

him, and told him he was a dog. I suppose he will fight."

"Ah yes; he will probably fight," repeated Spicca, thoughtfully. "What are your weapons, Don Giovanni?"

"Anything he likes."

"But the choice is yours if he challenges," returned the Count.

"As you please. Arrange all that—foils, swords, or pistols."

"You do not seem to take much interest in this affair," remarked Spicca, sadly.

"He is best with foils," said the old Prince.

"Foils or pistols, of course," said the Count. "Swords are child's play."

Satisfied that his seconds meant business, Giovanni sank back in his corner of the carriage, and was silent.

"We had better have the meeting in my villa," said his father. "If it rains, they can fight indoors. I will send for the surgeon at once."

In a few moments they reached the Palazzo Saracinesca. The Prince left word at the porter's lodge that any gentlemen who arrived were to be admitted, and all three went up-stairs. It was half-past two o'clock.

As they entered the apartments, they heard a carriage drive under the great archway below.

"Go to your rooms, Giovannino," said the old Prince. "These fellows are punctual. I will call you when they are gone. I suppose you mean business seriously?"

"I care nothing about him. I will give him any satisfaction he pleases," answered Giovanni. "It is very kind of you to undertake the matter—I am very grateful."

"I would not leave it to anybody else," muttered the old Prince, as he hurried away to meet Del Ferice's seconds.

Giovanni entered his own rooms, and went straight to his writing-table. He took a pen and a sheet of paper and began writing. His face was very grave, but his

hand was steady. For more than an hour he wrote without pausing. Then his father entered the room.

"Well?" said Giovanni, looking up.

"It is all settled," said the old gentleman, seriously.

"I was afraid they might make some objection to me as a second. You know there is an old clause about near relations acting in such cases. But they declared that they considered my co-operation an honour—so that is all right. You must do your best, my boy. This rascal means to hurt you if he can. Seven o'clock is the time. We must leave here at half-past six. You can sleep two hours and a half. I will sit up and call you. Spicca has gone home to change his clothes, and is coming back immediately. Now lie down. I will see to your foils——"

"Is it foils, then?" asked Giovanni, quietly.

"Yes. They made no objection. You had better lie down."

"I will. Father, if anything should happen to me—it may, you know—you will find my keys in this drawer, and this letter, which I beg you will read. It is to yourself."

"Nonsense, my dear boy! Nothing will happen to you—you will just run him through the arm and come home to breakfast."

The old Prince spoke in his rough cheerful way; but his voice trembled, and he turned aside to hide two great tears that had fallen upon his dark cheeks and were losing themselves in his white beard.

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## CHAPTER XII.

Giovanni slept soundly for two hours. He was very tired with the many emotions of the night, and the arrangements for the meeting being completed, it seemed as though work were over and the pressure removed. It

is said that men will sleep for hours when the trial is over and the sentence of death has been passed; and though it was more likely that Del Ferice would be killed than that Giovanni would be hurt, the latter felt not unlike a man who has been tried for his life. He had suffered in a couple of hours almost every emotion of which he was capable—his love for Corona, long controlled and choked down, had broken bounds at last, and found expression for itself; he had in a moment suffered the severest humiliation and the most sincere sorrow at her reproaches; he had known the fear of seeing her no more, and the sweetness of pardon from her own lips; he had found himself on a sudden in a frenzy of righteous wrath against Del Ferice, and a moment later he had been forced to hide his anger under a calm face; and at last, when the night was far spent, he had received the assurance that in less than four hours he would have ample opportunity for taking vengeance upon the cowardly eavesdropper who had so foully got possession of the one secret he held dear. Worn out with all he had suffered, and calm in the expectation of the morning's struggle, Giovanni lay down upon his bed and slept.

Del Ferice, on the contrary, was very wakeful. He had an unpleasant sensation about his throat as though he had been hanged, and cut down before he was dead; and he suffered the unutterable mortification of knowing that, after a long and successful social career, he had been detected by his worst enemy in a piece of disgraceful villainy. In the first place, Giovanni might kill him. Del Ferice was a very good fencer, but Saracinesca was stronger and more active; there was certainly considerable danger in the duel. On the other hand, if he survived, Giovanni had him in his power for the rest of his life, and there was no escape possible. He had been caught listening—caught in a flagrantly dishonest trick—and he well knew that if the matter had been brought before a jury of honour, he would have been declared incompetent to claim any satisfaction.

It was not the first time Del Ferice had done such things, but it was the first time he had been caught. He cursed his awkwardness in oversetting the vase just at the moment when his game was successfully played to the end—just when he thought that he began to see land, in having discovered beyond all doubt that Giovanni was devoted body and soul to Corona d'Astrardente. The information had been necessary to him, for he was beginning seriously to press his suit with Donna Tullia, and he needed to be sure that Giovanni was not a rival to be feared. He had long suspected Saracinesca's devotion to the dark Duchessa, and by constantly putting himself in his way, he had done his best to excite his jealousy and to stimulate his passion. Giovanni never could have considered Del Ferice as a rival; the idea would have been ridiculous. But the constant annoyance of finding the man by Corona's side, when he desired to be alone with her, had in some measure heightened the effect Del Ferice desired, though it had not actually produced it. Being a good judge of character, he had sensibly reckoned his chances against Giovanni, and he had formed so just an opinion of the man's bold and devoted character as to be absolutely sure that if Saracinesca loved Corona he would not seriously think of marrying Donna Tullia. He had done all he could to strengthen the passion when he guessed it was already growing, and at the very moment when he had received circumstantial evidence of it which placed it beyond all doubt, he had allowed himself to be discovered, through his own unpardonable carelessness.

Evidently the only satisfactory way out of the difficulty was to kill Giovanni outright, if he could do it. In that way he would rid himself of an enemy, and at the same time of the evidence against himself. The question was, how this could be accomplished; for Giovanni was a man of courage, strength, and experience, and he himself—Ugo del Ferice—possessed none of those qualities in any great degree. The result was, that he slept not at all, but passed the night in a state of nervous anxiety by no means con-

duce to steadiness of hand or calmness of the nerves. He was less pleased than ever when he heard that Giovanni's seconds were his own father and the melancholy Spicca, who was the most celebrated duellist in Italy, in spite of his cadaverous long body, his sad voice, and his expression of mournful resignation to the course of events.

In the event of his neither killing Don Giovanni nor being himself killed, what he most dreaded was the certainty that for the rest of his life he must be in his enemy's power. He knew that, for Corona's sake, Giovanni would not mention the cause of the duel, and no one could have induced him to speak of it himself; but it would be a terrible hindrance in his life to feel at every turn that the man he hated had the power to expose him to the world as a scoundrel of the first water. What he had heard gave him but small influence over Saracinesca, though it was of great value in determining his own action. To say aloud to the world that Giovanni loved the Duchessa d'Astrarrente would be of little use. Del Ferice could not, for very shame, tell how he had found it out; and there was no other proof but his evidence, for he guessed that from that time forward the open relation between the two would be even more formal than before—and the most credulous people do not believe in a great fire unless they can see a little smoke. He had not even the advantage of turning the duel to account in his interest with Donna Tullia, since Giovanni could force him to deny that she was implicated in the question, on pain of exposing his treachery. There was palpably no satisfactory way out of the matter unless he could kill his adversary. He would have to leave the country for a while; but Giovanni once dead, it would be easy to make Donna Tullia believe they had fought on her account, and to derive all the advantage there was to be gained from posing before the world as her defender.

But though Del Ferice's rest was disturbed by the contemplation of his difficulties, he did not neglect any precaution which might save his strength for the morrow. He lay down upon his bed, stretching himself at full

length, and carefully keeping his right arm free, lest, by letting his weight fall upon it as he lay, he should benumb the muscles or stiffen the joints; from time to time he rubbed a little strengthening ointment upon his wrist, and he was careful that the light should not shine in his eyes and weary them. At six o'clock his seconds appeared with the surgeon they had engaged, and the four men were soon driving rapidly down the Corso towards the gate.

So punctual were the two parties that they arrived simultaneously at the gate of the villa which had been selected for the encounter. The old Prince took a key from his pocket and himself opened the great iron gate. The carriages drove in, and the gates were closed by the astonished porter, who came running out as they creaked upon their hinges. The light was already sufficient for the purpose of fencing, as the eight men descended simultaneously before the house. The morning was cloudy, but the ground was dry. The principals and seconds saluted each other formally. Giovanni withdrew to a little distance on one side with his surgeon, and Del Ferice stood aside with his.

The melancholy Spicca, who looked like the shadow of death in the dim morning light, was the first to speak.

"Of course you know the best spot in the villa?" he said to the old Prince.

"As there is no sun, I suggest that they fight upon the ground behind the house. It is hard and dry."

The whole party followed old Saracinesca. Spicca had the foils in a green bag. The place suggested by the Prince seemed in every way adapted, and Del Ferice's seconds made no objection. There was absolutely no choice of position upon the ground, which was an open space about twenty yards square, hard and well rolled, preferable in every way to a grass lawn.

Without further comment, Giovanni took off his coat and waistcoat, and Del Ferice, who looked paler and more unhealthy than usual, followed his example. The seconds crossed sides to examine the principals' shirts,

and to assure themselves that they wore no flannel underneath the unstarched linen. This formality being accomplished, the foils were carefully compared, and Giovanni was offered the first choice. He took the one nearest his hand, and the other was carried to Del Ferice. They were simple fencing foils, the buttons being removed and the points sharpened—there was nothing to choose between them. The seconds then each took a sword, and stationed the combatants some seven or eight paces apart, while they themselves stood a little aside, each upon the right hand of his principal, and the witnesses placed themselves at opposite corners of the ground, the surgeons remaining at the ends behind the antagonists. There was a moment's pause. When all was ready, old Saracinesca came close to Giovanni, while Del Ferice's second approached his principal in like manner.

"Giovanni," said the old Prince, gravely, "as your second I am bound to recommend you to make any advance in your power towards a friendly understanding. Can you do so?"

"No, father, I cannot," answered Giovanni, with a slight smile. His face was perfectly calm, and of a natural colour. Old Saracinesca crossed the ground, and met Casalverde, the opposite second, half-way. Each formally expressed to the other his great regret that no arrangement would be possible, and then retired again to the right hand of his principal.

"Gentlemen," said the Prince, in a loud voice, "are you ready?" As both men bowed their assent, he added immediately, in a sharp tone of command, "In guard!"

Giovanni and Del Ferice each made a step forward, saluted each other with their foils, repeated the salute to the seconds and witnesses, and then came face to face and fell into position. Each made one thrust in tierce at the other, in the usual fashion of compliment, each parrying in the same way.

"Halt!" cried Saracinesca and Casalverde, in the same breath.

"In guard!" shouted the Prince again, and the duel commenced.

In a moment the difference between the two men was apparent. Del Ferice fenced in the Neapolitan style—his arm straight before him, never bending from the elbow, making all his play with his wrist, his back straight, and his knees so much bent that he seemed not more than half his height. He made his movements short and quick, and relatively few, in evident fear of tiring himself at the start. To a casual observer his fence was less graceful than his antagonist's, his lunges less daring, his parries less brilliant. But as the old Prince watched him he saw that the point of his foil advanced and retreated in a perfectly straight line, and in parrying described the smallest circle possible, while his cold watery blue eye was fixed steadily upon his antagonist; old Saracinesca ground his teeth, for he saw that the man was a most accomplished swordsman.

Giovanni fought with the air of one who defended himself, without much thought of attack. He did not bend so low as Del Ferice, his arm doubled a little before his lunge, and his foil occasionally made a wide circle in the air. He seemed careless, but in strength and elasticity he was far superior to his enemy, and could perhaps afford to trust to these advantages, when a man like Del Ferice was obliged to employ his whole skill and science.

They had been fencing for more than two minutes, without any apparent result, when Giovanni seemed suddenly to change his tactics. He lowered the point of his weapon a little, and, keeping it straight before him, began to press more closely upon his antagonist. Del Ferice kept his arm at full length, and broke ground for a yard or two, making clever feints in *carte* at Giovanni's body, with the object of stopping his advance. But Giovanni pressed him, and suddenly made a peculiar movement with his foil, bringing it in contact with his enemy's along its length.

"Halt!" cried Casalverde. Both men lowered their

weapons instantly, and the seconds sprang forward and touched their swords between them. Giovanni bit his lip angrily.

"Why 'halt'?" asked the Prince, sharply. "Neither is touched."

"My principal's shoe-string is untied," answered Casalverde, calmly. It was true. "He might easily trip and fall," explained Del Ferice's friend, bending down and proceeding to tie the silk ribbon. The Prince shrugged his shoulders, and retired with Giovanni a few steps back.

"Giovanni," he said, in a voice trembling with emotion, "if you are not more careful, he will do you a mischief. For heaven's sake run him through the arm and let us be done with it."

"I should have disarmed him that time if his second had not stopped us," said Giovanni, calmly. "He is ready again," he added, "come on."

"In guard!"

Again the two men advanced, and again the foils crossed and recrossed and rang loudly in the cold morning air. Once more Giovanni pressed upon Del Ferice, and Del Ferice broke ground. In answer to a quick feint, Giovanni made a round parry and a sharp short lunge in tierce.

"Halt!" yelled Casalverde. Old Saracinesca sprang in, and Giovanni lowered his weapon. But Casalverde did not interpose his sword. A full two seconds after the cry to halt, Del Ferice lunged right forward. Giovanni thrust out his arm to save his body from the foul attempt—he had not time to raise his weapon. Del Ferice's sharp rapier entered his wrist and tore a long wound nearly to the elbow.

Giovanni said nothing, but his sword dropped from his hand and he turned upon his father, white with rage. The blood streamed down his sleeve, and his surgeon came running towards him.

The old man had understood at a glance the foul play that had been practised, and going forward laid his hand upon the arm of Del Ferice's second.

"Why did you stop them, sir? And where was your sword?" he said in great anger. Del Ferice was leaning upon his friend; a greenish pallor had overspread his face, but there was a smile under his colourless moustache.

"My principal was touched," said Casalverde, pointing to a tiny scratch upon Del Ferice's neck, from which a single drop of blood was slowly oozing.

"Then why did you not prevent your principal from thrusting after you cried the halt?" asked Saracinesca, severely. "You have singularly misunderstood your duties, sir, and when these gentlemen are satisfied, you will be answerable to me."

Casalverde was silent.

"I protest myself wholly satisfied," said Ugo, with a disagreeable smile, as he glanced to where the surgeon was binding up Giovanni's arm.

"Sir," said old Saracinesca, fiercely addressing the second, "I am not here to bandy words with your principal. He may express himself satisfied through you, if he pleases. My principal, through me, expresses his entire dissatisfaction."

"Your principal, Prince," answered Casalverde, coldly, "is unable to proceed, seeing that his right arm is injured."

"My son, sir, fences as readily with his left hand as with his right," returned old Saracinesca.

Del Ferice's face fell, and his smile vanished instantly.

"In that case we are ready," returned Casalverde, unable, however, to conceal his annoyance. He was a friend of Del Ferice's and would gladly have seen Giovanni run through the body by the foul thrust.

There was a moment's consultation on the other side.

"I will give myself the pleasure of killing that gentleman to-morrow morning," remarked Spicca, as he mournfully watched the surgeon's operations.

"Unless I kill him myself to-day," returned the Prince savagely, in his white beard. "Are you ready, Giovanni?" It never occurred to him to ask his son if he was too badly hurt to proceed.

Giovanni never spoke, but the hot blood had mounted to his temples, and he was dangerously angry. He took the foil they gave him, and felt the point quietly. It was sharp as a needle. He nodded to his father's question, and they resumed their places, the old Prince this time standing on the left, as his son had changed hands. Del Ferice came forward rather timidly. His courage had sustained him so far, but the consciousness of having done a foul deed, and the sight of the angry man before him, were beginning to make him nervous. He felt uncomfortable, too, at the idea of fencing against a left-handed antagonist.

Giovanni made one or two lunges, and then, with a strange movement unlike anything any one present was acquainted with, seemed to wind his blade round Del Ferice's, and, with a violent jerk of the wrist, sent the weapon flying across the open space. It struck a window of the house, and crashed through the panes.

"More broken glass!" said Giovanni scornfully, as he lowered his point and stepped back two paces. "Take another sword, sir," he said; "I will not kill you defenceless."

"Good heavens, Giovannino!" exclaimed his father in the greatest excitement; "where on earth did you learn that trick?"

"On my travels, father," returned Giovanni, with a smile; "where you tell me I learned so much that was bad. He looks frightened," he added in a low voice, as he glanced at Del Ferice's livid face.

"He has cause," returned the Prince, "if he ever had in his life!"

Casalverde and his witness advanced from the other side with a fresh pair of foils; for the one that had gone through the window could not be recovered at once, and was probably badly bent by the twist it had received. The gentlemen offered Giovanni his choice.

"If there is no objection I will keep the one I have," said he to his father. The foils were measured, and

were found to be alike. The two gentlemen retired, and Del Ferice chose a weapon.

"That is right," said Spicca, as he slowly went back to his place. "You should never part with an old friend."

"We are ready!" was called from the opposite side.

"In guard, then!" cried the Prince. The angry flush had not subsided from Giovanni's forehead, as he again went forward. Del Ferice came up like a man who has suddenly made up his mind to meet death, with a look of extraordinary determination on his pale face.

Before they had made half-a-dozen passes Ugo slipped, or pretended to slip, and fell upon his right knee; but as he came to the ground, he made a sharp thrust upwards under Giovanni's extended left arm.

The old Prince uttered a fearful oath, that rang and echoed along the walls of the ancient villa. Del Ferice had executed the celebrated feint known long ago as the "Colpo del Tancredi," "Tancred's lunge," from the supposed name of its inventor. It is now no longer permitted in duelling. But the deadly thrust loses half its danger against a left-handed man. The foil grazed the flesh on Giovanni's left side, and the blood again stained his white shirt. In the moment when Del Ferice slipped, Giovanni had made a straight and deadly lunge at his body, and the sword, instead of passing through Ugo's lungs, ran swift and sure through his throat, with such force that the iron guard struck the falling man's jaw with tremendous impetus, before the oath the old Prince had uttered was fairly out of his mouth.

Seconds and witnesses and surgeons sprang forward hastily. Del Ferice lay upon his side; he had fallen so heavily and suddenly as to wrench the sword from Giovanni's grip. The old Prince gave one look, and dragged his son away.

"He is as dead as a stone," he muttered, with a savage gleam in his eyes.

Giovanni hastily began to dress, without paying any attention to the fresh wound he had received in the last

encounter. In the general excitement, his surgeon had joined the group about the fallen man. Before Giovanni had got his overcoat on he came back with Spicca, who looked crestfallen and disappointed.

"He is not dead at all," said the surgeon. "You did the thing with a master's hand—you ran his throat through without touching the jugular artery or the spine."

"Does he want to go on?" asked Giovanni, so savagely that the three men stared at him.

"Do not be so bloodthirsty, Giovannino," said the old Prince, reproachfully.

"I should be justified in going back and killing him as he lies there," said the younger Saracinesca, fiercely. "He nearly murdered me twice this morning."

"That is true," said the Prince, "the dastardly brute!"

"By the bye," said Spicca, lighting a cigarette, "I am afraid I have deprived you of the pleasure of dealing with the man who called himself Del Ferice's second. I just took the opportunity of having a moment's private conversation with him—we disagreed a little."

"Oh, very well," growled the Prince; "as you please. I daresay I shall have enough to do in taking care of Giovanni to-morrow. That is a villanous bad scratch on his arm."

"Bah! it is nothing to mention, save for the foul way it was given," said Giovanni between his teeth.

Once more old Saracinesca and Spicca crossed the ground. There was a word of formality exchanged, to the effect that both combatants were satisfied, and then Giovanni and his party moved off, Spicca carrying his green bag of foils under his arm, and puffing clouds of smoke into the damp morning air. They had been nearly an hour on the ground, and were chilled with cold, and exhausted for want of sleep. They entered their carriage and drove rapidly homewards.

"Come in and breakfast with us," said the old Prince to Spicca, as they reached the Palazzo Saracinesca.

"Thank you, no," answered the melancholy man. "I

have much to do, as I shall go to Paris to-morrow morning by the ten o'clock train. Can I do anything for you there? I shall be absent some months."

"I thought you were going to fight to-morrow," objected the Prince.

"Exactly. It will be convenient for me to leave the country immediately afterwards."

The old man shuddered. With all his fierce blood and headstrong passion, he could not comprehend the fearful calm of this strange man, whose skill was such that he regarded his adversary's death as a matter of course whenever he so pleased. As for Giovanni, he was still so angry that he cared little for the issue of the second duel.

"I am sincerely grateful for your kind offices," he said, as Spicca took leave of him.

"You shall be amply revenged of the two attempts to murder you," said Spicca, quietly; and so, having shaken hands with all, he again entered the carriage. It was the last they saw of him for a long time. He faithfully fulfilled his programme. He met Casalverde on the following morning at seven o'clock, and at precisely a quarter past, he left him dead on the field. He breakfasted with his seconds at half-past eight, and left Rome with them for Paris at ten o'clock. He had selected two French officers who were about to return to their home, in order not to inconvenience any of his friends by obliging them to leave the country; which showed that, even in moments of great excitement, Count Spicca was thoughtful of others.

When the surgeon had dressed Giovanni's wounds, he left the father and son together. Giovanni lay upon a couch in his own sitting-room, eating his breakfast as best he could with one hand. The old Prince paced the floor, commenting from time to time upon the events of the morning.

"It is just as well that you did not kill him, Giovannino," he remarked; "it would have been a nuisance to have been obliged to go away just now."

Giovanni did not answer.

"Of course, duelling is a great sin, and is strictly forbidden by our religion," said the Prince suddenly. "But then——"

"Precisely," returned Giovanni. "We nevertheless cannot always help ourselves."

"I was going to say," continued his father, "that it is, of course, very wicked, and if one is killed in a duel, one probably goes straight into hell. But then—it was worth something to see how you sent that fellow's foil flying through the window!"

"It is a very simple trick. If you will take a foil, I will teach it to you."

"Presently, presently; when you have finished your breakfast. Tell me, why did you say, 'more broken glass'?"

Giovanni bit his lip, remembering his imprudence.

"I hardly know. I believe it suggested something to my mind. One says all sorts of foolish things in moments of excitement."

"It struck me as a very odd remark," answered the Prince, still walking about. "By the bye," he added, pausing before the writing-table, "here is that letter you wrote for me. Do you want me to read it?"

"No," said Giovanni, with a laugh. "It is of no use now. It would seem absurd, since I am alive and well. It was only a word of farewell."

The Prince laughed too, and threw the sealed letter into the fire.

"The last of the Saracinesca is not dead yet," he said. "Giovanni, what are we to say to the gossips? All Rome will be ringing with this affair before night. Of course, you must stay at home for a few days, or you will catch cold in your arm. I will go out and carry the news of our victory."

"Better to say nothing about it—better to refer people to Del Ferice, and tell them he challenged me. Come in!" cried Giovanni, in answer to a knock at the door. Pasquale, the old butler, entered the room.

"The Duca d'Astrardente has sent to inquire after the health of his Excellency Don Giovanni," said the old man, respectfully.

The elder Saracinesca paused in his walk, and broke out into a loud laugh.

"Already! You see, Giovannino," he said. "Tell him, Pasquale, that Don Giovanni caught a severe cold at the ball last night—or no—wait! What shall we say, Giovannino?"

"Tell the servant," said Giovanni, sternly, "that I am much obliged for the kind inquiry, that I am perfectly well, and that you have just seen me eating my breakfast."

Pasquale bowed and left the room.

"I suppose you do not want her to know——" said the Prince, who had suddenly recovered his gravity.

Giovanni bowed his head silently.

"Quite right, my boy," said the old man, gravely. "I do not want to know anything about it either. How the devil could they have found out?"

The question was addressed more to himself than to his son, and the latter volunteered no answer. He was grateful to his father for his considerate silence.

### CHAPTER XIII.

When Astrardente saw the elder Saracinesca's face during his short interview with the diplomatist, his curiosity was immediately aroused. He perceived that there was something the matter, and he proceeded to try and ascertain the circumstances from his acquaintance. The ambassador returned to his *pâté* and his champagne with an air of amused interest, but vouchsafed no information whatever.

"What a singularly amusing fellow old Saracinesca is!" remarked Astrardente.