

"Why?"

"Because she hates her husband and hates you."

"Why, again?"

"Because you took Giovanni Saracinesca to your picnic yesterday; because you are always taking him away from her. For the matter of that, I hate him as much as the Astrardente hates you," added Del Ferice, with an agreeable smile. Donna Tullia did not despise flattery, but Ugo made her thoughtful.

"Do you think she really cares——?" she asked.

"As surely as that he does not," replied Del Ferice.

"It would be strange," said Donna Tullia, meditatively.

"I would like to know if it is true."

"You have only to watch them."

"Surely Giovanni cares more than she does," objected Madame Mayer. "Everybody says he loves her; nobody says she loves him."

"All the more reason. Popular report is always mistaken—except in regard to you."

"To me?"

"Since it ascribes to you so much that is good, it cannot be wrong," replied Del Ferice.

Donna Tullia laughed, and took his hand to descend from her carriage.

CHAPTER VII.

Monsieur Gouache's studio was on the second floor. The narrow flight of steps ended abruptly against a green door, perforated by a slit for the insertion of letters, by a shabby green cord which, being pulled, rang a feeble bell, and adorned by a visiting-card, whereon with many superfluous flourishes and ornaments of calligraphy was inscribed the name of the artist—ANASTASE GOUACHE.

The door being opened by a string, Donna Tullia and Del Ferice entered, and mounting half-a-dozen more

steps, found themselves in the studio, a spacious room with a window high above the floor, half shaded by a curtain of grey cotton. In one corner an iron stove gave out loud cracking sounds, pleasant to hear on the damp winter's morning, and the flame shone red through chinks of the rusty door. A dark-green carpet in passably good condition covered the floor; three or four broad divans, spread with oriental rugs, and two very much dilapidated carved chairs with leathern seats, constituted the furniture; the walls were hung with sketches of heads and figures; half-finished portraits stood upon two easels, and others were leaning together in a corner; a couple of small tables were covered with colour-tubes, brushes, and palette-knives; mingled odours of paint, varnish, and cigarette-smoke pervaded the air; and, lastly, upon a high stool before one of the easels, his sleeves turned up to the elbow, and his feet tucked in upon a rail beneath him, sat Anastase Gouache himself.

He was a man of not more than seven-and-twenty years, with delicate pale features, and an abundance of glossy black hair. A small and very much pointed moustache shaded his upper lip, and the extremities thereof rose short and perpendicular from the corners of his well-shaped mouth. His eyes were dark and singularly expressive, his forehead low and very broad; his hands were sufficiently nervous and well knit, but white as a woman's, and the fingers tapered delicately to the tips. He wore a brown velvet coat more or less daubed with paint, and his collar was low at the throat.

He sprang from his high stool as Donna Tullia and Del Ferice entered, his palette and mahl-stick in his hand, and made a most ceremonious bow; whereat Donna Tullia laughed gaily.

"Well, Gouache," she said familiarly, "what have you been doing?"

Anastase motioned to her to come before his canvas and contemplate the portrait of herself upon which he was working. It was undeniably good—a striking figure

in full-length, life-size, and breathing with Donna Tullia's vitality, if also with something of her coarseness.

"Ah, my friend," remarked Del Ferice, "you will never be successful until you take my advice."

"I think it is very like," said Donna Tullia, thoughtfully.

"You are too modest," answered Del Ferice. "There is the foundation of likeness, but it lacks yet the soul."

"Oh, but that will come," returned Madame Mayer. Then turning to the artist, she added in a more doubtful voice, "Perhaps, as Del Ferice says, you might give it a little more expression—what shall I say?—more poetry."

Anastase Gouache smiled a fine smile. He was a man of immense talent; since he had won the Prix de Rome he had made great progress, and was already half famous with that young celebrity which young men easily mistake for fame itself. A new comet visible only through a good glass causes a deal of talk and speculation in the world; but unless it comes near enough to brush the earth with its tail, it is very soon forgotten. But Gouache seemed to understand this, and worked steadily on. When Madame Mayer expressed a wish for a little more poetry in her portrait, he smiled, well knowing that poetry was as far removed from her nature as dry champagne is different in quality from small beer.

"Yes," he said; "I know—I am only too conscious of that defect." As indeed he was—conscious of the defect of it in herself. But he had many reasons for not wishing to quarrel with Donna Tullia, and he swallowed his artistic convictions in a rash resolve to make her look like an inspired prophetess rather than displease her.

"If you will sit down, I will work upon the head," he said; and moving one of the old carved chairs into position for her, he adjusted the light and began to work without any further words. Del Ferice installed himself upon a divan whence he could see Donna Tullia and her portrait, and the sitting began. It might have continued for some time in a profound silence as far as the two men

were concerned, but silence was not bearable for long to Donna Tullia.

"What were you and Saracinesca talking about yesterday?" she asked suddenly, looking towards Del Ferice.

"Politics," he answered, and was silent.

"Well?" inquired Madame Mayer, rather anxiously.

"I am sure you know his views as well as I," returned Del Ferice, rather gloomily. "He is stupid and prejudiced."

"Really?" ejaculated Gouache, with innocent surprise. "A little more towards me, Madame. Thank you—so." And he continued painting.

"You are absurd, Del Ferice!" exclaimed Donna Tullia, colouring a little. "You think every one prejudiced and stupid who does not agree with you."

"With me? With you, with us, you should say. Giovanni is a specimen of the furious Conservative, who hates change and has a cold chill at the word 'republic.' Do you call that intelligent?"

"Giovanni is intelligent for all that," answered Madame Mayer. "I am not sure that he is not more intelligent than you—in some ways," she added, after allowing her rebuke to take effect.

Del Ferice smiled blandly. It was not his business to show that he was hurt.

"In one thing he is stupid compared with me," he replied. "He is very far from doing justice to your charms. It must be a singular lack of intelligence which prevents him from seeing that you are as beautiful as you are charming. Is it not so, Gouache?"

"Does any one deny it?" asked the Frenchman, with an air of devotion.

Madame Mayer blushed with annoyance; both because she coveted Giovanni's admiration more than that of other men, and knew that she had not won it, and because she hated to feel that Del Ferice was able to wound her so easily. To cover her discomfiture she returned to the subject of politics.

"We talk a great deal of our convictions," she said; "but in the meanwhile we must acknowledge that we have accomplished nothing at all. What is the good of our meeting here two or three times a-week, meeting in society, whispering together, corresponding in cipher, and doing all manner of things, when everything goes on just the same as before?"

"Better give it up and join Don Giovanni and his party," returned Del Ferice, with a sneer. "He says if a change comes he will make the best of it. Of course, we could not do better."

"With us it is so easy," said Gouache, thoughtfully. "A handful of students, a few paving-stones, 'Vive la République!' and we have a tumult in no time."

That was not the kind of revolution in which Del Ferice proposed to have a hand. He meditated playing a very small part in some great movement; and when the fighting should be over, he meant to exaggerate the part he had played, and claim a substantial reward. For a good title and twenty thousand francs a-year he would have become as staunch for the temporal power as any canon of St. Peter's. When he had begun talking of revolutions to Madame Mayer and to half-a-dozen hare-brained youths, of whom Gouache the painter was one, he had not really the slightest idea of accomplishing anything. He took advantage of the prevailing excitement in order to draw Donna Tullia into a closer confidence than he could otherwise have aspired to obtain. He wanted to marry her, and every new power he could obtain over her was a step towards his goal. Neither she nor her friends were of the stuff required for revolutionary work; but Del Ferice had hopes that, by means of the knot of malcontents he was gradually drawing together, he might ruin Giovanni Saracinesca, and get the hand of Donna Tullia in marriage. He himself was indeed deeply implicated in the plots of the Italian party; but he was only employed as a spy, and in reality knew no more of the real intentions of those he served than did

Donna Tullia herself. But the position was sufficiently lucrative; so much so that he had been obliged to account for his accession of fortune by saying that an uncle of his had died and left him money.

"If you expected Don Giovanni to join a mob of students in tearing up paving-stones and screaming 'Vive la République!' I am not surprised that you are disappointed in your expectations," said Donna Tullia, rather scornfully.

"That is only Gouache's idea of a popular movement," answered Del Ferice.

"And yours," returned Anastase, lowering his mahlstick and brushes, and turning sharply upon the Italian—"yours would be to begin by stabbing Cardinal Antonelli in the back."

"You mistake me, my friend," returned Del Ferice, blandly. "If you volunteered to perform that service to Italy, I would certainly not dissuade you. But I would certainly not offer you my assistance."

"Fie! How can you talk like that of murder!" exclaimed Donna Tullia. "Go on with your painting, Gouache, and do not be ridiculous."

"The question of tyrannicide is marvellously interesting," answered Anastase in a meditative tone, as he resumed his work, and glanced critically from Madame Mayer to his canvas and back again.

"It belongs to a class of actions at which Del Ferice rejoices, but in which he desires no part," said Donna Tullia.

"It seems to me wiser to contemplate accomplishing the good result without any unnecessary and treacherous bloodshed," answered Del Ferice, sententiously. Again Gouache smiled in his delicate satirical fashion, and glanced at Madame Mayer, who burst into a laugh.

"Moral reflections never sound so especially and ridiculously moral as in your mouth, Ugo," she said.

"Why?" he asked, in an injured tone.

"I am sure I do not know. Of course, we all would like to see Victor Emmanuel in the Quirinal, and Rome

the capital of a free Italy. Of course we would all like to see it accomplished without murder or bloodshed; but somehow, when you put it into words, it sounds very absurd."

In her brutal fashion Madame Mayer had hit upon a great truth, and Del Ferice was very much annoyed. He knew himself to be a scoundrel; he knew Madame Mayer to be a woman of very commonplace intellect; he wondered why he was not able to deceive her more effectually. He was often able to direct her, he sometimes elicited from her some expression of admiration at his astuteness; but in spite of his best efforts, she saw through him and understood him better than he liked.

"I am sorry," he said, "that what is honourable should sound ridiculous when it comes from me. I like to think sometimes that you believe in me."

"Oh, I do," protested Donna Tullia, with a sudden change of manner. "I was only laughing. I think you are really in earnest. Only, you know, nowadays, it is not the fashion to utter moralities in a severe tone, with an air of conviction. A little dash of cynicism—you know, a sort of half sneer—is so much more *chic*; it gives a much higher idea of the morality, because it conveys the impression that it is utterly beyond you. Ask Gouache——"

"By all means," said the artist, squeezing a little more red from the tube upon his palette, "one should always sneer at what one cannot reach. The fox, you remember, called the grapes sour. He was probably right, for he is the most intelligent of animals."

"I would like to hear what Giovanni had to say about those grapes," remarked Donna Tullia.

"Oh, he sneered in the most fashionable way," answered Del Ferice. "He would have pleased you immensely. He said that he would be ruined by a change of government, and that he thought it his duty to fight against it. He talked a great deal about the level of the Tiber, and landed property, and the duties of gentlemen. And he ended by saying he would make the best of any change

that happened to come about, like a thoroughgoing egoist, as he is!"

"I would like to hear what you think of Don Giovanni Saracinesca," said Gouache; "and then I would like to hear what he thinks of you."

"I can tell you both," answered Del Ferice. "I think of him that he is a thorough aristocrat, full of prejudices and money, unwilling to sacrifice his convictions to his wealth or his wealth to his convictions, intelligent in regard to his own interests and blind to those of others, imbued with a thousand and one curious feudal notions, and overcome with a sense of his own importance."

"And what does he think of you?" asked Anastase, working busily.

"Oh, it is very simple," returned Del Ferice, with a laugh. "He thinks I am a great scoundrel."

"Really! How strange! I should not have said that."

"What? That Del Ferice is a scoundrel?" asked Donna Tullia, laughing.

"No; I should not have said it," repeated Anastase, thoughtfully. "I should say that our friend Del Ferice is a man of the most profound philanthropic convictions, nobly devoting his life to the pursuit of liberty, fraternity, and equality."

"Do you really think so?" asked Donna Tullia, with a half-comic glance at Ugo, who looked uncommonly grave.

"Madame," returned Gouache, "I never permit myself to think otherwise of any of my friends."

"Upon my word," remarked Del Ferice, "I am delighted at the compliment, my dear fellow; but I must infer that your judgment of your friends is singularly limited."

"Perhaps," answered Gouache. "But the number of my friends is not large, and I myself am very enthusiastic. I look forward to the day when 'liberty, equality, and fraternity' shall be inscribed in letters of flame, in the most expensive Bengal lights if you please, over the

porte cochère of every palace in Rome, not to mention the churches. I look forward to that day, but I have not the slightest expectation of ever seeing it. Moreover, if it ever comes, I will pack up my palette and brushes and go somewhere else by the nearest route."

"Good heavens, Gouache!" exclaimed Donna Tullia; "how can you talk like that? It is really dreadfully irreverent to jest about our most sacred convictions, or to say that we desire to see those words written over the doors of our churches!"

"I am not jesting. I worship Victor Hugo. I love to dream of the universal republic—it has immense artistic attractions—the fierce yelling crowd, the savage faces, the red caps, the terrible *mænad* women urging the brawny ruffians on to shed more blood, the lurid light of burning churches, the pale and trembling victims dragged beneath the poised knife,—ah, it is superb, it has stupendous artistic capabilities! But for myself—bah! I am a good Catholic—I wish nobody any harm, for life is very gay after all."

At this remarkable exposition of Anastase Gouache's views in regard to the utility of revolutions, Del Ferice laughed loudly; but Anastase remained perfectly grave, for he was perfectly sincere. Del Ferice, to whom the daily whispered talk of revolution in Donna Tullia's circle was mere child's play, was utterly indifferent, and suffered himself to be amused by the young artist's vagaries. But Donna Tullia, who longed to see herself the centre of a real plot, thought that she was being laughed at, and pouted her red lips and frowned her displeasure.

"I believe you have no convictions!" she said angrily. "While we are risking our lives and fortunes for the good cause, you sit here in your studio dreaming of barricades and guillotines, merely as subjects for pictures—you even acknowledge that in case we produce a revolution you would go away."

"Not without finishing this portrait," returned Anastase, quite unmoved. "It is an exceedingly good like-

ness; and in case you should ever disappear—you know people sometimes do in revolutions—or if by any unlucky accident your beautiful neck should chance beneath that guillotine you just mentioned,—why, then, this canvas would be the most delightful souvenir of many pleasant mornings, would it not?"

"You are incorrigible," said Donna Tullia, with a slight laugh. "You cannot be serious for a moment."

"It is very hard to paint you when your expression changes so often," replied Anastase, calmly.

"I am not in a good humour for sitting to you this morning. I wish you would amuse me, Del Ferice. You generally can."

"I thought politics amused you——"

"They interest me. But Gouache's ideas are detestable."

"Will you not give us some of your own, Madame?" inquired the painter, stepping back from his canvas to get a better view of his work.

"Oh, mine are very simple," answered Donna Tullia. "Victor Emmanuel, Garibaldi, and a free press."

"A combination of monarchy, republicanism, and popular education—not very interesting," remarked Gouache, still eyeing his picture.

"No; there would be nothing for you to paint, except portraits of the liberators——"

"There is a great deal of that done. I have seen them in every café in the north of Italy," interrupted the artist. "I would like to paint Garibaldi. He has a fine head."

"I will ask him to sit to you when he comes here."

"When he comes I shall be here no longer," answered Gouache. "They will whitewash the Corso, they will make a restaurant of the Colosseum, and they will hoist the Italian flag on the cross of St. Peter's. Then I will go to Constantinople; there will still be some years before Turkey is modernised."

"Artists are hopeless people," said Del Ferice. "They are utterly illogical, and it is impossible to deal with them."

If you like old cities, why do you not like old women? Why would you not rather paint Donna Tullia's old Countess than Donna Tullia herself?"

"That is precisely the opposite case," replied Anastase, quietly. "The works of man are never so beautiful as when they are falling to decay; the works of God are most beautiful when they are young. You might as well say that because wine improves with age, therefore horses do likewise. The faculty of comparison is lacking in your mind, my dear Del Ferice, as it is generally lacking in the minds of true patriots. Great reforms and great revolutions are generally brought about by people of fierce and desperate convictions, like yours, who go to extreme lengths, and never know when to stop. The quintessence of an artist's talent is precisely that faculty of comparison, that gift of knowing when the thing he is doing corresponds as nearly as he can make it with the thing he has imagined."

There was no tinge of sarcasm in Gouache's voice as he imputed to Del Ferice the savage enthusiasm of a revolutionist. But when Gouache, who was by no means calm by nature, said anything in a particularly gentle tone, there was generally a sting in it, and Del Ferice reflected upon the mean traffic in stolen information by which he got his livelihood, and was ashamed. Somehow, too, Donna Tullia felt that the part she fancied herself playing was contemptible enough when compared with the hard work, the earnest purpose, and the remarkable talent of the young artist. But though she felt her inferiority, she would have died rather than own it, even to Del Ferice. She knew that for months she had talked with Del Ferice, with Valdarno, with Casalverde, even with the melancholy and ironical Spicca, concerning conspiracies and deeds of darkness of all kinds, and she knew that she and they might go on talking for ever in the same strain without producing the smallest effect on events; but she never to the very end relinquished the illusion she cherished so dearly, that she was really and truly a conspirator, and that if any one of

her light-headed acquaintancé betrayed the rest, they might all be ordered out of Rome in four-and-twenty hours, or might even disappear into that long range of dark buildings to the left of the colonnade of St. Peter's, martyrs to the cause of their own self-importance and semi-theatrical vanity. There were many knots of such self-fancied conspirators in those days, whose wildest deed of daring was to whisper across a glass of champagne in a ball-room, or over a tumbler of Velletri wine in a Trasteverine cellar, the magic and awe-inspiring words, "Viva Garibaldi! Viva Vittorio!" They accomplished nothing. The same men and women are now grumbling and regretting the flesh-pots of the old Government, or whispering in impotent discontent "Viva la Repubblica!" and they and their descendants will go on whispering something to each other to the end of time, while mightier hands than theirs are tearing down empires and building up irresistible coalitions, and drawing red pencil-marks through the geography of Europe.

The conspirators of those days accomplished nothing after Pius IX. returned from Gaeta; the only men who were of any use at all were those who, like Del Ferice, had sources of secret information, and basely sold their scraps of news. But even they were of small importance. The moment had not come, and all the talking and whispering and tale-bearing in the world could not hasten events, nor change their course. But Donna Tullia was puffed up with a sense of her importance, and Del Ferice managed to attract just as much attention to his harmless chatter about progress as would permit him undisturbed to carry on his lucrative traffic in secret information.

Donna Tullia, who was not in the least artistic, and who by no means appreciated the merits of the portrait Gouache was painting, was very far from comprehending his definition of artistic comparison; but Del Ferice understood it very well. Donna Tullia had much foreign blood in her veins, like most of her class; but Del

Ferice's obscure descent was in all probability purely Italian, and he had inherited the common instinct in matters of art which is a part of the Italian birthright. He had recognised Gouache's wonderful talent, and had first brought Donna Tullia to his studio—a matter of little difficulty when she had learned that the young artist had already a reputation. It pleased her to fancy that by telling him to paint her portrait she might pose as his patroness, and hereafter reap the reputation of having influenced his career. For fashion, and the desire to be the representative of fashion, led Donna Tullia hither and thither as a lapdog is led by a string; and there is nothing more in the fashion than to patronise a fashionable portrait-painter.

But after Anastase Gouache had thus delivered himself of his views upon Del Ferice and the faculty of artistic comparison, the conversation languished, and Donna Tullia grew restless. "She had sat enough," she said; and as her expression was not favourable to the portrait, Anastase did not contradict her, but presently suffered her to depart in peace with her devoted adorer at her heels. And when they were gone, Anastase lighted a cigarette, and took a piece of charcoal and sketched a caricature of Donna Tullia in a liberty cap, in a fine theatrical attitude, invoking the aid of Del Ferice, who appeared as the Angel of Death, with the guillotine in the background. Having put the finishing touches to this work of art, Anastase locked his studio and went to breakfast, humming an air from the "Belle Hélène."

CHAPTER VIII.

When Corona reached home she went to her own small boudoir, with the intention of remaining there for an hour if she could do so without being disturbed. There was a prospect of this; for on inquiry she ascertained that her

husband was not yet dressed, and his dressing took a very long time. He had a cosmopolitan valet, who alone of living men understood the art of fitting the artificial and the natural Astrardente together. Corona believed this man to be an accomplished scoundrel; but she never had any proof that he was anything worse than a very clever servant, thoroughly unscrupulous where his master's interests or his own were concerned. The old Duca believed in him sincerely and trusted him alone, feeling that since he could never be a hero in his valet's eyes, he might as well take advantage of that misfortune in order to gain a confident.

Corona found three or four letters upon her table, and sat down to read them, letting her fur mantle drop to the floor, and putting her small feet out towards the fire, for the pavement of the church had been cold.

She was destined to pass an eventful day, it seemed. One of the letters was from Giovanni Saracinesca. It was the first time he had ever written to her, and she was greatly surprised on finding his name at the foot of the page. He wrote a strong clear handwriting, entirely without adornment of penmanship, close and regular and straight: there was an air of determination about it which was sympathetic, and a conciseness of expression which startled Corona, as though she had heard the man himself speaking to her.

"I write, dear Duchessa, because I covet your good opinion, and my motive is therefore before all things an interested one. I would not have you think that I had idly asked your advice about a thing so important to me as my marriage, in order to discard your counsel at the first opportunity. There was too much reason in the view you took of the matter to admit of my not giving your opinion all the weight I could, even if I had not already determined upon the very course you advised. Circumstances have occurred, however, which have almost induced me to change my mind. I have had an inter-