

CHAPTER IX.

The excitement which had reigned in Rome for weeks past was destined to end almost as suddenly as it had begun. The events which followed the 22d of October have been frequently and accurately described; indeed, if we consider the small number of the troops engaged and the promptness with which a very limited body of men succeeded in quelling what at first appeared to be a formidable revolution, we are surprised at the amount of attention which has been accorded to the little campaign. The fact is that although the armies employed on both sides were insignificant, the questions at stake were enormous, and the real powers which found themselves confronted at Monte Rotondo and Mentana were the Kingdom of Italy and the French Empire. Until the ultimatum was presented to Italy by the French Minister on the 19th of October, Italy hoped to take possession of Rome on the pretext of restoring order after allowing it to be subverted by Garibaldi's guerillas. The military cordon formed by the Italian army to prevent Garibaldi's crossing the frontier was a mere show. The arrest of the leader himself, however it was intended by those who ordered it, turned out in effect to be a mere comedy, as he soon found himself at liberty and no one again attempted to seize him. When France interfered the scale turned. She asserted her determination to maintain the Convention of 1864 by force of arms, and Italy was obliged to allow Garibaldi to be defeated, since she was unable to face the perils of a war with her powerful neighbour. If a small body of French troops had not entered Rome on the 30th of the month, the events of 1870 would have occurred three years earlier, though probably with different results.

It being the object of the general commanding the Pope's forces to concentrate a body of men with whom to meet Garibaldi, who was now advancing boldly, the small detachments, of which many had already been sent to the front, were kept back in Rome in the hope of getting together something like an army. Gouache's

departure was accordingly delayed from day to day, and it was not until the early morning of the 3d of November that he actually quitted Rome with the whole available corps of Zouaves. Ten days elapsed, therefore, after the events last described, during which time he was hourly in expectation of orders to march. The service had become so arduous within the city that he could scarcely call a moment his own. It was no time to think of social duties, and he spent the leisure he had in trying to see Faustina Montevarchi as often as possible.

This, however, was no easy matter. It was a provoking fact that his duties kept him busily occupied in the afternoon and evening, and that the hours he could command fell almost always in the morning. To visit the Palazzo Montevarchi on any pretext whatever before one o'clock in the day was out of the question. He had not even the satisfaction of seeing Faustina drive past him in the Corso when she was out with her mother and Flavia, since they drove just at the time when he was occupied. Gouache told himself again and again that the display of ingenuity was in a measure the natural duty of a man in love, but the declaration did not help him very much. He was utterly at a loss for an expedient, and suffered keenly in being deprived of the possibility of seeing Faustina after having seen her so often and so intimately. A week earlier he could have borne it better, but now the separation was intolerable. In time of peace he would have disobeyed orders and thrown up his service for the day, no matter what the consequences turned out to be for himself; but at the present moment, when every man was expected to be at his post, such conduct seemed dishonourable and cowardly. He submitted in silence, growing daily more careworn, and losing much of the inexhaustible gaiety which made him a general favourite with his comrades.

There was but one chance of seeing Faustina, and even that one offered little probability of an interview. He knew that on Sunday mornings she sometimes went to church at an early hour with no one but her maid for a companion. Her mother and Flavia preferred to rise later and attended another mass. Now it chanced that in the year 1867, the 22d of October, the date of the

insurrection, fell on Tuesday. Five days, therefore, must elapse before he could see Faustina on a Sunday, and if he failed to see her then he would have to wait another week.

Unfortunately, Faustina's early expeditions to church were by no means certain or regular, and it would be necessary to convey a message to her before the day arrived. This was no easy matter. To send anything through the post was out of the question, and Gouache knew how hard it would be to find the means of putting a note into her hands through a servant. Hour after hour he cudgelled his brains for an expedient without success, until the idea pursued him and made him nervous. The time approached rapidly and he had as yet accomplished nothing. The wildest schemes suggested themselves to him and were rejected as soon as he thought of them. He met some of his acquaintances during the idle hours of the morning, and it almost drove him mad to think that almost any one of them could see Faustina any day he pleased. He did what he could to obtain leave in the afternoon or evening, but his exertions were fruitless. He was a man who was trusted, and knew it, and the disturbed state of affairs made it necessary that every man should do precisely what was allotted to him, at the risk of causing useless complications in the effort to concentrate and organise the troops which was now going forward. At last he actually went to the Palazzo Montevarchi in the morning and inquired if he could see the princess.

The porter replied that she was not visible, and that the prince had gone out. There was nothing to be done, and he turned to go away. Suddenly he stopped as he stood under the deep arch, facing the blank wall on the opposite side of the street. That same wall was broad and smooth and dark in colour. He only looked at it a moment, and then to excuse his hesitation in the eyes of the porter, he took out a cigarette, and lit it before going out. As he passed through the Piazza Colonna a few minutes later he went into a shop and bought two large tubes of paint with a broad brush. That night, when he was relieved from duty, he went back to the Palazzo Montevarchi. It was very late, and the streets were

deserted. He stood before the great closed doors of the palace and then walked straight across the street to the blank wall with his paint and brush in his hands.

On the following morning when the Montevarchi porter opened the gates his eyes were rejoiced by some most extraordinary specimens of calligraphy executed upon the dark stones with red paint of a glaringly vivid hue. The letters A. G. were drawn at least four feet high in the centre, and were repeated in every size at irregular intervals for some distance above, below, and on each side. The words "*Domenica*," Sunday, and "*Messa*," mass, were scrawled everywhere in capitals, in round-hand, large and small. Then to give the whole the air of having been designed by a street-boy, there were other words, such as "*Viva Pio IX.*," "*Viva il Papa Rè*," and across these, in a different manner, and in green paint, "*Viva Garibaldi*," "*Morte a Antonelli*," and similar revolutionary sentiments. The whole, however, was so disposed that Gouache's initials and the two important words stood out in bold relief from the rest, and could not fail to attract the eye.

Of the many people who came and went that day through the great gate of the Palazzo Montevarchi two only attached any importance to the glaring scrawls on the opposite wall. One of these was Faustina herself, who saw and understood. The other was San Giacinto, who stared at the letters for several seconds, and then smiled faintly as he entered the palace. He, too, knew what the signs meant, and remarked to himself that Gouache was an enterprising youth, but that, in the interest of the whole tribe of Montevarchi, it would be well to put a stop to his love-making as soon as possible. It was now Saturday afternoon and there was no time to be lost.

San Giacinto made a short visit, and, on leaving, went immediately to the Palazzo Saracinesca. He knew that at four o'clock Corona would probably not yet be at home. This turned out to be the case, and having announced his intention of waiting for her return he was ushered into the sitting-room. As soon as the servant was gone he went to Corona's writing-table and took from it a couple of sheets of her paper and two of her envelopes.

These latter were stamped with a coronet and her initials. He folded the paper carefully and put the four bits into his pocket-book. He waited ten minutes, but no one came. Then he left the house, telling the servant to say that he had called and would return presently. In a few minutes he was at his lodgings, where he proceeded to write the following note. He had taken two sheets in case the first proved a failure:—

"I have understood, but alas! I cannot come. Oh, my beloved! when shall we meet again? It seems years since Tuesday night—and yet I am so watched that I can do nothing. Some one suspects something. I am sure of it. *A trusty person* will bring you this. I love you always—do not doubt it, though I cannot meet you to-morrow."

San Giacinto, who had received a tolerable education and had conscientiously made the best of it, prided himself upon his handwriting. It was small, clear, and delicate, like that of many strong, quiet men, whose nerves do not run away with their fingers. On the present occasion he took pains to make it even more careful than usual, and the result was that it looked not unlike the "copperplate" handwriting a girl would learn at the convent, though an expert would probably have declared it disguised. It had been necessary, in order to deceive Gouache, to write the note on the paper generally used by women of society. As he could not get any of Faustina's own, it seemed the next best thing to take Corona's, since Corona was her most intimate friend.

Gouache had told San Giacinto that he was engaged every afternoon, in hopes that he would in turn chance to mention the fact to Faustina. It was therefore pretty certain that Anastase would not be at home between four and five o'clock. San Giacinto drove to the Zouave's lodgings and asked for him. If he chanced to be in, the note could be given to his old landlady. He was out, however, and San Giacinto asked to be allowed to enter the room on the pretext of writing a word for his friend. The landlady was a dull old creature, who had been warming herself with a pot of coals when San Giacinto rang. In answer to his request she resumed her occupation and pointed to the door of the Zouave's apartment.

San Giacinto entered, and looked about him for a conspicuous place in which to put the letter he had prepared. He preferred not to trust to the memory of the woman, who might forget to deliver it until the next day, especially if Gouache came home late that night, as was very likely. The table of the small sitting-room was littered with letters and papers, books and drawings, so that an object placed in the midst of such disorder would not be likely to attract Gouache's attention. The door beyond was open, and showed a toilet-table in the adjoining chamber, which was indeed the bedroom. San Giacinto went in, and taking the note from his pocket, laid it on an old-fashioned pincushion before the glass. The thing slipped, however, and in order to fasten it firmly he thrust a gold pin that lay on the table through the letter and pinned it to the cushion in a conspicuous position. Then he went out and returned to the Palazzo Saracinesca as he had promised to do.

In doing all this he had no intention of injuring either Gouache or Faustina. He perceived clearly enough that their love affair could not come to any good termination, and as his interests were now very closely bound up with those of the Montevarchi, it seemed wisest to break off the affair by any means in his power, without complicating matters by speaking to Gouache or to Faustina's father or mother. He knew enough of human nature to understand that Gouache would be annoyed at losing the chance of a meeting, and he promised himself to watch the two so carefully as to be able to prevent other clandestine interviews during the next few days. If he could once sow the seeds of a quarrel between the two, he fancied it would be easy to break up the relations. Nothing makes a woman so angry as to wait for a man who has promised to meet her, and if he fails to come altogether her anger will probably be very serious. In the present case he supposed that Faustina would go to the church, but that Gouache, being warned that he was not to come, would not think of keeping the tryst. The scheme, if not profound, was at least likely to produce a good deal of trouble between the lovers.

San Giacinto returned to the Palazzo Saracinesca, but he found only the old prince at home, though he pro-

longed his visit in the hope of seeing Corona or Sant' Ilario.

"By the bye," he said, as he and his companion sat together in the prince's study, "I remember that you were so good as to say that you would let me see those family papers some day. They must be very interesting and I would be glad to avail myself of your offer."

"Certainly," replied Saracinesca. "They are in the Archives in a room of the library. It is rather late now. Do you mind waiting till to-morrow?"

"Not in the least, or as long as you like. To tell the truth, I would like to show them to my future father-in-law, who loves archæology. I was talking about them with him yesterday. After all, however, I suppose the duplicates are at the Cancelleria, and we can see them there."

"I do not know," said the prince, carelessly, "I never took the trouble to inquire. There is probably some register of them, or something to prove that they are in existence."

"There must be, of course. Things of that importance would not be allowed to go unregistered, unless people were very indifferent in those days."

"It is possible that there are no duplicates. It may be that there is only an official notice of the deed giving the heads of the agreement. You see it was a friendly arrangement, and there was supposed to be no probability whatever that your great-grandfather would ever marry. The papers I have are all in order and legally valid, but there may have been some carelessness about registering them. I cannot be sure. Indeed it is thirty years at least since I looked at the originals."

"If you would have them taken out some time before I am married, I should be glad to see them, but there is no hurry. So all this riot and revolution has meant something after all," added San Giacinto to change the subject. "Garibaldi has taken Monte Rotondo, I hear to-day."

"Yes, and if the French are not quick, we shall have the diversion of a siege," replied Saracinesca rather scornfully. "That same taking of Monte Rotondo was one of those gallant deeds for which Garibaldi is so justly

famous. He has six thousand men, and there were only three hundred and fifty soldiers inside. Twenty to one, or thereabouts."

It is unnecessary to detail the remainder of the conversation. Saracinesca went off into loud abuse of Garibaldi, confounding the whole Italian Government with him and devoting all to one common destruction, while San Giacinto reserved his judgment, believing that there was probably a wide difference between the real intentions of the guerilla general and of his lawful sovereign, Victor Emmanuel the Second, King of Italy. At last the two men were informed that Corona had returned. They left the study and found her in the sitting-room.

"Where is Giovanni?" she asked as soon as they entered. She was standing before the fireplace dressed as she had come in.

"I have no idea where he is," replied Saracinesca. "I suppose he is at the club, or making visits somewhere. He has turned into a very orderly boy since you married him." The old man laughed a little.

"I have missed him," said Corona, taking no notice of her father-in-law's remark. "I was to have picked him up on the Pincio, and when I got there he was gone. I am so afraid he will think I forgot all about it, for I must have been late. You see, I was delayed by a crowd in the Tritone — there is always a crowd there."

Corona seemed less calm than usual. The fact was, that since the affair which had caused her husband so much annoyance, some small part of which she had perceived, she had been trying to make up to him for his disappointment in not knowing her secret, by being with him more than usual, and by exerting herself to please him in every way. They did not usually meet during the afternoon, as he generally went out on foot, while she drove, but to-day they had agreed that she should come to the Pincio and take him for a short drive and bring him home. The plan was part of her fixed intention to be more than usually thoughtful where he was concerned, and the idea that she had kept him waiting and that he had gone away caused her more regret than would have been natural in the ordinary course of events.

In order to explain what now took place, it is necessary

to return to Giovanni himself who, as Corona had said, had waited for his wife near the band-stand on the Pincio for some time, until growing weary, he had walked away and left the gardens.

Though he manfully concealed what he felt, the passion that had been sown in his heart had grown apace and in a few days had assumed dominating proportions. He suspected everything and everybody while determined to appear indifferent. Even Corona's efforts to please him, which of late had grown so apparent, caused him suspicion. He asked himself why her manner should have changed, as it undoubtedly had during the last few days. She had always been a good and loving wife to him, and he was well pleased with her gravity and her dignified way of showing her affection. Why should she suddenly think it needful to become so very solicitous for his welfare and happiness during every moment of his life? It was not like her to come into his study early in the morning and to ask what he meant to do during the day. It was a new thing that she should constantly propose to walk with him, to drive with him, to read aloud to him, to make herself not only a part of his heart but a part of his occupations. Had the change come gradually, he would not have distrusted her motives. He liked his wife's company and conversation, but as they each had things to do which could not conveniently be done together, he had made up his mind to the existence which was good enough for his companions in society. Other men did not think of spending the afternoon in their wives' carriages, leaving cards or making visits, or driving round and round the Villa Borghese and the Pincio. To do so was to be ridiculous in the extreme, and besides, though he liked to be with Corona, he detested visiting, and hated of all things to stop a dozen times in the course of a drive in order to send a footman upstairs with cards. He preferred to walk or to lounge in the club or to stay at home and study the problems of his improvements for Saracinesca. Corona's manner irritated him therefore, and made him think more than ever of the subject which he would have done better to abandon from the first.

Nevertheless, he would not show that he was wearied

by his wife's attention, still less that he believed her behaviour to be prompted by a desire to deceive him. He was uniformly courteous and gentle, acquiescing in her little plans whenever he could do so, and expressing a suitable degree of regret when he was prevented from joining her by some previous engagement. But the image of the French Zouave was ever present with him. He could not get rid of Gouache's dark, delicate features, even in his dreams; the sound of the man's pleasant voice and of his fluent conversation was constantly in his ears, and he could not look at Corona without fancying how she would look if Anastase were beside her whispering tender speeches.

All the time, he submitted with a good grace to do whatever she proposed, and on this afternoon he found himself waiting for her beside the band-stand. At first he watched the passing carriages indifferently enough, supposing that his own liveries would presently loom up in the long line of high-seated coachmen and lacqueys, and having no especial desire to see them. His position when in Corona's company grew every day more difficult, and he thought as he stood by the stone pillar at the corner that he would on the whole be glad if she did not come. He was egregiously mistaken in himself, however. As the minutes passed he grew uneasy, and watched the advancing carriages with a feverish anxiety, saying to himself that every one must bring Corona, and actually growing pale with emotion as each vehicle turned the distant corner and came into view. The time seemed interminable after he had once yielded to the excitement, and before another quarter of an hour had elapsed, Sant' Ilario turned angrily away and left the Pincio by the stairs that descend near the band-stand towards the winding drive by which the Piazza del Popolo is reached.

It is not easy for a person who is calm to comprehend the workings of a brain over excited with a strong passion. To a man who has lost the sober use of his faculties in the belief that he has been foully betrayed, every circumstance, every insignificant accident, seems a link in the chain of evidence. A week earlier Giovanni would have thought himself mad if the mere idea had

suggested itself to him that Corona loved Gouache. To-day he believed that she had purposely sent him to wait upon the Pincio, in order that she might be sure of seeing Gouache without fear of interruption. The conviction thrust itself upon him with overwhelming force. He fancied himself the dupe of a common imposition, he saw his magnificent love and trust made the sport of a vulgar trick. The blood mounted to his dark face and as he descended the steps a red mist seemed to be spread between his eyes and all surrounding objects. Though he walked firmly and mechanically, saluting his acquaintances as he passed, he was unconscious of his actions, and moved like a man under the influence of a superior force. Jealousy is that one of all the passions which is most sure to break out suddenly into deeds of violence when long restrained.

Giovanni scarcely knew how he reached the Corso nor how it was that he found himself ascending the dusky staircase which led to Gouache's lodgings. It was less than a quarter of an hour since San Giacinto had been there, and the old woman still held her pot of coals in her hand as she opened the door. As she had pointed to the door when San Giacinto had come, so she now directed Giovanni in the same way. But Giovanni, on hearing that Anastase was out, began to ask questions.

"Has any one been here?" he inquired.

"Eh! There was a gentleman a quarter of an hour ago," replied the woman.

"Has any lady been here?"

"A lady? Macchè!" The old creature laughed. "What should ladies do here?"

Giovanni thought he detected some hesitation in the tone. He was in the mood to fancy himself deceived by every one.

"Are you fond of money?" he asked, brutally.

"Eh! I am an old woman. What would you have? Am I crazy that I should not like money? But Signor Gouache is a very good gentleman. He pays well, thank Heaven!"

"What does he pay you for?"

"What for? For his lodging — for his coffee. Bacchus! What should he pay me for? Strange question in truth.

Do I keep a shop? I keep lodgings. But perhaps you like the place? It is a fine situation — just in the Corso and only one flight of stairs, a beautiful position for the Carnival. Of course, if you are inclined to pay more than Signor Gouache, I do not say but what —"

"I do not want your lodgings, my good woman," returned Giovanni in gentler tones. "I want to know who comes to see your lodger."

"Who should come? His friends of course. Who else?"

"A lady, perhaps," said Giovanni in a thick voice. It hurt him to say it, and the words almost stuck in his throat. "Perhaps a lady comes sometimes," he repeated, pulling out some loose bank notes.

The old woman's filmy eyes suddenly twinkled in the gloom. The sound of the crisp pieces of paper was delightful to her ear.

"Well," she said after a moment's hesitation, "if a beautiful lady does come here, that is the Signore's affair. It is none of my business."

Giovanni thrust the notes into her palm, which was already wide open to receive them. His heart beat wildly.

"She is beautiful, you say?"

"Oh! As beautiful as you please!" chuckled the hag.

"Is she dark?"

"Of course," replied the woman. There was no mistaking the tone in which the question was asked, for Giovanni was no longer able to conceal anything that he felt.

"And tall, I suppose? Yes. And she was here a quarter of an hour ago, you say? Speak out!" he cried, advancing a step towards the old creature. "If you lie to me, I will kill you! She was here — do not deny it."

"Yes — yes," answered the woman, cowering back in some terror. "Per carità! Don't murder me — I tell you the truth."

With a sudden movement Giovanni turned on his heel and entered Gouache's sitting-room. It was now almost dark in the house and he struck a match and lighted a candle that stood on the stable. The glare illuminated his swarthy features and fiery eyes, and the veins stood

out on his forehead and temples like strained and twisted cords. He looked about him in every direction, examining the table, strewn with papers and books, the floor, the furniture, expecting every moment to find something which should prove that Corona had been there. Seeing nothing, he entered the bedroom beyond. It was a small chamber and he had scarcely passed through the door when he found himself before the toilet-table. The note San Giacinto had left was there pinned upon the little cushion with the gold pin, as he had placed it.

Giovanni stared wildly at the thing for several seconds and his face grew deadly white. There was no evidence lacking now, for the pin was Corona's own. It was a simple enough object, made of plain gold, the head being twisted into the shape of the letter C, but there was no mistaking its identity, for Giovanni had designed it himself. Corona used it for fastening her veil.

As the blood sank from his head to his heart Giovanni grew very calm. He set the candle upon the toilet-table and took the note, after putting the pin in his pocket. The handwriting seemed to be feigned, and his lip curled scornfully as he looked at it and then, turning it over, saw that the envelope was one of Corona's own. It seemed to him a pitiable piece of folly in her to distort her writing when there was such abundant proof on all sides to convict her. Without the slightest hesitation he opened the letter and read it, bending down and holding it near the candle. One perusal was enough. He smiled curiously as he read the words, "I am so watched that I can do nothing. Some one suspects something." His attention was arrested by the statement that a *trusty person*—the words were underlined—would bring the note. The meaning of the emphasis was explained by the pin; the *trusty person* was herself, who, perhaps by an afterthought, had left the bit of gold as a parting gift in case Gouache marched before they met again.

Giovanni glanced once more round the room, half expecting to find some other convicting piece of evidence. Then he hesitated, holding the candle in one hand and the note in the other. He thought of staying where he was and waiting for Gouache, but the idea did not seem feasible. Nothing which implied waiting

could have satisfied him at that moment, and after a few seconds he thrust the note into his pocket and went out. His hand was on the outer door, when he remembered the old woman who sat crouching over her pan of coals, scarcely able to believe her good luck, and longing for Giovanni's departure in order that she might count the crisp notes again. She dared not indulge herself in that pleasure while he was present, lest he should repent of his generosity and take back a part of them, for she had seen how he had taken them from his pocket and saw that he had no idea how much he had given.

"You will say nothing of my coming," said Giovanni, fixing his eyes upon her.

"I, Signore? Do not be afraid! Money is better than words."

"Very good," he answered. "Perhaps you will get twice as much the next time I want to know the truth."

"God bless you!" chuckled the wrinkled creature. He went out, and the little bell that was fastened to the door tinkled as the latch sprang back into its place. Then the woman counted the price of blood, which had so unexpectedly fallen into her hands. The bank-notes were many and broad, and crisp and new, for Giovanni had not reckoned the cost. It was long since old Caterina Ranucci had seen so much money, and she had certainly never had so much of her own.

"Qualche innamorato!" she muttered to herself as she smoothed the notes one by one and gloated over them and built castles in the air under the light of her little oil lamp. "It is some fellow in love. Heaven pardon me if I have done wrong! He seemed so anxious to know that the woman had been here—why should I not content him? Poveretto! He must be rich. I will always tell him what he wants to know. Heaven bring him often and bless him."

Then she rocked herself backwards and forwards, hugging her pot of coals and crooning the words of an ancient Roman ditty—

"Io vorrei che nella luna
Ci s'andasse in carrettella
Per vedere la più bella
Delle donne di là sù!"

What does the old song mean? Who knows whether it ever meant anything? "I wish one might drive in a little cart to the moon, to see the most beautiful of the women up there!" Caterina Ranucci somehow felt as though she could express her feelings in no better way than by singing the queer words to herself in her cracked old voice. Possibly she thought that the neighbours would not suspect her good fortune if they heard her favourite song.

CHAPTER X.

Sant' Ilario walked home from Gouache's lodgings. The cool evening air refreshed him and helped him to think over what he had before him in the near future. Indeed the position was terrible enough, and doubly so to a man of his temperament. He would have faced anything rather than this, for there was no point in which he was more vulnerable than in his love for Corona. As he walked her figure rose before him, and her beauty almost dazzled him when he thought of it. But he could no longer think of her without bringing up that other being upon whom his thoughts of vengeance concentrated themselves, until it seemed as though the mere intention must do its object some bodily harm.

The fall was tremendous in itself and in its effects. It must have been a great passion indeed which could make such a man demean himself to bribe an inferior for information against his wife. He himself was so little able to measure the force by which he was swayed as to believe that he had extracted the confession from a reluctant accomplice. He would never have allowed that the sight of the money and the prompting of his own words could have caused the old woman to invent the perfectly imaginary story which he had seemed so fully determined to hear. He did not see that Caterina Ranucci had merely confirmed each statement he had made himself and had taken his bribe while laughing to herself at his folly. He was blinded by something

which destroys the mental vision more surely than anger or hatred, or pride, or love itself.

To some extent he was to be pardoned. The chain of circumstantial evidence was consecutive and so convincing that many a just person would have accepted Corona's guilt as the only possible explanation of what had happened. The discoveries he had just made would alone have sufficed to set up a case against her, and many an innocent reputation has been shattered by less substantial proofs. Had he not found a letter, evidently written in a feigned hand and penned upon his wife's own writing-paper, fastened upon Gouache's table with her own pin? Had not the old woman confessed — before he had found the note, too, — that a lady had been there but a short time before? Did not these facts agree singularly with Corona's having left him to wait for her during that interval in the public gardens? Above all, did not this conclusion explain at once all those things in her conduct which had so much disturbed him during the past week?

What was this story of Faustina Montevarchi's disappearance? The girl was probably Corona's innocent accomplice. Corona had left the house at one o'clock in the morning with Gouache. The porter had not seen any other woman. The fact that she had entered the Palazzo Montevarchi with Faustina and without Anastase proved nothing, except that she had met the young girl somewhere else, it mattered little where. The story that Faustina had accidentally shut herself into a room in the palace was an invention, for even Corona admitted the fact. That Faustina's flight, however, and the other events of the night of the 22d had been arranged merely in order that Corona and Gouache might walk in the moonlight for a quarter of an hour, Giovanni did not believe. There was some other mystery here which was yet unsolved. Meanwhile the facts he had collected were enough — enough to destroy his happiness at a single blow. And yet he loved Corona even now, and though his mind was made up clearly enough concerning Gouache, he knew that he could not part from the woman he adored. He thought of the grim old fortress at Saracinesca with its lofty towers and impregnable walls, and