

excepting such as you yourself just now gave me, when you said that the prince had insulted you. Enough to give a semblance of truth to the story. By the bye, is that true?"

"It is and it is not," answered Gouache, blushing a little. "The poor man, when I began to explain my position, thought—how shall I say? He thought I wanted to sell him a picture. It was not his fault."

"Poor man!" sighed the cardinal. "He had not much tact. And so, Monsieur Gouache, you think that the great Saracinesca suit has had nothing to do with the murder?"

"It seems to me impossible. It looks rather as though he had been murdered by a servant, out of spite. It is hard to believe that any one not belonging to the house could have done it."

"I think the public will agree with you. I will occupy myself with the matter. Perhaps I have got the man safe in that room, but who knows? If you had come first, you might have gone to the Carceri Nuove instead of him. After all, he may be in love too."

The cardinal smiled, but Gouache started at the suggestion, as though it hurt him.

"I doubt that," he said quickly.

"So do I. It would be a strange coincidence, if two innocent men had accused themselves of the same crime, out of love, within twenty-four hours of its being committed. But now that you are calm—yes, you were beside yourself with excitement—I must tell you that you have done a very rash thing indeed. If I had not chanced to be a friend of yours, what would have become of you? I cannot help liking your courage and devotion—you have shown it in sterner matters, and in the face of the enemy—but you might have destroyed yourself. That would have been a great sin."

"Is there no case in which a man may destroy himself deliberately?"

"You speak of suicide? It was almost that you contemplated. No. The church teaches that a man who takes his own life goes straight to hell. So does Mohammed, for that matter."

"In any case?"

"In any case. It is a mortal sin."

"But," objected Gouache, "let us suppose me a very bad man, exercising a destroying influence on many other people. Suppose, in short, for the sake of argument, that my life caused others to lose their own souls, and that by killing myself I knew that they would all become good again. Suppose then, that I suddenly repented and that there was no way of saving these people but by my own suicide. Would it not be more honourable in me to say, 'Very well, I will submit to damnation rather than send all those others to eternal flames?' Should I not be justified in blowing out my brains?"

The cardinal did not know whether to smile or to look grave. He was neither a priest nor a theologian, but a statesman.

"My dear friend," he answered at last. "The ingenuity of your suppositions passes belief. I can only say that, when you find yourself in such a bad case as you describe, I will submit the matter for you to the Holy Father himself. But I would strongly advise you to avoid the situation if you possibly can."

Gouache took his leave with a light heart, little guessing as he descended the great marble staircase that Giovanni Saracinesca was the prisoner of whom the cardinal had spoken so mysteriously, still less that he, too, had falsely accused himself of having killed poor old Montevarchi. He wondered, as he walked rapidly along the streets in the bright morning sunshine, who the man was, and why he had done such a thing, but his thoughts were really with Faustina, and he longed to see her and to hear from her own lips the true version of what had happened.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Arnoldo Meschini was fully conscious of what he had done when he softly closed the door of the study behind him and returned to the library; but although he knew and realised that he had murdered his employer, he could

not explain the act to himself. His temples throbbed painfully and there was a bright red spot in each of his sallow cheeks. He shuffled about from one bookcase to another, and his hands trembled violently as he touched the big volumes. Now and then he glanced towards one or the other of the doors expecting at every moment that some one would enter to tell him the news, if indeed any one at such a time should chance to remember the existence of the humble librarian. His brain was on fire and seemed to burn the sockets of his eyes. And yet the time passed, and no one came. The suspense grew to be unbearable, and he felt that he would do anything to escape from it. He went to the door and laid his hand upon the latch.

For an instant the flush disappeared from his cheeks, as a great fear took possession of him. He was not able to face the sight of Montevarchi's body lying across that table in the silent study. His hand fell to his side and he almost ran to the other side of the library; then, as though ashamed of his weakness he came back slowly and listened at the door. It was scarcely possible that any distant echo could reach his ears, if the household had been already roused, for the passage was long and tortuous, interrupted by other doors and by a winding staircase. But in his present state he fancied that his senses must be preternaturally sharpened and he listened eagerly. All was still. He went back to the books.

There was nothing to be done but to make a desperate effort to occupy himself and to steady his nerves. If any one came now, he thought, his face would betray him. There must be a light in his eyes, an uncertainty in his manner which would speak plainly enough to his guilt. He tried to imagine what would take place when the body was found. Some one would enter the room and would see the body. He, or she, would perhaps think that the prince was in a fit, or asleep — who could tell? But he would not answer the voice that called him. Then the person would come forward and touch him — Meschini forced himself to think of it — would touch the dead hand and would feel that it was cold. With a cry of horror the person would hasten from the room. He might hear that cry, if he left the door open. Again he laid his

hand upon the latch. His fingers seemed paralysed and the cold sweat stood on his face, but he succeeded in mastering himself enough to turn the handle and look out. The cry came, but it was from his own lips. He reeled back from the entrance in horror, his eyes starting from his head. There stood the dead man, in the dusky passage, shaking at him the handkerchief.

It was only his fancy. He passed his hand across his forehead and a sickly look of relief crept over his face. He had been frightened by his own coat, that hung on a peg outside, long and thin and limp, a white handkerchief depending from the wide pocket. There was not much light in the corridor. He crept cautiously out and took the garment from its place with a nervous, frightened gesture. Dragging it after him, he hastily re-entered the library and rolled up the coat into a shape that could not possibly resemble anything which might frighten him. He laid it upon the table in the brightest place, where the afternoon sun fell upon it. There was a sort of relief in making sure that the thing could not again look like the dead man. He looked up and saw with renewed terror that he had left the door open. There was nothing but air between him and the place where that awful shadow had been conjured up by his imagination. The door must be shut. If it remained open he should go mad. He tried to think calmly, but it was beyond his power. He attempted to say that there was nothing there and that the door might as well remain open as be shut. But even while making the effort to reason with himself, he was creeping cautiously along the wall, in the direction of the entrance. By keeping his eyes close to the wooden panelling he could advance without seeing into the corridor. He was within a foot of the opening. Convulsed with fear, he put out his hand quickly and tried to pull the heavy oak on its hinges by the projecting bevel, but it was too heavy — he must look out in order to grasp the handle. The cold drops trickled down from his brow and he breathed hard, but he could not go back and leave the door unclosed. With a suppressed sob of agony he thrust out his head and arm. In a moment it was over, but the moral effort had been terrible, and his strength failed him, so that he staggered

against the wainscot and would have fallen but for its support.

Some moments elapsed before he could get to a chair, and when he at last sat down in a ray of sunshine to rest, his eyes remained fixed upon the sculptured brass handle of the latch. He almost expected that it would turn mysteriously of itself and that the dead prince would enter the room. He realised that in his present condition he could not possibly face the person who before long would certainly bring him the news. He must have something to stimulate him and deaden his nerves. He had no idea how long a time had elapsed since he had done the deed, but it seemed that three or four hours must certainly have passed. In reality it was scarcely five and twenty minutes since he had left the study. He remembered suddenly that he had some spirits in his room at the top of the palace. Slowly and painfully he rose to his feet and went towards the other exit from the library, which, as in many ancient houses, opened upon the grand staircase, so as to give free access to visitors from without. He had to cross the broad marble landing, whence a masked door led to the narrow winding steps by which he ascended to the upper story. He listened to hear whether any one was passing, and then went out. Once on his way he moved more quickly than seemed possible for a man so bent and mis-shapen.

The bright afternoon sun streamed in through the window of his little chamber, a relief from the sombre gloominess of the lofty library, where the straggling rays seemed to make the great hall more shadowy by contrast. But Meschini did not stop to look about him. In a closet in the wall he kept his stores, his chemicals, his carefully-composed inks, his bits of prepared parchment, and, together with many other articles belonging to his illicit business, he had a bottle of old brandy, which the butler had once given him out of the prince's cellar, in return for a bit of legal advice which had saved the servant a lawyer's fee. Arnaldo Meschini had always been a sober man, like most Italians, and the bottle had stood for years unopened in the cupboard. He had never thought of it, but, having been once placed there, it had been safe. The moment had come when the stimulant was

precious. His fingers shook as he put the bottle to his lips; when he set it down they were steady. The liquor acted like an enchantment, and the sallow-faced man smiled as he sat alone by his little table and looked at the thing that had restored him. The bottle had been full when he began to drink; the level of the liquid was now a good hand's breadth below the neck. The quantity he had swallowed would have made a temperate man, in his normal state, almost half drunk.

He sat still for a long time, waiting to see whether the draught would produce any other effect. He felt a pleasant warmth in his face and hands, the perspiration had disappeared from his brow, and he was conscious that he could now look out of the open door of the library without fear, even if his coat were hanging on the peg. It was incredible to him that he should have been so really terrified by a mere shadow. He had killed Prince Montevarchi, and the body was lying in the study. Yes, he could think of it without shuddering, almost without an unpleasant sensation. In the dead man's own words, it had been an act of divine justice and retribution, and since nobody could possibly discover the murderer, there was matter for satisfaction in the idea that the wicked old man no longer cumbered the earth with his presence. Strange, that he should have suffered such an agony of fear half an hour earlier. Was it half an hour? How pleasantly the sun shone in to the little room where he had laboured during so many years, and so profitably! Now that the prince was dead it would be amusing to look at those original documents for which he had made such skilfully-constructed substitutes. He would like to assure himself, however, that the deed had been well done. There was magic in that old liquor. Another little draught and he would go down to the study as though nothing had happened. If he should meet anybody his easy manner would disarm suspicion. Besides, he could take the bottle with him in the pocket of his long coat—the bottle of courage, he said to himself with a smile, as he set it to his lips. This time he drank but little, and very slowly. He was too cautious a man to throw away his ammunition uselessly.

With a light heart he descended the winding stair and

crossed the landing. One of Ascanio Bellegra's servants passed at that moment. Meschini looked at the fellow quietly, and even gave him a friendly smile, to test his own coolness, a civility which was acknowledged by a familiar nod. The librarian's spirits rose. He did not resent the familiarity of the footman, for, with all his learning, he was little more than a servant himself, and the accident had come conveniently as a trial of his strength. The man evidently saw nothing unusual in his appearance. Moreover, as he walked, the brandy bottle in his coat-tail pocket beat reassuringly against the calves of his legs. He opened the door of the library and found himself in the scene of his terror.

There lay the old coat, wrapped together on the table, as he had left it. The sun had moved a little farther during his absence, and the heap of cloth looked innocent enough. Meschini could not understand how it had frightened him so terribly. He still felt that pleasant warmth about his face and hands. That was the door before which he had been such a coward. What was beyond it? The empty passage. He would go and hang the coat where it had hung always, where he always left it when he came in the morning, unless he needed it to keep himself warm. What could be simpler, or easier? He took the thing in one hand, turned the handle and looked out. He was not afraid. The long, silent corridor stretched away into the distance, lighted at intervals by narrow windows that opened upon an inner court of the palace. Meschini suspended the coat upon the peg and stood looking before him, a contemptuous smile upon his face, as though he despised himself for his former fears. Then he resolutely walked towards the study, along the familiar way, down a flight of steps, then to the right—he stood before the door and the dead man was on the other side of it. He paused and listened. All was silent.

It was clear to him, as he stood before the table and looked at the body, that no one had been there. Indeed, Meschini now remembered that it was a rule in the house never to disturb the prince unless a visitor came. He had always liked to spend the afternoon in solitude over his accounts and his plans. The librarian paused oppo-

site his victim and gazed at the fallen head and the twisted, whitened fingers. He put out his hand timidly and touched them, and was surprised to find that they were not quite cold. The touch, however, sent a very unpleasant thrill through his own frame, and he drew back quickly with a slight shiver. But he was not terrified as he had been before. The touch, only, was disagreeable to him. He took a book that lay at hand and pushed it against the dead man's arm. There was no sign, no movement. He would have liked to go behind the chair and untie the handkerchief, but his courage was not quite equal to that. Besides, the handkerchief was Faustina's. He had seen her father snatch it from her and throw it upon the floor, as he watched the pair through the keyhole. A strange fascination kept him in the study, and he would have yielded to it had he not been fortified against any such morbid folly by the brandy he had swallowed. He thought, as he turned to go, that it was a pity the prince never kept money in the house, for, in that case, he might have helped himself before leaving. To steal a small value was not worth while, considering the danger of discovery.

He moved on tiptoe, as though afraid of disturbing the rest of his old employer, and once or twice he looked back. Then at last he closed the door and retraced his steps through the corridor till he gained the library. He was surprised at his own boldness as he went, and at the indifference with which he passed by the coat that hung, limp as ever, upon its peg. He was satisfied, too, with the result of his investigations. The prince was certainly dead. As a direct consequence of his death, the secret of the Saracinesca suit was now his own; no one had a share in it, and it was worth money. He pulled out a number of volumes from the shelves and began to make a pretence of working upon the catalogue. But though he surrounded himself with the implements and necessities for his task, his mind was busy with the new scheme that unfolded itself to his imagination.

He and he alone, knew that San Giacinto's possession of the Saracinesca inheritance rested upon a forgery. The fact that this forgery must be revealed, in order to

reinstated the lawful possessors in their right, did not detract in the least from the value of the secret. Two courses were open to him. He might go to old Leone Saracinesca and offer the original documents for sale, on receiving a guarantee for his own safety. Or he might offer them to San Giacinto, who was the person endangered by their existence. Montevarchi had promised him twenty thousand scudi for the job, and had never paid the money. He had cancelled his debt with his life, however, and had left the secret behind him. Either Saracinesca or San Giacinto would give five times twenty thousand, ten times as much, perhaps, for the original documents, the one in order to recover what was his own, the other to keep what did not belong to him. The great question to be considered was the way of making the offer. Meschini sat staring at the opposite row of books, engaged in solving the problem. Just then, one of the open volumes before him slipped a little upon another and the page turned slowly over. The librarian started slightly and glanced at the old-fashioned type. The work was a rare one, which he had often examined, and he knew it to be of great value. A new thought struck him. Why should he not sell this and many other volumes out of the collection, as well as realise money by disposing of his secret? He might as well be rich as possess a mere competence.

He looked about him. With a little care and ingenuity, by working at night and by visiting the sellers of old books during the day he might soon put together four or five hundred works which would fetch a high price, and replace them by so many feet of old trash which would look as well. With his enormous industry it would be a simple matter to tamper with the catalogue and to insert new pages which should correspond with the changes he contemplated. The old prince was dead, and little as he had really known about the library, his sons knew even less. Meschini could remove the stolen volumes to a safe place, and when he had realised the value of his secret, he would go to Paris, to Berlin, even to London, and dispose of his treasures one by one. He was amazed at the delights the future unfolded to him, everything seemed gilded, everything seemed ready

to turn into gold. His brain dwelt with an enthusiasm wholly new to him upon the dreams it conjured up. He felt twenty years younger. His fears had gone, and with them his humility. He saw himself no longer the poor librarian in his slippers and shabby clothes, cringing to his employer, spending his days in studying the forgeries he afterwards executed during the night, hoarding his ill-gotten gains with jealous secrecy, afraid to show to his few associates that he had accumulated a little wealth, timid by force of long habit and by the remembrance of the shame in his early life. All that had disappeared under the potent spell of his new-found courage. He fancied himself living in some distant capital, rich and respected, married, perhaps, having servants of his own, astonishing the learned men of some great centre by the extent of his knowledge and erudition. All the vanity of his nature was roused from its long sleep by a new set of emotions, till he could scarcely contain his inexplicable happiness. And how had all this come to him so suddenly in the midst of his obscure life? Simply by squeezing the breath out of an old man's throat. How easy it had been.

The unaccustomed energy which had been awakened in him by the spirits brought with it a pleasant restlessness. He felt that he must go again to his little room upstairs, and take out the deeds and read them over. The sight of them would give an increased reality and vividness to his anticipations. Besides, too, it was just barely possible that there might be some word, some expression which he could change, and which should increase their value. To sit still, poring over the catalogue in the library was impossible. Once more he climbed to his attic, but he could not comprehend why he felt a nervous desire to look behind him, as though he were followed by some person whose tread was noiseless. It was not possible, he thought, that the effects of his draught were already passing off. Such courage as he felt in him could not leave him suddenly. He reached his room and took the deeds from the secret place in which he had hidden them, spreading them out lovingly before him. As he sat down the bottle in his long coat touched the floor behind him with a short, dull thud.

It was as though a footstep had sounded in the silent room, and he sprang to his feet before he realised whence the noise came, looking behind him with startled eyes. In a moment he understood, and withdrawing the bottle from his pocket he set it beside him on the table. He looked at it for a few seconds as though in hesitation, but he determined not to have recourse to its contents so soon. He had undoubtedly been frightened again, but the sound that had scared him had been real and not imaginary. Besides, he had but this one bottle and he knew that good brandy was dear. He pushed it away, his avarice helping him to resist the temptation.

The old documents were agreeably familiar to his eye, and he read and re-read them with increasing satisfaction, comparing them carefully, and chuckling to himself each time that he reached the bottom of the sheet upon the copy, where there had been no room to introduce that famous clause. But for that accident, he reflected, he would have undoubtedly made the insertion upon the originals, and the latter would be now no longer in his possession. He did not quite understand why he derived such pleasure from reading the writing so often, nor why, when the surrounding objects in the room were clear and distinct to his eyes, the crabbed characters should every now and then seem to move of themselves and to run into each other from right to left. Possibly the emotions of the day had strained his vision. He looked up and saw the bottle. An irresistible desire seized him to taste the liquor again, even if he drank but a drop. The spirits wet his lips while he was still inwardly debating whether it were wise to drink or not. As he returned the cork to its place he felt a sudden revival within him of all he had experienced before. His face was warm, his fingers tingled. He took up one of the deeds with a firm hand and settled himself comfortably in his chair. But he could not read it through again. He laughed quietly at his folly. Did he not know every word by heart? He must occupy himself with planning, with arranging the details of his future. When that was done he could revel in the thought of wealth and rest and satisfied vanity.

To his surprise, his thoughts did not flow as con-

nectedly as he had expected. He could not help thinking of the dead man downstairs, not indeed with any terror, not fearing discovery for himself, but with a vague wonderment that made his mind feel empty. Turn over the matter as he would, he could not foresee connectedly what was likely to happen when the murder was known. There was no sequence in his imaginings, and he longed nervously for the moment when everything should be settled. The restlessness that had brought him up to his room demanded some sort of action to quiet it. He would willingly have gone out to see his friend, the little apothecary who lived near the Ponte Quattro Capi. It would be a relief to talk to some one, to hear the sound of a human voice. But a remnant of prudence restrained him. It was not very likely that he should be suspected; indeed, if he behaved prudently nothing was more improbable. To leave the house at such a time, however, would be the height of folly, unless it could be proved that he had gone out some time before the deed could have been done. The porter was vigilant, and Meschini almost always exchanged a few words with him as he passed through the gates. He would certainly note the time of the librarian's exit more or less accurately. Moreover, the body might have been found already, and even now the gendarmes might be downstairs. The latter consideration determined him to descend once more to the library. A slight chill passed over him as he closed the door of his room behind him.

The great hall now seemed very gloomy and cold, and the solitude was oppressive. He felt the necessity for movement, and began to walk quickly up and down the length of the library between the broad tables, from one door to the other. At first, as he reached the one that separated him from the passage he experienced no disagreeable sensation, but turned his back upon it at the end of his walk and retraced his steps. Very gradually, however, he began to feel uncomfortable as he reached that extremity of the room, and the vision of the dead prince rose before his eyes. The coat was there again, on the other side of the door. No doubt it would take the same shape again if he looked at it. His varying courage was

just at the point when he was able to look out in order to assure himself that the limp garment had not assumed the appearance of a ghost. He felt a painful thrill in his back as he turned the handle, and the cold air that rushed in as he opened the door seemed to come from a tomb. Although his eyes were satisfied when he had seen the coat in the corner, he drew back quickly, and the thrill was repeated with greater distinctness as he heard the bolt of the latch slip into its socket. He walked away again, but the next time he came back he turned at some distance from the threshold, and, as he turned, he felt the thrill a third time, almost like an electric shock. He could not bear it and sat down before the catalogue. His eyes refused to read, and after a lengthened struggle between his fears, his prudence and his economy, he once more drew the bottle from his pocket and fortified himself with a draught. This time he drank more, and the effect was different. For some seconds he felt no change in his condition. Presently, however, his nervousness disappeared, giving place now to a sort of stupid indifference. The light was fading from the clerestory windows of the library, and, within, the corners and recesses were already dark. But Meschini was past imagining ghosts or apparitions. He sat quite still, his chin leaning on his hand and his elbow on the table, wondering vaguely how long it would be before they came to tell him that the prince was dead. He did not sleep, but he fell into a state of torpor which was restful to his nerves. Sleep would certainly come in half an hour if he were left to himself as long as that. His breathing was heavy, and the silence around him was intense. At last the much-dreaded moment came, and found him dull and apathetic.

The door opened and a ray of light from a candle entered the room, which was now almost dark. A footman and a housemaid thrust in their heads cautiously and peered into the broad gloom, holding the candle high before them. Either would have been afraid to come alone.

"Sor Arnoldo, Sor Arnoldo!" the man called out timidly, as though frightened by the sound of his own voice.

"Here I am," answered Meschini, affecting a cheerful tone as well as he could. Once more and very quickly he took a mouthful from the bottle, behind the table where they could not see him. "What is the matter?" he asked.

"The prince is murdered!" cried the two servants in a breath. They were very pale as they came towards him.

If the cry he uttered was forced they were too much terrified to notice it. As they told their tale with every species of exaggeration, interspersed with expressions of horror and amazement, he struck his hands to his head, moaned, cried aloud, and, being half hysterical with drink, shed real tears in their presence. Then they led him away, saying that the prefect of police was in the study and that all the household had been summoned to be examined by him. He was now launched in his part, and could play it to the end without breaking down. He had afterwards very little recollection of what had occurred. He remembered that the stillness of the study and the white faces of those present had impressed him by contrast with the noisy grief of the servants who had summoned him. He remembered that he had sworn, and others had corroborated his oath, to the effect that he had spent the afternoon between the library and his room. Ascanio Bellegra's footman remembered meeting him on the landing, and said that he had smiled pleasantly in an unconcerned way, as usual, and had passed on. For the rest, no one seemed even to imagine that he could have done the deed, for no one had ever heard anything but friendly words between him and the prince. He remembered, too, having seen the dead body extended upon the great table of the study, and he recalled Donna Faustina's tone of voice indistinctly as in a dream. Then, before the prefect announced his decision, he was dismissed with the other servants.

After that moment all was a blank in his mind. In reality he returned to his room and sat down by his table with a candle before him. He never knew that after the examination he had begged another bottle of liquor of the butler on the ground that his nerves were upset by the terrible event. About midnight the candle burned

down into the socket. Profiting by the last ray of light he drank a final draught and reeled to his bed, dressed as he was. One bottle was empty, and a third of the second was gone. Arnaldo Meschini was dead drunk.

CHAPTER XXV.

Corona was not much surprised when the messenger brought her carriage and presented the order for Faustina's liberation. When Giovanni had left her she had felt that he would find means to procure the young girl's liberty, and the only thing which seemed strange to her was the fact that Giovanni did not return himself. The messenger said he had seen him with the cardinal and that Sant' Ilario had given the order to use the carriage. Beyond that, he knew nothing. Corona at once took Faustina to the Palazzo Montevarchi, and then, with a promise to come back in the course of the day, she went home to rest.

She needed repose even more than Faustina, who, after all, had slept soundly on her prison bed, trusting with childlike faith in her friend's promise that she should be free in the morning. Corona, on the contrary, had passed a wakeful night, and was almost worn out with fatigue. She remained in her room until twelve o'clock, the hour when the members of the family met at the midday breakfast. She found her father-in-law waiting for her, and at a glance she saw that he was in a savage humour. His bronzed face was paler than usual and his movements more sudden and nervous, while his dark eyes gleamed angrily beneath his bent and shaggy brows. Corona, on her part, was silent and preoccupied. In spite of the tragic events of the night, which, after all, only affected her indirectly at present, and in spite of the constant moral suffering which now played so important a part in her life, she could not but be disturbed by the tremendous loss sustained by her husband and by his father. It fell most heavily upon the latter,

who was an old man, and whose mind was not engaged by any other absorbing consideration, but the blow was a terrible one to the other also.

"Where is Giovanni?" asked Saracinesca brusquely, as they sat down to the table.

"I do not know," answered Corona. "The last I heard of him was that he was with Cardinal Antonelli. I suppose that after getting the order to release Faustina he stayed there."

"So his Eminence suffered himself to be persuaded that a little girl did not strangle that old sinner," remarked the prince.

"Apparently."

"If they had taken Flavia it would have been more natural. She would have inaugurated her reign as Princess Saracinesca by a night in the Termini. Delightful contrast! I suppose you know who did it?"

"No. Probably a servant, though they say that nothing was stolen."

"San Giacinto did it. I have thought the whole matter out, and I am convinced of it. Look at his hands. He could strangle an elephant. Not that he could have had any particular reason for liquidating his father-in-law. He is rich enough without Flavia's share, but I always thought he would kill somebody one of these days, ever since I met him at Aquila."

"Without any reason, why should he have done it?"

"My dear child, when one has no reason to give, it is very hard to say why a thing occurs. He looks like the man."

"Is it conceivable that after getting all he could desire he should endanger his happiness in such a way?"

"Perhaps not. I believe he did it. What an abominable omelet — a glass of water, Pasquale. Abominable, is it not, Corona? Perfectly uneatable. I suppose the cook has heard of our misfortunes and wants to leave."

"I fancy we are not very hungry," remarked Corona, in order to say something.

"I would like to know whether the murderer is eating his breakfast at this moment, and whether he has any appetite. It would be interesting from a psychological point of view. By the bye, all this is very like a *jettatura*."