

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.

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### 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

when he reflected that there was but one possible exit from the huge mass of buildings, he said to himself that Corona would be safe there for ever.

He had the instincts of a fierce and unforgiving race of men, who for centuries had held the law in their own hands, and were accustomed to wield it as it seemed good in their own eyes. It was not very long since the lords of Saracinesca had possessed the right of life and death over their vassals,<sup>1</sup> and the hereditary traits of character which had been fostered by ages of power had not disappeared with the decay of feudalism. Under the circumstances which seemed imminent, it would not have been thought unnatural if Giovanni had confined his wife during the remainder of her days in his castle among the mountains. The idea may excite surprise among civilised Europeans when it is considered that the events of which I write occurred as recently as 1867, but it would certainly have evoked few expressions of astonishment among the friends of the persons concerned. To Giovanni himself it seemed the only possible conclusion to what was happening, and the determination to kill Gouache and imprison Corona for life appeared in his eyes neither barbarous nor impracticable.

He did not hasten his pace as he went towards his home. There was something fateful in his regular step and marble face as he moved steadily to the accomplishment of his purpose. The fury which had at first possessed him, and which, if he had then encountered Gouache, would certainly have produced a violent outbreak, had subsided and was lost in the certainty of his dishonour, and in the immensity of the pain he suffered. Nothing remained to be done but to tell Corona that he knew all, and to inflict upon her the consequences of her crime without delay. There was absolutely no hope left that she might prove herself innocent, and in Giovanni's own breast there was no hope either, no hope of ever finding again his lost happiness, or of ever again setting one stone upon another of all that splendid fabric

<sup>1</sup> Until 1870 the right of life and death was still held, so far as actual legality was concerned, by the Dukes of Bracciano, and was attached to the possession of the title, which had been sold and subsequently bought back by the original holders of it.

of his life which he had built up so confidently upon the faith of the woman he loved.

As he reached the gates of his home he grew if possible paler than before, till his face was positively ghastly to see, and his eyes seemed to sink deeper beneath his brows, while their concentrated light gleamed more fiercely. No one saw him enter, for the porter was in his lodge, and on reaching the landing of the stairs Giovanni let himself into the apartments with a latch-key.

Corona was in her dressing-room, a high vaulted chamber, somewhat sombrely furnished, but made cheerful by a fire that blazed brightly in the deep old-fashioned chimney-piece. Candles were lighted upon the dressing-table, and a shaded lamp stood upon a low stand near a lounge beside the hearth. The princess was clad in a loose wrapper of some soft cream-coloured material, whose folds fell gracefully to the ground as she lay upon the couch. She was resting before dressing for dinner, and the masses of her blue-black hair were loosely coiled upon her head and held together by a great Spanish comb thrust among the tresses with a careless grace. She held a book in her slender, olive-tinted hand, but she was not reading; her head lay back upon the cushions and the firelight threw her features into strong relief, while her velvet eyes reflected the flashes of the dancing flames as she watched them. Her expression was serene and calm. She had forgotten for the moment the little annoyances of the last few days and was thinking of her happiness, contrasting the peace of her present life with what she had suffered during the five years of her marriage with poor old Astrardente. Could Giovanni have seen her thus his heart might have been softened. He would have asked himself how it was possible that any woman guilty of such enormous misdeeds could lie there watching the fire with a look of such calm innocence upon her face.

But Giovanni did not see her as she was. Even in the extremity of his anger and suffering his courtesy did not forsake him, and he knocked at his wife's door before entering the room. Corona moved from her position, and turned her head to see who was about to enter.

"Come in," she said.

She started when she saw Giovanni's face. Dazzled

as she was by the fire, he looked to her like a dead man. She laid one hand upon the arm of the couch as though she would rise to meet him. He shut the door behind him and advanced towards her till only a couple of paces separated them. She was so much amazed by his looks that she sat quite still while he fixed his eyes upon her and began to speak.

"You have wrecked my life," he said in a strange, low voice. "I have come to tell you my decision."

She thought he was raving mad, and, brave as she was, she shrank back a little upon her seat and turned pale.

"You need not be afraid of me," he continued, as he noticed the movement. "I am not going to kill you. I am sorry to say I am fool enough to love you still."

"Giovanni!" cried Corona in an agonised tone. She could find no words, but sprang to her feet and threw her arms about him, gazing imploringly into his face. His features did not relax, for he was prepared for any sort of acting on her part. Without hurting her, but with a strength few men could have resisted, he forced her back to her seat, and then retreated a step before he spoke again. She submitted blindly, feeling that any attempt to thwart him must be utterly useless.

"I know what you have done," he said. "You can have nothing to say. Be silent and listen to me. You have destroyed the greatest happiness the world ever knew. You have dishonoured me and mine. You have dragged my faith in you — God knows how great — into the mire of your infamous life. And worse than that — I could almost have forgiven that, I am so base — you have destroyed yourself —"

Corona uttered a wild cry and sank back upon the cushions, pressing her hands over her ears so that she might not hear the fearful words.

"I will not listen!" she gasped. "You are mad — mad!" Then springing up once more she again clasped him to her breast, so suddenly that he could not escape her. "Oh, my poor Giovanni!" she moaned. "What has happened to you? Have you been hurt? Are you dying? For Heaven's sake speak like yourself!"

He seized her wrists and held her before him so that she was forced to hear what he said. Even then his

grasp did not hurt her. His hands were like manacles of steel in which hers could turn though she could not withdraw them.

"I am hurt to death," he said, between his teeth. "I have been to Gouache's rooms and have brought away your letter — and your pin — the pin I gave you, Corona. Do you understand now, or must I say more?"

"My letter?" cried Corona in the utmost bewilderment.

"Yes," he answered, releasing her and instantly producing the note and the gold ornament. "Is that your paper? Is this your pin? Answer me — or no! they answer for themselves. You need say nothing, for you can have nothing to say. They are yours and you know it. If they are not enough there is the woman who let you in, who saw you bring them. What more do you want?"

As long as Giovanni's accusations had been vague and general, Corona had remained horrorstruck, believing that some awful and incomprehensible calamity had befallen her husband and had destroyed his reason. The moment he produced the proof of what he said, her presence of mind returned, and she saw at a glance the true horror of the situation. She never doubted for a moment that she was the victim of some atrocious plot, but having something to face which she could understand her great natural courage asserted itself. She was not a woman to moan and weep helplessly when there was an open danger to be met.

She took the letter and the pin and examined them by the light, with a calmness that contrasted oddly with her previous conduct. Giovanni watched her. He supposed that she had acted surprise until he had brought forward something more conclusive than words, and that she was now exercising her ingenuity in order to explain the situation. His lip curled scornfully, as he fancied he saw the meaning of her actions. After a few seconds she looked up and held out the two objects towards him.

"The paper is mine," she said, "but I did not write the letter. The pin is mine too. I lost it more than a month ago."

"Of course," replied Giovanni, coldly. "I expected that you would say that. It is very natural. But I do

not ask you for any explanations. I have them already. I will take you to Saracinesca to-morrow morning and you will have time to explain everything. You will have your whole life to use, until you die, for no other object. I told you I would not kill you."

"Is it possible that you are in earnest?" asked Corona, her voice trembling slightly.

"I am in earnest. Do you think I am a man to jest over such deeds?"

"And do you think I am a woman to do such deeds?"

"Since you have done them — what answer can there be? Not only are you capable of them. You are the woman who has done them. Do lifeless things, like these, lie?"

"No. But men do. I believe you, Giovanni. You found these things in Monsieur Gouache's rooms. You were told I put them there. Whoever told you so uttered the most infamous falsehood that ever was spoken on earth. The person who placed them where they were did so in the hope of ruining me. Can you look back into the past and tell me that you have any other reason for believing in this foul plot?"

"Reasons?" cried Giovanni, fiercely. "Do you want more reasons? We have time. I will give you enough to satisfy you that I know all you have done. Was not this man for ever near you last year, wherever you met, talking with you in low tones, showing by every movement and gesture that he distinguished you with his base love? Were you not together in a corner last Tuesday night just as the insurrection broke out? Did he not kiss your hand when you both thought no one was looking?"

"He kissed my hand before every one," replied Corona, whose wrath was slowly gathering as she saw her husband's determination to prove her guilty.

"There were people in the room," continued Giovanni in a tone of concentrated anger, "but you thought no one was watching you — I could see it in your manner and in your eyes. That same night I came home at one o'clock and you were out. You had gone out alone with that man, expecting that I would not return so soon — though it was late enough, too. You were forced to admit that you were with him, because the porter had seen you and had told me the man was a Zouave."

"I will tell you the story, since you no longer trust me," said Corona, proudly.

"I have no doubt you will tell me some very ingenious tale which will explain why, although you left my house alone, with Gouache, you reached the Palazzo Montevarchi alone with Faustina. But I have not done. He came here the next day. You treated him with unexampled rudeness before me. Half an hour later I found you together in the drawing-room. He was kissing your hand again. You were saying you forgave him and giving him that favourite benediction of yours, which you once bestowed upon me under very similar circumstances. Astrardente was alive and present at that dance in Casa Frangipani. You have me for a husband now and you have found another man whose heart will beat when you bless him. It would be almost better to kill you after all."

"Have you finished?" asked Corona, white with anger.

"Yes. That letter and that pin — left while I, poor fool, was waiting for you this afternoon on the Pincio — those things are my last words. They close the tale very appropriately. I wish I did not love you so — I would not wait for your answer."

"Do you dare to say you love me?"

"Yes — though there is no other man alive who would dare so much, who would dare to love such a woman as you are — for very shame."

"And I tell you," answered Corona in ringing tones, "that, although I can prove to you that every word you say against me is an abominable calumny, so that you shall see how basely you have insulted an innocent woman, yet I shall never love you again — never, never. A man who can believe such things, who can speak such things, is worthy of no woman's love and shall not have mine. And yet you shall hear me tell the truth, that you may know what you have done. You say I have wrecked your life and destroyed your happiness. You have done it for yourself. As there is a God in Heaven —"

"Do not blaspheme," said Giovanni, contemptuously. "I will hear your story."

"Before God, this thing is a lie!" cried Corona, standing at her full height, her eyes flashing with just indignation. Then lowering her voice, she continued speaking

rapidly but distinctly. "Gouache loves Faustina, and she loves him. When he left this house that night she followed him out into the street. She reached the Serriadori barracks and was stunned by the explosion. Gouache found her there many hours later. When you saw us together a little earlier he was telling me he loved her. He is a man of honour. He saw that the only way to save her good name was to bring her here and let me take her home. He sent me a word by the porter, while she waited in the shadow. I ran down and found her there. We purposely prevented the porter from seeing her. I took her to her father's house, and sent Gouache away, for I was angry with him. I believed he had led an innocent girl into following him — that it was a pre-arranged meeting and that she had gone not realising that there was a revolution. I invented the story of her having lost herself here, in order to shield her. The next day Gouache came. I would not speak to him and went to my room. The servants told me he was gone, but as I was coming back to you I met him. He stopped me and made me believe what is quite true, for Faustina has acknowledged it. She followed him of her own accord, and he had no idea that she was not safe at home. I forgave him. He said he was going to the frontier and asked me to give him a blessing. It was a foolish idea, perhaps, but I did as he wished. If you had come forward like a man instead of listening we would have told you all. But you suspected me even then. I do not know who told you that I had been to his lodging to-day. The carriage was stopped by a crowd in the Tritone, and I reached the Pincio after you had gone. As for the pin, I lost it a month ago. Gouache may have found it, or it may have been picked up and sold, and he may have chanced to buy it. I never wrote the letter. The paper was either taken from this house or was got from the stationer who stamps it for us. Faustina may have taken it — she may have been here when I was out — it is not her handwriting. I believe it is an abominable plot. But it is as transparent as water. Take the pin and wear it. See Gouache when you have it. He will ask you where you got it, for he has not the slightest idea that it is mine. Are you satis-

fied? I have told you all. Do you see what you have done, in suspecting me, in accusing me, in treating me like the last of women? I have done. What have you to say?"

"That you have told a very improbable story," replied Giovanni. "You have sunk lower than before, for you have cast a slur upon an innocent girl in order to shield yourself. I would not have believed you capable of that. You can no more prove your innocence than you can prove that this poor child was mad enough to follow Gouache into the street last Tuesday night. I have listened to you patiently. I have but one thing more to do and then there will be nothing left for me but patience. You will send for your servants, and order your effects to be packed for the journey to Saracinesca. If it suits your convenience we will start at eleven o'clock, as I shall be occupied until then. I advise you not to see my father."

Corona stood quite still while he spoke. She could not realise that he paid no attention whatever to her story, save to despise her the more for having implicated Faustina. It was inconceivable to her that all the circumstances should not now be as clear to him as they were to herself. From the state of absolute innocence she could not transfer herself in a moment to the comprehension of all he had suffered, all he had thought, and all he had recalled before accusing her. Even had that been possible, her story seemed to her to give a perfectly satisfactory explanation of all his suspicions. She was wounded, indeed, so deeply that she knew she could never recover herself entirely, but it did not strike her as possible that all she had said should produce no effect at all. And yet she knew his look and his ways, and recognised in the tone of his voice the expression of a determination which it would be hard indeed to change. He still believed her guilty, and he was going to take her away to the dismal loneliness of the mountains for an indefinite time, perhaps for ever. She had not a relation in the world to whom she could appeal. Her mother had died in her infancy; her father, for whom she sacrificed herself in marrying the rich old Duke of Astradente, was dead long ago. She could turn to no one,

unless it were to Prince Saracinesca himself — and Giovanni warned her not to go to his father. She stood for some moments looking fixedly at him as though trying to read his thoughts, and he returned her gaze with unflinching sternness. The position was desperate. In a few hours she would be where there would be no possibility of defence or argument, and she knew the man's character well enough to be sure that where proof failed entreaty would be worse than useless. At last she came near to him and almost gently laid her hand upon his arm.

"Giovanni," she said, quietly, "I have loved you very tenderly and very truly. I swear to you upon our child that I am wholly innocent. Will you not believe me?"

"No," he answered, and the little word fell from his lips like the blow of a steel hammer. His eyes did not flinch; his features did not change.

"Will you not ask some one who knows whether I have not spoken the truth? Will you not let me write — or write yourself to those two, and ask them to come here and tell you their story? It is much to ask of them, but it is life or death to me and they will not refuse. Will you not do it?"

"No, I will not."

"Then do what you will with me, and may God forgive you, for I cannot."

Corona turned from him and crossed the room. There was a cushioned stool there, over which hung a beautiful crucifix. Corona knelt down, as though not heeding her husband's presence, and buried her face in her hands.

Giovanni stood motionless in the middle of the room. His eyes had followed his wife's movements and he watched her in silence for a short time. Convinced, as he was, of her guilt, he believed she was acting a part, and that her kneeling down was merely intended to produce a theatrical effect. The accent of truth in her words made no impression whatever upon him, and her actions seemed to him too graceful to be natural, too dignified for a woman who was not trying all the time to make the best of her appearance. The story she had told coincided too precisely, if possible, with the doings of which he had accused her, while it failed in his judg-

ment to explain the motives of what she had done. He said to himself that he, in her place, would have told everything on that first occasion when she had come home and had found him waiting for her. He forgot, or did not realise, that she had been taken unawares, when she expected to find time to consider her course, and had been forced to make up her mind suddenly. Almost any other woman would have told the whole adventure at once; any woman less wholly innocent of harm would have seen the risk she incurred by asking her husband's indulgence for her silence. He was persuaded that she had played upon his confidence in her and had reckoned upon his belief in her sincerity in order to be bold with half the truth. Suspicion and jealousy had made him so ingenious that he imputed to her a tortuous policy of deception, of which she was altogether incapable.

Corona did not kneel long. She had no intention of making use of the appearance of prayer in order to affect Giovanni's decision, nor in order to induce him to leave her alone. He would, indeed, have quitted the room had she remained upon her knees a few moments longer, but when she rose and faced him once more he was still standing as she had left him, his eyes fixed upon her and his arms folded upon his breast. He thought she was going to renew her defence, but he was mistaken. She came and stood before him, so that a little distance separated him from her, and she spoke calmly, in her deep, musical voice.

"You have made up your mind, then. Is that your last word?"

"It is."

"Then I will say what I have to say. It shall not be much, but we shall not often talk together in future. You will remember some day what I tell you. I am an innocent and defenceless woman. I have no relation to whom I can appeal. You have forbidden me to write to those who could prove me guiltless. For the sake of our child — for the sake of the love I have borne you — I will make no attempt at resistance. The world shall not know that you have even doubted me, the mother of your son, the woman who has loved you. The time will come when you will ask my forgiveness for your deeds.

I tell you frankly that I shall never be capable of forgiving you, nor of speaking a kind word to you again. This is neither a threat nor a warning, though it may perhaps be the means of sparing you some disappointment. I only ask two things of your courtesy—that you will inform me of what you mean to do with our child, and that you will then be good enough to leave me alone for a little while.”

An evil thought crossed Giovanni's mind. He knew how Corona would suffer if she were not allowed either to see little Orsino or to know what became of him while she was living her solitary life of confinement in the mountains. The diabolical cruelty of the idea fascinated him for a moment, and he looked coldly into her eyes as though he did not mean to answer her. In spite of his new jealousy, however, he was not capable of inflicting this last blow. As he looked at her beautiful white face and serious eyes, he wavered. He loved her still and would have loved her, had the proofs against her been tenfold more convincing than they were. With him his love was a passion apart and by itself. It had been strengthened and made beautiful by the devotion and tenderness and faith which had grown up with it, and had surrounded it as with a wall. But though all these things were swept away the passion itself remained, fierce, indomitable and soul-stirring in its power. It stood alone, like the impregnable keep of a war-worn fortress, beneath whose shadow the outworks and ramparts have been razed to the ground, and whose own lofty walls are battered and dented by engines of war, shorn of all beauty and of all its stately surroundings, but stern and unshaken yet, grim, massive and solitary.

For an instant Giovanni wavered, unable to struggle against that mysterious power which still governed him and forced him to acknowledge its influence. The effort of resisting the temptation to be abominably cruel carried him back from his main purpose, and produced a sudden revulsion of feeling wholly incomprehensible to himself.

“Corona!” he cried, in a voice breaking with emotion. He threw out his arms wildly and sprang towards her. She thrust him back with a strength of which he would not have believed her capable. Bitter words rose to her

lips, but she forced them back and was silent, though her eyes blazed with an anger she had never felt before. For some time neither spoke. Corona stood erect and watchful, one hand resting upon the back of a chair. Giovanni walked to the end of the room, and then came back and looked steadily into her face. Several seconds elapsed before he could speak, and his face was very white.

“You may keep the child,” he said at last, in an unsteady tone. Then without another word he left the room and softly closed the door behind him.

When Corona was alone she remained standing as he had last seen her, her gaze fixed on the heavy curtains through which he had disappeared. Gradually her face grew rigid, and the expression vanished from her deep eyes, till they looked dull and glassy. She tottered, lost her hold upon the chair and fell to the floor with an inarticulate groan. There she lay, white, beautiful and motionless as a marble statue, mercifully unconscious, for a space, of all she had to suffer.

Giovanni went from his wife's presence to his father's study. The prince sat at his writing-table, a heap of dusty parchments and papers piled before him. He was untying the rotten strings with which they were fastened, peering through his glasses at the headings written across the various documents. He did not unfold them, but laid them carefully in order upon the table. When San Giacinto had gone away, the old gentleman had nothing to do for an hour or more before dinner. He had accordingly opened a solid old closet in the library which served as a sort of muniment room for the family archives, and had withdrawn a certain box in which he knew that the deeds concerning the cession of title were to be found. He did not intend to look them over this evening, but was merely arranging them for examination on the morrow. He looked up as Giovanni entered, and started from his chair when he saw his son's face.

“Good heavens! Giovannino! what has happened?” he cried, in great anxiety.

“I came to tell you that Corona and I are going to Saracinesca to-morrow,” answered Sant' Ilario, in a low voice.

It was certain that if there were a quarrel between husband and wife, and if Giovanni had the smallest show of right on his side, the old man's sympathies would be with him.

Giovanni's sense of honour, on the other hand, prevented him from telling his father what had happened. He did not choose that even his nearest relation should think of Corona as he thought himself, and he would have taken any step to conceal her guilt. Unfortunately for his purpose he was a very truthful man, and had no experience of lying, so that his father detected him at once. Moreover, his pale face and agitated manner told plainly enough that something very serious had occurred, and so soon as the old prince had convinced himself of this his goodwill was enlisted on the side of his son.

"Giovannino," he said at last very gently, "I do not want to pry into your secrets nor to ask you questions which you do not care to answer. I do not believe you are capable of having committed any serious folly which your wife could really resent. If you should be unfaithful to her, I would disown you. If, on the other hand, she has deceived you, I will do all in my power to help you."

Perhaps Giovanni's face betrayed something of the truth at these words. He turned away and leaned against the chimney-piece.

"I cannot tell you — I cannot tell you," he repeated. "I think I am doing what is best. That is all I can say. You may know some day, though I trust not. Let us go away without explanations."

"My dear boy," replied the old man, coming up to him and laying his hand on his shoulder, "you must do as you think best. Go to Saracinesca if you will, and if you can. If not, go somewhere else. Take heart. Things are not always as black as they look."

Giovanni straightened himself as though by an effort, and grasped his father's broad, brown hand.

"Thank you," he said. "Good-bye. I will come down and see you in a few days. Good-bye!"

His voice trembled and he hurriedly left the room. The prince stood still a moment and then threw himself into a deep chair, staring at the lamp and biting his gray

moustache savagely, as though to hide some almost uncontrollable emotion. There was a slight moisture in his eyes as they looked steadily at the bright lamp.

The papers and parchments lay unheeded on the table, and he did not touch them again that night. He was thinking, not of his lonely old age nor of the dishonour brought upon his house, but of the boy he had loved as his own soul for more than thirty years, and of a swarthy little child that lay asleep in a distant room, the warm blood tinging its olive cheeks and its little clinched hands thrown back above its head.

For Corona he had no thought but hatred. He had guessed Giovanni's secret too well, and his heart was hardened against the woman who had brought shame and suffering upon his son.

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## CHAPTER XI.

San Giacinto had signally failed in his attempt to prevent the meeting between Gouache and Faustina Montevarchi, and had unintentionally caused trouble of a much more serious nature in another quarter. The Zouave returned to his lodging late at night, and of course found no note upon his dressing-table. He did not miss the pin, for he of course never wore it, and attached no particular value to a thing of such small worth which he had picked up in the street and which consequently had no associations for him. He lacked the sense of order in his belongings, and the pin had lain neglected for weeks among a heap of useless little trifles, dingy cotillon favours that had been there since the previous year, stray copper coins, broken pencils, uniform buttons and such trash, accumulated during many months and totally unheeded. Had he seen the pin anywhere else he would have recognised it, but he did not notice its absence. The old woman, Caterina Ranucci, hugged her money and said nothing about either of the visitors who had entered the room during the afternoon. The consequence was that Gouache rose early on