

withdrawn, but immediately accounted for the fact on the theory that the surgeon wished to prevent any one from finding his visitor lest the secret should be divulged. He was not a nervous man, and had no especial horror of being left alone in a mortuary chamber for a few minutes. He looked about him, and saw that the room was high and vaulted. One window alone gave air, and this was ten feet from the floor and heavily ironed. He reflected with a smile that if it pleased the surgeon to leave him there he could not possibly get out. Neither his size nor his phenomenal strength could assist him in the least. There was no furniture in the place. Half a dozen slabs of slate for the bodies were built against the wall, solid and immovable, and the door was of the heaviest oak, thickly studded with huge iron nails. If the dead men had been living prisoners their place of confinement could not have been more strongly contrived.

San Giacinto waited a quarter of an hour, and at last, as the surgeon did not return, he sat down upon one of the marble slabs and, being very hungry, consoled himself by lighting a cigar, while he meditated upon the surest means of conveying Donna Faustina to her father's house. At last he began to wonder how long he was to wait.

"I should not wonder," he said to himself, "if that long-eared professor had taken me for a revolutionist."

He was not far wrong, indeed. The surgeon had despatched a messenger for a couple of gendarmes and had gone about his business in the hospital, knowing very well that it would take some time to find the police while the riot lasted, and congratulating himself upon having caught a prisoner who, if not a revolutionist, was at all events an impostor, since he had a card printed with a false name.

CHAPTER VI.

The improvised banquet at the Palazzo Saracinesca was not a merry one, but the probable dangers to the city and the disappearance of Faustina Montevarchi

furnished matter for plenty of conversation. The majority inclined to the belief that the girl had lost her head and had run home, but as neither Sant' Ilario nor his cousin returned, there was much speculation. The prince said he believed that they had found Faustina at her father's house and had stayed to dinner, whereupon some malicious person remarked that it needed a revolution in Rome to produce hospitality in such a quarter.

Dinner was nearly ended when Pasquale, the butler, whispered to the prince that a gendarme wanted to speak with him on very important business.

"Bring him here," answered old Saracinesca, aloud. "There is a gendarme outside," he added, addressing his guests, "he will tell us all the news. Shall we have him here?"

Every one assented enthusiastically to the proposition, for most of those present were anxious about their houses, not knowing what had taken place during the last two hours. The man was ushered in, and stood at a distance holding his three-cornered hat in his hand, and looking rather sheepish and uncomfortable.

"Well?" asked the prince. "What is the matter? We all wish to hear the news."

"Excellency," began the soldier, "I must ask many pardons for appearing thus —" Indeed his uniform was more or less disarranged and he looked pale and fatigued.

"Never mind your appearance. Speak up," answered old Saracinesca in encouraging tones.

"Excellency," said the man, "I must apologise, but there is a gentleman who calls himself Don Giovanni, of your revered name —"

"I know there is. He is my son. What about him?"

"He is not the Senior Principe di Sant' Ilario, Excellency — he calls himself by another name — Marchese di — di — here is his card, Excellency."

"My cousin, San Giacinto, then. What about him, I say?"

"Your Excellency has a cousin —" stammered the gendarme.

"Well? Is it against the law to have cousins?" cried the prince. "What is the matter with my cousin?"

"*Dio mio!*" exclaimed the soldier in great agitation. "What a combination! Your Excellency's cousin is in the mortuary chamber at Santo Spirito!"

"Is he dead?" asked Saracinesca in a lower voice, but starting from his chair.

"No," cried the man, "*questo è il male!* That is the trouble! He is alive and very well!"

"Then what the devil is he doing in the mortuary chamber?" roared the prince.

"Excellency, I beseech your pardon, I had nothing to do with locking up the Signor Marchese. It was the surgeon, Excellency, who took him for a Garibaldian. He shall be liberated at once —"

"I should think so!" answered Saracinesca, savagely. "And what business have your asses of surgeons with gentlemen? My hat, Pasquale. And how on earth came my cousin to be in Santo Spirito?"

"Excellency, I know nothing, but I had to do my duty."

"And if you know nothing how the devil do you expect to do your duty! I will have you and the surgeon and the whole of Santo Spirito and all the patients, in the Carceri Nuove, safe in prison before morning! My hat, Pasquale, I say!"

Some confusion followed, during which the gendarme, who was anxious to escape all responsibility in the matter of San Giacinto's confinement, left the room and descended the grand staircase three steps at a time. Mounting his horse he galloped back through the now deserted streets to the hospital.

Within two minutes after his arrival San Giacinto heard the bolt of the heavy lock run back in the socket and the surgeon entered the mortuary chamber. San Giacinto had nearly finished his cigar and was growing impatient, but the doctor made many apologies for his long absence.

"An unexpected relapse in a dangerous case, Signor Marchese," he said in explanation. "What would you have? We doctors are at the mercy of nature! Pray forgive my neglect, but I could send no one, as you did not wish to be seen. I locked the door, so that nobody might find you here. Pray come with me, and you shall see the young lady at once."

"By all means," replied San Giacinto. "Dead men are poor company, and I am in a hurry."

The surgeon led the way to the accident ward and introduced his companion to a small clean room in which a shaded lamp was burning. A Sister of Mercy stood by the white bed, upon which lay a young girl, stretched out at her full length.

"You are too late," said the nun very quietly. "She is dead, poor child."

San Giacinto uttered a deep exclamation of horror and was at the bedside even before the surgeon. He lifted the fair young creature in his arms and stared at the cold face, holding it to the light. Then with a loud cry of astonishment he laid down his burden.

"It is not she, Signor Professore," he said. "I must apologise for the trouble I have given you. Pray accept my best thanks. There is a resemblance, but it is not she."

The doctor was somewhat relieved to find himself freed from the responsibility which, as San Giacinto had told him, involved the honour of one of the greatest families in Rome. Before speaking, he satisfied himself that the young woman was really dead.

"Death often makes faces look alike which have no resemblance to each other in life," he remarked as he turned away. Then they both left the room, followed at a little distance by the sister who was going to summon the bearers to carry away her late charge.

As the two men descended the steps, the sound of loud voices in altercation reached their ears, and as they emerged into the vestibule, they saw old Prince Saracinesca flourishing his stick in dangerous proximity to the head of the porter. The latter had retreated until he stood with his back against the wall.

"I will have none of this lying," shouted the irate nobleman. "The Marchese is here — the gendarme told me he was in the mortuary chamber — if he is not produced at once I will break your rascally neck —" The man was protesting as fast and as loud as his assailant threatened him.

"Eh! My good cousin!" cried San Giacinto, whose unmistakable voice at once made the prince desist from

his attack and turn round. "Do not kill the fellow! I am alive and well, as you see."

A short explanation ensued, during which the surgeon was obliged to admit that as San Giacinto had no means of proving any identity he, the doctor in charge, had thought it best to send for the police, in view of the unquiet state of the city.

"But what brought you here?" asked old Saracinesca, who was puzzled to account for his cousin's presence in the hospital.

San Giacinto had satisfied his curiosity and did not care a pin for the annoyance to which he had been subjected. He was anxious, too, to get away, and having half guessed the surgeon's suspicions was not at all surprised by the revelation concerning the gendarme.

"Allow me to thank you again," he said politely, turning to the doctor. "I have no doubt you acted quite rightly. Let us go," he added, addressing the prince.

The porter received a coin as consolation money for the abuse he had sustained, and the two cousins found themselves in the street. Saracinesca again asked for an explanation.

"Very simple," replied San Giacinto. "Donna Faustina was not at her father's house, so your son and I separated to continue our search. Chancing to find myself here — for I do not know my way about the city — I learnt the news of the explosion, and was told that two Zouaves had been found dead and had been taken into the hospital. Fearing lest one of them might have been Gouache, I succeeded in getting in, when I was locked up with the dead bodies, as you have heard. Gouache, by the bye, was not one of them."

"It is outrageous —" began Saracinesca, but his companion did not allow him to proceed.

"It is no matter," he said, quickly. "The important thing is to find Donna Faustina. I suppose you have no news of her."

"None. Giovanni had not come home when the gendarme appeared."

"Then we must continue the search as best we can," said San Giacinto. Thereupon they both got into the prince's cab and drove away.

It was nearly midnight when a small detachment of Zouaves crossed the bridge of Sant' Angelo. There had been some sharp fighting at the Porta San Paolo, at the other extremity of Rome, and the men were weary. But rest was not to be expected that night, and the tired soldiers were led back to do sentry duty in the neighbourhood of their quarters. The officer halted the little body in the broad space beyond.

"Monsieur Gouache," said the lieutenant, "you will take a corporal's guard and maintain order in the neighbourhood of the barracks — if there is anything left of them," he added with a mournful laugh.

Gouache stepped forward and half a dozen men formed themselves behind him. The officer was a good friend of his.

"I suppose you have not dined any more than I, Monsieur Gouache?"

"Not I, mon lieutenant. It is no matter."

"Pick up something to eat if you can, at such an hour. I will see that you are relieved before morning. Shoulder arms! March!"

So Anastase Gouache trudged away down the Borgo Nuovo with his men at his heels. Among the number there was the son of a French duke, an English gentleman whose forefathers had marched with the Conqueror as their descendant now marched behind the Parisian artist, a young Swiss doctor of law, a couple of red-headed Irish peasants, and two or three others. When they reached the scene of the late catastrophe the place was deserted. The men who had been set to work at clearing away the rubbish had soon found what a hopeless task they had undertaken; and the news having soon spread that only the regimental musicians were in the barracks at the time, and that these few had been in all probability in the lower story of the building, where the band-room was situated, all attempts at finding the bodies were abandoned until the next day.

Gouache and many others had escaped death almost miraculously, for five minutes had not elapsed after they had started at the double-quick for the Porta San Paolo, when the building was blown up. The news had of course been brought to them while they were repulsing

the attack upon the gate, but it was not until many hours afterwards that a small detachment could safely be spared to return to their devastated quarters. Gouache himself had been just in time to join his comrades, and with them had seen most of the fighting. He now placed his men at proper distances along the street, and found leisure to reflect upon what had occurred. He was hungry and thirsty, and grimy with gunpowder, but there was evidently no prospect of getting any refreshment. The night, too, was growing cold, and he found it necessary to walk briskly about to keep himself warm. At first he tramped backwards and forwards, some fifty paces each way, but growing weary of the monotonous exercise, he began to scramble about among the heaps of ruins. His quick imagination called up the scene as it must have looked at the moment of the explosion, and then reverted with a sharp pang to the thought of his poor comrades-in-arms who lay crushed to death many feet below the stones on which he trod.

Suddenly, as he leaned against a huge block, absorbed in his thoughts, the low wailing of a woman's voice reached his ears. The sound proceeded apparently from no great distance, but the tone was very soft and low. Gradually, as he listened, he thought he distinguished words, but such words as he had not expected to hear, though they expressed his own feeling well enough.

"Requiem eternam dona eis!"

It was quite distinct, and the accents sounded strangely familiar. He held his breath and strained every faculty to catch the sounds.

"Requiem sempiternam — sempiternam — sempiternam!" The despairing tones trembled at the third repetition, and then the voice broke into passionate sobbing.

Anastase did not wait for more. At first he had half believed that what he heard was due to his imagination, but the sudden weeping left no doubt that it was real. Cautiously he made his way amongst the ruins, until he stopped short in amazement not unmingled with horror.

In an angle where a part of the walls was still standing, a woman was on her knees, her hands stretched wildly out before her, her darkly-clad figure faintly re-

vealed by the beams of the waning moon. The covering had fallen back from her head upon her shoulders, and the struggling rays fell upon her beautiful features, marking their angelic outline with delicate light. Still Anastase remained motionless, scarcely believing his eyes, and yet knowing that lovely face too well not to believe. It was Donna Faustina Montevarchi who knelt there at midnight, alone, repeating the solemn words from the mass for the dead; it was for him that she wept, and he knew it.

Standing there upon the common grave of his comrades, a wild joy filled the young man's heart, a joy such as must be felt to be known, for it passes the power of earthly words to tell it. In that dim and ghastly place the sun seemed suddenly to shine as at noonday in a fair country; the crumbling masonry and blocks of broken stone grew more lovely than the loveliest flowers, and from the dark figure of that lonely heart-broken woman the man who loved her saw a radiance proceeding which overflowed and made bright at once his eyes and his heart. In the intensity of his emotion, the hand which lay upon the fallen stone contracted suddenly and broke off a fragment of the loosened mortar.

At the slight noise, Faustina turned her head. Her eyes were wide and wild, and as she started to her feet she uttered a short, sharp cry, and staggered backward against the wall. In a moment Anastase was at her side, supporting her and looking into her face.

"Faustina!"

During a few seconds she gazed horrorstruck and silent upon him, stiffening herself and holding her face away from his. It was as though his ghost had risen out of the earth and embraced her. Then the wild look shivered like a mask and vanished, her features softened and the colour rose to her cheeks for an instant. Very slowly she drew him towards her, her eyes fixed on his; their lips met in a long, sweet kiss — then her strength forsook her and she swooned away in his arms.

Gouache supported her tenderly until she sat leaning against the wall, and then knelt down by her side. He did not know what to do, and had he known, it would have availed him little. His instinct told him that she

would presently recover consciousness and his emotions had so wholly overcome him that he could only look at her lovely face as her head rested upon his arm. But while he waited a great fear began to steal into his heart. He asked himself how Faustina had come to such a place, and how her coming was to be accounted for. It was long past midnight, now, and he guessed what trouble and anxiety there would be in her father's house until she was found. He represented to himself in quick succession the scenes which would follow his appearance at the Palazzo Montevarchi with the youngest daughter of the family in his arms—or in a cab, and he confessed to himself that never lover had been in such straits.

Faustina opened her eyes and sighed, nestled her head softly on his breast, sighing again, in the happy consciousness that he was safe, and then at last she sat up and looked him in the face.

"I was so sure you were killed," said she, in her soft voice.

"My darling!" he exclaimed, pressing her to his side.

"Are you not glad to be alive?" she asked. "For my sake, at least! You do not know what I have suffered."

Again he held her close to him, in silence, forgetting all the unheard-of difficulties of his situation in the happiness of holding her in his arms. His silence, indeed, was more eloquent than any words could have been.

"My beloved!" he said at last, "how could you run such risks for me? Do you think I am worthy of so much love? And yet, if loving you can make me worthy of you, I am the most deserving man that ever lived—and I live only for you. But for you I might as well be buried under our feet here with my poor comrades. But tell me, Faustina, were you not afraid to come? How long have you been here? It is very late—it is almost morning."

"Is it? What does it matter, since you are safe? You ask how I came? Did I not tell you I would follow you? Why did you run on without me? I ran here very quickly, and just as I saw the gates of the barracks there was a terrible noise and I was thrown down, I cannot tell how. Soon I got to my feet and crept under a doorway. I suppose I must have fainted, for I thought you

were killed. I saw a soldier before me, just when it happened, and he must have been struck. I took him for you. When I came to myself there were so many people in the street that I could not move from where I was. Then they went away, and I came here while the workmen tried to move the stones, and I watched them and begged them to go on, but they would not, and I had nothing to give them, so they went away too, and I knew that I should have to wait until to-morrow to find you—for I would have waited—no one should have dragged me away—ah! my darling—my beloved! What does anything matter now that you are safe!"

For fully half an hour they sat talking in this wise, both knowing that the situation could not last, but neither willing to speak the word which must end it. Gouache, indeed, was in a twofold difficulty. Not only was he wholly at a loss for a means of introducing Faustina into her father's house unobserved at such an hour; he was in command of the men stationed in the neighbourhood, and to leave his post under any circumstances whatever would be a very grave breach of duty. He could neither allow Faustina to return alone, nor could he accompany her. He could not send one of his men for a friend to help him, since to take any one into his confidence was to ruin the girl's reputation in the eyes of all Rome. To find a cab at that time of night was almost out of the question. The position seemed desperate. Faustina, too, was a mere child, and it was impossible to explain to her the social consequences of her being discovered with him.

"I think, perhaps," said she after a happy silence, and in rather a timid voice—"I think, perhaps, you had better take me home now. They will be anxious, you know," she added, as though fearing that he should suspect her of wishing to leave him.

"Yes, I must take you home," answered Gouache, somewhat absently. To her his tone sounded cold.

"Are you angry, because I want to go?" asked the young girl, looking lovingly into his face.

"Angry? No indeed, darling! I ought to have taken you home at once—but I was too happy to think of it. Of course your people must be terribly anxious, and the

question is how to manage your entrance. Can you get into the house unseen? Is there any way? Any small door that is open?"

"We can wake the porter," said Faustina, simply. "He will let us in."

"It would not do. How can I go to your father and tell him that I found you here? Besides, the porter knows me."

"Well, if he does, what does it matter?"

"He would talk about it to other servants, and all Rome would know it to-morrow. You must go home with a woman, and to do that we must find some one you know. It would be a terrible injury to you to have such a story repeated abroad."

"Why?"

To this innocent question Gouache did not find a ready answer. He smiled quietly and pressed her to his side more closely.

"The world is a very bad place, dearest. I am a man and know it. You must trust me to do what is best. Will you?"

"How can you ask? I will always trust you."

"Then I will tell you what we will do. You must go home with the Princess Sant' Ilario."

"With Corona? But —"

"She knows that I love you, and she is the only woman in Rome whom I would trust. Do not be surprised. She asked me if it was true, and I said it was. I am on duty here, and you must wait for me while I make the rounds of my sentries — it will not take five minutes. Then I will take you to the Palazzo Saracinesca. I shall not be missed here for an hour."

"I will do whatever you wish," said Faustina. "Perhaps that is best. But I am afraid everybody will be asleep. Is it not very late?"

"I will wake them up if they are sleeping."

He left her to make his round and soon assured himself that his men were not napping. Then before he returned he stopped at the corner of a street and by the feeble moonlight scratched a few words on a leaf from his notebook.

"Madame," he wrote, "I have found Donna Faustina

Montevarchi, who had lost her way. It is absolutely necessary that you should accompany her to her father's house. You are the only person whom I can trust. I am at your gate. Bring something in the way of a cloak to disguise her with."

He signed his initials and folded the paper, slipping it into his pocket where he could readily find it. Then he went back to the place where Faustina was waiting. He helped her out of the ruins, and passing through a side street so as to avoid the sentinels, they made their way rapidly to the bridge. The sentry challenged Gouache who gave the word at once and was allowed to pass on with his charge. In less than a quarter of an hour they were at the Palazzo Saracinesca. Gouache made Faustina stand in the shadow of a doorway on the opposite side of the street and advanced to the great doors. A ray of light which passed through the crack of a shutter behind the heavy iron grating on one side of the arch showed that the porter was up. Anastase drew his bayonet from his side and tapped with its point against the high window.

"Who is there?" asked the porter, thrusting his head out.

"Is the Principe di Sant' Ilario still awake?" asked Gouache.

"He is not at home. Heaven knows where he is. What do you want? The princess is sitting up to wait for the prince."

"That will do as well," replied Anastase. "I am sent with this note from the Vatican. It needs an immediate answer. Be good enough to say that I was ordered to wait."

The explanation satisfied the porter, to whom the sight of a Zouave was just then more agreeable than usual. He put his arm out through the grating and took the paper.

"It does not look as though it came from the Vatican," he remarked doubtfully, as he turned the scrap to the light of his lamp.

"The cardinal is waiting — make haste!" said Gouache. It struck him that even if the man could read a little, which was not improbable, the initials A. G., being those

of Cardinal Antonelli in reversed order would be enough to frighten the fellow and make him move quickly. This, indeed was precisely what occurred.

In five minutes the small door in the gate was opened and Gouache saw Corona's tall figure step out into the street. She hesitated a moment when she saw the Zouave alone, and then closed the door with a snap behind her. Gouache bowed quickly and gave her his arm.

"Let us be quick," he said, "or the porter will see us. Donna Faustina is under that doorway. You know how grateful I am — there is no time to say it."

Corona said nothing but hastened to Faustina's side. The latter put her arms about her friend's neck and kissed her. The princess threw a wide cloak over the young girl's shoulders and drew the hood over her head.

"Let us be quick," said Corona, repeating Gouache's words. They walked quickly away in silence, and no one spoke until they reached the Palazzo Montevarchi. Explanations were impossible, and every one was too much absorbed by the danger of the situation to speak of anything else. When they were a few steps from the gate Corona stopped.

"You may leave us here," she said coldly, addressing Gouache.

"But, princess, I will see you home," protested the latter, somewhat surprised by her tone.

"No — I will take a servant back with me. Will you be good enough to leave us?" she asked almost haughtily, as Gouache still lingered.

He had no choice but to obey her commands, though for some time he could not explain to himself the cause of the princess's behaviour.

"Good-night, Madame. Good-night, Mademoiselle," he said, quietly. Then with a low bow he turned away and disappeared in the darkness. In five minutes he had reached the bridge, running at the top of his speed, and he regained his post without his absence having been observed.

When the two women were alone, Corona laid her hand upon Faustina's shoulder and looked down into the girl's face.

"Faustina, my child," she said, "how could you be led into such a wild scrape?"

"Why did you treat him so unkindly?" asked the young girl with flashing eyes. "It was cruel and unkind —"

"Because he deserved it," answered Corona, with rising anger. "How could he dare — from my house — a mere child like you —"

"I do not know what you imagine," said Faustina in a tone of deep resentment. "I followed him to the Serristori barracks, and I fainted when they were blown up. He found me and brought me to you, because he said I could not go back to my father's house with him. If I love him what is that to you?"

"It is a great deal to me that he should have got you into this trouble."

"He did not. If it is trouble, I got myself into it. Do you love him yourself that you are so angry?"

"I!" cried Corona in amazement at the girl's audacity. "Poor Gouache!" she added with a half-scornful, half-pitying laugh. "Come, child! Let us go in. We cannot stand here all night talking. I will tell your mother that you lost your way in our house and were found asleep in a distant room. The lock was jammed, and you could not get out."

"I think I will simply tell the truth," answered Faustina.

"You will do nothing of the kind," said Corona, sternly. "Do you know what would happen? You would be shut up in a convent by your father for several years, and the world would say that I had favoured your meetings with Monsieur Gouache. This is no trifling matter. You need say nothing. I will give the whole explanation myself, and take the responsibility of the falsehood upon my own shoulders."

"I promised him to do as he bid me," replied Faustina. "I suppose he would have me follow your advice, and so I will. Are you still angry, Corona?"

"I will try not to be, if you will be sensible."

They knocked at the gate and were soon admitted. The whole household was on foot, though it was past one o'clock. It is unnecessary to describe the emotions

of Faustina's relations, nor their gratitude to Corona, whose explanation they accepted at once, with a delight which may easily be imagined.

"But your porter said he had seen her leave your house," said the Princess Montevarchi, recollecting the detail and anxious to have it explained.

"He was mistaken, in his fright," returned Corona, calmly. "It was only my maid, who ran out to see what was the matter and returned soon afterwards."

There was nothing more to be said. The old prince and Ascanio Bellegra walked home with Corona, who refused to wait until a carriage could be got ready, on the ground that her husband might have returned from the search and might be anxious at her absence. She left her escort at her door and mounted the steps alone. As she was going up the porter came running after her.

"Excellency," he said in low tones, "the Signor Principe came back while you were gone, and I told him that you had received a note from the Vatican and had gone away with the Zouave who brought it. I hope I did right——"

"Of course you did," replied Corona. She was a calm woman and not easily thrown off her guard, but as she made her answer she was conscious of an unpleasant sensation wholly new to her. She had never done anything concerning which she had reason to ask herself what Giovanni would think of it. For the first time since her marriage with him she knew that she had something to conceal. How, indeed, was it possible to tell him the story of Faustina's wild doings? Giovanni was a man who knew the world, and had no great belief in its virtues. To tell him what had occurred would be to do Faustina an irreparable injury in his eyes. He would believe his wife, no doubt, but he would tell her that Faustina had deceived her. She cared little what he might think of Gouache, for she herself was incensed against him, believing that he must certainly have used some persuasion to induce Faustina to follow him, mad as the idea seemed.

Corona had little time for reflection, however. She could not stand upon the stairs, and as soon as she entered the house she must meet her husband. She made

up her mind hurriedly to do what in most cases is extremely dangerous. Giovanni was in her boudoir, pale and anxious. He had forgotten that he had not dined that evening and was smoking a cigarette with short sharp puffs.

"Thank God!" he cried, as his wife entered the room. "Where have you been, my darling?"

"Giovanni," said Corona, gravely, laying her two hands on his shoulders, "you know you can trust me—do you not?"

"As I trust Heaven," he answered, tenderly.

"You must trust me now, then," said she. "I cannot tell you where I have been. I will tell you some day, you have my solemn promise. Faustina Montevarchi is with her mother. I took her back, and told them she had followed me from the room, had lost her way in the house, and had accidentally fastened a door which she could not open. You must support the story. You need only say that I told you so, because you were out at the time. I will not lie to you, so I tell you that I invented the story."

Sant' Ilario was silent for a few minutes, during which he looked steadily into his wife's eyes, which met his without flinching.

"You shall do as you please, Corona," he said at last, returning the cigarette to his lips and still looking at her. "Will you answer me one question?"

"If I can without explaining."

"That Zouave who brought the message from the Vatican—was he Gouache?"

Corona turned her eyes away, annoyed at the demand. To refuse to answer was tantamount to admitting the truth, and she would not lie to her husband.

"It was Gouache," she said, after a moment's hesitation.

"I thought so," answered Sant' Ilario in a low voice. He moved away, throwing his cigarette into the fireplace. "Very well," he continued, "I will remember to tell the story as you told it to me, and I am sure you will tell me the truth some day."

"Of course," said Corona. "And I thank you, Giovanni, with my whole heart! There is no one like you, dear."

She sat down in a chair beside him as he stood, and taking his hand she pressed it to her lips. She knew well enough what a strange thing she had asked, and she was indeed grateful to him. He stooped down and kissed her forehead.

"I will always trust you," he said, softly. "Tell me, dear one, has this matter given you pain? Is it a secret that will trouble you?"

"Not now," she answered, frankly.

Giovanni was in earnest when he promised to trust his wife. He knew, better than any living man, how well worthy she was of his utmost confidence, and he meant what he said. It must be confessed that the situation was a trying one to a man of his temper, and the depth of his love for Corona can be judged from the readiness with which he consented to her concealing anything from him. Every circumstance connected with what had happened that evening was strange, and the conclusion, instead of elucidating the mystery, only made it more mysterious still. His cousin's point-blank declaration that Faustina and Gouache were in love was startling to all his ideas and prejudices. He had seen Gouache kiss Corona's hand in a corner of the drawing-room, a proceeding which he did not wholly approve, though it was common enough. Then Gouache and Faustina had disappeared. Then Faustina had been found, and to facilitate the finding it had been necessary that Corona and Gouache should leave the palace together at one o'clock in the morning. Finally, Corona had appealed to his confidence in her and had taken advantage of it to refuse any present explanation whatever of her proceedings. Corona was a very noble and true woman, and he had promised to trust her. How far he kept his word will appear hereafter.

CHAPTER VII.

When San Giacinto heard Corona's explanation of Faustina's disappearance, he said nothing. He did not believe the story in the least, but if every one was satis-

fied there was no reason why he should not be satisfied also. Though he saw well enough that the tale was a pure invention, and that there was something behind it which was not to be known, the result was, on the whole, exactly what he desired. He received the thanks of the Montevarchi household for his fruitless exertions with a smile of gratification, and congratulated the princess upon the happy issue of the adventure. He made no present attempt to ascertain the real truth by asking questions which would have been hard to answer, for he was delighted that the incident should be explained away and forgotten at once. Donna Faustina's disappearance was of course freely discussed and variously commented, but the general verdict of the world was contrary to San Giacinto's private conclusions. People said that the account given by the family must be true, since it was absurd to suppose that a child just out of the convent could be either so foolish or so courageous as to go out alone at such a moment. No other hypothesis was in the least tenable, and the demonstration offered must be accepted as giving the only solution of the problem. San Giacinto told no one that he thought differently.

It was before all things his intention to establish himself firmly in Roman society, and his natural tact told him that the best way to accomplish this was to offend no one, and to endorse without question the opinion of the majority. Moreover, as a part of his plan for assuring his position consisted in marrying Faustina's sister, his interest lay manifestly in protecting the good name of her family by every means in his power. He knew that old Montevarchi passed for being one of the most rigid amongst the stiff company of the strait-laced, and that the prince was as careful of the conduct of his children, as his father had formerly been in regard to his own doings. Ascanio Bellegra was the result of this home education, and already bid fair to follow in his parent's footsteps. Christian virtues are certainly not incompatible with manliness, but the practice of them as maintained by Prince Montevarchi had made his son Ascanio a colourless creature, rather non-bad than good, clothed in a garment of righteousness that fitted him only because his harmless soul had no salient bosses of