

"We had better go home, my angel," said the old man. "You have got a bad chill."

"Oh no, I would rather stay. It is nothing, and the best part of the opera is to come." Corona spoke quietly enough. Her strong nerves had already recovered from the shock she had experienced, and she could command her voice. She did not want to go home; on the contrary, the brilliant lights and the music served for a time to soothe her. If there had been a ball that night she would have gone to it; she would have done anything that would take her thoughts from herself. Her husband looked at her curiously. The suspicion crossed his mind that Don Giovanni had said something which had either frightened or offended her, but on second thoughts the theory seemed absurd. He regarded Saracinesca as little more than a mere acquaintance of his wife's.

"As you please, my love," he answered, drawing his chair a little nearer to hers. "I am glad that fellow is gone. We can talk at our ease now."

"Yes; I am glad he is gone. We can talk now," repeated Corona, mechanically.

"I thought his excuse slightly conventional, to say the least of it," remarked Astrardente. "An important engagement! — just a little *banal*. However, any excuse was good enough which took him away."

"Did he say that?" asked Corona. "I did not hear. Of course, any excuse would do, as you say."

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## CHAPTER IX.

Giovanni left the theatre at once, alone, and on foot. He was very much agitated. He had done suddenly and unawares the thing of all others he had determined never to do; his resolutions had been broken down and carried away as an ineffectual barrier is swept to the sea

by the floods of spring. His heart had spoken in spite of him, and in speaking had silenced every prompting of reason. He blamed himself bitterly, as he strode out across the deserted bridge of Sant' Angelo and into the broad gloom beyond, where the street widens from the fortress to the entrance of the three Borghi: he walked on and on, finding at every step fresh reason for self-reproach, and trying to understand what he had done. He paused at the end of the open piazza and looked down towards the black rushing river which he could hear, but hardly see; he turned into the silent Borgo Santo Spirito, and passed along the endless wall of the great hospital up to the colonnades, and still wandering on, he came to the broad steps of St. Peter's and sat down, alone in the darkness, at the foot of the stupendous pile.

He was perhaps not so much to blame as he was willing to allow in his just anger against himself. Corona had tempted him sorely in that last question she had put to him. She had not known, she had not even faintly guessed what she was doing, for her own brain was intoxicated with a new and indescribable sensation which had left no room for reflection nor for weighing the force of words. But Giovanni, who had been willing to give up everything, even to his personal liberty, for the sake of concealing his love, would not allow himself any argument in extenuation of what he had done. He had had but very few affairs of the heart in his life, and they had been for the most part very insignificant, and his experience was limited. Even now it never entered his mind to imagine that Corona would condone his offence; he felt sure that she was deeply wounded, and that his next meeting with her would be a terrible ordeal—so terrible, indeed, that he doubted whether he had the courage to meet her at all. His love was so great, and its object so sacred to him, that he hesitated to conceive himself loved in return; perhaps if he had been able to understand that Corona loved him he would have left Rome for ever, rather than trouble her peace by his presence.

It would have been absolutely different if he had been paying court to Donna Tullia, for instance. The feeling that he should be justified would have lent him courage, and the coldness in his own heart would have left his judgment free play. He could have watched her calmly, and would have tried to take advantage of every mood in the prosecution of his suit. He was a very honourable man, but he did not consider marriages of propriety and convenience as being at all contrary to the ordinary standard of social honour, and would have thought himself justified in using every means of persuasion in order to win a woman whom, upon mature reflection, he had judged suitable to become his wife, even though he felt no real love for her. That is an idea inherent in most old countries, an idea for which Giovanni Saracinesca was certainly in no way responsible, seeing that it had been instilled into him from his boyhood. Personally he would have preferred to live and die unmarried, rather than to take a wife as a matter of obligation towards his family; but seeing that he had never seriously loved any woman, he had acquired the habit of contemplating such a marriage as a probability, perhaps as an ultimate necessity, to be put off as long as possible, but to which he would at last yield with a good grace.

But the current of his life had been turned. He was certainly not a romantic character, not a man who desired to experience the external sensations to be obtained by voluntarily creating dramatic events. He loved action, and he had a taste for danger, but he had sought both in a legitimate way; he never desired to implicate himself in adventures where the feelings were concerned, and hitherto such experiences had not fallen in his path. As is usual with such men, when love came at last, it came with a strength such as boys of twenty do not dream of. The mature man of thirty years, with his strong and dominant temper, his carelessness of danger, his high and untried ideals of what a true affection should be, resisting the first impressions of the master-passion with the indifference of

one accustomed to believe that love could not come near his life, and was in general a thing to be avoided—a man, moreover, who by his individual gifts and by his brilliant position was able to command much that smaller men would not dream of aspiring to,—such a man, in short, as Giovanni Saracinesca,—was not likely to experience love-sickness in a mild degree. Proud, despotic, and fiercely unyielding by his inheritance of temper, he was outwardly gentle and courteous by acquired habit, a man of those whom women easily love and men very generally fear.

He did not realise his own nature, he did not suspect the extremes of feeling of which he was eminently capable. He had at first felt Corona's influence, and her face and voice seemed to awaken in him a memory, which was as yet but an anticipation, and not a real remembrance. It was as the faint perfume of the spring wafted up to a prisoner in some stern fortress, as the first gentle sweetness that rose from the enchanted lakes of the cisalpine country to the nostrils of the war-hardened Goths as they descended the last snow-slopes in their southern wandering—an anticipation that seemed already a memory, a looking forward again to something that had been already loved in a former state. Giovanni had laughed at himself for it at first, then he had dreaded its growing charm, and at the last he had fallen hopelessly under the spell, retaining only enough of his former self to make him determined that the harm which had come upon himself should not come near this woman whom he so adored.

And behold, at the first provocation, the very first time that by a careless word she had fired his blood and set his brain throbbing, he had not only been unable to hide what he felt, but had spoken such words as he would not have believed he could speak—so bluntly, so roughly, that she had almost fainted before his very eyes.

She must have been very angry, he thought. Perhaps, too, she was frightened. It was so rude, so utterly contrary to all that was chivalrous to say thus at the first

opportunity, "I love you"—just that and nothing more. Giovanni had never thought much about it, but he supposed that men in love, very seriously in love, must take a long time to express themselves, as is the manner in books; whereas he was horrified at his own bluntness in having blurted out rashly such words as could never be taken back, as could never even be explained now, he feared, because he had put himself beyond the pale of all explanation, perhaps beyond the reach of forgiveness.

Nobody ever yet explained away the distinct statement "I love you," upon any pretence of a mistake. Giovanni almost laughed at the idea, and yet he conceived that some kind of apology would be necessary, though he could not imagine how he was to frame one. He reflected that few women would consider a declaration, even as sudden as his had been, in the light of an insult; but he knew how little cause Corona had given him for speaking to her of love, and he judged from her manner that she had been either offended or frightened, or both, and that he was to blame for it. He was greatly disturbed, and the sweat stood in great drops upon his forehead as he sat there upon the steps of St. Peter's in the cold night wind. He remained nearly an hour without changing his position, and then at last he rose and slowly retraced his steps, and went home by narrow streets, avoiding the theatre and the crowd of carriages that stood before it.

He had almost determined to go away for a time, and to let his absence speak for his contrition. But he had reckoned upon his former self, and he doubted now whether he had the strength to leave Rome. The most that seemed possible was that he should keep out of Corona's way for a few days, until she should have recovered from the shock of the scene in the theatre. After that he would go to her and tell her quite simply that he was very sorry, but that he had been unable to control himself. It would soon be over. She would not refuse to speak to him, he argued, for fear of attracting

the attention of the gossips and making an open scandal. She would perhaps tell him to avoid her, and her words would be few and haughty, but she would speak to him, nevertheless.

Giovanni went to bed. The next day he gave out that he had a touch of fever, and remained in his own apartments. His father, who was passionately attached to him, in spite of his rough temper and hasty speeches, came and spent most of the day with him, and in the intervals of his kindly talk, marched up and down the room, swearing that Giovanni was no more ill than he was himself, and that he had acquired his accursed habit of staying in bed upon his travels. As Giovanni had never before been known to spend twenty-four hours in bed for any reason whatsoever, the accusation was unjust; but he only smiled and pretended to argue the case for the sake of pleasing the old prince. He really felt exceedingly uncomfortable, and would have been glad to be left alone at any price; but there was nothing for it but to pretend to be ill in body, when he was really sick at heart, and he remained obstinately in bed the whole day. On the following morning he declared his intention of going out of town, and by an early train he left the city. No one saw Giovanni again until the evening of the Frangipani ball.

Meanwhile it would have surprised him greatly to know that Corona looked for him in vain wherever she went, and that, not seeing him, she grew silent and pale, and gave short answers to the pleasant speeches men made her. Every one missed Giovanni. He wrote to Valdarno to say that he had been suddenly obliged to visit Saracinesca in order to see to some details connected with the timber question; but everybody wondered why he should have taken himself away in the height of the season for so trivial a matter. He had last been seen in the Astrardente box at the opera, where he had only stayed a few minutes, as Del Ferice was able to testify, having sat immediately opposite in the box of Madame Mayer. Del

Perice swore secretly that he would find out what was the matter; and Donna Tullia abused Giovanni in unmeasured terms to a circle of intimate friends and admirers, because he had been engaged to dance with her at the Valdarno cotillon, and had not even sent word that he could not come. Thereupon all the men present immediately offered themselves for the vacant dance, and Donna Tullia made them draw lots by tossing a copper sou in the corner of the ball-room. The man who won the toss recklessly threw over the partner he had already engaged, and almost had to fight a duel in consequence; all of which was intensely amusing to Donna Tullia. Nevertheless, in her heart, she was very angry at Giovanni's departure.

But Corona sought him everywhere, and at last heard that he had left town, two days after everybody else in Rome had known it. She would probably have been very much disturbed, if she had actually met him within a day or two of that fatal evening, but the desire to see him was so great, that she entirely overlooked the consequences. For the time being, her whole life seemed to have undergone a revolution—she trembled at the echo of the words she had heard—she spent long hours in solitude, praying with all her strength that she might be forgiven for having heard him speak; but the moment she left her room, and went out into the world, the dominant desire to see him again returned. The secret longing of her soul was to hear him speak again as he had spoken once. She would have gone again to Padre Filippo and told him all; but when she was alone in the solitude of her passionate prayers and self-accusation, she felt that she must fight this fight alone, without help of any one; and when she was in the world, she lacked courage to put altogether from her what was so very sweet, and her eyes searched unceasingly for the dark face she loved. But the stirring strength of the mighty passion played upon her soul and body in spite of her, as upon an instrument of strings; and sometimes the music was gentle and full of sweet harmony, but often

there were crashes of discord, so that she trembled and felt her heart wrung as by torture; then she set her strong lips, and her white fingers wound themselves together, and she could have cried aloud, but that her pride forbade her.

The days came and went, but Giovanni did not return, and Corona's face grew every morning more pale and her eyes every night more wistful. Her husband did not understand, but he saw that something was the matter, as others saw it, and in his quick suspicious humour he connected the trouble in his wife's face with the absence of Giovanni and with the strange chill she had felt in the theatre. But Corona d'Astrardente was a very brave and strong woman, and she bore what seemed to her like the agony of death renewed each day, so calmly that those who knew her thought it was but a passing indisposition or annoyance, unusual with her, who was never ill nor troubled, but yet insignificant. She gave particular attention to the gown which her husband had desired she should wear at the great ball, and the need she felt for distracting her mind from her chief care made society necessary to her.

The evening of the Frangipani ball came, and all Rome was in a state of excitement and expectation. The great old family had been in mourning for years, owing to three successive deaths, and during all that time the ancient stronghold which was called their palace had been closed to the world. For some time, indeed, no one of the name had been in Rome—the prince and princess preferring to pass the time of mourning in the country and in travelling; while the eldest son, now just of age, was finishing his academic career at an English University. But this year the family had returned: there had been both dinners and receptions at the palace, and the ball, which was to be a sort of festival in honour of the coming of age of the heir, was expected as the principal event of the year. It was rumoured that there would be nearly thirty rooms opened besides the great hall, which was set aside for dancing, and that the arrangements were on a scale worthy of

a household which had endured in its high position for upwards of a thousand years. It was understood that no distinction had been made, in issuing the invitations, between parties in politics or in society, and that there would be more people seen there than had been collected under one roof for many years.

The Frangipani did things magnificently, and no one was disappointed. The gardens and courts of the palace were brilliantly illuminated; vast suites of apartments were thrown open, and lavishly decorated with rare flowers; the grand staircase was lined with footmen in the liveries of the house, standing motionless as the guests passed up; the supper was a banquet such as is read of in the chronicles of medieval splendour; the enormous conservatory in the distant south wing was softly lit by shaded candles concealed among the tropical plants; and the ceilings and walls of the great hall itself had been newly decorated by famous painters; while the polished wooden floor presented an innovation upon the old-fashioned canvas-covered brick pavement, not hitherto seen in any Roman palace. A thousand candles, disposed in every variety of chandelier and candelabra, shed a soft rich light from far above, and high in the gallery at one end an orchestra of Viennese musicians played unceasingly.

As generally happens at very large balls, the dancing began late, but numbers of persons had come early in order to survey the wonders of the palace at their leisure. Among those who arrived soon after ten o'clock was Giovanni Saracinesca, who was greeted loudly by all who knew him. He looked pale and tired, if his tough nature could ever be said to seem weary; but he was in an unusually affable mood, and exchanged words with every one he met. Indeed he had been sad for so many days that he hardly understood why he felt gay, unless it was in the anticipation of once more seeing the woman he loved. He wandered through the rooms carelessly enough, but he was in reality devoured by impatience, and his quick eyes sought Corona's tall figure in every direction.

But she was not yet there, and Giovanni at last came and took his station in one of the outer halls, waiting patiently for her arrival.

While he waited, leaning against one of the marble pillars of the door, the throng increased rapidly; but he hardly noticed the swelling crowd, until suddenly there was a lull in the unceasing talk, and the men and women parted to allow a cardinal to pass out from the inner rooms. With many gracious nods and winning looks, the great man moved on, his keen eyes embracing every one and everything within the range of his vision, his courteous smile seeming intended for each separate individual, and yet overlooking none, nor resting long on any, his high brow serene and unbent, his flowing robes falling back from his courtly figure, as with his red hat in his hand he bowed his way through the bowing crowd. His departure, which was quickly followed by that of several other cardinals and prelates, was the signal that the dancing would soon begin; and when he had passed out, the throng of men and women pressed more quickly in through the door on their way to the ball-room.

But as the great cardinal's eye rested on Giovanni Saracinesca, accompanied by that invariable smile that so many can remember well to this day, his delicate hand made a gesture as though beckoning to the young man to follow him. Giovanni obeyed the summons, and became for the moment the most notable man in the room. The two passed out together, and a moment later were standing in the outer hall. Already the torch-bearers were standing without upon the grand staircase, and the lackeys were mustering in long files to salute the Prime Minister. Just then the master of the house came running breathless from within. He had not seen that Cardinal Antonelli was taking his leave, and hastened to overtake him, lest any breach of etiquette on his part should attract the displeasure of the statesman.

"Your Eminence's pardon!" he exclaimed, hurriedly. "I had not seen that your Eminence was leaving us—so early too—the Princess feared——"

"Do not speak of it," answered the Cardinal, in suave tones. "I am not so strong as I used to be. We old fellows must to bed betimes, and leave you young ones to enjoy yourselves. No excuses—good night—a beautiful ball—I congratulate you on the reopening of your house—good night again. I will have a word with Giovanni here before I go down-stairs."

He extended his hand to Frangipani, who lifted it respectfully to his lips and withdrew, seeing that he was not wanted. He and many others speculated long upon the business which engaged his Eminence in close conversation with Giovanni Saracinesca, keeping him for more than a quarter of an hour in the cold ante-chamber, where the night wind blew in unhindered from the vast staircase of the palace. As a matter of fact, Giovanni was as much surprised as any one.

"Where have you been, my friend?" inquired the Cardinal, when they were alone.

"To Saracinesca, your Eminence."

"And what have you been doing in Saracinesca at this time of year? I hope you are attending to the woods there—you have not been cutting timber?"

"No one can be more anxious than we to see the woods grow thick upon our hills," replied Giovanni. "Your Eminence need have no fear."

"Not for your estates," said the great Cardinal, his small keen black eyes resting searchingly on Giovanni's face. "But I confess I have some fears for yourself."

"For me, Eminence?" repeated Giovanni, in some astonishment.

"For you. I have heard with considerable anxiety that there is a question of marrying you to Madame Mayer. Such a match would not meet with the Holy Father's approval, nor—if I may be permitted to mention my humble self in the same breath with our august sovereign—would it be wise in my own estimation."

"Permit me to remark to your Eminence," answered Giovanni, proudly, "that in my house we have never been

in the habit of asking advice upon such subjects. Donna Tullia is a good Catholic. There can therefore be no valid objection to my asking her hand, if my father and I agree that it is best."

"You are terrible fellows, you Saracinesca," returned the Cardinal, blandly. "I have read your family history with immense interest, and what you say is quite true. I cannot find an instance on record of your taking the advice of any one—certainly not of the Holy Church. It is with the utmost circumspection that I venture to approach the subject with you, and I am sure that you will believe me when I say that my words are not dictated by any officious or meddling spirit; I am addressing you by the direct desire of the Holy Father himself."

A soft answer turneth away wrath, and if the all-powerful statesman's answer to Giovanni seems to have been more soft than might have been expected, it must be remembered that he was speaking to the heir of one of the most powerful houses in the Roman State, at a time when the personal friendship of such men as the Saracinesca was of vastly greater importance than it is now. At that time some twenty noblemen owned a great part of the Pontifical States, and the influence they could exert upon their tenantry was very great, for the feudal system was not extinct, nor the feudal spirit. Moreover, though Cardinal Antonelli was far from popular with any party, Pius IX. was respected and beloved by a vast majority of the gentlemen as well as of the people. Giovanni's first impulse was to resist any interference whatsoever in his affairs; but on receiving the Cardinal's mild answer to his own somewhat arrogant assertion of independence, he bowed politely and professed himself willing to listen to reason.

"But," he said, "since his Holiness has mentioned the matter, I beg that your Eminence will inform him that, though the question of my marriage seems to be in everybody's mouth, it is as yet merely a project in which no active steps have been taken."

"I am glad of it, Giovanni," replied the Cardinal, familiarly taking his arm, and beginning to pace the hall; "I am glad of it. There are reasons why the match appears to be unworthy of you. If you will permit me, without any offence to Madame Mayer, I will tell you what those reasons are."

"I am at your service," said Giovanni, gravely, "provided only there is no offence to Donna Tullia."

"None whatever. The reasons are purely political. Madame Mayer—or Donna Tullia, since you prefer to call her so—is the centre of a sort of club of so-called Liberals, of whom the most active and the most foolish member is a certain Ugo del Ferice, a fellow who calls himself a count, but whose grandfather was a coachman in the Vatican under Leo XII. He will get himself into trouble some day. He is always in attendance upon Donna Tullia, and probably led her into this band of foolish young people for objects of his own. It is a very silly society; I daresay you have heard some of their talk?"

"Very little," replied Giovanni; "I do not trouble myself about politics. I did not even know that there was such a club as your Eminence speaks of."

Cardinal Antonelli glanced sharply at his companion as he proceeded.

"They affect solidarity and secrecy, these young people," he said, with a sneer, "and their solidarity betrays their secrecy, because it is unfortunately true in our dear Rome that wherever two or three are gathered together they are engaged in some mischief. But they may gather in peace at the studio of Monsieur Gouache, or anywhere else they please, for all I care. Gouache is a clever fellow; he is to paint my portrait. Do you know him? But, to return to my sheep in wolves' clothing—my amusing little conspirators. They can do no harm, for they know not even what they say, and their words are not followed by any kind of action whatsoever. But the principle of the thing is bad, Giovanni. Your brave old ancestors used to fight us Churchmen outright, and unless

the Lord is especially merciful, their souls are in an evil case, for the devil knoweth his own, and is a particularly bad paymaster. But they fought outright, like gentlemen; whereas these people—*foderunt foveam ut caperent me*—they have digged a ditch, but they will certainly not catch me, nor any one else. Their conciliabules, as Rousseau would have called them, meet daily and talk great nonsense and do nothing; which does not prove their principles to be good, while it demonstrates their intellect to be contemptible. No offence to the Signor Conte del Ferice, but I think ignorance has marked his little party for its own, and inanity waits on all his councils. If they believe in half the absurdities they utter, why do they not pack up their goods and chattels and cross the frontier? If they meant anything, they would do something."

"Evidently," replied Giovanni, half amused at his Eminence's tirade.

"Evidently. Therefore they mean nothing. Therefore our good friend Donna Tullia is dabbling in the emptiness of political dilettanteism for the satisfaction of a hollow vanity; no offence to her—it is the manner of her kind."

Giovanni was silent.

"Believe me, prince," said the Cardinal, suddenly changing his tone and speaking very seriously, "there is something better for strong men like you and me to do, in these times, than to dabble in conspiracy and to toss off glasses of champagne to Italian unity and Victor Emmanuel. The condition of our lives is battle, and battle against terrible odds. Neither you nor I should be content to waste our strength in fighting shadows, in waging war on petty troubles of our own raising, knowing all the while that the powers of evil are marshalled in a deadly array against the powers of good. *Sed non prevalebunt!*"

The Cardinal's thin face assumed a strange look of determination, and his delicate fingers grasped Giovanni's arm with a force that startled him.

"You speak bravely," answered the young man. "You are more sanguine than we men of the world. You believe that disaster impossible which to me seems growing daily more imminent."

Cardinal Antonelli turned his gleaming black eyes full on his companion.

"*O generatio incredula!* If you have not faith, you have not courage, and if you have not courage you will waste your life in the pursuit of emptiness! It is for men like you, for men of ancient race, of broad acres, of iron body and healthy mind, to put your hand to the good work and help us who have struggled for many years and whose strength is already failing. Every action of your life, every thought of your waking hours, should be for the good end, lest we all perish together and expiate our lukewarm indifference. *Timidi nunquam statuerunt tropæum*—if we would divide the spoil we must gird on the sword and use it boldly; we must not allow the possibility of failure; we must be vigilant; we must be united as one man. You tell me that you men of the world already regard a disaster as imminent—to expect defeat is nine-tenths of a defeat itself. Ah, if we could count upon such men as you to the very death, our case would be far from desperate."

"For the matter of that, your Eminence can count upon us well enough," replied Giovanni, quietly.

"Upon you, Giovanni—yes, for you are a brave gentleman. But upon your friends, even upon your class—no. Can I count upon the Valdarno, even? You know as well as I that they are in sympathy with the Liberals—that they have neither the courage to support us nor the audacity to renounce us; and, what is worse, they represent a large class, of whom, I regret to say, Donna Tullia Mayer is one of the most prominent members. With her wealth, her youth, her effervescent spirits, and her early widowhood, she leads men after her; they talk, they chatter, they set up an opinion and gloat over it, while they lack the spirit to support it. They are all alike—

*non tantum ovum ovo simile*—one egg is not more like another than they are. *Non tali auxilio*—we want no such help. We ask for bread, not for stones; we want men, not empty-headed dandies. We have both at present; but if the Emperor fails us, we shall have too many dandies and too few men—too few men like you, Don Giovanni. Instead of armed battalions we shall have polite societies for mutual assurance against political risks,—instead of the support of the greatest military power in Europe, we shall have to rely on a parcel of young gentlemen whose opinions are guided by Donna Tullia Mayer."

Giovanni laughed and glanced at his Eminence, who chose to refer all the imminent disasters of the State to the lady whom he did not wish to see married to his companion.

"Is her influence really so great?" asked Saracinesca, incredulously.

"She is agreeable, she is pretty, she is rich—her influence is a type of the whole influence which is abroad in Rome—a reflection of the life of Paris. There, at least, the women play a real part—very often a great one: here, when they have got command of a drawing-room full of fops, they do not know where to lead them; they change their minds twenty times a-day; they have an access of religious enthusiasm in Advent, followed by an attack of Liberal fever in Carnival, and their season is brought to a fitting termination by the prostration which overtakes them in Lent. By that time all their principles are upset, and they go to Paris for the month of May—*pour se retremper dans les idées idéalistes*, as they express it. Do you think one could construct a party out of such elements, especially when you reflect that this mass of uncertainty is certain always to yield to the ultimate consideration of self-interest? Half of them keep an Italian flag with the Papal one, ready to thrust either of them out of the window as occasion may require. Good night, Giovanni. I have talked enough, and all Rome will set upon you to



find out what secrets of State I have been confiding. You had better prepare an answer, for you can hardly inform Donna Tullia and her set that I have been calling them a parcel of—weak and ill-advised people. They might take offence—they might even call me by bad names,—fancy how very terribly that would afflict me! Good night, Giovanni—my greetings to your father.”

The Cardinal nodded, but did not offer his hand. He knew that Giovanni hated to kiss his ring, and he had too much tact to press the ceremonial etiquette upon any one whom he desired to influence. But he nodded graciously, and receiving his cloak from the gentleman who accompanied him and who had waited at a respectful distance, the statesman passed out of the great doorway, where the double line of torch-bearers stood ready to accompany him down the grand staircase to his carriage, in accordance with the custom of those days.

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## CHAPTER X.

When he was alone, Giovanni retraced his steps, and again took up his position near the entrance to the reception-rooms. He had matter for reflection in the interview which had just ended; and, having nothing better to do while he waited for Corona, he thought about what had happened. He was not altogether pleased at the interest his marriage excited in high quarters; he hated interference, and he regarded Cardinal Antonelli's advice in such a matter as an interference of the most unwarrantable kind. Neither he himself nor his father were men who sought counsel from without, for independence in action was with them a family tradition, as independence of thought was in their race a hereditary quality. To think that if he, Giovanni Saracinesca, chose to marry any woman whatsoever, any one, no matter how exalted

in station, should dare to express approval or disapproval was a shock to every inborn and cultivated prejudice in his nature. He had nearly quarrelled with his own father for seeking to influence his matrimonial projects; it was not likely that he would suffer Cardinal Antonelli to interfere with them. If Giovanni had really made up his mind—had firmly determined to ask the hand of Donna Tullia—it is more than probable that the statesman's advice would not only have failed signally in preventing the match, but by the very opposition it would have aroused in Giovanni's heart it would have had the effect of throwing him into the arms of a party which already desired his adhesion, and which, under his guidance, might have become as formidable as it was previously insignificant. But the great Cardinal was probably well informed, and his words had not fallen upon a barren soil. Giovanni had vacillated sadly in trying to come to a decision. His first Quixotic impulse to marry Madame Mayer, in order to show the world that he cared nothing for Corona d'Astrardente, had proved itself absurd, even to his impetuous intelligence. The growing antipathy he felt for Donna Tullia had made his marriage with her appear in the light of a disagreeable duty, and his rashness in confessing his love for Corona had so disturbed his previous conceptions that marriage no longer seemed a duty at all. What had been but a few days before almost a fixed resolution, had dwindled till it seemed an impracticable and even a useless scheme. When he had arrived at the Palazzo Frangipani that evening, he had very nearly forgotten Donna Tullia, and had quite determined that whatever his father might say he would not give the promised answer before Easter. By the time the Cardinal had left him, he had decided that no power on earth should induce him to marry Madame Mayer. He did not take the trouble of saying to himself that he would marry no one else.

The Cardinal's words had struck deep, in a deep nature. Giovanni had given Del Ferice a very fair exposition of