

been forged by Meschini. When a great injustice has been committed, through folly or carelessness, when those who have been most benefited by it admit that injustice, when to redress it is merely to act in accordance with the spirit of the laws, is it a crime then to bring about so much good by merely sacrificing a scruple of conscience, by employing some one to restore an inheritance to its rightful possessor with a few clever strokes of the pen? The answer seemed so clear to Montevarchi that he did not even ask himself the question. Indeed it would have been superfluous to do so, for he had so often satisfied all objections to doubtful courses by a similar sophistry that he knew beforehand what reply would present itself to his self-inquiry. He did not even experience a sense of relief as he turned from the contemplation of what he had just done to the question of Faustina's marriage, in which there was nothing that could torment his conscience. He was not even aware that he ought to recognise a difference between the two affairs. He was in great haste to settle the preliminaries, and that was all. If he should die, he thought, the princess would have her own way in everything, and would doubtless let Faustina throw herself away upon some such man as Gouache. The thought roused him from his reverie, and at the same time brought a sour smile to his face. Gouache, of all people! He looked up and saw that Faustina had entered and was standing before him, as though expecting him to speak. Her delicate, angelic features were pale, and she held her small hands folded before her. She had discovered by some means that Gouache had been with her father and she feared that something unpleasant had happened and that she was about to be called to account. The vision of Frangipani, too, was present in her mind, and she anticipated a stormy interview. But her mind was made up; she would have Anastase or she would have nobody. The two exchanged a preliminary glance before either spoke.

## CHAPTER XX.

Montevarchi made his daughter sit beside him and took her hand affectionately in his, assuming at the same time the expression of sanctimonious superiority he always wore when he mentioned the cares of his household or was engaged in regulating any matter of importance in his family. Flavia used to imitate the look admirably, to the delight of her brothers and sisters. He smiled meaningly, pressed the girl's fingers, and smiled again, attempting in vain to elicit some response. But Faustina remained cold and indifferent, for she was used to her father's ways and did not like them.

"You know what I am going to say, I am sure," he began. "It concerns what must be very near your heart, my dear child."

"I do not know what it can be," answered Faustina, gravely. She was too well brought up to show any of the dislike she felt for her father's way of doing things, but she was willing to make it as hard as possible for him to express himself.

"Cannot you guess what it is?" asked the old man, with a ludicrous attempt at banter. "What is it that is nearest to every girl's heart? Is not that little heart of yours already a resort of the juvenile deity?"

"I do not understand you, papa."

"Well, well, my dear — I see that your education has not included a course of mythology. It is quite as well, perhaps, as those heathens are poor company for the young. I refer to marriage, Faustina, to that all-important step which you are soon to take."

"Have you quite decided to marry me to Frangipani?" asked the young girl with a calmness that somewhat disconcerted her father.

"How boldly you speak of it!" he exclaimed with a sigh of disapproval. "I will not, however, conceal from you that I hope —"

"Pray talk plainly with me, papa!" cried Faustina suddenly looking up. "I cannot bear this suspense."

"Ah! Is it so, little one?" Montevarchi shook his finger playfully at her. "I thought I should find you ready! So you are anxious to become a princess at once? Well, well, all women are alike!"

Faustina drew herself up a little and fixed her deep brown eyes upon her father's face, very quietly and solemnly.

"You misunderstand me," she said. "I only wish to know your decision in order that I may give you my answer."

"And what can that answer be? Have I not chosen wisely, a husband fit for you in every way?"

"From your point of view, I have no doubt of it."

"I trust you are not about to commit the unpardonable folly of differing from me, my daughter," answered Montevarchi, with a sudden change of tone indicative of rising displeasure. "It is for me to decide, for you to accept my decision."

"Upon other points, yes. In the question of marriage I think I have something to say."

"Is it possible that you can have any objections to the match I have found for you? Is it possible that you are so foolish as to fancy that at your age you can understand these things better than I? Faustina, I would not have believed it!"

"How can you understand what I feel?"

"It is not a question of feeling, it is a question of wisdom, of foresight, of prudence, of twenty qualities which you are far too young to possess. If marriage were a matter of feeling, of vulgar sentiment, I ask you, what would become of the world? Of what use is it to have all the sentiment in life, if you have not that which makes life itself possible? Can you eat sentiment? Can you harness sentiment in a carriage and make it execute a *trottata* in the Villa Borghese? Can you change an ounce of sentiment into good silver scudi and make it pay for a journey in the hot weather? No, no, my child. Heaven knows that I am not avaricious. Few men, I think, know better than I that wealth is perishable stuff—but so is this mortal body, and the perishable must be nourished with the perishable, lest dust return to dust sooner than it would in the ordinary course of nature. Money alone

will not give happiness, but it is, nevertheless, most important to possess a certain amount of it."

"I would rather do without it than be miserable all my life for having got it."

"Miserable all your life? Why should you be miserable? No woman should be unhappy who is married to a good man. My dear, this matter admits of no discussion. Frangipani is young, handsome, of irreproachable moral character, heir to a great fortune and to a great name. You desire to be in love. Good. Love will come, the reward of having chosen wisely. It will be time enough then to think of your sentiments. Dear me! if we all began life by thinking of sentiment, where would our existence end?"

"Will you please tell me whether you have quite decided that I am to marry Frangipani?" Faustina found her father's discourses intolerable, and, moreover, she had something to say which would be hard to express and still harder to sustain by her actions.

"If you insist upon my giving you an answer, which you must have already foreseen, I am willing to tell you that I have quite decided upon the match."

"I cannot marry him!" exclaimed Faustina, clasping her hands together and looking into her father's face.

"My dear," answered Montevarchi with a smile, "it is absolutely decided. We cannot draw back. You must marry him."

"Must, papa? Oh, think what you are saying! I am not disobedient, indeed I am not. I have always submitted to you in everything. But this—no, not this. Bid me do anything else—anything—"

"But, my child, nothing else would produce the same result. Be reasonable. You tell me to impose some other duty upon you. That is not what I want. I must see you married before I die, and I am an old man. Each year, each day, may be my last. Of what use would it be that you should make another sacrifice to please me, when the one thing I desire is to see you well settled with a good husband? I have done what I could. I have procured you the best match in all Rome, and now you implore me to spare you, to reverse my decision, to tell my old friend Frangipani that you will not have his son,

and to go out into the market to find you another helpmeet. It is not reasonable. I had expected more dutiful conduct from you."

"Is it undutiful not to be able to love a man one hardly knows, when one is ordered to do so?"

"You will make me lose my patience, Faustina!" exclaimed Montevarchi, in angry tones. "Have I not explained to you the nature of love? Have I not told you that you can love your husband as much as you please? Is it not a father's duty to direct the affections of his child as I wish to do, and is it not the child's first obligation to submit to its father's will and guidance? What more would you have? In truth, you are very exacting!"

"I am very unhappy!" The young girl turned away and rested her elbow on the table, supporting her chin in her hand. She stared absently at the old bookcases as though she were trying to read the titles upon the dingy bindings. Montevarchi understood her words to convey a submission and changed his tone once more.

"Well, well, my dear, you will never regret your obedience," he said. "Of course, my beloved child, it is never easy to see things as it is best that we should see them. I see that you have yielded at last——"

"I have not yielded in the least!" cried Faustina, suddenly facing him, with an expression he had never seen before.

"What do you mean?" asked Montevarchi in considerable astonishment.

"What I say. I will not marry Frangipani—I will not! Do you understand?"

"No. I do not understand such language from my daughter; and as for your determination, I tell you that you will most certainly end by acting as I wish you to act."

"You cannot force me to marry. What can you do? You can put me into a convent. Do you think that would make me change my mind? I would thank God for any asylum in which I might find refuge from such tyranny."

"My daughter," replied the prince in bland tones, "I am fully resolved not to be angry with you. Your undutiful conduct proceeds from ignorance, which is

never an offence, though it is always a misfortune. If you will have a little patience——"

"I have none!" exclaimed Faustina, exasperated by her father's manner. "My undutiful conduct does not proceed from ignorance—it proceeds from love, from love for another man, whom I will marry if I marry any one."

"Faustina!" cried Montevarchi, holding up his hands in horror and amazement. "Do you dare to use such language to your father!"

"I dare do anything, everything—I dare even tell you the name of the man I love—Anastase Gouache!"

"My child! My child! This is too horrible! I must really send for your mother."

"Do what you will."

Faustina had risen to her feet and was standing before one of the old bookcases, her hands folded before her, her eyes on fire, her delicate mouth scornfully bent. Montevarchi, who was really startled almost out of his senses, moved cautiously towards the bell, looking steadily at his daughter all the while as though he dreaded some fresh outbreak. There was something ludicrous in his behaviour which, at another time, would not have escaped the young girl. Now, however, she was too much in earnest to perceive anything except the danger of her position and the necessity for remaining firm at any cost. She did not understand why her mother was to be called, but she felt that she could face all her family if necessary. She kept her eyes upon her father and was hardly conscious that a servant entered the room. Montevarchi sent a message requesting the princess to come at once. Then he turned again towards Faustina.

"You can hardly suppose," he observed, "that I take seriously what you have just said; but you are evidently very much excited, and your mother's presence will, I trust, have a soothing effect. You must be aware that it is very wrong to utter such monstrous untruths—even in jest——"

"I am in earnest. I will marry Monsieur Gouache or I will marry no one."

Montevarchi really believed that his daughter's mind

was deranged. His interview with Gouache had convinced him that Faustina meant what she said, though he affected to laugh at it, but he was wholly unable to account for her conduct on any theory but that of insanity. Being at his wits' end he had sent for his wife, and while waiting for her he did not quite know what to do.

"My dear child, what is Monsieur Gouache? A very estimable young man, without doubt, but not such a one as we could choose for your husband."

"I have chosen him," answered Faustina. "That is enough."

"How you talk, my dear! How rashly you talk! As though choosing a husband were like buying a new hat! And you, too, whom I always believed to be the most dutiful, the most obedient of my children! But your mother and I will reason with you, we will endeavour to put better thoughts into your heart."

Faustina glanced scornfully at her father and turned away, walking slowly in the direction of the window.

"It is of no use to waste your breath on me," she said presently. "I will marry Gouache or nobody."

"You—marry Gouache?" cried the princess, who entered at that moment, and heard the last words. Her voice expressed an amazement and horror fully equal to her husband's.

"Have you come to join the fray, mamma?" inquired Faustina, in English.

"Pray speak in a language I can understand," said Montevarchi who, in a whole lifetime, had never mastered a word of his wife's native tongue.

"Oh, Lotario!" exclaimed the princess. "What has the child been telling you?"

"Things that would make you tremble, my dear! She refuses to marry Frangipani——"

"Refuses! But, Faustina, you do not know what you are doing! You are out of your mind!"

"And she talks wildly of marrying a certain Frenchman, a Monsieur Gouache, I believe—is there such a man, my dear?"

"Of course, Lotario! The little man you ran over. How forgetful you are!"

"Yes, yes, of course. I know. But you must reason with her, Guendalina——"

"It seems to me, Lotario, that you should do that——"

"My dear, I think the child is insane upon the subject. Where could she have picked up such an idea? Is it a mere caprice, a mere piece of impertinence, invented to disconcert the sober senses of a careful father?"

"Nonsense, Lotario! She is not capable of that. After all, she is not Flavia, who always had something dreadful quite ready, just when you least expected it."

"I almost wish she were Flavia!" exclaimed Montevarchi, ruefully. "Flavia has done very well." During all this time Faustina was standing with her back towards the window and her hands folded before her, looking from the one to the other of the speakers with an air of bitter contempt which was fast changing to uncontrollable anger. Some last remaining instinct of prudence kept her from interrupting the conversation by a fresh assertion of her will, and she waited until one of them chose to speak to her. She had lost her head, for she would otherwise never have gone so far as to mention Gouache's name, but, as with all very spontaneous natures, with her to break the first barrier was to go to the extreme, whatever it might be. Her clear brown eyes were very bright, and there was something luminous about her angelic face which showed that her whole being was under the influence of an extraordinary emotion, almost amounting to exaltation. It was impossible to foresee what she would say or do.

"Your father almost wishes you were Flavia!" groaned the princess, shaking her head and looking very grave. Then Faustina laughed scornfully and her wrath bubbled over.

"I am not Flavia!" she cried, coming forward and facing her father and mother. "I daresay you do wish I were. Flavia has done so very well. Yes, she is Princess Saracinesca this evening, I suppose. Indeed she has done well, for she has married the man she loves, as much as she is capable of loving anything. And that is all the more reason why I should do the same. Besides, am I as old as Flavia that you should be in such

a hurry to marry me? Do you think I will yield? Do you think that while I love one man, I will be so base as to marry another?"

"I have explained to you that love ——"

"Your explanations will drive me mad! You may explain anything in that way—and prove that Love itself does not exist. Do you think your saying so makes it true? There is more truth in a little of my love than in all your whole life!"

"Faustina!"

"What? May I not answer you? Must I believe you infallible when you use arguments that would not satisfy a child? Is my whole nature a shadow because yours cannot understand my reality?"

"If you are going to make this a question of metaphysics——"

"I am not, I do not know what metaphysic means. But I will repeat before my mother what I said to you alone. I will not marry Frangipani, and you cannot force me to marry him. If I marry any one I will have the man I love."

"But, my dearest Faustina," cried the princess in genuine distress, "this is a mere idea—a sort of madness that has seized upon you. Consider your position, consider what you owe to us, consider——"

"Consider, consider, consider! Do you suppose that any amount of consideration would change me?"

"Do you think your childish anger will change us?" inquired Montevarchi, blandly. He did not care to lose his temper, for he was quite indifferent to Faustina's real inclinations, if she would only consent to marry Frangipani.

"Childish!" cried Faustina, her eyes blazing with anger. "Was I childish when I followed him out into the midst of the revolution last October, when I was nearly killed at the Serristori, when I thought he was dead and knelt there among the ruins until he found me and brought me home? Was that a child's love?"

The princess turned pale and grasped her husband's arm, staring at Faustina in horror. The old man trembled and for a few moments could not find strength to speak. Nothing that Faustina could have invented

could have produced such a sudden and tremendous effect as this revelation of what had happened on the night of the insurrection, coming from the girl's own lips with the unmistakable accent of truth. The mother's instinct was the first to assert itself. With a quick movement she threw her arms round the young girl, as though to protect her from harm.

"It is not true, it is not true," she cried in an agonised tone. "Faustina, my child—it is not true!"

"It is quite true, mamma," answered Faustina, who enjoyed an odd satisfaction in seeing the effect of her words, which can only be explained by her perfect innocence. "Why are you so much astonished? I loved him—I thought he was going out to be killed—I would not let him go alone——"

"Oh, Faustina! How could you do it!" moaned the princess. "It is too horrible—it is not to be believed——"

"I loved him, I love him still."

Princess Montevarchi fell into a chair and burst into tears, burying her face in her hands and sobbing aloud.

"If you are going to cry, Guendalina, you had better go away," said her husband, who was now as angry as his mean nature would permit him to be. She was so much accustomed to obey that she left the room, crying as she went, and casting back a most sorrowful look at Faustina.

Montevarchi shut the door and, coming back, seized his daughter's arm and shook it violently.

"Fool!" he cried angrily, unable to find any other word to express his rage.

Faustina said nothing but tried to push him away, her bright eyes gleaming with contempt. Her silence exasperated the old man still further. Like most very cowardly men he could be brutal to women when he was angry. It seemed to him that the girl, by her folly, had dashed from him the last great satisfaction of his life at the very moment when it was within reach. He could have forgiven her for ruining herself, had she done so; he could not forgive her for disappointing his ambition; he knew that one word of the story she had told would make the great marriage impossible, and he knew

that she had the power to speak that word when she pleased as well as the courage to do so.

"Fool!" he repeated, and before she could draw back, he struck her across the mouth with the back of his hand.

A few drops of bright red blood trickled from her delicate lips. With an instinctive movement she pressed her handkerchief to the wound. Montevarchi snatched it roughly from her hand and threw it across the room. From his eyes she guessed that he would strike her again if she remained. With a look of intense hatred she made a supreme effort, and concentrating the whole strength of her slender frame wrenched herself free.

"Coward!" she cried, as he reeled backwards; then, before he could recover himself, she was gone and he was left alone.

He was terribly angry, and at the same time his ideas were confused, so that he hardly understood anything but the main point of her story, that she had been with Gouache on that night when Corona had brought her home. He began to reason again. Corona knew the truth, of course, and her husband knew it too. Montevarchi realised that he had already taken his revenge for their complicity, before knowing that they had injured him. His overwrought brain was scarcely capable of receiving another impression. He laughed aloud in a way that was almost hysterical.

"All!" he cried in sudden exultation. "All—even to their name—but the other——" His face changed quickly and he sank into his chair and buried his face in his hands, as he thought of all he had lost through Faustina's folly. And yet, the harm might be repaired—no one knew except——

He looked up and saw that Meschini had returned and was standing before him, as though waiting to be addressed. The suddenness of the librarian's appearance made the prince utter an exclamation of surprise.

"Yes, I have come back," said Meschini. "The matter we were discussing cannot be put off, and I have come back to ask you to be good enough to pay the money."

Montevarchi was nervous and had lost the calm tone

of superiority he had maintained before his interview with Faustina. The idea of losing Frangipani, too, made his avarice assert itself very strongly.

"I told you," he replied, "that I refused altogether to talk with you, so long as you addressed me in that tone. I repeat it. Leave me, and when you have recovered your manners I will give you something for yourself. You will get nothing so long as you demand it as though it were a right."

"I will not leave this room without the money," answered Meschini, resolutely. The bell was close to the door. The librarian placed himself between the prince and both.

"Leave the room!" cried Montevarchi, trembling with anger. He had so long despised Meschini, that the exhibition of obstinacy on the part of the latter did not frighten him.

The librarian stood before the bell and the latch of the door, his long arms hanging down by his sides, his face yellow, his eyes red. Any one might have seen that he was growing dangerous. Instead of repeating his refusal to go, he looked steadily at his employer and a disagreeable smile played upon his ugly features. Montevarchi saw it and his fury boiled over. He laid his hands on the arms of his chair as though he would rise, and in that moment he would have been capable of striking Meschini as he had struck Faustina. Meschini shuffled forwards and held up his hand.

"Do not be violent," he said, in a low voice. "I am not your daughter, you know."

Montevarchi's jaw dropped, and he fell back into his chair again.

"You listened—you saw——" he gasped.

"Yes, of course. Will you pay me? I am desperate, and I will have it. You and your miserable secrets are mine, and I will have my price. I only want the sum you promised. I shall be rich in a few days, for I have entered into an affair in which I shall get millions, as many as you have perhaps. But the money must be paid to-morrow morning or I am ruined, and you must give it to me. Do you hear? Do you understand that I will have what is mine?"

At this incoherent speech, Montevarchi recovered something of his former nerve. There was something in Meschini's language that sounded like argument, and to argue was to temporise. The prince changed his tone.

"But, my dear Meschini, how could you be so rash as to go into a speculation when you knew that the case might not be decided for another week? You are really the most rash man I ever knew. I cannot undertake to guarantee your speculations. I will be just. I have told you that I would give you two thousand——"

"Twenty thousand!" Meschini came a little nearer.

"Not a single baiocco if you are exorbitant."

"Twenty thousand hard, good scudi in cash, I tell you. No more, but no less either." The librarian's hands were clenched, and he breathed hard, while his red eyes stared in a way that began to frighten Montevarchi.

"No, no, be reasonable! My dear Meschini, pray do not behave in this manner. You almost make me believe that you are threatening me. I assure you that I desire to do what is just——"

"Give me the money at once——"

"But I have not so much—murder!! Ah—gh—gh——"

Arnoldo Meschini's long arms had shot out and his hands had seized the prince's throat in a grip from which there was no escape. There lurked a surprising strength in the librarian's round shoulders, and his energy was doubled by a fit of anger that amounted to insanity. The old man rocked and swayed in his chair, and grasped at the green table-cover, but Meschini had got behind him and pressed his fingers tighter and tighter. His eye rested upon Faustina's handkerchief that lay on the floor at his feet. His victim was almost at the last gasp, but the handkerchief would do the job better. Meschini kept his grip with one hand and with the other snatched up the bit of linen. He drew it tight round the neck and wrenched at the knot with his yellow teeth. There was a convulsive struggle, followed by a long interval of quiet. Then another movement, less violent this time, another and another, and then Meschini felt the body collapse in his grasp. It was over.

Montevarchi was dead. Meschini drew back against the bookcases, trembling in every joint. He scarcely saw the objects in the room, for his head swam and his senses failed him, from horror and from the tremendous physical effort he had made. Then in an instant he realised what he had done, and the consequences of the deed suggested themselves.

He had not meant to kill the prince. So long as he had kept some control of his actions he had not even meant to lay violent hands upon him. But he had the nature of a criminal, by turns profoundly cunning and foolishly rash. A fatal influence had pushed him onward so soon as he had raised his arm, and before he was thoroughly conscious of his actions the deed was done. Then came the fear of consequences, then again the diabolical reasoning which intuitively foresees the immediate results of murder, and provides against them at once.

"Nobody knows that I have been here. Nothing is missing. No one knows about the forgery. No one will suspect me. There is no one in the library nor in the corridor. The handkerchief is not mine. If it was not his own it was Donna Faustina's. No one will suspect her. It will remain a mystery."

Meschini went towards the door through which he had entered and opened it. He looked back and held his breath. The prince's head had fallen forward upon his hands as they lay on the table, and the attitude was that of a man overcome by despair, but not that of a dead body. The librarian glanced round the room. There was no trace of a struggle. The position of the furniture had not been changed, nor had anything fallen on the floor. Meschini went out and softly closed the door behind him, leaving the dead man alone.

The quiet afternoon sun fell upon the houses on the opposite side of the street, and cast a melancholy reflection into the dismal chamber where Prince Montevarchi had passed so many hours of his life, and in which that life had been cut short so suddenly. On the table before his dead hands lay the copy of the verdict, the testimony of his last misdeed, of the crime for which he had paid the forfeit upon the very day it was due. It lay there

like the superscription upon a malefactor's gallows in ancient times, the advertisement of the reason of his death to all who chose to inquire. Not a sound was heard save the noise that rose faintly and at intervals from the narrow street below, the cry of a hawker, the song of a street-boy, the bark of a dog. To-morrow the poor body would be mounted upon a magnificent catafalque, surrounded by the pomp of a princely mourning, illuminated by hundreds of funeral torches, an object of aversion, of curiosity, even of jest, perhaps, among those who bore the prince a grudge. Many of those who had known him would come and look on his dead face, and some would say that he was changed and others that he was not. His wife and his children would, in a few hours, be all dressed in black, moving silently and mournfully and occasionally showing a little feeling, though not more than would be decent. There would be masses sung, and prayers said, and his native city would hear the tolling of the heavy bells for one of her greatest personages. All this would be done, and more also, until the dead prince should be laid to rest beneath the marble floor of the chapel where his ancestors lay side by side.

But to-day he sat in state in his shabby chair, his head lying upon that table over which he had plotted and schemed for so many years, his white fingers almost touching the bit of paper whereon was written the ruin of the Saracinesca.

And upstairs the man who had killed him shuffled about the library, an anxious expression on his yellow face, glancing from time to time at his hands as he took down one heavy volume after another, practising in solitude the habit of seeming occupied, in order that he might not be taken unawares when an under-servant should be sent to tell the insignificant librarian of what had happened that day in Casa Montevarechi.

## CHAPTER XXI.

Giovanni came home late in the afternoon and found Corona sitting by the fire in her boudoir. She had known that he would return before long, but had not anticipated his coming with any pleasure. When he entered the room she looked up quietly, without a smile, to assure herself that it was he and no one else. She said nothing, and he sat down upon the other side of the fireplace. There was an air of embarrassment about their meetings, until one or the other had made some remark which led to a commonplace conversation. On the present occasion neither seemed inclined to be the first speaker and for some minutes they sat opposite to each other in silence. Giovanni glanced at his wife from time to time, and once she turned her head and met his eyes. Her expression was cold and grave as though she wished him to understand that she had nothing to say. He thought she had never been so beautiful before. The firelight, striking her face at an upward angle, brought out clearly the noble symmetry of her features, the level brow, the wide, delicate nostrils, the even curve of her lips, the splendid breadth of her smooth forehead, shaded by her heavy black hair. She seemed to feel cold, for she sat near the flames, resting one foot upon the fender, in an attitude that threw into relief the perfect curves of her figure, as she bent slightly forward, spreading her hands occasionally to the blaze.

"Corona —" Giovanni stopped suddenly after pronouncing her name, as though he had changed his mind while in the act of speaking.

"What is it?" she asked indifferently enough.

"Would you like to go away? I have been wondering whether it would not be better than staying here."

She looked up in some surprise. She had thought of travelling more than once of late, but it seemed to her that to make a journey together would be only to increase the difficulties of the situation. There would be of necessity more intimacy, more daily converse than the