

the society of my wife, but when there is so much meat boiling, somebody must watch the pot, as we used to say in Naples. I am a practical man, you know."

"Ah, that is a great quality, one of the very greatest! If I had spent my life in a perpetual honeymoon with the princess, Casa Montevarchi would not be what it is, my son. I have always given my best attention to the affairs of my household, and I expect that you will continue the tradition."

"Never fear! If, by continuing the tradition, you mean that I should get what is mine, I will not disappoint you. Can you tell me when the case can be tried, and in what court it will be heard?"

"With my influence," replied Montevarchi, "the case may be put through at once. A month will suffice for the preliminaries, a day for the hearing. Everything is settled at once by the exhibition of the documents which provide for you in the most explicit terms. You can come in from the country and see them for yourself if you please. But I consider that quite unnecessary. The lawyers will settle everything."

"Pardon my curiosity, but I would like to know why you thought it best not to tell me anything of the matter until now."

"My dear son, you were so busy with the preparations for your marriage, and the questions involved seemed at first so doubtful that I thought it best not to trouble you with them. Then, when I knew the whole truth the time was so near that I preferred to give you the information as a sort of wedding present."

"A magnificent one indeed, for which I cannot find words to express my gratitude."

"No, no! Do not talk of gratitude. I feel that I am fulfilling a sacred duty in restoring to the fatherless his birthright. It is an act of divine justice for the execution of which I have been chosen as the humble instrument. Do your duty by my dear daughter, and render your gratitude to heaven — *quæ sunt Cæsaris, Cæsari, et quæ sunt Dei, Deo!* Would that we could all live by that rule!"

"To Saracinesca what is his, and to San Giacinto that which belongs to him — that is what you mean?"

"Yes, my good son. I am glad to see that you understand Latin. It does you credit that amidst the misfortunes of your early life you should have so improved yourself as to possess the education necessary to the high rank you are about to assume. I tell you frankly that, in spite of your personal qualities, in spite of the great name and possessions which will soon be yours, if I had not distinguished in you that refinement and instruction without which no gentleman is worthy of the name, I would not have bestowed upon you the hand of that sweet creature whom I have cherished as a flower in the house of my old age."

San Giacinto had made a study of old Montevarchi during a month past, and was not in the least deceived by his rounded periods and well expressed moral sentiments. But he smiled and bowed, enjoying the idea of attributing such flattery to himself in proportion as he felt that he was unworthy of it. He had indeed done his best to acquire a certain amount of instruction, as his father-in-law called it, and his tastes were certainly not so coarse as might have been expected, but he was too strong a man to be easily deceived concerning his own powers, and he knew well enough that he owed his success to his fortune. He saw, too, that Montevarchi, in giving him Flavia, had foreseen the possibility of his claiming the rights of his cousins, and if he had not been thoroughly satisfied with his choice he would have now felt that he had been deceived. He had no regrets, however, for he felt that even had he already enjoyed the titles and wealth he was so soon to claim, he would nevertheless have chosen Flavia for his wife. Of all the young girls he had seen in Rome she was the only one who really attracted him; a fact due, perhaps, to her being more natural than the rest, or at least more like what he thought a woman should naturally be. His rough nature would not have harmonised with Faustina's character; still less could he have understood and appreciated a woman like Corona, who was indeed almost beyond the comprehension of Giovanni, her own husband. San Giacinto was almost a savage, compared with the young men of the class to which he now belonged, and there was something wild and half-tamed in Flavia Mon-

tevarchi which had fascinated him from the first, and held him by that side of his temperament by which alone savages are governed.

Had the bringing of the suit been somewhat hastened it is not impossible that San Giacinto and his wife might have driven up to the ancient towers of Saracinesca on that Saturday afternoon, as Giovanni and Corona had done on their wedding day two years and a half earlier. As it was, they were to go out to Frascati to spend a week in Montevarchi's villa, as the prince and princess and all their married children had done before them.

"Eh! what a satisfaction!" exclaimed Flavia, with a sigh of relief as the carriage rolled out of the deep archway under the palace. Then she laughed a little and looked up at her husband out of the corners of her bright black eyes, after which she produced a very pretty silver scent-bottle which her mother had put into her hand as a parting gift. She looked at it, turned it round, opened it and at last smelled the contents.

"Ugh!" she cried, shutting it up quickly and making a wry face. "It is full of salts—horrible! I thought it was something good to smell! Did she think I was going to faint on the way?"

"You do not look like fainting," remarked San Giacinto, who looked gigantic in a wide fur pelisse. He put out his great hand, which closed with a sort of rough tenderness over hers, completely hiding it as well as the smelling-bottle she held. "So it is a satisfaction, is it?" he asked, with a gleam of pleasure in his deep-set eyes.

"If you had been educated under the supervision of the *eccellentissima casa* Montevarchi, you would understand what a blessed institution marriage is! You—what shall I call you—your name is Giovanni, is it not?"

"Yes—Giovanni. Do you like the name?"

"No—it reminds me of the head of John the Baptist. I will call you—let me see—Nino. Yes—that sounds so small, and you are so immensely big. You are Nino, in future. I am glad you are big. I do not like little men." She nestled close to the giant, with a laugh that pleased him.

San Giacinto suddenly found that he was very much

more in love than he had supposed. His life had been very full of contrasts, but this was the greatest which had yet presented itself. He remembered a bright summer's morning a few years earlier, when he had walked back from the church in Aquila with Felice Baldi by his side. Poor Felice! She had worn a very pretty black silk frock with a fine gold chain around her neck, and a veil upon her head, for she was not of the class "that wear hats," as they say in Rome. But she had forced her stout hands into gloves, and Giovanni the innkeeper had been somewhat proud of her ladylike appearance. Her face was very red and there were tears of pleasure and timidity in her eyes, which he remembered very well. It was strange that she, too, should have been proud of her husband's size and strength. Perhaps all women were very much alike. How well he remembered the wedding collation, the little yellow cakes with a drop of hard pink sugar in the middle of each, the bottles of sweet cordial of various flavours, cinnamon, clove, anise-seed and the like, the bright red japanned tray, and the cheaply gaudy plates whereon were painted all manner of impossible flowers.

Felice was dead, buried in the campo santo of Aquila, with its whitewashed walls of enclosure and its appalling monuments and mortuary emblems. Poor Felice! She had been a good wife, and he had been a good husband to her. She was such a simple creature that he could almost fancy her spirit shedding tears of satisfied pride at seeing her Giovanni married to a princess, rich and about to be metamorphosed into a prince himself. She had known that he was a Marchese of a great family, and had often begged him to let her be called the Signora Marchesa. But he had always told her that for people in their position it was absurd. They were not poor for their station; indeed, they were among the wealthiest of their class in Aquila. He had promised to assert his title when they should be rich enough, but poor Felice had died too soon. Then had come that great day when Giovanni had won in the lottery—Giovanni who had never played before and had all his life called it a waste of money and a public robbery. But, playing once, he had played high, and all his numbers had appeared on

the following Saturday. Two hundred thousand francs in a day! Such luck only falls to the lot of men who are born under destiny. Giovanni had long known what he should do if he only possessed the capital. The winnings were paid in cash, and in a fortnight he had taken up a government contract in the province of Aquila. Then came another and another. Everything turned to gold in his hands, and in two years he was a rich man.

Alone in the world, with his two little boys, and possessed of considerable wealth, the longing had come over him to take the position to which he had a legitimate right, a position which, he supposed, would not interfere with his increasing his fortune if he wished to do so. He had left the children under the supervision of old Don Paolo, the curate, and had come to Rome, where he had lodged in an obscure hotel until he had fitted himself to appear before his cousins as a gentleman. His grave temper, indomitable energy, and natural astuteness had done the rest, and fortune had crowned all his efforts. The old blood of the Saracinesca had grown somewhat coarse by the admixture of a stream very far from blue; but if it had lost in some respects it had gained in others, and the type was not wholly low. The broad-shouldered, dark-complexioned giant was not altogether unworthy of the ancient name, and he knew it as his wife nestled to his side. He loved the wild element in her, but most of all he loved the thoroughbred stamp of her face, the delicacy of her small hands, the aristocratic ring of her laughter, for these all told him that, after three generations of obscurity he had risen again to the level whence his fathers had fallen.

The change in his life became very dear to him, as all these things passed quickly through his mind; and with the consciousness of vivid contrast came the certainty that he loved Flavia far better than he had believed possible.

"And what shall I call you?" he asked, rather bluntly. He did not quite know whether it would be wise to use any term of endearment or not. Indeed, this was the weak point in his experience, but he supplemented the deficiency by a rough tenderness which was far from disagreeable to Flavia.

"Anything you like, dear," she answered. San Giacinto felt the blood rush to his head with pleasure as he heard the epithet.

"Anything?" he asked, with a very unwonted tremour in his voice.

"Anything — provided you will love me," she replied. He thought he had never seen such wicked, fascinating eyes. He drew her face to his and looked into them a moment, his own blazing suddenly with a passion wholly new to him.

"I will not call you anything — instead of calling you, I will kiss you — so — is it not better than any name?"

A deep blush spread over Flavia's face and then subsided suddenly, leaving her very pale. For a long time neither spoke again.

"Did your father tell you the news before we left?" asked San Giacinto at last, when they were rolling over the Campagna along the Via Latina.

"No — what?"

"It is somewhat remarkable news. If you are afraid of fainting," he added, with rough humour, "hold your bottle of salts ready."

Flavia looked up uneasily, wondering whether there were anything wrong about San Giacinto. She knew very well that her father had been glad to get rid of her.

"I am not San Giacinto after all," he said quietly. Flavia started and drew back.

"Who are you then?" she asked quickly.

"I am Prince Saracinesca, and you are the princess." He spoke very calmly, and watched her face to see the effect of the news.

"I wish you were!" she exclaimed nervously. She wondered whether he was going mad.

"There seems to be no doubt about it," he answered, "your father informed me of the fact as a wedding present. He has examined all the papers and will send the lawyers out to Frascati to prepare the case with me."

He told her the whole story in detail. As he proceeded, a singular expression came into Flavia's face, and when he had finished she broke out into voluble expressions of joy.

"I always knew that I was born to be a princess — I

mean a real one! How could I be anything else? Oh! I am so happy, and you are such a darling to be a prince! And to think that if papa had not discovered the papers, those horrid Sant' Ilario people would have had everything. Princess Saracinesca! Eh, but how it sounds! Almost as good as Orsini, and much nicer with you, you great big, splendid lion! Why did they not call you Leone? It is too good to be true! And I always hated Corona, ever since I was a little girl and she was the Astrardente, because she used to say I did not behave well and that Faustina was much prettier—I heard her say so when I was behind the curtains. Why did you not find it out ever so long ago? Think what a wedding we should have had, just like Sant' Ilario's! But it was very fine after all, and of course there is nothing to complain of. Evviva! Evviva! Do give me one of those cigarettes—I never smoked in my life, and I am so happy that I know it will not hurt me!”

San Giacinto had his case in his hand, and laughed as he presented it to her. Quiet as he was in his manner he was far the happier of the two, as he was far more capable of profound feeling than the wild girl who was now his wife. He was glad, too, to see that she was so thoroughly delighted, for he knew well enough that even after he had gained the suit he would need the support of an ambitious woman to strengthen his position. He did not believe that the Saracinesca would submit tamely to such a tremendous shock of fortune, and he foresaw that their resentment would probably be shared by a great number of their friends.

Flavia looked prettier than ever as she put the bit of rolled paper between her red lips and puffed away with an energy altogether unnecessary. He would not have believed that, being already so brilliant and good to see, a piece of unexpected good news could have lent her expression so much more brightness. She was positively radiant, as she looked from his eyes at her little cigarette, and then, looking back to him again, laughed and snapped her small gloved fingers.

“Do you know,” she said presently, with a glance that completed the conquest of San Giacinto's heart, “I thought I should be dreadfully shy with you—at first—

and I am not in the least! I confess, at the very moment when you were putting the ring on my finger I was wondering what we should talk about during the drive.”

“You did not think we should have such an agreeable subject of conversation, did you?”

“No—and it is such a pretty ring! I always wanted a band of diamonds—plain gold is so common. Did you think of it yourself or did some one else suggest the idea?”

“Castellani said it was old-fashioned,” answered San Giacinto, “but I preferred it.”

“Would you have liked one, too?”

“No. It would be ridiculous for a man.”

“You have very good taste,” remarked Flavia, eyeing him critically. “Where did you get it? You used to keep a hotel in Aquila, did you not?”

San Giacinto had long been prepared for the question and did not wince nor show the slightest embarrassment. He smiled calmly as he answered her.

“You would hardly have called it a hotel, it was a country inn. I daresay I shall manage Saracinesca all the better for having kept a hostelry.”

“Of course. Oh, I have such a delightful idea! Let us go to Aquila and keep the hotel together. It would be such fun! You could say you had married a little shopkeeper's daughter in Rome, you know. Just for a month, Nino—do let us do it! It would be such a change after society, and then we would go back for the Carnival. Oh, do!”

“But you forget the lawsuit——”

“That is true. Besides, it will be just as much of a change to be Princess Saracinesca. But we can do it another time. I would like so much to go about in an apron with a red cotton handkerchief on my head and see all the queer people! When are the lawyers coming?”

“During the week, I suppose.”

“There will be a fight,” said Flavia, her face growing more grave. “What will Sant' Ilario and his father say and do? I cannot believe that it will all go so smoothly as you think. They do not look like people who would give up easily what they have had so long. I suppose they will be quite ruined.”

"I do not know. Corona is rich in her own right, and Sant' Ilario has his mother's fortune. Of course, they will be poor compared with their present wealth. I am sorry for them——"

"Sorry?" Flavia looked at her husband in some astonishment. "It is their own fault. Why should you be sorry?"

"It is not exactly their fault. I could hardly have expected them to come to me and inform me that a mistake had been made in the last century, and that all they possessed was mine."

"All they possessed!" echoed Flavia, thoughtfully. "What a wonderful idea it is!"

"Very wonderful," assented San Giacinto, who was thinking once more of his former poverty.

The carriage rolled on and both were silent for some time, absorbed in dreaming of the greatness which was before them in the near future, San Giacinto enumerating in his mind the titles and estates which were soon to be his, while Flavia imagined herself in Corona's place in Rome, grown suddenly to be a central figure in society, leading and organising the brilliant amusements of her world, and above all, rejoicing in that lavish use of abundant money which had always seemed to her the most desirable of all enjoyments.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Faustina Montevarchi was delighted when her sister was at last married and out of the house. The two had always been very good friends, but Faustina felt that she had an enemy in San Giacinto and was relieved when he was gone. She had no especial reason for her suspicions, since he treated her with the same quiet and amicable politeness which he showed to the rest of the household; but her perceptions were extraordinarily true and keen, and she had noticed that he watched her whenever Gouache was in the room, in a way that made

her very uncomfortable. Moreover, he had succeeded of late in making Flavia accompany her to early mass on Sunday mornings on pretence of his wishing to see Flavia without the inevitable supervision of the old princess. The plan was ingenious; for Faustina, instead of meeting Gouache, was thus obliged to play chaperon while her sister and San Giacinto talked to their hearts' content. He was a discreet man, however, and Flavia was ignorant of the fact that Faustina and Anastase had sometimes met in the same way, and would have met frequently had they not been prevented. The young girl was clever enough to see why San Giacinto acted as he did; she understood that he was an ambitious man, and that, as he was about to ally himself with her family, he would naturally disapprove of her attachment to Gouache. Now that he was gone, she wondered whether he had devised any steps which would take effect after his departure.

Faustina was quite as much in love as Gouache himself, and spent much time in calculating the chances of a favourable issue from the situation in which she found herself. Life without Anastase was impossible, but the probabilities of her becoming his wife in the ordinary course of events were very few, as far as she was able to judge, and she had moments of extreme depression, during which she despaired of everything. The love of a very young girl may in itself be both strong and enduring, but it generally has the effect of making her prone to extremes of hope and fear, uncertain of herself, vacillating in her ideas, and unsteady in the pursuit of the smaller ends of life. Throw two equal weights into the scales of a perfectly adjusted balance, the arm will swing and move erratically many times before it returns to its normal position, although there is a potential equilibrium in the machine which will shortly assert itself in absolute tranquillity.

Love in a very young person is rarely interesting, unless it is attended by heroic or tragic circumstances. Human life is very like the game of chess, of which the openings are so limited in number that a practised player knows them all by heart, whereas the subsequent moves are susceptible of infinite variation. Almost all young