

"I miss him dreadfully!" she exclaimed, laying her head on her friend's shoulder. "And I am so unhappy! We parted angrily, and I can never tell him how sorry I am. You do not think it could have had anything to do with it, do you?"

"Your little quarrel? No, child. What could it have changed? We do not know what happened."

"I shall never forget his face. I was dreadfully undutiful—oh! I could almost marry that man if it would do any good!"

Corona smiled sadly. The young girl's sorrow was genuine, in strange contrast to Flavia's voluble flippancy. She laid her hand affectionately on the thick chestnut hair.

"Perhaps he sees now that you should not marry against your heart."

"Oh, do you think so? I wish it were possible. I should not feel as though I were so bad if I thought he understood now. I could bear it better. I should not feel as though it were almost a duty to marry Frangipani."

Corona turned quickly with an expression that was almost fierce in its intensity. She took Faustina's hands in hers.

"Never do that, Faustina. Whatever comes to you, do not do that! You do not know what it is to live with a man you do not love, even if you do not hate him. It is worse than death."

Corona kissed her and left her standing by the door. Was it possible, Faustina asked, that Corona did not love her husband? Or was she speaking of her former life with old Astrardente? Of course, it must be that. Giovanni and Corona were a proverbially happy couple.

When Corona again entered her own room, there was a note lying upon the table, the one her husband had written that morning from his place of confinement. She tore the envelope open with an anxiety of which she had not believed herself capable. She had asked for him when she returned and he had not been heard of yet. The vague uneasiness she had felt at his absence suddenly increased, until she felt that unless she saw him at once she must go in search of him. She read the note

through again and again, without clearly understanding the contents.

It was evident that he had left Rome suddenly and had not cared to tell her whither he was going, since the instructions as to what she was to say were put in such a manner as to make it evident that they were only to serve as an excuse for his absence to others, and not as an explanation to herself. The note was enigmatical and might mean almost anything. At last Corona tossed the bit of paper into the fire, and tapped the thick carpet impatiently with her foot.

"How coldly he writes!" she exclaimed aloud.

The door opened and her maid appeared.

"Will your Excellency receive Monsieur Gouache?" asked the woman from the threshold.

"No! certainly not!" answered Corona, in a voice that frightened the servant. "I am not at home."

"Yes, your Excellency."

CHAPTER XXVI.

The amount of work which Arnaldo Meschini did in the twenty-four hours of the day depended almost entirely upon his inclinations. The library had always been open to the public once a week, on Mondays, and on those occasions the librarian was obliged to be present. The rest of his time was supposed to be devoted to the incessant labour connected with so important a collection of books, and, on the whole, he had done far more than was expected of him. Prince Montevarchi had never proposed to give him an assistant, and he would have rejected any such offer, since the presence of another person would have made it almost impossible for him to carry on his business of forging ancient manuscripts. The manual labour of his illicit craft was of course performed in his own room, but a second librarian could not have failed to discover that there was something wrong. Night after night he carried the precious manuscripts to his chamber, bringing them back and restoring them to

their places every morning. During the day he studied attentively what he afterwards executed in the quiet hours when he could be alone. Of the household none but the prince himself ever came to the library; no other member of the family cared for the books or knew anything about them. His employer being dead, Meschini was practically master of all the shelves contained. No one disturbed him, no one asked what he was doing. His salary would be paid regularly by the steward, and he would in all probability be left to vegetate unheeded for the rest of his natural lifetime. When he died some one else would be engaged in his place. In the ordinary course of events no other future would have been open to him.

He awoke very late in the morning on the day after the murder, and lay for some time wondering why he was so very uncomfortable, why his head hurt him, why his vision was indistinct, why he could remember nothing he had done before going to bed. The enormous quantity of liquor he had drunk had temporarily destroyed his faculties, which were not hardened by the habitual use of alcohol. He turned his head uneasily upon the pillow and saw the bottles on the table, the candle burnt down in the brass candlestick and the general disorder in the room. He glanced at his own body and saw that he was lying dressed upon his bed. Then the whole truth flashed upon his mind with appalling vividness. A shock went through his system as though some one had struck him violently on the back of the head, while the light in the room was momentarily broken into flashes that pained his eyes. He got upon his feet with difficulty, and steadied himself by the bed-post, hardly able to stand alone.

He had murdered his master. The first moment in which he realised the fact was the most horrible he remembered to have passed. He had killed the prince and could recall nothing, or next to nothing, that had occurred since the deed. Almost before he knew what he was doing he had locked his door with a double turn of the key and was pushing the furniture against it, the table, the chairs, everything that he could move. It seemed to him that he could already hear upon the winding stair the clank of the gens d'armes' sabres as they

came to get him. He looked wildly round the room to see whether there was anything that could lead to discovery. The unwonted exertion, however, had restored the circulation of his blood, and with it arose an indistinct memory of the sense of triumph he had felt when he had last entered the chamber. He asked himself how he could have rejoiced over the deed, unless he had unconsciously taken steps for his own safety. The body must have been found long ago.

Very gradually there rose before him the vision of the scene in the study, when he had been summoned thither by the two servants, the dead prince stretched on the table, the pale faces, the prefect, Donna Faustina's voice, a series of questions asked in a metallic, pitiless tone. He had not been drunk, therefore, when they had sent for him. And yet, he knew that he had not been sober. In what state, then, had he found himself? With a shudder, he remembered his terror in the library, his fright at the ghost which had turned out to be only his own coat, his visit to his room, and the first draught he had swallowed. From that point onwards his memory grew less and less clear. He found that he could not remember at all how he had come upstairs the last time.

One thing was evident, however. He had not been arrested, since he found himself in his chamber unmolested. Who, then, had been taken in his place? He was amazed to find that he did not know. Surely, at the first inquest, something must have been said which would have led to the arrest of some one. The law never went away empty-handed. He racked his aching brain to bring back the incident, but it would not be recalled—for the excellent reason that he really knew nothing about the matter. It was a relief at all events to find that he had actually been examined with the rest and had not been suspected. Nevertheless, he had undoubtedly done the deed, of which the mere thought made him tremble in every joint. Or was it all a part of his drunken dreams? No, that, at least, could not be explained away. For a long time he moved uneasily from his barricade at the door to the window, from which he tried to see the street below. But his room was in the attic, and the broad stone cornice of the palace cut

off the view effectually. At last he began to pull the furniture away from the entrance, slowly at first, as he merely thought of its uselessness, then with feverish haste, as he realised that the fact of his trying to entrench himself in his quarters would seem suspicious. In a few seconds he had restored everything to its place. The brandy bottles disappeared into the cupboard in the wall; a bit of candle filled the empty candlestick. He tore off his clothes and jumped into bed, tossing himself about to give it the appearance of having been slept in. Then he got up again and proceeded to make his toilet. All his clothes were black, and he had but a slender choice. He understood vaguely, however, that there would be a funeral or some sort of ceremony in which all the members of the household would be expected to join, and he arrayed himself in the best he had—a decent suit of broadcloth, a clean shirt, a black tie. He looked at himself in the cracked mirror. His face was ghastly yellow, the whites of his eyes injected with blood, the veins at the temples swollen and congested. He was afraid that his appearance might excite remark, though it was in reality not very much changed.

Then, as he thought of this, he realised that he was to meet a score of persons, some of whom would very probably look at him curiously. His nerves were in a shattered condition; he almost broke down at the mere idea of what he must face. What would become of him in the presence of the reality? And yet he had met the whole household bravely enough on the very spot where he had done the murder on the previous evening. He sat down, overpowered by the revival of his fear and horror. The room swam around him and he grasped the edge of the table for support. But he could not stay there all day. Any reluctance to make his appearance at such a time might be fatal. There was only one way to get the necessary courage, and that was to drink again. He shrank from the thought. He had not acquired the habitual drunkard's certainty of finding nerve and boldness and steadiness of hand in the morning draught, and the idea of tasting the liquor was loathsome to him in his disordered state. He rose to his feet and tried to act as though he were in the midst of a crowd of persons.

Ape-like, he grinned at the furniture, walked about the room, spoke aloud, pretending that he was meeting real people, tried to frame sentences expressive of profound grief. He opened the door and made a pretence of greeting an imaginary individual. It was as though a stream of cold water had fallen upon his neck. His knees knocked together, and he felt sick with fear. There was evidently no use in attempting to go down without some stimulant. Almost sorrowfully he shut the door again, and took the bottle from its place. He took several small doses, patiently testing the effect until his hand was steady and warm.

Ten minutes later he was kneeling with many others before the catafalque, beneath the great canopy of black. He was dazed by the light of the great branches of candles, and confused by the subdued sound of whispering and of softly treading feet; but he knew that his outward demeanour was calm and collected, and that he exhibited no signs of nervousness. San Giacinto was standing near one of the doors, having taken his turn with the sons of the dead man to remain in the room. He watched the librarian and a rough sort of pity made itself felt in his heart.

"Poor Meschini!" he thought. "He has lost a friend. I daresay he is more genuinely sorry than all the family put together, poor fellow!"

Arnoldo Meschini, kneeling before the body of the man he had murdered, with a brandy bottle in the pocket of his long coat, would have come to an evil end if the giant had guessed the truth. But he looked what he was supposed to be, the humble, ill-paid, half-starved librarian, mourning the master he had faithfully served for thirty years. He knelt a long time, his lips moving mechanically with the words of an oft-repeated prayer. In reality he was afraid to rise from his knees alone, and was waiting until some of the others made the first move. But the rows of lacqueys, doubtless believing that the amount of their future wages would largely depend upon the vigour of their present mourning, did not seem inclined to desist from their orisons. To Meschini the time was interminable, and his courage was beginning to ooze away from him, as the sense of his position acquired

a tormenting force. He could have borne it well enough in a church, in the midst of a vast congregation, he could have fought off his horror even here for a few minutes, but to sustain such a part for a quarter of an hour seemed almost impossible. He would have given his soul, which indeed was just then of but small value, to take a sip of courage from the bottle, and his clasped fingers twitched nervously, longing to find the way to his pocket. He glanced along the line, measuring his position, to see whether there was a possibility of drinking without being observed, but he saw that it would be madness to think of it, and began repeating his prayer with redoubled energy, in the hope of distracting his mind. Then a horrible delusion began to take possession of him; he fancied that the dead man was beginning to turn his head slowly, almost imperceptibly, towards him. Those closed eyes would open and look him in the face, a supernatural voice would speak his name. As on the previous afternoon the cold perspiration began to trickle from his brow. He was on the point of crying aloud with terror, when the man next to him rose. In an instant he was on his feet. Both bent again, crossed themselves, and retired. Meschini stumbled and caught at his companion's arm, but succeeded in gaining the door. As he passed out, his face was so discomposed that San Giacinto looked down upon him with increased compassion, then followed him a few steps and laid his hand on his shoulder. The librarian started violently and stood still.

"He was a good friend to you, Signor Meschini," said the big man kindly. "But take heart, you shall not be forgotten."

The dreaded moment had come, and it had been very terrible, but San Giacinto's tone was reassuring. He could not have suspected anything, though the servants said that he was an inscrutable man, profound in his thoughts and fearful in his anger. He was the one of all the family whom Meschini most feared.

"God have mercy on him!" whined the librarian, trembling to his feet. "He was the best of men, and is no doubt in glory!"

"No doubt," replied San Giacinto drily. He entertained opinions of his own upon the subject, and he did

not like the man's tone. "No doubt," he repeated. "We will try and fulfil his wishes with regard to you."

"Grazie, Eccellenza!" said Meschini with great humility, making horns with his fingers behind his back to ward off the evil eye, and edging away in the direction of the grand staircase.

San Giacinto returned to the door and paid no more attention to him. Then Meschini almost ran down the stairs and did not slacken his speed until he found himself in the street. The cold air of the winter's day revived him, and he found himself walking rapidly in the direction of the Ponte Quattro Capi. He generally took that direction when he went out without any especial object, for his friend Tiberio Colaizzo, the poor apothecary, had his shop upon the little island of Saint Bartholomew, which is connected with the shores of the river by a double bridge, whence the name, "the birdge of four heads."

Meschini paused and looked over the parapet at the yellow swirling water. The eddies seemed to take queer shapes and he watched them for a long time. He had a splitting headache, of the kind which is made more painful by looking at quickly moving objects, which, at the same time, exercise an irresistible fascination over the eye. Almost unconsciously he compared his own life to the river — turbid, winding, destroying. The simile was incoherent, like most of his fancies on that day, but it served to express a thought, and he began to feel an odd sympathy for the muddy stream, such as perhaps no one had ever felt before him. But as he looked he grew dizzy, and drew back from the parapet. There must have been something strange in his face, for a man who was passing looked at him curiously and asked whether he were ill. He shook his head with a sickly smile and passed on.

The apothecary was standing idly at his door, waiting for a custom that rarely came his way. He was a cadaverous man, about fifty years of age, with eyes of an uncertain colour set deep in his head. An ill-kept, grizzled beard descended upon his chest, and gave a certain wildness to his appearance. A very shabby green smoking cap, trimmed with tarnished silver lace, was set far back

upon his head, displaying a wrinkled forehead, much heightened by baldness, but of proportions that denoted a large and active brain. That he took snuff in great quantities was apparent. Otherwise he was neither very dirty nor very clean, but his thumbs had that peculiar shape which seems to be the result of constantly rolling pills. Meschini stopped before him.

"Sor Arnaldo, good-day," said the chemist, scrutinising his friend's face curiously.

"Good-day, Sor Tiberio," replied the librarian. "Will you let me come in for a little moment?" There seemed to be an attempt at a jest in the question, for the apothecary almost smiled.

"Padrone," he said, retiring backwards through the narrow door. "A game of *scopa* to-day?"

"Have you the time to spare?" inquired the other, in a serious tone. They always maintained the myth that Tiberio Colaisso was a very busy man.

"To-day," answered the latter, without a smile, and emphasising the word as though it defined an exception, "to-day, I have nothing to do. Besides, it is early."

"We can play a hand and then we can dine at Cicco's."

"Being Friday in Advent, I had intended to fast," replied the apothecary, who had not a penny in his pocket. "But since you are so good as to invite me, I do not say no."

Meschini said nothing, for he understood the situation, which was by no means a novel one. His friend produced a pack of Italian cards, almost black with age. He gave Meschini the only chair, and seated himself upon a three-legged stool.

It was a dismal scene. The shop was like many of its kind in the poorer quarters of old Rome. There was room for the counter and for three people to stand before it when the door was shut. The floor was covered with a broken pavement of dingy bricks. As the two men began to play a fine, drizzling rain wet the silent street outside, and the bricks within at once exhibited an unctuous moisture. The sky had become cloudy after the fine morning, and there was little light in the shop. Three of the walls were hidden by cases with glass doors, containing an assortment of majolica jars which would

delight a modern amateur, but which looked dingy and mean in the poor shop. Here and there, between them, stood bottles large and small, some broken and dusty, others filled with liquids and bearing paper labels, brown with age, the ink inscriptions fading into the dirty surface that surrounded them. The only things in the place which looked tolerably clean were the little brass scales and the white marble tablet for compounding solid medicines.

The two men looked as though they belonged to the little room. Meschini's yellow complexion was as much in keeping with the surroundings as the chemist's gray, colourless face. His bloodshot eyes wandered from the half-defaced cards to the objects in the shop, and he was uncertain in his play. His companion looked at him as though he were trying to solve some intricate problem that gave him trouble. He himself was a man who, like the librarian, had begun life under favourable circumstances, had studied medicine and had practised it. But he had been unfortunate, and, though talented, did not possess the qualifications most necessary for his profession. He had busied himself with chemistry and had invented a universal panacea which had failed, and in which he had sunk most of his small capital. Disgusted with his reverses he had gravitated slowly to his present position. Finding him careless and indifferent to their wants, his customers had dropped away, one by one, until he earned barely enough to keep body and soul together. Only the poorest class of people, emboldened by the mean aspect of his shop, came in to get a plaster, an ointment or a black draught, at the lowest possible prices. And yet, in certain branches, Tiberio Colaisso was a learned man. At all events he had proved himself able to do all that Meschini asked of him. He was keen, too, in an indolent way, and a single glance had satisfied him that something very unusual had happened to the librarian. He watched him patiently, hoping to find out the truth without questions. At the same time, the hope of winning a few coppers made him keep an eye on the game. To his surprise he won easily, and he was further astonished when he saw that the miserly Meschini was not inclined to complain of his losses nor to accuse him of cheating.

"You are not lucky to-day," he remarked at last, when his winnings amounted to a couple of pauls — a modern franc in all.

Meschini looked at him uneasily and wiped his brow, leaning back in the rickety chair. His hands were trembling.

"No," he answered. "I am not quite myself to-day. The fact is that a most dreadful tragedy occurred in our house last night, the mere thought of which gives me the fever. I am even obliged to take a little stimulant from time to time."

So saying, he drew the bottle from his pocket and applied it to his lips. He had hoped that it would not be necessary, but he was unable to do without it very long, his nerves being broken down by the quantity he had taken on the previous night. Colaisso looked on in silence, more puzzled than ever. The librarian seemed to be revived by the dose, and spoke more cheerfully after it.

"A most terrible tragedy," he said. "The prince was murdered yesterday afternoon. I could not speak of it to you at once."

"Murdered?" exclaimed the apothecary in amazement. "And by whom?"

"That is the mystery. He was found dead in his study. I will tell you all I know."

Meschini communicated the story to his friend in a disjointed fashion, interspersing his narrative with many comments intended to give himself courage to proceed. He told the tale with evident reluctance, but he could not avoid the necessity. If Tiberio Colaisso read the account in the paper that evening, as he undoubtedly would, he would wonder why his companion had not been the first to relate the catastrophe; and this wonder might turn into a suspicion. It would have been better not to come to the apothecary's, but since he found himself there he could not escape from informing him of what had happened.

"It is very strange," said the chemist, when he had heard all. Meschini thought he detected a disagreeable look in his eyes.

"It is, indeed," he answered. "I am made ill by it. See how my hand trembles. I am cold and hot."

"You have been drinking too much," said Colaisso suddenly, and with a certain brutality that startled his friend. "You are not sober. You must have taken a great deal last night. A libation to the dead, I suppose, in the manner of the ancients."

Meschini winced visibly and began to shuffle the cards, while he attempted to smile to hide his embarrassment.

"I was not well yesterday — at least — I do not know what was the matter — a headache, I think, nothing more. And then, this awful catastrophe — horrible! My nerves are unstrung. I can scarcely speak."

"You need sleep first, and then a tonic," said the apothecary in a business-like tone.

"I slept until late this morning. It did me no good. I am half dead myself. Yes, if I could sleep again it might do me good."

"Go home and go to bed. If I were in your place I would not drink any more of that liquor. It will only make you worse."

"Give me something to make me sleep. I will take it."

The apothecary looked long at him and seemed to be weighing something in his judgment. An evil thought crossed his mind. He was very poor. He knew well enough, in spite of Meschini's protestations, that he was not so poor as he pretended to be. If he were he could not have paid so regularly for the chemicals and for the experiments necessary to the preparation of his inks. More than once the operations had proved to be expensive, but the librarian had never complained, though he haggled for a baiocco over his dinner at Cicco's wine shop, and was generally angry when he lost a paul at cards. He had money somewhere. It was evident that he was in a highly nervous state. If he could be induced to take opium once or twice it might become a habit. To sell opium was very profitable, and Colaisso knew well enough the power of the vice and the proportions it would soon assume, especially if Meschini thought the medicine contained only some harmless drug.

"Very well," said the apothecary. "I will make you a draught. But you must be sure that you are ready to sleep when you take it. It acts very quickly."

The draught which Meschini carried home with him

was nothing but, weak laudanum and water. It looked innocent enough in the little glass bottle labelled "Sleeping potion." But the effect of it, as Colaisso had told him, was very rapid. Exhausted by all he had suffered, the librarian closed the windows of his room and lay down to rest. In a quarter of an hour he was in a heavy sleep. In his dreams he was happier than he had ever been before. The whole world seemed to be his, to use as he pleased. He was transformed into a magnificent being such as he had never imagined in his waking hours. He passed from one scene of splendour to another, from glory to glory, surrounded by forms of beauty, by showers of golden light in a beatitude beyond all description. It was as though he had suddenly become emperor of the whole universe. He floated through wondrous regions of soft colour, and strains of divine music sounded in his ears. Gentle hands carried him with an easy swaying motion to transcendent heights, where every breath he drew was like a draught of sparkling life. His whole being was filled with something which he knew was happiness, until he felt as though he could not contain the overflowing joy. At one moment he glided beyond the clouds through a gorgeous sunset; at another he was lying on a soft invisible couch, looking out to the bright distance—distance that never ended, never could end, but the contemplation of which was rapture, the greater for being inexplicable. An exquisite new sense was in him, corresponding to no bodily instinct, but rejoicing wildly in something that could not be defined, nor understood, nor measured, but only felt.

At last he began to descend, slowly at first and then with increasing speed, till he grew giddy and unconscious in the fall. He awoke and uttered a cry of terror. It was night, and he was alone in the dark. He was chilled to the bone, too, and his head was heavy, but the darkness was unbearable, and though he would gladly have slept again he dared not remain an instant without a light. He groped about for his matches, found them, and lit a candle. A neighbouring clock tolled out the hour of midnight, and the sound of the bells terrified him beyond measure. Cold, miserable, in an agony of fear, his nervousness doubled by the opium and by a need

of food of which he was not aware, there was but one remedy within his reach. The sleeping potion had been calculated for one occasion only, and it was all gone. He tried to drain a few drops from the phial, and a drowsy, half-sickening odour rose from it to his nostrils. But there was nothing left, nothing but the brandy, and little more than half a bottle of that. It was enough for his present need, however, and more than enough. He drank greedily, for he was parched with thirst, though hardly conscious of the fact. Then he slept till morning. But when he opened his eyes he was conscious that he was in a worse state than on the previous day. He was not only nervous but exhausted, and it was with feeble steps that he made his way to his friend's shop, in order to procure a double dose of the sleeping mixture. If he could sleep through the twenty-four hours, he thought, so as not to wake up in the dead of night, he should be better. When he made his appearance Tiberio Colaisso knew what he wanted, and although he had half repented of what he had done, the renewed possibility of selling the precious drug was a temptation he could not withstand.

One day succeeded another, and each morning saw Arnaldo Meschini crossing the Ponte Quattro Capi on his way to the apothecary's. In the ordinary course of human nature a man does not become an opium-eater in a day, nor even, perhaps, in a week, but to the librarian the narcotic became a necessity almost from the first. Its action, combined with incessant doses of alcohol, was destructive, but the man's constitution was stronger than would have been believed. He possessed, moreover, a great power of controlling his features when he was not assailed by supernatural fears, and so it came about that, living almost in solitude, no one in the Palazzo Montevarchi was aware of his state. It was bad enough, indeed, for when he was not under the influence of brandy he was sleeping from the effects of opium. In three days he was willing to pay anything the apothecary asked, and seemed scarcely conscious of the payments he made. He kept up a show of playing the accustomed game of cards, but he was absent-minded, and was not even angry at his daily losses. The apothecary had more

money in his pocket than he had possessed for many a day. As Arnolfo Meschini sank deeper and deeper, the chemist's spirits rose, and he began to assume an air of unwonted prosperity. One of the earliest results of the librarian's degraded condition was that Tiberio Colaisso procured himself a new green smoking cap ornamented profusely with fresh silver lace.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Sant' Ilario had guessed rightly that the place of safety and secrecy to which he was to be conveyed was no other than the Holy Office, or prison of the Inquisition. He was familiar with the interior of the building, and knew that it contained none of the horrors generally attributed to it, so that, on the whole, he was well satisfied with the cardinal's choice. The cell to which he was conveyed after dark was a large room on the second story, comfortably furnished and bearing no sign of its use but the ornamented iron grating that filled the window. The walls were not thicker than those of most Roman palaces, and the chamber was dry and airy, and sufficiently warmed by a huge brazier of coals. It was clear from the way in which he was treated that the cardinal relied upon his honour more than upon any use of force in order to keep him in custody. A silent individual in a black coat had brought him in a carriage to the great entrance, whence a man of similar discretion and of like appearance had conducted him to his cell. This person returned soon afterwards, bringing a sufficient meal of fish and vegetables—it was Friday—decently cooked and almost luxuriously served. An hour later the man came back to carry away what was left. He asked whether the prisoner needed anything else for the night.

"I would like to know," said Giovanni, "whether any of my friends will be allowed to see me, if I ask it."

"I am directed to say that any request or complaint

you have to make will be transmitted to his Eminence by a special messenger," answered the man. "Anything," he added in explanation, "beyond what concerns your personal comfort. In this respect I am at liberty to give you whatever you desire, within reason."

"Thank you. I will endeavour to be reasonable," replied Giovanni. "I am much obliged to you."

The man left the room and closed the door softly, so softly that the prisoner wondered whether he had turned the key. On examining the panels he saw, however, that they were smooth and not broken by any latch or keyhole. The spring was on the outside, and there was no means whatever of opening the door from within.

Giovanni wondered why a special messenger was to be employed to carry any request he made directly to the cardinal. The direction could not have been given idly, nor was it without some especial reason that he was at once told of it. Assuredly his Eminence was not expecting the prince to repent of his bargain and to send word that he wished to be released. The idea was absurd. The great man might suppose, however, that Giovanni would desire to send some communication to his wife, who would naturally be anxious about his absence. Against this contingency, however, Sant' Ilario had provided by means of the note he had despatched to her. Several days would elapse before she began to expect him, so that he had plenty of time to reflect upon his future course. Meanwhile he resolved to ask for nothing. Indeed, he had no requirements. He had money in his pockets and could send the attendant to buy any linen he needed without getting it from his home.

He was in a state of mind in which nothing could have pleased him better than solitary imprisonment. He felt at once a sense of rest and a freedom from all responsibility that soothed his nerves and calmed his thoughts. For many days he had lived in a condition bordering on madness. Every interview with Corona was a disappointment, and brought with it a new suffering. Much as he would have dreaded the idea of being separated from her for any length of time, the temporary impossibility of seeing her was now a relief, of which he realised the importance more and more as the hours succeeded