

of shielding another was not in his power. People might laugh at him and call him Quixotic, forsooth, because he would not do like every one else and make a marriage of convenience—of propriety. Propriety! when his heart was breaking within him; when every fibre of his strong frame quivered with the strain of passion; when his aching eyes saw only one face, and his ears echoed the words she had spoken that very afternoon! Propriety indeed! Propriety was good enough for cold-blooded dullards. Donna Tullia had done him no harm that he should marry her for propriety's sake, and make her life miserable for thirty, forty, fifty years. It would be propriety rather for him to go away, to bury himself in the ends of the earth, until he could forget Corona d'Astrardente, her splendid eyes, and her deep sweet voice.

He had pledged his father his word that he would consider the marriage, and he was to give his answer before Easter. That was a long time yet. He would consider it; and if by Eastertide he had forgotten Corona, he would—he laughed aloud in his silent room, and the sound of his voice startled him from his reverie.

Forget? Did such men as he forget? Other men did. What were they made of? They did not love such women, perhaps; that was the reason they forgot. Any one could forget poor Donna Tullia. And yet how was it possible to forget if one loved truly?

Giovanni had never believed himself in love before. He had known one or two women who had attracted him strongly; but he had soon found out that he had no real sympathy with them, that though they amused him they had no charm for him—most of all, that he could not imagine himself tied to any one of them for life without conceiving the situation horrible in the extreme. To his independent nature the idea of such ties was repugnant: he knew himself too courteous to break through the civilities of life with a wife he did not love; but he knew also that in marrying a woman who was indifferent to him, he would be engaging to play a part for life in the most

fearful of all plays—the part of a man who strives to bear bravely the galling of a chain he is too honourable to break.

It was four o'clock in the morning when Giovanni went to bed; and even then he slept little, for his dreams were disturbed. Once he thought he stood upon a green lawn with a sword in his hand, and the blood upon its point, his opponent lying at his feet. Again, he thought he was alone in a vast drawing-room, and a dark woman came and spoke gently to him, saying, "Marry her for my sake." He awoke with a groan. The church clocks were striking eight, and the meet was at eleven, five miles beyond the Porta Pia. Giovanni started up and rang for his servant.

CHAPTER IV.

It was a beautiful day, and half Rome turned out to see the meet, not because it was in any way different from other meets, but because it chanced that society had a fancy to attend it. Society is very like a fever patient in a delirium; it is rarely accountable for its actions; it scarcely ever knows what it is saying; and occasionally, without the least warning or premeditation, it leaps out of bed at an early hour of the morning and rushes frantically in pursuit of its last hallucination. The main difference is, that whereas a man in a fever has a nurse, society has none.

On the present occasion every one had suddenly conceived the idea of going to the meet, and the long road beyond the Porta Pia was dotted for miles with equipages of every description, from the four-in-hand of Princee Valdarno to the humble donkey-cart of the caterer who sells messes of boiled beans, and bread and cheese, and salad to the grooms—an institution not connected in the English mind with hunting. One after another the vehicles rolled out along the road, past Sant' Agnese, down the

hill and across the Ponte Nomentana, and far up beyond to a place where three roads met and there was a broad open stretch of wet, withered grass. Here the carriages turned in and ranged themselves side by side, as though they were pausing in the afternoon drive upon the Pincio, instead of being five miles out upon the broad Campagna.

To describe the mountains to southward of Rome would be an insult to nature; to describe a meet would be an affront to civilised readers of the English language. The one is too familiar to everybody; the pretty crowd of men and women, dotted with pink and set off by the neutral colour of the winter fields; the hunters of all ages, and sizes, and breeds, led slowly up and down by the grooms; while from time to time some rider gets into the saddle and makes himself comfortable, assures himself of girth and stirrup, and of the proper disposal of the sandwich-box and sherry-flask, gives a final word of instruction to his groom, and then moves slowly off. A Roman meet is a little less business-like than the same thing elsewhere; there is a little more dawdling, a little more conversation when many ladies chance to have come to see the hounds throw off; otherwise it is not different from other meets. As for the Roman mountains, they are so totally unlike any other hills in the world, and so extremely beautiful in their own peculiar way, that to describe them would be an idle and a useless task, which could only serve to exhibit the vanity of the writer and the feebleness of his pen.

Don Giovanni arrived early in spite of his sleepless night. He descended from his dogcart by the roadside, instead of driving into the field, and he took a careful survey of the carriages he saw before him. Conspicuous in the distance he distinguished Donna Tullia Mayer standing among a little crowd of men near Valdarno's drag. She was easily known by her dress, as Del Ferice had remarked on the previous evening. On this occasion she wore a costume in which the principal colours were green and yellow, an enormous hat, with feathers in the same proportion surmounting her head, and she carried

a yellow parasol. She was a rather handsome woman of middle height, with unnaturally blond hair, and a fairly good complexion, which as yet she had wisely abstained from attempting to improve by artificial means; her eyes were blue, but uncertain in their glance—of the kind which do not inspire confidence; and her mouth was much admired, being small and red, with full lips. She was rapid in her movements, and she spoke in a loud voice, easily collecting people about her wherever there were any to collect. Her conversation was not brilliant, but it was so abundant that its noisy vivacity passed current for cleverness; she had a remarkably keen judgment of people, and a remarkably bad taste in her opinions of things artistic, from beauty in nature to beauty in dress, but she maintained her point of view obstinately, and admitted no contradiction. It was a singular circumstance that whereas many of her attributes were distinctly vulgar, she nevertheless had an indescribable air of good breeding, the strange inimitable stamp of social superiority which cannot be acquired by any known process of education. A person seeing her might be surprised at her loud talking, amused at her eccentricities of dress, and shocked at her bold manner, but no one would ever think of classing her anywhere save in what calls itself "the best society."

Among the men who stood talking to Donna Tullia was the inevitable Del Ferice, a man of whom it might be said that he was never missed, because he was always present. Giovanni disliked Del Ferice without being able to define his aversion. He disliked generally men whom he suspected of duplicity; and he had no reason for supposing that truth, looking into her mirror, would have seen there the image of Ugo's fat pale face and colourless moustache. But if Ugo was a liar, he must have had a good memory, for he never got himself into trouble, and he had the reputation of being a useful member of society, an honour to which persons of doubtful veracity rarely attain. Giovanni, however, disliked him,

and suspected him of many things; and although he had intended to go up to Donna Tullia, the sight of Del Ferice at her side very nearly prevented him. He strolled leisurely down the little slope, and as he neared the crowd, spoke to one or two acquaintances, mentally determining to avoid Madame Mayer, and to mount immediately. But he was disappointed in his intention. As he stood for a moment beside the carriage of the Marchesa Rocca, exchanging a few words with her, and looking with some interest at her daughter, the little Rocca girl whom his father had proposed as a possible wife for him, he forgot his proximity to the lady he wished to avoid; and when, a few seconds later, he proceeded in the direction of his horse, Madame Mayer stepped forward from the knot of her admirers and tapped him familiarly upon the shoulder with the handle of her parasol.

"So you were not going to speak to me to-day?" she said rather roughly, after her manner.

Giovanni turned sharply and faced her, bowing low. Donna Tullia laughed.

"Is there anything so amazingly ridiculous in my appearance?" he asked.

"*Altro!* when you make that tremendous salute——"

"It was intended to convey an apology as well as a greeting," answered Don Giovanni, politely.

"I would like more apology and less greeting."

"I am ready to apologise——"

"Humbly, without defending yourself," said Donna Tullia, beginning to walk slowly forward. Giovanni was obliged to follow her.

"My defence is, nevertheless, a very good one," he said.

"Well, if it is really good, I may listen to it; but you will not make me believe that you intended to behave properly."

"I am in a very bad humour. I would not inflict my cross temper upon you; therefore I avoided you."

Donna Tullia eyed him attentively. When she answered she drew in her small red lips with an air of annoyance.

"You look as though you were in bad humour," she answered. "I am sorry I disturbed you. It is better to leave sleeping dogs alone, as the proverb says."

"I have not snapped yet," said Giovanni. "I am not dangerous, I assure you."

"Oh, I am not in the least afraid of you," replied his companion, with a little scorn. "Do not flatter yourself your little humours frighten me. I suppose you intend to follow?"

"Yes," answered Saracinesca, shortly; he was beginning to weary of Donna Tullia's manner of taking him to task.

"You had much better come with us, and leave the poor foxes alone. Valdarno is going to drive us round by the cross-roads to the Capannelle. We will have a picnic lunch, and be home before three o'clock."

"Thanks very much. I cannot let my horse shirk his work. I must beg you to excuse me——"

"Again?" exclaimed Donna Tullia. "You are always making excuses." Then she suddenly changed her tone, and looked down. "I wish you would come with us," she said, gently. "It is not often I ask you to do anything."

Giovanni looked at her quickly. He knew that Donna Tullia wished to marry him; he even suspected that his father had discussed the matter with her—no uncommon occurrence when a marriage has to be arranged with a widow. But he did not know that Donna Tullia was in love with him in her own odd fashion. He looked at her, and he saw that as she spoke there were tears of vexation in her bold blue eyes. He hesitated a moment, but natural courtesy won the day.

"I will go with you," he said, quietly. A blush of pleasure rose to Madame Mayer's pink cheeks; she felt she had made a point, but she was not willing to show her satisfaction.

"You say it as though you were conferring a favour,"

she said, with a show of annoyance, which was belied by the happy expression of her face.

"Pardon me; I myself am the favoured person," replied Giovanni, mechanically. He had yielded because he did not know how to refuse; but he already regretted it, and would have given much to escape from the party.

"You do not look as though you believed it," said Donna Tullia, eyeing him critically. "If you are going to be disagreeable, I release you." She said this well knowing, the while, that he would not accept of his liberty.

"If you are so ready to release me, as you call it, you do not really want me," said her companion. Donna Tullia bit her lip, and there was a moment's pause. "If you will excuse me a moment I will send my horse home—I will join you at once."

"There is your horse—right before us," said Madame Mayer. Even that short respite was not allowed him, and she waited while Don Giovanni ordered the astonished groom to take his hunter for an hour's exercise in a direction where he would not fall in with the hounds.

"I did not believe you would really do it," said Donna Tullia, as the two turned and sauntered back towards the carriages. Most of the men who meant to follow had already mounted, and the little crowd had thinned considerably. But while they had been talking another carriage had driven into the field, and had halted a few yards from Valdarno's drag. Astrardente had taken it into his head to come to the meet with his wife, and they had arrived late. Astrardente always arrived a little late, on principle. As Giovanni and Donna Tullia came back to their drag, they suddenly found themselves face to face with the Duchess and her husband. It did not surprise Corona to see Giovanni walking with the woman he did not intend to marry, but it seemed to give the old Duke undisguised pleasure.

"Do you see, Corona, there is no doubt of it! It is just as I told you," exclaimed the aged dandy, in a voice

so audible that Giovanni frowned and Donna Tullia blushed slightly. Both of them bowed as they passed the carriage. Don Giovanni looked straight into Corona's face as he took off his hat. He might very well have made her a little sign, the smallest gesture, imperceptible to Donna Tullia, whereby he could have given her the idea that his position was involuntary. But Don Giovanni was a gentleman, and he did nothing of the kind; he bowed and looked calmly at the woman he loved as he passed by. Astrardente watched him keenly, and as he noticed the indifference of Saracinesca's look, he gave a curious little snuffling snort that was peculiar to him. He could have sworn that neither his wife nor Giovanni had shown the smallest interest in each other. He was satisfied. His wife was above suspicion, as he always said; but he was an old man, and had seen the world, and he knew that however implicitly he might trust the noble woman who had sacrificed her youth to his old age, it was not beyond the bounds of possibility that she might become innocently interested, even unawares, in some younger man—in some such man as Giovanni Saracinesca—and he thought it worth his while to watch her. His little snort, however, was indicative of satisfaction. Corona had not winced at the mention of the marriage, and had nodded with the greatest unconcern to the man as he passed.

"Ah, Donna Tullia!" he cried, as he returned their greeting, "you are preventing Don Giovanni from mounting; the riders will be off in a moment."

Being thus directly addressed, there was nothing to be done but to stop and exchange a few words. The Duchess was on the side nearest to the pair as they passed, and her husband rose and sat opposite her, so as to talk more at his ease. There were renewed greetings on both sides, and Giovanni naturally found himself talking to Corona, while her husband and Donna Tullia conversed together.

"What man could think of hunting when he could

be talking to you instead?" said old Astrardente, whose painted face adjusted itself in a sort of leer that had once been a winning smile. Every one knew he painted, his teeth were a miracle of American dentistry, and his wig had deceived a great portrait-painter. The padding in his clothes was disposed with cunning wisdom, and in public he rarely removed the gloves from his small hands. Donna Tullia laughed at what he said.

"You should teach Don Giovanni to make pretty speeches," she said. "He is as surly as a wolf this morning."

"I should think a man in his position would not need much teaching in order to be gallant to you," replied the old dandy, with a knowing look. Then lowering his voice, he added confidentially, "I hope that before very long I may be allowed to congratulate——"

"I have prevailed upon him to give up following the hounds to-day," interrupted Donna Tullia, quickly. She spoke loud enough to be noticed by Corona. "He is coming with us to picnic at the Capannelle instead."

Giovanni could not help glancing quickly at Corona. She smiled faintly, and her face betrayed no emotion.

"I daresay it will be very pleasant," she said gently, looking far out over the Campagna. In the next field the pack was moving away, followed at a little distance by a score of riders in pink; one or two men who had stayed behind in conversation, mounted hastily and rode after the hunt; some of the carriages turned out of the field and began to follow slowly along the road, in hopes of seeing the hounds throw off; the party who were going with Valdarno gathered about the drag, waiting for Donna Tullia; the grooms who were left behind congregated around the men who sold boiled beans and salad; and in a few minutes the meet had practically dispersed.

"Why will you not join us, Duchessa?" asked Madame Mayer. "There is lunch enough for everybody, and the more people we are the pleasanter it will be." Donna Tullia made her suggestion with her usual frank manner,

fixing her blue eyes upon Corona as she spoke. There was every appearance of cordiality in the invitation; but Donna Tullia knew well enough that there was a sting in her words, or at all events that she meant there should be. Corona, however, glanced quietly at her husband, and then courteously refused.

"You are most kind," she said, "but I fear we cannot join you to-day. We are very regular people," she explained, with a slight smile, "and we are not prepared to go to-day. Many thanks; I wish we could accept your kind invitation."

"Well, I am sorry you will not come," said Donna Tullia, with a rather hard laugh. "We mean to enjoy ourselves immensely."

Giovanni said nothing. There was only one thing which could have rendered the prospect of Madame Mayer's picnic more disagreeable to him than it already was, and that would have been the presence of the Duchessa. He knew himself to be in a thoroughly false position in consequence of having yielded to Donna Tullia's half-tearful request that he would join the party. He remembered how he had spoken to Corona on the previous evening, assuring her that he would not marry Madame Mayer. Corona knew nothing of the change his plans had undergone during the stormy interview he had had with his father; he longed, indeed, to be able to make the Duchessa understand, but any attempt at explanation would be wholly impossible. Corona would think he was inconsistent, or at least that he was willing to flirt with the gay widow, while determined not to marry her. He reflected that it was part of his self-condemnation that he should appear unfavourably to the woman he loved, and whom he was determined to renounce; but he realised for the first time how bitter it would be to stand thus always in the appearance of weakness and self-contradiction in the eyes of the only human being whose good opinion he coveted, and for whose dear sake he was willing to do all things. As he stood by her, his hand rested upon the side of the

carriage, and he stared blankly at the distant hounds and the retreating riders.

"Come, Don Giovanni, we must be going," said Donna Tullia. "What in the world are you thinking of? You look as though you had been turned into a statue!"

"I beg your pardon," returned Saracinesca, suddenly called back from the absorbing train of his unpleasant thoughts. "Good-bye, Duchessa; good-bye, Astrardente—a pleasant drive to you."

"You will always regret not having come, you know," cried Madame Mayer, shaking hands with both the occupants of the carriage. "We shall probably end by driving to Albano, and staying all night—just fancy! Immense fun—not even a comb in the whole party! Good-bye. I suppose we shall all meet to-night—that is, if we ever come back to Rome at all. Come along, Giovanni," she said, familiarly dropping the prefix from his name. After all, he was a sort of cousin, and people in Rome are very apt to call each other by their Christian names. But Donna Tullia knew what she was about; she knew that Corona d'Astrardente could never, under any circumstances whatever, call Saracinesca plain "Giovanni." But she had not the satisfaction of seeing that anything she said produced any change in Corona's proud dark face; she seemed of no more importance in the Duchessa's eyes than if she had been a fly buzzing in the sunshine.

So Giovanni and Madame Mayer joined their noisy party, and began to climb into their places upon the drag; but before they were prepared to start, the Astrardente carriage turned and drove rapidly out of the field. The laughter and loud talking came to Corona's ears, growing fainter and more distant every second, and the sound was very cruel to her; but she set her strong brave lips together, and leaned back, adjusting the blanket over her old husband's knees with one hand, and shading the sun from her eyes with the parasol she held in the other.

"Thank you, my dear; you are an angel of thought-

fulness," said the old dandy, stroking his wife's hand. "What a singularly vulgar woman Madame Mayer is! And yet she has a certain little *chic* of her own."

Corona did not withdraw her fingers from her husband's caress. She was used to it. After all, he was kind to her in his way. It would have been absurd to have been jealous of the grossly flattering speeches he made to other women; and indeed he was as fond of turning compliments to his wife as to any one. It was a singular relation that had grown up between the old man and the young girl he had married. Had he been less thoroughly a man of the world, or had Corona been less entirely honest and loyal and self-sacrificing, there would have been small peace in their wedlock. But Astrardente, decayed roué and worn-out dandy as he was, was in love with his wife; and she, in all the young magnificence of her beauty, submitted to be loved by him, because she had promised that she would do so, and because, having sworn, she regarded the breaking of her faith by the smallest act of unkindness as a tainig beyond the bounds of possibility. It had been a terrible blow to her to discover that she cared for Don Giovanni even in the way she believed she did, as a man whose society she preferred to that of other men, and whose face it gave her pleasure to see. She, too, had spent a sleepless night; and when she had risen in the morning, she had determined to forget Giovanni, and if she could not forget him, she had sworn that more than ever she would be all things to her husband.

She wondered now, as Giovanni had known she would, why he had suddenly thrown over his day's hunting in order to spend his time with Donna Tullia; but she would not acknowledge, even to herself, that the dull pain she felt near her heart, and that seemed to oppress her breathing, bore any relation to the scene she had just witnessed. She shut her lips tightly, and arranged the blanket for her husband.

"Madame Mayer is vulgar," she answered. "I suppose she cannot help it."

"Women can always help being vulgar," returned Astrardente. "I believe she learned it from her husband. Women are not naturally like that. Nevertheless she is an excellent match for Giovanni Saracinesca. Rich, by millions. Undeniably handsome, gay—well, rather too gay; but Giovanni is so serious that the contrast will be to their mutual advantage."

Corona was silent. There was nothing the old man disliked so much as silence.

"Why do you not answer me?" he asked, rather petulantly.

"I do not know—I was thinking," said Corona, simply. "I do not see that it is a great match after all, for the last of the Saracinesca."

"You think she will lead him a terrible dance, I dare say," returned the old man. "She is gay—very gay; and Giovanni is very, very solemn."

"I did not mean that she was too gay. I only think that Saracinesca might marry, for instance, the Rocca girl. Why should he take a widow?"

"Such a young widow. Old Mayer was as decrepit as any old statue in a museum. He was paralysed in one arm, and gouty—gouty, my dear; you do not know how gouty he was." The old fellow grinned scornfully; he had never had the gout. "Donna Tullia is a very young widow. Besides, think of the fortune. It would break old Saracinesca's heart to let so much money go out of the family. He is a miserly old wretch, Saracinesca!"

"I never heard that," said Corona.

"Oh, there are many things in Rome that one never hears, and that is one of them. I hate avarice—it is so extremely vulgar."

Indeed Astrardente was not himself avaricious, though he had all his life known how to protect his interests. He loved money, but he loved also to spend it, especially in such a way as to make a great show with it. It was not true, however, that Saracinesca was miserly. He spent a large income without the smallest ostentation.

"Really, I should hardly call Prince Saracinesca a miser," said Corona. "I cannot imagine, from what I know of him, why he should be so anxious to get Madame Mayer's fortune; but I do not think it is out of mere greediness."

"Then I do not know what you can call it," returned her husband, sharply. "They have always had that dismal black melancholy in that family—that detestable love of secretly piling up money, while their faces are as grave and sour as any Jew's in the Ghetto."

Corona glanced at her husband, and smiled faintly as she looked at his thin old features, where the lights and shadows were touched in with delicate colour more artfully than any actress's, superficially concealing the lines traced by years of affectation and refined egotism; and she thought of Giovanni's strong manly face, passionate indeed, but noble and bold. A moment later she resolutely put the comparison out of her mind, and finding that her husband was inclined to abuse the Saracinesca, she tried to turn the conversation.

"I suppose it will be a great ball at the Frangipani's," she said. "We will go, of course?" she added, interrogatively.

"Of course. I would not miss it for all the world. There has not been such a ball for years as that will be. Do I ever miss an opportunity of enjoying myself—I mean, of letting you enjoy yourself?"

"No, you are very good," said Corona, gently. "Indeed I sometimes think you give yourself trouble about going out on my account. Really, I am not so greedy of society. I would often gladly stay at home if you wished it."

"Do you think I am past enjoying the world, then?" asked the old man, sourly.

"No indeed," replied Corona, patiently. "Why should I think that? I see how much you like going out."

"Of course I like it. A rational man in the prime of life always likes to see his fellow-creatures. Why should not I?"

The Duchessa did not smile. She was used to hearing her aged husband speak of himself as young. It was a harmless fancy.

"I think it is quite natural," she said.

"What I cannot understand," said Astrardente, muffling his thin throat more closely against the keen bright *tramontana* wind, "is that such old fellows as Saracinesca should still want to play a part in the world."

Saracinesca was younger than Astrardente, and his iron constitution bade fair to outlast another generation, in spite of his white hair.

"You do not seem to be in a good humour with Saracinesca to-day," remarked Corona, by way of answer.

"Why do you defend him?" asked her husband, in a new fit of irritation. "He jars on my nerves, the sour old creature!"

"I fancy all Rome will go to the Frangipani ball," began Corona again, without heeding the old man's petulance.

"You seem to be interested in it," returned Astrardente.

Corona was silent; it was her only weapon when he became petulant. He hated silence, and generally returned to the conversation with more suavity. Perhaps, in his great experience, he really appreciated his wife's wonderful patience with his moods, and it is certain that he was exceedingly fond of her.

"You must have a new gown, my dear," he said presently, in a conciliatory tone.

His wife passed for the best-dressed woman in Rome, as she was undeniably the most remarkable in many other ways. She was not above taking an interest in dress, and her old husband had an admirable taste; moreover, he took a vast pride in her appearance, and if she had looked a whit less superior to other women, his smiling boast that she was above suspicion would have lost some of its force.

"I hardly think it is necessary," said Corona; "I have so many things, and it will be a great crowd."

"My dear, be economical of your beauty, but not in your adornment of it," said the old man, with one of his engaging grins. "I desire that you have a new gown for this ball which will be remembered by every one who goes to it. You must set about it at once."

"Well, that is an easy request for any woman to grant," answered Corona, with a little laugh; "though I do not believe my gown will be remembered so long as you think."

"Who knows— who knows?" said Astrardente, thoughtfully. "I remember gowns I saw"—he checked himself—"why, as many as ten years ago!" he added, laughing in his turn, perhaps at nearly having said forty for ten. "Gowns, my dear," he continued, "make a profound impression upon men's minds."

"For the matter of that," said the Duchessa, "I do not care to impress men at all, nor women either." She spoke lightly, pleased that the conversation should have taken a more pleasant turn.

"Not even to impress me, my dear?" asked old Astrardente, with a leer.

"That is different," answered Corona, quietly.

So they talked upon the subject of the gown and the ball until the carriage rolled under the archway of the Astrardente palace. But when it was three o'clock, and Corona was at liberty to go out upon her usual round of visits, she was glad that she could go alone; and as she sat among her cushions, driving from house to house and distributing cards, she had time to think seriously of her situation. It would seem a light thing to most wives of aged husbands to have taken a fancy to a man such as Giovanni Saracinesca. But the more Corona thought of it, the more certain it appeared to her that she was committing a great sin. It weighed heavily upon her mind, and took from her the innocent pleasure she was wont to feel in driving in the bright evening air in the Villa Borghese. It took the colour from the sky, and the softness from the cushions; it haunted her and made her miserably

unhappy. At every turn she expected to see Giovanni's figure and face, and the constant recurrence of the thought seemed to add magnitude to the crime of which she accused herself,—the crime of even thinking of any man save her old husband—of wishing that Giovanni might not marry Donna Tullia after all.

"I will go to Padre Filippo," she said to herself as she reached home.

CHAPTER V.

Valdarno took Donna Tullia by his side upon the front seat of the drag; and as luck would have it, Giovanni and Del Ferice sat together behind them. Half-a-dozen other men found seats somewhere, and among them were the melancholy Spicca, who was a famous duellist, and a certain Casalverde, a man of rather doubtful reputation. The others were members of what Donna Tullia called her "corps de ballet." In those days Donna Tullia's conduct was criticised, and she was thought to be emancipated, as the phrase went. Old people opened their eyes at the spectacle of the gay young widow going off into the Campagna to picnic with a party of men; but if any intimate enemy had ventured to observe to her that she was giving occasion for gossip, she would have raised her eyebrows, explaining that they were all just like her brothers, and that Giovanni was indeed a sort of cousin. She would perhaps have condescended to say that she would not have done such a thing in Paris, but that in dear old Rome one was in the bosom of one's family, and might do anything. At present she sat chatting with Valdarno, a tall and fair young man, with a weak mouth and a good-natured disposition: she had secured Giovanni, and though he sat sullenly smoking behind her, his presence gave her satisfaction. Del Ferice's smooth face wore an expression of ineffable calm, and his watery blue eyes gazed languidly

on the broad stretch of brown grass which bordered the highroad.

For some time the drag bowled along, and Giovanni was left to his own reflections, which were not of a very pleasing kind. The other men talked of the chances of luck with the hounds; and Spicca, who had been a great deal in England, occasionally put in a remark not very complimentary to the Roman hunt. Del Ferice listened in silence, and Giovanni did not listen at all, but buttoned his overcoat to the throat, half closed his eyes, and smoked one cigarette after another, leaning back in his seat. Suddenly Donna Tullia's laugh was heard as she turned half round to look at Valdarno.

"Do you really think so?" she cried. "How soon? What a dance we will lead them then!"

Del Ferice pricked his ears in the direction of her voice, like a terrier that suspects the presence of a rat. Valdarno's answer was inaudible, but Donna Tullia ceased laughing immediately.

"They are talking politics," said Del Ferice in a low voice, leaning towards Giovanni as he spoke. The latter shrugged his shoulders and went on smoking. He did not care to be drawn into a conversation with Del Ferice.

Del Ferice was a man who was suspected of revolutionary sympathies by the authorities in Rome, but who was not feared. He was therefore allowed to live his life much as he pleased, though he was conscious from time to time that he was watched. Being a man, however, who under all circumstances pursued his own interests with more attention than he bestowed on those of any party, he did not pretend to attach any importance to the distinction of being occasionally followed by a spy, as a more foolish man might have done. If he was watched, he did not care to exhibit himself to his friends as a martyr, to tell stories of the *shirro* who sometimes dogged his footsteps, nor to cry aloud that he was unjustly persecuted. He affected a character above suspicion, and rarely allowed himself to express an opinion.