without so much as hurting him. He did not believe that, even in that case, the old man would have insisted upon the satisfaction of arms, nor would he have been afraid to meet him if a duel had been required. He knew that what withheld him from an act of violence was neither fear nor respect for his adversary's weakness and age. Yet he was quite unable to define the influence which at last broke down his resolution. It was in all probability only the resultant of the argument Spicca had brought to bear and which Maria Consuelo had herself used in the first instance, and of Spicca's calm, undaunted personality.

The crisis did not last long. The two men faced each other for ten seconds and then Orsino turned away with an impatient movement of the shoulders.

"Very well," he said. "I will not go with her."

"It is best so," answered Spicca, leaving the door and returning to his seat.

"I suppose that she will let you know where she is, will she not?" asked Orsino.

"Yes. She will write to me."

"Good-night, then."

"Good-night."

Without shaking hands, and almost without a glance at the old man, Orsino left the room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Orsino walked slowly homeward, trying to collect his thoughts and to reach some distinct determination with regard to the future. He was oppressed by the sense of failure and disappointment and felt inclined to despise himself for his weakness in yielding so easily. To all intents and purposes he had lost Maria Consuelo, and if he had not lost her through his own fault, he had at least

tamely abandoned what had seemed like a last chance of winning her back. As he thought of all that had happened he tried to fix some point in the past, at which he might have acted differently, and from which another act of consequence might have begun. But that was not easy. Events had followed each other with a certain inevitable logic, which only looked unreasonable because he suspected the existence of facts beyond his certain knowledge. His great mistake had been in going to Spicca, but nothing could have been more natural, under the circumstances, than his appeal to Maria Consuelo's father, nothing more unexpected than the latter's determined refusal to help him. That there was weight in the argument used by both Spicca and Maria Consuelo herself, he could not deny; but he failed to see why the marriage was so utterly impossible as they both declared it to be. There must be much more behind the visible circumstances than he could guess.

He tried to comfort himself with the assurance that he could leave Rome on the following day, and that Spicca would not refuse to give him Maria Consuelo's address in Paris. But the consolation he derived from the idea was small. He found himself wondering at the recklessness shown by the woman he loved in escaping from him. His practical Italian mind could hardly understand how she could have changed all her plans in a moment, abandoning her half-furnished apartment without a word of notice even to the workmen, throwing over her intention of spending the winter in Rome as though she had not already spent many thousands in preparing her dwelling, and going away, probably, without as much as leaving a representative to wind up her accounts. It may seem strange that a man as much in love as Orsino was should think of such details at such a moment. Perhaps he looked upon them rather as proofs that she meant to come back after all; in any case he thought of them seriously, and even calculated roughly the sum she would be sacrificing if she stayed away.

Beyond all he felt the dismal loneliness which a man can only feel when he is suddenly and effectually parted from the woman he dearly loves, and which is not like any other sensation of which the human heart is capable.

More than once, up to the last possible moment, he was tempted to drive to the station and leave with Maria Consuelo after all, but he would not break the promise he had given Spicca, no matter how weak he had been in giving it.

On reaching his home he was informed, to his great surprise, that San Giacinto was waiting to see him. He could not remember that his cousin had ever before honoured him with a visit and he wondered what could have brought him now and induced him to wait, just at the hour when most people were at dinner.

The giant was reading the evening paper, with the help of a particularly strong cigar.

"I am glad you have come home," he said, rising and taking the young man's outstretched hand. "I should have waited until you did."

"Has anything happened?" asked Orsino nervously. It struck him that San Giacinto might be the bearer of some bad news about his people, and the grave expression on the strongly marked face helped the idea.

"A great deal is happening. The crash has begun. You must get out of your business in less than three days if you can."

Orsino drew a breath of relief at first, and then grew grave in his turn, realising that unless matters were very serious such a man as San Giacinto would not put himself to the inconvenience of coming. San Giacinto was little given to offering advice unasked, still less to interfering in the affairs of others.

"I understand," said Orsino. "You think that everything is going to pieces. I see."

The big man looked at his young cousin with something like pity.

"If I only suspected, or thought—as you put it—that there was to be a collapse of business, I should not have taken the trouble to warn you. The crash has actually begun. If you can save yourself, do so at once."

"I think I can," answered the young man, bravely. But he did not at all see how his salvation was to be accomplished. "Can you tell me a little more definitely what is the matter? Have there been any more failures to-day?"

"My brother-in-law Montevarchi is on the point of stopping payment," said San Giacinto calmly.

"Montevarchi!"

Orsino did not conceal his astonishment.

"Yes. Do not speak of it. And he is in precisely the same position, so far as I can judge of your affairs, as you yourself, though of course he has dealt with sums ten times as great. He will make enormous sacrifices and will pay, I suppose, after all. But he will be quite ruined. He also has worked with Del Ferice's bank."

"And the bank refuses to discount any more of his paper?"

"Precisely. Since this afternoon."

"Then it will refuse to discount mine to-morrow."

"Have you acceptances due to-morrow?"

"Yes—not much, but enough to make the trouble. It will be Saturday, too, and we must have money for the workmen."

"Have you not even enough in reserve for that?"

"Perhaps. I cannot tell. Besides, if the bank refuses to renew I cannot draw a cheque."

"I am sorry for you. If I had known yesterday how near the end was, I would have warned you."

"Thanks. I am grateful as it is. Can you give me any advice?"

Orsino had a vague idea that his rich cousin would generously propose to help him out of his difficulties. He was not quite sure whether he could bring himself to accept such assistance, but he more than half expected that

it would be offered. In this, however, he was completely mistaken. San Giacinto had not the smallest intention of offering anything more substantial than his opinion. Considering that his wife's brother's liabilities amounted to something like five and twenty millions, this was not surprising. The giant bit his cigar and folded his long arms over his enormous chest, leaning back in the easy chair which creaked under his weight.

"You have tried yourself in business by this time, Orsino," he said, "and you know as well as I what there is to be done. You have three modes of action open to you. You can fail. It is a simple affair enough. The bank will take your buildings for what they will be worth a few months hence, on the day of liquidation. There will be a big deficit, which your father will pay for you and deduct from your share of the division at his death. That is one plan, and seems to me the best. It is perfectly honourable, and you lose by it. Secondly, you can go to your father to-morrow and ask him to lend you money to meet your acceptances and to continue the work until the houses are finished and can be sold. They will ultimately go for a quarter of their value, if you can sell them at all within the year, and you will be in your father's debt, exactly as in the other case. You would avoid the publicity of a failure, but it would cost you more, because the houses will not be worth much more when they are finished than they are now."

"And the third plan—what is it?" inquired Orsino.

"The third way is this. You can go to Del Ferice, and if you are a diplomatist you may persuade him that it is in his interest not to let you fail. I do not think you will succeed, but you can try. If he agrees it will be because he counts on your father to pay in the end, but it is questionable whether Del Ferice's bank can afford to let out any more cash at the present moment. Money is going to be very tight, as they say."

Orsino smoked in silence, pondering over the situation. San Giacinto rose.

"You are warned, at all events," he said. "You will find a great change for the worse in the general aspect of things to-morrow."

"I am much obliged for the warning," answered Orsino. "I suppose I can always find you if I need your advice—and you will advise me?"

"You are welcome to my advice, such as it is, my dear boy. But as for me, I am going towards Naples to-night on business, and I may not be back again for a day or two. If you get into serious trouble before I am here again, you should go to your father at once. He knows nothing of business, and has been sensible enough to keep out of it. The consequence is that he is as rich as ever, and he would sacrifice a great deal rather than see your name dragged into the publicity of a failure. Good-night, and good luck to you."

Thereupon the Titan shook Orsino's hand in his mighty grip and went away. As a matter of fact he was going down to look over one of Montevarchi's biggest estates with a view to buying it in the coming cataclysm, but it would not have been like him to communicate the smallest of his intentions to Orsino, or to any one, not excepting his wife and his lawyer.

Orsino was left to his own devices and meditations. A servant came in and inquired whether he wished to dine at home, and he ordered strong coffee by way of a meal. He was at the age when a man expects to find a way out of his difficulties in an artificial excitement of the nerves.

Indeed, he had enough to disturb him, for it seemed as though all possible misfortunes had fallen upon him at once. He had suffered on the same day the greatest shock to his heart, and the greatest blow to his vanity which he could conceive possible. Maria Consuelo was gone and the failure of his business was apparently inevitable. When he tried to review the three plans which San Giacinto had suggested, he found himself suddenly thinking of the woman he loved and making schemes for following her; but so soon as he had transported himself in imagination

to her side and was beginning to hope that he might win her back, he was torn away and plunged again into the whirlpool of business at home, struggling with unheard-of difficulties and sinking deeper at every stroke.

A hundred times he rose from his chair and paced the floor impatiently, and a hundred times he threw himself down again, overcome by the hopelessness of the situation. Occasionally he found a little comfort in the reflexion that the night could not last for ever. When the day came he would be driven to act, in one way or another, and he would be obliged to consult his partner, Contini. Then at last his mind would be able to follow one connected train of thought for a time, and he would get rest of some kind.

Little by little, however, and long before the day dawned, the dominating influence asserted itself above the secondary one and he was thinking only of Maria Consuelo. Throughout all that night she was travelling, as she would perhaps travel throughout all the next day and the second night succeeding that. For she was strong and having once determined upon the journey would very probably go to the end of it without stopping to rest. He wondered whether she too were waking through all those long hours, thinking of what she had left behind, or whether she had closed her eyes and found the peace of sleep for which he longed in vain. He thought of her face, softly lighted by the dim lamp of the railway carriage, and fancied he could actually see it with the delicate shadows, the subdued richness of colour, the settled look of sadness. When the picture grew dim, he recalled it by a strong effort, though he knew that each time it rose before his eyes he must feel the same sharp thrust of pain, followed by the same dull wave of hopeless misery which had ebbed and flowed again so many times since he had parted from her.

At last he roused himself, looked about him as though he were in a strange place, lighted a candle and betook himself to his own quarters. It was very late, and he

was more tired than he knew, for in spite of all his troubles he fell asleep and did not awake till the sun was streaming into the room.

Some one knocked at the door, and a servant announced that Signor Contini was waiting to see Don Orsino. The man's face expressed a sort of servile surprise when he saw that Orsino had not undressed for the night and had been sleeping on the divan. He began to busy himself with the toilet things as though expecting Orsino to take some thought for his appearance. But the latter was anxious to see Contini at once, and sent for him.

The architect was evidently very much disturbed. He was as pale as though he had just recovered from a long illness and he seemed to have grown suddenly emaciated during the night. He spoke in a low, excited tone.

In substance he told Orsino what San Giacinto had said on the previous evening. Things looked very black indeed, and Del Ferice's bank had refused to discount any more of Prince Montevarchi's paper.

"And we must have money to-day," Contini concluded.

When he had finished speaking his excitement disappeared and he relapsed into the utmost dejection. Orsino remained silent for some time and then lit a cigarette.

"You need not be so down-hearted, Contini," he said at last. "I shall not have any difficulty in getting money—you know that. What I feel most is the moral failure."

"What is the moral failure to me?" asked Contini gloomily. "It is all very well to talk of getting money. The bank will shut its tills like a steel trap and to-day is Saturday, and there are the workmen and others to be paid, and several bills due into the bargain. Of course your family can give you millions—in time. But we need cash to-day. That is the trouble."

"I suppose the state telegraph is not destroyed because Prince Montevarchi cannot meet his acceptances," observed Orsino. "And I imagine that our steward here in the house has enough cash for our needs, and will not hesitate to hand it to me if he receives a telegram from

my father ordering him to do so. Whether he has enough to take up the bills or not, I do not know; but as to-day is Saturday we have all day to-morrow to make arrangements. I could even go out to Saracinesca and be back on Monday morning when the bank opens."

"You seem to take a hopeful view."

"I have not the least hope of saving the business. But the question of ready money does not of itself disturb me."

This was undoubtedly true, but it was also undeniable that Orsino now looked upon the prospect of failure with more equanimity than on the previous evening. On the other hand he felt even more keenly than before all the pain of his sudden separation from Maria Consuelo. When a man is assailed by several misfortunes at once, twenty-four hours are generally enough to sift the small from the great and to show him plainly which is the greatest of all.

"What shall we do this morning?" inquired Contini.

"You ask the question as though you were going to propose a picnic," answered Orsino. "I do not see why this morning need be so different from other mornings."

"We must stop the works instantly——"

"Why? At all events we will change nothing until we find out the real state of business. The first thing to be done is to go to the bank as usual on Saturdays. We shall then know exactly what to do."

Contini shook his head gloomily and went away to wait in another room while Orsino dressed. An hour later they were at the bank. Contini grew paler than ever. The head clerk would of course inform them that no more bills would be discounted, and that they must meet those already out when they fell due. He would also tell them that the credit balance of their account current would not be at their disposal until their acceptances were met. Orsino would probably at last believe that the situation was serious, though he now looked so supremely and scornfully indifferent to events.

They waited some time. Several men were engaged in earnest conversation, and their faces told plainly enough that they were in trouble. The head clerk was standing with them, and made a sign to Orsino, signifying that they would soon go. Orsino watched him. From time to time he shook his head and made gestures which indicated his utter inability to do anything for them. Contini's courage sank lower and lower.

"I will ask for Del Ferice at once," said Orsino.

He accordingly sought out one of the men who wore the bank's livery and told him to take his card to the count.

"The Signor Commendatore is not coming this morning," answered the man mysteriously.

Orsino went back to the head clerk, interrupting his conversation with the others. He inquired if it were true that Del Ferice were not coming.

"It is not probable," answered the clerk with a grave face. "They say that the Signora Contessa is not likely to live through the day."

"Is Donna Tullia ill?" asked Orsino in considerable astonishment.

"She returned from Naples yesterday morning, and was taken ill in the afternoon—it is said to be apoplexy," he added in a low voice. "If you will have patience Signor Principe, I will be at your disposal in five minutes."

Orsino was obliged to be satisfied and sat down again by Contini. He told him the news of Del Ferice's wife.

"That will make matters worse," said Contini.

"It will not improve them," answered Orsino indifferently. "Considering the state of affairs I would like to see Del Ferice before speaking with any of the others."

"Those men are all involved with Prince Montevarchi," observed Contini, watching the group of which the head clerk was the central figure. "You can see by their faces what they think of the business. The short, grey haired man is the steward—the big man is the archi-

tect. The others are contractors. They say it is not less than thirty millions."

Orsino said nothing. He was thinking of Maria Consuelo and wishing that he could get away from Rome that night, while admitting that there was no possibility of such a thing. Meanwhile the head clerk's gestures to his interlocutors expressed more and more helplessness. At last they went out in a body.

"And now I am at your service, Signor Principe," said the grave man of business coming up to Orsino and Contini. "The usual accommodation, I suppose? We will just look over the bills and make out the new ones. It will not take ten minutes. The usual cash, I suppose, Signor Principe? Yes, to-day is Saturday and you have your men to pay. Quite as usual, quite as usual. Will you come into my office?"

Orsino looked at Contini, and Contini looked at Orsino, grasping the back of a chair to steady himself.

"Then there is no difficulty about discounting?" stammered Contini, turning his face, now suddenly flushed, towards the clerk.

"None whatever," answered the latter with an air of real or affected surprise. "I have received the usual instructions to let Andrea Contini and Company have all the money they need."

He turned and led the way to his private office. Contini walked unsteadily. Orsino showed no astonishment, but his black eyes grew a little brighter than usual as he anticipated his next interview with San Giacinto. He readily attributed his good fortune to the supposed well-known prosperity of the firm, and he rose in his own estimation. He quite forgot that Contini, who had now lost his head, had but yesterday clearly foreseen the future when he had said that Del Ferice would not let the two partners fail until they had fitted the last door and the last window in the last of their houses. The conclusion had struck him as just at the time. Contini was the first to recall it.

"It will turn out, as I said," he began, when they were driving to their office in a cab after leaving the bank. "He will let us live until we are worth eating."

"We will arrange matters on a firmer basis before that," answered Orsino confidently. "Poor old Donna Tullia! Who would have thought that she could die! I will stop and ask for news as we pass."

He stopped the cab before the gilded gate of the detached house. Glancing up, he saw that the shutters were closed. The porter came to the bars but did not show any intention of opening.

"The Signora Contessa is dead," he said solemnly, in answer to Orsino's inquiry.

"This morning?"

"Two hours ago."

Orsino's face grew grave as he left his card of condolence and turned away. He could hardly have named a person more indifferent to him than poor Donna Tullia, but he could not help feeling an odd regret at the thought that she was gone at last with all her noisy vanity, her restless meddlesomeness and her perpetual chatter. She had not been old either, though he called her so, and there had seemed to be still a superabundance of life in her. There had been yet many years of rattling, useless, social life before her. To-morrow she would have taken her last drive through Rome—out through the gate of Saint Lawrence to the Campo Varano, there to wait many years perhaps for the pale and half sickly Ugo, of whom every one had said for years that he could not live through another twelve month with the disease of the heart which threatened him. Of late, people had even begun to joke about Donna Tullia's third husband. Poor Donna Tullia!

Orsino went to his office with Contini and forced himself through the usual round of work. Occasionally he was assailed by a mad desire to leave Rome at once, but he opposed it and would not yield. Though his affairs had gone well beyond his expectation the present crisis

made it impossible to abandon his business, unless he could get rid of it altogether. And this he seriously contemplated. He knew however, or thought he knew, that Contini would be ruined without him. His own name was the one which gave the paper its value and decided Del Ferice to continue the advances of money. The time was past when Contini would gladly have accepted his partner's share of the undertaking, and would even have tried to raise funds to purchase it. To retire now would be possible only if he could provide for the final liquidation of the whole, and this he could only do by applying to his father or mother, in other words by acknowledging himself completely beaten in his struggle for independence.

The day ended at last and was succeeded by the idleness of Sunday. A sort of listless indifference came over Orsino, the reaction, no doubt, after all the excitement through which he had passed. It seemed to him that Maria Consuelo had never loved him, and that it was better after all that she should be gone. He longed for the old days, indeed, but as she now appeared to him in his meditations he did not wish her back. He had no desire to renew the uncertain struggle for a love which she denied in the end; and this mood showed, no doubt, that his own passion was less violent than he had himself believed. When a man loves with his whole nature, undividedly, he is not apt to submit to separations without making a strong effort to reunite himself, by force, persuasion or stratagem, with the woman who is trying to escape from him. Orsino was conscious of having at first felt the inclination to make such an attempt even more strongly than he had shown it, but he was consciousalso that the interval of two days had been enough to reduce the wish to follow Maria Consuelo in such a way that he could hardly understand having ever entertained it.

Unsatisfied passion wears itself out very soon. The higher part of love may and often does survive in such

cases, and the passionate impulses may surge up after long quiescence as fierce and dangerous as ever. But it is rarely indeed that two unsatisfied lovers who have parted by the will of the one or of both can meet again without the consciousness that the experimental separation has chilled feelings once familiar and destroyed illusions once more than dear. In older times, perhaps, men and women loved differently. There was more solitude in those days than now, for what is called society was not invented, and people generally were more inclined to sadness from living much alone. Melancholy is a great strengthener of faithfulness in love. Moreover at that time the modern fight for life had not begun, men as a rule had few interests besides love and war, and women no interests at all beyond love. We moderns should go mad if we were suddenly forced to lead the lives led by knights and ladies in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The monotonous round of such an existence in time of peace would make idiots of us, the horrors of that old warfare would make many of us maniacs. But it is possible that youths and maidens would love more faithfully and wait longer for each other than they will or can to-day. It is questionable whether Bayard would have understood a single page of a modern love story, Tancred would certainly not have done so; but Caesar would have comprehended our lives and our interests without effort, and Catullus could have described us as we are, for one great civilization is very like another where the same races are concerned.

In the days which followed Maria Consuelo's departure, Orsino came to a state of indifference which surprised himself. He remembered that when she had gone away in the spring he had scarcely missed her, and that he had not thought his own coldness strange, since he was sure that he had not loved her then. But that he had loved her now, during her last stay in Rome, he was sure, and he would have despised himself if he had not been able to believe that he loved her still. Yet, if he was

not glad that she had quitted him, he was at least strangely satisfied at being left alone, and the old fancy for analysis made him try to understand himself. The attempt was fruitless, of course, but it occupied his thoughts.

He met Spicca in the street, and avoided him. He imagined that the old man must despise him for not having resisted and followed Maria Consuelo after all. The hypothesis was absurd and the conclusion vain, but he could not escape the idea, and it annoyed him. He was probably ashamed of not having acted recklessly, as a man should who is dominated by a master passion, and yet he was inwardly glad that he had not been allowed to yield to the first impulse.

The days succeeded each other and a week passed away, bringing Saturday again and the necessity for a visit to the bank. Business had been in a very bad state since it had been known that Montevarchi was ruined. So far, he had not stopped payment and although the bank refused discount he had managed to find money with which to meet his engagements. Probably, as San Giacinto had foretold, he would pay everything and remain a very poor man indeed. But, although many persons knew this, confidence was not restored. Del Ferice declared that he believed Montevarchi solvent, as he believed every one with whom his bank dealt to be solvent to the uttermost centime, but that he could lend no more money to any one on any condition whatsoever, because neither he nor the bank had any to lend. Every one, he said, had behaved honestly, and he proposed to eclipse the honesty of every one by the frank acknowledgment of his own lack of cash. He was distressed, he said, overcome by the sufferings of his friends and clients, ready to sell his house, his jewelry and his very boots, in the Roman phrase, to accommodate every one; but he was conscious that the demand far exceeded any supply which he could furnish, no matter at what personal sacrifice, and as it was therefore impossible to help

everybody, it would be unjust to help a few where all were equally deserving.

In the meanwhile he proved the will of his deceased wife, leaving him about four and a half millions of francs unconditionally, and half a million more to be devoted to some public charity at Ugo's discretion, for the repose of Donna Tullia's unquiet spirit. It is needless to say that the sorrowing husband determined to spend the legacy magnificently in the improvement of the town represented by him in parliament. A part of the improvement would consist in a statue of Del Ferice himself—representing him, perhaps, as he had escaped from Rome, in the garb of a Capuchin friar, but with the addition of an army revolver to show that he had fought for Italian unity, though when or where no man could tell. But it is worth noting that while he protested his total inability to discount any one's bills, Andrea Contini and Company regularly renewed their acceptances when due and signed new ones for any amount of cash they required. The accommodation was accompanied with a request that it should not be mentioned. Orsino took the money indifferently enough, conscious that he had three fortunes at his back in case of trouble, but Contini grew more nervous as time went on and the sums on paper increased in magnitude, while the chances of disposing of the buildings seemed reduced to nothing in the stagnation which had already set in.

CHAPTER XXV.

At this time Count Spicca received a letter from Maria Consuelo, written from Nice and bearing a postmark more recent than the date which headed the page, a fact which proved that the writer had either taken an unusually long time in the composition or had withheld the missive several days before finally despatching it.