

to help you and you are incensed because I am powerless, and furious because I object to your leaving Rome in the same train with her, against her will. You are more furious still to-day because you have adopted her belief that I am a monster of iniquity. Observe—that, apart from hindering you from a great piece of folly the other day, I have never interfered. I do not interfere now. As I said then, follow her if you please, persuade her to marry you if you can, quarrel with all your family if you like. It is nothing to me. Publish the banns of your marriage on the doors of the Capitol and declare to the whole world that Madame d'Aranjuez, the future Princess Saracinesca, is the daughter of Count Spicca and Lucrezia Ferris, his lawful wife. There will be a little talk, but it will not hurt me. People have kept their marriages a secret for a whole lifetime before now. I do not care what you do, nor what the whole tribe of the Saracinesca may do, provided that none of you do harm to Maria Consuelo, nor bring useless suffering upon her. If any of you do that, I will kill you. That at least is a threat, if you like. Good-night."

Thereupon Spicca rose suddenly from his seat, leaving his dinner unfinished, and went out.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

Orsino did not leave Rome after all. He was not in reality prevented from doing so by the necessity of attending to his business, for he might assuredly have absented himself for a week or two at almost any time before the new year, without incurring any especial danger. From time to time, at ever increasing intervals, he felt strongly impelled to rejoin Maria Consuelo in Paris where she had ultimately determined to spend the autumn and winter, but the impulse always lacked

just the measure of strength which would have made it a resolution. When he thought of his many hesitations he did not understand himself and he fell in his own estimation, so that he became by degrees more silent and melancholy of disposition than had originally been natural with him.

He had much time for reflection and he constantly brooded over the situation in which he found himself. The question seemed to be, whether he loved Maria Consuelo or not, since he was able to display such apparent indifference to her absence. In reality he also doubted whether he was loved by her, and the one uncertainty was fully as great as the other.

He went over all that had passed. The position had never been an easy one, and the letter which Maria Consuelo had written to him after her departure had not made it easier. It had contained the revelations concerning her birth, together with many references to Spicca's continued cruelty, plentifully supported by statements of facts. She had then distinctly told Orsino that she would never marry him, under any circumstances whatever, declaring that if he followed her she would not even see him. She would not ruin his life and plunge him into a life long quarrel with his family, she said, and she added that she would certainly not expose herself to such treatment as she would undoubtedly receive at the hands of the Saracinesca if she married Orsino without his parents' consent.

A man does not easily believe that he is deprived of what he most desires exclusively for his own good and welfare, and the last sentence quoted wounded Orsino deeply. He believed himself ready to incur the displeasure of all his people for Maria Consuelo's sake, and he said in his heart that if she loved him she should be ready to bear as much as he. The language in which she expressed herself, too, was cold and almost incisive.

Unlike Spicca Orsino answered this letter, writing in an argumentative strain, bringing the best reasons he



could find to bear against those she alleged, and at last reproaching her with not being willing to suffer for his sake a tenth part of what he would endure for her. But he announced his intention of joining her before long, and expressed the certainty that she would receive him.

To this Maria Consuelo made no reply for some time. When she wrote at last, it was to say that she had carefully considered her decision and saw no good cause for changing it. To Orsino her tone seemed colder and more distant than ever. The fact that the pages were blotted here and there and that the handwriting was unsteady, was probably to be referred to her carelessness. He brooded over his misfortune, thought more than once of making a desperate effort to win back her love, and remained in Rome. After a long interval he wrote to her again. This time he produced an epistle which, under the circumstances, might have seemed almost ridiculous. It was full of indifferent gossip about society, it contained a few sarcastic remarks about his own approaching failure, with some rather youthfully cynical observations on the instability of things in general and the hollowness of all aspirations whatsoever.

He received no answer, and duly repented the flippant tone he had taken. He would have been greatly surprised could he have learned that this last letter was destined to produce a greater effect upon his life than all he had written before it.

In the meanwhile his father, who had heard of the increasing troubles in the world of business, wrote him in a constant strain of warning, to which he paid little attention. His mother's letters, too, betrayed her anxiety, but expressed what his father's did not, to wit the most boundless confidence in his power to extricate himself honourably from all difficulties, together with the assurance that if worst came to worst she was always ready to help him.

Suddenly and without warning old Saracinesca returned from his wanderings. He had taken the trouble to keep

the family informed of his movements by his secretary during two or three months and had then temporarily allowed them to lose sight of him, thereby causing them considerable anxiety, though an occasional paragraph in a newspaper reassured them from time to time. Then, on a certain afternoon in November, he appeared, alone and in a cab, as though he had been out for a stroll.

"Well, my boy, are you ruined yet?" he inquired, entering Orsino's room without ceremony.

The young man started from his seat and took the old gentleman's rough hand, with an exclamation of surprise.

"Yes—you may well look at me," laughed the Prince. "I have grown ten years younger. And you?" He pushed his grandson into the light and scrutinised his face fiercely. "And you are ten years older," he concluded, in a discontented tone.

"I did not know it," answered Orsino with an attempt at a laugh.

"You have been at some mischief. I know it. I can see it."

He dropped the young fellow's arm, shook his head and began to move about the room. Then he came back all at once and looked up into Orsino's face from beneath his bushy eyebrows.

"Out with it, I mean to know!" he said, roughly but not unkindly. "Have you lost money? Are you ill? Are you in love?"

Orsino would certainly have resented the first and the last questions, if not all three, had they been put to him by his father. There was something in the old Prince's nature, something warmer and more human, which appealed to his own. Sant' Ilario was, and always had been, outwardly cold, somewhat measured in his speech, undemonstrative, a man not easily moved to much expression or to real sympathy except by love, but capable, under that influence, of going to great lengths. And Orsino, though in some respects resembling his mother rather than his father, was not unlike the latter, with a



larger measure of ambition and less real pride. It was probably the latter characteristic which made him feel the need of sympathy in a way his father had never felt it and could never understand it, and he was thereby drawn more closely to his mother and to his grandfather than to Sant' Ilario.

Old Saracinesca evidently meant to be answered, as he stood there gazing into Orsino's eyes.

"A great deal has happened since you went away," said Orsino, half wishing that he could tell everything. "In the first place, business is in a very bad state, and I am anxious."

"Dirty work, business," grumbled Saracinesca. "I always told you so. Then you have lost money, you young idiot! I thought so. Did you think you were any better than Montevarchi? I hope you have kept your name out of the market, at all events. What in the name of heaven made you put your hand to such filth! Come—how much do you want? We will whitewash you and you shall start to-morrow and go round the world."

"But I am not in actual need of money at all——"

"Then what the devil are you in need of?"

"An improvement in business, and the assurance that I shall not ultimately be bankrupt."

"If money is not an assurance that you will not be bankrupt, I would like to learn what is. All this is nonsense. Tell me the truth, my boy—you are in love. That is the trouble."

Orsino shrugged his shoulders.

"I have been in love some time," he answered.

"Young? Old? Marriageable? Married? Out with it, I say!"

"I would rather talk about business. I think it is all over now."

"Just like your father—always full of secrets! As if I did not know all about it. You are in love with that Madame d'Aranjuez."

Orsino turned a little pale.

"Please do not call her 'that' Madame d'Aranjuez," he said, gravely.

"Eh? What? Are you so sensitive about her?"

"Yes."

"You are? Very well—I like that. What about her?"

"What a question!"

"I mean—is she indifferent, cold, in love with some one else?"

"Not that I am aware. She has refused to marry me and has left Rome, that is all."

"Refused to marry you!" cried old Saracinesca in boundless astonishment. "My dear boy, you must be out of your mind! The thing is impossible. You are the best match in Rome. Madame d'Aranjuez refuse you—absolutely incredible, not to be believed for a moment. You are dreaming. A widow—without much fortune—the relict of some curious adventurer—a woman looking for a fortune, a woman——"

"Stop!" cried Orsino, savagely.

"Oh yes—I forgot. You are sensitive. Well, well, I meant nothing against her, except that she must be insane if what you tell me is true. But I am glad of it, my boy, very glad. She is no match for you, Orsino. I confess, I wish you would marry at once. I would like to see my great grandchildren—but not Madame d'Aranjuez. A widow, too."

"My father married a widow."

"When you find a widow like your mother, and ten years younger than yourself, marry her if you can. But not Madame d'Aranjuez—older than you by several years."

"A few years."

"Is that all? It is too much, though. And who is Madame d'Aranjuez? Everybody was asking the question last winter. I suppose she had a name before she married, and since you have been trying to make her



your wife, you must know all about her. Who was she?"

Orsino hesitated.

"You see!" cried the old Prince. "It is not all right. There is a secret—there is something wrong about her family, or about her entrance into the world. She knows perfectly well that we would never receive her and has concealed it all from you——"

"She has not concealed it. She has told me the exact truth. But I shall not repeat it to you."

"All the stronger proof that everything is not right. You are well out of it, my boy, exceedingly well out of it. I congratulate you."

"I would rather not be congratulated."

"As you please. I am sorry for you, if you are unhappy. Try and forget all about it. How is your mother?"

At any other time Orsino would have laughed at the characteristic abruptness.

"Perfectly well, I believe. I have not seen her all summer," he answered gravely.

"Not been to Saracinesca all summer! No wonder you look ill. Telegraph to them that I have come back and let us get the family together as soon as possible. Do you think I mean to spend six months alone in your company, especially when you are away all day at that wretched office of yours? Be quick about it—telegraph at once."

"Very well. But please do not repeat anything of what I have told you to my father or my mother. That is the only thing I have to ask."

"Am I a parrot? I never talk to them of your affairs."

"Thanks. I am grateful."

"To heaven because your grandfather is not a parakeet! No doubt. You have good cause. And look here, Orsino——"

The old man took Orsino's arm and held it firmly, speaking in a lower tone.

"Do not make an ass of yourself, my boy—especially in business. But if you do—and you probably will, you know—just come to me, without speaking to any one else. I will see what can be done without noise. There—take that, and forget all about your troubles and get a little more colour into your face."

"You are too good to me," said Orsino, grasping the old Prince's hand. For once, he was really moved.

"Nonsense—go and send that telegram at once. I do not want to be kept waiting a week for a sight of my family."

With a deep, good humoured laugh he pushed Orsino out of the door in front of him and went off to his own quarters.

In due time the family returned from Saracinesca and the gloomy old palace waked to life again. Corona and her husband were both struck by the change in Orsino's appearance, which indeed contrasted strongly with their own, refreshed and strengthened as they were by the keen mountain air, the endless out-of-door life, the manifold occupations of people deeply interested in the welfare of those around them and supremely conscious of their own power to produce good results in their own way. When they all came back, Orsino himself felt how jaded and worn he was as compared with them.

Before twelve hours had gone by, he found himself alone with his mother. Strange to say he had not looked forward to the interview with pleasure. The bond of sympathy which had so closely united the two during the spring seemed weakened, and Orsino would, if possible, have put off the renewal of intimate converse which he knew to be inevitable. But that could not be done.

It would not be hard to find reasons for his wishing to avoid his mother. Formerly his daily tale had been one of success, of hope, of ever increasing confidence. Now he had nothing to tell of but danger and anxiety for the future, and he was not without a suspicion that she would strongly disapprove of his allowing himself to be kept



afloat by Del Ferice's personal influence, and perhaps by his personal aid. It was hard to begin daily intercourse on a basis of things so different from that which had seemed solid and safe when they had last talked together. He had learned to bear his own troubles bravely, too, and there was something which he associated with weakness in the idea of asking sympathy for them now. He would rather have been left alone.

Deep down, too, was the consciousness of all that had happened between himself and Maria Consuelo since his mother's departure. Another suffering, another and distinctly different misfortune, to be borne better in silence than under question even of the most affectionate kind. His grandfather had indeed guessed at both truths and had taxed him with them at once, but that was quite another matter. He knew that the old gentleman would never refer again to what he had learned, and he appreciated the generous offer of help, of which he would never avail himself, in a way in which he could not appreciate an assistance even more lovingly proffered, perhaps, but which must be asked for by a confession of his own failure.

On the other hand, he was incapable of distorting the facts in any way so as to make his mother believe him more successful than he actually was. There was nothing dishonest, perhaps, in pretending to be hopeful when he really had little hope, but he could not have represented the condition of the business otherwise than as it really stood.

The interview was a long one, and Corona's dark face grew grave if not despondent as he explained to her one point after another, taking especial care to elucidate all that bore upon his relations with Del Ferice. It was most important that his mother should understand how he was placed, and how Del Ferice's continued advances of money were not to be regarded in the light of a personal favour, but as a speculation in which Ugo would probably get the best of the bargain. Orsino knew how sensitive his mother

would be on such a point, and dreaded the moment when she should begin to think that he was laying himself under obligations beyond the strict limits of business.

Corona leaned back in her low seat and covered her eyes with one hand for a moment, in deep thought. Orsino waited anxiously for her to speak.

"My dear," she said at last, "you make it very clear, and I understand you perfectly. Nevertheless, it seems to me that your position is not very dignified, considering who you are, and what Del Ferice is. Do you not think so yourself?"

Orsino flushed a little. She had not put the point as he had expected, and her words told upon him.

"When I entered business, I put my dignity in my pocket," he answered, with a forced laugh. "There cannot be much of it in business, at the best."

His mother's black eyes seemed to grow blacker, and the delicate nostril quivered a little.

"If that is true, I wish you had never meddled in these affairs," she said, proudly. "But you talked differently last spring, and you made me see it all in another way. You made me feel, on the contrary that in doing something for yourself, in showing that you were able to accomplish something, in asserting your independence, you were making yourself more worthy of respect—and I have respected you accordingly."

"Exactly," answered Orsino, catching at the old argument. "That is just what I wished to do. What I said a moment since was in the way of a generality. Business means a struggle for money, I suppose, and that, in itself, is not dignified. But it is not dishonourable. After all, the means may justify the end."

"I hate that saying!" exclaimed Corona hotly. "I wish you were free of the whole affair."

"So do I, with all my heart!"

A short silence followed.

"If I had known all this three months ago," Corona resumed, "I would have taken the money and given it to



you, to clear yourself. I thought you were succeeding and I have used all the funds I could gather to buy the Montevarchi's property between us and Affile and in planting eucalyptus trees in that low land of mine where the people have suffered so much from fever. I have nothing at my disposal unless I borrow. Why did you not tell me the truth in the summer, Orsino? Why have you let me imagine that you were prospering all along, when you have been and are at the point of failure? It is too bad——"

She broke off suddenly and clasped her hands together on her knee.

"It is only lately that business has gone so badly," said Orsino.

"It was all wrong from the beginning! I should never have encouraged you. Your father was right, as he always is—and now you must tell him so."

But Orsino refused to go to his father, except in the last extremity. He represented that it was better, and more dignified, since Corona insisted upon the point of dignity, to fight the battle alone so long as there was a chance of winning. His mother, on the other hand, maintained that he should free himself at once and at any cost. A few months earlier he could easily have persuaded her that he was right; but she seemed changed since he had parted from her, and he fancied that his father's influence had been at work with her. This he resented bitterly. It must be remembered, too, that he had begun the interview with a preconceived prejudice, expecting it to turn out badly, so that he was the more ready to allow matters to take an unfavourable turn.

The result was not a decided break in his relations with his mother, but a state of things more irritating than any open difference could have been. From that time Corona discouraged him, and never ceased to advise him to go to his father and ask frankly for enough money to clear him outright. Orsino, on his part, obstinately refused to apply to any one for help, as long as Del Ferice continued to advance him money.

In those months which followed there were few indeed who did not suffer in the almost universal financial cataclysm. All that Contini and others, older and wiser than he, had predicted, took place, and more also. The banks refused discount, even upon the best paper, saying with justice that they were obliged to hold their funds in reserve at such a time. The works stopped almost everywhere. It was impossible to raise money. Thousands upon thousands of workmen who had come from great distances during the past two or three years were suddenly thrown out of work, penniless in the streets and many of them burdened with wives and children. There were one or two small riots and there was much demonstration, but, on the whole, the poor masons behaved very well. The government and the municipality did what they could—what governments and municipalities can do when hampered at every turn by the most complicated and ill-considered machinery of administration ever invented in any country. The starving workmen were by slow degrees got out of the city and sent back to starve out of sight in their native places. The emigration was enormous in all directions.

The dismal ruins of that new city which was to have been built and which never reached completion are visible everywhere. Houses seven stories high, abandoned within a month of completion rise uninhabited and uninhabitable out of a rank growth of weeds, amidst heaps of rubbish, staring down at the broad, desolate streets where the vigorous grass pushes its way up through the loose stones of the unrolled metalling. Amidst heavy low walls which were to have been the ground stories of palaces, a few ragged children play in the sun, a lean donkey crops the thistles, or if near to a few occupied dwellings, a wine seller makes a booth of straw and chestnut boughs and dispenses a poisonous, sour drink to those who will buy. But that is only in the warm months. The winter winds blow the wretched booth to pieces and increase the desolation. Further on, tall



façades rise suddenly up, the blue sky gleaming through their windows, the green moss already growing upon their naked stones and bricks. The Barbarini of the future, if any should arise, will not need to despoil the Colosseum to quarry material for their palaces. If, as the old pasquinade had it the Barbarini did what the Barbarians did not, how much worse than barbarians have these modern civilizers done!

The distress was very great in the early months of 1889. The satisfaction which many of the new men would have felt at the ruin of great old families was effectually neutralized by their own financial destruction. Princes, bankers, contractors and master masons went down together in the general bankruptcy. Ugo Del Ferice survived and with him Andrea Contini and Company, and doubtless other small firms which he protected for his own ends. San Giacinto, calm, far-seeing, and keen as an eagle, surveyed the chaos from the height of his magnificent fortune, unmoved and immovable, awaiting the lowest ebb of the tide. The Saracinesca looked on, hampered a little by the sudden fall in rents and other sources of their income, but still superior to events, though secretly anxious about Orsino's affairs, and daily expecting that he must fail.

And Orsino himself had changed, as was natural enough. He was learning to seem what he was not, and those who have learned that lesson know how it influences the real man whom no one can judge but himself. So long as there had been one person in his life with whom he could live in perfect sympathy he had given himself little trouble about his outward behaviour. So long as he had felt that, come what might, his mother was on his side, he had not thought it worth his while not to be natural with every one, according to his humour. He was wrong, no doubt, in fancying that Corona had deserted him. But he had already suffered a loss, in Maria Consuelo, which had at the time seemed the greatest conceivable, and the pain he had suffered

then, together with the deep though unacknowledged wound to his vanity, had predisposed him to believe that he was destined to be friendless. The consequence was that a very slight break in the perfect understanding which had so long existed between him and his mother had produced serious results. He now felt that he was completely alone, and like most lonely men of sound character he acquired the habit of keeping his troubles entirely to himself, while affecting an almost unnaturally quiet and equable manner with those around him. On the whole, he found that his life was easier when he lived it on this principle. He found that he was more careful in his actions since he had a part to sustain, and that his opinion carried more weight since he expressed it more cautiously and seemed less liable to fluctuations of mood and temper. The change in his character was more apparent than real, perhaps, as changes of character generally are when not in the way of logical development; but the constant thought of appearances reacts upon the inner nature in the end, and much which at first is only put on, becomes a habit next, and ends by taking the place of an impulse.

Orsino was aware that his chief preoccupation was identical with that which absorbed his mother's thoughts. He wished to free himself from the business in which he was so deeply involved, and which still prospered so strangely in spite of the general ruin. But here the community of ideas ended. He wished to free himself in his own way, without humiliating himself by going to his father for help. Meanwhile, too, Sant' Ilario himself had his doubts concerning his own judgment. It was inconceivable to him that Del Ferice could be losing money to oblige Orsino, and if he had desired to ruin him he could have done so with ease a hundred times in the past months. It might be, he said to himself, that Orsino had after all, a surprising genius for affairs and had weathered the storm in the face of tremendous difficulties. Orsino saw the belief growing in his father's mind, and the cer-



tainty that it was there did not dispose him to throw up the fight and acknowledge himself beaten.

The Saracinesca were one of the very few Roman families in which there is a tradition in favour of non-interference with the action of children already of age. The consequence was that although the old Prince, Giovanni and his wife, all three felt considerable anxiety, they did nothing to hamper Orsino's action, beyond an occasionally repeated warning to be careful. That his occupation was distasteful to them, they did not conceal, but he met their expressions of opinion with perfect equanimity and outward good humour, even when his mother, once his staunch ally, openly advised him to give up business and travel for a year. Their prejudice was certainly not unnatural, and had been strengthened by the perusal of the unsavoury details published by the papers at each new bankruptcy during the year. But they found Orsino now always the same, always quiet, good-humoured and firm in his projects.

Andrea Contini had not been very exact in his calculation of the date at which the last door and the last window would be placed in the last of the houses which he and Orsino had undertaken to build. The disturbance in business might account for the delay. At all events it was late in April of the following year before the work was completed. Then Orsino went to Del Ferice.

"Of course," he said, maintaining the appearance of calm which had now become habitual with him, "I cannot expect to pay what I owe the bank, unless I can effect a sale of these buildings. You have known that, all along, as well as I. The question is, can they be sold?"

"You have no applicant, then?" Del Ferice looked grave and somewhat surprised.

"No. We have received no offer."

"You owe the bank a very large sum on these buildings, Don Orsino."

"Secured by mortgages on them," answered the young man quietly, but preparing for trouble.

"Just so. Secured by mortgages. But if the bank should foreclose within the next few months, and if the buildings do not realize the amount secured, Contini and Company are liable for the difference."

"I know that."

"And the market is very bad, Don Orsino, and shows no signs of improvement."

"On the other hand the houses are finished, habitable, and can be let immediately."

"They are certainly finished. You must be aware that the bank has continued to advance the sums necessary for two reasons. Firstly, because an expensive but habitable dwelling is better than a cheap one with no roof. Secondly, because in doing business with Andrea Contini and Company we have been dealing with the only really honest and economical firm in Rome."

Orsino smiled vaguely, but said nothing. He had not much faith in Del Ferice's flattery.

"But that," continued the latter, "does not dispense us from the necessity of realising what is owing to us—I mean the bank—either in money, or in an equivalent—or in an equivalent," he repeated, thoughtfully rolling a big silver pencil case backward and forward upon the table under his fat white hand.

"Evidently," assented Orsino. "Unfortunately, at the present time, there seems to be no equivalent for ready money."

"No—no—perhaps not," said Ugo, apparently becoming more and more absorbed in his own thoughts. "And yet," he added, after a little pause, "an arrangement may be possible. The houses certainly possess advantages over much of this wretched property which is thrown upon the market. The position is good and the work is good. Your work is very good, Don Orsino. You know that better than I. Yes—the houses have advantages, I admit. The bank has a great deal of waste masonry on its hands, Don Orsino—more than I like to think of."



"Unfortunately, again, the time for improving such property is gone by."

"It is never too late to mend, says the proverb," retorted Del Ferice with a smile. "I have a proposition to make. I will state it clearly. If it is not to our mutual advantage, I think neither of us will lose so much by it as we should lose in other ways. It is simply this. We will cry quits. You have a small account current with the bank, and you must sacrifice the credit balance—it is not much, I find—about thirty-five thousand."

"That was chiefly the profit on the first contract," observed Orsino.

"Precisely. It will help to cover the bank's loss on this. It will help, because when I say we will cry quits, I mean that you shall receive an equivalent for your houses—a nominal equivalent of course, which the bank nominally takes back as payment of the mortgages."

"That is not very clear," said Orsino. "I do not understand you."

"No," laughed Del Ferice. "I admit that it is not. It represented rather my own view of the transaction than the practical side. But I will explain myself beyond the possibility of mistake. The bank takes the houses and your cash balance and cancels the mortgages. You are then released from all debt and all obligation upon the old contract. But the bank makes one condition which is important. You must buy from the bank, on mortgage of course, certain unfinished buildings which it now owns, and you—Andrea Contini and Company—must take a contract to complete them within a given time, the bank advancing you money as before upon notes of hand, secured by subsequent and successive mortgages."

Orsino was silent. He saw that if he accepted, Del Ferice was receiving the work of a whole year and more without allowing the smallest profit to the workers, besides absorbing the profits of a previous successfully executed contract, and besides taking it for granted that

the existing mortgages only just covered the value of the buildings. If, as was probable, Del Ferice had means of either selling or letting the houses, he stood to make an enormous profit. He saw, too, that if he accepted now, he must in all likelihood be driven to accept similar conditions on a future occasion, and that he would be binding Andrea Contini and himself to work, and to work hard, for nothing and perhaps during years.

But he saw also that the only alternative was an appeal to his father, or bankruptcy which ultimately meant the same thing. Del Ferice spoke again.

"Whether you agree, or whether you prefer a foreclosure, we shall both lose. But we should lose more by the latter course. In the interests of the bank I trust that you will accept. You see how frankly I speak about it. In the interests of the bank. But then, I need not remind you that it would hardly be fair to let us lose heavily when you can make the loss relatively a slight one—considering how the bank has behaved to you, and to you alone, throughout this fatal year."

"I will give you an answer to-morrow," said Orsino.

He thought of poor Contini who would find that he had worked for nothing during a whole year. But then, it would be easy for Orsino to give Contini a sum of money out of his private resources. Anything was better than giving up the struggle and applying to his father.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

Orsino was to all intents and purposes without a friend. How far circumstances had contributed to this result and how far he himself was to blame for his lonely state, those may judge who have followed his history to this point. His grandfather had indeed offered him help and in a way to make it acceptable if he had felt that he