

deeply, indeed, than yesterday, though the cause appeared to his inexperience to be a far less adequate one. It was evident, he thought, that she had not really pardoned his want of tact, but had yielded to the necessity of giving a reluctant forgiveness, merely because she did not wish to break off her acquaintance with him. On the other hand, she had allowed him to say again and again that he loved her, and she had not forbidden him to call her by her name.

He had always heard that it was hard to understand women, and he began to believe it. There was one hypothesis which he had not considered. It was faintly possible that she loved him already, though he was slow to believe that, his vanity lying in another direction. But even if she did, matters were not clearer. The supposition could not account for her sending him away so abruptly and with such evident intention. If she loved him, she would naturally, he supposed, wish him to stay as long as possible. She had only wished to keep him long enough to tell him how angry she was. He resented that again, for he was in the humour to resent most things.

It was all extremely complicated, and Orsino began to think that he might find the complication less interesting than he had expected a few hours earlier. He had little time for reflection either, since he was to meet both Maria Consuelo and Del Ferice at dinner. He felt as though the coming evening were in a measure to decide his future existence, and it was indeed destined to exercise a great influence upon his life, as any person not disturbed by the anxieties which beset him might easily have foreseen.

Before leaving the house he made an excuse to his mother, saying that he had unexpectedly been asked to dine with friends, and at the appointed hour he rang at Del Ferice's door.

## CHAPTER XII.

Orsino looked about him with some curiosity as he entered Del Ferice's abode. He had never expected to find himself the guest of Donna Tullia and her husband and when he took the robust countess's hand he was inclined to wish that the whole affair might turn out to be a dream. In vain he repeated to himself that he was no longer a boy, but a grown man, of age in the eyes of the law to be responsible for his own actions, and old enough in fact to take what steps he pleased for the accomplishment of his own ends. He found no solace in the reflection, and he could not rid himself of the idea that he had got himself into a very boyish scrape. It would indeed have been very easy to refuse Del Ferice's invitation and to write him a note within the hour explaining vaguely that circumstances beyond his control obliged him to ask another interview for the discussion of business matters. But it was too late now. He was exchanging indifferent remarks with Donna Tullia, while Del Ferice looked on benignantly, and all three waited for Madame d'Aranjuez.

Five minutes had not elapsed before she came, and her appearance momentarily dispelled Orsino's annoyance at his own rashness. He had never before seen her dressed for the evening, and he had not realised how much to her advantage the change from the ordinary costume, or the inevitable "tea-garment," to a dinner gown would be. She was assuredly not over-dressed, for she wore black without colours and her only ornament was a single string of beautiful pearls which Donna Tullia believed to be false, but which Orsino accepted as real. Possibly he knew even more about pearls than the countess, for his mother had many and wore them often, whereas Donna Tullia preferred diamonds and rubies. But his eyes did not linger on the necklace, for



Maria Consuelo's whole presence affected him strangely. There was something light-giving and even dazzling about her which he had not expected, and he understood for the first time that the language of the newspaper paragraphs was not so grossly flattering as he had supposed. In spite of the great artistic defects of feature, which could not long escape an observer of ordinary taste, it was clear that Maria Consuelo must always be a striking and central figure in any social assembly, great or small. There had been moments in Orsino's acquaintance with her, when he had thought her really beautiful; as she now appeared, one of those moments seemed to have become permanent. He thought of what he had dared on the preceding day, his vanity was pleased and his equanimity restored. With a sense of pride which was very far from being delicate and was by no means well founded, he watched her as she walked in to dinner before him, leaning on Del Ferice's arm.

"Beautiful—eh? I see you think so," whispered Donna Tullia in his ear.

The countess treated him at once as an old acquaintance, which put him at his ease, while it annoyed his conscience.

"Very beautiful," he answered, with a grave nod.

"And so mysterious," whispered the countess again, just as they reached the door of the dining-room. "She is very fascinating—take care!"

She tapped his arm familiarly with her fan and laughed, as he left her at her seat.

"What are you two laughing at?" asked Del Ferice, smiling pleasantly as he surveyed the six oysters he found upon his plate, and considered which should be left until the last as the crowning tit-bit. He was fond of good eating, and especially fond of oysters as an introduction to the feast.

"What we were laughing at? How indiscreet you are, Ugo! You always want to find out all my little secrets. Consuelo, my dear, do you like oysters, or do you not?"

That is the question. You do, I know—a little lemon and a very little red pepper—I love red, even to adoring cayenne!"

Orsino glanced at Madame d'Aranjuez, for he was surprised to hear Donna Tullia call her by her first name. He had not known that the two women had reached the first halting place of intimacy.

Maria Consuelo smiled rather vaguely as she took the advice in the shape of lemon juice and pepper. Del Ferice could not interrupt his enjoyment of the oysters by words, and Orsino waited for an opportunity of saying something witty.

"I have lately formed the highest opinion of the ancient Romans," said Donna Tullia, addressing him. "Do you know why?"

Orsino professed his ignorance.

"Ugo tells me that in a recent excavation twenty cartloads of oyster shells were discovered behind one house. Think of that! Twenty cartloads to a single house! What a family must have lived there—indeed the Romans were a great people!"

Orsino thought that Donna Tullia herself might pass for a heroine in future ages, provided that the shells of her victims were deposited together in a safe place. He laughed politely and hoped that the conversation might not turn upon archæology, which was not his strong point.

"I wonder how long it will be before modern Rome is excavated and the foreigner of the future pays a franc to visit the ruins of the modern house of parliament," suggested Maria Consuelo, who had said nothing as yet.

"At the present rate of progress, I should think about two years would be enough," answered Donna Tullia. "But Ugo says we are a great nation. Ask him."

"Ah, my angel, you do not understand those things," said Del Ferice. "How shall I explain? There is no development without decay of the useless parts. The snake casts its old skin before it appears with a new one."



And there can be no business without an occasional crisis. Unbroken fair weather ends in a dead calm. Why do you take such a gloomy view, Madame?"

"One should never talk of things—only people are amusing," said Donna Tullia, before Madame d'Aranjuez could answer. "Whom have you seen to-day, Consuelo? And you, Don Orsino? And you, Ugo? Are we to talk for ever of oysters, and business and snakes? Come, tell me, all of you, what everybody has told you. There must be something new. Of course that poor Carantoni is going to be married again, and the Princess Befana is dying, as usual, and the same dear old people have run away with each other, and all that. Of course. I wish things were not always just going to happen. One would like to hear what is said on the day after the events which never come off. It would be a novelty."

Donna Tullia loved talk and noise, and gossip above all things, and she was not quite at her ease. The news that Orsino was to come to dinner had taken her breath away. Ugo had advised her to be natural, and she was doing her best to follow his advice.

"As for me," he said, "I have been tormented all day, and have spent but one pleasant half hour. I was so fortunate as to find Madame d'Aranjuez at home, but that was enough to indemnify me for many sacrifices."

"I cannot do better than say the same," observed Orsino, though with far less truth. "I believe I have read through a new novel, but I do not remember the title and I have forgotten the story."

"How satisfactory!" exclaimed Maria Consuelo, with a little scorn.

"It is the only way to read novels," answered Orsino, "for it leaves them always new to you, and the same one may be made to last several weeks."

"I have heard it said that one should fear the man of one book," observed Maria Consuelo, looking at him.

"For my part, I am more inclined to fear the woman of many."

"Do you read much, my dear Consuelo?" asked Donna Tullia, laughing.

"Perpetually."

"And is Don Orsino afraid of you?"

"Mortally," answered Orsino. "Madame d'Aranjuez knows everything."

"Is she blue, then?" asked Donna Tullia.

"What shall I say, Madame?" inquired Orsino, turning to Maria Consuelo. "Is it a compliment to compare you to the sky of Italy?"

"For blueness?"

"No—for brightness and serenity."

"Thanks. That is pretty. I accept."

"And have you nothing for me?" asked Donna Tullia, with an engaging smile.

The other two looked at Orsino, wondering what he would say in answer to such a point-blank demand for flattery.

"Juno is still Minerva's ally," he said, falling back upon mythology, though it struck him that Del Ferice would make a poor Jupiter, with his fat white face and dull eyes.

"Very good!" laughed Donna Tullia. "A little classic, but I pressed you hard. You are not easily caught. Talking of clever men," she added with another meaning glance at Orsino, "I met your friend to-day, Consuelo."

"My friend? Who is he?"

"Spicca, of course. Whom did you think I meant? We always laugh at her," she said, turning to Orsino, "because she hates him so. She does not know him, and has never spoken to him. It is his cadaverous face that frightens her. One can understand that—we of old Rome, have been used to him since the deluge. But a stranger is horrified at the first sight of him. Consuelo positively dreads to meet him in the street. She says that he makes her dream of all sorts of horrors."

"It is quite true," said Maria Consuelo, with a slight



movement of her beautiful shoulders. "There are people one would rather not see, merely because they are not good to look at. He is one of them and if I see him coming I turn away."

"I know, I told him so to-day," continued Donna Tullia cheerfully. "We are old friends, but we do not often meet nowadays. Just fancy! It was in that little antiquary's shop in the Monte Brianzo—the first on the left as you go, he has good things—and I saw a bit of embroidery in the window that took my fancy, so I stopped the carriage and went in. Who should be there but Spicca, hat and all, looking like old Father Time. He was bargaining for something—a wretched old bit of brass—bargaining, my dear! For a few sous! One may be poor, but one has no right to be mean—I thought he would have got the miserable antiquary's skin."

"Antiquaries can generally take care of themselves," observed Orsino incredulously.

"Oh, I daresay—but it looks so badly, you know. That is all I mean. When he saw me he stopped wrangling and we talked a little, while I had the embroidery wrapped up. I will show it to you after dinner. It is sixteenth century, Ugo says—a piece of a chasuble—exquisite flowers on claret-coloured satin, a perfect gem, so rare now that everything is imitated. However, that is not the point. It was Spicca. I was forgetting my story. He said the usual things, you know—that he had heard that I was very gay this year, but that it seemed to agree with me, and so on. And I asked him why he never came to see me, and as an inducement I told him of our great beauty here—that is you, Consuelo, so please look delighted instead of frowning—and I told him that she ought to hear him talk, because his face had frightened her so that she ran away when she saw him coming towards her in the street. You see, if one flatters his cleverness he does not mind being called ugly—or at least I thought not, until to-day. But to my consternation he seemed angry, and he asked me almost

savagely if it were true that the Countess d'Aranjuez—that is what he called you, my dear—really tried to avoid him in the street. Then I laughed and said I was only joking, and he began to bargain again for the little brass frame and I went away. When I last heard his voice he was insisting upon seventy-five centimes, and the antiquary was jeering at him and asking a franc and a half. I wonder which got the better of the fight in the end. I will ask him the next time I see him."

Del Ferice supported his wife with a laugh at her story, but it was not very genuine. He had unpleasant recollections of Spicca in earlier days, and his name recalled events which Ugo would willingly have forgotten. Orsino smiled politely, but resented the way in which Donna Tullia spoke of his father's old friend. As for Maria Consuelo, she was a little pale, and looked tired. But the countess was irrepressible, for she feared lest Orsino should go away and think her dull.

"Of course we all really like Spicca," she said. "Every one does."

"I do, for my part," said Orsino gravely. "I have a great respect for him, for his own sake, and he is one of my father's oldest friends."

Maria Consuelo looked at him very suddenly, as though she were surprised by what he said. She did not remember to have heard him mention the melancholy old duellist. She seemed about to say something, but changed her mind.

"Yes," said Ugo, turning the subject, "he is one of the old tribe that is dying out. What types there were in those days, and how those who are alive have changed! Do you remember, Tullia? But of course you cannot, my angel, it was far before your time."

One of Ugo's favourite methods of pleasing his wife was to assert that she was too young to remember people who had indeed played a part as lately as after the death of her first husband. It always soothed her.

"I remember them all," he continued. "Old Mon-



tevarchi, and Frangipani, and poor Casalverde—and a score of others.”

He had been on the point of mentioning old Astrardente, too, but checked himself.

“Then there were the young ones, who are in middle age now,” he went on, “such as Valdarno and the Montevarchi whom you know, as different from their former selves as you can well imagine. Society was different too.”

Del Ferice spoke thoughtfully and slowly, as though wishing that some one would interrupt him or take up the subject, for he felt that his wife’s long story about Spicca and the antiquary had not been a success, and his instinct told him that Spicca had better not be mentioned again, since he was a friend of Orsino’s and since his name seemed to exert a depressing influence on Maria Consuelo. Orsino came to the rescue and began to talk of current social topics in a way which showed that he was not so profoundly prejudiced by traditional ideas as Del Ferice had expected. The momentary chill wore off quickly enough, and when the dinner ended Donna Tullia was sure that it had been a success. They all returned to the drawing-room and then Del Ferice, without any remark, led Orsino away to smoke with him in a distant apartment.

“We can smoke again, when we go back,” he said. “My wife does not mind and Madame d’Aranjuez likes it. But it is an excuse to be alone together for a little while, and besides, my doctor makes me lie down for a quarter of an hour after dinner. You will excuse me?”

Del Ferice extended himself upon a leathern lounge, and Orsino sat down in a deep easy-chair.

“I was so sorry not to be able to come away with you to-day,” said Orsino. “The truth is, Madame d’Aranjuez wanted some information and I was just going to explain that I would stay a little longer, when you asked us both to dinner. You must have thought me very forgetful.”

“Not at all, not at all,” answered Del Ferice. “Indeed, I quite supposed that you were coming with me, when it struck me that this would be a much more pleasant place for talking. I cannot imagine why I had not thought of it before—but I have so many details to think of.”

Not much could be said for the veracity of either of the statements which the two men were pleased to make to each other, but Orsino had the small advantage of being nearer to the letter, if not to the spirit of the truth. Each, however, was satisfied with the other’s tact.

“And so, Don Orsino,” continued Del Ferice after a short pause, “you wish to try a little operation in business. Yes. Very good. You have, as we said yesterday, a sum of money ample for a beginning. You have the necessary courage and intelligence. You need a practical assistant, however, and it is indispensable that the point selected for the first venture should be one promising speedy profit. Is that it?”

“Precisely.”

“Very good, very good. I think I can offer you both the land and the partner, and almost guarantee your success, if you will be guided by me.”

“I have come to you for advice,” said Orsino. “I will follow it gratefully. As for the success of the undertaking, I will assume the responsibility.”

“Yes. That is better. After all, everything is uncertain in such matters, and you would not like to feel that you were under an obligation to me. On the other hand, as I told you, I am selfish and cautious. I would rather not appear in the transaction.”

If any doubt as to Del Ferice’s honesty of purpose crossed Orsino’s mind at that moment, it was fully compensated by the fact that he himself distinctly preferred not to be openly associated with the banker.

“I quite agree with you,” he said.

“Very well. Now for business. Do you know that it is sometimes more profitable to take over a half-



finished building, than to begin a new one? Often, I assure you, for the returns are quicker and you get a great deal at half price. Now, the man whom I recommend to you is a practical architect, and was employed by a certain baker to build a tenement building in one of the new quarters. The baker dies, the house is unfinished, the heirs wish to sell it as it is—there are at least a dozen of them—and meanwhile the work is stopped. My advice is this. Buy this house, go into partnership with the unemployed architect, agreeing to give him a share of the profits, finish the building and sell it as soon as it is habitable. In six months you will get a handsome return."

"That sounds very tempting," answered Orsino, "but it would need more capital than I have."

"Not at all, not at all. It is a mere question of taking over a mortgage and paying stamp duty."

"And how about the difference in ready money, which ought to go to the present owners?"

"I see that you are already beginning to understand the principles of business," said Del Ferice, with an encouraging smile. "But in this case the owners are glad to get rid of the house on any terms by which they lose nothing, for they are in mortal fear of being ruined by it, as they probably will be if they hold on to it."

"Then why should I not lose, if I take it?"

"That is just the difference. The heirs are a number of incapable persons of the lower class, who do not understand these matters. If they attempted to go on they would soon find themselves entangled in the greatest difficulties. They would sink where you will almost certainly swim."

Orsino was silent for a moment. There was something despicable, to his thinking, in profiting by the loss of a wretched baker's heirs.

"It seems to me," he said presently, "that if I succeed in this, I ought to give a share of the profits to the present owners."

Not a muscle of Del Ferice's face moved, but his dull eyes looked curiously at Orsino's young face.

"That sort of thing is not commonly done in business," he said quietly, after a short pause. "As a rule, men who busy themselves with affairs do so in the hope of growing rich, but I can quite understand that where business is a mere pastime, as it is to be in your case, a man of generous instincts may devote the proceeds to charity."

"It looks more like justice than charity to me," observed Orsino.

"Call it what you will, but succeed first and consider the uses of your success afterwards. That is not my affair. The baker's heirs are not especially deserving people, I believe. In fact they are said to have hastened his death in the hope of inheriting his wealth and are disappointed to find that they have got nothing. If you wish to be philanthropic you might wait until you have cleared a large sum and then give it to a school or a hospital."

"That is true," said Orsino. "In the meantime it is important to begin."

"We can begin to-morrow, if you please. You will find me at the bank at mid-day. I will send for the architect and the notary and we can manage everything in forty-eight hours. Before the week is out you can be at work."

"So soon as that?"

"Certainly. Sooner, by hurrying matters a little."

"As soon as possible then. And I will go to the bank at twelve o'clock to-morrow. A thousand thanks for all your good offices, my dear count."

"It is a pleasure, I assure you."

Orsino was so much pleased with Del Ferice's quick and business-like way of arranging matters that he began to look upon him as a model to imitate, so far as executive ability was concerned. It was odd enough that any one of his name should feel anything like admiration for



Ugo, but friendship and hatred are only the opposite points at which the social pendulum pauses before it swings backward, and they who live long may see many oscillations.

The two men went back to the drawing-room where Donna Tullia and Maria Consuelo were discussing the complicated views of the almighty dressmaker. Orsino knew that there was little chance of his speaking a word alone with Madame d'Aranjuez and resigned himself to the effort of helping the general conversation. Fortunately the time to be got over in this way was not long, as all four had engagements in the evening. Maria Consuelo rose at half-past ten, but Orsino determined to wait five minutes longer, or at least to make a show of meaning to do so. But Donna Tullia put out her hand as though she expected him to take his leave at the same time. She was going to a ball and wanted at least an hour in which to screw her magnificence up to the dancing pitch.

The consequence was that Orsino found himself helping Maria Consuelo into the modest hired conveyance which awaited her at the gate. He hoped that she would offer him a seat for a short distance, but he was disappointed.

"May I come to-morrow?" he asked, as he closed the door of the carriage. The night was not cold and the window was down.

"Please tell the coachman to take me to the Via Nazionale," she said quickly.

"What number?"

"Never mind—he knows—I have forgotten. Good-night."

She tried to draw up the window, but Orsino held his hand on it.

"May I come to-morrow?" he asked again.

"No."

"Are you angry with me still?"

"No."

"Then why——"

"Let me shut the window. Take your hand away."

Her voice was very imperative in the dark. Orsino relinquished his hold on the frame, and the pane ran up suddenly into its place with a rattling noise. There was obviously nothing more to be said.

"Via Nazionale. The Signora says you know the house," he called to the driver.

The man looked surprised, shrugged his shoulders after the manner of livery stable coachmen and drove slowly off in the direction indicated. Orsino stood looking after the carriage and a few seconds later he saw that the man drew rein and bent down to the front window as though asking for orders. Orsino thought he heard Maria Consuelo's voice, answering the question, but he could not distinguish what she said, and the brougham drove on at once without taking a new direction.

He was curious to know whither she was going, and the idea of following her suggested itself but he instantly dismissed it, partly because it seemed unworthy and partly, perhaps, because he was on foot, and no cab was passing within hail.

Orsino was very much puzzled. During the dinner she had behaved with her usual cordiality but as soon as they were alone she spoke and acted as she had done in the afternoon. Orsino turned away and walked across the deserted square. He was greatly disturbed, for he felt a sense of humiliation and disappointment quite new to him. Young as he was, he had been accustomed already to a degree of consideration very different from that which Maria Consuelo thought fit to bestow, and it was certainly the first time in his life that a door—even the door of a carriage—had been shut in his face without ceremony. What would have been an unpardonable insult, coming from a man, was at least an indignity when it came from a woman. As Orsino walked along, his wrath rose, and he wondered why he had not been angry at once.



"Very well," he said to himself. "She says she does not want me. I will take her at her word and I will not go to see her any more. We shall see what happens. She will find out that I am not a child, as she was good enough to call me to-day, and that I am not in the habit of having windows put up in my face. I have much more serious business on hand than making love to Madame d'Aranjuez."

The more he reflected upon the situation, the more angry he grew, and when he reached the door of the club he was in a humour to quarrel with everything and everybody. Fortunately, at that early hour, the place was in the sole possession of half a dozen old gentlemen whose conversation diverted his thoughts though it was the very reverse of edifying. Between the stories they told and the considerable number of cigarettes he smoked while listening to them he was almost restored to his normal frame of mind by midnight, when four or five of his usual companions straggled in and proposed baccarat. After his recent successes he could not well refuse to play, so he sat down rather reluctantly with the rest. Oddly enough he did not lose, though he won but little.

"Lucky at play, unlucky in love," laughed one of the men carelessly.

"What do you mean?" asked Orsino, turning sharply upon the speaker.

"Mean? Nothing," answered the latter in great surprise. "What is the matter with you, Orsino? Cannot one quote a common proverb?"

"Oh—if you meant nothing, let us go on," Orsino answered gloomily.

As he took up the cards again, he heard a sigh behind him and turning round saw that Spicca was standing at his shoulder. He was shocked by the melancholy count's face, though he was used to meeting him almost every day. The haggard and cadaverous features, the sunken and careworn eyes, contrasted almost horribly with the freshness and gaiety of Orsino's companions, and the

brilliant light in the room threw the man's deadly pallor into strong relief.

"Will you play, Count?" asked Orsino, making room for him.

"Thanks—no. I never play nowadays," answered Spicca quietly.

He turned and left the room. With all his apparent weakness his step was not unsteady, though it was slower than in the old days.

"He sighed in that way because we did not quarrel," said the man whose quoted proverb had annoyed Orsino.

"I am ready and anxious to quarrel with everybody to-night," answered Orsino. "Let us play baccarat—that is much better."

Spicca left the club alone and walked slowly homewards to his small lodging in the Via della Croce. A few dying embers smouldered in the little fireplace which warmed his sitting-room. He stirred them slowly, took a stick of wood from the wicker basket, hesitated a moment, and then put it back again instead of burning it. The night was not cold and wood was very dear. He sat down under the light of the old lamp which stood upon the mantelpiece, and drew a long breath. But presently, putting his hand into the pocket of his overcoat in search of his cigarette case, he drew out something else which he had almost forgotten, a small something wrapped in coarse paper. He undid it and looked at the little frame of chiselled brass which Donna Tullia had found him buying in the afternoon, turning it over and over, absently, as though thinking of something else.

Then he fumbled in his pockets again and found a photograph which he had also bought in the course of the day—the photograph of Gouache's latest portrait, obtained in a contraband fashion and with some difficulty from the photographer.

Without hesitation Spicca took a pocket-knife and began to cut the head out, with that extraordinary neat-



ness and precision which characterised him when he used any sharp instrument. The head just fitted the frame. He fastened it in with drops of sealing-wax and carefully burned the rest of the picture in the embers.

The face of Maria Consuelo smiled at him in the lamp-light, as he turned it in different ways so as to find the best aspect of it. Then he hung it on a nail above the mantelpiece just under a pair of crossed foils.

"That man Gouache is a very clever fellow," he said aloud. "Between them, he and nature have made a good likeness."

He sat down again and it was a long time before he made up his mind to take away the lamp and go to bed.

### CHAPTER XIII.

Del Ferice kept his word and arranged matters for Orsino with a speed and skill which excited the latter's admiration. The affair was not indeed very complicated though it involved a deed of sale, the transfer of a mortgage and a deed of partnership between Orsino Saracinesca and Andrea Contini, architect, under the style "Andrea Contini and Company," besides a contract between this firm of the one party and the bank in which Del Ferice was a director, of the other, the partners agreeing to continue the building of the half-finished house, and the bank binding itself to advance small sums up to a certain amount for current expenses of material and workmen's wages. Orsino signed everything required of him after reading the documents, and Andrea Contini followed his example.

The architect was a tall man with bright brown eyes, a dark and somewhat ragged beard, close cropped hair, a prominent, bony forehead and large, coarsely shaped, thin ears oddly set upon his head. He habitually wore a

dark overcoat, of which the collar was generally turned up on one side and not on the other. Judging from the appearance of his strong shoes he had always been walking a long distance over bad roads, and when it had rained within the week his trousers were generally bespattered with mud to a considerable height above the heel. He habitually carried an extinguished cigar between his teeth of which he chewed the thin black end uneasily. Orsino fancied that he might be about eight and twenty years old, and was not altogether displeased with his appearance. He was not at all like the majority of his kind, who, in Rome at least, usually affect a scrupulous dandyism of attire and an uncommon refinement of manner. Whatever Contini's faults might prove to be, Orsino did not believe that they would turn out to be those of idleness or vanity. How far he was right in his judgment will appear before long, but he conceived his partner to be gifted, frank, enthusiastic and careless of outward forms.

As for the architect himself, he surveyed Orsino with a sort of sympathetic curiosity which the latter would have thought unpleasantly familiar if he had understood it. Contini had never spoken before with any more exalted personage than Del Ferice, and he studied the young aristocrat as though he were a being from another world. He hesitated some time as to the proper mode of addressing him and at last decided to call him "Signor Principe." Orsino seemed quite satisfied with this, and the architect was inwardly pleased when the young man said "Signor Contini" instead of Contini alone. It was quite clear that Del Ferice had already acquainted him with all the details of the situation, for he seemed to understand all the documents at a glance, picking out and examining the important clauses with unflinching acuteness, and pointing with his finger to the place where Orsino was to sign his name.

At the end of the interview Orsino shook hands with Del Ferice and thanked him warmly for his kindness,