

might have escaped notice for a long time, and it was no wonder if he expressed astonishment on waking up to find himself comfortably installed in Saracinesca's carriage, tended by the man who a few days earlier had wanted to take his life.

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CHAPTER XV.

Gouache's wound was by no means dangerous, and when he had somewhat recovered from the combined effects of loss of blood and excessive fatigue he did not feel much the worse for having a ball in his shoulder. Giovanni and the doctor gave him food and a little wine in the carriage, and long before they reached the gates of the city the Zouave was well enough to have heard Sant' Ilario's explanation. The presence of the surgeon, however, made any intimate conversation difficult.

"I came to find you," said Giovanni in a low voice, "because everything has been set right in your absence, and I was afraid you might be killed at Mentana without receiving my apology."

Gouache looked at his companion in some surprise. He knew very well that Sant' Ilario was not a man to make excuses without some very extraordinary reasons for such a step. It is a prime law of the code of honour, however, that an apology duly made must be duly accepted as putting an end to any quarrel, and Anastase saw at once that Giovanni had relinquished all intention of fighting.

"I am very glad that everything is explained," answered Gouache. "I confess that I was surprised beyond measure by the whole affair."

"I regret having entered your rooms without your permission," continued Giovanni who intended to go to the end of what he had undertaken. "The pin was my wife's, but the letter was written by another person with a view to influencing your conduct. I cannot explain here, but you shall know whatever is necessary when we are alone. Of course, if you still desire any satisfaction, I am at your service."

"Pray do not suggest such a thing. I have no further feeling of annoyance in the matter."

Gouache insisted on being taken to his own lodgings, though Sant' Ilario offered him the hospitality of the Palazzo Saracinesca. By four o'clock in the morning the ball was extracted and the surgeon took his leave, recommending sleep and quiet for his patient. Gouache, however, would not let Giovanni go without hearing the end of the story.

"The facts are very few," said the latter after a moment's hesitation. "It appears that you had arranged to meet a lady on Sunday morning. A certain person whom I will not name discovered your intention, and conceived the idea of preventing the meeting by sending you a note purporting to come from the lady. As he could get none of her note-paper he possessed himself of some of my wife's. He pinned the note on your table with the pin you had chanced to find. I was foolish enough to enter your room and I recognised the pin and the paper. You understand the rest."

Gouache laughed merrily.

"I understand that you did me a great service. I met the lady after all, but if I had received the note I would not have gone, and she would have waited for me. Do you mind telling me the name of the individual who tried to play me the trick?"

"If you will excuse my discretion, I would rather not. He knows that his plan failed. I should not feel justified in telling you his name, from other motives."

"As you please," said Gouache. "I daresay I shall find him out."

So the interview ended and Giovanni went home to rest at last, almost as much worn out as Gouache himself. He was surprised at the ease with which everything had been arranged, but he was satisfied with the result and felt that a weight had been taken from his mind. He slept long and soundly and awoke the next morning to hear that Corona was much better.

The events of Saturday and Sunday had to all appearances smoothed many difficulties from the lives of those with whom my history is concerned. Corona and Giovanni were once more united, though the circumstances

that had produced so terrible a breach between them had left a shadow on their happiness. Gouache had fought his battle and had returned with a slight wound, so that as soon as he could go out he would be able to renew his visits at the Palazzo Montevarchi and see Faustina without resorting to any more ingenious stratagems. San Giacinto had failed to produce the trouble he had planned, but his own prospects were brilliant enough. His marriage with Flavia was to take place on the last of the month and the preliminaries were being arranged as quickly as possible. Flavia herself was delighted with the new dignity she assumed in the family, and if she was not positively in love with San Giacinto, was enough attracted by him to look forward with pleasure upon the prospect of becoming his wife. Old Montevarchi alone seemed preoccupied and silent, but his melancholy mood was relieved by occasional moments of anticipated triumph, while he made frequent visits to the library and seemed to find solace in the conversation of the librarian, Arnaldo Meschini.

In the future of each of these persons there was an element of uncertainty which most of them disregarded. As Corona recovered, Giovanni began to think that she would really forget as well as forgive all he had made her suffer. Gouache on his part entertained the most sanguine hopes of marrying Faustina. Montevarchi looked forward with assurance to the success of his plot against the Saracinesca. San Giacinto and Flavia were engaged, indeed, but were not yet married. And yet the issue of none of these events was absolutely sure.

The first matter with which we are concerned is the forgery of the clauses in the documents, which Meschini had undertaken to accomplish and actually finished in less than three weeks. It was indeed an easy task for a man so highly skilled in the manufacture of chirographic antiquities, but he had found himself unexpectedly balked at the outset, and the ingenuity he displayed in overcoming the difficulties he met with is worth recording.

It was necessary in the first place to ascertain whether there was a copy of the principal deed at the Chancery. He had no trouble in finding that such a copy existed, and was indeed fully prepared for the contingency. But

when the parchment was produced, his face fell. It was a smaller sheet than the first and the writing was a little wider, so that the space at the foot of the first page was considerably less than in the original. He saw at once that it would be impossible to make the insertion, even if he could get possession of the document for a time long enough to execute the work. Moreover, though he was not actually watched while he read it, he could see that it would be almost impracticable to use writing materials in the office of the Chancery without being observed. He was able, however, to take out the original which he carried with him and to compare it with the copy. Both were by one hand, and the copy was only distinguished by the seal of the government office. It was kept, like all such documents, in a dusty case upon which were written the number and letter of the alphabet by which it was classified.

Meschini hesitated only a moment, and then decided to substitute the original for the copy. Should the keeper of the archives chance to look at the parchment and discover the absence of the seal, Meschini could easily excuse himself by saying that he had mistaken the two, and indeed with that one exception they were very much alike. The keeper, however, noticed nothing and Arnaldo had the satisfaction of seeing him unsuspectingly return the cardboard case to its place on the shelves. He went back to his room and set to work.

The longer he looked at the sheet the more clearly he saw that it would be impossible to make the insertion. There was nothing to be done but to forge a new document with the added words. He did not like the idea, though he believed himself fully able to carry it out. There was a risk, he thought, which he had not meant to undertake; but on the other hand the reward was great. He put forth all his skill to produce the imitation and completed it in ten days to his entire satisfaction. He understood the preparation of seals as well as the rest of his art, and had no difficulty in making a die which corresponded precisely with the wax. In the first place he took off the impression carefully with kneaded bread. From this with a little plaster of Paris he reproduced the seal, which he very carefully retouched with a fine steel

instrument until it was quite perfect. Over this again he poured melted lead, thus making a hard die with which he could stamp the wax without danger of breaking the instrument. Once more he retouched the lead with a graving tool, using a lens for the work and ultimately turning out an absolutely accurate copy of the seal used in the Chancery office. He made experiments as he proceeded, and when he was at last satisfied he turned to the actual forgery, which was a longer matter and required greater skill and patience. Nothing was omitted which could make the fraud complete. The parchment assumed the exact shade under his marvellous manipulation. The smallest roughness was copied with faultless precision, and then by many hours of handling and the use of a little dust collected among the books in the library, he imparted to the whole the appearance of age which was indispensable. When he had finished he showed his work to old Montevarchi, but by an inherent love of duplicity did not tell him that the whole document was forged, merely pointing to the inserted clause as a masterpiece of imitation. First, however, he pretended that the copy had actually contained the inserted words, and the prince found it hard to believe that this was not the case. Meschini was triumphant.

Again he returned to the Chancery and substituted what he had written for the first original upon which he had now to make the insertion. There was no difficulty here, and yet he hesitated before beginning. It seemed to him safer after all to forge the whole of the second as he had done the first. A slip of the pen, an unlucky drop of ink might mar the work and excite suspicion, whereas if he made a mistake upon a fresh sheet of parchment he could always begin again. There was only one danger. The Saracinesca might have made some private mark upon the original which should elude even his microscopic examination. He spent nearly a day in examining the sheet with a lens but could discover nothing. Being satisfied of the safety of the proceeding he executed the forgery with the same care he had bestowed upon the first, and showed it to his employer. The latter could scarcely believe his eyes, and was very far from imagining that the two originals were intact and carefully

locked up in Meschini's room. The prince took the document and studied its contents again during many hours before he finally decided to return it to old Saracinesca.

It was a moment of intense excitement. He hesitated whether he should take the manuscripts back himself or send them by a messenger. Had he been sure of controlling himself, he would have gone in person, but he knew that if Saracinesca should chance to look over the writing when they were together, it would be almost impossible to conceal emotion under such a trial of nerve. What he really hoped was that the prince would think no more of the matter, and put away the parcel without examining the contents.

Montevarchi pondered long over the course he should pursue, his eyes gleaming now and then with a wild triumph, and then growing dull and glassy at the horrible thought of discovery. Then again the consciousness that he was committing a great crime overcame him, and he twisted his fingers nervously. He had embarked upon the undertaking, however, and he fully believed that it would be impossible to draw back even had he wished to do so. The insertions were made and could not be erased. It is possible that at one moment, had Montevarchi known the truth, he would have drawn back; but it is equally sure that if he had done so he would sooner or later have regretted it, and would have done all in his power to recover lost ground and to perpetrate the fraud. The dominant passion for money, when it is on the point of being satisfied, is one of the strongest incentives to evil deeds, and in the present case the stake was enormous. He would not let it slip through his fingers. He rejoiced that the thing was done and that the millions of the Saracinesca were already foredoomed to be his.

It is doubtful whether he was able to form a clear conception of what would take place after the trial was over and the property awarded to his son-in-law. It was perhaps enough for his ambition that his daughter should be Princess Saracinesca, and he did not doubt his power to control some part of the fortune. San Giacinto, who was wholly innocent in the matter, would, he thought, be deeply grateful for having been told of his position,

and would show his gratitude in a befitting manner. Moreover, Montevarchi's avarice was on a grand scale, and it was not so much the possession of more money for himself that he coveted, as the aggrandisement of his children and grandchildren. The patriarchal system often produces this result. He would scarcely have known what to do with a greater fortune than he possessed, but he looked forward with a wild delight to seeing his descendants masters of so much wealth. The fact that he could not hope to enjoy his satisfaction very long did not detract from its reality or magnitude. The miser is generally long-lived, and does not begin to anticipate death until the catastrophe is near at hand. Even then it is a compensation to him to feel that the heirs of his body are to be made glorious by what he has accumulated, and his only fear is that they will squander what he has spent his strength in amassing. He educates his children to be thrifty and rejoices when they spend no money, readily believing them to be as careful as himself, and seldom reflecting that, if he furnished them with the means, their true disposition might turn out to be very different. It is so intensely painful to him to think of wealth being wasted that he cultivates the belief in the thriftiness of those who must profit by his death. If he has been born to worldly state as well as to a great inheritance, he extends the desire of accumulation to the fortunes of his relations and descendants, and shows a laudable anxiety that they should possess all that he can get for them, provided it is quite impossible that he should get it for himself. The powers of the world have been to a great extent built up on this principle, and it is a maxim in many a great family that there is no economy like enriching one's relatives to the third and fourth generation.

The struggle in Montevarchi's mind was so insignificant and lasted so short a time, that it might be disregarded altogether, were it not almost universally true that the human mind hesitates at the moment of committing a crime. That moment of hesitation has prevented millions of frightful deeds, and has betrayed thousands of carefully plotted conspiracies whose success seemed assured, and it is amazing to think what an influence has

been exerted upon the destinies of the human race by the instinctive fear of crossing the narrow boundary between right and wrong. The time occupied in such reflection is often only infinitesimal. It has been called the psychological moment, and if the definition means that it is the instant during which the soul suggests, it is a true one. It is then that our natural repulsion for evil asserts itself; it is then that the consequences of what we are about to do rise clearly before us as in a mirror; it is then that our courage is suddenly strengthened to do the right, or deserts us and leaves us mere instruments for the accomplishment of the wrong. If humanity had not an element of good in it, there would be no hesitation in the perpetration of crime, any more than a wild beast pauses before destroying a weaker creature. Perhaps there is no clearer proof of the existence of a divine soul in man, than his intuitive reluctance to do what in the lower animals would be most natural. Circumstances, education, the accidents of life, all tend to make this psychologic moment habitually shorter or longer. The suspense created in the conscience, during which the intelligence is uncertain how to act, may last a week or a second, a year or a quarter of an hour; but it is a stage through which all must pass, both the professional criminal and the just man who is perhaps tempted to commit a crime but once during his life.

Old Lotario Montevarchi had never been guilty of any misdeed subject to the provisions of the penal code; but he had done most things in his love of money which were not criminal only because the law had not foreseen the tortuous peculiarities of his mind. Even now he persuaded himself that the end was a righteous one, and that his course was morally justifiable. He had that power of deceiving himself which characterises the accomplished hypocrite, and he easily built up for San Giacinto a whole edifice of sympathy which seemed in his own view very real and moral. He reflected with satisfaction upon the probable feelings of the old Leone Saracinesca, when, after relinquishing his birthright, he found himself married and the father of a son. How the poor man must have cursed his folly and longed for some means of undoing the deed! It was but common justice after all — it

was but common justice, and it was a mere accident of fate that Leone's great-grandson, who was now to be reinstated in all the glories of his princely possessions, was also to marry Flavia Montevarechi.

The prospect was too alluring and the suspense lasted but a moment, though he believed that he spent much time in considering the situation. The thoughts that really occupied him were not of a nature to hinder the accomplishment of his plan, and he was not at all surprised with himself when he finally tied up the packet and rang for a messenger. Detection was impossible, for by Meschini's skilful management, the original and the official copy corresponded exactly and were such marvellous forgeries as to defy discovery. When it is considered that the greatest scientists and specialists in Europe have recently disagreed concerning documents which are undoubtedly of modern manufacture, and which were produced by just such men as Arnaldo Meschini, it need not appear surprising that the latter should successfully impose upon a court of law. The circumstances of the Saracinesca family history, too, lent an air of probability to the alleged facts. The poverty and temporary disappearance of Leone's descendants explained why they had not attempted to recover their rights. Nay, more, since Leone had died when his son was an infant, and since there was no copy of the document among his papers, it was more than probable that the child on growing up had never known the nature of the deed, and would not have been likely to suspect what was now put forward as the truth, unless his attention were called to it by some person possessed of the necessary knowledge.

The papers were returned to Prince Saracinesca in the afternoon with a polite note of thanks. It will be remembered that the prince had not read the documents, as he had meant to do, in consequence of the trouble between Giovanni and Corona which had made him forget his intention. He had not looked over them since he had been a young man and the recollection of their contents was far from clear. Having always supposed the collateral branch of his family to be extinct, it was only natural that he should have bestowed very little thought upon the ancient deeds which he believed to have been drawn up in due form and made perfectly legal.

When he came home towards evening, he found the sealed packet upon his table, and having opened it, was about to return the papers to their place in the archives. It chanced that he had a letter to write, however, and he pushed the documents aside before taking them to the library. While he was writing, Giovanni entered the room.

As has been seen, the prince had been very angry with his son for having allowed himself to doubt Corona, and though several days had elapsed since the matter had been explained, the old man's wrath had not wholly subsided. He still felt considerable resentment against Giovanni, and his intercourse with the latter had not yet regained its former cordiality. As Sant' Ilario entered the room, Saracinesca looked up with an expression which showed clearly that the interruption was unwelcome.

"Do I disturb you?" asked Giovanni, noticing the look.

"Do you want anything?"

"No — nothing especial."

Saracinesca's eye fell upon the pile of manuscripts that lay on the table. It struck him that Giovanni might occupy himself by looking them over, while he himself finished the letter he had begun.

"There are those deeds relating to San Giacinto," he said, "you might look through them before they are put away. Montevarechi borrowed them for a day or two and has just sent them back."

Giovanni took the bundle and established himself in a comfortable chair beside a low stand, where the light of a lamp fell upon the pages as he turned them. He made no remark, but began to examine the documents, one by one, running his eye rapidly along the lines, as he read on mechanically, not half comprehending the sense of the words. He was preoccupied by thoughts of Corona and of what had lately happened, so that he found it hard to fix his attention. The prince's pen scratched and spattered on the paper, and irritated Giovanni, for the old gentleman wrote a heavy, nervous handwriting, and lost his temper twenty times in five minutes, mentally cursing the ink, the paper and the pen, and wishing he could write like a shopman or a clerk.

Giovanni's attention was arrested by the parchment on which the principal deed was executed, and he began to read the agreement with more care than he had bestowed upon the other papers. He understood Latin well enough, but the crabbed characters puzzled him from time to time. He read the last words on the first page without thinking very much of what they meant.

" . . . Eo tamen pacto, quod si praedicto Domino Leoni ex legitimo matrimonio heres nasceretur, instrumentum hoc nullum, vanum atque plane invalidum fiat."

Giovanni smiled at the quaint law Latin, and then read the sentence over again. His face grew grave as he realised the tremendous import of those few words. Again and again he translated the phrase, trying to extract from it some other meaning than that which was so unpleasantly clear. No other construction, however, could be put upon what was written, and for some minutes Giovanni sat staring at the fire, bewildered and almost terrified by his discovery.

"Have you ever read those papers?" he asked at last, in a voice that made his father drop his pen and look up.

"Not for thirty years."

"Then you had better read them at once. San Giacinto is Prince Saracinesca and you and I are nobody." Saracinesca uttered a fierce oath and sprang from his chair.

"What do you mean?" he asked, seizing Giovanni's arm violently with one hand and taking the parchment with the other.

"Read for yourself. There — at the foot of the page, from 'eo tamen pacto.' It is plain enough. It says, 'On the understanding that if an heir be born to the aforesaid Don Leone, in lawful wedlock, the present instrument shall be wholly null, void and inefficacious.' An heir was born, and San Giacinto is that heir's grandson. You may tear up the document. It is not worth the parchment it is written upon, nor are we either."

"You are mad, Giovannino!" exclaimed the prince, hoarsely, "that is not the meaning of the words. You have forgotten your Latin."

"I will get you a dictionary — or a lawyer — whichever you prefer."

"You are not in earnest, my boy. Look here — eo tamen pacto — that means 'by this agreement' — does it not? I am not so rusty as you seem to think."

"It means 'on this understanding, however.' Go on. Quod si, that if — praedicto Domino Leoni, to the aforesaid Don Leone — ex legitimo matrimonio, from a lawful marriage — heres nasceretur, an heir should be born — hoc instrumentum, this deed — shall be null, worthless and invalid. You cannot get any other sense out of it. I have tried for a quarter of an hour. You and I are beggars. Saracinesca, Torleone, Barda, and all the rest belong to San Giacinto, the direct descendant of your great-grandfather's elder brother. You are simple Don Leone, and I am plain Don Giovanni. That is what it means."

"Good God!" cried the old man in extreme horror. "If you should be right —"

"I am right," replied Giovanni, very pale.

With wild eyes and trembling hands the prince spread the document upon the table and read it over again. He turned it and went on to the end, his excitement bringing back in the moment, such scholarship as he had once possessed and making every sentence as clear as the day.

"Not even San Giacinto — not even a title!" he exclaimed desperately. He fell back in his chair, crushed by the tremendous blow that had fallen so unexpectedly upon him in his old age.

"Not even San Giacinto," repeated Giovanni, stupidly. His presence of mind began to forsake him, too, and he sank down, burying his face in his hands. As in a dream he saw his cousin installed in the very chair where his father now sat, master of the house in which he, Giovanni, had been born, like his father before him, master of the fortresses and castles, the fair villas and the broad lands, the palaces and the millions to which Giovanni had thought himself heir, lord over the wealth and inheritances of his race, dignified by countless titles and by all the consideration that falls to the lot of the great in this world.

For a long time neither spoke, for both were equally overwhelmed by the magnitude of the disaster that hung over their heads. They looked furtively at each other,

and each saw that his companion was white to the lips. The old man was the first to break the silence.

"At all events, San Giacinto does not know how the deed stands," he said.

"It will make it all the harder to tell him," replied Giovanni.

"To tell him? You would not be so mad——"

"Do you think it would be honourable," asked the younger man, "for us to remain in possession of what clearly does not belong to us? I will not do it."

"We have been in possession for more than a century."

"That is no reason why we should continue to steal another man's money," said Giovanni. "We are men. Let us act like men. It is bitter. It is horrible. But we have no other course. After all, Corona has Astrardente. She will give you a home. She is rich."

"Me? Why do you say me? Us both."

"I will work for my living," said Giovanni, quietly.

"I am young. I will not live on my wife."

"It is absurd!" exclaimed the prince. "It is Quixotic. San Giacinto has plenty of money without ruining us. Even if he finds it out I will fight the case to the end. I am master here, as my father and my father's father were before me, and I will not give up what is mine without a struggle. Besides, who assures us that he is really what he represents himself to be? What proves that he is really the descendant of that same Leone?"

"For that matter," answered Giovanni, "he will have to produce very positive proofs, valid in law, to show that he is really the man. I will give up everything to the lawful heir, but I will certainly not turn beggar to please an adventurer. But I say that, if San Giacinto represents the elder branch of our house, we have no right here. If I were sure of it I would not sleep another night under this roof."

The old man could not withhold his admiration. There was something supremely noble and generous about Giovanni's readiness to sacrifice everything for justice which made his old heart beat with a strange pride. If he was reluctant to renounce his rights it was after all more on Giovanni's account, and for the sake of Corona and little Orsino. He himself was an old man and had lived most of his life out already.

"You have your mother's heart, Giovannino," he said simply, but there was a slight moisture in his eyes, which few emotions had ever had the power to bring there.

"It is not a question of heart," replied Giovanni. "We cannot keep what does not belong to us."

"We will let the law decide what we can keep. Do you realise what it would be like, what a position we should occupy if we were suddenly declared beggars? We should be absolute paupers. We do not own a foot of land, a handful of money that does not come under the provisions of that accursed clause."

"Wait a minute," exclaimed Giovanni, suddenly recollecting that he possessed something of his own, a fact he had wholly forgotten in the excitement of his discovery. "We shall not be wholly without resources. It does not follow from this deed that we must give to San Giacinto any of the property our branch of the family has acquired by marriage, from your great grandfather's time to this. It must be very considerable. To begin with me, my fortune came from my mother. Then there was your mother, and your father's mother, and so on. San Giacinto has no claim to anything not originally the property of the old Leone who made this deed."

"That is true," replied the prince, more hopefully. "It is not so bad as it looked. You must be right about that point."

"Unless the courts decide that San Giacinto is entitled to compensation and interest, because four generations have been kept out of the property."

Both men looked grave. The suggestion was unpleasant. Such judgments had been given before and might be given again.

"We had better send for our lawyer," said the prince, at last. "The sooner we know the real value of that bit of parchment the better it will be for us. I cannot bear the suspense of waiting a day to know the truth. Imagine that the very chair I am sitting upon may belong to San Giacinto. I never liked the fellow, from the day when I first found him in his inn at Aquila."

"It is not his fault," answered Giovanni, quietly. "This is a perfectly simple matter. We did not know

what these papers were. Even if we had known, we should have laughed at them until we discovered that we had a cousin. After all we shall not starve, and what is a title? The Pope will give you another when he knows what has happened. I would as soon be plain Don Giovanni as Prince of Sant' Ilario."

"For that matter, you can call yourself Astrardente."

"I would rather not," said Giovanni, with something like a laugh. "But I must tell Corona this news."

"Wait till she is herself again. It might disturb her too much."

"You do not know her!" Giovanni laughed heartily this time. "If you think she cares for such things, you are very much mistaken in her character. She will bear the misfortune better than any of us. Courage, padre mio! Things are never so black as they look at first."

"I hope not, my boy, I hope not! Go and tell your wife, if you think it best. I would rather be alone."

Giovanni left the room, and Saracinesca was alone. He sank back once more in his chair and folded his strong brown hands together upon the edge of the table before him. In spite of all Giovanni could say, the old man felt keenly the horror of his position. Only those who, having been brought up in immense wealth and accustomed from childhood to the pomp and circumstance of a very great position, are suddenly deprived of everything, can understand what he felt.

He was neither avaricious nor given to vanity. He had not wasted his fortune, though he had spent magnificently a princely income. He had not that small affection for greatness which, strange to say, is often found in the very great. But his position was part of himself, so that he could no more imagine himself plain Don Leone Saracinesca, than he could conceive himself boasting of his ancient titles. And yet it was quite plain to him that he must either cease to be a prince altogether, or accept a new title as a charity from his sovereign. As for his fortune, it was only too plain that the greater part of it had never been his.

To a man of his temperament the sensation of finding himself a mere impostor was intolerable. His first impulse had of course been to fight the case, and had the

attack upon his position come from San Giacinto, he would probably have done so. But his own son had discovered the truth and had put the matter clearly before him, in such a light as to make an appeal to his honour. He had no choice but to submit. He could not allow himself to be outdone in common honesty by the boy he loved, nor could he have been guilty of deliberate injustice, for his own advantage, after he had been convinced that he had no right to his possessions. He belonged to a race of men who had frequently committed great crimes and done atrocious deeds, notorious in history, from motives of personal ambition, for the love of women or out of hatred for men, but who had never had the reputation of loving money or of stooping to dishonour for its sake. As soon as he was persuaded that everything belonged to San Giacinto, he felt that he must resign all in favour of the latter.

One doubt alone remained to be solved. It was not absolutely certain that San Giacinto was the man he represented himself to be. It was quite possible that he should have gained possession of the papers he held, by some means known only to himself; such things are often sold as curiosities, and as the last of the older branch of whom there was any record preserved in Rome had died in obscurity, it was conceivable that the ex-innkeeper might have found or bought the documents he had left, in order to call himself Marchese di San Giacinto. Saracinesca did not go so far as to believe that the latter had any knowledge whatsoever of the main deed which was about to cause so much trouble, unless he had seen it in the hands of Montevarchi, in which case he could not be blamed if he brought a suit for the recovery of so much wealth.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

Giovanni was quite right in his prediction concerning Corona's conduct. He found her in her dressing-room, lying upon the couch near the fire, as he had found her