

his guests, and ushered them out to the door with a courteous bow. Before they had gone twenty yards in the street, the Prince looked back and caught a last glimpse of Giovanni's towering figure, standing upon the steps with the bright light falling upon it from within. He remembered that impression long.

At the door of his own inn he took leave of the good curate with many expressions of thanks, and with many invitations to the Palazzo Saracinesca, in case the old man ever visited Rome.

"I have never seen Rome, your Excellency," answered the priest, rather sadly. "I am an old man—I shall never see it now."

So they parted, and the Prince had a solitary supper of pigeons and salad in the great dusky hall of the Locanda del Sole, while his horses were being got ready for the long night-journey.

The meeting and the whole clearing up of the curious difficulty had produced a profound impression upon the old Prince. He had not the slightest doubt but that the story of the curate was perfectly accurate. It was all so very probable, too. In the wild times between 1806 and 1815 the last of the Neapolitan branch of the Saracinesca had disappeared, and the rich and powerful Roman princes of the name had been quite willing to believe the Marchesi di San Giacinto extinct. They had not even troubled themselves to claim the title, for they possessed more than fifty of their own, and there was no chance of recovering the San Giacinto estate, already mortgaged, and more than half squandered at the time of the confiscation. That the rough soldier of fortune should have hidden himself in his native country after the return of Ferdinand, his lawful king, against whom he had fought, was natural enough; as it was also natural that, with his rough nature, he should accommodate himself to a peasant's life, and marry a peasant's only daughter, with her broad acres of orange and olive and vine land; for peasants in the far south were often rich, and their daughters

were generally beautiful—a very different race from the starved tenants of the Roman Campagna.

The Prince decided that the story was perfectly true, and he reflected somewhat bitterly that unless his son had heirs after him, this herculean innkeeper of Aquila was the lawful successor to his own title, and to all the Saracinesca lands. He determined that Giovanni's marriage should not be delayed another day, and with his usual impetuosity he hastened back to Rome, hardly remembering that he had spent the previous night and all that day upon the road, and that he had another twenty-four hours of travel before him.

At dawn his carriage stopped at a little town not far from the papal frontier. Just as the vehicle was starting, a large man, muffled in a huge cloak, from the folds of which protruded the long brown barrel of a rifle, put his head into the window. The Prince started and grasped his revolver, which lay beside him on the seat.

"Good morning, Prince," said the man. "I hope you have slept well."

"Sor Giovanni!" exclaimed the old gentleman. "Where did you drop from?"

"The roads are not very safe," returned the innkeeper. "So I thought it best to accompany you. Good-bye—*buon viaggio!*"

Before the Prince could answer, the carriage rolled off, the horses springing forward at a gallop. Saracinesca put his head out of the window, but his namesake had disappeared, and he rolled on towards Terni, wondering at the innkeeper's anxiety for his safety.

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### CHAPTER XXX.

Even old Saracinesca's iron strength was in need of rest when, at the end of forty-eight hours, he again entered his son's rooms, and threw himself upon the great divan.

"How is Corona?" was his first question.



"She is very anxious about you," returned Giovanni, who was himself considerably disturbed.

"We will go and set her mind at rest as soon as I have had something to eat," said his father.

"It is all right, then? It was just as I said—a namesake?"

"Precisely. Only the namesake happens to be a cousin—the last of the San Giacinto, who keeps an inn in Aquila. I saw him, and shook hands with him."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Giovanni. "They are all extinct——"

"There has been a resurrection," returned the Prince. He told the whole story of his journey, graphically and quickly.

"That is a very extraordinary tale," remarked Giovanni, thoughtfully. "So, if I die without children the innkeeper will be prince."

"Precisely. And now, Giovanni, you must be married next week."

"As soon as you please—to-morrow if you like."

"What shall we do with Del Ferice?" asked the old prince.

"Ask him to the wedding," answered Giovanni, magnanimously.

"The wedding will have to be a very quiet one, I suppose," remarked his father, thoughtfully. "The year is hardly over——"

"The more quiet the better, provided it is done quickly. Of course we must consult Corona at once."

"Do you suppose I am going to fix the wedding-day without consulting her?" asked the old man. "For heaven's sake order dinner, and let us be quick about it."

The Prince was evidently in a hurry, and moreover, he was tired and very hungry. An hour later, as both the men sat over the coffee in the dining-room, his mood was mellowed. A dinner at home has a wonderful effect upon the temper of a man who has travelled and fared badly for eight-and-forty hours.

"Giovannino," said old Saracinesca, "have you any idea what the Cardinal thinks of your marriage?"

"No; and I do not care," answered the younger man. "He once advised me not to marry Donna Tullia. He has not seen me often since then."

"I have an idea that it will please him immensely," said the Prince.

"It would be very much the same if it displeased him."

"Very much the same. Have you seen Corona to-day?"

"Yes—of course," answered Giovanni.

"What is the use of my going with you this evening?" asked his father, suddenly. "I should think you could manage your own affairs without my help."

"I thought that as you have taken so much trouble, you would enjoy telling her the story yourself."

"Do you think I am a vain fool, sir, to be amused by a woman's praise? Nonsense! Go yourself."

"By all means," answered Giovanni. He was used to his father's habit of being quarrelsome over trifles, and he was much too happy to take any notice of it now.

"You are tired," he continued. "I am sure you have a right to be. You must want to go to bed."

"To bed indeed!" growled the old man. "Tired! You think I am good for nothing; I know you do. You look upon me as a dotting old cripple. I tell you, boy, I can——"

"For heaven's sake, *padre mio*, do precisely as you are inclined. I never said——"

"Never said what? Why are you always quarrelling with me?" roared his father, who had not lost his temper for two days, and missed his favourite exercise.

"What day shall we fix upon?" asked Giovanni, unmoved.

"Day! Any day. What do I care? Oh!—well, since you speak of it, you might say a week from Sunday. To-day is Friday. But I do not care in the least."

"Very well—if Corona can get ready."



"She shall be ready—she must be ready!" answered the old gentleman, in a tone of conviction. "Why should she not be ready, I would like to know?"

"No reason whatever," said Giovanni, with unusual mildness.

"Of course not. There is never any reason in anything you say, you unreasonable boy."

"Never, of course." Giovanni rose to go, biting his lips to keep down a laugh.

"What the devil do you mean by always agreeing with me, you impertinent scapegrace? And you are laughing, too—laughing at me, sir, as I live! Upon my word!"

Giovanni turned his back and lighted a cigar. Then, without looking round, he walked towards the door.

"Giovannino," called the Prince.

"Well?"

"I feel better now. I wanted to abuse somebody. Look here—wait a moment." He rose quickly, and left the room.

Giovanni sat down and smoked rather impatiently, looking at his watch from time to time. In five minutes his father returned, bringing in his hand an old red morocco case.

"Give it to her with my compliments, my boy," he said. "They are some of your mother's diamonds—just a few of them. She shall have the rest on the wedding-day."

"Thank you," said Giovanni, and pressed his father's hand.

"And give her my love, and say I will call to-morrow at two o'clock," added the Prince, now perfectly serene.

With the diamonds under his arm, Giovanni went out. The sky was clear and frosty, and the stars shone brightly, high up between the tall houses of the narrow street. Giovanni had not ordered a carriage, and seeing how fine the night was, he decided to walk to his destination. It was not eight o'clock, and Corona would have scarcely finished dinner at that hour. He walked

slowly. As he emerged into the Piazza di Venezia some one overtook him.

"Good evening, Prince." Giovanni turned, and recognised Anastase Gouache, the Zouave.

"Ah, Gouache—how are you?"

"I am going to pay you a visit," answered the Frenchman.

"I am very sorry—I have just left home," returned Giovanni, in some surprise.

"Not at your house," continued Anastase. "My company is ordered to the mountains. We leave to-morrow morning for Subiaco, and some of us are to be quartered at Saracinesca."

"I hope you will be among the number," said Giovanni. "I shall probably be married next week, and the Duchessa wishes to go at once to the mountains. We shall be delighted to see you."

"Thank you very much. I will not fail to do myself the honour. My homage to Madame la Duchesse. I must turn here. Good night."

"*Au revoir*," said Giovanni, and went on his way.

He found Corona in an inner sitting-room, reading beside a great wood-fire. There were soft shades of lilac mingled with the black of her dress. The year of mourning was past, and so soon as she could she modified her widow's weeds into something less solemnly black. It was impossible to wear funeral robes on the eve of her second marriage; and the world had declared that she had shown an extraordinary degree of virtue in mourning so long for a death which every one considered so highly appropriate. Corona, however, felt differently. To her, her dead husband and the man she now so wholly loved belonged to two totally distinct classes of men. Her love, her marriage with Giovanni, seemed so natural a consequence of her being left alone—so absolutely removed from her former life—that, on the eve of her wedding, she could almost wish that poor old Astrardente were alive to look as her friend upon her new-found happiness.



She welcomed Giovanni with a bright smile. She had not expected him that evening, for he had been with her all the afternoon. She sprang to her feet and came quickly to meet him. She almost unconsciously took the morocco case from his hands, not looking at it, and hardly noticing what she did.

"My father has come back. It is all settled!" cried Giovanni.

"So soon! He must have flown!" said she, making him sit down.

"Yes, he has never rested, and he has found out all about it. It is a most extraordinary story. By the by, he sends you affectionate messages, and begs you to accept these diamonds. They were my mother's," he added, his voice softening and changing. Corona understood his tone, and perhaps realised, too, how very short the time now was. She opened the case carefully.

"They are very beautiful; your mother wore them, Giovanni?" She looked lovingly at him, and then bending down kissed the splendid coronet as though in reverence of the dead Spanish woman who had borne the man she loved. Whereat Giovanni stole to her side, and kissed her own dark hair very tenderly.

"I was to tell you that there are a great many more," he said, "which my father will offer you on the wedding-day." Then he kneeled down beside her, and raising the crown from its case, set it with both his hands upon her diadem of braids.

"My princess!" he exclaimed. "How beautiful you are!" He took the great necklace, and clasped it about her white throat. "Of course," he said, "you have such splendid jewels of your own, perhaps you hardly care for these and the rest. But I like to see you with them—it makes me feel that you are really mine."

Corona smiled happily, and gently took the coronet from her head, returning it to its case. She let the necklace remain about her throat.

"You have not told me about your father's discovery," she said, suddenly.

"Yes—I will tell you."

In a few minutes he communicated to her the details of the journey. She listened with profound interest.

"It is very strange," she said. "And yet it is so very natural."

"You see it is all Del Ferice's doing," said Giovanni. "I suppose it was really an accident in the first place; but he managed to make a great deal of it. It is certainly very amusing to find that the last of the other branch is an innkeeper in the Abruzzi. However, I daresay we shall never hear of him again. He does not seem inclined to claim his title. Corona *mia*, I have something much more serious to say to you to-night."

"What is it?" she asked, turning her great dark eyes rather wonderingly to his face.

"There is no reason why we should not be married, now——"

"Do you think I ever believed there was?" she asked, reproachfully.

"No, dear. Only—would you mind its being very soon?"

The dark blood rose slowly to her cheek, but she answered without any hesitation. She was too proud to hesitate.

"Whenever you please, Giovanni. Only it must be very quiet, and we will go straight to Saracinesca. If you agree to those two things, it shall be as soon as you please."

"Next week? A week from Sunday?" asked Giovanni, eagerly.

"Yes—a week from Sunday. I would rather not go through the ordeal of a long engagement. I cannot bear to have every one here, congratulating me from morning till night, as they insist upon doing."

"I will send the people out to Saracinesca to-morrow," said Giovanni, in great delight. "They have been at work all winter, making the place respectable."

"Not changing, I hope?" exclaimed Corona, who dearly loved the old grey walls.



"Only repairing the state apartments. By the by, I met Gouache this evening. He is going out with a company of Zouaves to hunt the brigands, if there really are any."

"I hope he will not come near us," answered Corona. "I want to be all alone with you, Giovanni, for ever so long. Would you not rather be alone for a little while?" she asked, looking up suddenly with a timid smile. "Should I bore you very much?"

It is unnecessary to record Giovanni's answer. If Corona longed to be alone with him in the hills, Giovanni himself desired such a retreat still more. To be out of the world, even for a month, seemed to him the most delightful of prospects, for he was weary of the city, of society, of everything save the woman he was about to marry. Of her he could never tire; he could not imagine that in her company the days would ever seem long, even in old Saracinesca, among the grey rocks of the Sabines. The average man is gregarious, perhaps; but in strong minds there is often a great desire for solitude, or at least for retirement, in the society of one sympathetic soul. The instinct which bids such people leave the world for a time is never permanent, unless they become morbid. It is a natural feeling; and a strong brain gathers strength from communing with itself or with its natural mate. There are few great men who have not at one time or another withdrawn into solitude, and their retreat has generally been succeeded by a period of extraordinary activity. Strong minds are often, at some time or another, exposed to doubt and uncertainty incomprehensible to a smaller intellect—due, indeed, to that very breadth of view which contemplates the same idea from a vast number of sides. To a man so endowed, the casting-vote of some one whom he loves, and with whom he almost unconsciously sympathises, is sometimes necessary to produce action, to direct the faculties, to guide the overflowing flood of his thought into the mill-race of life's work. Without a certain amount of

prejudice to determine the resultant of its forces, many a fine intellect would expend its power in burrowing among its own labyrinths, unrecognised, misunderstood, unheard by the working-day world without. For the working-day world never lacks prejudice to direct its working.

For some time Giovanni and Corona talked of their plans for the spring and summer. They would read, they would work together at the schemes for uniting and improving their estates; they would build that new road from Astrardente to Saracinesca, concerning which there had been so much discussion during the last year; they would visit every part of their lands together, and inquire into the condition of every peasant; they would especially devote their attention to extending the forest enclosures, in which Giovanni foresaw a source of wealth for his children; above all, they would talk to their hearts' content, and feel, as each day dawned upon their happiness, that they were free to go where they would, without being confronted at every turn by the troublesome duties of an exigent society.

At last the conversation turned again upon recent events, and especially upon the part Del Ferice and Donna Tullia had played in attempting to prevent the marriage. Corona asked what Giovanni intended to do about the matter.

"I do not see that there is much to be done," he answered. "I will go to Donna Tullia to-morrow, and explain that there has been a curious mistake—that I am exceedingly obliged to her for calling my attention to the existence of a distant relative, but that I trust she will not in future interfere in my affairs."

"Do you think she will marry Del Ferice after all?" asked Corona.

"Why not? Of course he gave her the papers. Very possibly he thought they really proved my former marriage. She will perhaps blame him for her failure, but he will defend himself, never fear; he will make her marry him."



"I wish they would marry and go away," said Corona, to whom the very name of Del Ferice was abhorrent, and who detested Donna Tullia almost as heartily. Corona was a very good and noble woman, but she was very far from that saintly superiority which forgets to resent injuries. Her passions were eminently human, and very strong. She had struggled bravely against her overwhelming love for Giovanni; and she had so far got the mastery of herself, that she would have endured to the end if her husband's death had not set her at liberty. Perhaps, too, while she felt the necessity of fighting against that love, she attained for a time to an elevation of character which would have made such personal injuries as Donna Tullia could inflict seem insignificant in comparison with the great struggle she sustained against an even greater evil. But in the realisation of her freedom, in suddenly giving the rein to her nature, so long controlled by her resolute will, all passion seemed to break out at once with renewed force; and the conviction that her anger against her two enemies was perfectly just and righteous, added fuel to the fire. Her eyes gleamed fiercely as she spoke of Del Ferice and his bride, and no punishment seemed too severe for those who had so treacherously tried to dash the cup of her happiness from her very lips.

"I wish they would marry," she repeated, "and I wish the Cardinal would turn them out of Rome the next day."

"That might be done," said Giovanni, who had himself revolved more than one scheme of vengeance against the evil-doers. "The trouble is, that the Cardinal despises Del Ferice and his political diletteism. He does not care a fig whether the fellow remains in Rome or goes away. I confess it would be a great satisfaction to wring the villain's neck."

"You must not fight him again, Giovanni," said Corona, in sudden alarm. "You must not risk your life now—you know it is mine now." She laid her hand tenderly on his, and it trembled.

"No, dearest—I certainly will not. But my father is very angry. I think we may safely leave the treatment of Del Ferice in his hands. My father is a very sudden and violent man."

"I know," replied Corona. "He is magnificent when he is angry. I have no doubt he will settle Del Ferice's affairs satisfactorily." She laughed almost fiercely. Giovanni looked at her anxiously, yet not without pride, as he recognised in her strong anger something akin to himself.

"How fierce you are!" he said, with a smile.

"Have I not cause to be? Have I not cause to wish these people an evil end? Have they not nearly separated us? Nothing is bad enough for them—what is the use of pretending not to feel? You are calm, Giovanni? Perhaps you are much stronger than I am. I do not think you realise what they meant to do—to separate us—*us!* As if any torture were bad enough for them!"

Giovanni had never seen her so thoroughly roused. He was angry himself, and more than angry, for his cheek paled, and his stern features grew more hard, while his voice dropped to a hoarser tone.

"Do not mistake me, Corona," he said. "Do not think I am indifferent because I am quiet. Del Ferice shall expiate all some day, and bitterly too."

"Indeed I hope so," answered Corona between her teeth. Had Giovanni foreseen the long and bitter struggle he would one day have to endure before that expiation was complete, he would very likely have renounced his vengeance then and there, for his wife's sake. But we mortals see but in a glass; and when the mirror is darkened by the master-passion of hate, we see not at all. Corona and Giovanni, united, rich and powerful, might indeed appear formidable to a wretch like Del Ferice, dependent upon a system of daily treachery for the very bread he ate. But in those days the wheel of fortune was beginning to turn, and far-sighted men prophesied that many an obscure individual would one day be playing the part of a great



personage. Years would still elapse before the change, but the change would surely come at last.

Giovanni was very thoughtful as he walked home that night. He was happy, and he had cause to be, for the long-desired day was at hand. He had nearly attained the object of his life, and there was now no longer any obstacle to be overcome. The relief he felt at his father's return was very great; for although he had known that the impediment raised would be soon removed, any impediment whatever was exasperating, and he could not calculate the trouble that might be caused by the further machinations of Donna Tullia and her affianced husband. All difficulties had, however, been overcome by his father's energetic action, and at once Giovanni felt as though a load had fallen from his shoulders, and a veil from his eyes. He saw himself wedded to Corona in less than a fortnight, removed from the sphere of society and of all his troubles, living for a space alone with her in his ancestral home, calling her, at last, his wife. Nevertheless he was thoughtful, and his expression was not one of unmingled gladness, as he threaded the streets on his way home; for his mind reverted to Del Ferice and to Donna Tullia, and Corona's fierce look was still before him. He reflected that she had been nearly as much injured as himself, that her wrath was legitimate, and that it was his duty to visit her sufferings as well as his own upon the offenders. His melancholic nature easily fell to brooding over any evil which was strong enough to break the barrier of his indifference; and the annoyances which had sprung originally from so small a cause had grown to gigantic proportions, and had struck at the very roots of his happiness.

He had begun by disliking Del Ferice in an indifferent way whenever he chanced to cross his path. Del Ferice had resented this haughty indifference as a personal insult, and had set about injuring Giovanni, attempting to thwart him whenever he could. Giovanni had caught Del Ferice in a dastardly trick, and had been so far roused as to take

summary vengeance upon him in the duel which took place after the Frangipani ball. The wound had entered into Ugo's soul, and his hatred had grown the faster that he found no opportunity of revenge. Then, at last, when Giovanni's happiness had seemed complete, his enemy had put forward his pretended proof of a former marriage; knowing well enough that his weapons were not invincible—were indeed very weak—but unable to resist any longer the desire for vengeance. Once more Giovanni had triumphed easily, but with victory came the feeling that it was his turn to punish his adversary. And now there was a new and powerful motive added to Giovanni's just resentment, in the anger his future wife felt, and had a good right to feel, at the treachery which had been practised upon both. It had taken two years to rouse Giovanni to energetic action against one whom he had in turn regarded with indifference, then despised, then honestly disliked, and finally hated. But his hatred had been doubled each time by a greater injury, and was not likely to be easily satisfied. Nothing short of Del Ferice's destruction would be enough, and his destruction must be brought about by legal means.

Giovanni had not far to seek for his weapons. He had long suspected Del Ferice of treasonable practices; he did not doubt that with small exertion he could find evidence to convict him. He would, then, allow him to marry Donna Tullia; and on the day after the wedding, Del Ferice should be arrested and lodged in the prison of the Holy Office as a political delinquent of the meanest and most dangerous kind—as a political spy. The determination was soon reached. It did not seem cruel to Giovanni, for he was in a relentless mood; it would not have seemed cruel to Corona,—Del Ferice had deserved all that, and more also.

So Giovanni went home and slept the sleep of a man who has made up his mind upon an important matter. And in the morning he rose early and communicated his ideas to his father. The result was that they determined



for the present to avoid an interview with Donna Tullia, and to communicate to her by letter the result of old Saracinesca's rapid journey to Aquila.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

When Donna Tullia received Saracinesca's note, explaining the existence of a second Giovanni, his pedigree and present circumstances, she almost fainted with disappointment. It seemed to her that she had compromised herself before the world, that all Rome knew the ridiculous part she had played in Del Ferice's comedy, and that her shame would never be forgotten. Suddenly she saw how she had been led away by her hatred of Giovanni into believing blindly in a foolish tale which ought not to have deceived a child. So soon as she learned the existence of a second Giovanni Saracinesca, it seemed to her that she must have been mad not to foresee such an explanation from the first. She had been duped, she had been made a cat's-paw, she had been abominably deceived by Del Ferice, who had made use of this worthless bribe in order to extort from her a promise of marriage. She felt very ill, as very vain people often do when they feel that they have been made ridiculous. She lay upon the sofa in her little boudoir, where everything was in the worst possible taste—from the gaudy velvet carpet and satin furniture to the gilt clock on the chimney-piece—and she turned red and pale and red again, and wished she were dead, or in Paris, or anywhere save in Rome. If she went out she might meet one of the Saracinesca at any turn of the street, or even Corona herself. How they would bow and smile sweetly at her, enjoying her discomfiture with the polite superiority of people who cannot be hurt!

And she herself—she could not tell what she should

do. She had announced her engagement to Del Ferice, but she could not marry him. She had been entrapped into making him a promise, into swearing a terrible oath; but the Church did not consider such oaths binding. She would go to Padre Filippo and ask his advice.

But then, if she went to Padre Filippo, she would have to confess all she had done, and she was not prepared to do that. A few weeks would pass, and that time would be sufficient to mellow and smooth the remembrance of her revengeful projects into a less questionable shape. No—she could not confess all that just yet. Surely such an oath was not binding; at all events, she could not marry Del Ferice, whether she broke her promise or not. In the first place, she would send for him and vent her anger upon him while it was hot.

Accordingly, in the space of three-quarters of an hour, Ugo appeared, smiling, smooth and persuasive as usual. Donna Tullia assumed a fine attitude of disdain as she heard his step outside the door. She intended to impress him with a full and sudden view of her just anger. He did not seem much moved, and came forward as usual to take her hand and kiss it. But she folded her arms and stared at him with all the contempt she could concentrate in the gaze of her blue eyes. It was a good comedy. Del Ferice, who had noticed as soon as he entered the room that something was wrong, and had already half-guessed the cause, affected to spring back in horror when she refused to give her hand. His pale face expressed sufficiently well a mixture of indignation and sorrow at the harsh treatment he received. Still Donna Tullia's cold eye rested upon him in a fixed stare.

"What is this? What have I done?" asked Del Ferice in low tones.

"Can you ask? Wretch! Read that, and understand what you have done," answered Donna Tullia, making a step forward and thrusting Saracinesca's letter in his face.

Del Ferice had already seen the handwriting, and knew