while some one knocked at his door. "Favorisca!" said Francisco, with an effort; but the word was said with such a gasp under his breath that it was impossible any one could have heard it. Then he went faltering to the door. On the threshold stood Monsignore and the Advocate. But the eager words on the lips of both were dashed by the sight of the young exhausted passionate face that looked out upon them. Monsignore took the young man's hand, and then threw his old arms round him, after the fashion of his country. The old man was sad and sorry to see the change wrought in that face. He did not hail him with any burst of triumph. "Chichino mio, thy cause is won," said the good priest softly in the young man's ear. The kind voice seemed to say to him, Command yourself—control yourself; but Francisco was too far gone for that caution. Out of Monsignore's arms he dropped into a chair and burst into tears. Won! He had never been trained to reticence, that young Roman—his custom was to express his feelings as freely as a savage. He burst into a flood of rapid unrestrainable tears. Won! —then it was a lie that vile possibility which to his heart had disgusted him with the entire business? He could think nothing more nor further, as in that first moment of conscious victory he buried his face in his hands.

"Victoria!" shouted Rospigliosi, "never was a more glorious end to a hard battle. I congratulate the illustrious Duke: viva il Duca Agostini! Monsignore would come with me, Don Francisco, to moderate my triumph; but there is a friend of your Signoria below who will not be moderated. Bravo, Gig!" cried the excited Avvocato, rushing to the window, which he threw open. "Bravo, amico mio! The Duke hears you; viva il Duca Agostini! The battle is won!"

"My son," said Monsignore, "it is not the time to weep; look up—for thy friends' sake it is necessary that thou shouldest take thy triumph. God, and the blessed Madonna, and the holy saints, bless thee in thy new station. Rise up, my son."

Francisco rose up in mechanical obedience. He was dizzy and dazzled as if with sudden light. He understood it was his duty to rejoice and thank his companions, but he did not understand much more clearly what had befallen. The miraculous change in his own position, which he had contemplated for months, almost for years, had come about in a moment, and was no longer a dream; but Francisco was still unchanged in his own person, and could not realise himself under an-

other name. He cast a wondering glance round the bare walls, hung with unframed pictures, which had not expanded, and at the open window, where Rospigliosi's big figure, gesticulating to some one below, filled up the whole space, and shut out everything but some gleams of sky about the Avvocato's black head. Perhaps it was that touch of nature peeping in,—nature so oddly, almost so ludicrously framing Signor Antonio's bearded head, and leaving his big person to lose itself as it might against the darker background of the opposite houses—that more than anything else recalled Francisco to himself. He smiled at the pictorial effect, as instinctively he held his head a little on one side, and took a step apart to note it; and it occurred to him only then in reality, with a sudden start and shock, what a mighty difference, in these few minutes, had passed upon himself.

"This is the lodging of Francisco the painter; there is the Beatrice he has ruined," said the young man, with a somewhat tremulous smile: "here he has lived, and worked, and slept, and ate, for two long years; but, Monsignore, I pray you to tell me, of grace, who we are who stand here now."

"His Excellency the Duke speaks to you, Ser Antonio," said Monsignore with a smile.

"Pardon," cried Rospigliosi, coming in immediately with his broad full person, which half filled the apartment, and seemed to crush into one central spot the light of Francisco's lamp; "I am excited—it is natural. We have not left the enemy a foot to stand upon. Your excellent mother had to fly from the contest; no one had a word to say against your unquestionable rights. Permit that I offer you my respectful felicitations—Evviva, the Duke Agostini! and your Excellency will permit me to say that there have been few Dukes Agostini more worthy of the name."

"My son, God bless thee! thou hast done well—take with a joyful heart," cried Monsignore, "the reward of Heaven!"

And while Francisco submitted to the violent shaking of hands with which his advocate expressed the fervour of his feelings, and bent his head to receive Monsignore's blessing, Gigi's shout, swelled by some other willing voices, ascended into the little room—"Viva il Duca Agostini!" The shout rung over the Piazza of Trajan, startling the calm echoes which Francisco's many thoughts had never disturbed. The name came to the young man's ear with a thrill and reverberation in that familiar place. The clouds passed from his head; he knew now that it had happened, this grand unbelievable event. He laughed a short laugh of momentary, irrestrainable triumph; then he went to the window, and called Gigi loudly to come up. When Gigi, half crazy with joy, clambered up the stair, and kissed, falling down on his knees, half in gratitude to Heaven, and half in homage to Il Duca, his Excellency's hand, that familiar voice and genuine joy brought the common nature back to Francisco's heart. "Eccellenza, we are all ready to make festa at Rocca—there is not a villano but will keep it like the day of his espousals. It is too great an honour for us to think thou wert bred amongst us, Illustrious Duke!" cried Gigi, with many pauses and much effort. Then the good fellow paused to find words worthy the occasion; but, overcome by his honest ecstacy, only burst forth with a familiar benediction—"And God bless thee, Chichino mio!" blubbered honest Gigi, weeping over Francisco's hand.

"And thanks, a thousand thanks, dear old friend," cried Francisco, suddenly released from all his youthful pride and self-importance by the big unquestionable rank which swallowed them up, "for thy kindness to little Chichino. I should have had a cold childhood but for thee and Mariuccia, amico mio! This is the galantuomo who would have mortgaged his vineyard to help me, my friends! This was the first protector I ever knew. Stand up, my Gigi; assure yourself, while Francisco lives thou shalt never want a friend."

"Ah, Eccellenza, it is too much of honour!" cried Gigi; "but your Signoria will give me the beautiful picture which he painted of my little

Marietta. Grazia a Dio!—there are no more pictures to go to the dealer in the Babuino. But that her children may know how honoured she was, Signor il Duca, your Signoria will give it to me?"

"And if we come to gifts, your Excellency will remember the Cæsaretti villa," cried Rospigliosi, with a gleeful chuckle, rubbing his hands in victorious satisfaction with himself.

"And, my son, thy alms to the poor!" said Monsignore, stretching out his hand with a smile. Francisco laughed once more the short momentary laugh of incredulous triumph. He had in his little purse at that moment a five-scudi note and three silver pauls—not two-and-twenty shillings altogether—yet he could bestow that gift of the villa just as easily as the other gift of the picture; and what magnificent incomprehensible sums might there not be at the young hero's disposal for these alms to the poor!

CHAPTER XXVI.

"It is very astonishing to me," said Cenci, "how you young people, who are revolutionary, will still speak evil of Monsignori the Prelates. What goodness! what justice! what humility! To think that they who would not hear the Duchessa took the trouble to listen to *me!*"

"And they would not hear her—é vero?" asked Mariuccia; "Madonna Santissima! what courage they have! I would rather spend the rest of my life in one of the huts on the Campagna than meet the Duchessa now, after being so bold as to witness against her——but to be sure it was for the sake of my young Signore. But for Don Francisco, Sora Cenci, the secret would have been safe with me."

"Ah, the Monsignori are good judges," said Cenci. "It is to be supposed, indeed, that they should know the truth better even than the Duchessa; and old Fra Angelo, my lady's confessor, what could he know about it? To be sure, he baptised the little unfortunate—blessed Madonna! I mean the illustrious Duke; but what do you suppose an old monk such as he could know about a baby? I indeed—or thyself, Mariuccia mia—or even Madame Margherita—but Monsignori the judges knew better than to listen to an old monk."

"Nonna, Nonna! I see the Signore Don Francisco coming along the street," cried Gigi's pretty daughter from the window of a front room communicating with Teta's sitting-room, where she had placed herself. "He walks along just as if nothing had happened," cried the excited girl. "He wears the same coat—ah, and how kind he is! he is throwing his alms into the blind man's box—though I have heard him say at Rocca how troublesome they were with their bajocchi rattling in the tin box. See, Nonna, how he comes, just the same Signore Francisco as when he painted thy face!"

"Ah," cried Teta, with a little nod of superior knowledge, "he comes to say good-by to us before he goes away."

"Where, then, is he going?" cried Cenci and Mariuccia in a breath.

"Listen, my friends," said Teta, triumphantly. "Before long there will be another Duchessa. Ah, the poor child! have not I held her in my arms when she was going away, and would not even leave a message for him, with her pretty English pride. They are inexplicable when they are in love, these Signorine Inglese. I could not any more understand my sweet Miss Lucy, though she spoke very good language—not, to be sure, the bocca Romana, but as good as if she had been born at Subiaco or Ostia, or some other out-of-the-way place—I could no more understand her, I tell you, when she came to talk of Don Francisco, than if she had spoken English to me. She loved him, to be sure; but she would not look at him, nor write to him, nor hear him speak—and all because she would not break her faith with that old Milord, who persecuted her, as grandparents will. You may be sure she will never break her faith to her husband, that little English girl. I am sorry thou hast a prejudice against the Forestieri, mamma mia, for Il Duca, you may be sure, will not lose a

moment in bringing home his English bride."

"The Forestieri may be very good, but they are not like one's own country-people," said Cenci, shrugging her shoulders; "but I am out of the service of the family Agostini, and it does not matter much to me; only, Teta, if thou art in favour with the new Duchessa, thou shouldst give her some advice. There is a great difference between that cold country and Italy. I hear in Inghilterra that people perish with the cold—or was it in Russia? Va-bene! it does not matter; they are all Forestieri alike; and there are some customs they have——"

"Of dressing the poor little children," cried Mariuccia, with horror. "Madonna Santissima! to think that perhaps the babies of my dear young padrone should be dressed in the modo Inglese! Ah, it is very sad—very sad! If I saw it, I should be too melancholy. You do not understand it, Sora Teta, or you would not laugh."

"And they drink aquavitæ quite early in the morning, instead of coffee," said Cenci, shaking her head. "I have heard a great deal about the Forestieri, when the great ladies among them came to see the Duchessa. They walk about so covered up with fur that they look like wild beasts. Teta mia, Gaetano tells thee the best of them, and keeps the other side to himself."

"Benissimo!" cried Teta, with a laugh of satisfaction and amusement. "She does not drink aquavitæ nor wear furs, my sweet Signorina Lucia. But hush! is not that the step of Il Duca upon the stair?"

Francisco came in with a little haste, and an atmosphere of emotion and excitement about him, happier and more effusive than the excitement and emotion in which he had lived for many months. His face was cleared of its clouds, and carried no longer that heavy weight of care over the eyebrows which had overshadowed every landscape with a kind of mental scirocco for many a long day to the anxious young man. His heart was liberated now. He did not feel the actual and positive gain, vast as that was, half so much as he felt the liberation, the freedom, the certainty which renewed his life. But to be calm was just now impossible; there was no tranquillising power in his astonishing change of fortune, nor even in that sweet fluttering figure which glided white and bright about his horizon, among the stars of his new life—Lucy! But Lucy had still to be sought and to be won.

With Francisco — though even Gigi's Marietta had no eyes for the saint of Rocca at that moment—came Monsignore, who, half because he liked the lad and took pleasure in his joy, half because he found it difficult to believe that Francisco might not do something extravagant and extraordinary if left to himself, had kept by him since he heard the news. The young man had spent the night at Monsignore's town lodging, and was the guest of the good priest; for, to be sure, the fourth piano in the Piazza of Trajan was no longer, even for one night, a dwelling-place fit for the Duke Agostini. And after these two illustrious personages, dropping in at Teta's great door, and stumbling up the long stairs about ten minutes after them, as he had followed them all the morning, came Gigi, who had by no means recovered his wits. All the friends of Francisco's life were gathered in Teta's room—his nurses, his supporters, his consolers under all his youthful troubles. Mariuccia, in her scarlet jacket and white veil; Teta, with her glossy black hair and long earrings, and Roman amplitude of bust; then Gigi, the honest kind fellow, who had helped the little Chichino to all his boyish diversions; and Monsignore, who had touched him with the chrism of confirmation—his spiritual father—and who had taken up his cause with strength superior to the others, though with no better will. They were all there whom the young man could depend on to enter fully into either his joys or his troubles. He needed to have no fear of his own feelings in that little assembly. He dared either laugh or weep, as it happened that either of these common channels could carry best the transcending tide of his emotion. Of all places in the world there was

none where he could be so perfectly at ease as in that little sitting-room of Teta's, with the present little company assembled there.

"Dear old friends," said Francisco, "what do you suppose I can say to you? can I thank you? You are as joyful of this change as I am, and it is you who have done it. I know not any more what to say; you have been my friends all my life; you are my friends still, and will be, as I hope. I am not less indebted to one than to another; and that for which I am most indebted of all, is a thing which cannot be paid by thanks or words, or even by deeds, but only in kind, amichi mei—I mean your love!"

At this agitated pause in Francisco's little speech, Mariuccia uttered a fervent ejaculation to the Madonna; Cenci held up her hands in astonishment, strangely mixed with gratitude and disapproval; Teta hid her face in her handkerchief; and Monsignore took a pinch of snuff; while from the door, where little Marietta stood, half concealing and half concealed by her father's cloak and person, with the tears running down her pretty face, there came an indistinct blubber of sound, half laughter, half sobbing, from Gigi, who for twenty-four hours had been inarticulate. Men and women (they had little regard for committing themselves, being undisciplined Romans, not staid English) had the greatest mind to fall into a common burst of inarticulate joy and kindness, laughing and crying; and perhaps the reason why they did not do so was nothing more nor less than that indomitable little sprite of a Lucy fluttering upon the warm Italian horizon of the new Duke. However that may be, it is certain that the young man made an effort and restrained himself, and, after a moment, recovered his voice.

"I go as soon as I can away from you for a time, my good friends," said Francisco; "and when I return, if God wills, I will bring one with me who will be like light to our eyes; because, you understand, her name is Lucia," said the young lover, with a tremulous pause, half-playful, half-pathetic; "and I pray you all to wish me buon viaggio, and God-speed."

With that the little speech of Il Duca—who, by some bewildering trick, was still merely Francisco the painter, and whom it was impossible somehow to disjoin from that familiar individual—came to an abrupt conclusion. The good wishes of the assembled party poured out upon him thereafter in the most overwhelming profusion. They wished him not only a good journey and success in his undertaking, but every good thing in earth and heaven; for Cenci and Mariuccia at least, old women both, did not stop at the limits of mortality. Then, with many advices, praises, and blessings, they let him go reluctantly at last, Monsignore, somewhat appalled by this sudden apparition of a mystic wife in prospect, still accompanying the young man. An English Protestant Lucy, of spirit indomitable, able to assume on occasion the English look of stone, was not likely to come a Lucia to the eyes of the good priest. He was the kindest of men, but he did not like that conjunction. He thought Tenebra would have been a more appropriate name.

And while Monsignore went his way with the new Duke, Gigi prepared to return home. His mother and daughter had places engaged for them in a vettura, which presently, with much tinkling of bells and clinking of horses, came up with a flourish to Teta's door to take them up; while he himself jogged off, solitary and triumphant, to his favourite Osteria, where the polenta was almost equal to the polenta in Trastevere—where he put his horse to his homely cart, drank a fogliett of wine with much satisfaction of heart, and taking his seat under shelter of the triangular shield of matting stretched upon two poles, which stood up like a sail from the centre of his cart, in defence against the sun, took his way across the Campagna towards the slopes nearer at hand than his own mountain village—the soft olive slopes which embosom that little town of Frascati, where Chico, famous for fireworks, lived and pursued his art. Gigi made the programme of the festa in his own mind as he jogged silently over that calm brown expanse, where the wild cattle fed, and

where no other sign of life was visible. Rocca had never seen such a high holiday as that which rose before Gigi's honest imagination; and between himself and Chico of Frascati it would be odd if Monte Cavo, that night if no other, did not gleam a mountain of fire through the blue distance to the astonished eyes of Rome.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Far more impatient than he had been before the trial, Francisco chafed now at every hour or day that interposed between him and his lover's journey. He had a great deal of necessary business to attend to before he could leave Rome, and the Avvocato had no particular inclination to lessen the amount of it, or to let his young client escape. He found it agreeable to introduce his friends to the hero of the day, and to be courted in consequence of his connection with the new Agostini—a pleasure which of course would cease entirely when Francisco left the town. Monsignore too, good man as he was, did not hesitate to throw what gentle hindrances he could in the way of the young lover. Monsignore did not pretend to be pleased with the heretical Duchessa who dawned upon his firmament. Perhaps even the old Duchessa, with her beauty, and her passions, and her wickedness, weaknesses of nature, was safer than a seducing little heretic good and pure, whose goodness might prepossess the easily-deluded people in favour of her faith. So between the two the young man was kept back as much as it was possible to keep back his eagerness. These days were quite intolerable to Francisco. After many cogitations on the subject, and answering with very nearly a flat refusal the advice of Monsignore to seek acquaintance and reconciliation with his mother, he did, notwithstanding, nobody knowing of his intention, present himself at her door; but the Duchessa refused to see him—refused to see any one, her servants told him; was ill and nervous, and saw nobody but her confessor. Neither would Donna Anna take any notice of the unwelcome young brother thus springing up to disinherit her; and there were even appearances among the greater houses of Rome of an intention to follow Donna Anna's example and ignore the new Duke; so at least Monsignore, alarmed for his protégé, imagined. Francisco cared for none of these things. He had gladly dismissed the trial from his mind as soon as he knew it was over. He did not ask—not because he was afraid to be answered so much as because he could not suffer any talk about his mother—what she had meant to say before the Tribunale when the judges refused to hear her. He had no wish to retain the "case" within his memory: even now, in the excitement of the moment, Francisco had no desire to talk of it as Rospigliosi had, and seemed to find no pleasure in going over all the skilful arrangements of evidence and felicitous force of pleading—a thing which much astonished the worthy Avvocato. Already, though nothing could be more entirely removed from arrogance than the demeanour of the young Duke, he disliked allusions to his "wrongs," and held his honours lightly, as if he had been accustomed to them. Perhaps it was magnanimity, perhaps it was shame; but before he had been a week in possession of his new dignity, every one around Francisco knew that while they were quite at liberty to speak of his youth at San Michele, of his peasant childhood, of his pictures and poverty, any words which insinuated hardship and injury—anything which inferred a reproach upon his mother or the dead Duke—anything, above all, of surprise at their motive or wonder at their conduct, immediately brought a flush of haughty resentment to his face. Beyond the decision of the Tribunale he would not go. They had examined the matter, and placed him in this position; the evidence on either side was now nothing to him. So he chose it to appear.

And in the mean time an anxiety still more absorbing occupied his

days. He had been comparatively at ease about Lucy while he was still in his garret in the Piazza of Trajan; now he was devoured with impatience to seek her. What if, in those very days which he lost, some one should come between him and his prize? What if Lucy somehow heard of his change of fortune, and sat by a window somewhere, sick at heart, wondering why her Roman lover, to whom she had promised to go honestly and bravely with her fortune in her hand, did not come to her? He tormented himself with this idea, upon which he rang a hundred changes. Sometimes he saw her in the midst of some gay assembly of the wandering English, hearing the romantic Roman story, nobody knowing her interest in the hero. Sometimes Lucy sat by herself reading the report in a newspaper: always it was the steadfast bright face of the little English maiden looking out for him, waiting for him, growing pale, and wondering why he did not come. Doubts of her fidelity to that visionary engagement did not trouble Francisco. He only thought with impatience uncontrollable that he himself would not be the first to take her the news, that she might hear of it, and wonder why he did not come.

And still they continued to put every possible obstacle in his way. He had to take possession of his property—so much of it as could be his before the death of the Duchessa. He had to manage firmly, but courteously, his dealings with the family of Lontoria, with the expectations of which he had interfered so sadly. He had to curb and moderate Rospigliosi, who still conceived himself entitled to manage his young client's affairs, and who, much elated by his triumph, was somewhat apt to conclude that everything must yield to the man who had gained the great Agostini cause. He had to show himself in public places, and to enter into the new world which opened its arms to receive him, in spite of the coldness of Prince Borgia and the Princess Coromila. Francisco made something of a sensation in the society which was so new to him, the secret of his power being, not so much his romantic story—for the Roman great ladies, like all other great ladies, were quite disposed to patronise and smile at the young hero suddenly raised to such an elevation, and whose head might naturally be supposed to swim a little, and feel the dizzying effect of that unusual height and atmosphere—but his preoccupation, which entirely puzzled his patrons. Francisco was not dizzy with his extraordinary change of circumstances; he was not dazzled by the beauty, and the smiles, and the sweet flattery of interest which so many professed in him. He bore his honours with a gravity and unconsciousness which, more than anything else could have done, impressed his countrymen. He was not a *parvenu;* he was apparently quite at his ease and unelated by his title and rank; the secret being simply that he was preoccupied, his eyes bent towards another quarter, his thoughts not at leisure to canvass the manner of his reception, or the effect his appearance produced. Monsignore, looking on, and finding it somewhat unnecessary to give himself all the trouble he had intended as social godfather of the new-comer, stood aside and wondered, and was pleased, and could not make it out, never thinking of the future little heretic Duchessa, or any share she might have in the good manners of her lover. Rome murmured and rustled through all its feminine oracles the warmest approbation, by voice and gesture, of the young Agostini. The Duchessa, hypochondriac and miserable, shut up with her penance and her confessor, heard in her dismal seclusion of the young man's *succès*, and remembered with a tremble of strange attraction that one supreme moment in which his indignant youthful lips, pale with passion, had touched his mother's hand. Even Teta heard of Don Francisco's popularity, and did not wonder; while Francisco kept up the charm of the whole, quite unwitting of the spell, by dreaming perpetually of an English little maiden at a window looking out for her hero, and growing pale with wonder why he did not come.

There are some circumstances in which mere necessity, often most unwillingly yielded to, does all for us

that the most exquisite contrivance could have done. Business and Rospigliosi compelled Francisco to stay in Rome, where his preoccupied heart and thoughts gained for him a place which his mere rank could not have attained; and just at the critical point when the lively Romans might have begun to tire of that preoccupation, nature and youthful impetuosity prevailed over Rospigliosi and his businesses. The young man broke away out of his bonds in search of Lucy. He could not keep himself under control any longer. He went off suddenly, leaving that lively, brilliant, gossiping world full of gossip and interest. Where had he gone to, the young paladin? Had he disappeared again into the unknown as suddenly as he came? Everybody, as one may suppose, was charmed with the new Duke, who gave them so soon a second subject to talk and be curious about. Come back when he would, he had made his reputation. Though the great houses of Borgia and Coromila had not deigned to smile, everybody else did; and Monsignore was satisfied. Was satisfied, but shrugged his old shoulders and took snuff, and wondered within himself which might be the most vulnerable point of the new heretic Duchessa; for, alas! the new heretic Duchessina, the little indomitable Lucy, was inevitable now; unless — a chance which Monsignore devoutly took into his consideration — the Madonna herself might graciously interpose.

Meanwhile Francisco, thinking neither of his *succès* nor of his sponsor's anxious regard, nor of the goodwill of society which he had been so fortunate in securing—of nothing at all but Lucy, who must certainly have heard by this time, and by this time, doubtless, must have grown indignantly amazed at his delay—Francisco, with a retinue of servants proportioned to his dignity, embarked, all eager, impatient, and anxious, on that sea which respects neither dukes, heroes, nor lovers. Now she might indeed sit at her window, that little English maid. The road was long, to be sure, and the evening skies were wistful, but the true knight was on his way!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Francisco made all haste to Paris, travelling night and day—his eagerness and anxiety only growing greater as he approached the termination of his cares, and all the usual train of passing fears and suggestions of evil, which always crowd to us when we are close to our object, thronging about his heart. In Paris he made a pause, half compulsory; for the young lover did not of course prefer to appear travel-worn and overfatigued before the lady of his love. He stopped to improve his toilette—to fit himself better than he had as yet found time or inclination to do for the exigencies of his new rank. He was now alone for the first time since he came to his kingdom; nobody with him but new, strange, unfamiliar servants, who had neither the power nor the privilege of recalling to him his former life—that life which had fallen away from him like a dream, yet had left him to his own consciousness, under the cover of his wealth and his dukedom, still Francisco the painter. His mind went back to that past time with a comfort and facility unknown to him while he lived under the eye of Monsignore and the observation of "the world." And Lucy was the star of that past: he could not think of her without remembering himself of his light-hearted youth, when he painted portraits, and made copies, and lived cheerfully in his fourth-floor apartment, and enjoyed himself with Roman temperance at his café, before any splendid hopes came to distract his life. But for these splendid hopes he must have resigned himself to the necessity, inevitable and not to be conquered, of losing sight of that Signorina Inglese who had woke him out of the happy carelessness of his youth: and must have consoled himself as he best could, up yonder in the Piazza of Trajan, in his harmless, useless, unprogressive life—a Roman—nothing in the world possible to

him because he was a Roman, except the craft to which he had been trained, and the condition in which (as he supposed) he had been born; while the star which he called Lucia must have twinkled calm and distant above him, inaccessible as the heavens, light to some other eyes, but not to his. Now he was the temporary tenant of the finest rooms of a splendid Parisian hotel, his windows commanding those gay gardens of the Tuileries, with all the luxuries of that luxurious capital at his disposal, and soft-voiced obsequious attendants waiting on the lightest wishes of Monsieur le Duc. And he was going to seek his bride going to claim Lucy, as she had bidden him! going proudly to lay the Agostini honours at the little Englishwoman's feet! Francisco laughed to himself as he remembered his own rage at Milord, and revengeful intentions of humiliating him. He had no desire to humiliate anybody now. If he could but get fairly upon that road which the little maid watched from her window! if he could but see her start of sweet surprise and pleasure when she perceived him on the way!

Thinking thus, Francisco got up, out of pure restlessness, and, because it was not possible to start immediately on his further journey, went languidly and dreaming down the stairs, to weary himself with a stroll through those fascinating Parisian streets. Somebody had just arrived at that palace of public entertainment—somebody who had come in a handsome plain travelling-carriage, at present unpacking before the door. Francisco cast a careless glance at the cozy English vehicle with the shawls and books and cushions, out of the midst of which the travellers had come — at the confused English maid with a veil over her face, whom somebody drew aside out of the way of Monsieur le Duc as he sauntered to the door—and at the broad back of the courier, who was paying something or somebody at a little distance, and who, it occurred momentarily in passing to Francisco, presented at that distant view a contour not unlike the stout Roman build of Gaetano, Teta's courier-husband. It was quite possible it might be Gaetano. Il Duca resolved to ascertain when he came back; in the mean time his own condition of excited suspense was not favourable to curiosity. He sauntered towards the Champs Elysées, remembering, indolently, perhaps with his old painter instinct, the soft half-round into which that shawl had dropped on the warm cushions of the carriage, dropped from some pair of dainty shoulders, all warm and light in its soft folds, with the books which had amused the traveller fallen under it. Somehow it haunted his memory that shawl. Somebody's Lucy had thrown it off as she stepped out of that *tête-à-tête* carriage. Perhaps such a shawl and such a carriage might by-and-by help the Duchessa Agostini to bear the journey to her new home.

He came back sooner than he had intended, vaguely interested. The broad-shouldered courier, with his black beard, jovial and polyglot, was standing on the steps at the great door, a well-known and justly-prized individual, whom everybody was disposed to honour. If it had been a less personage than Monsieur le Duc, the warmly-affectionate waiters who surrounded him would scarcely have given way, but they disappeared before the advance of Francisco. The courier looked up quickly to see who the illustrious stranger was, and with a sudden exclamation took off his hat, revealing the indisputable face of Gaetano. The greeting was warm on the side of Francisco, respectful on that of his old acquaintance. The Duke condescended to give the last news of Teta and Cenci, and to ask where Gaetano and his "party" were going. With a smile which expanded his red good-humoured lips out of his black beard, the courier told his somewhat indifferent auditor, whose preoccupied thoughts had wandered already, that he was in attendance upon some ladies, former lodgers of his wife, who were going to Rome. "All for the Holy Week," Francisco said languidly, and turned his eyes through the large dim hall towards the staircase which some one was descending. Nobody but a confused English waiting-woman, whose life was overcast by dread of a strange

language and strange "ways," could have come dropping and stumbling after such a fashion down those great stairs. She saw Gaetano in the distance, and Gaetano was the only hope of the distressed woman's life; sorely conscious of the observation of waiting men and women, who smiled sweetly with French politeness at her awkwardness, she made her way towards the courier who could speak everybody's language. Francisco's eye had traced the progress of this nervous doubtful figure, perhaps with some amusement, unawares, for some time before he observed her features. When he did at last glance slightly down at her face, she was almost close to him, on her way to Gaetano, and at the same moment she raised her eyes to see who the stranger was. The result was a mutual start and recognition. "La!" cried Reynolds, clasping her hands together on her breast. Then without another word she turned round and fled up-stairs again, wild with fright and eagerness. Francisco did not hear Gaetano's explanation—scarcely knew what he was doing—saw only before him, a single step in advance, the flying figure of the waiting-woman, in pursuit of whom, with long noiseless strides, he devoured the way. He cried out, "Where is Lucy?" first in Italian, then in the scanty English he had learned; but he could not make sure that his voice had been audible in the extreme excitement of the moment. The woman at least did not stop to answer. She ran along the polished shining passages, and stumbled against the door of a sitting-room close to his own. The door burst open, the woman fell not fainting but breathless, and out of her senses, into the room where somebody rose up startled. Francisco, rushing after her, took no time to think of the privacy on which he intruded. He clutched at the fallen woman, put her on the nearest chair, and was in the room with his cry of "Lucy, Lucy!" before the startled somebody who had risen from the table had time to assail him. Lucy, Lucy! "Lucia mia!" light of his eyes! Before he had got to the further end of the large room with his cry, and his searching eyes, and open arms, Lucy herself stood at a door waiting him, startled out of all her pretty proprieties and reticences by that simple honest voice of love calling upon her, undoubting, eager, careless of everything but that she was there. He took possession of her with a shout of joy. He thought of no obstacles, nobody who could come between them, nothing that stood in the way; he felt no explanation necessary, never observed her black dress, nor thought of her companion, nor asked himself what she was doing here; only cried aloud in his youthful pride and delight as he caught out of the distance and the silence which had so long hidden her from his sight, the little English Lucy of his dreams.

The somebody by the table was an English relation of Lucy's, a reluctant chaperone going with that misguided young woman to find out her Roman lover, and endow him with herself and the fortune which grandpapa had left her when he died. That event had happened some months before, and Lucy, like her lover, had chafed with sad and restless impatience that she could not go at once to Rome to redeem her promise. She had not been waiting and watching at that window, but struggling, like himself, among baffling cares and friends, and wondering, if Francisco had heard, what he would think of her? What they thought of each other now was not unsatisfactory. Lucy, perhaps, was a little disappointed that he had come to his fortune without any help of hers; and certainly was horrorstricken to find that she had, in honest affectionate simplicity going to seek the young painter to whom she had been betrothed, walked into the arms of the Duke Agostini instead. Lucy's unwilling chaperone, however, on the contrary, was much conciliated by Monsieur le Duc. She forgave that burst into her room, that total disregard of herself, that unreserved furor of lovemaking to his Signoria, when she never could have forgiven it to Francisco the painter. Neither of the two travelling parties went further. Gay Paris, sparkling and sunshiny, had its attractions to the young people in their heyday of

happiness and youth; and Francisco, as it turned out, was in no special haste, having once secured her, to carry his bride to her home.

So that it was not till some time later, when the old Duchessa was dead, and that extraordinary link of mingled attraction and repulsion which subsisted between herself and her forsaken son had come to an end for ever, that Francisco carried home the Lucia, the light of his eyes, who had chosen him in his poverty. But the wanderings of the two in the mean time in that *tête-à-tête* carriage, where the shawl had dropped from Lucy's shoulders, were sufficiently agreeable wanderings; and the only individual who did anything but smile to welcome the young people home to their bright Genzaro villa was Monsignore, who added to his congratulations a secret sigh over that sweet Duchessina—little Duchess, as they called her with caressing tenderness—who, good and pretty as she was, alas, was still a heretic! The sun shone upon dark-blue Nemi — Nemi bluer than the skies; the autumn winds rustled through the famous avenue of elms; Monte Cavo looked down blandly curious, with the cloud feathers in his cap; and even Monsignore, though he sighed over the heretic, did not refuse to join in the universal congratulation which welcomed the Duchessa Lucia to the house where her husband was born.

A VISIT TO THE TRIBES OF THE RYHANLU TURKMANS.

Amongst all the wild nomade tribes that range about the plains and mountains of Syria and Asia Minor, many of whom have been actively engaged in, and mixed up with, the recent massacres of Christians, there is none more remarkable, as differing from the rest of the Bedouin family in every respect, save only as regards pilfering and lying, than the Ryhanlu Turkmans, who spread themselves over mountain and valley and plain in one almost uninterrupted line from the defiles of Latakia and Antioch to the perpetually snow-capped Taurus range, at that point where the stupendous natural gates of Kulek Boghaz afford an impregnable and impassable barrier to all invaders approaching from the vast plains of Asia Minor, embracing in this sweeping curve the cities and towns of Latakia, Antioch, Aleppo, Killis, Marashe, Scanderoon, the plains of Issus, Tarsus, and the city of Adana. They are a people unique in every sense of the word, and utterly at variance with all other nomade tribes, inasmuch as that, although they wander to and fro in the winter and autumn, they have fixed residences and town gardens and fields during the spring and summer, to which they return almost to the day, year after year. Then, again, they fare well, and even luxuriously, living upon dainties which many a Bedouin has never even set eyes upon; and they differ from him in another respect—that whereas the one is noted for unostentatious and simple-hearted hospitality, the Ryhanlu Turkmen are the most inhospitable and selfish people in the East: morose in disposition, and never rendering a service unless well satisfied beforehand that the recompense will tenfold repay them. On the other hand, although they would jump at an opportunity to sack or pillage any town or village so long as they hoped to escape detection or recognition, they would refrain from bloodshed and other detestable crimes, perpetrated by those Arab tribes which took an active part in the tragedies of Damascus and Dur-il-Kamar, not so much, perhaps, from any moral restraint, as from a notion that such participation would eventually prove a deathblow to the commerce they now carry on with the Europeans, native Christians, and Jews, and upon which alone they subsist, and are enabled to live in that ease and luxury which they so dearly love. It must be remembered that when we speak of the "*luxury*" of the Ryhanlu