

Ouida

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**A House-Party,  
Don Gesualdo,  
and A Rainy  
June**

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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**A HOUSE-PARTY  
DON GESUALDO**

AND

**A RAINY JUNE.**

BY OUIDA

AUTHOR OF "OTHMAR," "PRINCESS NAPEAXINE,"  
"UNDER TWO FLAGS," "WANDA," ETC., ETC.

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**A HOUSE-PARTY.**

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## CHAPTER I.

It is an August morning. It is an old English manor-house. There is a breakfast-room hung with old gilded leather of the times of the Stuarts; it has oak furniture of the same period; it has leaded lattices with stained glass in some of their frames, and the motto of the house in old French, "Jay bon vouloir," emblazoned there with the crest of a heron resting in a crown. Thence, windows open on to a green, quaint, lovely garden, which was laid out by Monsieur Beaumont when he planned the gardens of Hampton Court. There are clipped yew-tree walks and arbors and fantastic forms; there are stone terraces and steps like those of Haddon, and there are peacocks which pace and perch upon them; there are beds full of all the flowers which blossomed in the England of the Stuarts, and birds dart and butterflies pass above them; there are huge old trees, cedars, lime, hornbeam; beyond the gardens there are the woods and grassy lawns of the home park.

The place is called Surrenden Court, and is one of the houses of George, Earl of Usk,—his favorite house in what pastoral people call autumn, and what he calls the shooting season.

Lord Usk is a well-made man of fifty, with a good-looking face, a little spoiled by a permanent expression of irritability and impatience, which is due to the state of his liver; his eyes are good-tempered, his mouth is querulous; nature meant him for a very amiable man, but the dinner-table has interfered with, and in a measure upset, the good intentions of nature: it very often does. Dorothy, his wife, who is by birth a Fitz-Charles, third daughter of the Duke of Derry, is a still pretty woman of thirty-five or -six, inclined to an *embonpoint* which is the despair of herself and her maids; she has small features, a gay expression, and very intelligent eyes; she does not look at all a great lady, but she can be one when it is necessary. She prefers those merrier moments in life in which it is not necessary. She and Lord Usk, then Lord Surrenden, were greatly in love when they married; sixteen years have gone by since then, and it now seems very odd to each of them that they should ever have been so. They are not, however, bad friends, and have even at the bottom of their hearts a lasting regard for each other. This is saying much, as times go. When they are alone they quarrel considerably; but then they are so seldom alone. They both consider this disputatiousness the inevitable result of their respective relations. They have three sons, very pretty boys and great pickles, and two young and handsome daughters. The eldest son, Lord Surrenden, rejoices in the names of Victor Albert Augustus George, and is generally known as Boom.

They are now at breakfast in the garden-chamber; the china is old Chelsea, the silver is Queen Anne, the roses are old-fashioned Jacqueminots and real cabbage roses. There is a pleasant scent from flowers, coffee, cigarettes, and newly-mown grass. There is a litter of many papers on the floor.

There is yet a fortnight before the shooting begins; Lord Usk feels that those fifteen days will be intolerable; he repents a fit of fright and economy in which he has sold his great Scotch moors and deer-forest to an American capitalist; not having his own lands in Scotland any longer, pride has kept him from accepting any of the many invitations of his friends to go to them there for the Twelfth; but he has a keen dread of the ensuing fifteen days without sport.

His wife has asked her own set; but he hates her set; he does not much like his own; there is only Dulcia Waverley whom he does like, and Lady Waverley will not come till the twentieth. He feels bored, hipped, annoyed; he would like to strangle the American who has bought Achnalorrie. Achnalorrie, having gone irrevocably out of his hands, represents to him for the time being the one absolutely to be desired spot upon earth. Good heavens! he thinks, can he have been such a fool as to sell it?

When he was George Rochfort, a boy of much promise going up to Oxford from Eton, he had a clever brain, a love of classics, and much inclination to scholarly pursuits; but he gradually lost all these tastes little by little, he could not very well have said how; and now he never hardly opens a book, and he has drifted into that odd, English habit of only counting time by the seasons for killing things. There is nothing to kill just now except rabbits, which he scorns, so he falls foul of his wife's list of people she has invited, which is lying, temptingly provocative, of course, on the breakfast-table, scribbled in pencil on a sheet of note-paper.

"Always the same thing!" he says, as he glances over it. "Always the very worst lot you could get together, and there isn't one of the husbands or one of the wives!"

"Of course there isn't," says Lady Usk, looking up from a Society newspaper which told her that her friends were all where they were not, and fitted all the caps of scandal on to all the wrong heads, and yet from some mysterious reason gave her amusement on account of its very blunders.

"I do think," he continues, "that nobody on earth ever had such absolutely indecent house-parties as yours!"

"You always say these absurd things."

"I don't think they're absurd. Look at your list: everybody asks that he may meet somebody whom he shouldn't meet!"

"What nonsense! As if they didn't all meet everywhere every day, and as if it mattered!"

"It does matter."

He has not been a moral man himself, but at fifty he likes to *faire la morale pour les autres*. When we are compelled to relinquish cakes and ale ourselves, we begin honestly to believe them indigestible for everybody; why should they be sold, or be made, at all?

"It does matter," he repeats. "Your people are too larky, much too larky. You grow worse every year. You don't care a straw what's said about 'em so long as they please you, and you let 'em carry on till there's the devil to pay."

"They pay him,—I don't; and they like it."

"I know they like it, but I don't choose you should give 'em opportunity for it."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"Not nonsense at all. This house is a kind of Agapemone, a sort of Orleans Club."

"You ought not to be bored in it, then."

"One is always bored at one's own place. I tell you I don't like your people. You ask everybody who wants to meet somebody else; and it's never respectable. It's a joke at the clubs. Jack's always saying to his Jill, 'We'll get Lady Usk to ask us together,' and they do. I say it's indecent."

"But, my dear, if Jack sulks without his Jill, and if Jill's in bad form without Jack, one must ask them together. I want people to like me and to enjoy themselves."

"Enjoy themselves! That means flirting till all's blue with somebody you'd hate if you'd married her."

"What does that matter, so long as they're amused?"

"What an immoral woman you are, Dolly! To hear you----"

"I only mean that I don't think it matters; you know it doesn't matter; everybody's always doing it."

"If you'd only ask some of the women's husbands, some of the men's wives----"

"I couldn't do that, dear. I want people to like my house!"

"Just as I say--you're so immoral."

"No, I'm not. Nobody ever pays a bill for me, except you."

"Enviably distinction! Pay! I think I do pay! Though why you can't keep within your pin-money----"

"Pin-money means money to buy pins. I did buy two diamond pins with it last year, eight hundred guineas each."

"You ought to buy clothes."

"Clothes! What an expression! I can't buy a child's frock even; it all goes in little things, and all my own money too; wedding-presents, christening-presents, churches, orphanages, concerts; and it's all nonsense you're grumbling about my bills to Worth and Elise and Viot; Boom read me a passage out of his Ovid last Easter, in which it describes the quantities of things that the Roman women had to wear and make them look pretty; a great deal more than any of us ever have, and their whole life was spent over their toilets, and then they had tortoise-shell steps to get down from their litters, and their dogs had jewelled collars; and liking to have things nice is nothing new, though you talk as if it were a crime and we'd invented it!"

Usk laughs a little crossly as she comes to the end of her breathless sentences. "*Naso Magister eris*," he remarks, "might certainly be inscribed over the chamber doors of all your friends!"

"I know you mean something odious. My friends are all charming people."

"I'll tell you what I do mean,—that I don't like the house made a joke of in London; I'll shut it up and go abroad if the thing goes on. If a scandal's begun in town in the season, it always comes down here to carry on; if there are two

people fond of each other when they shouldn't be, you always ask 'em down here and make pets of 'em. As you're taking to quoting Ovid, I may as well tell you that in his time the honest women didn't do this sort of thing; they left it to the light-o'-loves under the porticoes."

"I really don't know what I've done that I should be called an honest woman! One would think you were speaking to the housemaids! I wish you'd go and stay in somebody else's house: you always spoil things here."

"Very sorry. I like my own shooting. Three days here, three days there, three days t'other place, and expected to leave the game behind you and to say 'thanks' if your host gives you a few brace to take away with you,--not for me, if I know it, while there's a bird in the covers at my own places."

"I thought you were always bored at home?"

"Not when I'm shooting. I don't mind having the house full, either, only I want you to get decenter people in it. Why, look at your list!--they're all paired, like animals in the ark. Here's Lady Arthur for Hugo Mountjoy, here's Iona and Madame de Caillac, here's Mrs. Curzon for Lawrence, here's Dick Wootton and Mrs. Faversham, here's the Duke and Lady Dolgelly, here's old Beaumanoir and Olive Dawlish. I say it's absolutely indecent, when you know how all these people are talked about!"

"If one waited for somebody not talked about, one would have an empty house or fill it with old fogies. My dear George, haven't you ever seen that advertisement about matches which will only light on their own boxes? People in love are like those matches. If you ask the matches without the boxes, or the boxes without the matches, you won't get anything out of either."

"Ovid was born too early: he never knew this admirable illustration!"

"There's only one thing worse than inviting people without the people they care about; it is to invite them with the people they're tired of: I did that once last year. I asked Madame de Saumur and Gervase together, and then found that they had broken with each other two months before. That is the sort of blunder I do hate to make!"

"Well, nothing happened?"

"Of course nothing happened. Nobody ever shows anything. But it looks so stupid in *me*: one is always expected to know----"

"What an increase to the responsibilities of a hostess! She must know all the ins and outs of her acquaintances' unlawful affections as a Prussian officer knows the French by-roads! How simple an affair it used to be when the Victorian reign was young, and Lord and Lady So-and-So and Mr. and Mrs. Nobody all came to stay for a week in twos and twos as inevitably as we buy fancy pigeons in pairs!"

"You pretend to regret those days, but you know you'd be horribly bored if you had always to go out with me."

"Politeness would require me to deny, but truthfulness would compel me to assent."

"Of course it would. You don't want anybody with you who has heard all your best stories a thousand times, and knows what your doctor has told you not to eat; I don't want anybody who has seen how I look when I'm ill, and knows where my false hair is put on. It is quite natural. By the way, Boom says Ovid's ladies had perukes, too, as one of them put her wig on upside down before him, and it chilled his feelings towards her; it would chill most people's. I wonder if they made them well in those days, and what they cost."

"I think you might have invited *some* of the husbands."

"Oh, dear, no. Why? They're all staying somewhere else."

"And your friends are never jealous, I suppose; at least, never about their husbands?"

"An agreeable woman is never jealous of anybody. She hasn't time to be. It is only the women who can't amuse themselves who make that sort of fuss."

"Are you an agreeable woman, my dear?"

"I have always been told so, by everybody except yourself."

Lord Usk rose and laughed as he lighted a cigar.

"Well, I won't have any scandal in the house. Mind that."

"You'd better put that up on a placard, as you have put 'No fees allowed to the servants,' up in the hall."

"I'm sure I would with pleasure if I thought anybody would attend to it. I don't like you're set, Dolly. That's the truth. I wish you'd drop nine-tenths of 'em."

"My dear George, I wish you would mind your own business, to use a very vulgar expression. Do I ever say anything when you talk nonsense in the Lords, and when you give your political picnics and shout yourself hoarse to the farmers who go away and vote against your man? Do I ever say anything when you shoot pheasants which cost you a sovereign a head for their corn, and stalk stags which cost you eighty pounds each for their keep, and lose races with horses which cost you ten thousand a year for their breeding and training? Do I ever say anything when you think that people who are hungering for the whole of your land will be either grateful or delighted because you take ten per cent. off their rents? You know I don't. I think you ought to be allowed to ruin yourself and accelerate the revolution in any absurd way which may seem best to you. In return, pray let me manage my own house-parties and choose my own acquaintances. It is not much to ask. What! are you gone away? How exactly like a man, to go away when he gets the worst of the argument!"

Lord Usk has gone into the gardens in a towering rage. He is a gentleman: he will quarrel with his wife all day long, but he will always stop short of swearing at her, and he feels that if he stays in the room a moment longer he will swear: that allusion to the Scotch stags is too much for humanity (with a liver) to endure. When Achnalorrie is sold to that beastly American, to be twitted with what stags used to cost! Certainly they had cost a great deal, and the keepers had been bores, and the crofters had been nuisances, and there had always been some disease or other among the birds, and he had never cared as much as some men for deer-stalking; but still, as Achnalorrie is irrevocably gone, the thirty-mile drive over the bleak hills, and the ugly house on the stony strathside, and the blinding rains, and the driving snows, and the swelling streams which the horses had to cross as best they could, all seem unspeakably lovely to him and the sole things worth living for: and then his wife has the heartlessness to twit him with the cost of each stag!

"Women have no feeling," he growls, as he walks about the gardens. "If they think they can make a point they'll make it, let it hurt you how it may."

He strolls down between two high yew walls with his hands in his pockets, and feels injured and aggrieved. He ought to be a very happy person; he is still rich despite the troubles of the times, he has fine estates, fair rents, handsome children, and a life of continual change, and yet he is bored and doesn't like anything, and this peaceful, green garden, with its innumerable memories and its delicious, dreamful solitudes, says nothing at all to him. Is it his own fault or the fault of his world? He doesn't know. He supposes it is the fault of his liver. His father was always contented, and jolly as a sand-boy; but then in his father's time there was no grouse-disease, no row about rents, no wire fencing to lame your horses, no Ground Game Bill to corrupt your farmers, no Leaseholder's Bills hanging over your London houses, no corn imported from Arkansas and California, no Joe Chamberlain. When poor Boom's turn comes, how will things be? Joe Chamberlain President, perhaps, and Surrenden cut up into allotment-grounds.

He possesses two other very big places in adjacent counties, Orme Castle and Denton Abbey, but they are ponderous, vast, gorgeous, ceremonious, ugly: he detests both of them. Of Surrenden he is, on the contrary, as fond as he can be of anything except the lost Achnalorrie and a little cosey house that he has at Newmarket where the shadow of Lady Usk has never fallen.

He hears the noise of wheels on gravel. It comes from the other side of the house; it is his brake and his omnibus going down the avenue on their way to the nearest railway-station, four miles off, to meet some of his coming guests there. Well, there'll be nothing seen of them till two o'clock at luncheon. They are all people he hates, or thinks he hates, for that best of all possible reasons, that his wife likes them. Why can't Dulcia Waverley come before the 20th? Lady Waverley always amuses him, and agrees with him. It is so pleasant to be agreed with, only when one's own people do so it makes one almost more angry than when one is contradicted. When his wife agrees with him it leaves him nothing to say. When Dulcia Waverley agrees with him it leaves him with a soothing sense of being sympathized with and appreciated. Dulcia Waverley always tells him that he might have been a great statesman if he had chosen: as he always thinks so himself, the echo of his thoughts is agreeable.

He sits down in one of the clipped-yew-tree arbors to light a new cigar and smoke it peaceably. A peacock goes past him, drawing its beautiful train over the smooth-shaven grass. A mavis is singing on a rose-bough. The babble of a stream hidden under adjacent trees is pleasant on the morning silence. He doesn't notice any of it; he thinks it odiously hot, and what fools they were who clipped a yew-tree into the shape of a periwig, and what a beast of a row that trout-stream makes. Why don't they turn it, and send it farther from the house? He's got no money to do anything, or he would have it done to-morrow.

A peacock begins to scream. The noise of a peacock cannot be said to be melodious or soothing at any time.

"Why don't you wring that bird's neck?" he says savagely to a gardener's boy who is gathering up fallen rose-leaves.

The boy gapes and touches his hair, his hat being already on the ground in sign of respect. The peacocks have been at Surrenden ever since Warren Hastings sent the first pair as a present to the Lady Usk of that generation, and they are regarded with a superstitious admiration by all the good Hampshire people who walk in the gardens of Surrenden or visit them on the public day. The Surrenden peacocks are as sacred to the neighborhood and the workpeople as ever was the green ibis in old Egypt.

"How long will they touch their caps or pull their forelocks to us?" thinks Lord Usk; "though I don't see why they can reasonably object to do it as long as we take off our hats to Wales and say 'Sir' to him."

This political problem suggests the coming elections to his mind: the coming elections are a disagreeable subject for meditation: why wasn't he born in his grandfather's time, when there were pocket boroughs as handy and portable as snuff-boxes, and the county returned Lord Usk's nominee as a matter of course without question?

"Well, and what good men they got in those days," he thinks, "Fox, and Hervey, and Walpole, and Burke, and all the rest of 'em; fine orators, clever ministers, members that did the nation honor; every great noble sent up some fine fellow with breeding and brains; bunkum and bad logic and dropped aspirates had no kind of chance to get into the House in those days. Now, even when Boom's old enough to put up himself, I dare say there'll be some biscuit-baker or some pin-maker sent down by the Radical Caucus or the English Land League who'll make the poor devils believe that the millennium's coming in with them, and leave Boomnowhere!"

The prospect is so shocking that he throws his cigar-end at the peacocks and gets up out of the evergreen periwig.

As he does so he comes, to his absolute amazement, face to face with his friend Lord Brandolin.

Lord Brandolin is supposed by all the world, or at least that large portion of it which is interested in his movements, to be at that moment in the forest-recesses of Lahore.

"My dear George," says Lord Brandolin, in a very sweet voice, wholly unlike the peacocks', "I venture to take you by surprise. I have left my tub at Weymouth and come on foot across-country to you. It is most unpardonable conduct, but I have always abused your friendship."

The master of Surrenden cannot find words of welcome warm enough to satisfy himself. He is honestly delighted. Failing Dulcia Waverley, nobody could have been so agreeable to him as Brandolin. For once a proverb is justified, "a self-invited guest is thrice welcome." He is for dragging his visitor in at once to breakfast, but Brandolin resists. He has breakfasted on board his yacht; he could not eat again before luncheon; he likes the open air, he wishes to sit in the periwig and smoke.

"Do not let us disturb Lady Usk," he said. "I know chatelaines in the country have a thousand and one things to do before luncheon, and I know your house is full from gable to cellar."

"It will be by night," says the master of Surrenden, with disgust, "and not a decent soul among 'em all."

"That is very sad for you," says Brandolin, with a twinkle in his handsome eyes. He is not a handsome man, but he has beautiful eyes, a patrician profile, and a look of extreme distinction; his expression is a little cynical, but more amused; he is about forty years old, but looks younger. He is not married, having by some miracle of good fortune, or of personal dexterity, contrived to elude all the efforts made for his capture. His barony is one of the oldest in England, and he would not exchange it, were it possible, for a dukedom.

"Since when have you been so in love with decency, George?" he asks, gravely.

Lord Usk laughs. "Well, you know I think one's own house should be proper."

"No doubt," says Lord Brandolin, still more gravely. "To do one's morality vicariously is always so agreeable. Is Lady Waverley not here? She would save a hundred Sodoms, with a dozen Gomorrahs thrown in gratis."

"I thought you were in India," says his host, who does not care to pursue the subject of Lady Waverley's saintly qualifications for the salvation of cities or men.

"I went to India, but it bored me. I liked it when I was twenty-four; one likes so many things when one is twenty-four,--even champagne and a cotillon. How's Boom?"

"Very well; gone to his cousins' in Suffolk. Sure you won't have something to eat? They can bring it here in a minute if you like out-of-doors best."

"Quite sure, thanks. What a lovely place this is! I haven't seen it for years. I don't think there's another garden so beautiful in all England. After the great dust-plains and the sweltering humid heats of India, all this coolness and greenness are like Paradise."

Brandolin laughs languidly.

"Hot! you ungrateful, untravelled country squire! I should like to fasten you to a life-buoy in the middle of the Red Sea. Why do Englishmen perspire in every pore the moment the thermometer's above zero in their own land, and yet stand the tropics better than any other Europeans?"

"You know I've sold Achnalorrie?" says his host, *a propos de rien*, but to him Achnalorrie seems *a propos* of everything in creation.

Brandolin is surprised, but he does not show any surprise. "Ah! Quite right, too. If we wished to please the Radicals we couldn't find any way to please them and injure ourselves equal to our insane fashion of keeping hundreds of square acres at an enormous cost, only that for a few weeks in the summer we may do to death some of the most innocent and graceful of God's creatures."

"That's just the bosh Dolly talks."

"Lady Usk is a wise politician, then. Let her train Boom for his political life. I don't know which is the more utterly indefensible,—our enormous Highland deer-slaughter or our imbecile butchery of birds. They ought to have recorded the introduction of battue-shooting into the British Isles by the Great and Good on the Albert Memorial."

"One must shoot something."

"I never saw why. But 'something' honestly found by a setter in stubble, and three thousand head of game between five guns in a morning, are very different things. What did they give you for Achnalorrie?"

Usk discourses of Achnalorrie with breathless eloquence, as of a lover eulogizing the charms of a mistress forever lost to him.

Brandolin listens with admirable patience, and affects to agree that the vision of the American crawling on his stomach over soaking heather in a thick fog for eight hours after a "stag of ten" is a vision of such unspeakably enviable bliss that it must harrow the innermost soul of the dispossessed lord of the soil.

"And yet, do you know," he says, in conclusion, "I am such a degenerate mortal, such an unworthy 'son of a gun,' that I would actually sooner be sitting in these lovely, sunny, shady gardens, where one expects to see all Spenser's knights coming through the green shadows towards one, than I would be the buyer of Achnalorrie, even in the third week of August?"

"You say so, but you don't mean it," says the seller of Achnalorrie.

"I never say what I don't mean," says Brandolin. "And I never cared about Scotland."

The other smokes dejectedly, and refuses to be comforted.

"Lady Waverley isn't here?" asks Brandolin, with a certain significance. Lady Waverley alone would have the power of making the torturing vision of the American among the heather fade into the background of her host's reflections.



## CHAPTER II.

"Dolly is nasty about Achnalorrie," says Lord Usk, as they at last rise and approach the house.

"Not logical if she objects to moors on political principles. But ladies are seldom logical when they are as charming as Lady Usk."

"She never likes me to enjoy anything."

"I don't think you are quite just to her: you know I always tell you so." (Brandolin remembers the sweetness with which Dorothy Usk invites Lady Waverley season after season.) "You are a great grumbler, George. I know grumbling is a Briton's privilege, provided for and secured to him in Magna Charta; but still too great abuse of the privilege spoils life."

"Nobody was ever so bothered as I am." Lord Usk regards himself invariably with compassion as an ill-used man. "You always take everything lightly; but then you aren't married, and I suppose you get *some* of your rents?"

"I have always been rather poor, but I don't mind it. So long as I needn't shut up or let the old place, and can keep my boat afloat, I don't much care about anything more. I've enough for myself."

"Ah, that's just it; but when one has no end of family expenses and four great houses to keep up, and the counties looking to one for everything, and the farmers, poor devils, ruined themselves, it's another matter. I assure you if I hadn't made that sacrifice of Achnalorrie----"

Lady Usk coming out of the garden-room down the steps of one of the low windows spares Brandolin the continuation of the lament. She looks pretty; mindful of her years, she holds a rose-lined sun-umbrella over her head; the lace and muslin of her breakfast-gown sweep the lawn softly; she has her two daughters with her, the Ladies Alexandra and Hermione, known as Dodo and Lillie. She welcomes Brandolin with mixed feelings, though with unmixed suavity. She is glad to see him because he amuses Usk, and is a person of wit and distinction whom everybody tries to draw to their houses; but then he upsets all her nicely-balanced combinations; there is nobody for him; he will be the "one out" when all her people so nicely arranged and paired; and, as she is aware that he is not a person to be reconciled to such isolation, he will dispossess somebody else and cause probably those very dissensions and complications from which it is always her effort to keep all her house-parties free. However, there he is; and he is accustomed to be welcomed and made much of wherever he goes. She can do no less.

Brandolin makes himself charming in return, and turns pretty compliments to her and the children, which he can do honestly, for he has always liked Dorothy Usk, and the two young girls are as agreeable objects of contemplation as youth, good looks, fair skins, pretty frocks, open air, much exercise, and an indescribable air of "breeding" can make them. An English patrician child is one of the prettiest and most wholesome things on the face of the earth.

He goes to play lawn tennis with them and their youngest brother Cecil, called the Babe; and Lady Usk, under her rose-lined umbrella, sits as umpire, while her lord saunters off disconsolately to an interview with his steward. In these times those interviews are of an unbroken melancholy, and always result in producing the conviction in his mind that Great Britain cannot possibly last out another year. Without the nobility and gentry what will she be? and they will all go to the lands they've bought in America, if they're in luck, and if they aren't will have to turn shoeblacks.

"But the new electorate won't have its shoes blacked,--won't even have any shoes to black," suggests Mr. Lanyon, the land-steward, who began life as an oppidan at Eton and captain of an Eight, but has been glad to take refuge from the storm on the estates of his old Eton comrade, a trust which he discharges with as much zeal as discretion, dwelling contentedly in a rose-covered grange on the edge of the home-woods of Surrenden. If Boom finds things at all in order when he comes into possession, it will be wholly due to John Lanyon.

In one of the pauses of their game the tennis-players hear the brake and the omnibus returning. None of those whom they bring will be visible until luncheon at two o'clock.

"Have you anybody very nice, Lady Usk?" asks Brandolin of his hostess.

She hesitates; there are some women that he would call nice, but then they each have their man. "I hardly know," she answers, vaguely. "You don't like many people, if I remember----"

"All ladies, surely," says Brandolin, with due gravity.

"I'm sure you don't like Grandma Sophy," says the saucy Babe, sitting cross-legged in front of him. He means the Dowager Duchess of Derry, a very unpleasant person of strong principles, called by the profane "Sophia, by the grace

of God," because she ruled Ireland in a viceroyalty of short duration and long-enduring mischief. She and Brandolin do not agree, a fact which the Babe has seen and noted with the all-seeing eyes of a petted boy who is too much in his mother's drawing-rooms.

"I plead guilty to having offended her Grace Sophia," says Brandolin, "but I conclude that Lady Usk's guests are not all like that most admirable lady."

The Babe and his sisters laugh with much irreverent enjoyment; her Grace is not more appreciated by her grandchildren than she was by Ireland.

"If I had known you were going to be so kind as to remember us, I would have invited some of your friends," says his hostess, without coming to the rescue of her august mother's name. "I am so sorry; but there is nobody I think who will be very sympathetic to you. Besides, you know them all already."

"And is that fatal to sympathy? What a cruel suggestion, dear Lady Usk!"

"Sympathy is best new, like a glove. It fits best; you don't see any wrinkles in it for the first hour."

"What cynicism! Do you know that I am very fond of old gloves? But, then, I never was a dandy----"

"Lord Brandolin will like Madame Sabaroff," says Dodo, a very *eveille* young lady of thirteen.

"Fair prophetic, why? And who is Madame Sabaroff? A second O. K., a female Stepniak?"

"What are those?" says Dodo. "She is very handsome, and a princess in her own right."

"She gave me two Ukraine ponies and a real droschky," says the Babe.

"And Boom a Circassian mare, all white, and each of us a set of Siberian turquoises," says Lillie.

"Her virtues must be as many as her charms," says Brandolin.

"She is a lovely creature," adds Lady Usk, "but I don't think she is your style at all; you like fast women who make you laugh."

"My tastes are catholic where your adorable sex is in question," says Brandolin. "I am not sure that I do like fast women; they are painful to one's vanity; they flirt with everybody."

Lady Usk smiles. "The season before last, I recollect----"

"Dearest lady, don't revert to pre-historic times. Nothing is so disagreeable as to think this year of what we liked last year."

"It was Lady Leamington last year!" cries the terrible Babe.

Brandolin topples him over on the grass and hoists him up on his own shoulders. "You precocious rascal! What will you be when you are twenty?"

"Babe's future is a thing of horror to contemplate," says his mother, smiling placidly.

"Who is Madame Sabaroff?" asks Brandolin, again, with a vague curiosity.

"A princess in her own right; a god-daughter of the Emperor's," says Dodo. "She is so handsome, and her jewels--you never saw such jewels."

"Her father was Chancellor," adds her mother, "and her husband held some very high place at court, I forget what."

"Held? Is he disgraced, then, or dead?"

"Oh, dead: that is what is so nice for her," says Dodo.

"Heartless Dodo!" says Brandolin. "Then if I marry you four years hence I must kill myself to become endeared to you?"

"I should pity you indeed if you were to marry Dodo," says Dodo's mother. "She has not a grain of any human feeling, except for her dog."

Dodo laughs. She likes to be called heartless; she thinks it is *chic* and grown-up; she will weep over a lame puppy, a beaten horse, a dead bird, but she is "hard as nails to humans," as her brother Boom phrases it.

"Somebody will reign some day where the Skye reigns now over Dodo's soul. Happy somebody!" says Brandolin. "I shall be too old to be that somebody. Besides, Dodo will demand from fate an Adonis and a Cr[oe]sus in one!"

Dodo smiles, showing her pretty white teeth; she likes the banter and the flirtation with some of her father's friends. She feels quite old; in four years' time her mother will present her, and she means to marry directly after that.

"When does this Russian goddess who drops ponies and turquoises out of the clouds arrive here?" asks Brandolin, as he picks up his racquet to resume the game.

"She won't be here for three days," says Lady Usk.

"Then I fear I shall not see her."

"Oh, nonsense! You must stay all the month, at least."

"You are too good, but I have so many engagements."

"Engagements are made to be broken. I am sure George will not let you go."

"We won't let you go," cries the Babe, dragging him off to the nets, "and I'll drive you this afternoon, behind my ponies."

"I have gone through most perils that can confront a man, Babe, and I shall be equal even to that," says Brandolin.

He is a great favorite with the children at Surrenden, where he has always passed some weeks of most years ever since they can remember, or he either, for he was a godson and ward of the late Lord Usk, and always welcome there. His parents died in his infancy: even a long minority failed to make him a rich man. He has, however, as he had said, enough for his not extravagant desires, and is able to keep his old estate of St. Hubert's Lea, in Warwickshire, unembarrassed. His chief pleasure has been travelling and sailing, and he has travelled and sailed wherever a horse or a dromedary, a schooner or a canoe, can penetrate. He has told some of his travels in books so admirably written that, *mirabile dictu!* they please both learned people and lazy people. They have earned him a reputation beyond the drawing-rooms and clubs of his own fashionable acquaintances. He has even considerable learning himself, although he carries it so lightly that few people suspect it. He has had a great many passions in his life, but they have none of them made any very profound impression on him. When any one of them has grown tiresome or seemed likely to enchain him more than he thought desirable, he has always gone to Central Asia or the South Pole. The butterflies which he has broken on his wheel have, however, been of that order which is not crushed by abandonment, but mends itself easily and soars to new spheres. He is incapable of harshness to either man or woman, and his character has a warmth, a gayety, and a sincerity in it which endear him inexpressibly to all his friends. His friendships have hitherto been deeper and more enduring than his amours. He is, on the whole, happy,—as happy as any thinking being can be in this world of anomalies and purposeless pains.

"But then you always digest all you eat," Usk remarks to him, enviously.

"Put it the other way and be nearer the point," says Brandolin. "I always eat what I can digest, and I always leave off with an appetite."

"I should be content if I could begin with one," says Usk.

Brandolin is indeed singularly abstemious in the pleasures of the table, to which the good condition of his nerves and constitution may no doubt be attributed. "I have found that eating is an almost entirely unnecessary indulgence," he says in one of his books. "If an Arab can ride, fight, kill lions, and slay Frenchmen on a mere handful of pulse or of rice, why cannot we live on it too?" Whereat Usk wrote once on the margin of the volume, in pencil, "Why should we?"

The author, seeing this one day, wrote also on the margin, "For the best of all reasons: to do away with dyspepsia and with doctors, who keep their carriages on our indigestion and make fifty thousand a year each out of it."

Usk allowed that the reason was excellent; but then the renunciation involved was too enormous.

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### CHAPTER III.

Let it not for an instant be supposed that the guests of Surrenden are people looked in the least coldly or shyly on by society. Not they. They go to drawing-rooms, which means nothing; they are invited to state balls and state concerts, which means much. They are among the most eminent leaders of that world of fashion which has of late revolutionized taste, temper, and society in England. Mrs. Wentworth Curzon sails a little near the wind, perhaps because she is careless, and now and then Lady Dawlish has been "talked about," because she has a vast number of debts and a lord who occasionally makes scenes; but, with these exceptions, all these ladies are as safe on their pedestals as if they were marble statues of chastity. That their tastes are studied and their men asked to meet them everywhere is only a matter of delicate attention, like the bouquets which the housekeeper sets out in their bedrooms and the new novels which are laid on their writing-tables.

"I like my house to be pleasant," says Dorothy Usk, and she does not look any further than that: as for people's affairs, she is not supposed to know anything about them. She knows well enough that Iona would not come to her unless she had asked the Marquise de Caillac, and she is fully aware that Lawrence Hamilton would never bestow the cachet of his illustrious presence on Surrenden unless Mrs. Wentworth Curzon brought thither her *fourgons*, her maids, her collie dog, her famous emeralds, and her no less famous fans. Of course she knows that, but she is not supposed to know it. Nobody except her husband would be so ill-bred as to suggest that she did know it; and if any of her people should ever by any mischance forget their tact and stumble into the newspapers, or become notorious by any other accident, she will drop them, and nobody will be more surprised at the discovery of their naughtiness than herself. Yet she is a kind woman, a virtuous woman, a very warm friend, and not more insincere in her friendships than any one else; she is only a hostess of the last lustre of the nineteenth century, a woman who knows her London and follows it in all its amazing and illimitable condonations as in its eccentric and exceptional severities.

The guests are numerous; they might even be said to be miscellaneous, were it not that they all belonged to the same set. There is Dick Wootton, who believes himself destined to play in the last years of the nineteenth century the part played by Charles Greville in the earlier. There is Lord Vanstone, an agreeable, eccentric, unsatisfactory valetudinarian, who ought to have done great things with his life, but has always been too indolent and had too bad health to carry out his friends' very large expectations of him. There is the young Duke of Whitby, good-natured and foolish, with a simple pleasant face and a very shy manner. "If I had that ass's opportunities I'd make the world spin," says Wriothesley Ormond, who is a very poor and very witty member of Parliament, and also, which he values more, the most popular member of the Marlborough. There is Lord Iona, very handsome, very silent, very much sought after and spoiled by women. There is Hugo Mountjoy, a pretty young fellow in the Guards, with a big fortune and vague ideas that he ought to "do something;" he is not sure what. There is Lawrence Hamilton, who, as far as is possible in an age when men are clothed, but do not dress, gives the law to St. James Street in matters of male toilet. There is Sir Adolphus Beaumanoir, an ex-diplomatist, admirably preserved, charmingly loquacious, and an unconscionable flirt, though he is seventy. Each of these happy or unhappy beings has the lady invited to meet him in whom his affections are supposed to be centred, for the time being, in those tacit but potent relations which form so large a portion of men's and women's lives in these days. It is this condonance on the part of his wife which George Usk so entirely denounces, although he would be very much astonished and very much annoyed if she made any kind of objections to inviting Dulcia Waverley. Happily, there is no Act of Parliament to compel any of us to be consistent, or where would anybody be?

Lady Dolgelly, much older than himself, and with a *taille de couturiere*, as all her intimate friends delight to reveal, is supposed to be indispensable to the existence of His Grace of Whitby; Lady Leamington is not less necessary to the happiness of Wriothesley Ormond. Mr. Wootton would be supposed incapable of cutting a single joke or telling a single good story unless his spirits were sustained by the presence of Mrs. Faversham, the prettiest brunette in the universe, for whom Worth is supposed to make marvellous combinations of rose and gold, of amber and violet, of deep orange and black, and of a wondrous yellow like that of the daffodil, which no one dares to wear but herself. Mrs. Wentworth Curzon is the momentary goddess of Lawrence Hamilton; and Lord Iona, as far as he has ever opened his handsome mouth to say anything "serious," has sworn himself the slave of Madame de Caillac. Sir Adolphus has spread the aegis of his semi-paternal affection over the light little head of that extravagant little beauty, Lady Dawlish; whilst Hugo Mountjoy is similarly protected by the prescient wisdom and the rare experience of his kindest of friends, Lady Arthur Audley.

Sir Hugo and several other gilded youths there present are all exact patterns of one another, the typical young Englishman of the last years of this curious century; the masher pure and simple; close-shaven, close-cropped, faultlessly clothed, small of person, small of features, stiff, pale, insignificant, polite, supercilious, indifferent; occasionally amusing, but never by any chance original; much concerned as to health, climate, and their own nerves; often talking of their physicians, and flitting southward before cold weather like swallows, though they have nothing

whatever definite the matter with them.

These young men are all convinced that England is on the brink of ruin, and they talk of it in the same tone with which they say that their cigarette is out, or the wind is in the east. The Throne, the Church, the Lords, and the Thirty-Nine Articles are all going down pell-mell next week, and it is very shocking; nevertheless, there is no reason why they should not be studious of their digestions and very anxious about the parting of their hair.

It never occurs to them that they and their father's battue-shooting, pigeon-shooting, absenteeism, clubism, and general preference for every country except their own, may have had something to do with bringing about this impending cataclysm. That all the grand old houses standing empty, or let to strangers, among the rich Herefordshire pastures, the green Warwickshire woods, the red Devon uplands, the wild Westmoreland fells, may have also something to do with it, never occurs to them. That while they are flirting at Aix, wintering at Pau, throwing comfits at Rome, losing on the red at Monaco, touring in California, or yawning in Berlin, the demagogue's agents are whispering to the smock-frocks in the meadows, and pouring the gall of greed and hatred into the amber ale of the village pothouse, never occurs to them. If any one suggests it, they stare: "such a beastly climate, you know; nobody can stand it. Live in the country? Oh, Lord! who could live in the country?"

And then they wonder that Mr. George has replaced Sir Roger de Coverley, and that Joseph Chamberlain's voice is heard instead of Edmund Burke's.

Their host could kick them with a sensation of considerable satisfaction. Their neatness, smallness, and self-complacency irritate him excessively. The bloods of George the Fourth's time at least were men,—so he says.

"You do these poor boys injustice," says Brandolin. "When they get out in a desert, or are left to roast and die under the equator, they put off all their affectations with their starched cambric, and are not altogether unworthy of their great-grandfathers. Britons are still bad ones to beat when the trial comes."

"They must leave their constitutions at their clubs, then, and their nervous system in their hat-boxes," growls Usk. "If you are like those namby-pamby fellows when you are twenty, Boom, I'll put a bullet through your head myself," he says to his heir one morning, when that good-looking and high-spirited boy has come back from Suffolk.

Boom laughs. He is a careless, high-spirited, extravagant lad, and he does not at present lean towards the masher type. Gordon is in his head; that is his idea of a man. The country had one hero in this century, and betrayed him, and honors his betrayer; but the hearts of the boys beat truer than that of the House of Commons and the New Electorate. They remember Gordon, with a noble, headlong, quixotic wish to go and do likewise. That one lonely figure standing out against the yellow light of the desert may perhaps be as a pharos to the youth of his nation, and save them from the shipwreck which is nigh.

"Curious type, the young fellows," says Brandolin, musingly. "I don't think they will keep England what our fathers and grandfathers made it. I don't think they will, even if Chamberlain and Company will let them, which they certainly won't."

"Tell you what it is," says Usk, "it all comes of having second horses hunting, and loaders behind you out shooting."

"You confound cause and effect. The race wouldn't have come to second horses and men to load if it hadn't degenerated. Second horses and men to load indicate in England just what pasties of nightingales' tongues, and garlands of roses, indicated with the Romans,—effeminacy and self-indulgence. The Huns and the Goths were knocking at their doors, and Demos and the Debacle are knocking at ours. History repeats itself, which is lamentable, for its amazing tendency to tell the same tale again and again makes it a bore.

"I should like to know, by the way," he continues, "why English girls get taller and taller, stronger and stronger, and are as the very palm of the desert for vigor and force, whilst the English young man gets smaller and smaller, slighter and slighter, and has the nerves of an old maid and the habits of a valetudinarian. It is uncommonly droll; and, if the disparity goes on increasing, the ladies will not only get the franchise, but they will carry the male voter to the polling-place on their shoulders."

"As the French women did their husbands out of some town that surrendered in some war," said Boom, who was addicted to historical illustration and never lost occasion to display it.

"They won't carry their *husbands*," murmurs Brandolin. "They'll drive *them*, and carry somebody else."

"Will they have any husbands at all when they can do as they like?" says Boom.

"Probably not," says Brandolin. "My dear boy, what an earthly paradise awaits you when you shall be of mature age, and shall have seen us all descend one by one into the tomb, with all our social prejudices and antiquated ways!"

"I dare say he'll be a navy in New Guinea by that time, and all his acres here will be being let out by the state at a rack-rent which the people will call free land," says the father, with a groan.

"Very possible, too," replies Brandolin.

The boy's eyes go thoughtfully towards the landscape beyond the windows, the beautiful lawns, the smiling gardens, the rolling woods. A look of resolution comes over his fair frank face.

"They shan't take our lands without a fight for it," he says, with a flush on his cheeks.

"And the fight will be a fierce one," says Brandolin, with a sigh, "and I am afraid it is in Mr. Gladstone's 'dim and distant future,'--that is to say, very near at hand indeed."

"Well, I shall be ready," says the lad. Both his father and Brandolin are silent, vaguely touched by the look of the gallant and gracious boy, as he stands there with the sun in his brave blue eyes, and thinking of the troubled time which will await his manhood in this green old England, cursed by the spume of wordy demagogues, and hounded on to envenomed hatreds and causeless discontents, that the professional politician may fatten on her woes.

What will Boom live to see?

It will be a sorry day for the country when her wooded parks and stately houses are numbered with the things that are no more.

Brandolin puts his arm over the boy's shoulder, and walks away with him a little way under the deep boughs of yew.

"Look here, Boom," he says to him, "you won't care to be like those fellows, but you don't know how hard it is to get out of the fashion of one's set, to avoid going with the stream of one's contemporaries. Nobody can say what will be the style of the 'best men' when you're of age, but I'm much afraid it will still be the Masher. The Masher is not very vicious, he is often cultured, he is a more harmless animal than he tries to appear, but he is weak; and we are coming on times, or times are coming on us, when an English gentleman will want to be very strong if he is to hold his own and save his country from shame in her old age. Don't be conventional. Scores of people who would be ashamed to seem virtuous haven't courage to resist appearing vicious. Don't talk all that odious slang which is ruining English. Don't get into that stupid way of counting the days and seasons by steeple-chases, coursing-meetings, flat-races, and the various different things to be shot at. Sport is all very well in its place, but Squire Allworthy beating the turnips with a brace of setters is a different figure to Lord Newgold sending his hampers of pheasants to Leadenhall. Certainly, Mr. Bradlaugh has no more right to make a misdemeanor of our covert-shooting, and put the axe to our home woods, than we have to make a misdemeanor of his shoes and stockings, or put an axe to his head. But I think if of our own accord we centred our minds and spent our guineas less on our preserves, we might be wiser, and if we grudged our woods less to the hawk and the woodpecker and the owl and the jay, and all the rest of their native population, we should be wiser still. I never see a beast or a bird caught or dead in a keeper's trap but that I think to myself that after all, if we ourselves are caught in the end between the grinning jaws of anarchy, it will really be only partial justice on our injustice. Only I fear that it won't better the birds and beasts very much, even when we all go to prison for the crime of property, and Bradlaugh will grub up their leafy haunts with a steam plough from Chicago."

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## CHAPTER IV.

Meanwhile, let the country be going to the dogs as it may, Surrenden is full of very gay people, and all its more or less well-matched doves are cooing at Surrenden, whilst the legitimate partners of their existences are diverting themselves in other scenes, Highland moors, German baths, French chateaux, Channel yachting, or at other English country houses. It is George Usk's opinion that the whole thing is immoral: he is by no means a moral person himself. His wife, on the contrary, thinks that it is the only way to have your house liked, and that nobody is supposed to know anything, and that nothing of that sort matters; she is a woman who on her own account has never done anything that she would in the least mind having printed in the *Morning Post* to-morrow.

"Strange contradiction!" muses Brandolin. "Here is George, who's certainly no better than he should be, hallooing out for Dame Propriety, and here's my lady, who's always run as straight as a crow flies, making an Agapemone of her house to please her friends. To the pure all things are pure, I suppose; but if purity can stand Mrs. Wentworth Curzon and Lady Dawlish, I think I shall select my wife from among *les jolies impures*."

However, he takes care audibly to hold up his hostess's opinions and condemn her lord's.

"The poor little woman means well, and only likes to be popular," he reflects; "and we are none of us so sure that we shan't want indulgence some day."

Brandolin is very easy and elastic in his principles, as becomes a man of the world; he is even considered by many of his friends a good deal too lax in all his views; but in the depths of his soul there is a vague dislike to similar looseness of principle in women. He may have been glad enough to avail himself of the defect; that is another matter; he does not like it, does not admire it: licentiousness in a woman seems to him a fault in her taste; it is as if she wore fur slippers with her court train. "Of course," he will say, apologetically, "this idea of mine is born of the absurd English conventionality which sleeps in all of us; nothing better; an Englishman is always conventional somewhere, let him live as he will."

He himself is the most unconventional of beings, appalls his county, terrifies his relations, and irrevocably offends the bishop of his diocese; he has lived with Arabs, Bohemians, and wild men of the woods, and believes that he has not such a thing as prejudice about him; yet at the bottom of his soul there is this absurd feeling born of sheer conventionality,—he cannot thoroughly like a light-minded woman. Absurd, indeed, in the times in which his lot is cast! He is quite ashamed of it.

Dorothy Usk does not favor the modern mode of having relays of guests for two or three days; she thinks it makes a country house too like an hotel. She wishes her people to be perfectly well assorted, and then to stay with her at least a week, even two weeks or three weeks. People do not often object: Orme, Denton, and Surrenden are all popular places, and Surrenden is perhaps most popular of all.

"An ideal house," says Brandolin, who would not stay a day where he was not as free as air.

"It's too much like an hotel," grumbles the master of it, "and an hotel where the *table-d'hote* bell rings to deaf ears. Lord! I remember in my poor mother's days everybody had to be down to breakfast at nine o'clock every morning as regularly as if they were charity children, and the whole lot of 'em were marched off to church on Sunday whether they liked it or not. The villagers used to line the path across the fields to see the great folks pass. Now it's as much as ever Dolly can do to get a woman or two up in time to go with her. How things are changed, by Jove! And it isn't so very long ago, either."

"The march of intellect, my dear George," says Brandolin; "neither *le bon Dieu* nor we are great folks any longer."

"Well, I think it's a pity," sighs Usk. "Everybody was happier then, and jollier too, though we do tear about so to try and get amused."

"There is still nothing to prevent you going to sleep in the big pew if it pleases you," replies Brandolin; "and Lawrence Hamilton always goes that he may look at Mrs. Curzon's profile as she sings: she is really saintly then. I think Sunday service is to Englishwomen what confession is to Catholic ladies: it sweeps all the blots off the week's tablets. It is convenient, if illogical."

"You are very irreligious," says his host, who is invariably orthodox when orthodoxy doesn't interfere with anything.

"Not more so than most people," says Brandolin. "I have even felt religious when I have been alone in the savannas or in the jungle. I don't feel so in a wooden box covered with red velvet, with a curate bawling in my ears about the hewing in pieces of Agag."

"That's nothing to do with it," says Usk: "we're bound to set an example."

"That's why you doze in public, and Mrs. Curzon wears her big pearls, to lead the school-children in the way they should go."

"That's nothing to do with it," repeats Lord Usk, somewhat crossly. He has a comfortable if indistinct idea that he does something patriotic, patriarchal, and highly praiseworthy in getting up an hour earlier than usual one Sunday out of three, and putting on a tall hat, a frock-coat, and a pair of new gloves, to attend the village church for morning service when he is at Orme, Denton, or Surrenden in fine weather.

If he sleeps, what of that? There are curtains to the pew, and nobody sees him except the Babe, who takes fiendish rapture in catching big flies and releasing them from a careful little hand to alight on his father's forehead or nose. The Babe would define the Sunday morning as a horrid bore tempered by blue-bottles.

"What a curiously conventional mind is the English mind!" thinks Brandolin, when he is alone. "Carlisle is right: the gig is its standard. The gig is out of fashion as a vehicle, but the national mind remains the same as in the age of gigs,--content with the outside of things, clinging to the husk, to the shell, to the outward appearance, and satisfied with these. My dear friend puts on his chimney-pot, then takes it off and snores in his pew, and thinks that he has done something holy which will sustain both Church and State, as he thinks that he prays when he buries his face in his hat and creases his trousers on a hassock! Mysterious consolations of the unfathomable human breast!"



## CHAPTER V.

A few new people have come by the brake, and make their appearance at luncheon. More come by the five-o'clock train, and are visible at six-o'clock tea, which is always to be had in the library any time before seven: dinner at all the Usk houses is always at nine. Brandolin's doctrines do not prevail with any of his acquaintances, although he, unlike most professors, emphasizes them by example.

Among the people who come by the latter train are the famous Mr. Wootton, a man very famous at London dinner-parties, and Lady Gundrede Vansittart, whose dinners are the best in London.

"Where would those two people be if you brought the pulse and the rice you recommend into fashion?" says their host to Brandolin. "Take 'em away from the table, they'd be good for nothing. He wouldn't say 'Bo' to a goose, and she wouldn't be worth leaving a card upon. Believe me, my dear Guy, such *esprit* as there is left in us is only brought out by eating."

"I think you invert all your reasonings," says Brandolin. "Say rather, that too much eating has destroyed all *esprit*. Don't we eat all day long everywhere, or at least are expected to do so? You lament your ruined digestion. It is impossible to digest when time is only counted by what our beloved Yankees call square meals (why square I fail to fathom), and for women it is worse than for us, because they eat such quantities of sweet things we don't touch, and then the way they go in for caviare bread-and-butter, and anchovy sandwiches, and all kinds of rich cakes, and *deux doigts de Madere* or glasses of kummel at the tea-hour,—it is frightful! I wonder they have any complexions at all left, even with the assistance of all the '*secrets de Venus*.'"

"You won't alter 'em, my dear fellow," replies Usk, "if you put yourself out about it ever so much. If you were to marry a savage out of Formosa, or an Esquimaux, she'd take kindly to the caviare and the kummel before a week was out, if you brought her to Europe. Why, look at dogs,—you may keep 'em on biscuit and tripe if they live in the kennels, but if they once come to the dining-room they'll turn their noses up at a beef-steak if it isn't truffled!"

"Dogs, at least, stop short of the kummel," says Brandolin; "but if you were to put together the sherry, the dry champagne, the liqueurs at tea, the brandy in the *chasse* at dinner, which a fashionable woman takes in the course of the day (not counting any pick-me-up that she may require in her own room), the amount would be something enormous,—incredible! You would not believe the number of women who have cured me of an unhappy passion for them by letting me see what a lot they could drink."

"You will adore the Sabaroff, then. She never touches anything that I see, except tea."

"Admirable person! I am ready to adore her. Tell me more about her. By the way, who is she?"

"Oh, you must go to Dolly for biographies of her foreigners. I can't keep even their names in my head."

"Foreigners! What an expression!" cries Dorothy Usk, in disdain. "Since steam effaced frontiers, nobody but insular people like ourselves ever use such a term. Nationalities are obliterated."

She is very fond of Xenia Sabaroff: she has a great many warm attachments to women who help to make her house attractive.

"Nationalities are still discernible in different tobaccos," murmurs Brandolin. "The Havana won't acknowledge an equal in the Cavour."

"Dolly don't know anything about her," continues Usk, clinging to the subject.

"Oh, my dear!" cried his wife, shocked, "when she is the niece of the great Chancellor and her mother was a Princess Dourtza."

"You don't know anything about her," repeats Usk, with that unpleasant obstinacy characteristic of men when they talk to their wives. "You met her in Vienna and took one of your crazes for her, and she may have sent a score of lovers to Siberia, or deserve to go there herself, for anything you can tell. One can never be sure of anything about foreigners."

"How absurd you are, and how *insular*!" cries Dorothy Usk, again. "Foreigners! As if there were any foreigners in these days, when Europe is like one family!"

"A family which, like most families, squabbles and scratches pretty often, then," says Usk,—which seems to his wife a reply too vulgar to be worthy of contradiction. He is conscious that Xenia Sabaroff is a very great lady, and that her quarterings, backed by descent and alliance, are wholly irreproachable,—indeed, written in that *libro d'oro*, the

"Almanach de Gotha," for all who choose to read.

Her descent and her diamonds are alike immaculate, but her character?--he is too old-fashioned a Briton not to think it very probable that there is something *louche* there.

Usk is a Russophobic, as becomes a true Tory. He has a rooted impression that all Russians are spies when they are not swindlers; much as in the early years of the century his grandsire had been positive that all Frenchmen were assassins when they were not dancing-masters. The White Czar has replaced the Petit Caporal, and the fur cap the cocked hat, in the eyes of Englishmen of Usk's type, as an object of dread and detestation. He would never be in the least surprised if it turned out that the real object of Madame Sabaroff's visit to Surrenden were to have possible opportunities to examine the facilities of Weymouth as a landing-place for Cossacks out of Muscovite corvettes.

"Russians are tremendous swells at palaver," he says, with much contempt, "gammon you no end if you like to believe 'em: they've always some political dodge or other behind it all."

"I don't say she isn't an agreeable woman," he continues, now: his admiration of Madame Sabaroff is much mitigated by his sense that she has a rather derisive opinion of himself. "I don't say she isn't an agreeable woman, but she gives me the idea of artificiality,--insincerity,--mystery."

"Just because she's a Russian!" cries his wife, with disdain.

"My dear George," observes Brandolin, "there are preconceived ideas about all nationalities. As a rule, they are completely false. The received Continental idea is that an Englishman is a bluff, blunt, unpleasant, opinionated person, very cross, very clean too it is true, but on the strength of his tub and his constitution despising all the rest of mankind. Now, how completely absurd such an opinion is! You yourself are an example of the *suaviter in modo, fortiter in re*, of which the true-blue Briton always gives so admirable an example."

Usk laughs, but sulkily; he has the impression that his beloved friend is making fun of him, but he is not quite sure. He himself believes that he is an ideal Englishman; Brandolin is only half or a quarter of one, he does not shoot, wears furs in winter, only drinks very light Rhenish wine, never goes to any church, and never cuts his hair very short. Added to this, he has no fixed political opinion, except a general impression that England and the world in general are going down-hill as fast as they can, "tobogganing" as they say in Canada, at the rate of fifty miles a minute, to land in the slough of Socialism and be picked out of it by some military despot,--democracy invariably ending in absolutism.

"What ridiculous rubbish!" says his wife. "You might as well say that the *demoiselles-mannequins* at Worth's or Rodrigue's are conspiring for the Orleanists when they try on my clothes."

"They are conspiring for the ruin of your family," says Usk, with a groan. "Whose purse can stand those Paris prices?"

"What an irrelevant remark!" cries Lady Usk. "You are always dragging money-questions into everything."

"Those *faiseurs*, as you call 'em," continues Usk, unheeding, "are at the root of half the misery of society. Women get into debt up to their eyes for their toilets, and they don't care what abomination they do if they get enough out of it to go on plunging. Hundred-guinea gowns soon make up a pretty total when you change 'em three times a day."

"And if women are guys aren't the men furious?" asks his wife. "Even if they try to economize, aren't they always taunted with being dowdies? You none of you know anything about the cost of things, and you expect everybody to be *bien mise* on a halfpenny a day. When Boom saw me at Ascot this year he stared at me, and whispered to me, 'Oh, I say, mother! you've got the same bonnet on you had at the Oaks. I do hope the other fellows won't notice it.' That is how he will speak to his wife some day; and yet I dare say, like you, he will expect her to get her bonnets from Vivot at ten francs apiece!"

Lady Usk is angry and roused.

"Look at my poor little sister," she goes on. "What a life that brute Mersey leads her about money! All those dreadfully plain girls to dress, and nothing to do it on, and yet if they are not all well got up wherever they go to, he swears he is ashamed to be seen with them. You can't dress well, you can't do anything well, without spending money; and if you haven't money you must get into debt. That is as clear as that two and two are four. When ever do men remember their own extravagances? You smoke ten cigars a day; your cigars cost a shilling or eighteenpence each,--that is ten or fifteen shillings a day; five pounds a week, not counting your cigarettes! Good heavens! five pounds a week for sheer silly personal indulgence that your doctors tell you will canker your tongue and dry up your gastric juice! At all events, our toilets don't hurt our digestion; and what would the world look like if women weren't well dressed in it? Your cigars benefit nobody, and only make your teeth yellow."

"Well, in a year they cost about what one ball-gown does that's worn twice."

"I always wear mine three times, even in London," says Dorothy Usk, with conscious virtue. "But I don't see any sin in spending money. I think it ought to be spent. But you are always dragging money-questions into everything, and Boom says that the Latin person whom you and Lord Brandolin are always quoting declares most sensibly that money should always be regarded as a means, never as an end; and if it is to be a means to anything, must not it be spent before it can become so?"

"That's neither here nor there," replies her lord; "and if Boom only reads his classics upside down like that he'd better leave 'em alone."

"You are never content. Most men would be delighted if a boy read *at all*."

"I don't know why, I'm sure," replies Usk, drearily. "Reading's going out, you know; nobody'll read at all fifty years hence: poking about in guinea-pigs' stomachs, and giving long names to insects out of the coal-hole, is what they call education nowadays."

"Frederic Harrison has said very aptly," remarks Brandolin, who is present at this conjugal colloquy, and seeks to make a diversion on it, "that the boast of science is to send the Indian mails across seas and deserts in nine days, but that science cannot put in those mail-bags a single letter equal to Voltaire's or Sevigne's, and he doubts very much that there is one."

"It's an ill bird that fouls its own nest," says Usk, grimly: "still, I'm very glad if those scientific prigs fall out among themselves."

"I think some people write charming letters still," says Dorothy Usk. "Of course when one is in a hurry--and one is almost always in a hurry----"

"Hurry is fatal, Lady Usk," says Brandolin. "It destroys style, grace, and harmony. It is the curse of our times. The most lovely thing in life is leisure; and we call it progress to have killed it."

"Read this letter," says his hostess, giving him one which she holds in her hand. "There is nothing private in it, and nothing wonderful, but there is a grace in the expressions; whilst the English, for a foreigner, is absolutely marvellous."

"I thought there were no foreigners?" says Usk. "I thought steam had effaced nationalities?"

His wife does not deign to reply.

Brandolin has taken the letter with hesitation. "Do you really think I may read it?"

"When I tell you to do so," says Dolly Usk, impatiently. "Besides, there is nothing in it, only it is pretty."

Brandolin reads; it is on very thick paper, almost imperceptibly scented, with a princess's crown embossed on it and a gold X.

"It is very kind of you, dear Lady Usk, to have remembered a *solitaire* like myself in the midst of your charming children and your many joys." ("My many annoyances, she means," interpolates Lady Usk.) "I will be with you, as you so amiably wish, next Tuesday or Wednesday. I am for the moment in Paris, having been this month at Aix, not that I have any aches or pains myself, but a friend of mine, Marie Woronszoff, has many, and tries to cure them by warm sunshine and the cold douches which her physicians prescribe. There are many pleasant people here; every one is supposed to be very ill and suffering agony, but every one laughs, flirts, plays, sits under the little tents under the trees, dances at the Casino, and eats a fair dinner as usual, so that if Pallida Mors be indeed among us she looks just like every one else. I came to Aix from my own place on the White Sea, and the gay groups, the bright alleys, the green embowered chalets, and the goatherds with their flocks which come tinkling their bells down the hill-sides in all directions, all seemed to me like an operetta of Offenbach's, spiritualized and washed with the pure daylight and the mountain-air, but still Offenbach. How are your children? Do they still care for me? That is very sweet of them. A day at their years is as long as a season at mine. Assure them of my unforgetting gratitude. I shall be pleased to be in England again, and, though I do not know Surrenden, my recollections of Orme tell me *d'avance* that I shall in any house of yours find the kindest of friends, the most sympathetic of companions. Say many things to your lord for me. I think he is only so discontented because the gods have been too good to him and given him too completely everything he can desire." ("That's all *she* knows about it!" says Usk, *sotto voce*.) "*Au revoir*, dear Lady Usk. Receive the assurance of my highest consideration, and believe in my sincere regard. *Bien a vous*.--XENIA P. SABAROFF."

"A very pretty letter," says Brandolin. "Many thanks." And he restores it to its owner.

"Bunkum!" says Usk.

"Not a bit in the world," says his wife, with contempt and indignation. "*She* does not 'pose,' if you do!"

"My dear George," says Brandolin, "you are one of those thorough-going Britons who always think that everybody who doesn't deal in disagreeable remarks must be lying. Believe me, there are people who really see 'the side that's next the sun,'--even in a crab-apple."

"And deuced irritating, too, they are," says Usk, with emphasis. "'What a beastly bad day,' one says to 'em when it's pouring cats and dogs, and they answer, 'Oh, yes, but rain was so wanted we must be thankful.' That's the kind of answer that would make a saint swear."

"You are not a saint, and you swear on small provocation," replies Brandolin. "To look at rain in that light argues true philosophy. Unfortunately, philosophy is too often strained to bursting in our climate, by having to contemplate rain destroying the crops. If we only had rain when we wanted it, I think the most unreasonable among us would view it with equanimity."

Rain is at that moment running down the painted panes of the Surrenden casements, and driving across the lawns and terraces of the Surrenden gardens. It makes Usk very cross: all the ensilage in the world will not console him for ripening corn beaten down in all directions, and young families of pheasants dying of cramp and pip in their ferny homes.

"Dig a big pit and cram your soaked grass into it: very well, I don't say no," he growls. "But what about your mildewed wheat? And where should we be if we had to undergo a blockade? I'm not against making more pasture, grazing's all very well; but if there's a war big enough to sweep the seas of the grain-ships that come to us from the Colonies and the United States, where shall we be if we've nothing to eat but our own beef and mutton? Beef and mutton are solid food, but I believe we should all go mad on them if we'd no bread to eat too."

"I'm all for pasture," replies Brandolin; "and as the British Isles can never, under any cultivation whatever, feed all their population, we may as well dedicate ourselves to what is picturesque. I am fascinated by Laveleye's portrait of England when she shall have turned grazier exclusively: it is lovely: 'L'Angleterre redeviendra ce qu'elle etait sous les Tudors, un grand parc vert, parseme d'ormes et de chenes, ou b[oe]ufs et moutons se promeneront dans des prairies sans limites.'"

"'Prairies sans limites?' when the land's to be all sliced up in little bits between peasant proprietors!" says Usk.

"I don't think Laveleye believes in peasant proprietors, though he is a professor of social economy."

"Social economy!" says Usk, with a groan. "Oh, I know that fool of a word! In plain English, it means ruin all round, and fortune for a few d----d manufacturers."

"The d----d manufacturer is the principal outcome of two thousand centuries of Christianity, civilization, and culture. The result is not perfectly satisfactory or encouraging, one must admit," says Brandolin, as he reaches down a volume of eighteenth-century memoirs, and adds, with entire irrelevancy to manufacturers or memoirs, "Is she really as handsome as your children tell me?"

"Who?" asks Usk. "Oh, the Russian woman: yes, very good-looking. Yes, she was here at Easter, and she turned their heads."

"Has she any lovers older than Babe?"

"She has left 'em in Russia if she has."

"A convenient distance to leave anything at: Italy and Russia are the only countries remaining to us in which Messalina can still do her little murders comfortably without any fuss being made."

"She isn't Messalina, at least I think not. But one never knows."

"No, one never knows till one tries," says Brandolin. And he wishes vaguely that the Russian woman were already here. He is fond of Surrenden, and fond of all its people, but he is a little, a very little, bored. He sees that all Lady Usk's doves are paired, and he does not wish to disturb their harmony, possibly because none of the feminine doves attract him. But he cannot flirt forever with the children, because the children are not very often visible, and without flirting civilized life is dull, even for a man who is more easily consoled by ancient authors off the library-shelves than most people can be.

This conversation occurs in the forenoon in Lady Usk's boudoir. In the late afternoon in the library over their teacups the ladies talk of Xenia Sabaroff. It is perceptible to Brandolin that they would prefer that she should not arrive.

"Is she really so very good-looking?" he asks of Mrs. Wentworth Curzon.

"Oh, yes," replies that lady, with an accent of depreciation in her tones. "Yes, she is very handsome; but too pale, and her eyes too large. You know those Russian women are mere *paquets de nerfs*, shut up in their rooms all day and smoking so incessantly: they have all that is worst in the Oriental and Parisienne mixed together."

"How very sad!" says Brandolin. "I don't think I have known one, except Princess Kraskawa: she went sleighing in all weathers, wore the frankest of gingerbread wigs, and was always surrounded by about fifty grandchildren."

Princess Kraskawa had been for many years ambassadress in London.

"Of course there are exceptions," says Nina Curzon; "but generally, you know, they are very depraved, such inordinate gamblers, and so fond of morphine, and always *maladives*."

"Ah," says Brandolin, pensively, "but the physical and moral perfection of Englishwomen always makes them take too high a standard: poor humanity toils hopelessly, and utterly exhausted, many miles behind them."

"Don't talk nonsense," says Mrs. Curzon; "we are no better than our neighbors, perhaps, but we are not afraid of the air, we don't heat our houses to a thousand degrees above boiling-point, we don't gamble,--at least not much,--and we don't talk every language under the sun except our own, and yet not one of them grammatically."

"Decidedly," reflects Brandolin, "Lawrence must have looked too often at Madame Sabaroff."

"Sabaroff is dead, isn't he?" he asked, aloud. "You know I have been out of society for a year: the whole map of Europe gets altered in one's absence."

"Sabaroff was shot in a duel four years ago," replies Mrs. Curzon,--"a duel about her."

"What a fortunate woman! To get rid of a husband, and to get rid of him in such interesting circumstances! *C'est le comble de bonheur!*"

"That depends. With her it resulted in her exile from court."

"Oh, to be sure; when Russians are naughty they are sent to live on their estates, as riotous children are dismissed to the nursery. Was she compromised, then?"

"Very much compromised; and both men were killed, for the adversary of Sabaroff had been wounded mortally, when, with an immense effort, he fired, and shot the prince through the lungs."

"A pretty little melodrama. Who was the opponent?"

"Count Lustoff, a colonel of the Guard. I wonder you did not hear of it: it made a stir at the time."

"I may have heard: when one doesn't know the people concerned, no massacre, even of the Innocents, makes any impression on one. And the result was that the lady had to leave the imperial court?"

"Yes: they do draw a line *there*."

Brandolin laughs; it tickles his fancy to hear Mrs. Wentworth Curzon condemning by implication the laxity of the court of St. James.

"They can't send *us* to our estates," he replies, "the lands are so small and the railways are so close. Else it would have a very good effect if all our naughty people could be shut up inside their own gates, with nobody to speak to but the steward and the rector. Can you imagine anything that would more effectively contribute to correct manners and morals? But how very desolate London would look!"

"You think everybody would be exiled inside his own ring-fence!"

"*Her* own ring-fence,--well, nearly everybody. There would certainly be no garden-parties at Marlborough House."

Mrs. Wentworth Curzon is not pleased; she is a star of the first magnitude at Marlborough House.

"Why does she take this absent woman's character away?" thinks Brandolin, with a sense of irritation. "I will trust the Babe's instincts sooner than hers."

He does not know Xenia Sabaroff; but he admires the photograph of her which stands on the boudoir table, and he likes the tone of the letter written from Aix. With that spirit of contradiction which is inborn in human nature, he is inclined to disbelieve all that Nina Curzon has told him. Lustoff and Sabaroff probably both deserved their fates, and the departure from the court of St. Petersburg might very possibly have been voluntary. He has a vague feeling of tenderness for the original of the photograph. It often happens to him to fall sentimentally and ephemerally in love with

some unknown woman whose portrait he has seen or of whose charms he has heard. Sometimes he has avoided knowing these in their actual life, lest he should disturb his ideals. He is an imaginative man with a great amount of leisure in which to indulge his fancies, and his knowledge of the world has not hardened his feelings or dulled his fancy. There is something of the Montrose, of the Lord Surrey, in him.

"To think of all one knows about that hussy," he muses, as he smokes a cigar in his bedroom before dressing for dinner. By the uncomplimentary epithet he means Mrs. Wentworth Curzon. "Such a good fellow as Fred Curzon is, too, a man who might have been made anything of if she'd only treated him decently. When he married her he adored the ground she walked on, but before a week was out she began to fret him, and jar at him, and break him in, as she called it; he was too poor for her, and too slow for her, and too good for her, and she was vilely cruel to him,—it's only women who can be cruel like that, she's had more lovers than anybody living, and she's taken every one of 'em for money; nothing but money. Old Melton gave her the Park-Lane House, and Glamorgan gave her her emeralds, and Dartmoor paid her Paris bills for ten years, and Riverston takes all her stable-expenses. Everything she does is done for money; and if she puts any heart at all now into this thing with Lawrence, it is only because she's getting older and so getting jealous,—they always do as they get on,—and then she calls Russians dissolute and depraved, good Lord!"

With which he casts aside his cigar, and resigns himself to his servant's hands as the second gong sounds.



## CHAPTER VI.

The very bachelor rooms at Surrenden are conducive to revery and indolence, cosily comfortable and full of little attentions for the guest's *bien-etre*, among which there is a printed paper which is always laid on the dressing-table in every room at this house: it contains the latest telegrams of public news, which come every afternoon from a London news-agency.

"I dare say to the political fellows they are delightful," reflects Brandolin, as he glances down the lines, "but to me they unpleasantly recall an uncomfortable world. I don't dine the worse, certainly, for knowing that there is a revolution in Patagonia or an earthquake in Bolivia, but neither do I dine the better for being told that the French government is *destituant* all moderate prefets in favor of immoderate ones. It is very interesting, no doubt, but it doesn't interest me, and I think the possession of these fresh scraps of prosaic news spoils dinner-conversation."

Brandolin does not consider it conversation to say, "Have you seen so-and-so?" or, "What a sad thing such-and-such is, isn't it!" He likes persiflage, he likes banter, he likes argument, he likes antithesis, he likes brilliancy, and the dinner-tables of the epoch seldom offer these good things with their Metternich hock and Mouton Rothschild. He is fond of talking himself, and he can be also a very good listener. If you cannot give the *quid quo pro* in hearing as in speaking, you may be immensely clever, but you will be immediately pronounced a bore, like Macaulay and Madame de Stael. Brandolin likes talking not for the sake of showing himself off, but for the sake of being amused, of eliciting the opinions and observing the minds of others, and he is convinced that if the conversational art were cultured as it used to be in Bourbon Paris, life would become more refined, more agreeable, more sympathetic, and less given over to gross pleasures of the appetites.

"Children should be taught to talk," he observes one day to Lady Usk, "and they should not be allowed to be slovenly in their speech any more than in their dress. You would not let them enter your presence with unbrushed hair, but you do let them use any bald, slangy, or inappropriate words which come uppermost to them. There is so much in the choice of words! A beautiful voice is a delicious thing, but it avails little without the usage of apt and graceful phrases. Did you ever hear Mrs. Norton sustain a discussion or relate an anecdote? It was like listening to perfect phrasing in music. When she died, the art of conversation died with her."

"We are always in such a hurry," says Lady Usk, which is her habitual explanation of anything in which her generation is at fault. "And hurry is always vulgar, you know, as you said the other day: it cannot help itself."

"You are a purist, my dear Brandolin," says Lady Dolgelly, who hates him.

"Purity, daughter of sweet virtues mild!" murmurs Brandolin. "Alas, my dear ladies, I cannot hope that she dwells with *me* in any form! When she has a home in your own gentle breasts, who can hope that she would ever take shelter in a man's?"

"How impertinent and how nasty he is!" thinks the lady; and she detests him a little more cordially than before. There is not a very good feeling towards him among any of the ladies at Surrenden: he does not make love to them, he does not endeavor to alter existing arrangements in his favor; it is generally felt that he would not care to do so. What can you expect from a man who sits half his days in a library?

The Surrenden library is well stored, an elegant and lettered lord of the eighteenth century having been a bibliophile. It is a charming room, panelled with inlaid woods, and with a ceiling painted after Tiepolo; the bookcases are built into the wall, so that the books look *chez eux*, and are not mere lodgers or visitors; oriel windows look out on to a portion of the garden laid out by Beaumont. One window has been cut down to the ground, an anachronism and innovation indeed, somewhat impairing the uniformity of the room. The present Lady Usk had it done, but one forgives her the sacrilege when one feels how pleasant it is to walk out from the mellow shadows of the library on to the smooth-shaven grass and gather a rose with one hand whilst holding an eighteenth-century author with the other.

It is in the smaller library adjacent, filled with modern volumes, that five-o'clock tea is always to be had, with all the abundant demoralizing abominations of caviare, kummel, etc. It is a gay room, with *dessus-des-portes* after Watteau and every variety of couch and of lounging-chair. "Reading made easy" somebody calls it. But there is little reading done either in it or in the big library: Brandolin when he goes there finds himself usually alone, and can commune as he chooses with Latin philosophy and Gaulois wit.

"You *used* to read, George?" he says to his host, in expostulation.

"Yes, I used,—ages ago," says Usk, with a yawn.

Brandolin looks at him with curiosity.

"I can understand a man who has never read," he replies, "but I cannot understand a man losing the taste for reading if he has ever had it. One can dwell contented in B[oe]jotia if one has never been out of it, but to go back to B[oe]jotia after living in Attica----"

"It's one's life does it."

"What life? One has the life one wishes."

"That's the sort of thing a man says who hasn't married."

"My dear George, you cannot pretend your wife would prevent your reading Latin and Greek, or even Sanscrit. I am sure she would much sooner you read them than--well, than do other things you do do."

"I don't say she would prevent me," returns the lord of Surrenden, with some crossness, "but it's the kind of life one gets into that kills all that sort of thing in one. There is no time for it."

"I keep out of the life: why don't you?"

"There's no time for anything," says Usk, gloomily. "There's such heaps of things to see to, and such numbers of places to go to, and then one lives *au jour le jour*, and one gets into the swim and goes on, and then there's the shooting, and when there isn't the shooting there's the season, and the racing."

"I lead my own life," Brandolin remarks.

"Yes; but you don't mind being called eccentric."

"No; I don't mind it in the least. If they say nothing worse of me I am grateful."

"But you couldn't do it if you had all my places, and all my houses, and all my brothers, and all my family. You're a free agent. I declare that all the time goes away with me in such a crowd of worries that I've hardly a second to smoke a cigarette in, in any peace!"

Brandolin smiles.

A sixth part of most days his host passes leaning back in some easy-chair with a cigar in his mouth, whether his venue be Surrenden, Orme, Denton, the smoking-room of a club, or the house of a friend,--whether London or the country. Usk's own view of himself is of a man entirely devoted to, and sacrificed to, business, politics, the management of his estates, and the million-and-one affairs which perpetually assail him; but this is not the view which his friends take of him.

When ever is the view that our friends take of us our view?

"Once a scholar always a scholar, it seems to me," says Brandolin. "I could as soon live without air as without books." And he quotes Cowley,--

"Books should as business entertain the light."

"You don't continue the quotation," says Usk, with a smile.

"*Autres temps autres m[oe]urs*," says Brandolin. He laughs, and gets up: it is four in the afternoon; the delicious green garden is lying bathed in warm amber light; one of the peacocks is turning round slowly with all his train displayed; he seems never to tire of turning round.

"How exactly that bird is like some politicians one could name!" says Brandolin. "Do you know that this charming garden always reminds me of St. Hubert's Lea,--our west garden, I mean? I think the same man must have laid them out. Is it not Bulwer Lytton who says that so long as one has a garden one always has one room which is roofed by heaven?"

"A heaven mitigated by gardeners' wages,--very considerably mitigated," says Usk.

"You are cynical, George, and your mind is running on pounds, shillings, and pence,--an offence against Nature on such a day as this. There is nothing so demoralizing as to think of money."

"To have debts and not to think of 'em is more so; and Boom----"

"Sell something of his that he likes very much, to pay his debts: that's the only way I know of to check a boy at the onset. Your father did it with me the very first time I owed twenty pounds; and he read me a lesson I never forgot. I

have been eternally obliged to him ever since."

"What did he sell?"

"My cob,—a cob I adored. I wept like a child, but he didn't see my tears. What I saved up next half to trace out that cob and buy him back at twice his value,—what I denied myself to make up the money,—nobody would believe; and the beast wasn't easy to find: some dealer had taken him over to Ireland."

"That could be done with you," says Usk, gloomily. "It would be no use to do it with Boom: his mother would buy him some other horse the next day. You've no chance to bring up a boy decently if he's got a mother!"

"The reverse is the received opinion of mankind," said Brandolin; "but I believe there's something to be said for your view. No end of women have no idea of bringing up their children, and when they ought to be ordered a flogging they fondle them."

"Dolly does," says her husband. "What's a woman's notion of a horse? That he must have slender legs, a coat like satin, and be fed on apples and sugar: still, they saw his mouth till he half dislocates his neck, and tear his ribs open with their spur. They're just as unreasonable with their children."

"Who is *that* woman?" says Brandolin, making a step across the window and into the garden. "Now I am perfectly certain that is Madame Sabaroff, without your saying so."

"Then I needn't say so," replies Usk. "I wonder when she came. They didn't expect her till to-morrow."

They both look at a lady in one of the distant alleys walking between the high green walls. She is dressed in some soft cream-colored stuff with quantities of lace. She carries a sunshade of the same hue. She has a tall cane in her other hand. On either side of her are the Ladies Alexandra and Hermione, and before her gambols in his white sailor clothes, with his blue silk stockings and his silver-buckled shoes, the Babe.

"Decidedly the Sabaroff," says Usk. "Won't you come and speak to her?"

"With pleasure," says Brandolin. "Even if the Babe brains me with the cane!"

He looks very well as he walks bareheaded over the grass and along the green alley; he wears a loose brown velvet coat admirably made, and brown breeches and stockings; his legs are as well made as his coat; the sun shines on his curling hair; there is a *degage*, picturesque, debonair, yet distinguished look about him, which pleases the eyes of Xenia Sabaroff, as they watch him draw near.

"Who is that person with your father?" she asks. The children tell her, all speaking at once.

She recognizes the name; she has heard of him often in the world, and has read those books which praise solitude and a dinner of herbs. "I doubt his having been alone very long, however," she reflects, as she looks at him. A certain unlikeness in him to Englishmen in general, some women who are fond of him fancifully trace to the fact that the first Brandolin was a Vénétian, who fled for his life from the Republic, and made himself conspicuous and acceptable for his talents alike as a lutist and a swordsman at the court of Henry the Second. "It can't count, it's so very far away," he himself objects; but perhaps it does count. Of all things ineffaceable, the marks of race are the most indelible.

The Vénétian Brandolin married the daughter of a Norman knight, and his descendants became affectionate sons of England, and held their lands of St. Hubert's Lea safely under the wars of the Roses, of the Commonwealth, and of the Jacobites. They were always noticeable for scholarly habits and artistic tastes, and in the time of George the Second the Lord Brandolin of the period did much to enrich his family mansion and diminish the family fortunes by his importations of Italian sculptures and pictures and his patronage of Italian musicians. The house at St. Hubert's Lea is very beautiful, but it requires much more to keep it up than the present owner possesses. He is often urged to let it, but he scouts the idea. "You might as well ask me to sell the Brandolin portraits, like Charles Surface," he says, angrily, whenever his more intimate friends venture on the suggestion. So the old house stands in its warm-hued and casket-like loveliness, empty, save for his occasional visits and the presence of many old and devoted servants.

"An interesting woman," he thinks now, as he exchanges with the Princess Sabaroff the usual compliments and commonplaces of a presentation. "Russians are always interesting; they are the only women about whom you feel that you know very little; they are the only women who, in this chatterbox of a generation *tout en dehors* as it is, preserve some of the vague charm of mystery; and what a charm that is!"

His reasons for admiring her are not those of the Babe and his sisters, but he admires her almost as much as they. Brandolin, who in his remote travels has seen a great deal of that simple nature which is so much lauded by many people, has a great appreciation of well-dressed women, and the Madame Sabaroff is admirably dressed, from her long

loose cream-colored gloves to her bronze shoes with their miniature diamond clasps.

"Didn't I tell you?" whispers the Babe, climbing up behind Brandolin.

"Yes, you did," returned Brandolin, "and you were quite right; but it is abominably bad manners to whisper, my dear Cecil."

The Babe subsides into silence with hot cheeks when anybody calls him Cecil he is conscious that he has committed some flagrant offence.

"Those brats are always bothering you, princess," says their father.

"They are very kind to me," replies Xenia Sabaroff, in English which has absolutely no foreign accent. "They make me feel at home! What a charming place this is! I like it better than your castle--what is its name?--where I had the pleasure to visit you at Easter."

"Orme. Oh, that's beastly,--a regular barn: obliged to go there just for show, you know."

"Orme was built by Inigo Jones, and the ingratitude to fortune of its owner is a constant temptation to Providence to deal in thunder-bolts, or have matches left about by housemaids," says Brandolin.

"I think Lord Usk has not a contented mind," says Madame Sabaroff, amused.

"Contented! By Jove, who should be, when England's going to the dogs as fast as she can?"

"In every period of your history," says the princess, "your country is always described as going headlong to ruin; and yet she has not gone there yet, and she has not done ill."

"Our constitution is established on a mere equipoise, with dark precipices and deep waters all around it! So said Burke," replies Brandolin. "At the present moment everybody has forgotten the delicacy of this nice equipoise, and one day or other it will lose its balance and topple over into the deep waters, and be engulfed. Myself, I confess I do not think that time is very distant."

"I hope it is; I am very much attached to England," replies the Princess Xenia, gravely, "and to naughty English boys," she adds, passing her hand over the shining locks of the Babe.

"She must be in love with an Englishman," thinks Brandolin, with the one-sided construction which a man is always ready to place on the words of a woman. "Must we go in-doors?" he asks, regretfully, as she is moving towards the house. "It is so pleasant in these quaint green arbors. To be under a roof on such a summer afternoon as this, is to fly in the face of a merciful Creator with greater ingratitude than Usk's ingratitude to Inigo Jones."

"But I have scarcely seen my hostess," says Madame Sabaroff; nevertheless, she resigns herself to a seat in a yew-tree cut like a helmet.

There are all manner of delightful old-fashioned flowers, such flowers as Disraeli gave to the garden of Corisande, growing near in groups encircled by clipped box-edging.

Those disciples of Pallas Athene who render the happy lives of the Surrenden children occasionally a burden to them seize at that moment on their prey and bear them off to the school-room. The Babe goes to his doom sullenly; he would be tearful, only that were too unmanly.

"Why do you let those innocents be tortured, George?" asks Brandolin.

"Books should, like business, entertain the day,"

replies Usk: "so you said, at least, just now. Their governesses are of the same opinion."

"That is not the way to make them love books, to shut them up against their wills on a summer afternoon."

"How will you educate your children when you have 'em, then?"

"He always gets out of any impersonal argument by putting some personal question," complains Brandolin to Madame Sabaroff. "It is a common device, but always an unworthy one. Because a system is very bad, it does not follow that I alone of all men must be prepared with a better one. I think if I had children I would not have them taught in that way at all. I should get the wisest old man I could find, a Samuel Johnson touched with a John Ruskin, and should tell him to make learning delightful to them, and associated, as far as our detestable climate would allow, with open-air studies in cowslip meadows and under hawthorn hedges. If I had only read dear Horace at school, should I ever have loved him

as I do? No; my old tutor taught me to feel all the delight and the sweet savor of him, roaming in the oak woods of my own old place."

"I am devoutly thankful," says his host, "that Dorothy among her caprices had never had the fancy you have, for a Dr. Johnson *double* with a Ruskin, to correct my quotations, abuse my architecture, and make prigs of the children."

"Prigs!" exclaims Brandolin. "Prigs! When did ever real scholarship and love of nature make anything approaching to a prig? Science and class-rooms make prigs, not Latin verse and cowslip meadows."

"That is true, I think," says the Princess Xenia, with her serious smile.

"If they are beginning to agree with one another I shall be *de trop*," thinks Usk, who is very good-natured to his guests, and popular enough with women not to be resigned to play what is vulgarly termed "second fiddle" (though why an expression borrowed from the orchestra should be vulgar it were hard to say). So he goes a few paces off to speak to a gardener, and by degrees edges away towards the house, leaving Brandolin and Madame Sabaroff to themselves in the green yew-helmet arbor.

Brandolin is in love with his subject, and does not abandon it.

"It is absurd," he continues, "the way in which children are made to loathe all scholarship by its association with their own pains and subjection. A child is made as a punishment to learn by rote fifty lines of Virgil. Good heavens! It ought rather to be as a reward that he should be allowed to open Virgil! To walk in all those delicious paths of thought should be the highest pleasure that he could be brought to know. To listen to the music of the poets should be at once his privilege and his recompense. To be deprived of books should be, on the contrary, his cruellest chastisement!"

"He would be a very exceptional child, surely," says Madame Sabaroff.

"I was not an exceptional child," he answers, "but that is how I was brought up and how I felt."

"You had an exceptional training, then?"

"It ought not to be exceptional: that is just the mischief. Up to the time I was seventeen, I was brought up at my own place (by my father's directions, in his will) by a most true and reverent scholar, whom I loved as Burke loved Shackleton. He died, God rest his soul, but the good he left behind him lives after him: whatever grains of sense I have shown, and whatever follies I have avoided, both what I am and what I am not, are due to him, and it is to him that I owe the love of study which has been the greatest consolation and the purest pleasure of my life. That is why I pity so profoundly those poor Rochefort children, and the tens of thousands like them, who are being educated by the commonplace, flavorless, cramming system which people call education. It may be education; it is not culture. What will the Babe always associate with his Latin themes? Four walls, hated books, inky, aching fingers, and a headache. Whereas I never look at a Latin line in a newspaper, be it one ever so hackneyed, without pleasure, as at the face of an old friend, and whenever I repeat to myself the words, I always smell the cowslips and the lilac and the hawthorn of the spring mornings when I was a boy."

Xenia Sabaroff looked at him with some little wonder and more approval.

"My dear lord," she says seriously, "I think in your enthusiasm you forget one thing, that there is ground on which good seed falls and brings forth flowers and fruit, and there is other ground on which the same seed, be it strewn every so thickly, lies always barren. Without underrating the influences of your tutor, I must believe that had you been educated at an English public school, or even in a French Lycee, you would still have become a scholar, still have loved your books."

"Alas, madame," says Brandolin, with a little sigh, "perhaps I have only been what Matthew Arnold calls a 'foiled circuitous wanderer' in the orbit of life!"

"I imagine that you have not very often been foiled," replies the lady, with a smile, "and wandering has a great deal to be said in its favor, especially for a man. Women are happiest, perhaps, at anchor."

"Women used to be: not our women. *Nous avons change tout cela*. I have bored you too much with myself and my opinions."

"No, you interest me," says his companion with a serious serenity which deprives the words of all sound of flattery or encouragement. "I have long admired your writings," she adds, and Brandolin colors a little with gratification. The same kind of phrase is said to him on an average five hundred times a year, and his usual emotion is either ennui or irritation. The admiration of fools is folly, and humiliates him. But the admiration of so lovely a woman as Xenia Sabaroff would lay a flattering unction to the soul of any man, even if she were absolutely mindless; and she gives him

the impression that she has a good deal of mind, and one out of the common order.

"My writings have no other merit," he says, after the expression of his sense of the honor she does him, "than being absolutely the chronicle of what I have seen and what I have thought; and I think they are expressed in tolerably pure English, though that is claiming a great deal in these times; for since John Newman laid down the pen there is scarcely a living Briton who can write his own tongue with eloquence and purity."

"I think it must be very nice to leave off wandering if one has a home," replies Madame Sabaroff, with a slight sigh, which gave him the impression that, though no doubt she had many houses, she had no home. "Where is your place that you spoke of just now?--the place where you learned to love Horace?"

Brandolin is always pleased to speak of St. Hubert's Lea. He has a great love for it and for the traditions of his race, which makes many people accuse him of great family pride, though, as has been well said *a propos* of a greater man than Brandolin, it is rather that sentiment which the Romans defined as piety. When he talks of his old home he grows eloquent, unreserved, cordial; and he describes with an artist's touch its antiquities, its landscapes, and its old-world and sylvan charms.

"It must be charming to care for any place so much as that," says his companion, after hearing him with interest.

"I think one cares more for places than for people," he replies.

"Sometimes one cares for neither," says Xenia Sabaroff, with a tone which in a less lovely woman would have been morose.

"One must suffice very thoroughly to one's self in such a case?"

"Oh, not necessarily."

At that moment there is a little bustle under a very big cedar near at hand; servants are bringing out folding tables, folding chairs, a silver camp-kettle, cakes, fruit, cream, liqueurs, sandwiches, wines, all those items of an afternoon tea on which Brandolin has animadverted with so much disgust in the library an hour before. Lady Usk has chosen to take these murderous compounds out of doors in the west garden. She herself comes out of the house with a train of her guests around her.

"Adieu to rational conversation," says Brandolin, as he rises with regret from his seat under the evergreen helmet.

Xenia Sabaroff is pleased at the expression. She is too handsome for men often to speak to her rationally: they usually plunge headlong into attempts at homage and flattery, of which she is nauseated.



## CHAPTER VII.

"How do you like Lord Brandolin?" says Lady Usk, when she can say so unobserved.

"I like him very much," replies Madame Sabaroff. "He is what one would expect him to be from his books; and that is so agreeable,--and so rare."

Dorothy Usk is not pleased. She does not want her Russian ph[oe]nix to admire Brandolin. She has arranged an alliance in her own mind between the Princess Sabaroff and her own cousin Alan, Lord Gervase, whom she is daily expecting at Surrenden. Gervase is a man of some note in diplomacy and society; she is proud of him, she is attached to him, she desires to see him ultimately fill all offices of state that the ambition of an Englishman can aspire to; and Xenia Sabaroff is so enormously rich, as well as so unusually handsome. It would be a perfectly ideal union; and, desiring it infinitely, the mistress of Surrenden, with that tact which distinguishes her, has never named Lord Gervase to the Princess Sabaroff nor the Princess Sabaroff to Lord Gervase. He is to be at Surrenden in a week's time. Now she vaguely wishes that Brandolin had not these eight days' start of him. But then Brandolin, she knows, will only flirt; that is to say, if the Russian lady allow him to do so: he is an unconscionable flirt, and never means anything by his tenderest speeches. Brandolin, she knows, is not a person who will ever marry; he has lost scores of the most admirable opportunities, and rejected the fairest and best-filled hands that have been offered to him. To the orderly mind of Lady Usk, he represents an Ishmael forever wandering in wild woods, outside the pale of general civilization. She can never see why people make such a fuss with him. She does not say so, because it is the fashion to make the fuss, and she never goes against a fashion. A very moral woman herself, she is only as charitable and elastic as she is to naughty people because such charity and elasticity is the mark of good society in the present day. Without it, she would be neither popular nor well bred; and she would sooner die than fail in being either.

"Why don't you ever marry, Lord Brandolin?" asks Dorothy Usk. "Why have you never married?"

"Because he's much too sensible," growls her husband, but adds, with infinite compassion, "He'll have to, some day, or the name will die out."

"Yes, I shall have to, some day, to use your very grammatical expression," assents Brandolin. "I don't wish the name to die out, and there's nobody to come after me except the Southesk-Vanes, who detest me as I detest them."

"Well, then, why not make some marriage at once?" says Lady Usk. "I know so many charming----"

Brandolin arrests the sentence with a deprecatory gesture, "Dear Lady Usk, *please!* I like you so much, I wouldn't for worlds have you mixed up in anything which would probably, or at least very possibly, make me so much dislike you in the years to come."

Usk gives a laugh of much enjoyment.

His wife is slightly annoyed. She does not like this sort of jesting.

"You said a moment ago that you must marry!" she observes, with some impatience.

"Oh, there is no positive 'must' about it," says Brandolin, dubiously. "The name doesn't matter greatly, after all; it is only that I don't like the place to go to the Southesk-Vanes: they are my cousins, heaven knows how many times removed; they have most horrible politics, and they are such dreadfully prosaic people that I am sure they will destroy my gardens, poison my Indian beasts, strangle my African birds, turn my old servants adrift, and make the country round hideous with high farming."

"Marry, then, and put an end to anything so dreadful," says Dorothy Usk.

Brandolin gets up and walks about the room. It is a dilemma which has often been present to his mind in various epochs of his existence.

"You see, my dear people," he says, with affectionate confidence, "the real truth of the matter is this. A good woman is an admirable creation of Providence, for certain uses in her generation; but she is tiresome. A naughty woman is delightful; but then she is, if you marry her, compromising. Which am I to take of the two? I should be bored to death by what Renan calls *la femme pure*, and against *la femme teree* as a wife I have a prejudice. The woman who would amuse me I would not marry if I could, and as, if I were bored, I should leave my wife entirely, and go to the Equator or the Pole, it would not be honest in me to sacrifice a virgin to the mere demands of my family pride."

Lady Usk feels shocked, but she does not like to show it, because it is so old-fashioned and prudish and *arriere* nowadays to be shocked at anything.

"I have thought about it very often, I assure you," continues Brandolin, "and sometimes I have really thought that I would marry a high-caste Hindoo woman. They are very beautiful, and their forms far more exquisite than any European's, wholly uncramped as they are by any stays, and accustomed to spend so many hours on all kinds of arts for the embellishment of the skin."

"I don't think, you know," Lady Usk interposes, hastily, to repress more reminiscences, "that you need be afraid of the young girls of our time being innocent: they are *eveillees* enough, heaven knows, and experienced enough in all conscience."

"Oh, but that is odious," says Brandolin, with disgust. "The girls of the day are horrible; nothing is unknown to them; they smoke, they gamble, they flirt without decency or grace, their one idea is to marry for sake of a position which will let them go as wild as they choose, and for the sake of heaps of money which will sustain their unconscionable extravagance. Lord deliver me from any of them! I would sooner see St. Hubert's Lea cut up into allotment-grounds than save it from the Southesk-Vanes by marrying a *debutante* with her mind fixed on establishing herself, and her youthful memories already full of dead-and-gone flirtations. No! let me wait for Dodo, if you will give me permission to educate her."

"Dodo will never be educated out of flirting; she is born for it," says her father, "and she will be a handful when she gets into society. I am afraid you would return her to us and sigh for your high-caste Hindoo."

"Pray, how would you educate her? what is missing in her present education?" asks Lady Usk, somewhat piqued at what he implies.

"I would let her see a great deal more of her mother than she is allowed to do," says Brandolin: "where could she take a better model?" he adds, with a bow of much grace.

Her mother is not sure whether she ought to be flattered or offended. Brandolin has a way of mingling graceful compliments and implied censure with so much skill and intricacy that to disentangle them is difficult for those whom he would at once flatter and rebuff. "One never quite knows what he means," she thinks, irritably. "I do believe he intends to imply that I neglect my children!"

Brandolin seems to her an unpleasant man, eccentric, discourteous, and immoral. She cannot imagine what George or the world sees to admire and like so much in him.

"Lord Brandolin actually declares that black women have much better figures than we have," she says, an hour later, to Leila Faversham.

"Black women!" exclaims that lady, in unspeakable horror.

"Well, Hindoos: it is the same thing," says Lady Usk with that ignorance of her Indian fellow-subjects which is characteristic of English society, from the highest strata to the lowest.

"Oh, he is always so odd, you know," says Mrs. Faversham, as of a person whom it is hopeless even to discuss. Brandolin is indeed so odd that he has never perceived her own attractions. What can seem odder to a pretty woman than that?

Leila Faversham tells Lady Dawlish ten minutes later that Brandolin has confessed that he only likes black women. "Isn't it horrid? He actually has numbers of them down in Warwickshire, just as he keeps the Indian animals and the African birds."

"How very shocking!" says Lady Dawlish. "But I dare say it is very economical: they only eat a spoonful of rice and wear a yard of calico, you know, and, as he is poor, that must suit him."

Lady Dawlish tells this fact to Nina Curzon, adding various embellishments of her fancy; Mrs. Curzon thinks the notion new and amusing; she writes of it that morning to a journal of society which she occasionally honors with news of her world, not from want of the editor's fee, but from the amusement it affords her to destroy the characters of her acquaintances. The journal will immediately, she knows, produce a mysterious but sensational paragraph regarding the black women in Warwickshire, or some article headed "An Hereditary Legislature at Home." Brandolin is a person whom it is perfectly safe to libel: he is very indolent, very contemptuous, and he never by any chance reads a newspaper.

"An extremely interesting woman," muses Brandolin that evening, as he dresses for dinner. "Interesting, and moreover with something original, something mysterious and suggestive, in her. Despite Lady Usk, there is a difference still in different nationalities. I could still swear to an Englishwoman anywhere, if I only saw the back of her head and her shoulders. No Englishwoman could have the delicious languor of Madame Sabaroff's movements."

She interests him; he decides to stay on at Surrenden.

When he sees her at dinner he is still more favorably impressed.

Her figure is superb, and her sleeveless gown shows the beauty of her bust and arms; she has a flat band of diamonds worn between the elbow and the shoulder of the right arm. The effect is singular, but good.

"It is to show that she has the muscle above the elbow," says old Sir Adolphus, who is learned in sculpture and anatomy. "You know, not one woman in ten thousand has it; and for want of it their arms fall in above the elbow. I have heard sculptors say so a hundred times. She has it, and so she wears that flat bracelet to emphasize the fact."

Brandolin feels annoyed. There is no reason in life why he should object to Madame Sabaroff having any number of affectations and vanities, or why he should mind hearing this handsome old *viveur* discuss them; but he is annoyed by both facts.

There is not a plain woman among the guests of Surrenden: some are even far beyond the average of good looks, and all have that *chic* which lends in itself a kind of beauty to the woman of the world. But the handsomest of them all, Nina Curzon herself, pales beside the beautiful pallor of the Russian lady, contrasted as it is with the splendor of her jewels, the red rose of her lips, and the darkness of her eyelashes and eyes.

At dinner, Xenia Sabaroff does not speak much: she has a dreamy look, almost a fatigued one.

Brandolin is opposite to her: as there are no ornaments or flowers on the table higher than eight inches, he can contemplate her at his leisure across the field of shed rose-leaves which is between them. Finding that she is so silent, he talks in his best fashion, in his most reckless, antithetical, picturesque manner: he perceives he gains her attention, though he never directly addresses her.

He also makes Mr. Wootton furious. Mr. Wootton has half a dozen good stories untold. His method of getting good stories is ingenious: he procures obscure but clever memoirs, French and English, which are wholly forgotten, alters their most piquant anecdotes a little, and fits them on to living and famous personages; the result is admirable, and has earned him his great reputation as a *raconteur* of contemporary scandal. He has six delicious things ready now, and he cannot find a moment in which he can lead up to and place any one of them.

"Brandolin is so amusing when he likes," says Lady Arthur Audley, incautiously, to this suppressed and sullen victim.

"A monologist! a monologist!" replies Mr. Wootton, with a deprecatory accent.

Lady Arthur is silenced, for she has not the slightest idea what a monologist is. She fancies it means some kind of a sect like the Mormons, and Brandolin is so odd that he may possibly belong to a sect, or may have founded one, like Laurence Oliphant. She remembers the black women that they talked of, and does not like to ask, being a sensitive person, very delicate-minded, and perfectly proper, except her one little affair with Sir Hugo, which everybody says is most creditable to her, Arthur Audley being the scamp that he is.

Dinner over, Brandolin finds a pleasant seat on a low chair behind the bigger chair on which Madame Sabaroff is reclining; other men devoted to other women look longingly at her, some approach; Brandolin comprehends why she is not beloved in her generation by her own sex.

After a time she is induced to sing; she has a very sweet voice, of great power, with much pathos in it; she sings volkslieder of her own country, strange yearning wistful songs, full of the vague mystical melancholy of the Russian peasant. She ceases abruptly, and walks back to her seat; her diamonds gleam in the light like so many eyes of fire. Brandolin has listened in silence, conscious of a troubled pleasure within himself, which is invariably the herald of one of those attachments which have so often at once embellished and disturbed his existence.

Like all romantic people, his heart is much younger than his years. It has not been scarred by any one of those tragic passions which, like fire on a hill-side, wither up all green things, so that not a blade of grass will grow where it has passed. He has usually found love only the most agreeable of pastimes. He has always wondered why anybody allowed it to tear their life to tatters, as a bad actor tears a fine piece of blank verse. An uncle of his possessed an Aphrodite in Paphian marble which had been dug up in a vineyard at Luna, and a work of great beauty of the second period of Greek art. A lover of pleasure, but withal a philosopher, his uncle treasured and adored this statue, and whenever he felt that any living woman was getting more power over him than he liked, he compared her in his mind with the Luna Venus, and found that the human creature's defects outbalanced her charms, and thus reduced the potency of the latter to more reasonable dimensions.

Instead of his uncle's Luna goddess, Brandolin keeps in some remote and sealed-up nook of his mind a certain ideal; now and then he remembers it, takes it out and looks at it, and it has usually served with him at such moments the

purpose which the Luna marble served with his uncle.

As he saunters towards the smoking-room with his hands in the pockets of a loose velvet jacket, he summons this useful resident of his brain, intending to banish with it the remembrance, the too enervating remembrance, of Xenia Sabaroff. But, to his surprise, they seem very like one another, and their features blend confusedly into one.

"And I know nothing at all about this lady, except that she has a voice like Albani's, big jewels, and a Russian name!" he thinks, with some derision of himself. The smokers do not find him amusing, while his companions seem to him insufferably tiresome. He hears the echo of Madame Sabaroff's grave, low, melodious voice, and is not in temper for the somewhat *scabreux* jests of the smoking-room. He thinks that it is all very well for boys to like that sort of salacious talk, but it seems to him intolerably absurd that men of his own age, and older, should find any kind of savor in it.

They tease him about the black women, moreover, and for once he is not easy enough to be good-tempered and indifferent. He answers contemptuously and irritably, and of course all his friends suppose, which they had not supposed before, that there is, after all, some truth in Mrs. Curzon's anecdote.

"What stupid stories that old *blagueur* Wootton has told in the smoking-room, and what beastly ones Fred Ormond has related! and all as if they were something new, too! as if the one weren't taken out of the manuscripts at Bute House, and the other out of last week's 'Figaro'! If men won't be original, or can't be, why don't they hold their tongues?"

"What fools we are to sit shut up with gas-lights and tobacco on such a night as this!--a night for Lorenzo and Jessica, for Romeo and Juliet," he thinks, as he stands awhile at the open window of his own bedroom.

It is three o'clock: there is a faint suggestive light which means the dawn, young birds are twittering, there is a delicious scent of green leaves, of full-blown roses, of dewy mosses; the air is damp and warm, he can hear the feet of blackbirds scraping and turning over the mould and the grass; it is dark, yet he can distinguish the masses of the great woods beyond the gardens, the outlines of the trees near his casement, the shape of the clouds as they move slowly southward. He wonders in what part of the old house, whose fantastic roofs and turrets and gargoyles and ivy-colored buttresses are hidden in the dusk of the summer night, they have given the Princess Sabaroff her chamber. He remains some time at the open window, and goes to his bed as the dawn grows rosy.

"Lord Brandolin is in a very bad temper," says Mr. Wootton, when the smoking-room door has closed on the object of his detestation; then he pauses, and adds, significantly, "The Brandolins, you know, were always a little--just a little--clever family, very clever, but we all know to what great wits are sadly often allied. And this man has never done anything, with all his talent and opportunities; never done anything at all!"

"He has written first-rate books," says Usk, angrily, always ready to defend a friend in absence.

"Oh, books!" says "Mr. Wootton, with bland but unutterable disdain. Mr. Wootton is a critic of books, and therefore naturally despises them.

"What would you have him do?" growls Usk, pugnaciously.

Mr. Wootton stretches his legs out, and gazes with abstracted air at the ceiling. "Public life," he murmurs. "Public life is the only possible career for an Englishman of position. But it demands sacrifices; it demands sacrifices."

"You mean that one has to marry?" says the young Duke of Queenstown, timidly.

Mr. Wootton smiles on him loftily. "Marry? yes, undoubtedly; and avoid scandals afterwards; avoid, beyond all, those connections which lend such a charm to existence, but are so apt to get into the newspapers."

There is a general laugh.

Mr. Wootton has not intended to make them laugh, and he resumes, with stateliness, as though they had not interrupted him. "The country expects those sacrifices: no man succeeds in public life in England who does not make them."

"Melbourne, Palmerston, Sidney Herbert?" murmurs one rebellious hearer.

Mr. Wootton waves him aside as he would do an importunate fly. "Not to touch on living persons, I would select Lord Althorp as the model of the public leader most suited to this country. It would not suit Lord Brandolin to lead the blameless life of Lord Althorp. It would not suit him even to pretend to lead it. I doubt if he could even look the part, if he tried. The English are a peculiar people; they always mix public and private life together. Lord Beaconsfield remarked to me once----"

And Mr. Wootton tells a story of Disraeli, a very good story, only he has taken it out of the journals of the President des Brosses and fathered it on to Disraeli. But M. le President des Brosses is an author seldom read now, and nobody knows; if they did, nobody would care.

"Public opinion," he resumes, "is irresistible in England; and if it once turn against a man, were he Messiah himself, he could do nothing. It is not an intelligent public opinion: it confuses public and private qualifications. A man may be a great statesman and yet dislike his wife and like somebody else's. A man may be a great hero and yet may have an unseemly passion or an unpaid tailor. But the British public does not understand this. It invariably overlooks the man's greatness, and only sees the lady or the tailor who compromises him. It thinks--unhappily or happily, as you please to consider--that genius should keep the whole ten commandments. Now, genius is conspicuous for breaking them."

Mr. Wootton here knocks a little ash off his cigar, and smiles like a man who has said something neatly.

"It is the first time I ever heard you compliment genius," murmurs Lawrence Hamilton.

"In Italy," pursues Mr. Wootton, "not very long ago a minister was accused of buying a piano out of the public funds for his mistress. Neither the piano nor the mistress hurt the gentleman in public estimation in that soft and accommodating clime. But that piano, though he might have paid for it with own money, would have ruined an English politician. Though it had been the very smallest cottage piano conceivable, it would have buried him forever under it if it had got talked about; he would never have explained it away, or made it even contingently endurable to the nation. You may, if you are a public man in England, commit every conceivable blunder, add millions to the national debt, eat your own words every evening in debate, and plunge the country into an abyss of unmeasured and unmeasurable revolution, and they will still have confidence in you if you read the lessons in church and walk home with your wife; but if it is ever rumored that you admire your neighbor's wife, down you go forever. And yet," continues Mr. Wootton, pensively, "people *do* admire their neighbor's wife in England, and it seems a venial offence when one compares it with the desertion of Gordon, or the encouragement of a hydra-headed greed for the rich man's goods."

With which Mr. Wootton yawns, rises, and also declares his intention to go to bed.

The young duke follows him and walks by his side down the corridor. He is not at all like Disraeli's young duke: he is awkward, shy, and dull, he is neither amiable nor distinguished, but he has a painstaking wish in him to do well by his country, which is almost noble in a person who has been toadied, indulged, and tempted in all ways and on all sides ever since his cradle days. It is the disinterested patriotism which has been so largely the excellence and honor of the English nobility, and which is only possible in men of position so high that they are raised by it from birth above all vulgar covetousness or pecuniary needs.

"Do you really think?" says the duke, timidly, for he is very afraid of Henry Wootton,--"do you really think that to have any influence on English public life it is necessary--necessary--to keep so very straight, as regards women, I mean, you know?"

"It is most necessary to *appear* to keep very straight," replies Mr. Wootton. The two things are obviously different to the meanest capacity.

The young man sighs.

"And to have that--that--appearance, one must be married?"

"Indisputably. Marriage is as necessary to respectability in any great position as a brougham to a doctor, or a butler to a bishop," replies the elder, smiling compassionately at the wick of his candle. He does not care a straw about the duke: he has no daughters to marry, and Mr. Wootton's social eminence is far beyond the power of dukes or princes to make or mend.

"But," stammers his Grace of Queenstown, growing red, yet burning with a desire for instruction, "but don't you think a--a connection with--with any lady of one's own rank is quite safe, quite sure not to cause scandal?"

Mr. Wootton balances his candlestick carefully on one finger, pauses in his walk, and looks hard at his questioner.

"That would depend entirely upon the lady's temper," replies this wise monitor of youth.

They are words of wisdom so profound that they sink deep into the soul of his pupil, and fill him with a consternated sadness and perplexity. The temper of Lady Dawlish is a known quantity, and the quality of it is alarming. Lady Dawlish is not young, she is good-looking, and she has debts. Lord Dawlish has indeed hitherto let her pay her debts in any way she chose, being occupied enough with paying such of his own as he cannot by any dexterity avoid; but there is no knowing what he may do any day out of caprice or ill nature, and, although he will never obtain a divorce, he may try for one, which will equally effectually convulse the duke's county and the cathedral city which is situated in its

centre. His own affair with Lady Dawlish is, he firmly believes, known to no human being save themselves and their confidential servants: he little dreams that it has been the gossip of all London until London grew tired of it; he is indeed aware that everybody invited them in the kindest manner together, but he attributed this coincidence to her tact in the management of her set and choice of her own engagements.

The human mind is like the ostrich: its own projects serve to it the purpose which sand plays to the ostrich: comfortably buried in them, it defies the scrutiny of mankind; wrapped in its own absorbing passions, it leaves its hansom before a lady's hall door, or leaves its coroneted handkerchief on a bachelor's couch, and never dreams that the world is looking on round the corner or through the keyhole. Human nature the moment it is interested becomes blind. Therefore the duke has put his question in good faith.

He would abhor any kind of scandal. He is devoted to his mother, who is a pious and very proper person; he has a conscientious sense of his own vast duties and responsibilities; he would feel most uncomfortable if he thought people were talking grossly of him in his own county; and he has a horror of Lord Dawlish, noisy, insolent, coarse, a gambler and a rake.

Arrived at his bedroom door, Mr. Wootton is touched vaguely with a kind feeling towards his humble interrogator, or with some other sentiment less kindly, it may be. He pauses, looks straight before him at the wick of his candle, and speaks with that oracular air so becoming to him which many ungrateful people are known to loathe.

"That kind of connections are invariably dangerous; invariably," he remarks. "They have their uses, I admit, they have their uses: they mould a man's manners when he is young, they enable him to acquire great insight into female character, they keep him out of the lower sorts of entanglements, and they are useful in restraining him from premature marriage. But they are perilous if allowed to last too long. If permitted to claim privileges, rights, usurpations, they are apt to become irksome and compromising, especially if the lady be no longer young. When a woman is no longer young there is a desperate *acharnement* in her tenacity about a last passion which is like that of the mariner clinging to a spar in the midst of a gusty sea. It is not easy for the spar to disengage itself. On the whole, therefore, women of rank are perhaps best avoided in this sense. Passions are safest which can be terminated by the cheque-book. The cheque-book is not always indeed refused by great ladies,—when they are in debt,—but a cheque-book is an unpleasant witness in the law courts. However, as I said before, all depends on the lady's temper: no woman who has a bad temper is ever truly discreet. Good-night to your Grace." And Mr. Wootton, with his candle, disappears within his door-way.

He smiles a little blandly as his man undresses him. Five years before, Lady Dawlish offended him at a house-party at Sandringham, taking a fiendish pleasure in capping all his best stories and tracing the sources of all his epigrams. In that inaccessible but indelible note-book, his memory, he has written her name down as that of one to whom he has a debt to pay. "*Je lui ai donne du fil a retordre,*" he thinks, as he drops into his first doze.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

"Alan is really coming to day!" says Dorothy Usk to her lord, with pleasure, a few days later, looking up from a telegram.

"How you excite yourself!" says Usk, with rude disdain. "What can you see to care about? He is a pretentious humbug, if ever there was one!"

"George!" She regards him with horror and amaze. Is he wholly out of his mind? Her cousin is Lady Usk's ideal of what an English gentleman should be. *He* does not keep black women down in Warwickshire.

"A pretentious humbug," repeats Usk. He likes to ticket his relations and connections with well-chosen descriptions. "All good looks and soft sawder. Women like that sort of thing----"

"Of course we like good manners, though they are not your weakness," interrupts his wife, with acerbity. "Alan has the manners of a man who respects women: that may seem very tame to you and your friend Brandolin, but in these days it has at least the charm of novelty."

"Respects women!" Usk is unable to restrain his hilarity. "My dear Dolly, you're not a chicken: you can't mean that you don't know that Gervase----"

"I know that he is well-bred. You were so once, but it is a very long time ago," replies his wife, with cutting sententiousness, and with that unkind reply she leaves him. As if she did not understand men better than he, she thinks, contemptuously. He may understand dogs and horses, and deer and partridges, but about human nature he knows no more than the old man at the lodge gates.

"Surely she can't be soft on Gervase herself?" her husband reflects, with a sensation of amusement; "it would be too funny, after running so straight all these years, and just as her daughters are growing up; but they often are like that."

He is not sure whether the idea diverts or irritates him, but he knows that he has always detested Gervase, such a coxcomb and such a humbug as the fellow is!

"Respect women, good Lord!" ejaculates Usk in his solitude.

"To be sure," adds that honest gentleman in his own mind, "there are very few of 'em who would thank you to respect 'em nowadays."

"Gervase will be here by dinner," he says in the course of the day to Princess Sabaroff.

"Indeed," she replies, with indifference. "Who is he?"

"A friend of my wife's; at least, a cousin. I thought you might know him; he was some time in Russia."

"No,"--and there is a coldness in the negative disproportioned to so simple a denial,--"I do not think so. I do not remember such a name. Who is he?"

"A person who is expected to be great in foreign affairs some day or other," says Brandolin. "He will have one qualification rare in an English foreign minister,--daily growing rarer, thanks to the imbecilities of examinations: he knows how to bow and he knows what to say."

"A friend of yours?"

"Oh, no; an acquaintance. He thinks very ill of me."

"Why?"

"Because I do nothing for my country. He thinks he does a great deal when he has fomented a quarrel or received a decoration."

"That is not generous. The world owes much to diplomatists: it will know how much in a few years, when it will be governed by clerks controlled by telephones."

"That is true: I stand corrected. But Gervase and I have few sympathies: none, indeed, except politically, and even there we differ,--his is the Toryism of Peel, mine is the Toryism of the late Lord Derby: there are leagues between the two."

"I know: the one is opportunism; the other is optimate-ism."

"Perhaps," says Brandolin, with a smile, and thinks, meantime, "She knows something about him. What is it?"

"Does she know Gervase, despite her denial?" he wonders. He has an impression that she does. There was a look of recognition in her eyes when she gave that vague bland gesture in answer to her host. All trifles in her interest him, as they always do interest a man in a woman whom he admires and is not sure that he understands; and Gervase he is aware has been a good deal in Russia.

He himself has known the subject of their discourse ever since they were boys, and had that sort of intimacy with him which exists between men who live in the same sets and belong to the same clubs. But to him Gervase seems a *petit-maitre*, a *poseur*, a man artificial, conventional, ambitious in small things, and to Gervase he himself seems much as he does to Lady Usk, a perverse and lawless Bohemian, only saved from the outer darkness by the fact of his aristocratic birth.

Meanwhile, in her own room, Xenia Sabaroff is pursuing her own reflections whilst her maid disrobes her.

"It will be better to see him once and for all," she muses. "I cannot go on forever avoiding him in every city in Europe. Very likely he will not even remember my face or my name."

She feels a strong temptation to invent some plausible reason and break off her visit to Surrenden; but she is a courageous woman, and flight is repugnant to her. More than once of late she has avoided a meeting which is disagreeable to her, by some abrupt change of her own plans or reversal of her own engagements. To continue to do this seems weakness. Indeed, to do it at all seems too great a flattery to the person avoided. What is painful is best encountered without procrastination. It is the old question of grasping the nettle.

A haughty flush passes over her face at her own reflections. After all, to have any emotion at all about it, pleasurable or painful, is humiliation. She is a proud woman, as well as a courageous one. There are memories associated with this coming guest which are bitter and hateful.

Women like Mrs. Wentworth Curzon carry such memories lightly, or rather do not carry them at all, but bury them by scores, pell-mell, one on the top of another, like old letters, and forget all about their interment; but she is different from them.

It has not been difficult for her to avoid meeting Lord Gervase; he is one of those persons whose movements are known and chronicled; but she is conscious that the time is come when she can no longer escape doing so, except by such an abrupt departure that it would seem to herself too great a weakness, and be to him too great a flattery, for such a step to enter for an instant into the category of possibilities. It is, she reflects, or it should be, a matter to her of absolute indifference to see again a person whom she has not seen for seven years.

Yet she is conscious of a sense of pain and excitement as her woman puts on her a maize satin tea-gown covered with point d'Alencon at five o'clock the next day, and she knows that when she goes down to the room in a few minutes Gervase, who was to arrive by the afternoon train, will in all probability be present there.

Every one is in-doors that day, for a fine summer rain is falling without, and has been falling since noon. All the house-party are in the library, and the children are there also; the windows are open, and the sweet smell from the damp gardens and wet grass fills the air.

Every one is laughing and talking; Usk is drinking a glass of kummel, and Brandolin is playing with the dog; conversing with Nina Curzon and the mistress of the house, and standing in front of them, is a tall fair man irreproachable in *tenue* and extremely distinguished in appearance. He is Lord Gervase. His back is towards the door, and he does not see or hear her enter, but as the Babe rushes towards her, toppling over a stool and treading mercilessly on the trains of tea-gowns in the wind of his going, the noise made by the child makes him turn his head, and an expression of recognition mingled with amazement passes over his usually impassive features.

"Is that not Princess Sabaroff?" he asks of his hostess, with a certain breathless astonishment betrayed in his voice.

Lady Usk assents. "One of my dearest friends," she adds. "I think you don't know her? I will present you in a moment. She is as clever as she is beautiful. The children adore her. Look at Babe."

The Babe has dragged his princess to a couch and climbed up on it himself, kneeling half on her lap and half off it, with no respect for the maize satin, whilst his impatient little feet beat the devil's tattoo among the point d'Alencon.

"My dear Babe, do not be such a monopolist," says Brandolin, as he approaches with a cup of tea and a wafer of caviare bread-and-butter. "Your shoes have seventeenth-century buckles, it is true, yet still they are scarcely *bibelots* to be wrapped up in a lady's dress."

The Babe grins saucily, tossing his hair out of his eyes; but, with unwonted obedience, he disentangles his feet with some care out of the lace.

Xenia Sabaroff does not take as much notice of him as usual. She is reserved and preoccupied. Brandolin, like the child, fails in awakening her interest or attention. She has seated herself almost with her back to where Gervase is standing, but every now and then she looks half round, as by an irresistible unconscious impulse of curiosity.

Brandolin notes the gesture, as her actions have an interest for him which grows daily in its fascination. "There is Dorothy Usk's Ph[oe]nix," he says to her, in a low tone, when the Babe has scampered off after bon-bons: he indicates Gervase with a glance. Her eyebrows contract slightly, as in some displeasure or constraint.

"Lady Usk is very soon satisfied," she replies, coldly. "Her own amiability makes her see perfection everywhere."

"It is a quality we cannot value too highly in so imperfect a world. It is better than seeing everything *en noir*, surely?" says Brandolin. "If we make people what we think them, as optimists say, it is best to be optimistic."

"I dislike optimism," she says, curtly. "It is absurd and untrue. Our Dostoevsky is a wiser novelist than your Dickens. One must believe something," she says.

"It is pretty for a woman to think so," says Brandolin, "but myself I have never seen why. I may hope, I may wish, I may regret, I may--if I am very sanguine--even expect; but believe--no!"

"Perhaps I should like to believe in a woman," he adds, more softly, with that inflection of his voice which has always had at all events the effect of making women believe in him.

Madame Sabaroff is not so easily touched as many. She pauses a moment, then says, with a certain weariness, "Anybody who can believe can love: that is nothing new."

"What would be new? To love and disbelieve in what we love? It would be very painful."

"It would be a test," says his companion.

Then she drops the subject decidedly, by approaching the other ladies. Brandolin has a faint sense of discomfiture and sadness: he is accustomed to very facile conquests; and yet he is not a coxcomb, like Lawrence Hamilton; he did not precisely anticipate one here, but habit is second nature, and it has been his habit to succeed with women with rapidity and ease. That sense of mystery which there is also for him in the Princess Xenia oppresses whilst it allures him. He is English enough to think that he dislikes mystery, yet as an element of romance it has always an irresistible fascination for romantic temperaments.

Gervase meanwhile has sunk into a chair by the side of Nina Curzon, and is saying, in a whisper, "Who is that lady? The one with her back to us, to whom Lord Brandolin is so *empresse*? I thought that I knew all the Usks' people."

"Look in your Russian memories, and you will probably find that you know her too," replies Mrs. Curzon.

"Oh, she is Russian?" says Gervase, then adds, negligently, "I think, now you tell me that, I have seen her before. Is she not the Princess Sabaroff?"

"Why did you pretend not to know her?" thinks Nina Curzon as she answers, "Yes, that is her name. You must have met her in Petersburg."

"Petersburg is very dim in my memories," he replies, evasively. "Its baccarat is what made the deepest impression on my remembrance and my fortunes. Now I think of it, however, I recollect her quite well: her husband was Anatole Sabaroff, and Lustoff shot him in a duel about her? Am I right?"

"So charming for her!" says Nina Curzon. "Englishwomen never have anything happen for them picturesque like that: our men always die of indigestion, or going after a fox."

"It is very curious."

"What is? Dyspepsia? Hunting?"

"How one comes across people."

"After long years," quotes Mrs. Curzon, with mock romance in her tones. "Generally, I think," she adds, with a little yawn, "we can never get rid of our people, the world is so small, and there is really only one set in it that is decent, so we can't ever get out of it. It must have been very nice in Romeo and Juliet's days, when a little drive to Mantua took you into realms wholly inaccessible to your Verona acquaintances. Nowadays, if you run away from anybody in

London you are sure to run against them in Yeddo or Yucatan."

"Constancy made easy, like the three R's," says Gervase. "Unfortunately, despite our improved facilities, we are not constant."

"He means to imply that he threw over the Sabaroff," thinks Mrs. Curzon; "but he is such a boaster of his *bonnes fortunes* that one can never know whether he is lying."

"Pray let me make you known to Madame Sabaroff," says Lady Usk to him, a little later. "She is such a very dear friend of mine, and I see you have been looking at her ever since she entered the room."

"She is a very handsome person: any one would look at her," replies her cousin. Were he not so perfectly well-bred and impassive, it might almost be said that the suggested presentation fills him with some vague nervousness.

Nina Curzon watches him inquisitively as he is led up and presented to Madame Sabaroff.

"I think I have had the honor before now, in Petersburg," murmurs Gervase. She looks at him very coldly.

"I think not," she replies. The words are of the simplest, but *c'est le ton qui fait la musique*, and, for the solitary time in his existence, Lord Gervase is embarrassed.

Brandolin, playing with the colley dog near at hand, listens and observes.

Lady Usk is not so observant. "It is a long time since he was in Russia," she says to her friend, "I dare say you have forgotten. His father was alive, and his name was Baird then, you know."

Xenia Sabaroff makes a little polite gesture expressive of entire indifference to the change in these titles. With an action which would be rude in any woman less high-bred, she turns away her head and speaks to Brandolin, ignoring the acquaintance and the presence of Gervase.

Across the good-natured and busy brain of her hostess there flashes an electric and odious thought: is it possible that Usk may be right, and that there may be something wrong, after all, in this her latest and most adored friend? She feels that she will die of suffocated curiosity if she do not speedily get her cousin alone and learn all he has ever known or heard of the Princess Sabaroff.

"A snub direct!" whispers Lawrence Hamilton to Mr. Wootton.

"Or a cut direct: which?" says that far-sighted gentleman.

"Anyhow, it's delightful to see him let in for it," reflects Usk, who has also observed the incident from where he stands by the liqueurs.

Gervase, who has never been known to be at a loss in any position, however difficult, colors and looks at once annoyed and confused. He stands before Xenia Sabaroff for a few moments hesitating and irresolute, conscious that every one is looking at him; then he takes refuge with Lady Dawlish, whom he detests, because she is the nearest person to him.

"Madame Sabaroff is eclipsing the black women," says that lady.

"What black women?" asks Gervase, very inattentive and bored. She tells him the story of the Hindoo harem, and he hears no word of it.

"Brandolin is always so odd," he says, indifferently, watching the hand of Xenia Sabaroff as it rests on the shoulder of the Babe, who is leaning against her knees gazing at her adoringly.

Gervase is angered; irritated, interested, and mortified all at once. He has never been in an absurd position before, and he is aware that he was in one a moment ago, and that the whole house-party of Surrenden Court saw him in it. "What a fool Dolly was not to tell me she was here!" he thinks, forgetting that his cousin and hostess has not the remotest suspicion that he and the Princess Xenia have ever met each other before.

"Seven years!" he thinks. "Good heavens! what an eternity! And she is handsomer than she was then; very handsome; wonderfully handsome."

He looks at her all the while from under his half-closed eyelids, whilst he talks he knows not what kind of rubbish to Lady Dawlish.

Xenia Sabaroff does not once look his way. The moment which she had dreaded has passed, and it has made no

impression whatever upon her: her indifference reconciles her to herself. Is it possible, she wonders, that she ever loved, or ever thought that she loved, this man?

"Why will you always treat me as a stranger, Madame Sabaroff?" murmurs Gervase to her that night when for a moment he is alone near her, while the cotillion overture commences.

"You are a stranger--to me," replies Xenia Sabaroff; and as she speaks she looks full at him.

He colors with discomfiture. "Because in the due course of nature I have succeeded to my father's title, you seem to consider that I have changed my whole identity," he says, with great irritation.

She is silent; she looks down on the white ostrich-feathers of her fan. He is vaguely encouraged by that silence. "Strangers! That is surely a very cold and cruel word between those who once were friends?"

The direct appeal to her makes her look up once more, with great *hauteur* in the coldness of her face.

"Sir, I think when people have forgotten that each other exist, it is as though they had never met. They are perhaps something more distant still than strangers, for to strangers friendship in the future is possible; but those who have been separated by oblivion on the one hand and by contempt on the other are parted as surely and eternally as though death had divided them."

Gervase gathers some solace from the very strength of the words. She would not, he thinks, feel so strongly unless she felt more than he allows: he gazes at her with feigned humility and unfeigned admiration and regret.

"If Madame Sabaroff," he murmurs, "can doubt her own powers of compelling remembrance, she is the one person on earth only who can do so."

She is stung to anger.

"I am really at loss to decide whether you are intentionally insolent or unintentionally insincere. You are possibly both."

"I am neither. I am only a man who passionately and uselessly rebels against his fate."

"Who regrets his own actions, you mean to say. That is nothing uncommon."

"Well, who regrets the past, if you will put it so, and who would atone for it would you allow him?"

"Atone! Do you suppose that you owe me reparation? It is I who owe you thanks for a momentary oblivion which did me immeasurable service."

"That is a very harsh doctrine. The Princess Xenia whom I knew was neither so stern nor so sceptical."

"The Princess Xenia whom you knew was a child, a foolish child; she is dead, quite as much dead as though she were under so many solid square feet of Baltic ice. Put her from your thoughts: you will never awake her."

Then she rises and leaves him and goes out of the ball-room.

Throughout that evening he does not venture to approach her again, and he endeavors to throw himself with some show of warmth into a flirtation with Nina Curzon.

"Why did you pretend not to know her?" says Mrs. Curzon to him.

He smiles, the fatuous smile with which a man ingeniously expresses what he would be thought a brute to put into words.

"She does not deign to know me--now," he says, modestly, and to the experienced comprehension of Nina Curzon the words, although so modest, tell her as much as the loudest boast could do.



## CHAPTER IX.

Gervase saunters in to his hostess's boudoir the next morning, availing himself of the privilege accorded to that distant relationship which it pleases them both to raise into an intimate cousinship. It is a charming boudoir, style Louis Quinze, with the walls hung with flowered silk of that epoch, and the dado made of fans which belonged to the same period. Lady Usk writes here at a little secretaire painted by Fragonard, and uses an inkstand said to have belonged to Madame de Parabere, made in the shape of a silver shell driven by a gold Cupidon; yet, despite the frivolity of these associations, she contrives to get through a vast mass of business at this fragile table, and has one of the soundest heads for affairs in all England. Gervase sits down and makes himself agreeable, and relates to her many little episodes of his recent experiences.

She is used to be the confidante of her men; she is young enough to make a friend who is attractive to them, and old enough to lend herself *de bon c[oe]ur* to the recital of their attachments to other women. Very often she gives them very good advice, but she does not obtrude it unseasonably. "An awfully nice woman all round," is the general verdict of her visitants to the boudoir. She does not seek to be more than that to them.

Gervase does not make any confidences: he only tells her things which amuse her and reveal much about her acquaintances, nothing about himself. He smokes some of her favorite cigarettes, praises some new china, suggests an alteration in the arrangement of the fans, and makes critical discourses *a propos* of her collection of snuff-boxes.

When he is going away, he lingers a moment intently looking at a patch-box of vernis Martin, and says, with studied carelessness, "Dolly, tell me, when did you make the acquaintance of Madame Sabaroff?"

"Last year, at Cannes: why do you want to know? She came and stayed with us at Orme last Easter. Is she not perfectly charming?"

"Very good-looking," says Gervase, absently. "You don't know anything about her, then?"

"Know?" repeats his hostess. "What should I know? What everybody does, I suppose. I met her first at the Duchesse de Luynes'. You can't possibly mean that there can be anything--anything----"

"Oh, no," replies Gervase; but it produces on his questioner the same effect as if he had said, "Oh, yes."

"How odious men are! such scandal-mongers," says Lady Usk, angrily. "Talk of *our* 'damning with faint praise'! There is nothing comparable to the way in which a man destroys a woman's reputation just by raising his eyebrows or twisting his moustache."

"I have no moustache to twist, and am sure there is no reputation which I wish to destroy," says her cousin.

"Then why do you ask me where I made her acquaintance?"

"My dear Dolly! Surely the most innocent and general sort of question ever on the lips of any human being!"

"Possibly; not in the way you said it, however; and when one knows that you were a great deal in Russia, it suggests five hundred things,--five thousand things: and of course one knows he was shot in a duel about her, and I believe people have talked."

"I have never helped them to talk. When do they not talk?"

And beyond this she cannot prevail upon him to go: he pretends that the Princess Sabaroff is beyond all possibility of any approach of calumny, but the protestation produces on her the impression that he could tell her a great deal wholly to the contrary if he chose.

"She certainly was staying with Madame de Luynes," she insists.

"Who ever said the lady might not stay with the Archbishop of Canterbury?" replies Gervase.

She is irritated and vexed.

Xenia Sabaroff is her idol of the moment, and if her idol were proved human she would be very angry. She reflects that she will have Dodo and the children kept more strictly in the school-room, and not let them wander about over the park as they do with their Russian friend most mornings.

"One can never be too careful with children of that age," she muses, "and they are terribly *eveillees* already."

Dorothy Usk's friendships, though very ardent, are like most friendships which exist in society: they are apt to blow

about with every breeze. She is cordial, kind, and in her way sincere; but she is what her husband characterizes as "weathercocky."

Who is not "weathercocky" in the world?

Although so tolerant in appearance of naughty people, because it is the fashion to be so, and not to be so looks priggish and dowdy and odd, she never at the bottom of her heart likes her naughty people. She has run very straight herself, as her lord would express it; she has been always much too busy to have time or inclination to be tempted "off the rails," and she has little patience with women who have gone off them; only she never says so, because it would look so goody-goody and stupid, and for fear of looking so she even manages to stifle in her own breast her own antipathy to Dulcia Waverley.

There have been very many martyrs to the sense that they ought to smile at virtue when they hate it, but Dorothy Usk's martyrdom is of a precisely opposite kind: she forces herself to seem to approve the reverse of virtue whilst she detests it. Anything is better, in her creed, than looking odd; and nowadays you do look so odd and so old-fashioned if you make a fuss about anything. Still, in her heart of hearts she feels excessively vexed, because it is quite apparent to her that Gervase knows something very much to the disadvantage of her new acquaintance.

"George will be so delighted if he finds out that Madame Sabaroff is like all those horrid women he is so fond of," she reflects. "I shall never hear the last of it from him. It will be a standing joke for him the whole of his life."

Certainly Madame Sabaroff is letting Brandolin carry on with her more than is altogether proper. True, they are people who may marry each other if they please, but Brandolin is not a man who marries, and his attentions are never likely to take that form. He probably pays so much court to Madame Sabaroff because he has heard that of her which leads him to suppose that his efforts may be *couronne*, as French vaudevillists say, without any thought of marriage.

Lady Usk has always known that he is horribly unprincipled,—more so than even men of his world usually are. That bantering tone of his is odious, she thinks; and he always has it, even on the gravest subjects.

"What's the row, my lady? You look ruffled!" inquires Usk, coming into her boudoir with a sheaf of half-opened letters in his hand.

"There are always things to annoy one," she answers, vaguely.

"It is an arrangement of a prudential Providence to prevent our affections being set on this world," replies Usk, piously.

His wife's only comment on this religious declaration is an impatient twist to the tail of her Maltese dog.

Usk proceeds to turn over to her such letters as bore him; they are countable by dozens; the two or three which interest him have been read in the gun-room and put away in an inside pocket.

"Mr. Bruce could attend to all these," she says, looking with some disgust at the correspondence. Bruce is his secretary.

"He always blunders," says Usk.

"Then change him," says his wife; nevertheless she is pleased at the compliment implied to herself.

"All secretaries are fools," says Usk, impartially.

"Even secretaries of state," says Mr. Wootton, who has the *entree* of the boudoir, and saunters in at that moment. "I have some news this morning," he adds: "Coltsfoot marries Miss Hoard."

"Never!" exclaims Dorothy Usk.

"Perfectly true," says Mr. Wootton. "Both of them staying at Dunrobin, and engagement publicly announced."

Lord Coltsfoot is heir to a dukedom; Miss Hoard is the result in bullion of iron-works.

"Never!" reiterates Lady Usk. "It is impossible that he can do such a horrible thing! Why, she has one shoulder higher than the other, and red eyes!"

"There are six millions paid down," replies Mr. Wootton, sententiously.

"What the deuce will Mrs. Donnington say?" asks Usk.

"One never announces any marriage," remarks Mr. Wootton, "but there is a universal outcry about what will some lady, married long ago to somebody else, say to it. Curious result of supposed monogamy!"

"It is quite disgusting!" says Lady Usk. "Some of those new people are presentable, but she isn't; and Coltsfoot is so good-looking and so young."

"It is what the French call an '*alliance tres comme il faut*,'" says Usk, from sheer spirit of contradiction. "The dukedom is as full of holes as an old tin pot; she tinkers it up with her iron and gold; and I bet you that your friend Worth will manage to cut Lady Coltsfoot's gowns so that one shoulder higher than the other will become all the rage next season."

"Of course you set no store on such a simple thing as happiness," says his wife, with acerbity.

"Happiness? Lord, my dear! Happiness was buried with Strephon and Chloe centuries ago! We are amused or bored, we are successful or unsuccessful, we are popular or unpopular, we are somebody or we are nobody, but we are never either happy or miserable."

"People who have a heart are still both!"

"A heart! You mean spoons!"

"What a hideous expression! Strephon and Chloe never used that."

"When we have an unfortunate passion now," remarks Mr. Wootton, "we go to Carlsbad. It's only an affair of the liver."

"Or the nerves," suggests Usk. "Flirtation is the proper thing: flirtation never hurts anybody: it's like puff-paste, seltzer water, and Turkish cigarettes."

"Puff-paste may bring on an indigestion when one's too old to eat it!"

"There! Didn't I tell you so? She is always saying something about my age. A man is the age that he feels."

"No, a woman is the age that she looks. If you will quote things, quote them properly."

"The age that she looks? That's so very variable. She's twenty when she enters a ball-room at midnight, she's fifty when she comes out at sunrise; she's sixteen when she goes to meet somebody at Hurlingham, she's sixty when she scolds her maid and has a scene with her husband!"

Lady Usk interrupts him with vivacity: "And he? Pray, isn't he five-and-twenty when he's in Paris alone, and five-and-ninety when he's grumbling at home?"

"Because he's bored at home! Youth is, after all, only good spirits. If you laugh you are young, but your wife don't make you laugh; you pay her bills, and go with her to a state ball, and sit opposite to her at dinner, and when you catch a cold she is always there to say, 'My dear, didn't I tell you so?' but I defy any man living to recall any hour of his existence in which his wife ever made him laugh!"

"And yet you wanted me to ask married people together."

"Because I wanted it all to be highly proper and deadly dull. Surrenden has got a sort of reputation of being a kind of Orleans Club."

"And yet you complain of being bored in it!"

"One is always bored in one's own house! One can never take in to dinner the person one likes."

"You make up to yourself for the deprivation after dinner!"

"My lady's very ruffled to-day," says Usk to Mr. Wootton. "I don't know which of her doves has turned out a fighting-cock."

"That reminds me," observes Mr. Wootton. "I wanted to ask you, did you know that Gervase, when he was Lord Baird, was very much *au mieux* with Madame Sabaroff? I remember hearing long ago from Russians----"

Lady Usk interrupts the great man angrily: "Very much *au mieux*! What barbarous polygot language for a great critic like you! Must you have the assistance of bad grammar in two tongues to take away my friend's reputation?"

Lord Usk chuckles. "Reputations aren't taken away so easily; they're very hardy plants nowadays, and will stand a good deal of bad weather."

Mr. Wootton is shocked. "Oh, Lady Usk! Reputation! You couldn't think I meant to imply of any guest of yours--only, you know, he was secretary in Petersburg when he was Lord Baird, and so----"

"Well, it doesn't follow that he is the lover of every woman in Petersburg!"

Mr. Wootton is infinitely distressed. "Oh, indeed I didn't mean anything of that sort."

"You did mean everything of that sort," murmurs his hostess.

"But, you see, he admired her very much, was constantly with her, and yesterday I saw they didn't speak to each other, so I was curious to know what could be the reason."

"I believe she didn't recognize him."

Mr. Wootton smiles. "Oh, ladies have such prodigious powers of oblivion--and remembrance!"

"Yes," observes Usk, with complacency: "the storms of memory sometimes sink into them as if they were sponges, and sometimes glide off them as if they were ducks. It is just as they find it convenient. But Madame Sabaroff can't have been more than a child when Gervase was in Russia."

Mr. Wootton smiles again significantly. "She was married."

"To a brute!" cries Dorothy Usk.

"All husbands," says Lord Usk, with a chuckle, "are brutes, and all wives are angels. *C'est imprime!*"

"I hope no one will ever call me an angel! I should know at once that I was a bore!"

"No danger, my lady: you've no wings on your shoulders, and you've salt on your tongue."

"I'm sure you mean to be odiously rude, but to my taste it's a great compliment."

"My dear Alan," says Dorothy Usk, having got him at a disadvantage in her boudoir one-quarter of an hour after luncheon, "what has there been between you and the Princess Sabaroff? Everybody feels there is something. It is in the air. Indeed, everybody is talking about it. Pray tell me. I am dying to know."

Gervase is silent.

"Everybody in the house is sure of it," continues his hostess. "They don't say so, of course, but they think so. Nina Curzon, who is *mauvaise langue*, pretends even that she knows all the circumstances; and it would seem that they are not very nice circumstances. I really cannot consent to go on in the dark any longer."

"Ask the lady," replies Gervase, stiffly.

"I certainly shall do nothing so ill-bred. You are a man, you are a relation of mine, and I can say things to you I couldn't possibly say to a stranger, which Madame Sabaroff is quite to me. If you won't answer, I shall only suppose that you paid court to her and were 'spun,' as the boys say at the examinations."

"Not at all," says Gervase, haughtily.

"Then tell me the story."

He hesitates. "I don't know whether you will think very well of me if I tell you the truth."

"That you may be sure I shall not. No man ever behaves well where women are in the question."

"My dear Dolly, what unkind exaggeration! If I tell you anything, you will be sure not to repeat what I say? Madame Sabaroff considers me a stranger to her: I am bound to accept her decision on such a point."

"You knew her in Russia?"

"Yes; when I was there she was the new beauty at the court. She had been married a year or less to Paul Sabaroff. I had the honor of her friendship at that time; if she withdraws it now I must acquiesce."

"Oh!"

Lady Usk gives a little sound between a snort and a sigh.

She is annoyed. The gossipers are right, then. She is sorry the children have been so much with their friend, and she is infuriated at the idea of her husband's triumph over her credulity.

"Oh, pray don't think--don't think for a moment----" murmurs Gervase; but his cousin understands that it is the conventional compulsory expostulation which every man who is well-bred is bound to make on such subjects.

"She must have been very young then?" she says, beating impatiently on her blotting-book with her gold pen.

"Very young; but such a husband as Paul Sabaroff made is--well, a more than liberal education to any woman, however young. She was sixteen, I think, and very lovely; though she is perhaps handsomer now. I had the honor of her confidence: she was unhappy and *incomprise*; her father had given her hand in discharge of a debt at cards; Sabaroff was a gambler and a brute; at the end of the second winter season he had a violent fit of jealousy, and sent her to his estate on the White Sea----"

"Jealousy of you?"

Gervase bowed.

"Where she was kept in a state of surveillance scarcely better than absolute imprisonment. I did all manner of crazy and romantic things to endeavor to see her; and once or twice I succeeded; but he had discovered letters of mine, and made her captivity more rigorous than ever. I myself was ordered on the special mission to Spain,--you remember,--and I left Russia with a broken heart. From that time to this I have never seen her."

"But your broken heart has continued to do its daily work?"

"It is a figure of speech. I adored her, and the husband was a brute. When Lustoff shot him he only rid the world of a brute. You have seen that broad bracelet she wears above the right elbow? People always talk so about it. She wears it to hide where Sabaroff broke her arm one night in his violence: the marks of it are there forever."

Lady Usk is silent: she is divided between her natural compassion and sympathy, which are very easily roused, and her irritation at discovering that her new favorite is what Usk would call "just like all the rest of them."

"You perceive," he added, "that, as the princess chooses wholly to ignore the past, it is not for me to recall it. I am obliged to accept her decision, however much I must suffer from it."

"Suffer!" echoes his cousin. "After her husband's death you never took the trouble to cross Europe to see her."

"She had never answered my letters," says Gervase, but he feels that the excuse is a frail one. And how, he thinks, angrily, should a good woman like his cousin, who has never flirted in her life and never done anything which might not have been printed in the daily papers, understand a man's inevitable inconstancy?

"I assure you that I have never loved any woman as I loved her," he continues.

"Then you are another proof, if one were wanted, that men have died and worms have eaten them, but not for----"

"I did not die, certainly," Gervase says, much irritated; "but I suffered greatly, whether you choose to believe it or not."

"I am not inclined to believe it," replies his hostess. "It is not your style."

"I wrote to her a great many times."

He pauses.

Lady Usk fills up the pause. "And she answered you?" she inquires.

"N-no," replies Gervase, unwilling to confess such an affront to him. "She did not write. Prudence, I suppose; or perhaps she might be too closely watched, or her letters might be stopped: who can say?"

"Nobody but herself, clearly. Well?"

"I was sent to Madrid; and I heard nothing of her except that Sabaroff was shot in a duel about her with Lustoff; but that was two years afterwards."

"And when he was shot why did you not in due course go to the White Sea, or wherever she was, and offer yourself?"

"The truth is, I had become acquainted with a Spanish lady----"

"A great many Spanish ladies, no doubt! What a half-hearted Lothario!"

"Not at all. Only just at that time----"

"Manillas, mandolines, balconies, bull-fights, high mass, and moonlight had the supremacy! My dear Alan, tell your story how you will, you can't make yourself heroic."

"I have not the smallest pretension to do so," says Gervase, very much annoyed. "I have no heroism. I leave it to Lord Brandolin, who has been shipwrecked five hundred times, I believe, and ridden as many dromedaries over unknown sand-plains as Gordon----"

"As you don't care in the least for her, why should you care if his shipwrecks and his dromedaries interest her? We don't know that they do; but----"

"How little sympathy you have!"

"George says I have always a great deal too much. What do you want me to sympathize with? According to your own story, you 'loved and rode away;' at least, took a through-ticket across Europe, as Lovelace has to do in these prosaic days. If you did not go back to Russia when you might have gone back, *a qui la faute?* Nobody's but your own and the nameless Spanish lady or ladies!"

"You are very perverse."

"It is you who are, or who were, perverse. According to your own story, you adored a woman when she was unattainable; when she became attainable you did not even take the trouble to get into a railway-carriage: you were otherwise amused. What romantic element is there in such a tale as yours to excite the smallest fragment of interest? To judge you out of your own mouth, you seem to me to have behaved with most uninteresting inconstancy."

"It was four years, and she had never answered my letters."

"Really a reason to make you esteem her infinitely more than if she had answered them. My dear Alan, you were a flirt, and you forgot as flirts forget: why should one pity you for being so easily consoled? You ought to be infinitely grateful that Madame Sabaroff did not send you reams of reproaches, and telegraph you compromising messages which would have got you into trouble in Downing Street. The thing died a natural death; you did not care to keep it alive: why are you now all lamentations over its grave? I really do not follow the course of your emotions,--if you feel any emotion: I thought you never did. Madame Sabaroff has never been a person difficult to follow or to find; the fashionable intelligence of the newspapers would at any time have enabled you to know where she was; you never had inclination or remembrance enough to make you curious to see her again, and then when you come across her in a country house you think yourself very ill used because she does not all at once fall into your arms. You couldn't possibly care about her, since you never tried to see her all those years!"

Dorothy Usk is really annoyed.

She is not a person who has a high standard of humanity at any time, and she knows men thoroughly, and they have no chance of being heroes in her sight. But she likes a man to be a man, and to be an ardent lover if he be a lover at all, and her favorite cousin seems to her to wear a poor aspect in this page of his autobiography.

"Pray, did you know that she is as rich as she is?" she asks, with some sharpness in her tone.

Gervase colors a little, being conscious that his response cannot increase his cousin's sympathies with him.

"No. Is she rich? Paul Sabaroff was poor. He had gambled away nearly everything. Your children have a great deal of *blague* about her riches; but I suppose it is all nonsense."

"Not nonsense at all. Two years ago some silver was discovered on a bit of rough land which belonged to her, somewhere beyond the Urals, I think, and she is enormously rich,--will be richer every year, they say."

"Indeed!"

He tries to look indifferent, but his cousin's penetrating eyes seem to him to be reading his very soul.

"How dreadfully sorry he must be that he didn't leave Madrid!" she thinks, and aloud says, irritably, "Why on earth didn't you try to renew things with her all these three years?"

"I imagined that I had forgotten her."

"Well, so you had,--completely forgotten her, till you saw her here."

"On my honor, she is the only woman I have ever really loved."

"Oh, men always say that of somebody or another, generally of the most impossible people. George always declares that the only woman he ever really loved was a pastry-cook when he was at Christ-church."

"Dear Dorothy, don't joke. I assure you I am thoroughly in earnest."

"She certainly has forgotten you."

She knows that for him to be convinced of this is the surest way to revive a died-out passion.

"Who knows? She would be indifferent in that case, and polite: as it is, she is cold, even rude."

"That may be resentment."

"Resentment means remembrance."

"Oh, not always."

"Then she has a number of my letters."

"So you said; you cannot be so very sure she has kept them. Other people may have written her the same sort of letters, or more admirable letters still: how can you tell?"

He colors angrily. "She is not a *femme legere*."

"She is receiving a great deal of attention now from Lord Brandolin, and she does not seem to dislike it. They say he writes exquisite letters to women he is fond of; I don't know myself, because I have never had anything more interesting from him than notes about dinners or visits; but they say so. They even say that his deserted ladies forgive his desertions because he writes his farewells so divinely."

"Lord Brandolin's epistolary accomplishments do not interest me in the least. Everybody knows what he is with women." He pauses a moment, then adds, with some hesitation,--

"Dear Dorothy, you know her very well. Don't you think you could find out for me, and tell me----"

"What?"

"Well, what she thinks or does not think; in a word, how I stand with her."

"No,--oh, no, my dear Alan; I couldn't attempt anything of that sort,--in my own house, too: it would seem so horribly rude. Besides, I am not in the least--not the very least--intimate with her. I think her charming, we are *bonnes connaiassances*, the children adore her; but I have never said anything intimate to her in my life,--never."

"But you have so much tact."

"The more tact I have, the less likely shall I be to recall to her what she is evidently perfectly determined to ignore. You can do it yourself if you want it done. You are not usually shy."

Gervase gets up impatiently, and walks about in the narrow limits of the boudoir, to the peril of the Sevres and Saxe.

"But women have a hundred indirect ways of finding out everything: you might discover perfectly well, if you chose, whether--whether she feels anger or any other sentiment; whether--whether, in a word, it would be prudent to recall the past to her."

Lady Usk shakes her head with energy, stirring all its pretty blonde curls, real and false. "*Entre l'arbre et l'ecorce ne mettez pas le doigt*. That is sound advice which I have heard given at the Francais."

"That is said of not interfering between married people."

"It is generally true of people who wish, or may not wish, to marry. And I suppose, Alan, that when you speak in my house of renewing your--your--relations with the Princess Sabaroff, you do not mean that you have any object less serious than *le bon motif*?"

Gervase is amused, although he is disconcerted and irritated.

"Come, Dorothy, your guests are not always so very serious, are they? I never knew you so prim before."

Then she in turn feels angry. She always steadily adheres to the convenient fiction that she knows nothing whatever of the amorous filaments which bind her guests together in pairs, as turtle-doves might be tied together by blue ribbons.

"If you only desire to reawake the sentiments of Madame Sabaroff in your favor that you may again make sport of them, you must excuse me if I say that I cannot assist your efforts, and that I sincerely hope they will not be successful," she says, with dignity and distance.

"Do you suppose his are any better than mine?" asks Gervase, irritably, as he waves his hand towards the window which looks on the west gardens. Between the yew- and cedar-trees, at some distance from the house, Brandolin is walking beside Xenia Sabaroff: his manner is interested and deferential; she moves with slow and graceful steps down the grassy paths, listening with apparent willingness, her head is uncovered, she carries a large sunshade opened over

it made of white lace and pale-rose silk, she has a cluster of Duchess of Sutherland roses in her hand. They are really only speaking of recent French poets, but those who look at them cannot divine that.

"He is not my cousin, and he does not solicit my assistance," says Dorothy Usk, seeing the figures in her garden with some displeasure. "*Je ne fais pas la police pour les autres*; but if he asked me what you asked me, I should give him the same answer that I give to you."

"He is probably independent of any assistance," says Gervase, with irritable irony.

"Probably," says his hostess, who is very skilful at fanning faint flame. "He is not a man whom I like myself, but many women--most women, I believe--think him irresistible."

Thereon she leaves him, without any more sympathy or solace, to go and receive some county people who have come to call, and who converse principally about prize poultry.

"*Comme elles sont assommees avec leurs poules!*" says the Marquise de Caillac, who chances to be present at this infliction, and gazes in stupefaction at a dowager duchess who has driven over from twenty miles off, who wears very thick boots, her own thin gray hair, water-proof tweed clothing, and a hat tied under her double chin with black strings. "*Un paquet!*" murmurs Madame de Caillac; "*un veritable paquet!*"

"*C'est la vertu anglaise, un peu demodee,*" says Lord Iona, with a yawn.

Gervase stays on as well as Brandolin, somewhat bored, very much *enerve*, but fascinated, too, by the presence of his Russian Ariadne, and stung by the sight of Brandolin's attentions to her into such a strong sense of revived passion that he means what he says when he declares to his cousin that the wife of Sabaroff was the only woman he has ever really loved. Her manner to him also, not cold enough to be complimentary, but entirely indifferent, never troubled, never moved in any way by his vicinity or by his direct allusions to the past, is such as irritates, piques, attracts, and magnetizes him. It seems to him incredible that any woman can ignore him so utterly. If she only seemed afraid of him, agitated in any way, even adversely, he could understand what was passing in her mind; but he cannot even flatter himself that she does this: she treats him with just such perfect indifference as she shows to the Duke of Queenstown or Hugo Mandeville or any one of the gilded youths there present. If he could once see a wistful memory in her glance, once see a flush of color on her face at his approach, it is probable that his vanity would be satisfied and his interest cease as quickly as it has revived; but he never does see anything of this sort, and, by the rule of contradiction, his desire to see it increases. And he wonders uneasily what she has done with his letters.



## CHAPTER X.

Lord Gervase was eight years younger when he wrote those letters than he is now, and he has unpleasant recollections of unpleasant passages in them which would compromise him in his career, or at least get him horribly talked about, were they ever made sport of in the world. Where are his letters? Has Madame Sabaroff kept them? He longs to ask her, but he dare not.

He does not say to his cousin that he has more than once endeavored to hint to Xenia Sabaroff that it would be sweet to him to recall the past, would she permit it. But he has elicited no response. She has evaded without directly avoiding him. She is no longer the impressionable shy girl whom he knew in Russia, weighted with an unhappy fate, and rather alarmed by the very successes of her own beauty than flattered by them. She is a woman of the world, who knows her own value and her own power to charm, and has acquired the talent which the world teaches, of reading the minds of others without revealing her own. *Saule pleureur!* the Petersburg court ladies had used to call her in those early times when the tears had started to her eyes so quickly; but no one ever sees tears in her eyes now.

Gervase is profoundly troubled to find how much genuine emotion the presence of a woman whose existence he had long forgotten has power to excite in him. He does not like emotion of any kind; and in all his affairs of the heart he is accustomed to make others suffer, not himself. Vanity and wounded vanity enter so largely into the influences moulding human life, that it is very possible, if the sight of him had had power to disturb her, the renewal of association with her would have left him unmoved. But, as it is, he has been piqued, mortified, excited, and attracted; and the admiration which Brandolin and Lawrence Hamilton and other men plainly show of her is the sharpest spur to memory and to desire.

Whenever he has remembered Xenia Sabaroff, at such rare times as he has heard her name mentioned in the world, he has thought of her complacently as dwelling in the solitudes of Baltic forests, entirely devoted to his memory. Women who are entirely devoted to their memory men seldom trouble themselves to seek out; but to see her courted, sought, and desired, more handsome than ever, and apparently wholly indifferent to himself, is a shock to his self-esteem, and galvanism to his dead wishes and slumbering recollections. He begins to perceive that he would have done better not to forget her quite so quickly.

Meanwhile, all the guests at Surrenden, guided by a hint from Nina Curzon, begin to see a quantity of things which do not exist, and to exert their minds in endeavoring to remember a vast deal which they never heard with regard to both himself and her. No one knows anything or has a shadow of fact to go on, but this is an insignificant detail which does not tie their tongues in the least. Nina Curzon has invention enough to supply any *lacunae*, and in this instance her imagination is stimulated by a double jealousy: she is jealous of Lawrence Hamilton, whom she is inclined to dismiss, and she is jealous of Brandolin, whom she is inclined to appropriate.

Twenty-four hours have not elapsed since the arrival of Gervase, before she has given a dozen people the intimate conviction that she knows all about him and the Princess Sabaroff, and that there is something very dreadful in it,--much worse than in the usual history of such relations. Everything is possible in Russia, she says, and has a way of saying this which suggests unfathomable abysses of license and crime.

No one has the slightest idea what she means, but no one will be behind any other in conjecturing; and there rises about the unconscious figure of Xenia Sabaroff a haze of vague suggested indistinct suspicion, like the smoke of the blue fires which hide the form of the Evil One on the stage in operas. Brandolin perceives it, and is deeply irritated.

"What is it to me?" he says to himself, but says so in vain.

Fragments of these ingenious conjectures and imaginary recollections come to his ear and annoy him intensely,--annoy him the more because his swift intuitions and unerring perceptions have told him from his own observation that Xenia Sabaroff does not see in Gervase altogether a stranger, though she has greeted him as such. Certain things are said which he would like to resent, but he is powerless to do so.

His days have been delightful to him before the arrival of this other man at Surrenden; now they are troubled and embittered. Yet he is not inclined to break off his visit abruptly and go to Scotland, Germany, or Norway, as might be wisest. He is in love with Xenia Sabaroff in a manner which surprises himself. He thought he had outlived that sort of boyish and imaginative passion. But she has a great power over his fancy and his senses, and she is more like his earliest ideal of a woman than any one he has ever met.

"Absurd that I should have an ideal at all at my age!" he thinks to himself; but, as there are some who are never accompanied by that ethereal attendant even in youth, so there are some whom it never leaves till they reach their graves.

Therefore when he hears these vague, floating, disagreeable jests, he suffers acutely, and finds himself in the position which is perhaps most painful of all to any man who is a gentleman, that of being compelled to sit silent and hear a woman he longs to protect lightly spoken of, because he has no right to defend her, and would indeed only compromise her more if he attempted her defence.

People do not venture to say much before Usk, because he is her host and might resent it, but nevertheless he too hears also something, and thinks to himself, "Didn't I tell Dolly foreigners are never any better than they should be?"

But Dulcia Waverley is here, and her languid and touching ways, her delicate health, and her soft sympathies have an indescribable sorcery for him at all times, so that he thinks but very little since her arrival of anything else. Usk likes women who believe devoutly that he might have been a great politician if he had chosen, and who also believe in his ruined digestion: no one affects both these beliefs so intensely as Lady Waverley, and when she tells him that he could have solved the Irish question in half an hour had he taken office, or that no one could understand his constitution except a German doctor in a bath in the Bohmerwald, whither she goes herself every autumn, she does, altogether and absolutely, anything she chooses with him.

His wife sees that quite well, and dislikes it, but it might be so much worse, she reflects: it might be a woman out of society, or a public singer, or an American adventuress: so she is reasonable, and always makes *bonne mine* to Dulcia Waverley, with her nerves, her cures, and her angelic smiles. After all, it does not much matter, she thinks, if they like to go and drink nasty waters together and poison themselves with sulphur, iron, and potassium. It is one of the odd nineteenth-century ways of playing Antony and Cleopatra.

Notwithstanding the absorption of his thoughts, Usk, however, one day spares a moment from Lady Waverley and his own liver, to put together words dropped by different people then under his own roof, to ponder upon them, and finally to interrogate his wife.

"Did you know that people say they used to carry on together?" he asks, without preamble.

"Who?" asks the lady of Surrenden, sharply.

"Madame Sabaroff and Gervase," he growls. "It'd be odd if they hadn't, as they've come to this house!"

"Of course I knew they were friends; but there was never anything between them in the vulgar sense which you would imply renders them eligible for my house," replies Dorothy Usk, with the severity of a woman whose conscience is clear, and the tranquillity of a woman who is telling a falsehood.

Usk stares at her. "Well, if you knew it, you rode a dark horse, then, when you asked her here?"

"Your expressions are incoherent," returns his wife. "If I wished two people to meet when both were free, who had had a certain sympathy for each other when honor kept them apart, there is nothing very culpable in it? What is your objection?"

"Oh, Lord, I've no objection: I don't care a straw," says her lord, with a very moody expression. "But Brandolin will, I suspect: she's certainly encouraged him. I think you might have shown us your cards."

"Lord Brandolin is certainly old enough to take care of himself in affairs of the heart, and experienced enough, too, if one is to believe all one hears," replies his wife. "What can he care, either, for a person he has known a few days? Whereas the attachment of Gervase to her is of very long date and most romantic origin. He has loved her hopelessly for eight years."

Usk gives a grim guffaw. "The constancy has had many interludes, I suspect! Now I see why you took such a craze for the lady; but you might have said what you were after to me, at any rate. I could have hinted to Brandolin how the land lay, and he wouldn't have walked with his eyes shut into her net."

"Her 'net'? She is as cold as ice to him!" replies his wife, with disgust; "and, were she otherwise, the loves of your friend are soon consoled. He writes a letter, takes a voyage, and throws his memories overboard. Alan's temperament is far more serious."

"If by serious you mean selfish, I agree with you. There isn't such another d---d egotist anywhere under the sun." And, much out of temper, Usk flings himself out of the room and goes to Lady Waverley, who is lying on a sofa in the small library. She has a headache, but her smile is sweet, her hand cool, her atmosphere soothing and delightful, with the blinds down and an odor of attar of roses.

If any one were to tell Dolly Usk that she had been making up fibs on this occasion, she would be mortally offended and surprised. She would reply that she had only been *brodant un peu*,--putting the thing as it ought to be put, as it

must be put, if Gervase is to obtain the hand of Xenia Sabaroff, and if nobody is to know anything which ought not to be known. Indeed, she has pondered so much on this manner of putting it, that she has almost ended in believing that her version of the story is the true one.

"Brandolin's feelings, indeed!" she thinks, with great contempt. "As if any pain he might feel, if he did feel any, would not be due and fitting retribution upon him for the horrid life he has led, and the way he has played fast and loose with women. He can go back to his Hindoos, whose figures are so superior to any European's! But George is always so absurd about his friends."

Whereon, being in an irritated and unkind mood, she desires the servant, who just then announces the visit of the rector of the parish, to show that reverend person into the small library, where she knows that Dulcia Waverley is trying to get rid of her headache. It is very seldom that she is unwise enough to indulge in this kind of domestic vengeance; but at this moment it seems sweet to her.

The unfortunate and innocent rector finds the lord of Surrenden monosyllabic and impolite, but Lady Waverley, woman-like, is wholly equal to the occasion, and in her sweet low voice discourses of village choirs, and village readings, and village medicines and morals, with such divine patience and feminine adaptability that the good man dismisses from his mind as impossible what he had certainly fancied he saw in the moment when the library door opened before him.

If ever there was purity incarnate, Dulcia Waverley looks it, with her white gown, her Madonna-like hair, her dewy pensive eyes, and her appealing smile. She suggests the portraits in the Keepsakes and Forget-me-Nots of fifty years ago; she has always about her the faint old-fashioned perfume of attar of roses, and she wears her soft fair hair in Raphaelite bands which in any other woman would look absurd; but her experience has told her that, despite all change in modes and manners, the surest weapons to subdue strong men are still those old-fashioned charms of fragility and of apparent helplessness which made Othello weep when his bridal moon was young above the Venetian waters. Only if she had ever spoken candidly all she knows, which she never by any chance does, she would say that to succeed thus with Othello, or with any other male creature, you must be, under all your apparent weakness, tenacious as a magnet and cold as steel. Therein lies the secret of all power: the velvet glove and the iron hand may be an old saying, but it is a truth never old.

The conclusion which she had drawn from Gervase and his fragmentary story has seriously annoyed and shocked his cousin, but on reflection she decides to adhere to her invariable rule of ignoring all that is equivocal in it, and treating it accordingly.

No one has ever heard Lady Usk admit that there is the slightest impropriety in the relations of any of her guests: it is one of those fictions like the convenient fictions of the law, which are so useful that every one agrees not to dispute their acceptance. She will never know a person who is really compromised. Therefore, if there be any soil on the wings of her doves, she shuts her eyes to it so long as those of the world are shut. She has the agreeable power of never seeing but what she wishes to see: so, although for the moment she has been uncomfortably shocked, she recovers her composure rapidly, and persuades herself that Gervase merely spoke of a passing attachment, perfectly pure. Why should he not marry the object of it? To the mind of Dorothy Usk that would make everything right. Things may have been wrong once, but that is nobody's business. Xenia Sabaroff is a charming and beautiful woman, and the silver-mine beyond the Urals is a very real thing. Lady Usk is not a mercenary, she is even a generous woman; but when English fortunes are so embarrassed as they are in this day, with Socialists at the roots and a Jacquerie tearing at the fruits of them, any solid fortune situated out of England would be of great use to any Englishman occupying a great position.

"We shall all of us have to live abroad before long," she reflects, with visions of Hodge chopping down her palms for firewood and Sally smashing the porcelain in her model dairy.

No doubt the relations of her cousin and her guest have not been always what they ought to have been; but she does not wish to think of this, and she will not think of it: by-gones are always best buried. The people who manage to be happy are those who understand the art of burying them and use plenty of quicklime.

During the twenty years which have elapsed since her presentation, Dolly Usk has had a very varied experience of men and women, and has continually been solicited to interfere in their love-affairs, or has even interfered without being solicited. She likes the feeling of being a *diva ex machina* to her friends, and, though she has so decidedly refused Gervase her assistance to discover the state of Xenia Sabaroff's feelings towards him, she begins in her own mind immediately to cast about for some indirect means of learning it, and arranges in her own fancy the whole story as it will sound prettiest and most proper, if she be ever called on to relate it to the world.

She has a talent at putting such stories so nicely in order that anything which may be objectionable in them is

altogether invisible, as a clever *faiseur* will so arrange old laces on a court train that the darns and stains in them are wholly hidden away. She likes exercising her ingenuity in this way; and, although the narrative given her by Gervase has certainly seemed to her objectionable, and one which places the hero of it in an unpleasant light, it may with tact be turned so as to show nothing but what is interesting. And to this end she also begins to drop little hints, little phrases suggestive of that virtue of blameless and long constancy with which it is necessary to invest her cousin Alan, if he is to be made a centre of romance. She even essays these very delicately on the ear of Xenia Sabaroff; but they are met with so absolute a lack of response, so discouraging and cold an absence of all understanding, that she cannot continue to try them in that direction.

"If that odious Brandolin were not here!" she thinks, irritably.

The attentions of Brandolin are very marked to the Princess Sabaroff, and are characterized by that carelessness of comment and that color of romance which have always marked his interest in any woman. He is not a rival *a plaisanter*, she knows; but then she knows, too, that he never is serious in these matters. When she first hears the story of Gervase, she heartily wishes that there were any pretence to get rid of Xenia Sabaroff, and hastily wonders what excuse she could make to break up her Surrenden circle. But on reflection she desires as strongly to retain her there; and, as there is to be a child's costume ball on the occasion of the Babe's birthday a fortnight hence, she makes the children entreat their friend to stay for it, and adds her own solicitation to theirs. Madame Sabaroff hesitates, is inclined to refuse, but at length acquiesces.

Unfortunately, Usk, who always to his wife's mind represents the bull in the china-shop with regard to any of her delicate and intricate combinations, insists that Brandolin shall not leave either. So the situation remains unchanged, though many guests come and go, some staying two days, some three or four.

Xenia Sabaroff has seen and suffered enough to make her not lightly won or easily impressed. She knows enough of the world to know her own value in it, and she has measured the brutality and the inconsistency which may lie under the most polished exterior.

"I am not old yet in years," she says, once, "but I am very old in some things. I have no illusions."

"When there is a frost in spring the field-flowers die," says Brandolin, softly, "but they come again."

"In the fields, perhaps," replies Xenia Sabaroff.

"And in the human heart," says Brandolin.

He longs to ask her what have been the relations between her and Gervase which people seem so sure have existed once; he longs to know whether it was the brutality of her husband, or the infidelity of any lover, which has taught her so early the instability of human happiness.

But he hesitates before any demand, however veiled or delicate, upon her confidence. He has known her such a little while, and he is conscious that she is not a *femme facile*. It is her greatest fascination for him: though he is credited with holding women lightly, he is a man whose theories of what they ought to be are high and difficult to realize. Each day that he sees her at Surrenden tends to convince him more and more that she does realize them, despite the calumnies which are set floating round her name.

One day, among several new arrivals, a countryman of hers comes down from London, where, being momentarily *charge-d'affaires* of the Russian Legation, he has been cursing the heat, the dust, the deserted squares, the empty clubs, the ugly parks, and rushing out of town whenever he can for twenty-four hours, as he now comes to Surrenden from Saturday to Monday. "*Comme un calicot! Comme un calicot!*" he says, piteously. Such are the miseries of the diplomatic service.

He kisses the hand of Madame Sabaroff with ardor and reverence: he has known her in her own country. A gleam of amusement comes into his half-shut gray eyes as he recognizes Gervase.

The next morning is Sunday. Usk and Dulcia Waverley are at church, with the children and Lady Usk and Nina Curzon.

Brandolin strays into the small library, takes down a book, and stretches himself on a couch. He half expects that Madame Sabaroff will come down before luncheon and also seek a book, as she did last Sunday. He lights a cigarette and waits, lazily watching the peacocks drawing their trains over the velvety turf without. It is a lovely dewy morning, very fresh and fragrant after rains in the night. He thinks he will persuade her to go for a walk: there is a charming walk near, under deep trees by a little brown brook, full of forget-me-nots.

He hears a step, and looks up: he does not see her, but the Russian secretary, Gregor Litroff, always called "Toffy" by his female friends in England.

"*Dieu de Dieu!* What an institution your English Sunday is!" says Litroff, with a yawn. "I looked out of my window an hour ago, and beheld Usk in a tall hat, with his little boy on one side and miladi Waverley on the other, solemnly going to church. How droll! He would not do it in London."

"It is not more ridiculous to go to church in a tall hat than to prostrate yourself and kiss a wooden cross, as you would do if you were at home," says Brandolin, contemptuously, eying the intruder with irritation.

"That may be," says the secretary, good-humoredly. "We do it from habit, to set an example, not to make a fuss. So, I suppose, does he."

"Precisely," says Brandolin, wondering how he shall get rid of this man.

"And he takes Lady Waverley for an example, too?" asks Litroff, with a laugh.

"Religion enjoins us," replies Brandolin, curtly, "to offer what we have most precious to the Lord."

The secretary laughs again.

"That is very good," he says, with enjoyment.

Mr. Wootton comes in at that instant. He has been away, but has returned: the cooks at Surrenden are admirable. Brandolin sees his hopes of a *tete-a-tete* and a walk in the home wood fading farther and farther from view. Mr. Wootton has several telegram-papers in his hand.

"All bad news, from all the departments," he remarks.

"There is nothing but bad news," says Brandolin. "It is painful to die by driblets. We shall all be glad when we have got the thing over;--seen Windsor burnt, London sacked, Ireland admitted to the American Union, and Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone crowned at Westminster."

Mr. Wootton coughs: he does not like unseemly jests, nor to have the gravity and exclusiveness of the private intelligence he receives doubted. He turns to Litroff, talks of Russian politics, and brings the conversation round to the Princess Sabaroff.

Brandolin, appearing absorbed in his book, lies on his couch wondering whether he should meet her anywhere about the gardens if he went out. He listens angrily when he hears her name.

"Was she ever talked about?" asks Mr. Wootton, searching the book-shelves.

"What charming woman is not?" returns Litroff, gallantly.

"My dear count," replies Mr. Wootton, with grave rebuke, "we have thousands of noble wives and mothers in England before whom Satan himself would be obliged to bow in reverence."

"Ah, truly," says Litroff: "so have we, I dare say: I have never asked."

"No doubt you have," says Mr. Wootton, kindly. "The virtue of its women is the great safeguard of a nation."

"One understands why England is losing her nice equipoise, then, now," murmurs Brandolin.

Mr. Wootton disregards him.

"But Madame Sabaroff *was* talked about, I think,--unjustly, no doubt?" he insists.

Mr. Wootton always insists.

"Ach!" says Litroff, apologetically, "Sabaroff was such a great brute. It was very natural----"

"What was natural?"

"That she should console herself."

"Ah! she did console herself?"

Litroff smiles. "Ask Lord Gervase: he was Lord Baird at that time. We all expected he would have married her when Sabaroff was shot."

"But it was Lustoff who shot Sabaroff in a duel about her?"

"Not about her. Lustoff quarrelled with him about a gambling affair, not about her at all, though people have said so."

Lord Baird--Gervase--was, I am certain, her first lover, and has been her only one, as yet."

Brandolin flings his book with some violence on the floor, gets up, and walks to the window. Mr. Wootton looks after him.

"No one could blame her," says Litroff, who is a good-natured man. "She was married when she was scarcely sixteen to a brute; she was immensely admired; she was alone in the midst of a society both loose and brilliant; Gervase laid siege to her sans treve, and she was hardly more than a child."

"Where there is no principle early implanted," begins Mr. Wootton---

But Litroff is not patient under preaching. "My dear sir," he says, impatiently, "principle (of that kind) is more easily implanted in plain women than in handsomer ones. Madame Sabaroff is a proud woman, which comes to nearly the same thing as a high-principled one. She has lived like a saint since Sabaroff was shot, and if she take up matters with her early lover again it will only be, I imagine, this time, *pour le bon motif*. Anyhow, I don't see why we should blame her for the past, when the present shows us such an admirable and edifying spectacle as miladi Waverley and miladi Usk going to sit in church with George Usk between them!"

Whereon the Russian secretary takes a "Figaro" off the newspaper-table, and rudely opens it and flourishes it between Mr. Wootton and himself, in sign that the conversation is ended.

Mr. Wootton has never been so treated in his life.

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## CHAPTER XI.

Brandolin walks down the opening between the glass doors into the garden. He paces impatiently the green shady walks where he has seen her on other mornings than this. It is lovely weather, and the innumerable roses fill the warm moist air with fragrance. There is a sea-breeze blowing from the sea-coast some thirty miles away; his schooner is in harbor there; he thinks that it would be wisest to go to it and sail away again for as many thousand miles as he has just left behind him. Xenia Sabaroff has a great and growing influence over him, and he does not wish her to exercise it and increase it if this thing be true: perhaps, after all, she may be that kind of sorceress of which Mary Stuart is the eternal type,—cold only that others may burn, *reculant pour mieux sauter*, exquisitely feminine only to be more dangerously powerful. He does not wish to play the *role* of Chastelard, or of Douglas, or of Henry Darnley. He is stung to the quick by what he has heard said.

It is not new: since the arrival of Gervase the same thing has been hinted more or less clearly, more or less obscurely, within his hearing more than once; but the matter-of-fact words of Litroff have given the tale a kind of circumstantiality and substance which the vague uncertain suggestions of others did not do. Litroff has, obviously, no feeling against her; he even speaks of her with reluctance and admiration: therefore his testimony has a truthfulness about it which would be lacking in any mere malicious scandal.

It is intensely painful to him to believe, or even to admit to himself as possible, that it may be thus true. She seems to him a very queen among women: all the romance of his temperament clothes her with ideal qualities. He walks on unconsciously till he has left the west garden and entered the wood which joins it, and the grassy seats made underneath the boughs. As he goes, his heart thrills, his pulse quickens: he sees Madame Sabaroff. She is seated on one of the turf banks, reading, the dog of the house at her feet. He has almost walked on to her before he has perceived her.

"I beg your pardon," he murmurs, and pauses, undecided whether to go or stay.

She looks at him a little surprised at the ceremony of his manner.

"For what do you beg my pardon? You are as free of the wood as I," she replies, with a smile. "I promised the children to keep their dogs quiet, and to await them here as they return from their church."

"You are too good to the children," says Brandolin, still with restraint. Her eyes open with increased surprise. She has never seen his manner, usually so easy, nonchalant, and unstudied, altered before.

"He must have heard bad news," she thinks, but says nothing, and keeps her book open.

Brandolin stands near, silent and absorbed. He is musing what worlds he would give, if he had them, to know whether the story is true! He longs passionately to ask her in plain words, but it would be too brutal and too rude; he has not known her long enough to be able to presume to do so.

He watches the sunshine fall through the larch boughs on to her hands in their long loose gloves and touch the pearls which she always wears at her throat.

"How very much he is unlike himself!" she thinks; she misses his spontaneous and picturesque eloquence, his warm *abandon* of manner, his caressing deference of tone. At that moment there is a gleam of white between the trees, a sound of voices in the distance.

The family party are returning from church. The dogs jump up and wag their tails and bark their welcome. The Babe is dashing on in advance. There is an end of their brief *tete-a-tete*; he passionately regrets the loss of it, though he is not sure of what he would have said in it.

"Always together!" says Dulcia Waverley, in a whisper, to Usk, as she sees them. "Does he know that he succeeds Lord Gervase, do you think?"

"How should I know?" says Usk; "and Dolly says there was nothing between her and Gervase,—nothing; at least it was all in honor, as the French say."

"Oh, of course," agrees Lady Waverley, with her plaintive eyes gazing dreamily down the aisle of larch-trees. The children have run on to Madame Sabaroff.

"Where is Alan?" thinks Dolly Usk, angrily, on seeing Brandolin.

Gervase, who is not an early riser, is then taking his coffee in bed as twelve strikes. He detests an English Sunday:

although at Surrenden it is disguised as much as possible to look like any other day, still there is a Sunday feeling in the air, and Usk does not like people to play cards on Sundays: it is his way of being virtuous vicariously.

"Primitive Christianity," says Brandolin, touching the white feathers of Dodo's hat and the white lace on her short skirts.

"We only go to sleep," replies the child, disconsolately. "We might just as well go to sleep at home; and it is so hot in that pew, with all that red cloth!"

"My love!" says Dulcia Waverley, scandalized.

"Lady Waverley don't go to sleep!" cries the Babe, in his terribly clear little voice. "She was writing in her hymn-book and showing it to papa."

No one appears to hear this indiscreet remark except Dodo, who laughs somewhat rudely.

"I was trying to remember the hymn of Faber's 'Longing for God,'" says Lady Waverley, who is never known to be at a loss. "The last verse escapes me. Can any one recall it? It is so lamentable that sectarianism prevents those hymns from being used in Protestant churches."

But no one there present is religious enough or poetic enough to help her to the missing lines.

"There is so little religious feeling anywhere in England," she remarks, with a sigh.

"It's the confounded levelling that destroys it," says Usk, echoing the sigh.

"They speak of Faber," says Madame Sabaroff. "The most beautiful and touching of all his verses are those which express the universal sorrow of the world."

And in her low, grave, melodious voice she repeats a few of the lines of the poem:

"The sea, unmated creature, tired and lone,  
Makes on its desolate sands eternal moan.  
Lakes on the calmest days are ever throbbing  
Upon their pebbly shores with petulant sobbing.

"The beasts of burden linger on their way  
Like slaves, who will not speak when they obey;  
Their eyes, whene'er their looks to us they raise,  
With something of reproachful patience gaze.

"Labor itself is but a sorrowful song,  
The protest of the weak against the strong;  
Over rough waters, and in obstinate fields,  
And from dark mines, the same sad sound it yields."

She is addressing Brandolin as she recites them; they are a little behind the others.

He does not reply, but looks at her with an expression in his eyes which astonishes and troubles her. He is thinking, as the music of her tones stirs his innermost soul, that he can believe no evil of her, will believe none,--no, though the very angels of heaven were to cry out against her.



## CHAPTER XII.

"Where were you all this morning?" asks Lady Usk of her cousin, after luncheon.

"I never get up early," returns Gervase. "You know that."

"Brandolin was in the home wood with Madame Sabaroff as we returned from church," remarks Dolly Usk. "They were together under a larch-tree. They looked as if they were on the brink of a quarrel or at the end of one: either may be an interesting *rapprochement*."

"I dare say they were only discussing some poet. They are always discussing some poet."

"Then they had fallen out over the poet. Poets are dangerous themes. Or perhaps she had been showing him your letters, if, as you seem to think, she carries them about with her everywhere like a reliquary."

"I never presumed to imagine that she had preserved them for a day."

"Oh, yes, you did. You had a vision of her weeping over them in secret every night, until you saw her here and found her as unlike a *delaisse* as a woman can be."

"Certainly she does not look that. Possibly, if Dido could have been dressed by Worth and Rodrigues, had diamonds as big as plovers' eggs, and been adored by Lord Brandolin, she would never have perished in despair. *Autres temps autres m[oe]urs*."

He speaks with sullen and scornful bitterness: his handsome face is momentarily flushed.

Dorothy Usk looks at him with inquisitiveness: she has never known him fail to rely on his own attractions before. "You are unusually modest," she replies. "Certainly, in our days, if Aeneas does not come back, we take somebody else; sometimes we do that even if he does come back."

Gervase is moodily silent.

"I never knew you 'funk a fence' before!" says his cousin to him, sarcastically.

"I have tried to say something to her," replies Gervase, moodily, "but she gives me no hearing, no occasion."

"I should have thought you were used well enough to make both for yourself," returns his cousin, with curt sympathy. "You have always been 'master of yourself, though women sigh,'--a paraphrase of Pope at your service."

Gervase smiled, conscious of his past successes and willing to acknowledge them.

"But you see she does not sigh!" he murmurs, with a sense that the admission is not flattering to his own *amour-propre*.

"You have lost the power to make her sigh, do you mean?"

"I make no impression on her at all. I am utterly unable to imagine her feelings, her sentiments,--how much she would acknowledge, how much she would ignore."

"That is a confession of great helplessness! I should never have believed that you would be baffled by any woman, above all by a woman who once loved you."

"It is not easy to make a fire out of ashes."

"Not if the ashes are quite cold, certainly; but if a spark remains in them, the fire soon comes again."

He is silent: the apparent indifference of a person whom he believed to be living out her life in solitude, occupied only with his memory, annoys and mortifies him. He has never doubted his own power to write his name indelibly on the hearts of women.

"Perhaps she wishes to marry Brandolin?" suggests Dorothy Usk.

"Pshaw!" says Lord Gervase.

"Why pshaw?" repeats his cousin, persistently. "He would not be a man to my taste, and he hates marriage, and he has a set of Hindoos at St. Hubert's Lea, which would require as much cleaning as the Augean stable; but I dare say she doesn't know anything about them, and he may be persuading her that he thinks marriage opens the doors of Paradise:

men can so easily pretend that sort of thing! A great many men have wanted to marry her, I believe, since she came back into the world after her seclusion. George declares that Brandolin is quite serious."

"Preposterous!" replies Lord Gervase.

"Really, I don't see that," replies his judicious cousin. "A great many women have wanted to marry *him*, though one wonders why. Indeed, I have heard some of them declare that he is wholly irresistible when he chooses."

"With Hindoos, perhaps," says Gervase.

"With our own women," says his cousin. "Lady Mary Jardine died of a broken heart because he wouldn't look at her."

"Pray spare me the roll-call of his victims," says Lord Gervase, irritably: he is passionately jealous of Brandolin. He himself had forgotten Xenia Sabaroff, and forgotten all his obligations to her, when she had been, as he always had believed, within reach of his hand if he stretched it out; but viewed as a woman whom other men wooed and another man might win, she has become to him intensely to be desired and to be disputed. He has been a spoiled child of fortune and of the drawing-rooms all his years, and the slightest opposition is intolerable to him.

"I have no doubt," continues Dorothy Usk, gently, continuing her embroidery of a South Kensington design of lilies and palm-leaves, "that if he were aware you had a prior claim, if he thought or knew that you had ever enjoyed her sympathy, he would immediately withdraw and leave the field: he is a very proud man, with all his carelessness, and would not, I think, care to be second to anybody in the affections of a woman whom he seriously sought."

"What do you mean?" asks Gervase, abruptly, pausing in his walk to and fro the boudoir.

"Only what I say," she answers. "If you wish to *eloigner* Brandolin, give him some idea of the truth."

Gervase laughs a little.

"On my honor," he thinks, with some bitterness, "for sheer uncompromising meanness there is nothing comparable to the suggestions which a woman will make to you!"

"I couldn't do that," he says, aloud. "What would he think of me?"

"My dear Alan," replies Dorothy Usk, impatiently, getting her silks in a tangle, "when a man has behaved to any woman as you, by your own account, have behaved to Madame Sabaroff, I think it is a little late in the day to pretend to much elevation of feeling."

"You do not understand----"

"I have always found," says his cousin, impatiently searching for shades of silk which she does not see, "that whenever we presume to pronounce an opinion on any man's conduct and think ill of it we are always told that we don't understand anything. When we flatter the man, or compliment him on his conduct, there is no end to the marvellous powers of our penetration, the fineness of our instincts, the accuracy of our intuitions."

Gervase does not hear: his thoughts are elsewhere: he is thinking of Xenia Sabaroff as he saw her first in the Salle des Palmiers in the Winter Palace,--a mere girl, a mere child, startled and made nervous by the admiration she excited and the homage she received, under the brutality of her husband, the raillery of her friends; but that time is long ago, very long, as the life of women counts, and Xenia Sabaroff is now perfect mistress of her own emotions, if emotions she ever feels. Gervase cannot for one moment tell whether the past is tenderly remembered by her, is utterly forgotten, or is only recalled to be touched and dismissed without regret. He is a vain man, but vanity has no power to reassure him here.

In the warm afternoon of the next day the children are in the school-room, supposed to be preparing their lessons for the morrow; but the German governess, who is alone as guardian of order in the temple of intellect, has fallen asleep, with flies buzzing about her blonde hair, and her blue spectacles pushed up on her forehead, and Dodo has taken advantage of the fact to go and lean out of one of the windows, whilst her sister draws a caricature of the sleeping virgin from Deutschland, and the Babe slips away from his books to a mechanical Punch, which, contraband in the school-room, is far dearer to him than his Gradus and rule of three.

Dodo, with her hands thrust among her abundant locks, lolls with half her body in the air, and, by twisting her neck almost to dislocation, manages to see round an ivy-grown buttress of the east wall, and to espy people who are getting on their horses at the south doors of the building.

"They are going out riding and I am shut up here!" she groans. "Oh, what a while it takes one to grow up!"

"Who are going to ride?" asks Lilie, too fascinated by her drawing to leave it.

"Lots of them," replies Dodo, who speaks four languages, and her own worst of all. "All of them, pretty nearly. Mamma's on Pepper, and Lady Waverley's got Bopeep,--she's always nervous, you know. I can't see very much, 'cause of the ivy. Oh, there's the princess on Satan,--nobody else could ride Satan; Lord Brandolin's put her up, and now he's riding by her. They're gone now,--and papa's stopping behind them all to do something to Bopeep's girths." Whereat the dutiful Dodo laughs rudely, as she laughed coming home from church.

The sound of the horses' hoofs going farther away down the avenue comes through the stillness, as her voice and her laughter cease.

"What a shame to be shut up here just because one isn't old!" she groans, as she listens enviously. The sun is pouring liquid gold through the ivy-leaves, the air is hot and fragrant, gardeners are watering the flower-beds below, and the sweet, moist scent comes up to Dodo's nostrils and makes her writhe with longing to get out; not that she is by any means ardently devoted to nature, but she loves life, movement, gayety, and she dearly loves showing off her figure on her pony and being flirted with by her father's friends.

"I am sure Lord Brandolin is in love with her, awfully in love," she says, as she peers into the distance, where the black form of Satan is just visible through far-off oak-boughs.

"With whom?" asks Lilie, getting up from her caricature to lean also out over the ivy.

"Xenia," says Dodo. She is very proud of calling her friend Xenia. "Take care Goggles don't wake, or she'll see what you've been doing."

The lady from Deutschland was always known to them by this endearing epithet.

"I don't care," says Lilie, kicking her bronze boots in the air. "Do you think she'll marry Lord Brandolin?"

"Who? Goggles?"

"The idea!" They laugh deliciously.

"You say he's in love with Xenia. If they're in love they will marry," says Lilie, pensively.

"No, they won't: people who are in love never marry," replies Dodo.

"What do they do, then?" inquires the younger sister.

"They marry somebody else, and ask the one they like to go and stay with them. It is much better," she adds. "It is what I shall do."

"Why is it better? It's a roundabout way," objects Lilie. "I shouldn't care to marry at all," she adds, "only one can't ever be Mistress of the Robes if one doesn't."

"Oh, everybody marries, of course; only some muff it, and don't get all they want by it," replies the cynic Dodo.

"*Et l'amour, Miladi Alexandra?*" says the French governess, entering at that moment. "*Ou donc mettez-vous l'amour?*"

"*Nous ne sommes pas des bourgeoises,*" returns Dodo, very haughtily.

The Babe, sitting astride on a chair, trying to mend his mechanical Punch, who screamed and beat his wife *absolument comme la nature*, as the French governess said, before he was broken, hears the discourse of his sisters and muses on it. He is very fond of Brandolin, and he adores his princess: he would like them to live together, and he would go and see them without his sisters, who tease him, and without Boom, who lords it over him. Into his busy and precocious little brain there enters the resolution to *pousser la machine*, as his governess would call it.

The Babe has a vast idea of his own resources in the way of speech and invention, and he has his mother's tendencies to interfere with other people's affairs, and is quite of an opinion that if he had the management of most things he should better them. He has broken his Parisian Punch in his endeavor to make it say more words than it could say, but this slight accident does not affect his own admiration and belief in his own powers, any more than to have brought a great and prosperous empire within measurable distance of civil war affects a statesman's conviction that he is the only person who can rule that empire. The Babe, like Mr. Gladstone, is in his own eyes infallible. Like the astute diplomatist he is, he waits for a good opportunity; he is always where the ladies are, and his sharp little wits have been preternaturally quickened in that atmosphere of what the French call "*l'odeur feminine.*"

He has to wait some days for his occasion. The frank and friendly intercourse which existed at first between Brandolin and Madame Sabaroff is altered: they are never alone, and the pleasant discussions on poets and poetry, on philosophers and follies, in the gardens in the forenoon are discontinued, neither could very well say why, but the presence of Gervase chills and oppresses both of them and keeps them apart. She has the burden of memory, he the burden of suspicion; and suspicion is a thing so hateful and intolerable to the nature of Brandolin that it makes him miserable to feel himself guilty of it.

But one morning the Babe coaxes her out to go with him to his garden,--a floral republic, where a cabbage comes up cheek by jowl with a gloxinia, and plants are plucked up by the roots to see if they are growing aright. The Babe's system of horticulture is to dig intently for ten minutes in all directions, to make himself very red in the face, and then to call Dick, Tom, or Harry, any under-gardener who may be near, and say, "Here, do it, will you?" Nevertheless, he retains the belief that he is the creator and cultivator of this his garden, as M. Grevy believes that he is the chief person in the French Republic; and he takes Madame Sabaroff to admire it.

"It would look better if it were a little more in order," she permits herself to observe.

"Oh, that's their fault," says the Babe, just as M. Grevy would say of disorder in the Chambers, the Babe meaning Dick, Tom, or Harry, as the President would mean Clemenceau, Rochefort, or M. de Mun.

"My dear Babe, how exactly you are like the Head of a Department!" says Brandolin, who has followed them out of the house and comes up behind them. "According to the Head of a Department, it is never the head that is at fault, always the understrappers. May I inquire since when it has become the fashion to set sunflowers with their heads downward?"

"I wanted to see if the roots would turn after the sun," says the Babe, and regards his explanation as triumphant.

"And they only die! How perverse of them! You would become a second Newton, if your destiny were not already cast, to dazzle the world by a blending of Beau Brummel and Sir Joseph Paxton."

The Babe looks a little cross; he does not like to be laughed at before his princess. He has got his opportunity, but it vexes him; he has an impression that his companions will soon drift into forgetting both him and his garden. Since the approach of Brandolin the latter has said nothing.

The children's gardens are in a rather wild and distant part of the grounds of Surrenden. It is noon; most people staying in the house are still in their own rooms; it is solitary, sunny, still; a thrush is singing in a jessamine thicket, there is no other sound except that of a gardener's broom sweeping on the other side of the laurel hedge.

The Babe feels that it is now or never for his *coup de maitre*.

He plucks a rose, the best one he has, and offers it to Madame Sabaroff, who accepts it gratefully, though it is considerably earwig-eaten, and puts it in her corsage.

The eyes of Brandolin follow it wistfully.

The Babe glances at them alternately from under his hair; then his small features assume an expression of cherubic innocence and unconsciousness. The most *ruse* little rogue in the whole kingdom, he knows how to make himself look like a perfect reproduction of Sir Joshua Reynolds's Artlessness or Infancy. He gazes up in Xenia Sabaroff's face with angelic simplicity admirably assumed.

"When you marry him," says the Babe, pointing to Brandolin, with admirably affected *naivete*, "you will let me hold up your train, won't you? I always hold up my friends' trains when they marry. I have a page's dress, Louis something or other, and a sword, and a velvet cap with a badge and a feather: I always look very well."

"Oh, what an odious *petit-maitre* you will be when you are a man, my dear Babe!" says Xenia Sabaroff.

She does not take any notice of his opening words, but a flush of color comes over her face and passes as quickly as it came.

"*Petit-maitre*,--what is that?" says the Babe. "But you will let me, won't you? And don't marry him till the autumn, or even the winter, because the velvet makes me so hot when the day is hot, and the dress wouldn't look nice made in thin things."

"Could I only add my prayer to his," murmurs Brandolin, "and hope that in the autumn----"

Xenia Sabaroff looks at him with a strange gaze: it is penetrating, dreamy, wistful, inquiring.

"We jest as the child jests," she says, abruptly, and walks onward.

"I do not jest," says Brandolin.

The Babe glances at them under his thick eyelashes, and, being a *fine mouche*, only innocent in appearance, he runs off after a butterfly. He has not been brought up in a feminine atmosphere of *poudre de riz* and *lait d'iris* without learning discretion.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

"The Babe is a better courtier than gardener," says Xenia Sabaroff, as she shakes a green aphid out of her rose: her tone is careless, but her voice is not quite under her command, and has a little tremor in it.

Brandolin looks at her with impassioned eyes: he has grown very pale.

"It is no jest with me," he says, under his breath. "I would give you my life if you would take it?"

The last words have the accent of an interrogation, of an appeal.

"That is to say a great deal," replies Xenia Sabaroff: she is startled, astonished, troubled; she was not expecting any such entire avowal.

"Many men must have said as much to you who have more to recommend them than I. Say something to me: what will you say?"

She does not immediately reply; she looks on the ground, and absently traces patterns on the path with the end of her long walking-stick.

"Do you know," she says, at last, after a silence which seems to him endless, "do you know that there are people who believe that I have been the *delaissee* of Lord Gervase? They do not phrase it so roughly, but that is what they say."

Brandolin's very lips are white, but his voice does not falter for one moment as he answers, "They will not say it in my hearing."

"And, knowing that they say it, you would still offer me your name?"

"I do so."

"And you would ask me nothing save what I choose to tell you?"

The sunny air seems to turn round with him for an instant: his brain grows dizzy; his heart contracts with a sickening pain; but in the next moment a great wave of strong and perfect faith in the woman he cares for lifts his soul up on it, as a sea-wave lifts a drowning man to land.

"You shall tell me nothing save what you choose," he says, clearly and very tenderly. "I have perfect faith in you. Had I less than that, I would not ask you to be my wife."

She looks at him with astonishment and with wondering admiration.

"Yet you know so little of me!" she murmurs, in amaze.

"I love you," says Brandolin; then he kisses her hand with great reverence.

The tears which she had thought driven from her eyes forever, rise in them now.

"You are very noble," she replies, and leaves her hand for an instant within his.

The Babe, who has been watching from behind a tuft of laurel, can control his impatience no longer, but comes out of his ambush and runs towards them, regardless of how undesired he may be.

"Dodo says that women never marry anybody they love," he says, breathlessly; "but that is not true, is it, and you will let me carry your train?"

"Hush, my dear," says Xenia Sabaroff, laying her hand on the child's shoulder, while there is a sound in her voice which subdues to silence even the audacious spirit of the Babe.

"Give me time to think," she says, in a low tone to Brandolin; and then, with her hand still on the little boy's shoulder, she turns away from him and walks slowly towards the house.

The child walks silently and shyly beside her, his happy vanity troubled for once by the sense that he has made some mistake, and that there are some few things still in the universe which he does not quite entirely understand.

"You are not angry?" he asks her, at last, with a vague terror in his gay and impudent little soul.

"Angry with you?" says Xenia Sabaroff. "My dear child, no. I am perhaps angry with myself,--myself of many years ago."

The Babe is silent: he does not venture to ask any more, and he has a humiliating feeling that he is not first in the thoughts of Madame Sabaroff,—nay, that, though his rose is in her gown and her hand upon his shoulder, she has almost, very nearly almost, forgotten him.

Brandolin does not attempt to follow her. Her great charm for him consists in the power she possesses of compelling him to control his impulses. He walks away by himself through the green shadows of the boughs, wishing for no companionship save hers. He is fully aware that he has done a rash, perhaps an utterly unwise, thing in putting his future into the hands of a woman of whom he knows so little, and has, perhaps, the right to suspect so much. Yet he does not repent.

He does not see her again before dinner. She does not come into the library at the tea-hour; there is a large dinner that night; county people are there, as well as the house-party. He has to take in a stupid woman, wife of the Lord-Lieutenant, who thinks him the most absent-minded and unpleasant person she has ever known, and wonders how he has got his reputation as a wit. He is so seated that he cannot even see Xenia Sabaroff, and he chafes and frets throughout the dinner, from the bisque soup to the caviare biscuit, and thinks what an idiotic thing the habits of society have made of human life.

When he is fairly at rare intervals goaded into speech, he utters paradoxes, and suggests views so startling that the wife of the Lord-Lieutenant is scandalized, and thinks the lunacy laws are defective if they cannot include and incarcerate him. She feels sure that the rumor about the Hindoo women at St. Hubert's Lea is entirely true.

After dinner he is free to approach the lady of his thoughts, but he endeavors in vain to tell from her face what answer he will receive, what time and meditation may have done or undone for him. She avoids the interrogation of his eyes, and is surrounded by other men as usual.

The evening seems to him intolerably long and intolerably tedious. It is, however, for others very gay. There is an improvised dance, ending in an impromptu cotillion, and following on an act of a comic opera given with admirable spirit by Lady Dawlish, Mrs. Curzon, and some of the younger men. Every one is amused, but the hours seem very slow to him: Gervase scarcely leaves her side at all, and Brandolin, with all his chivalrous refusal and unchanging resolution to allow no shadow of doubt to steal over him, feels the odious whispers he has heard and the outspoken words of Litroff recur to his memory and weigh on him like the incubus of a nightmare. With a sensation of dread, he realizes that it is possible, do what he may, that they may haunt him so all his life. A man may be always master of his acts, but scarcely always of his thoughts.

"But I will never ask her one syllable," he thinks, "and I will marry her to-morrow if she chooses."

But will she choose?

He is far from sure. He pleases her intelligence; he possesses her friendship; but whether he has the slightest power to touch her heart he does not know. If he loved her less than he does he would be more confident.

As the interminable hours wear away, and the noise and absurdities of the cotillion are at their height, she, who never dances anywhere, drops her fan, and he is before the others in restoring it to her. As she takes it, she says, in a low voice, "Be in the small library at eleven to-morrow."

Soon after she leaves the ball-room altogether, and goes to her bedchamber.

Brandolin goes to his before the cotillion is over, but he sleeps very little. He longs for the morrow, and yet he dreads it. "*Quand meme*," he murmurs, as from his bed he sees the white dawn over the dark masses of the Surrenden woods. Tell him what she may, he thinks, he will give her his life if she will take it. He is madly in love, no doubt; but there is something nobler and purer than the madness of love, than the mere violent instincts of passion, in his loyalty to her. Before anything he cherishes the honor of his name and race, and he is willing, blindfold, to trust her with it.

That morning it seems to him as if the hours would never pass, though they are few until the clocks strike eleven. The house is still, almost every one is asleep, for the cotillion, successful as only unpremeditated things ever are, had lasted till the sun was high and the dew on the grass of the garden was dry.

With a thickly-beating heart, nervous and eager as though he were a boy of sixteen seeking his first love-tryst, he enters the small library far before the hour, and waits for her there, pacing to and fro the floor. The room is full of memories of her: here they have talked on rainy days and have strolled out on to the lawns on fine ones; there is the chair which she likes best, and there the volume she had taken down yesterday; could it be only ten days since standing here he had seen her first in the distance with the children? Only ten days! It seems to him ten years, ten centuries.

The morning is very still, a fine soft rain is falling, wet jessamine-flowers tap against the panes of the closed windows, a great apprehension seems to make his very heart stand still.

As the clock points to the hour she enters the room.

She is very pale, and wears a morning gown of white plush, which trails behind her in a silver shadow. He kisses her hands passionately, but she draws them away.

"Wait a little," she says, gently. "Wait till you know--whatever there is to know."

"I want to know but one thing."

She smiles a little sadly.

"Oh, you think so now because you are in love with me. But in time to come, when that is passed, you will not be so easily content. If"--she hesitates a moment--"if there is to be any community between our lives, you must be quite satisfied as to my past. It is your right to be so satisfied; and were you not so, some time or other we should both be wretched."

His eyes flash with joy.

"Then----" he begins breathlessly.

"Oh! how like a man that is!" she says, sadly. "To think but of the one thing, of the one present moment, and to be ready to give all the future in pawn for it! Wait to hear everything. And first of all I must tell you that Lord Gervase also last night asked me to marry him."

"And you!"

"I shall not marry Lord Gervase. But I will not disguise from you that once I would have done so gladly, had I been free to do it."

Brandolin is silent: he changes color.

"I bade him come here for my answer," she continues. "He will be here in a few minutes. I wish you to remain in the large library, so that you may hear all that I say to him."

"I cannot do that. I cannot play the part of eavesdropper."

"You will play that part, or any other that I ask you, if you love me," she says, with a touch of imperiousness.

"Do you not see," she goes on, with more gentleness, "that if our lives are to be passed near each other (I do not say that they are, but you seem to wish it), you must first of all be convinced of the truth of all I tell you? If one doubt, one suspicion, remain, you will, in time, become unable to banish it. It would grow and grow until you were mastered by it. You believe in what I tell you now; but how long would you believe after marriage?"

"I want no proof: I only want your word. Nay, I do not even want that. I will ask you nothing. I swear that I will never ask you anything."

"That is very beautiful; and I am sure that you mean it now. But it could not last. You are a very proud man; you are *gentilhomme de race*. It would in time become intolerable to you if you believed that any one living man had any title to point a finger of scorn at you. You have a right to know what my relations were with Lord Gervase: it is necessary for all the peace of our future that you should know everything,--know that there is nothing more left for you to know. You can only be convinced of that if you yourself hear what I say to him. Go; and wait there."

Brandolin hesitates. To listen unseen is a part which seems very cowardly to him, and yet she is right, no doubt; all the peace of the future may depend on it. He is ready to pledge himself blindly in the dark in all ways, but he knows that she, in forbidding him to do so, speaks the word of wisdom, of foresight, and of truth.

"Go," she repeats. "Men have a thousand ways of proving the truth of whatever they say; we have none, or next to none. If you refuse me this, the sole poor evidence that I can produce, I will never be to you anything that you now wish. Never; that I swear to you."

He hesitates, and looks at her with a long inquiring regard. Then he bows, and goes.

After all, she is within her rights. She has no other means to show him with any proof what this man whose name is so odiously entangled with her own has, or has not, been to her.

The house is still quite silent, and no one is likely to come into those rooms until much later. Every syllable said in the small library can be heard in any part of the larger one. He stands in the embrasure of one of the windows, the velvet curtains making a screen behind him. He seems to wait for hours; in reality only five minutes have passed when he hears the door of the great library open, and Gervase passes quickly through the apartment without seeing him, and goes on into the one where she awaits his coming.

"Are you really risen so early?" she says, with a sarcastic coldness in her voice. "I remembered afterwards that it was too cruel to name to you any hour before noon."

"You are unkind," he answers. "To hear what I hope to hear, you may be sure that I would have gone through much greater trials than even rising with the lark, had you commanded it."

His words are light, but his accent is tender and appealing.

"What do you hope to hear?" she asks, abruptly. The question embarrasses him and sounds cold.

"I hope to hear that you pardon me the past and will deign to crown my future."

"I pardon you the past, certainly. With neither your present nor your future have I anything to do."

"You say that very cruelly,--so cruelly that it makes your forgiveness more unkind than your hatred would be."

"I intend no unkindness. I merely wish to express indifference. Perhaps I am even mistaken in saying that I entirely forgive you. When I remember that you once possessed any influence over me, I scarcely do forgive you, for I am forced to despise myself."

"Those are very hard words! Perhaps in the past I was unworthy of having known and loved you; but if you will believe in my regret, and allow me occasion to atone, you shall never repent of your indulgence. Pray hear me out, Xenia----"

"You cannot call me by that name. It is for my friends: you are not numbered among them."

"I would be much more than your friend. If you will be my wife."

"It is too late," she replies, and her voice is as cold as ice.

"Why too late? We have all the best of our lives unspent before us."

"When I say too late, I mean that if you had said as much to me after the death of Prince Sabaroff I should have accepted your hand, and I should have spent the whole remainder of my existence in repenting that I had done so; for I should soon have fathomed the shallowness of your character, the artificiality and poverty of your sentiments, the falseness of your mind, and I should speedily have hated both myself and you."

"You are not merciful, madame!"

He is bitterly humbled and passionately incensed.

"Were you merciful?" she asks him, with the sound of a great anger, carefully controlled, vibrating in her voice. "I was a child, taken out of a country convent, and married as ignorantly as a bird is trapped. I had rank, and I was burdened by it. I was in a great world, a great court, and I was terrified by them. The man I had been given to was a gambler, a drunkard, and a brute. He treated me in private as he had treated the women captured in Turkestan or sold as slaves in Persia. You knew that: you were his intimate associate. You used your opportunities to interest me and win your way into my confidence. I had no one in the whole world that I could trust. I did trust you."

She pauses a moment.

Gervase does not dare reply.

"You were so gentle, so considerate, so full of sympathy; I thought you a very angel. A girl of sixteen or seventeen sees the face of St. John in the first Faust who finds his way into her shut soul! You made me care for you; I do not deny it. But why did I care? Because I saw in you the image of a thousand things you were not. Because I imagined that my own fanciful ideal existed in you, and you had the ability to foster the illusion."

"But why recall all this?" he says, entreatingly. "Perhaps I was unworthy of your innocent attachment, of your exalted imaginations; I dare not say that I was not; but now that I meet you again, now that I care for you ten thousand--ten million times more----"

"What is that to me?" she says, with almost insolent coldness. "It was not I who loved you, but a child who knew no better, and whose heart was so bleeding from the tortures of another man that the first hand which soothed it could take it as one takes a wounded bird! But when my eyes opened to your drift and your desires, when I saw that you were no better than other men, that you tried to tempt me to the lowest forms of intrigue under cover of your friendship with my husband, then, child though I was, I saw you as you were, and I hid myself from you! You thought that Sabaroff exiled me from his jealousy of you to the northern estates; but it was not so. I entreated him to let me leave Petersburg, and he had grown tired of torturing me and let me go."

"You blame me for being merely human. I loved you not better but not worse than men do love."

"I blame you for having been insincere, treacherous, dishonest. You approached me under cover of the most delicate and forbearing sympathy and reverence, and you only wore those masks to cover the vulgar designs of a most commonplace Lothario. Of course, now I know that one must not play with fire unless one is willing to be burned. I did not know it then. I was a stupid, unhappy, trembling child, full of poetic fancies, and alone in a dissolute crowd. When you could not make me what you wished to make me, I seemed very tame and useless to you. You turned to more facile women, no doubt, and you left Russia."

"I left Russia under orders; and I wrote to you. I wrote to you repeatedly. You never answered."

"No; I had no wish to answer you. I had seen you as you were, and the veil had fallen from my eyes. I burnt your letters as they came to me. But after the death of Prince Sabaroff you were careful to write no more."

Gervase colors hotly; there is an accent in the words which makes them strike him like whips.

"If you had written to me after that," she continues, "perhaps I should have answered you; perhaps not: I cannot tell. When you knew that I was set free you were silent; you stayed away, I know not where. I never saw you again; I never heard from you again. Now I thank you for your neglect and oblivion, but at the time I confess that it made me suffer. I was very young still, and romantic. For a while I expected every month which melted the snow would bring you back. So much I admit, though it will flatter you."

It does not flatter him as she says it; rather it wounds him. He has a hateful sense of his own impotency to stir her one hand's breadth, to breathe one spark of warmth into those ashes gone cold forever.

"I do not think," she continues, "that I ever loved you in the sense that women can love; but you had the power to make me suffer, to feel your oblivion, to remember you when you had forgotten me. When I went into the world again I heard of your successes with others, and gradually I came to see you in your true light, and, almost, the drunken brutality of Prince Sabaroff seemed to me a manlier thing than your half-hearted and shallow erotics had been. Now, when we meet again by pure hazard in the same country house, you do me the honor to offer me your hand after eight years. I can only say, as I have said before, that it is seven years too late!"

"Too late, only because Lord Brandolin now is everything to you."

"Lord Brandolin may possibly be something to me in the future. But, if Lord Brandolin did not exist, if no other living man existed, be sure that it would make no difference to me--or to you."

"Is that your last word?"

"Yes."

Pale and agitated as no other woman had ever seen him, Gervase bows low and leaves her abruptly, pushing open one of the glass doors on to the garden and closing it with a clash behind him.

Xenia Sabaroff goes towards the large library, her silvery train catching the lights and shadows as she goes.

Brandolin meets her with his hands outstretched.

"You are content, then?" she asks.

"I am more than content,--if I may be allowed to atone to you for all that you have suffered."

His own eyes are dim as he speaks.

"But you know that the world will always say that he was my lover?"

"I do not think that the world will say it--of my wife; but, if it do, I, at least, shall not be troubled."

"You have a great nature," she says, with deep emotion.

Brandolin smiles. "Oh, I cannot claim so much as that; but I have a great love."

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"I'm awfully glad that prig's got spun," says George Usk, as Gervase receives a telegram from the Foreign Office which requires his departure from Surrenden at four o'clock that afternoon.

"Spun! What imagination!" says his wife, very angrily. "Who should have spun him, pray will you tell me?"

"We shall never hear it in so many words," says Usk, with a grim complacency, "but I'll swear, if I die for it, that he's asked your Russian friend to marry him and that she's said she won't. Very wise of her, too. Especially if, as you imply, they carried on together years ago: he'd be eternally throwing it in her teeth: he's what the Yanks call a 'tarnation mean cuss.'"

"I never implied anything of the sort," answers the lady of Surrenden, with great decorum and dignity. "I never suppose that all my friends are all they ought to be, whatever *yours* may leave to be desired. If he were attached long ago to Madame Sabaroff, it is neither your affair nor mine. It may possibly concern Lord Brandolin, if he have the intentions which you attribute to him."

"Brandolin can take care of himself," says Usk, carelessly. "He knows the time of day as well as anybody, and I don't know why you should be rough on it, my lady: it will be positively refreshing if anybody marries after one of your house-parties; they generally only get divorced after them."

"The Waverleys are very good friends still, I believe," says Dorothy Usk, coldly.

The reply seems irrelevant, but to the ear of George Usk it carries considerable relevancy.

He laughs a little nervously. "Oh, yes: so are we, aren't we?"

"Certainly," says the mistress of Surrenden.

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At the first Drawing-room this year, the admired of all eyes, and the centre of all comment, is the Lady Brandolin.

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**DON GESUALDO.**

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## CHAPTER I.

It was a day in June.

The crickets were chirping, the lizards were gliding, the butterflies were flying above the ripe corn, the reapers were out among the wheat, and the tall stalks were swaying and falling under the sickle. Through the little windows of his sacristy Don Gesualdo, the young vicar of San Bartolo, in the village of Marca, looked with wistful eyes at the hill-side which rose up in front of him, seen through a frame of cherry-boughs in full fruit. The hill-side was covered with corn, with vines, with mulberry-trees; the men and women were at work among the trees, it was the first day of harvest; there was a blue, happy sky above them all; their voices chattering and calling to one another over the sea of grain came to his ears gayly and softened by air and distance. He sighed as he looked and as he heard. Yet, interrogated, he would have said that he was happy and wanted for nothing.

He was a slight, pale man, still almost a youth, with a delicate face without color and beardless; his eyes were brown and tender and serious, his mouth was sensitive and sweet. He was the son of a fisherman away by Bocca d'Arno, where the river meets the sea, amidst the cane- and cactus-brakes which Costa loves to paint. But who could say what fine, time-filtered, pure Etruscan or Latin blood might not run in his veins? There is so much of the classic features and the classic form among the peasants of Tyrrhene sea-shores, of Cimbrian oak woods, of Roman grass-plains, of Maremma marshes.

It was the last day of peace which he was destined to know in Marca.

He turned from the window with reluctance and regret, as the old woman who served him as housekeeper and church-cleaner in one summoned him to his frugal supper. He could have supped at any hour he had chosen, there were none to say him nay, but it was the custom at Marca to sup at the twenty-third hour, and he was not a person to violate custom: he would as soon have thought of spitting on the blessed bread itself. Habit is a masterful ruler in all Italian communities; it has always been so; it is a formula which excuses all things and sanctifies all things, and to none did it do so more than to Gesualdo. Often he was not in the least hungry at sunset, often he grudged sorely the hours spent in breaking black bread and in eating poor soup when Nature was at her sweetest and the skies giving their finest spectacle to a thankless earth. Yet never did he fail to meekly answer old Candida's summons to the humble repast. To have altered the hour of eating would have seemed to him irreligious, revolutionary, altogether impossible.

Candida was a little old woman, burnt black by the sun, with a wisp of gray hair fastened on the crown of her head, and a neater look about her kerchief and her gown than was usual in Marca, for she was a woman originally from a Northern city. She had always been a servant in priests' houses, and, if the sacristan were ill or away, knew as well as he where every book, bell, and candle were kept, and could have said the offices herself had her sex allowed her. In tongue she was very sharp, and in secret was proud of the power she possessed in making the vicegerent of God afraid of her. The priest was the first man in this parish of poor folks, and the priest would shrink like a chidden child if she found out that he had given his best shirt to a beggar, or had inadvertently come in with wet boots over the brick floor which she had just washed and sanded. It was the old story of so many sovereignties. He had power, no doubt, to bind and loose, to bless and curse, to cleanse or refuse to cleanse the sinful souls of men; but for all that he was only a stupid, forgetful baby of a man in his servant's eyes, and she made him feel the scorn she had for him, mixed up with a half-motherly, half-scolding admiration, which saw in him half a child, half a fool, and, maybe she would add in her own thoughts, a kind of angel.

Don Gesualdo was not wise or learned in any way: he had barely been able to acquire enough knowledge to pass through the examinations necessary for entrance into the priesthood. That slender amount of scholarship was his all; but he was clever enough for Marca, which had very little brains of its own, and he did his duty most faithfully, as far as he saw it, at all times. As for doubts of any sort as to what that duty was, such scepticism never could possibly assail him. His creed appeared as plain and sure to him as the sun which shone in the heavens, and his faith was as single-hearted and unswerving as the devoted soul of a docile sheep-dog.

He was of a poetic and retiring nature; religion had taken entire possession of his soul, and he was as unworldly, as visionary, and as simple as any one of the *peccarelle di Dio* who dwelt around Francesco d'Assisi. His mother had been a German servant-girl, married out of a small inn in Pisa, and some qualities of the dreamy, slow, and serious Teutonic temperament were in him, all Italian of the western coast as he was. On such a dual mind the spiritual side of his creed had obtained intense power; and the office he filled was to him a heaven-given mission, which compelled him to incessant sacrifice of every earthly appetite and every selfish thought.

"He is too good to live," said his old housekeeper.

It was a very simple and monotonous life which was led by him in his charge. There was no kind of change in it for anybody, unless they went away, and few people born in Marca ever did that. They were not forced by climate to be nomads, like the mountaineers of the Apennines, nor like the men of the sea-coast and ague-haunted plains. Marca was a healthy, homely place on the slope of a hill in the wilderness, where its sons and daughters could stay and work all the year round, if they chose, without risk of fever worse than such as might be brought on by too much new wine at close of autumn. Marca was not pretty, nor historical, nor picturesque, nor uncommon in any way: there are five hundred, five thousand, villages like it, standing among corn-lands and maize-fields and mulberry-trees, with its little dark church, and its whitewashed presbytery, and its dusky red-tiled houses, and its great silent empty villa, that used to be a fortified and stately palace and now is given over to the rats and the spiders and the scorpions. A very quiet little place, far away from cities and railways, dusty and uncomely in itself, but blessed in the abundant light and the divine landscape which are around it, and of which no one in it ever thought, except this simple young priest, Gesualdo Brasailo.

Of all natural gifts, a love of natural beauty surely brings most happiness to the possessor of it,—happiness altogether unalloyed and unpurchasable, and created by the mere rustle of green leaves, the mere ripple of brown waters. It is not an Italian gift at all, nor an Italian feeling; to an Italian, gas is more beautiful than sunshine, and a cambric flower more beautiful than a real one; he usually thinks the mountains hateful and a city divine, he detests trees and adores crowds. But there are exceptions to all rules: there are poetic natures everywhere, though everywhere rare: Gesualdo was the exception in Marca and its neighborhood, and evening after evening saw him in the summer weather strolling through the fields, his breviary in his hand, but his heart with the dancing fire-flies, the quivering poplar leaves, the tall green cane, the little silvery fish darting over the white stones of the shallow river-waters. He could not have told why he loved to watch these things: he thought it was because they reminded him of Bocca d'Arno and the sand-beach and the canebrakes; but he did love them, and they filled him with that vague emotion, half pleasure, half pain, known to all who love Nature for herself alone.

His supper over, he went into his church: a little, red-bricked, whitewashed passage connected it with his parlor. The church was small, and dark, and old; it had an altar-piece said to be old, and by a Sienese master, and of some value, but Gesualdo knew nothing of these matters: a Raphael might have hung there and he would have been none the wiser. He loved the church, ugly and simple as it was, as a mother loves a plain child or a dull one because it is hers; and now and then he preached strange, passionate, pathetic sermons in it, which none of his people understood, and which he barely understood himself. He had a sweet, full, far-reaching voice, with an accent of singular melancholy in it, and as his mystical, romantic, involved phrases passed far over the heads of his hearers, like a flight of birds flying high up against the clouds, the pathos and music in his tones stirred their hearts vaguely. He was certainly, they thought, a man whom the saints loved. Candida, sitting near the altar with her head bowed and her hands feeling her rosary, would think, as she heard the unintelligible eloquence, "Dear Lord, all that power of words, all that skill of the tongue, and he would put his shirt on bottom upward were it not for me!"

There was no office in his church that evening, but he lingered about it, touching this thing and the other with tender fingers. There was always a sweet scent in the little place: its door usually stood open to the fields amidst which it was planted, and the smell of the incense which century after century had been burned in it blended with the fragrance from primroses, or dog-roses, or new-mown hay, or crushed ripe grapes, which, according to the season, came in it from without. Candida kept it very clean, and the scorpions and spiders were left so little peace there by her everactive broom that they betook themselves elsewhere, dear as the wooden benches and the crannied stones had been to them for ages.

Since he had come to Marca nothing of any kind had happened in it. There had been some marriages, a great many births, not a few burials; but that was all. The people who came to confession at Easter confessed very common sins: they had stolen this or that, cheated here, there, and everywhere, got drunk and quarrelled, nothing more: he would give them clean bills of spiritual health, and bid them go in peace and sin no more, quite sure, as they were sure themselves, that they would have the self-same sins to tell off next time they came there.

Everybody in Marca thought a great deal of their religion; that is, they trusted to it in a helpless but confident kind of way as a fetich which, being duly and carefully propitiated, would make things all right for them after death. They would not have missed a mass to save their lives: that they dozed through it, and cracked nuts or took a suck at their pipe-stems when they woke, did not affect their awed and unchangeable belief in its miraculous and saving powers. If they had been asked what they believed, or why they believed, they would have scratched their heads and felt puzzled. Their minds dwelt in a twilight in which nothing had any distinct form. The clearest idea ever presented to them was that of the Madonna: they thought of her as of some universal mother who wanted to do them good in present and future if they only observed her ceremonials: just as in the ages gone by upon these same hill-sides the Latin peasant had thought of the great Demeter.

Gesualdo himself, despite all the doctrine which had been instilled into him in his novitiate, did not know much more than they: he repeated the words of his offices without any distinct notion of all that they meant; he had a vague feeling that all self-denial and self-sacrifice were thrice blessed, and he tried his best to save his own soul and the souls of others; but there he ceased to think: outside that speculation lay, and speculation was a thrice-damnable offence. Yet he, being imaginative and intelligent in a humble and dog-like way, was at times infinitely distressed to see how little effect this religion which he taught and which they professed had upon the lives of his people. His own life was altogether guided by it: why could not theirs be the same? Why did they go on all through the year swearing, cursing, drinking, quarrelling, lying, stealing? He could not but perceive that they came to him to confess their peccadilloes only that they might pursue them more completely at their ease. He could not flatter himself that his ministrations in Marca, which were now of six years' duration, had made the village a whit different from what it had been when he had entered it.

Thinking of this, as he did think of it continually night and day, being a man of singularly sensitive conscience, he sat down on a marble bench near the door and opened his breviary. The sun was setting behind the pines on the crest of the hills; the warm orange light poured across the paved way in front of the church, through the stems of the cypresses which stood before the door, and found its way over the uneven slates of the stone floor to his feet. A nightingale was singing somewhere in the dog-rose hedge beyond the cypress-trees. Lizards ran from crack to crack in the pavement. A tendril of honeysuckle came through a hole in the wall, thrusting its delicate curled horns of perfume towards him. The whole entrance was bathed in golden warmth and light; the body of the church behind him was quite dark.

He had opened his breviary from habit, but he did not read: he sat and gazed at the evening clouds, at the blue hills, at the radiant air, and listened to the song of the nightingales in that dreamy trance which made him look so stupid in the eyes of his housekeeper and his parishioners, but which was only the meditation of a poetic temper, cramped and cooped up in a narrow and uncongenial existence, and not educated or free enough to be able even to analyze what it felt.

"The nightingale's song in June is altogether unlike its songs of April and May," thought this poor priest, whom Nature had made a poet, and to whom she had given the eyes which see and the ears which hear. "The very phrases are wholly different; the very accent is not the same: in spring it is all a canticle like the Song of Solomon, in midsummer--what is it he is singing? Is he lamenting the summer? or is he only teaching his young ones how they should sing next year?"

And he fell again to listening to the sweetest bird that gladdens earth. The nightingale was patiently repeating his song, again and again, sometimes more slowly, sometimes more quickly, seeming to lay stress on some phrases more than on others; and another voice, fainter and feebler than his own, repeated the trills and roulades after him fitfully, and often breaking down altogether. It was plain that there in the wild-rose hedge he was teaching his son. Any one who will may hear these sweet lessons given under bays and myrtle, under arbutus and pomegranate, through all the month of June.

Nightingales in Marca were only regarded as creatures to be trapped, shot, caged, eaten, sold for a centime like any other small bird; but about the church no one touched them: the people knew that their *parocco* cared to hear their songs coming sweetly through the pauses in the recitatives of the office. Absorbed as he was now in hearkening to the music-lesson among the white dog-roses, he started violently as a shadow fell across the threshold and a voice called to him, "Good-evening, Don Gesualdo."

He looked up and saw a woman whom he knew well,--a young woman, scarcely indeed eighteen years old, very handsome, with a face full of warmth and color and fire and tenderness, great flashing eyes which could at times be as soft as a dog's, and a beautiful ruddy mouth with teeth as white as a dog's are also. She was by name Generosa Fe: she was the wife of Tasso Tassilo, the miller. In Marca, most of the women by toil and sun were black as berries by the time they were twenty, and looked old almost before they were young, with rough hair and loose forms and wrinkled skins, and children dragging at their breasts all the year through. Generosa was not like them: she did little work; she had the form of a goddess; she took care of her beauty, and she had no children, though she had married at fifteen. She was friends with Gesualdo; they had both come from the Bocca d'Arno, and it was a link of common memory and mutual attachment. They liked to recall how they had each run through the tall canes and cactus, and waded in the surf, and slept in the hot sand, and hidden themselves for fright when the king's camels had come towards them, throwing their huge misshapen shadows over the seas of flowering reeds and rushes.

He remembered her a small child, jumping about on the sand and laughing at him, a youth, when he was going to college to study for entrance into the Church. "Gesualdo! che Gesualdo!" she had cried. "A fine priest he will make for us all to confess to!" And she had screamed with mirth, her handsome little face rippling all over with gayety like the waves of the sea with the sunshine.

He had remembered her, and had been glad when Tasso Tassilo, the miller, had gone sixty miles away for a wife, and had brought her from the Bocca d'Arno to live at the mill on the small river which was the sole water that ran through the village of Marca.

Tasso Tassilo, going on business once to the sea-coast, had chanced to see that handsome face of hers, and had wooed and won her without great difficulty, for her people were poor folk, living by carting sand, and she herself was tired of her bare legs and face, her robust hunger, which made her glad to eat the fruit off the cactus-plants, and her great beauty, which nobody ever saw except the sea-gulls and carters and fishers and cane-cutters, who were all as poor as she was herself.

Tasso Tassilo, in his own person, she hated, an ugly, dry, elderly man, with his soul wrapped up in his flour-bags and his money-bags; but he adored her, and let her spend as she chose on her attire and her ornaments; and the mill-house was a pleasant place enough with its walls painted on the outside *in tempora*, and the willows drooping over its eaves, and the young men and the mules loitering about on the land-side of it, and the peasants coming up with corn to be ground whenever there had been rain in summer and so water enough in the river-bed to turn the mill-wheels. In drought the stream was low and its stones dry and no work could be done by the grindstones. There was then only water enough for the ducks to paddle in, and the pretty teal to float in, which they would always do at sunrise unless the miller let fly a charge of small shot among them from the windows under the roof.

"Good-evening, Don Gesualdo," said the miller's wife now, in the midst of the nightingale's song and the orange glow from the sunset.

Gesualdo rose with a smile. He was always glad to see her. She had something about her for him of boyhood, of home, of the sea, and of the careless days before he became a seminarist: he did not positively regret that he had entered the priesthood, but he remembered the earlier life wistfully, and with wonder that he could ever have been that light-hearted lad who had run through the canebrakes to plunge into the rolling waters with all the wide gay sunlit world of sea and sky and river and shore before him, behind him, and above him.

"What is wrong, Generosa?" he asked her, seeing as he looked up that her handsome face was clouded. Her days were not often tranquil; her husband was jealous, and she gave him cause for jealousy: the mill was a favorite resort of all the young men for thirty miles around, and unless Tasso Tassilo had ceased to grind corn he could not have shut his doors to them.

"It is the old story, Don Gesualdo," she answered, leaning against the church porch. "You know what Tasso, is and what a dog's life he leads me." "You are not always prudent, my daughter," said Gesualdo, with a faint smile.

"Who could be always prudent at my years?" said the miller's young wife. "Tasso is a brute, and a fool too. One day he will drive me out of myself: I tell him so."

"That is not the way to make him better," said Gesualdo. "I am sorry you do not see it. The man loves you, and he feels he is old, and he knows that you do not care: that is always like a thorn in his flesh: he feels you do not care."

"How should he suppose that I care?" said Generosa, passionately. "I hated him always; he is as old as my father; he expects me to be shut up like a nun; if he had his own way I should never stir out of the house: does one marry for that?"

"One should marry to do one's duty," said Gesualdo, timidly, for he felt the feebleness of his counsels and arguments against the force and the warmth and the self-will of a woman, conscious of her beauty and her power and her lovers, and moved by all the instincts of vanity and passion.

"We had a terrible scene an hour ago," said Generosa, passing over what she did not choose to answer. "It cost me much not to put a knife into him. It was about Falko. There was nothing new, but he thought there was. I fear he will do Falko mischief one day: he threatened it: it is not the first time."

"That is very grave," said Gesualdo, growing paler as he heard. "My daughter, you are more in error than Tassilo. After all, he has his rights. Why do you not send the young man away? He would obey you."

"He would obey me in anything else, not in that," said the woman, with the little conscious smile of one who knows her own power. "He would not go away. Indeed, why should he go away? He has his employment here. Why should he go away because Tasso is a jealous fool?"

"Is he such a fool?" said Gesualdo, and he raised his eyes suddenly and looked straight into hers. Generosa colored through her warm, paleless skin. She was silent.

"It has not gone as far as you think," she muttered, after a pause.

"But I will not be accused for nothing," she added. "Tasso shall have what he thinks he has had. Why would he marry me? He knew I hated him. We were all very poor down there by Bocca d'Arno, but we were gay and happy. Why did he take me away?"

The tears started to her eyes and rolled down her hot cheeks. It was the hundredth time that she had told her sorrows to Gesualdo, in the confessional and out of it: it was an old story, of which she never tired of the telling. Her own people were far away by the sea-shore, and she had no friends in Marca, for she was thought a "foreigner," not being of that country-side, and the women were jealous of her beauty, and of the idle life which she led in comparison to theirs, and of the cared-for look of her person. Gesualdo seemed a countryman, and a relative, and a friend. She took all her woes to him. A priest was like a woman, she thought; only a still safer confidant.

"You are ungrateful, my daughter," he said, now, with an effort to be severe in reprimand. "You know that you were glad to marry so rich a man as Tassilo. You know that you father and mother were glad, and you yourself likewise. No doubt the man is not all that you could wish, but you owe him something; indeed, you owe him much. I speak to you now out of my office, only as a friend. I would entreat you to send your lover away. If not, there will be crime, perhaps bloodshed, and the fault of all that may happen will be yours."

She gave a gesture which said that she cared nothing, whatever might happen. She was in a headstrong and desperate mood; she had had a violent quarrel with her husband, and she loved Falko Melegari, the steward of the absent noble who owned the empty, half-ruined palace which stood on the banks of the river; he was a fair and handsome young man, with Lombard blood in him, tall, slender, vigorous, amorous and light-hearted,—the strongest of contrasts in all ways to Tasso Tassilo, taciturn, feeble, sullen, and unlovely, and twice the years of his wife.

There was not more than a mile between the mill-house and the deserted villa; Tassilo might as well have tried to arrest the sirocco or the mariner's winds, when they blew, as prevent an intercourse so favored and so facilitated by circumstances. The steward had a million reasons in a year to visit the mill, and when the miller insulted him and forbade him his doors he had no power to prevent him from fishing in the waters, from walking on the bank, from making signals from the villa terraces and appointments in the canebrakes and the vine-fields. Nothing could have broken off the intrigue except the departure of one or the other of the lovers from Marca. But Falko Melegari would not go away from a place where his interests and his passions both combined to hold him; and it never entered the mind of the miller to take his wife elsewhere. He had dwelt at the mill all the years of his life, and his forefathers for five generations before him. To change their residence never occurs to such people as these: they are fixed, like the cypress-trees, in the ground, and dream no more than they of new homes. Like the tree, they never change till death fells them. Generosa continued to pour out her woes, leaning against the pillar of the porch, and playing with a twig of pomegranate, whose buds were not more scarlet than her own lips; and Gesualdo continued to press on her his good counsels, knowing all the while that he might as well speak to the swallows under the church eaves, for any benefit that he could effect. In sole answer to the arguments of Gesualdo she retorted in scornful words.

"You may find duty enough for you because you are a saint," she added, with less of reverence than of disdain; "but I am no saint, and I will not spend all my best days tied to the side of a sickly and sullen old man."

"You are wrong, my daughter," said Gesualdo, sternly. He colored; he knew not why. "I know nothing of these passions," he added, with some embarrassment; "but I know what duty is, and yours is clear."

He did not know much of human nature, and of woman nature nothing, yet he dimly comprehended that Generosa was now at that crisis of her life when all the ardors of her youth and all the delight in her own power made her passionately rebellious against the cruelties of her fate; when it was impossible to make duty look other than hateful to her, and when the very peril and difficulty which surrounded her love-story made it the sweeter and more irresistible to her. She was of a passionate, ardent, careless, daring temperament; and the dangers of the intrigue which she pursued had no terrors for her, whilst the indifference which she had felt for years for her husband had deepened of late into hatred.

"One is not a stick, nor a stone, nor a beam of timber, nor a block of granite, that one should be able to live without love all one's days!" she cried, with passion and contempt.

She threw the branches of pomegranate over the hedge, gave him a glance half contemptuous and half compassionate, and left the church door.

"After all, what should he understand!" she thought. "He is a saint, but he is not a man."

Gesualdo looked after her a moment as she went over the court-yard and between the stems of the cypresses out towards the open hill-side. The sun had set; there was a rosy after-glow which bathed her elastic figure in a carmine light; she had that beautiful walk which some Italian women have who have never worn shoes in the first fifteen years of their lives. The light shone on her dusky auburn hair, her gold ear-rings, the slender column of her throat, her

vigorous and voluptuous form. Gesualdo looked after her, and a subtle warmth and pain passed through him, bringing with it a sharp sense of guilt. He looked away from her and went within his church and prayed.

That night Falko Melegari had just alighted from the saddle of his good gray horse, when he was told that the parrocco of San Bartolo was waiting to see him.

The villa had been famous and splendid in other days; but it formed now only one of the many neglected possessions of a gay young noble, called Ser Baldo by his dependents, who spent what little money he had in pleasure-places out of Italy, seldom or never came near his estates, and accepted without investigation all such statements of accounts as his various men of business were disposed to send to him.

His steward lived on the ground-floor of the great villa, in the vast frescoed chambers with their domed and gilded ceilings, their sculptured cornices, their carved doors, their stately couches with the satin dropping in shreds, and the pale tapestries with the moths and the mice at work in them. His narrow camp-bed, his deal table and chairs, were sadly out of place in those once splendid halls; but he did not think about it: he vaguely liked the space and the ruined grandeur about him, and all the thoughts he had were given to his love, Generosa, the wife of Tasso Tassilo. From the terraces of the villa he could see the mill a mile farther down the stream, and he would pass half the short nights of the summer looking at the distant lights in it.

He was only five-and-twenty, and he was passionately in love with all the increased ardor of a forbidden passion.

He was fair-haired and blue-eyed, was well-made and very tall; in character he was neither better nor worse than most men of his age, but as a steward he was tolerably honest, and as a lover he was thoroughly sincere. He went with a quick step into the central hall to meet his visitor: he supposed that the vicar had come about flowers for the feast of St. Peter and St. Paul, which was on the morrow. Though the villa gardens were wholly neglected, they were still rich in flowers which wanted no care, lilies, lavender, old-fashioned roses, oleanders red and white, and magnolia-trees.

"Good-evening, reverend Father. You do me honor," he said, as he saw Gesualdo. "Is there anything that I can do for you? I am your humble servant."

Gesualdo looked at him curiously. He had never noticed the young man before: he had seen him ride past, he had seen him at mass, he had spoken to him of the feasts of the Church, but he had never noticed him. Now he looked at him curiously as he answered, without any preface whatever,--

"I am come to speak to you of Generosa Fe, the wife of Tasso Tassilo."

The young steward colored violently. He was astonished and silent.

"She loves you," said Gesualdo, simply.

Falko Melegari made a gesture as though he implied that it was his place neither to deny nor to affirm.

"She loves you," said Gesualdo, again.

The young man had that fatuous smile which unconsciously expresses the consciousness of conquest. But he was honest in his passion and ardent in it.

"Not so much as I love her," he said, rapturously, forgetful of his hearer.

Gesualdo frowned.

"She is the wife of another man," he said, with reproof. Falko Melegari shrugged his shoulders: that did not seem any reason against it to him.

"How will it end?" said the priest.

The lover smiled. "These things always end in one way."

Gesualdo winced, as though some one had wounded him.

"I am come to bid you go out of Marca," he said, simply.

The young man stared at him; then he laughed angrily.

"Good Ser Vicario," he said, impatiently, "you are the keeper of our souls, no doubt, but not quite to such a point as that. Has Tassilo sent you to me, or she?" he added, with a gleam of suspicion in his eyes.

"No one has sent me."

"Why, then----"

"Because, if you do not go, there will be tragedy and misery. Tasso Tassilo is not a man to make you welcome to his couch. I have known Generosa since she was a little child: we were both born on the Bocca d'Arno. She is of a warm nature, but not a deep one; and if you go away she will forget. Tassilo is a rude man and a hard one; he gives her all she has; he has many claims on her, for in his way he has been generous and tender. You are a stranger; you can only ruin her life; you can with ease find another *gattaria* far away in another province: why will you not go? If you really loved her you would go."

Falko laughed. "Dear Don Gesualdo, you are a holy man, but you know nothing of love."

Gesualdo winced a little again. It was the second time this had been said to him this evening.

"Is it love," he said, after a pause, "to risk her murder by her husband? I tell you Tassilo is not a man to take his dishonor quietly."

"Who cares what Tassilo does?" said the young steward, petulantly. "If he touches a hair of her head I will make him die a thousand deaths."

"All those are words," said Gesualdo. "You cannot mend one crime by another, and you cannot protect a woman from her husband's just vengeance. There is only one way by which to save her from the danger you have dragged her into. It is for you to go away."

"I will go away when this house walks a mile," said Falko. "Not before. Go away!" he echoed, in wrath. "What! run like a mongrel dog before Tassilo's anger? What! leave her all alone to curse me as a faithless coward? What! go away, when all my life and my soul, and all the light of my eyes, is in Marca? Don Gesualdo, you are a good man, but you are mad. You must pardon me if I speak roughly. Your words make me beside myself."

"Do you believe in no duty, then?"

"I believe in the duty of every honest lover," said Falko, with vehemence, "and that duty is to do everything that the loved one wishes. She is bound to a cur; she is unhappy; she has not even any children to comfort her; she is like a beautiful flower shut up in a cellar, and she loves me--me!--and you bid me go away! Don Gesualdo, keep to your church offices, and leave the loves of others alone. What should you know of them? Forgive me if I am rude. You are a holy man, but you know nothing at all of men and women."

"I do not know much," said Gesualdo, meekly.

He was depressed and intimidated. He was sensible of his own utter ignorance of the passions of life. This man, nigh his own age, but so full of vigor, of ardor, of indignation, of pride in his consciousness that he was beloved, and of resolve to stay where that love was, be the cost what it would, daunted him with a sense of power and of triumph such as he himself could not even comprehend, and yet wistfully envied. It was sin, no doubt, he said to himself; and yet it was life, it was strength, it was virility.

He had come to reprove, to censure, and to persuade into repentance this headstrong lover, and he could only stand before him feeble and oppressed with a sense of his own ignorance and childishness. All the stock, trite arguments which his religious belief supplied him seemed to fall away and to be of no more use than empty husks of rotten nuts before the urgency, the fervor, and the self-will of real life. This man and woman loved each other, and they cared for no other fact than this on earth or in heaven. He left the villa-grounds in silence, with only a gesture of farewell salutation.



## CHAPTER II.

"Poor innocent, he meant well!" thought the steward, as he watched the dark, slender form of the priest pass away through the vines and mulberry-trees. The young man did not greatly venerate the Church himself, though he showed himself at mass and sent flowers for the feast-days because it was the custom to do so. He was like most young Italians who have had a smattering of education, very indifferent on such matters, and inclined to ridicule. He left them for women and old men. But there was something about his visitant which touched him,—a simplicity, an unworldliness, a sincerity, which moved his respect; and he knew in his secret heart that the parocco, as he called him, was right enough in everything that he had said.

Gesualdo himself went on his solitary way, his buckled shoes dragging wearily over the dusty grass of the wayside. He had done no good, and he did not see what good he could do. He felt helpless before the force and speed of an unknown and guilty passion, as he once felt before a forest fire which he had seen in the Marche. All his Church books gave him homilies enough on the sins of the flesh and the temptings of the devil; but none of these helped him before the facts of this lawless and godless love, which seemed to pass high above his head like a whirlwind. He went on slowly and dully along the edge of the river-bed: a sense of something which he had always missed, which he would miss eternally, was with him.

It was now quite night. Gesualdo liked to walk late at night. All things were so peaceful, or at the least seemed so. You did not see the gashes in the lopped trees, the scars in the burned hill-side, the wounds in the mule's loins, the blood-shot eyes of the working ox, the goitred throat of the child rolling in the dust. Night, kindly friend of dreams, cast her soft veil over all woes, and made the very dust seem as a silvered highway to a throne for God.

He went now through the balmy air, the rustling canes, the low-hanging boughs of the fruit-laden peach-trees, and the sheaves of cut corn leaning one up against another under the hives. He followed the course of the water, a shallow thread at this season, glistening under the moon in its bed of shingle and sand. He passed the mill-house perforce on his homeward way, he saw the place of the weir made visible even in the dark by the lanterns which swung on a cord stretched from one bank to another, to entice any such fish as there might still be in the shallows. The mill stood down into the water, a strong place, built in olden days; the great black wheels were perforce at rest; the mules champed and chafed in their stalls, inactive, like the mill; for the next three months there would be nothing to do unless a storm came and brought a freshet from the hills. The miller would have the more leisure to nurse his wrongs, thought Gesualdo; and his heart was troubled: he had never met with these woes of the passions; they oppressed and alarmed him.

As he passed the low mill windows, protected from thieves by their iron gratings, he could see the interior, lighted as it was by the flame of oil lamps, and through the open lattices the voices, raised high in stormy quarrel, seemed to smite the holy stillness of the night like a blow. The figure of Generosa stood out against the light which shone behind her; she was in a paroxysm of rage; her eyes flashed like the lightnings of the hills, and her beautiful arms were tossed above her head in impassioned imprecation. Tasso Tassilo seemed for the moment to crouch beneath this rain of flame-like words; his face, on which the light shone full, was deformed with malignant and impotent fury, with covetous and jealous desire: there was no need to hear her words to know that she was taunting him with her love for Falko Melegari. Gesualdo was a weak man and physically timid; but here he hesitated but one instant. He lifted the latch of the house door and walked straightway into the mill kitchen.

"In the name of Christ, be silent!" he said to them, and made the sign of the cross.

The torrent of words stopped on the lips of the young woman; the miller scowled, and shrank from the light, and was mute.

"Is this how you keep your vows to heaven and to each other?" said Gesualdo.

A flush of shame came over the face of the woman; the man drew his hat farther over his eyes and went out of the kitchen silently. The victory had been easier than their monitor had expected. And yet of what use was it? he thought; they were silent out of respect for him. As soon as the restraint of his presence should be removed they would begin afresh. Unless he could change their souls, it was of little avail to bridle their lips for an hour.

There was a wild chafing hatred on one side and a tyrannical, covetous, dissatisfied love on the other: out of such discordant elements what peace could come?

Gesualdo shut the wooden shutters of the windows, that others should not see, as he had seen, into the interior; then he strove to pacify his old playmate, whose heaving breast, and burning cheeks, and eyes which scorched up in fire their own tears, spoke of a tempest lulled, not spent. He spoke with all the wisdom with which study and the counsels of the Fathers had supplied him, and with what was sweeter and more likely to be efficacious, a true and yearning wish

to save her from herself. She was altogether wrong, and he strove to make her see the danger and the error of her ways. But he strove in vain. She had one of those temperaments, reckless, vehement, pleasure-loving, ardent, and profoundly selfish, which see only their own immediate gain, their own immediate desires. When he tried to stir her conscience by speaking of the danger she drew down on the head of the man she professed to love, she almost laughed.

"He would be a poor creature," she said, proudly, "if all danger would not be dear to him for me!"

Gesualdo looked her full in the eyes.

"You know that this matter must end in the death of one man or of the other. Do you mean that this troubles you not one whit?"

"It will not be my fault," said Generosa; and he saw in her the woman's lust of vanity, which finds food for its pride in the blood shed for her, as the tigress does, and even the gentle hind.

He remained an hour or more with her, exhausting every argument which his creed and his sympathy could suggest to him as having any possible force in it to sway this wayward and sin-bound soul; but he knew that his words were poured on her ear as uselessly as water on a stone floor. She was in a manner grateful to him as her friend, in a manner afraid of that vague majesty of some unknown power which he represented to her; but she hated her husband, she adored her lover: he could not stir her from those two extremes of passion. He left her with apprehension and a pained sense of his own impotence. She promised him that she would provoke Tassilo no more that night, and this poor promise was all that he could wring from her. It was late when he left the mill-house. He feared Candida would be alarmed at his unusual absence, and hastened, with trouble on his soul, towards the village, lying white and lonely underneath the midsummer moon. He had so little influence, so slender a power to persuade or warn, to counsel or command; he felt afraid that he was unworthy of his calling.

"I should have been better in the cloister," he thought, sadly: "I have not the key to human hearts."

He went on through a starry world of fire-flies making luminous the still-uncut corn, and, entering his presbytery, crept noiselessly up the stairs to his chamber, thankful that the voice of his housekeeper did not cry to him out of the darkness to know why he had so long tarried. He slept little that night, and was up, as was his wont, by daybreak. It was still dark when the church-bell was clanging above his head for the first office.

It was the day of St. Peter and of St. Paul. Few people came to the early mass,—some peasants who wanted to have the rest of the day clear, some women, thrifty housewives who were up betimes, Candida herself; no others. The lovely morning light streamed in, cool and roseate; there were a few lilies and roses on the altar; some red draperies floated in the door-way; the nightingales in the wild-rose hedge sang all the while, their sweet voices crossing the monotonous Latin recitatives. The mass was just over when into the church from without there arose a strange sound, shrill and yet hoarse, inarticulate and yet uproarious: it came from the throats of many people, all screaming and shouting and talking and swearing together. The peasants and the women who were on their knees scrambled to their feet and rushed to the door, thinking the earth had opened and the houses were falling. Gesualdo came down from the altar and strove to calm them, but they did not heed him, and he followed them despite himself. The whole village seemed out,—man, woman, and child: the nightingales grew dumb under the outcry.

"What is it?" asked Gesualdo.

Several voices shouted back to him, "Tasso Tassilo has been murdered!"

"Ah!"

Gesualdo gave a low cry, and leaned against the stem of a cypress-tree to save himself from falling. What use had been his words that night!

The murdered man had been found lying under the canes on the wayside not a rood from the church. A dog smelling at it had caused the body to be sought out and discovered. He had been dead but a few hours,—apparently killed by a knife thrust under his left shoulder, which had struck straight through the heart.

The agitation in the people was unimaginable, the uproar deafening. Some one with a grain of sense remaining had sent for the carabinieri, but their picket was two miles off, and they had not yet arrived. The dead man still lay where he had fallen: every one was afraid to touch him.

"Does his wife know?" said Gesualdo, in a strange, hoarse voice.

"His wife will not grieve," said a man in the crowd, and there was a laugh, subdued by awe and the presence of death and of the priest.

Gesualdo, with a strong shudder of disgust, held up his hand in horror and reproof, then bent over the dead body where it lay among the reeds.

"Bring him to the sacristy," he said to the men nearest him. "He must not lie there, like a beast unclean, by the roadside. Go fetch a hurdle,--a sheet,--anything."

But no one of them would stir.

"If we touch him they will take us up for murdering him," they muttered, as one man.

"Cowards! Stand off: I will carry him in-doors," said the priest.

"You are in full canonicals!" cried Candida, twitching at his sleeve.

But Gesualdo did not heed her. He was brushing off with a tender hand the flies which had begun to buzz about the dead man's mouth. The flies might have stung and eaten him all the day through for what any one of the little crowd would have cared: they would not have stretched a hand even to drag him into the shade.

Gesualdo was a weakly man; he had always fasted long and often, and had never been strong from his birth; but indignation, compassion, and horror for the moment lent him a strength not his own: he stooped down and raised the dead body in his arms, and, staggering under his burden, he bore it the few rods which separated the place where it had fallen from the church and the vicar's house.

The people looked on open-mouthed with wonder and awe. "It is against the law," they muttered, but they did not offer active opposition. Gesualdo, unmolested save for the cries of the old housekeeper, carried his load into his own house and laid it reverently down on the couch which stood in the sacristy. He was exhausted with the great strain and effort; his limbs shook under him, the sweat poured off his face, the white silk and golden embroideries of his cope and stole were stained with the clotted blood which had fallen from the wound in the dead man's breast. He did not heed it, nor did he hear the cries of Candida mourning the disfigured vestments, nor the loud chattering of the crowd thrusting itself into the sacristy. He stood looking down on the poor, dusty, stiffening corpse before him with blind eyes, and thinking, in silent terror, "Is it her work?"

In his own soul he had no doubt.

Candida plucked once more at his robes.

"The vestments! the vestments! You will ruin them! Take them off----"

He put her from him with a gesture of dignity which she had never seen in him, and motioned the throng back towards the open door.

"I will watch with him till the guards come," he said. "Go send his wife hither."

Then he scattered holy water on the dead body, and kneeled down beside it and prayed.

The crowd thought that he acted strangely. Why was he so still and cold, and why did he seem so stunned and stricken? If he had screamed and raved, and run hither and thither purposelessly, and let the corpse lie where it was in the canes, he would have acted naturally in their estimation. They hung about the door-ways half afraid, half angered: some of them went to the mill-house, eager to have the honor of being the first bearer of such news.

No one was sorry for the dead man, except some few who were in his debt and knew that now they would be obliged to pay with heavy interest what they owed up to his successors.

With the grim pathos and dignity which death imparts to the commonest creature, the murdered man lay on the bench of the sacristy, amidst the hubbub and the uproar of the crowding people, he and the priest the only mute creatures in the place.

Gesualdo kneeled by the dead man in his blood-stained, sand-stained canonicals; he was praying with all the soul there was in him, not for the dead man, but for the living woman.

The morning broadened into the warmth of day. He rose from his knees, and bade his sacristan bring linen, and spread it over the corpse to cheat the flies and the gnats of their ghastly repast. No men of law came. The messengers returned. The picket-house had been closed at dawn, and the carabineers were away. There was nothing to be done but to wait. The villagers stood or sat about in the paved court, and in the road under the cypresses. They seldom had such an event as this in the dulness of their lives. They brought hunches of bread and ate as they discoursed of it.

"Will you not break your fast?" said Candida to Gesualdo. "You will not bring him to life by starving yourself."

Gesualdo made a sign of refusal.

His mouth was parched, his throat felt closed; he was straining his eyes for the first sight of Generosa on the white road. If she were guilty she would never come, he thought, to look on the dead man.

Soon he saw her, coming with swift feet and flying skirts and bare head, through the boles of the cypresses. She was livid; her unbound hair was streaming behind her.

She had passed a feverish night, locking her door against her husband, and spending the whole weary hours at the casement where she could see the old gray villa where her lover dwelt, standing out against the moonlight among its ilex- and olive-trees. She had had no sense of the beauty of the night: she had been only concerned by the fret and fever of a first love and of a guilty passion.

She was not callous at heart, though wholly untrained and undisciplined in character, and her conscience told her that she gave a bad return to a man who had honestly and generously adored her, who had been lavish to her poverty out of his riches, and had never been unkind until a natural and justified jealousy had embittered the whole current of his life. She held the offence of infidelity lightly, yet her candor compelled her to feel that she was returning evil for good, and repaying in a base manner an old man's unwise but generous affection. She would have hesitated at nothing that could have united her life to her lover; yet in a corner of her soul she was vaguely conscious that there was a degree of unfairness and baseness in setting their youth and their ardor to hoodwink and betray a feeble and aged creature like Tasso Tassilo. She hated him fiercely: he was her jailer, her tyrant, her keeper. She detested the sound of his slow step, of his croaking voice, of his harsh calls to his men and his horses and mules; the sight of his withered features, flushed and hot with restless jealous pains, was at once absurd and loathsome to her. Youth has no pity for such woes of age, and she often mocked him openly and cruelly to his face. Still, she knew that she did him wrong, and her conscience had been more stirred by the reproof of Gesualdo than she had acknowledged. She was in that wavering mood when a woman may be saved from an unwise course by change, travel, movement, and the distractions of the world; but there were none of these for the miller's young wife. So long as her husband lived, so long would she be doomed to live here, with the roar of the mill-wheels and the foaming of the weir-water on her ear, and before her eyes the same thickets of cane, the same fields with their maples and vines, the same white, dusty road winding away beyond the poplars, and with nothing to distract her thoughts or lull her mind away from its idolatry of her fair-haired lover at the old gray palace on the hill above her home.

She had spent the whole night gazing at the place where he lived. He was not even there at that moment: he had gone away for two days to a grain-fair in the town of Vendramino, but she recalled with ecstasy their meetings by the side of the low green river, their hours in the wild flowering gardens of the palace, the lovely evenings when she had stolen out to see him come through the maize and canes, the fire-flies all alight about his footsteps. Sleepless but languid, weary and yet restless, she had thrown herself on her bed without taking off her clothes, and in the dark, as the bells for the first mass had rung over the shadowy fields. She had for the first time fallen into a heavy sleep, haunted by dreams of her lover, which made her stretch her arms to him in the empty air, and murmur, sleeping, wild and tender words.

She had been still on her bed, when the men of the mill had roused her, beating at the chamber door and crying to her,--  
"Generosa, Generosa, Padrona! get up! The master is murdered, and lying dead at the church!"

She had been lying dreaming of Falko, and feeling in memory his kisses on her mouth, when those screams had come through the stillness of the early daybreak, through the music of the blackbirds piping in the cherry-boughs outside her windows.

She had sprung from off her bed.

She had huddled on some decenter clothing, and, bursting through the detaining hands of the henchmen and neighbors, had fled, as fast as her trembling limbs could bear her, to the church.

"Is it true? Is it true?" she cried, with white lips, to Gesualdo.

He looked at her with a long, inquiring regard: then, without a word, he drew the linen off the dead face of her husband, and pointed to it.

She, strong as a colt and full of life as a young tree, fell headlong on the stone floor in a dead swoon.

The people gathered about the door-way and watched her suspiciously and without compassion. There was no one there who did not believe her to be the murderess. No one except Gesualdo. In that one moment when he had looked into her eyes he had felt that she was guiltless. He called Candida to her and left her, and closed the door on the

curious, cruel, staring eyes of the throng without.

The people murmured: what title had he more than they to command and direct in this matter? The murder was a precious feast to them: why should he defraud them of their rights?

"He knows she is guilty," they muttered, "and he wants to screen her and give her time to recover herself and to arrange what story she shall tell."

Soon there came the sound of horses' feet on the road, and the jingling of chains and scabbards stirred the morning air: the carabinieri had arrived. Then came also the syndic and petty officers of the larger village of Sant' Arturo, where the communal municipality in which Marca was enrolled had its seat of justice, its tax-offices, and its schools. There was a great noise and stir, grinding of wheels and shouting of orders, vast clouds of dust and ceaseless din of voices, loud bickerings of conflicting authorities at war with one another, and rabid inquisitiveness and greedy excitement on all sides.

In a later time they remembered against him all this which he did now.

The feast of St. Peter and St. Paul had been a day of disaster and disorder, but to the good people of Marca both these were sweet. They had something to talk of from dawn till dark, and the blacker the tragedy the merrier wagged the tongues. The soul of their vicar alone was sick within him. Since he had seen the astonished, horrified eyes of the woman Generosa he had never once doubted her, but he felt that her guilt must seem clear as the noonday to all others. Her disputes with her husband and her passion for Falko Melegari were facts known to all the village, and who else had any interest in his death? The whole of Marca pronounced as with one voice against her: the women had always hated her for her superior beauty, and the men had always borne her a grudge for her saucy disdain of them, and that way of bearing herself as though a beggar from Bocca d'Arno were a queen.

"Neighbors put up with her pride while she was on the sunny side of the street," said Candida, with grim satisfaction, "but now she is in the shade they'll fling the stones fast enough." And she was ready to fling her own stone. Generosa had always seemed an impudent jade to her, coming and talking with Don Gesualdo, as she did, at all hours, and as though the church and the sacristy were open bazaars!

How that day passed, and how he bore himself through all its functions, he never knew. It was the dead of night, when he, still dressed, and unable even to think calmly, clasping his crucifix in his hands, and pacing to and fro his narrow chamber with restless and uneven steps, heard his name called by the voice of a man in great agitation, and, looking out of his casement, saw Falko Melegari on his gray horse, which was covered with foam and sweating as from a hard gallop.

"Is it true?" he cried, a score of times.

"Yes, it is all true," said Gesualdo. His voice was stern and cold: he could not tell what share this man might not have had in the crime.

"But she is innocent as that bird in the air," screamed her lover, pointing to a scops owl which was sailing above the cypresses.

Gesualdo bowed his head and spread out his hands, palm downward, in a gesture which meant hopeless doubt.

"I went away at dark into the town to buy cattle," said the steward, with sobs in his throat. "I rode out by the opposite road. I knew naught of it. Oh, my God, why was I not here? They should not have taken her without its costing them hard."

"You would have done her no good," said Gesualdo, coldly. "You have done her harm enough already," he added, after a pause. Falko did not resent the words: the tears were falling like rain down his cheeks, his hands were clinched on his saddle-bow, the horse stretched its foam-flecked neck unheeded.

"Who did it? Who could do it? He had many enemies. He was a hard man," he muttered.

Gesualdo gave a gesture of hopeless doubt and ignorance. He looked down on the lover's handsome face and head in the moonlight. There was a strange expression in his own eyes.

"Curse you for a cold-hearted priest," thought the young steward, with bitterness. Then he wheeled his horse sharply round, and, without any other word, rode off towards his home in the glistening white light, to stable his weary horse, and to saddle another to ride into the larger village of Sant' Arturo. It was past midnight; he could do no good; he could see no one; but it was a relief to him to be in movement; he felt that it would choke him to sit and sup and sleep and smoke as usual in his quiet house among the magnolias and the myrtles, whilst the love of his life lay alone in her

misery.

All gladness which would at any natural death of Tasso Tassilo's have filled his soul was quenched in the darkness of horror in which her fate was snatched from him and plunged into the mystery and the blackness of imputed crime.

He never actually suspected her for a moment; but he knew that others would no doubt do more than suspect.

"Perhaps the brute killed himself," he thought, "that the blame of the crime might lie on her and part her from me."

Then he knew that such a thought was absurd. Tasso Tassilo had loved his life, loved his mill, and his money, and his petty power, and his possession of his beautiful wife; and, besides, what man could stab himself from behind between the shoulders? It was just the blow that a strong yet timid woman would give. As he walked to and fro on the old terrace whilst they saddled the horse, he felt a sickening shudder run through him. He did not suspect her. No, not for an instant. And yet there was a dim, unutterable horror upon him which veiled the remembered beauty of her face.

The passing of the days which came after this feast of the two apostles was full of an unspeakable horror to him, and in the brief space of them he grew haggard, hollow-cheeked, almost aged, despite his youth. The dread formalities and tyrannies of the law seized on the quiet village and tortured every soul in it: every one who had seen or heard or known aught of the dead man was questioned, tormented, harangued, examined, suspected. Don Gesualdo himself was made subject to a searching and oft-repeated interrogation, and severely reproved that he had not let the body lie untouched until the arrival of the officers of justice. He told the exact truth as far as he knew it, but when questioned as to the relations of the murdered man and his wife he hesitated, prevaricated, contradicted himself, and gave the impression to the judicial authorities that he knew much more against the wife than he would say. What he tried to do was to convey to others his own passionate conviction of the innocence of Generosa; but he utterly failed in doing this; and his very anxiety to defend her only created an additional suspicion against her.

The issue of the preliminary investigation was that the wife of Tasso Tassilo, murdered on the morning of the day of St. Peter and St. Paul, was consigned to prison, to be "detained as a precaution" under the lock and key of the law, circumstantial evidence being held to be strongly against her as the primary cause, if not the actual executant, of the murder of her lord.

Every one called from the village to speak of her spoke against her, with the exception of Falko Melegari, who was known to be her lover, and whose testimony weighed not a straw, and Don Gesualdo himself, a priest, indeed, but the examining judge was no friend of priests, and would not have believed them on their oaths, whilst the strong friendship for her, and the nervous anxiety to shield her, displayed so unwisely though so sincerely by him, did her more harm than good, and made his bias so visible that his declarations were held valueless.

"You know I am innocent!" she cried to him, the day of her arrest; and he answered her, with the tears falling down his cheeks, "I am sure of it! I would die to prove it! For one moment I did doubt you,--pardon me!--but only one. I am sure you are innocent, as I am sure that the sun hangs in the skies."

But his unsupported belief availed nothing to secure that of others: the dominant feeling among the people of Marca was against her, and, in face of that feeling and of the known jealousy of her which had consumed the latter days of the dead man, the authorities deemed that they could do no less than order her provisional arrest. Her very beauty was a weapon turned against her. It seemed so natural to her accusers that so lovely and so young a woman should have desired to rid herself of a husband, old, ill-favored, exacting, and unloved. In vain--utterly in vain--did Falko Melegari, black with rage and beside himself with misery, swear by every saint in the calendar that his relations with her had been hitherto absolutely innocent. No one believed him.

"You are obliged to say that," said the judge, with good-humored impatience.

"But, God in heaven, why not when it is true?" shouted Falko.

"It is always true when the *damo* is a man of honor?" said the ironical judge, with an incredulous, amused smile.

So, her only defenders utterly discredited, she paid the penalty of being handsomer and grander than her neighbors, and was taken to the town of Vèndramino, and there left to lie in prison until such time as the majesty of the law should be pleased to decide whether or not it deemed her guilty of causing the death of her husband. The people of Marca were content. They only could not see why the law should take such a time to doubt and puzzle over a fact which to them all was as clear as the weather-vane on their church tower.

"Who should have killed him, if not she or her *damo*?" they asked, and no one could answer.

So she was taken away by the men of justice, and Marca no more saw her handsome head with the silver pins in its coiled hair leaning out from the square mill windows, or her bright-colored skirts going light as the wind up the brown

sides of the hills, and through the yellow-blossomed gorse in the warm autumn air, to some trysting-place under the topmost pines, where the wild pigeons dwelt in the boughs above, and the black stoat ran through the bracken below.

The work of the mill went on the same, being directed by the brother of Tassilo, who had always had a share in it, both of labor and profit. The murder still served for food for people's tongues through vintage and onward until the maize-harvest and the olive-gathering. As the nights grew long and the days cold, it ceased to be the supreme theme of interest in Marca: no one ever dreamed that there could be a doubt of the absent woman's guilt, or said a good word for her; and no one gave her any pity for wasting her youth and fretting her soul out in a prison-cell, though they were disposed to grant that what she had done had been, after all, perhaps only natural, considering all things. Her own family were too poor to travel to her help,—indeed, only heard of her misfortunes after many days, and then only by chance, through a travelling hawker: they could do nothing for her, and did not try; she had never sent them as much of her husband's money as they had expected her to do, and now that she was in trouble she might get out of it as she could, so they said. She had always cared for her ear-rings and breastpins, never for them: she would see if her jewels would help her now. When any member of a poor family marries into riches, the desire to profit by her marriage is, if ungratified, quickly turned into hatred of herself. Why should she have gone to eat stewed kid and fried lamb and hare baked with fennel, when they had only a bit of salt fish and an onion now and then?

They had admitted the vicar of San Bartolo, once or twice, to visit her, the jailer standing by, but he had been unable to do more than to weep with her and assure her of his own perfect belief in her innocence. The change he found in her shocked him so greatly that he could scarcely speak; and he thought to himself, as he saw how aged and wasted and altered she was, if she lose her beauty and grow old before her time, what avail will it be to her even if they declare her innocent? Her gay lover will look at her no more.

Falko Melegari loved her wildly, ardently, vehemently indeed; but Gesualdo, with that acute penetration which sometimes supplies in delicate natures that knowledge of the world which they lack, felt that it was not a love which had any qualities in it to withstand the trials of time or the loss of physical charms. Perchance Generosa herself felt as much; and the cruel consciousness of it hurt her more than her prison-bars.

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### CHAPTER III.

The winter passed away, and with February the corn spread a green carpet everywhere, the almond-trees blossomed on the hill-sides, the violets opened the way for the wind-flowers, and the willows budded beside the water-mill. There were braying of bugles, twanging of lutes, cracking of shots, drinking of wines on the farms and in the village as a rustic celebration of Carnival. Not much of it, for times are hard and men's hearts heavy in these days, and the sunlit grace and airy gayety natural to it are things forever dead in Italy, like the ilex forests and the great gardens that have perished for ever and aye.

Lent came, with its church-bells sounding in melancholy iteration over the March fields, where the daffodils were blowing by millions, and the parocco of San Bartolo fasted and prayed and mortified his flesh in every way that his creed allowed, and hoped by such miseries, pains, and penances to attain grace in heaven, if not on earth, for Generosa in her misery. All through Lent he wearied the ear of God with incessant supplication for her.

Day and night he racked his brain to discover any evidence as to who the assassin had been. He never once doubted her: if the very apostles and saints of his Church had all descended on earth to witness against her, he would have cried to them that she was innocent.

The sickening suspicions, the haunting, irrepressible doubts, which now and then came over the mind of her lover as he walked to and fro by the edge of the river at night, looking up at what had been the casement of her chamber, did not assail for an instant the stronger faith of Gesualdo, weak as he was in body and, in some ways, weak in character.

The truth might remain in horrid mystery, in impenetrable darkness, forever; it would make no difference to him; he would be always convinced that she had been innocent. Had he not known her when she was a little, barefooted child, coming flying through the shallow green pools and the great yellow grasses and the sunny canebrakes of the Bocca d'Arno?

Most innocent, indeed, had been his relations with the wife of Tassilo, but to him it seemed that the interest he had taken in her, the pleasure he had felt in converse with her, had been criminal. There had been times when his eyes, which should have only seen in her a soul to save, had become aware of her mere bodily beauty, had dwelt on her with an awakening of carnal admiration. It sufficed to make him guilty in his own sight. This agony which he felt for her was the sympathy of a personal affection. He knew it, and his consciousness of it flung him at the feet of his crucifix in tortures of conscience.

He knew, too, that he had done her harm by the incoherence and the reticence of his testimony, by the mere vehemence with which he had unwisely striven to affirm an innocence which he had no power to prove,—even by that natural impulse of humanity which had moved him to bring her husband's corpse under the roof of the church and close the door upon the clamorous and staring throng who saw in the tragedy but a pastime. He, more than any other, had helped to cast on her the darkness of suspicion; he, more than any other, had helped to make earthly peace and happiness forever denied to her.

Even if they acquitted her in the house of law yonder, she would be dishonored for life. Even her lover, who loved her with all the hot coarse ardor of a young man's uncontrolled desires, had declared that he would be ashamed to walk beside her in broad day so long as this slur of possible, if unproved, crime were on her. His sensitive soul began to take alarm lest it were not a kind of sin to be so occupied with the fate of one to the neglect and detriment of others. Candida saw him growing thinner and more shadow-like every day, with ever-increasing anxiety. To fast, she knew, was needful above all for a priest in Lent, but he did not touch what he might lawfully have eaten: the new-laid eggs and the crisp lettuces of her providing failed to tempt him; and no mortal man, she told him, could live on air and water as he did.

"There should be reason in all piety," she said to him, and he assented.

But he did not change his ways, which were rather those of a monk of the Thebaid than of a vicar of a parish. He had the soul in him of a St. Anthony, of a St. Francis, and he had been born too late; the world as it is was too coarse and too incredulous for him, even in a little rustic primitive village hidden away from the eyes of men under its millet and its fig-trees.

The people of Marca noticed the change in him. Pale he had always been, but now he was the color of his own ivory Christ; taciturn, too, he had always been, yet he had ever had playful words for the children, kind words for the aged; these were silent now. The listless and mechanical manner with which he went through the offices of the Church contrasted with the passionate and despairing cries which seemed to come from his very soul when he preached, and which vaguely frightened a rural congregation who were wholly unable to understand them.

"One would think the good parocco had some awful sin on his soul," said a woman to Candida one evening.

"Nay, nay; he is as pure as a lamb," said Candida, twirling her distaff. "But he was always helpless and childlike, and too much taken up with heavenly things--may the saints forgive me for saying so! He should be in a monastery along with St. Romolo and St. Francis."

But yet the housekeeper, though loyalty itself, was, in her own secret thoughts, not a little troubled at the change she saw in her master. She put it down to the score of his agitation at the peril of Generosa Fe; but this in itself seemed to her unfitting in one of his sacred calling. A mere light-o'-love and saucebox, as she had always herself called the miller's wife, was wholly unworthy to occupy, even in pity, the thoughts of so holy a man.

There could not be a doubt that she had given that knife-stroke among the canes in the dusk of the dawn of St. Peter and St. Paul, thought Candida, among whose virtues charity had small place; but what had the parocco to do with it?

In her rough way, motherly and unmannerly, she ventured to take her master to task for so much interest in a sinner.

"The people of Marca say you think too much about that foul business; they even whisper that you neglect your holy duties," she said to him, as she served the frugal supper of cabbage soaked in oil. "There will always be crimes as long as the world wags on, but that is no reason why good souls should put themselves out about that which they cannot help."

Gesualdo said nothing, but she saw the nerves of his mouth quiver.

"I have no business to lecture your reverence on your duties," she added, tartly; "but they do say that so much anxiety for a guilty woman is a manner of injustice to innocent souls."

Gesualdo struck his closed hand on the table with concentrated expression of passion.

"How dare you say that she is guilty?" he cried. "Who has proved her so?"

Candida looked at him with shrewd suspicious eyes as she set down the bottle of vinegar.

"I have met with nobody who doubts it," she said, cruelly, "except your reverence, and her lover up yonder at the villa."

"You are all far too ready to believe evil," said Gesualdo, with nervous haste; and he arose and pushed aside the untasted dish and went out of the house.

"He is beside himself for that jade's sake," thought Candida, and, after waiting a little while to see if he returned, she sat down and ate the cabbage.

Whether there were as many crimes in the world as flies on the pavement in summer, she saw no reason why that good food should be wasted.

After her supper, she took her distaff and went and sat on the low wall which divided the church ground from the road, and gossiped with any one of the villagers who chanced to come by. No one was ever too much occupied not to have leisure to talk in Marca, and the church wall was a favorite gathering-place for the sunburnt women with faces like leather under their broad summer hats or their woollen winter kerchiefs, who came and went to and from the fields or the well or the washing-reservoir, with its broad stone tanks brimming with brown water under a vine-covered pergola, where the hapless linen was wont to be beaten and banged as though it were so many sheets of cast-iron. And here with her gossips and friends Candida could not help letting fall little words--stray sentences--which revealed the trouble her mind was in as to the change in her master. She was devoted to him, but her devotion was not so strong as her love of mystery and her impatience of anything which opposed a barrier to her curiosity. She was not conscious that she said a syllable which could have affected his reputation, yet her neighbors all went away from her with the idea that there was something wrong in the presbytery, and that if she had chosen, the priest's housekeeper could have told some very strange tales.

Since the days of the miller's murder, a vague feeling against Don Gesualdo had been growing up in Marca. A man who does not cackle and scream and roar till he is hoarse at the slightest thing which happens is always unnatural and suspicious in the eyes of an Italian community. The people of Marca began to remember that he had some foreign blood in him, and that he had always been more friendly with the wife of Tasso Tassilo than was meet in one of his calling.

Falko Melegari had been denied admittance to her by the authorities. They were not sure that he, as her lover, had not some complicity in the crime committed; and, moreover, his impetuous and inconsiderate language to the judge of

instruction at the preliminary investigation had been so fierce and so unwise that it had prejudiced against him all the officers of the law. This exclusion of him heightened the misery he felt, and moved him also to a querulous impatience with the vicar of San Bartolo for being allowed to see her.

"Those black snakes slip and slide in anywhere," he thought, savagely, and his contempt for and dislike of ecclesiastics, which the manner and character of Gesualdo had held in abeyance, revived in its pristine force.

In Easter-time Gesualdo was always greatly fatigued; and when Easter came round this year, and the sins of Marca were poured into his ear,—little, sordid, mean sins, of which the narration wearied and sickened him,—they seemed more loathsome to him than they had ever done. There was such likeness and such repetition in the confessions of all of them,—greed, avarice, dishonesty, fornication: the scale never varied, and the story told kept always at the same low level of petty and coarse things. Their confessor heard with a tired mind and a sick heart, and, as he gave them absolution, shuddered at the doubts of the infallibility of his Church which for the first time passed with dread terror through his thoughts. The whole world seems to him changing. He felt as though the solid earth itself were giving way beneath his feet. His large eyes had a startled and frightened look in them, and his face grew thinner every day.

It was after the last office in this Easter week, when a man came through the evening shadows towards the church. His name was Emilio Raffagiolo, but he was always known as the Girellone,—the rover. Such nicknames replace the baptismal names of the country-people till the latter are almost forgotten, whilst the family name is scarcely ever employed at all in rural communities. The Girellone was a carter, who had been in service at the water-mill for some few months. He was a man of thirty or thereabouts, with a dusky face and a shock head of hair, and hazel eyes, dull and yet cunning. He was dressed now in his festal attire, and he had a round hat set on one side of his head: he doffed it as he entered the church. He could not read or write, and his ideas of his creed were hazy and curious: the Church represented to him a thing with virtue in it, like a charm or a bunch of herbs; it was only necessary, he thought, to observe certain formulæ of it to be safe within it; conduct outside it was of no consequence. Nothing on earth can equal in confusion and indistinctness the views of the Italian rustic as regards his religion. The priest is to him as the medicine-man to the savage; but he has ceased to respect his counsels, whilst retaining a superstitious feeling about his office. This man, doffing his hat, entered the church and approached the confessional, crossing himself as he did so. Gesualdo, with a sigh, prepared to receive his confession, although the hour was unusual, and the many services of the day had fatigued him until his head swam and his vision was clouded. But at no time had he ever availed himself of any excuse of time or physical weakness to avoid the duties of his office. Recognizing the carter, he wearily awaited the usual tale of low vice and petty sins, some drunkenness, or theft, or lust gratified in some unholy way, and resigned himself wearily to follow the confused repetitions with which the rustic of every country answers questions or narrates circumstances. His conscience smote him for his apathy. Ought not the soul of this clumsy, wine-sodden boor to be as dear to him as that of lovelier creatures?

The man answered the usual priestly interrogations sullenly and at random; he could not help doing what he did, because superstition drove him to it and was stronger for the time than any other thing; but he was angered at his own conscience and afraid of what he did: his limbs trembled, and his tongue seemed to him to swell and grow larger than his mouth, and refused to move, as he said at length, in a thick, choked voice,—

"It was I that killed him!"

"Whom?" asked Gesualdo, whilst his own heart stood still. Without hearing the answer, he knew what it would be.

"Tasso, the miller,—my master," said the carter; and, having confessed thus far, he recovered confidence and courage, and, in the rude, involved, garrulous utterances common to his kind, he leaned his mouth closer to Gesualdo's ear, and told, with a curious sort of pride in the accomplishment of it, why and how it had been done.

"I wanted to go to South America," he muttered. "I have a cousin there, and he says one makes money fast and works little. I had often wished to take Tassilo's money, but I was always afraid. He locked it up as soon as he took any, were it ever so little, and it never saw light again till it went to the bank or was paid away for her finery. He wasted many a good fifty-franc note on her back.

"Look you, the night before the feast of Peter and Paul, he had received seven hundred francs in the day for wheat, and I saw him lock it up in his bureau and say to his wife that he should take it to the town next day. That was in the forenoon. At eventide they had a worse quarrel than usual. She taunted him, and he threatened her. In the dawn I was listening to hear him stir. He was up before dawn, and he unbarred and opened the mill-house himself, and called to the foreman, and said he was going to town, and told us what we were to do. 'I shall be away all day,' he said. It was still dusky. I stole out after him without the men seeing. I said to myself I would take this money from him as he went along the crossroads to take the diligence at Sant' Arturo. I did not say to myself I would kill him, but I resolved to get the money. It was enough to take one out to America and keep one awhile when one got out there. So I made up my mind.

Money is at the bottom of most things. I followed him half a mile before I could get my courage up. He did not see me because of the canes. He was crossing that grass where the trees are so thick, when I said to myself, 'Now or never!' Then I sprang on him and stabbed him under the shoulder. He fell like a stone. I searched him, but there was nothing in his pockets except a revolver loaded. I think he had only made a feint of going to the town, thinking to come back and find the lovers together. I buried the knife under a poplar a few yards off where he fell. I could have thrown it in the river, but they say things which have killed people always float. You will find it if you dig for it under the big poplar-tree that they call the Grand Duke's, because they say Pietro Leopoldo sat under it once on a time. There was a little blood on the blade, but there was none anywhere else, for he bled inwardly. They do if you strike right. I was a butcher's lad once, and I used to kill the oxen, and I know. That is all.

"When I found the old rogue had no money with him I could have killed him a score of times over. I cannot think how it was that he left home without it, unless it was, as I say, that he meant to go back unknown and unawares and surprise his wife with Melegari. That must have been it, I think. For, greedy as he was over his money, he was greedier still over his wife. I turned him over on his back, and left him lying there, and I went back to the mill and began my day's work, till the people came and wakened her and told the tale: then I left off work and came and looked on like the rest of them. That is all."

The man who made the confession was calm and unmoved; the priest who heard it was sick with horror, pale to the lips with agitation and anguish.

"But his wife is accused! She may be condemned!" he cried, in agony.

"I know that," said the man, stolidly. "But you cannot tell of me. I have told you under the seal of confession."

It was quite true: come what would, Gesualdo could never reveal what he had heard. His eyes swam, his head reeled, a deadly sickness came upon him; all his short life simple and harmless things had been around him; he had been told of the crimes of men, but he had never been touched by them; he had known of the sins of the world, but he had never realized them. The sense that the murderer of Tasso Tassilo was within a hand's breadth of him, that these eyes which stared at him, this voice which spoke to him, were those of the actual assassin, that it was possible and yet utterly impossible for him to help justice and save innocence,—all this overcame him with its overwhelming burden of horror and of divided duty. He lost all consciousness as he knelt there, and fell heavily forward on the wood-work of the confessional.

His teachers had said aright, in the days of his novitiate, that he would never be of stern enough stuff to deal with the realities of life.

When he recovered his senses, sight and sound and sensibility all returning to him slowly and with a strange, numb, pricking pain in his limbs and his body and his brain, the church was quite dark, and the man who had confessed his crime to him was gone.

Gesualdo gathered himself up with effort, and sat down on the wooden seat and tried to think. He was bitterly ashamed of his own weakness. What was he worth, he, shepherd and leader of men, if at the first word of horror which affrighted him he fainted as women faint, and failed to speak in answer the condemnation which should have been spoken? Was it for such cowardice as this that they had anointed him and received him as a servitor of the Church?

His first impulse was to go and relate his feebleness and failure to his bishop; the next moment he remembered that even so much support as this he must not seek: to no living being must he tell this wretched blood-secret.

The law which respects nothing would not respect the secrets of the confessional; but he knew that all the human law in the world could not alter his own bondage to the duty he had with his own will accepted.

It was past midnight when, with trembling limbs, he groped his way out of the porch of his church and found the entrance of the presbytery and climbed the stone stairs to his own chamber.

Candida opened her door, and thrust her head through the aperture, and cried to him,—

"Where have you been mooning all this while, and the lamp burning to waste, and your good bed yawning for you? You are not a strong man enough to keep these hours, and for a priest they are not decent ones."

"Peace, woman!" said Gesualdo, in a tone which she had never heard from him. He went within and closed the door. He longed for the light of dawn, and yet he dreaded it.

When the dawn came it brought nothing to him except the knowledge that the real murderer was there, within a quarter of a mile of him, and yet could not be denounced by him to justice even to save the guiltless. The usual occupations of a week-day claimed his time, and he went through them all with mechanical precision, but he spoke all his words as in a

dream, and the red sanded bricks of his house, the deal table, with the black coffee and the round loaf set out on it, the stone sink at which Candida was washing endive and cutting lettuces, the old men and women who came and went telling their troubles garrulously and begging for pence, the sunshine which streamed in over the threshold, the poultry which picked up the crumbs off the floor, all these homely and familiar things seemed unreal to him, and were seen as through a mist.

This little narrow dwelling with the black cypress shadows falling athwart it, which had once seemed to him the abode of perfect peace, now seemed to imprison him, till his heart failed and died within him.

In the dead of night, at the end of the week, moved by an unconquerable impulse which had haunted him the whole seven days, he rose, and lit a lantern and let himself out of his own door noiselessly, stealthily, as though he were on some guilty errand, and took the sexton's spade from the tool-house, and went across the black shadows which stretched over the grass, towards the place where the body of Tasso Tassilo had lain dead. In the moonlight there stood tall and straight a column of green leaves: it was the stately Lombardy poplar, which was spared by the hatchet, because Marca was, so far as it understood anything, loyal in its regret for the days that were gone. Many birds which had been for hours sound asleep in its boughs flew out with a great whirr of wings and with chirps of terror as the footfall of Gesualdo awakened and alarmed them. He set his lantern down on the ground, for the rays of the moon did not penetrate as far as the deep gloom the poplars threw around them, and began to dig. He dug some little time without success: then his spade struck against something which shone amidst the dry clay soil; it was the knife. He took it up with a shudder. There were dark red spots on the steel blade. It was a narrow, slightly-curved knife about six inches long, such a knife as every Italian of the lower classes carries every day, and with which most Italian murders are committed.

He looked at it long. If the inanimate thing could but have spoken, could but have told, the act which it had done!

He, kneeling on the ground, gazed at it with a sickening fascination; then he replaced it deeper down in the ground, and with his spade smoothed the earth with which he covered it. The soil was so dry that it did not show much trace of having been disturbed. Gravely he returned homeward, convinced now of the truth of the confession made to him. Some men met him on the road, country lads driving cattle early to a distant fair: they saluted him with respect, but laughed when they had passed him.

What had his reverence, they wondered, been doing with a spade at this time of night? Did he dig for treasure? There was a tradition in the country-side of sacks of ducats which had been buried by the river to save them from the French troops in the time of the invasion by the First Consul.

Gesualdo, unconscious of their comments, went home, put the spade back in the tool-house, unlocked his church, entered, and prayed long; then, waking his sleepy *capellano*, he bade him rise and set the bell ringing for the first mass. The man got up, grumbling because it was still quite dark, and next day talked to his neighbors about the queer ways of his vicar,—how he would walk all night about his room, sometimes get up and go out in the dead of night even. He complained that his own health and patience would soon give way. An uneasy feeling grew up in the village: some gossips even suggested that the bishop should be spoken to in the town; but every one was fearful of being the first to take such a step, and no one was sure how so great a person could be approached, and the matter remained in abeyance. But the disquietude and the antagonism which the manner and appearance of their priest had created grew with the growth of the year, and with it also the impression that he knew more of the miller's assassination than he would ever say.

A horrible sense of being this man's accomplice grew also upon himself: the bond of silence which he kept perforce with this wretch seemed to him to make him so. His slender strength and sensitive nerves ill fitted him to sustain so heavy a burden, so horrible a knowledge.

"It has come to chastise me because I have thought of her too often, have been moved by her too warmly," he told himself; and his soul shrank within him at what appeared the greatness of his own guilt.

Since receiving the confession of the carter he did not dare to seek an interview with Generosa. He did not dare to look on her agonized eyes and feel that he knew what could set her free and yet must never tell it. He trembled lest in sight of the suffering of this woman, who possessed such power to move and weaken him, he should be untrue to his holy office, should let the secret he had to keep escape him. Like all timid and vacillating tempers, he sought refuge in procrastination.

All unconscious of the growth of public feeling against him, and wrapped in that absorption which comes from one dominant idea, he pursued the routine of his parochial life, and went through all the ceremonials of his office, hardly more conscious of what he did than the candles which his sacristan lighted. The confession made to him haunted him night and day. He saw it, as it were, written in letters of blood on the blank white walls of his bedchamber, of his

sacristy, of his church itself. The murderer was there, at large, unknown to all,--at work like any other man in the clear, sweet sunshine, talking and laughing, eating and drinking, waking and sleeping, yet as unsuspected as a child unborn. And all the while Generosa was in prison. There was only one chance left; if she should be acquitted by her judges. But even then the slur and stain of an imputed, though unproved, crime would always rest upon her and make her future dark, her name a by-word in her birthplace. Yes, after what her lover had said, no mere acquittal, leaving doubt and suspicion behind it, would give her back to the light and joy of life. Every man's hand would be against her; every child would point at her as the woman who had been accused of the assassination of her husband.

One day he sought Falko Melegari when the latter was making up the accounts of his stewardship at an old bureau in a deep window-embasement of the villa.

"You know that the date of the trial is fixed for the 10th of next month?" he said, in a low, stifled voice.

The young man, leaning back in his wooden chair, gave a sign of assent.

"And you," said Gesualdo, with a curious expression in his eyes,--"if they absolve her, will you have the courage to prove your own belief in her innocence? Will you marry her when she is set free?"

The question was abrupt and unlooked for. Falko changed color: he hesitated.

"You will not!" said Gesualdo.

"I have not said so," answered the young man, evasively. "I do not know that she would exact it."

Exact it! Gesualdo did not know much of human nature, but he knew what the use of that cold word implied.

"I thought you loved her! I mistook," he said, bitterly. A rosy flush came for a moment on the wax-like pallor of his face.

Falko Melegari looked at him insolently.

"A churchman should not meddle with these things! Love her! I love her,--yes. It ruins my life to think of her yonder. I would cut off my right arm to save her; but to marry her if she come out absolved,--that is another thing; one's name a by-word, one's credulity laughed at, one's neighbors shy of one,--that is another thing, I say. It will not be enough for her judges to acquit her; that will not prove her innocence to all the people here, or to my people at home in my own country."

He rose and pushed his heavy chair away impatiently: he was ashamed of his own words, but in the most impetuous Italian natures prudence and self-love are always the strongest instincts. Gesualdo looked at him with a great scorn in the depths of his dark, deep, luminous eyes. This handsome and virile lover seemed to him a very poor creature, a coward and faithless.

"In the depths of your soul you doubt her yourself!" he said, with severity and contempt, as he turned away from the writing-table and went out through the windows into the garden beyond.

"No, as God lives, I do not doubt her," cried Falko Melegari. "Not for an hour, not for a moment. But to make others believe,--that is more difficult. I will maintain her and befriend her always if they set her free; but marry her,--take her to my people,--have every one say that my wife had been in jail on suspicion of murder,--that I could not do: no man would do it who had a reputation to lose. One loves for love's sake, but one marries for the world's."

He spoke to empty air: there was no one to hear him but the little green lizards who had slid out of their holes in the stone under the window-step. Gesualdo had gone across the rough grass of the garden, and had passed out of sight beyond the tall hedge of rose-laurel.

The young man resumed his writing, but he was restless and uneasy, and could not continue his calculations of debit and audit of loss and profit. He took his gun, whistled his dog, and went up towards the hills, where hares were to be found in the heather and snipes under the gorse. His temper was ruffled, and his mind in great irritation against his late companion: he felt angrily that he must have appeared a poltroon and a poor and unmanly lover in the eyes of the churchman. Yet he had only spoken, he felt sure, as any other man would have done in his place.

In the sympathy of their common affliction, his heart had warmed for a while to Gesualdo, as to the only one who like himself cared for the fate of Tasso Tassilo's wife; but now that suspicion had entered into him, there returned with it all his detestation of the Church and all the secular hatred which the gentle character of the priest of Marca had for a time lulled in him.

"Of course he is a liar and a hypocrite," he thought savagely. "Perhaps he is a murderer as well!"

He knew that the idea was a kind of madness. Gesualdo had never been known to hurt a fly; indeed, his aversion even to see pain inflicted had made him often the laughing-stock of the children of Marca when he had rescued birds or locusts or frogs from their tormenting fingers, and forbidden them to throw stones at the lambs or kids they drove to pasture. "They are not baptized," the children had often said, with a grin; and Gesualdo had as often answered, "The good God baptized them himself."

It was utter madness to suppose that such a man, tender as a woman, timid as a sheep, gentle as a spaniel, could possibly have stabbed Tasso Tassilo to the death within a few rods of his own church, almost on holy ground itself. And yet the idea grew and grew in the mind of Generosa's lover until it acquired all the force of an actual conviction. We welcome no supposition so eagerly as one which accords with and intensifies our own prejudices. He neglected his duties and occupations to brood over this one suspicion and put together all the trifles which he could remember in confirmation of it. It haunted him wherever he was,—at wine-fair, at horse-market, at cattle-sale, in the corn-field, among the vines, surrounded by his peasantry at noonday, or alone in the wild deserted garden of the villa by moonlight.

In his pain and fury, it was a solace to him to turn his hatred on to some living creature. As he sat alone and thought over all which had passed (as he did think of it night and day always), many a trifle rose to his mind which seemed to him to confirm his wild and vague suspicions of the vicar of San Bartolo. Himself a free-thinker, it appeared natural to suspect any kind of crime in a member of the priesthood. The Italian sceptic is as narrow and as arrogant in his free-thought as the Italian believer in his bigotry. Melegari was a good-hearted young man, and kind and gay and generous by nature; but he had the prejudices of his time and of his school. These prejudices made him ready to believe that a priest was always fit food at heart for the galleys or the scaffold,—a mass of concealed iniquity covered by his cloth.

"I believe you know more of it than any one," he said, roughly, one day when he passed the priest on a narrow field-path, while his eyes flashed suspiciously over the downcast face of Gesualdo, who shrank a little, as if he had received a blow, and was silent. He had spoken on an unconsidered impulse, and would have been unable to say what his own meaning really was; but, as he saw the embarrassment and observed the silence of his companion, what he had uttered at hazard seemed to him curiously confirmed and strengthened.

"If you know anything which could save her and you do not speak," he said, passionately, "may all the devils you believe in torture you through all eternity!"

Gesualdo still kept silent. He made the sign of the cross nervously, and went on his way.

"Curse all these priests!" said the young man, bitterly, looking after him. "If one could only deal with them as one does with other men!—but in their vileness and their feebleness they are covered by their frock like women."

He was beside himself with rage and misery and the chafing sense of his own impotence; he was young and strong and ardently enamoured, and yet he could do no more to save the woman he loved from eternal separation from him than if he had been an idiot or an infant, than if he had had no heart in his breast and no blood in his veins.

Whenever he met the vicar afterwards he did not even touch his hat, and ceased those outward observances of respect to the Church which he had always given before to please his master, who liked such example to be set by the steward to the peasantry.

"If Ser Baldo send me away for it, so he must do," he thought. "I will never set foot in the church again. I should choke that accursed parocco with his own wafer."

For suspicion is a poisonous weed which, if left to grow unchecked, soon reaches maturity, and Falko Melegari soon persuaded himself that his own suspicion was a truth, which only lacked time and testimony to become as clear to all eyes as it was to his.

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## CHAPTER IV.

Meantime, Gesualdo was striving with the utmost force that was in him to persuade the real criminal to confess publicly what he had told under the seal of confession. He saw the man secretly, and used every argument with which the doctrines of his Church and his own intense desires could supply him. But there is no obstinacy so dogged, no egotism so impenetrable, no shield against persuasion so absolute, as the stolid ignorance and self-love of a low mind. The Girellone turned a deaf ear to all censure as to all entreaty: he was stolidly indifferent to all the woe that he had caused and would cause if he remained silent. What was all that to him? The thought of the miller's widow shut up in prison pleased him; he had hated her as he had seen her in what he called her finery, going by him in the sunshine, with all her bravery of pearl necklace, of silver hair-pins, of gold watch and chain. Many and many a time he had thirsted to snatch at them and pull them off her. What right had she to them, she, a daughter of naked hungry folks, who dug and carted sea- and river-sand for a living? She was no better than himself! Now and then, Generosa had called him, in her careless, imperious fashion, to draw water or carry wood for her, and when she had done so she never had taken the trouble to bid him good-day or to say a good-natured word. His pride was hurt, and he had had much ado to restrain himself from calling her a daughter of beggars, a worm of the sand. Like her own people, he was pleased that she should now find her fine clothes and her jewelled trinkets of no avail to her, and that she should weep the light out of her big eyes, and the rose-bloom off her peach-like cheeks, in the squalor and nausea of a town prison.

Gesualdo, with all the force which a profound conviction that he speaks the truth lends to any speaker, wrestled for the soul of this dogged brute, and warned him of the punishment everlasting which would await him if he persisted in his refusal to surrender himself to justice. But he might as well have spoken to the great millstones at rest in the river-water. Why then had this wretch cast the burden of his vile secret on innocent shoulders? It was the most poignant anguish to him that he could awaken no sense of guilt in the conscience of the criminal. The man had come to him partly from a vague superstitious impulse, remnant of a credulity instilled into him in childhood, and partly from the want to *sfogare* himself, as he called it,—to tell his story to some one,—which is characteristic of all weak minds in times of trouble and peril. It had relieved him to drag the priest into sharing his own guilty consciousness; he was half proud and half afraid of the manner in which he had slain his master, and bitterly incensed that he had done the deed for nothing; but beyond this he had no other emotion, except that he was glad that Generosa should suffer through and for it.

"You will burn forever if you persist in such hideous wickedness," said Gesualdo again and again to him.

"I will take my chance of that," said the man. "Hell is far off, and the galleys are near."

"But if you do not believe in my power to absolve you or leave you accursed, why did you ever confess to me?" cried Gesualdo.

"Because one must clear one's breast to somebody when one has a thing like that on one's mind," answered the Girellone, "and I know you cannot tell of it again."

And from that position nothing moved him. No entreaties, threats, arguments, denunciations, stirred him a hair's-breadth. He had confessed *per sfogarsi*: that was all.

But one night after Gesualdo had thus spoken to him, vague fears assailed him,—terrors material, not spiritual: he had parted with his secret: who could tell that it might not come out like a sleuth-hound and find him and denounce him? He had told it to be at peace, but he was not at peace. He feared every instant to have the hand of the law upon him. Whenever he heard the trot of the carabinieri's horses going through the village, or saw the white belts and cocked hats of gendarmes in the sunlight of the fields, a cold tremor of terror seized him lest the priest should, after all, have told. He knew that it was impossible, and yet he was afraid.

He counted up the money he had saved, a little roll of filthy and crumpled bank-notes for very small amounts, and wondered if they would be enough to take him across to America. They were very few, but his fear compelled him to trust to them. He invented a story of remittances which he had received from his brother, and told his fellow-laborers and his employer that he was invited to join that brother; and then he packed up his few clothes and went. At the mill and in the village they talked a little of it, saying that the Girellone was in luck, but that they for their parts would not care to go so far.

Gesualdo heard of his flight in the course of the day.

"My God!--gone away!--out of the country?" he cried, involuntarily, with white lips.

The people who heard him wondered. "What could it matter to him that a carter had gone to seek his fortunes over the seas?"

The Girellone had not been either such a good worker or such a good boon companion that any one at the mill or in the village should greatly regret him.

"America gets all our rubbish," said the people. "Much good may it do her!"

Meantime, the man took his way across the country, and, sometimes by walking, sometimes by lifts in wagons, sometimes by helping charcoal-burners on the road, made his way, without spending much, to the sea-coast, and in the port of Leghorn took his passage in an emigrant-ship then loading there. The green canebrakes and peaceful millet-fields of Marca saw him no more.

But he had left the burden of his blood-guiltiness behind him, and it lay on the guiltless soul with the weight of the world.

So long as the man had remained in Marca there had been always a hope present with Gesualdo that he would persuade him to confess in a court of justice what he had confessed to the Church, or that some sequence of accidents would lead up to the discovery of his guilt. But with the ruffian gone across the seas, lost in that utter darkness which swallows up the lives of the poor and obscure when once they have left the hamlet in which their names mean something to their neighbors, this one hope was quenched; and Gesualdo in agony reproached himself with not having prevailed in his struggle for the wretch's soul,—with not having been eloquent enough, or wise enough, or stern enough, to awe him into declaration of his ghastly secret to the law.

His failure seemed to him a sign of heaven's wrath against himself.

"How dare I," he thought, "how dare I, feeble and timid and useless as I am, call myself a servant of God, or attempt to minister to other souls?"

He had thought, like an imbecile, as he told himself, to be able to awaken the conscience and compel the public confession of this man, and the possibility of flight had never presented itself to his mind, natural and simple as had been such a course to a creature without remorse, continually haunted by personal fears of punishment. He, he alone on earth, knew the man's guilt; he, he alone, had the power to save Generosa, and could not use the power because the secrecy of his holy office was fastened on him like an iron padlock on his lips.

The days passed him like nightmares; he did his duties mechanically, scarcely consciously; the frightful alternative which was set before him seemed to parch up the very springs of life itself. He knew that he must look strange in the eyes of the people; his voice sounded strangely in his own ears; he began to feel that he was unworthy to administer the blessed bread to the living, to give the last unction to the dying; he knew that he was not at fault, and yet he felt that he was accursed. Choose what he would, he must commit some hateful sin.

The day appointed for the trial came: it was the 10th of May. A hot day, with the bees booming among the acacia-flowers, and the green tree-frogs shouting joyously above in the ilex-tops, and the lizards running in and out of the china-rose hedges on the highways. Many people of Marca were summoned as witnesses, and these went to the town in mule-carts or crazy chaises, with the farm-horse put in the shafts, and grumbled because they would lose their day's labor in their fields, and yet were pleasurably excited at the idea of seeing Generosa in the prisoner's dock, and being able themselves to tell all they knew, and a great deal that they did not know.

Falko Melegari rode over at dawn by himself, and Gesualdo with his housekeeper and sacristan, who were all summoned to give testimony, went, as they had no choice but to do, by the diligence, which started from Sant' Arturo, and rolled through the dusty roads, and over the bridges, and past the wayside shrines and shops and forges, across the country to the town.

The vicar never spoke throughout the four weary hours during which the rickety and crowded vehicle, with its poor, starved, bruised beasts, rumbled on its road through the lovely shadows and cool sunlight of the early morning. He held his breviary in his hand for form's sake, and, seeing him thus absorbed in holy meditation, as they thought, his garrulous neighbors did not disturb him, but chattered among themselves, filling the honeysuckle-scented air with the odors of garlic and wine and coarse tobacco.

Candida glanced at him anxiously from time to time, haunted by she could not have said what,—a vague presentiment of ill. His face looked very strange, she thought, and his closely-locked lips were white as the lips of a corpse. When the diligence was driven over the stones of the town, all the passengers by it descended at the first wine-house which they saw on the piazza, to eat and drink; but he, with never a word, motioned his housekeeper aside when she would have pressed food on him, and went into the great church of the place to pray alone.

The town was hot and dusty and sparsely peopled. It had brown walls and large brick palaces untenanted, and ancient towers, also of brick, pointing high to heaven. It was a place dear to the memory of lovers of art for the sake of some

fine paintings of the Sienese school which hung in its churches, and was occasionally visited by strangers for sake of these; but for the most part it was utterly forgotten by the world; and its bridge of many arches, said to have been built by Augustus, seldom resounded to any other echoes than those of the heavy wheels of the hay- or corn-wagons coming in from the pastoral country around.

The court-house, where all great trials took place, stood in one of the bare, silent, dusty squares of the town. It had once been the ancient palace of the podesta, and had the machicolated walls, the turreted towers, and the vast stairways and frescoed chambers of a larger and statelier time than ours. The hall of justice was a vast chamber pillared with marble, vaulted and painted, sombre and grand: it was closely thronged with country-folks; there was a scent of hay, of garlic, of smoking pipes hastily thrust into trouser-pockets, of unwashed flesh steaming hotly in the crowd and the close air. The judge was there with his officers, a Renaissance figure in black square cap and black gown. The accused was behind the cage assigned to such prisoners, guarded by carabinieri and by the jailers. Gesualdo looked in once from a distant door-way; then, with a noise in his ears like the sound of the sea, and a deadly sickness on him, he stayed without in the audience-chamber, where a breath of air came to him up one of the staircases, there waiting until his name was called.

The trial began. Everything was the same as it had been in the preliminary examination which had preceded her committal on the charge of murder. The same depositions were made now that had then been made. In the interval, the people of Marca had forgotten a good deal, so added somewhat of their own invention to make up for the deficiency; but, on the whole, the testimony was the same, given with that large looseness of statement and absolute indifference to fact so characteristic of the Italian mind, the judge, from habit, sifting the chaff from the wheat in the evidence with unerring skill, and following with admirable patience the tortuous windings and the hazy imagination of the peasants he examined.

The examination of Gesualdo did not come on until the third day. These seventy or eighty hours of suspense were terrible to him. He scarcely broke his fast, or was conscious of what he did. The whole of the time was passed by him listening in the court of justice or praying in the churches. When at last he was summoned, a cold sweat bathed his face and hair; his hands trembled; he answered the interrogations of the judge and of the advocates almost at random; his replies seemed scarcely to be those of a rational being; he passionately affirmed her innocence with delirious repetition and emphasis, which produced on the minds of the examiners the contrary effect to that which he endeavored to create.

"This priest knows that she is guilty," thought the president. "He knows it. Perhaps he knows even more: perhaps he was her accomplice."

His evidence, his aspect, his wild and contradictory words, did as much harm to her cause as he ignorantly strove to do good. From other witnesses of Marca the judge had learned that a great friendship had always been seen to exist between the vicar of San Bartolo and Generosa Fe, and that on the morning when the murder was discovered the priest had removed the body of the dead man to the sacristy, forestalling the officers of justice, and disturbing the scene of the murder. A strong impression against him was created beforehand in the audience and on the bench; and his pallid, agitated countenance, his incoherent words, his wild eyes, which incessantly sought the face of the prisoner, all gave him the appearance of a man conscious of some guilt himself, and driven out of his mind by fear. The president cross-examined him without mercy, censured him, railed at him, and did his uttermost to extract the truth which he believed that Gesualdo concealed; but to no avail: incoherent and half insane as he seemed, he said no syllable which could betray that which he really knew. Only when his eyes rested on Generosa there was such an agony in them that she herself was startled by it.

"Who would ever have dreamt that he would care so much?" she thought. "But he was always a tender soul; he always pitied the birds in the traps, and the oxen that went to the slaughter."

Reproved and censured without stint, for the president knew that to insult a priest was to merit promotion in high quarters, Gesualdo was at last permitted to escape from his place of torture. Blind and sick he got away through the crowd, past the officials, down the stairs, and out into the hot air. The piazza was thronged with people who could not find standing-room in the court-house. The murmur of their rapid and loud voices was like the noise of a sea on his ears; they had all the same burden. They all repeated like one man the same words, "They will condemn her," and then wondered what sentence she would receive,—whether a score of years of seclusion, or a lifetime.

Gesualdo went through the chattering, curious, cruel throng, barbarous with that barbarity of the populace which in all countries sees with glee a bull die, a wrestler drop, a malefactor ascend the scaffold, or a rat scour the streets soaked in petroleum and burning alive. The dead man had been nothing to them, and his wife had done none of them any harm, yet there was not a man or a woman, a youth or a girl, in the crowd, who would not have felt that he or she was defrauded of his entertainment if she were acquitted by her judges, although yet there was a general sense among them

that she had done no more than had been natural, and no more than had been her right.

The dark, slender, emaciated figure of the priest glided through their excited and boisterous groups; the air had the heat of summer, the sky above was blue and cloudless, the brown brick walls of the church and palace seemed baking in the light of the sun. In the corner of the square was a fountain, relic of the old times when the town had been a place of pageantry and power,—beautiful pale-green water, cold and fresh, leaping and flowing around marble dolphins. Gesualdo stooped and drank thirstily, as though he would never cease to drink, then went on his way and pushed aside the leathern curtain of the church door and entered into the coolness and solitude of that place of refuge.

There he stretched himself before the cross in prayer, and wept bitter, burning, unavailing tears for the burden which he bore of another's sin, and for his own helplessness beneath it, which seemed to him like a greater crime.

But even at the very altar of his God peace was denied him. Hurried, loud, impetuous steps from heavy boots fell on the old, worn, marble floor of the church, and Falko Melegari strode up behind him and laid a heavy hand upon his shoulders. The young man's face was deeply flushed, his eyes were savage, his breath was quick and uneven: he had no heed for the sanctity of the place or of his companion.

"Get up and hear me," he said, roughly. "They all say the verdict will be against her: you heard them."

Gesualdo made a gesture of assent.

"Very well, then," said the steward, through his clinched teeth. "If it be so indeed, I swear, as you and I live, that I will denounce you to the judges in her stead."

Gesualdo did not speak. He stood in a meditative attitude, with his arms folded on his chest. He did not express either surprise or indignation.

"I will denounce you," repeated Melegari, made more furious by his silence. "What did you do at night under the Grand Duke's poplars? Why did you carry in and screen the corpse? Does not the whole village talk of your strange ways and your altered habits? There is more than enough against you to send to the galleys a score of better men than you. Anyhow, I will denounce you if you do not make a clean breast of all you know to the president to-morrow. You are either the assassin or the accomplice, you accursed, black-coated hypocrite!"

A slight flush rose on the waxen pallor of Gesualdo's face, but he still kept silence.

The young man watching him with eyes of hatred, saw guilt in that obstinate and mulish dumbness.

"You dare not deny it, trained liar though you be!" he said, with passionate scorn. "Oh, wretched cur, who venture to call yourself a servitor of heaven, you would let her drag all her years out in misery to save your own miserable, puling, sexless, worthless life! Well, hear me, and understand. No one can say that I do not keep my word, and here, by the cross which hangs above us, I take my oath that if you do not tell all you know to-morrow, should she be condemned I will denounce you to the law, and if the law fail to do justice I will kill you as Tasso Tassilo was killed. May I die childless, penniless, and accursed if my hand fail!"

Then, with no other word, he strode from the church, the golden afternoon sunshine streaming through the stained windows above and falling on his fair hair, his flushed face, his flaming eyes, till his common humanity seemed as if transfigured. He looked like the avenging angel of Tintoretto's Paradise.

Gesualdo stood immovable in the deserted church, his arms crossed on his breast, his head bent. A great resolve, a mighty inspiration, had descended on him with the furious words of his foe. Light had come to him as from heaven itself. He could not give up the secret which had been confided to him in the confessional, but he could give up himself. His brain was filled with legends of sacrifice and martyrdom. Why might he not become one of that holy band of martyrs?

Nay, he was too humble to place himself beside them even in thought. The utmost he could do, he knew, would be only expiation for what seemed to him his ineffaceable sin in letting any human affection, however harmless, unselfish, and distant, stain the singleness and purity of his devotion to his vows. He had been but a peasant-boy until he had taken his tender heart and his ignorant mind to the seminary, and he had been born with the soul of a St. Francis, of a San Rocco, of a St. John, out of place, out of time, in the world he lived in, and in which the passions of faith and of sacrifice were as strong as are the passions of lust and of selfishness in other natures. The spiritual world was to him a reality, and the earth, with its merciless and greedy peoples, its plague of lusts, its suffering hearts, its endless injustice, an unreal and hideous dream.

To his temper, the sacrifice which suddenly rose before him as his duty appeared one which would reconcile him at once to the Deity he had offended and the humanity he was tempted to betray. To his mind, enfeebled and exhausted

by long fasting of the body and denial of every natural indulgence, such sacrifice of self seemed an imperious command from heaven. He would drag out his own life in misery and obloquy, indeed; but what of that? Had not the great martyrs and founders of his Church endured as much or more? Was it not by such torture voluntarily accepted and endured on earth that the grace of God was won?

He would tell a lie, indeed; he would draw down ignominy on the name of the Church; he would make men believe that an anointed priest was a common murderer, swayed by low and jealous hatreds; but of this he did not think. In the tension and perplexity of his tortured soul, the vision of a sacrifice in which he would be the only sufferer, in which the woman would be saved and the secret told to him be preserved, appeared as a heaven-sent solution of the doubts and difficulties in his path. Stretched in agonized prayer before one of the side altars of the church, he imagined the afternoon sunbeams streaming through the high window on his face to be the light of a celestial world, and in the hush and heat of the incense-scented air he believed that he heard a voice which cried to him, "By suffering all things are made pure."

He was not a wise, or strong, or educated man. He had the heart of a poet and the mind of a child. There was a courage in him to which sacrifice was welcome, and there was a credulity in him which made all exaggeration of simple faith possible. He was young and ignorant and weak; yet at the core of his heart there was a dim heroism: he could suffer and be mute: and in the depths of his heart he loved this woman better than himself,—with a love which in his belief made him accursed for all time.

When he at last arose and went out of the church doors his mind was made up to the course that he would take: an immense calm had descended upon the unrest of his soul.

The day was done, the sun had set, the scarlet flame of its after-glow bathed all the rusty walls and dusty ground with colors of glory. The crowd had dispersed; there was no sound in the deserted square except the ripple of the water as it fell from the dolphins' mouths into the marble basin. As he heard that sweet familiar murmur of the falling stream, the tears rose in his eyes and blotted out the flame-like pomp and beauty of the skies. Never again would he hear the water of the Marca river rushing in cool autumn days past the poplar-stems and the primrose-roots upon its mossy banks; never again would he hear in the place of his birth the gray-green waves of Arno sweeping through the canebreaks to the sea.

At three of the clock on the following day the judgment was given in the court.

Generosa Fe was decreed guilty of the murder of her husband, and sentenced to twenty years of solitary confinement. She dropped like a stone when she heard the sentence, and was carried out from the court insensible. Her lover, when he heard it, gave a roar of anguish like that of some great beast in torment and dashed his head against the wall, and struggled like a mad bull in the hands of the men who tried to hold him. Gesualdo, waiting without on the head of the great staircase, did not even change countenance: to him this bitterness, as of the bitterness of death, had been long past; he had been long certain what the verdict would be; and he had many hours before resolved on his own part.

A great calm had come upon his soul, and his face had that tranquillity which comes alone from a soul which is at peace within itself.

The sultry afternoon shed its yellow light on the brown and gray and dusty town; the crowd poured out of the courthouse, excited, contrite, voluble, pushing and bawling at one another, ready to take the side of the condemned creature now that she was the victim of the law. The priest alone of them all did not move: he remained sitting on the upright chair under a sculptured allegory of Justice and Equity which was on the arch above his head, and with the golden light of sunset falling down on him through the high casement above. He paid no heed to the hurrying of the crowd, to the tramp of guards, to the haste of clerks and officials eager to finish their day's work and get away to their wine and dominoes at the taverns. His hands mechanically held his breviary; his lips mechanically repeated a Latin formula of prayer. When all the people were gone, one of the custodians of the place touched his arm, telling him that they were about to close the doors. He raised his eyes like one who is wakened from a trance, and to the man said, quietly,—

"I would see the president of the court for a moment quite alone. Is it possible?"

After many demurs and much delay, they brought him into the presence of the judge in a small chamber of the great palace.

"What do you want with me?" asked the judge, looking nervously at the white face and the wild eyes of his unbidden visitant.

Gesualdo answered, "I am come to tell you that you have condemned an innocent woman."

The judge looked at him with sardonic derision and contempt.

"What more?" he asked. "If she be innocent, will you tell me who is guilty?"

"I am," replied the priest.

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At his trial he never spoke.

With his head bowed and his hands clasped, he stood in the cage where she had stood, and never replied by any single word to the repeated interrogations of his judges. Many witnesses were called, and all they said testified to the apparent truth of his self-accusation. Those who had always vaguely suspected him, all those who had seen him close the door of the sacristy on the crowd when he had borne the murdered man within, the mule-drivers who had seen him digging at night under the great poplars, the sacristan who had been awakened by him that same night so early, even his old housekeeper, though she swore that he was a lamb, a saint, an angel, a creature too good for earth, a holy man whose mind was distraught by fasting, by visions,—these all, either wilfully or ignorantly, bore witness which confirmed his own confession. The men of law had the mould and grass dug up under the Grand Duke's poplar, and when the blood-stained knife was found therein, the very earth, it seemed, yielded up testimony against him.

In the end, after many weeks of investigation, Generosa was released, and he was sentenced in her place.

Her lover married her, and they went to live in his own country in the Lombard plains, and were happy and prosperous, and the village of Marca and the waters of its cane-shadowed stream knew them no more.

Sometimes she would say to her husband, "I cannot think that he was guilty: there was some mystery in it." And her husband always laughed, and said in answer, "He was guilty, be sure: it was I that frightened him into confession. Those black rats of the Church have livers as white as their coats are black."

Generosa did not wholly believe, but she thrust the grain of doubt away from her and played with her handsome children. And, after all, she mused, what doubt could there be? Did not Don Gesualdo himself reveal his guilt? and had he not always cared for her? and was not the whole population of Marca willing to bear witness that they had always suspected him and had only held their peace out of respect for the Church?

He himself lived two long years among the galley-slaves of the western coast: all that time he never spoke; and he was considered by the authorities to be insane. Then, in the damp and cold of the third winter, his lungs decayed, his frail strength gave way; he died of what they called consumption in the spring of the year. In his last moments there was seen a light of unspeakable ecstasy upon his face, a smile of unspeakable rapture on his mouth.

"*Laus Deus libera me!*" he murmured, as he died.

A bird came and sang at the narrow casement of his prison-cell as his spirit passed away. It was a nightingale,—perchance one of those who had once sung to him in the summer nights from the wild-rose hedge at Marca.

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## A RAINY JUNE.

*From the Prince di San Zenone, Claridge's, London, to the Duchessa dell'Aquila Fulva, Monterone, near Milano, Italy.*

*Carissima Teresa,—*

I received your letter, which is delightful to me because it is yours, and terrible to me because it scolds me, abuses me, flies at me, makes me feel like a schoolboy who has had a *saponata*. Yes, it is quite true. I cannot help it She has bewitched me. She is a lily made into a woman. I feared you would be angry, especially angry because she is a foreigner; but the hour of fate has struck. You will not wonder when you see her. She is as blonde as the dawn and as pure as a pearl. It seems to me that I have never loved any woman at all in my life before. To love her is like plunging one's hand in cool spring-water on a midsummer noon. She is such repose; such innocence; such holiness! In the midst of this crowded, over-colored, vulgar London life—for it is very vulgar at its highest—she seems like some angel of purity. I saw her first standing with a knot of roses in her hand under a cedar-tree, at one of their afternoon clubs on the river. She was drinking a cup of tea: they are always drinking tea. And she is so white. I never saw anything so white except the snow on the Leonessa. She is not in the least like the fast young ladies of England of whom one sees so much in the winter at Rome. I do not like their fast young women. If you want a woman who is fast, a Parisienne is

best, or even an American. Englishwomen overdo it. She is just like a primrose; like a piece of porcelain; like a soft, pale star shining in the morning. I write all kinds of poetry when I think of her. And then there is something *Sainte-Nitouche* about her which is delicious because it is so real. The only thing which was wanting in her was that she ought to have been shut up in a convent, and I ought to have had to imperil my soul for all eternity by getting her over a stone wall with a silken ladder. But it is a prosaic age, and this is a very prosaic country. London amuses me; but it is such a crowd, and it is frightfully ugly. I cannot think how people who are so enormously rich as the English can put up with such ugliness. The houses are all too small, even the big ones. I have not seen a good ball-room. They say there are good ones in the country houses. The clubs are admirable; but life in general seems to me hurried, costly, ungraceful, very noisy, and almost entirely consecrated to eating. It is made up of a scramble and a mass of food. People engage themselves for dinners a month in advance. Everybody's engagement-book is so full that it is the burden of their days. They accept everything, and, at the eleventh hour, pick out what they prefer, and, to use their own language, "throw over" the rest. I do not think it is pretty behavior; but nobody seems to object to it. I wonder that the women do not do so; but they seem to be afraid of losing their men altogether if they exact good manners from them. People here are not at all well-mannered, to my taste,—neither the men nor the women. They are brusque and negligent, and have few *petite soins*. You should have come over for my marriage to show them all what an exquisite creature a Venetian patrician beauty can be. Why *would* you marry that Piedmontese? Only two things seem to be of any importance in England: they are eating and politics. They eat all day long, and are always talking of Mr. Gladstone. Mr. Gladstone *m'embete!* Half of them say he is the destruction of England, the other half say he is the salvation of England. Myself, I don't care the least which he is; only I know they cannot keep him out of their conversation, one way or another, for five minutes, which, to an unprejudiced foreigner, is a *seccatura*. But to-morrow I go down into the country with my primrose,—all alone; to-morrow she will be mine altogether and unalterably, and I shall hear nothing about Mr. Gladstone or anything that is tiresome. Of course you are wondering that I should marry. I wonder myself; but, then, if I did not marry I should be compelled to say an eternal *addio* to the Lenten Lily. She has such a spiked wall around her of male relatives and family greatness. It is not the convent wall; there is no ladder that will go over it; one must enter at the big front door, or not at all. Felicitate me, and yet compassionate me! I am going to Paradise, no doubt; but I have the uncomfortable doubt as to whether it will suit me, which all people who are going to Paradise always do feel. Why? Because we are mortal or because we are sinners? *A rivederci, cara mia Teresina!* Write to me at my future Eden: it is called Coombe-Bysset, near Luton, Bedfordshire. We are to be there a month. It is the choice of my primrose.

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*From the Lady Mary Bruton, Belgrave Square, London, to Mrs. D'Arcy, British Embassy, Berlin.*

The season has been horribly dull; quantities of marriages. People always will marry, however dull it is. The one most talked about is that of the Cowes's second daughter, Lady Gladys, with the Prince of San Zenone. She is one of the beauties, but a very simple girl, quite old-fashioned, indeed. She has refused Lord Hampshire, and a good many other people, and then fallen in love in a week with this Roman, who is certainly as handsome as a picture. But Cowes didn't like it at all; he gave in because he couldn't help it; but he was dreadfully vexed that the Hampshire affair did not come off instead. Hampshire is such a good creature, and his estates are close to theirs. It is certainly very provoking for them that this Italian must take it into his head to spend a season in London, and lead the cotillon so beautifully that all the young women talked of nothing else but his charms.

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*From the Lady Mona St. Clair, Grosvenor Square, London, to Miss Burns, Schooner-yacht Persephone, off Cherbourg.*

The wedding was very pretty yesterday. We had frocks of tussore silk, with bouquets of orchids and Penelope Boothby caps. She looked very pretty, but as white as her gown,—such a goose!—it was ivory satin, with *point de Venise*. He is quite too handsome, and I cannot think what he could see in her. He gave us each a locket with *her* portrait inside. I wished it had been *his*. I dare say Hampshire would have been better for her, and worn longer, than Romeo. Lord Cowes is furious about Romeo. He detests the religion and all that, and he could hardly make himself look pleasant even at church. Of course they were two ceremonies. The Cardinal had consented at last, though I believe he had made all kinds of fuss first. Lady Gladys, you know, is very, *very* High Church, and I suppose that reconciled a little the very irreconcilable Cardinal. She thinks of nothing but the Church, and her missions, and her poor people. I am afraid the Roman prince will get dreadfully bored. And they are going down into Bedfordshire, of all places, to be shut up for a month! It is very stupid of her, and such a wet season as it is! They are going to Coombe-Bysset, her aunt Lady Caroline's place. I fancy Romeo will soon be bored, and I don't think Coombe-Bysset at all judicious. I would have gone to Homburg, or Deauville, or Japan.

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*From the Princess di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset, Luton, Bedfordshire, to the Countess of Cowes, London.*

DEAREST MOTHER,--

I am too, too, too happy. It is no use writing about it. I would if I could, but I *can't*. He is delighted with Coombe, and says the verdure is something wonderful. We got here just as the sun was setting. There were all Aunt Carrie's school-children out to meet us with baskets of roses. Piero said they looked like bigger roses themselves. He is enchanted with England. It is very fine to-day, and I do so hope it won't rain; but the glass is falling. Forgive a hurried word like this. I am going to take Piero on the lake. I know you haven't liked it, dear; but, I am sure, when you see how happy I am you will say there was never any one like him on earth.

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*From the Countess of Cowes, Cowes House, London, to the Duchess of Dunne, Wavertree, Worcestershire.*

No, I confess I do not approve of the marriage: it will take her away from us, and I am afraid she won't be happy. She has always had such very *exalte* ideas. She is not in the least the girl of the period. Of course she was taken by his picturesque face and his admirable manners. His manners are really wonderful in these days, when our men have none at all; and he has charmingly caressing and deferential ways, which win even me. I cannot wonder at her, poor child, but I am afraid: candidly, I am afraid! He makes all our men look like ploughboys. And it was all done in such tremendous haste that she had no time to reason or reflect; and I don't think they have said two serious words to each other. If only it had been dear, good Hampshire, whom we have known all our lives, and whose lands march with ours! But that was too good to be, I suppose, and there was no positive objection we could raise to San Zenone. We could not refuse his proposals because he is too good-looking, isn't an Englishman, and has a mother who is reputed *maitresse femme*. Gladys writes from Coombe as from the seventh heaven. They have been married three days! But I fear she will have trouble before her. I fear he is weak and unstable, and will not back her up among his own people when she goes among them; and though, nowadays, a man and woman, once wedded, see so little of each other, Gladys is not quite of the time in her notions. She will take it all very seriously, poor child, and expect the idyl to be prolonged over the honeymoon. And she is very English in her tastes, and has been so very little out of England. However, every girl in London is envying her. It is only her father and I who see these little black specks on the fruit she has plucked. They are gone to Coombe by her wish. I think it would have been wiser not to subject an Italian to such an ordeal as a wet English June in an utterly lonely country house. You know, even Englishmen, who can always find such refuge and comfort in prize pigs and straw-yards and unusually big mangolds, get bored if they are in the country when there is nothing to shoot; and Englishmen are used to being drenched to the skin every time they move out. He is not. Lord Cowes says love is like a cotton frock,--very pretty as long as the sun shines, but it won't stand a wetting. I wish you had been here: Gladys looked quite lovely. Cardinal Manning most kindly relented, and the whole thing went off very well. Of the San Zenone family, there was only present Don Fabrizio, the younger son, a very good-looking young man. The terrible duchess didn't come, on account, I think, of her sulks. She hates the marriage on her side as much as we do on ours, I am sure. Really, one must believe a little bit in fate. I do think that Gladys would soon have resigned herself to accepting Hampshire out of sheer fatigue at saying "No;" and, besides, she knew that we are so fond of him, and to live in the same county was such an attraction. But this irresistible young Roman must take it into his head that he wished to see a London season, and when once they had met (it was one afternoon at Ranelagh) there was no more chance for our poor, dear, good, stupid neighbor. Well, we must hope for the best!

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*From the Prince Piero di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset, to the Duchessa dell'Aquila Fulva, Palazzo Fulva, Milano.*

*Carissima mia,*--

There are quantities of nightingales in little green nests at this season. I am a nightingale in a green nest. I never saw anything so green as this Paradise of mine. It is certainly Paradise. If I feel a little *depayse* in it, it is only because I have been such a sinner. No doubt it is only that. Paradise is chilly: this is its only fault. It is the 6th of June, and we have fires. Fires in the dressing-rooms, fires in the drawing-rooms, fires at both ends of the library, fires on both sides of the hall, fires everywhere; and, with all of them, I shiver. I cannot help shivering, and I feel convinced that, in my rapture, I have mistaken the month: it must be December. It is all enchantingly pretty here; the whole place looks in such perfect order that it might have been taken out of a box last night. I have a little the sensation of being always at church. That, no doubt, is the effect of the first step towards virtue that I have ever made. Pray do not think that I am not perfectly

happy. I should be more sensible of my happiness, no doubt, if I had not quite such a feeling, due to the dampness of the air, of having been put into an aquarium like a jellyfish. But Gladys is adorable in every way, and, if she were not quite so easily scared, would be perfection. It was that little air of hers, like that of some irresistible Alpine flower, which bewitched me. But when one has got the Alpine flower, one cannot live forever on it--*ma basta!* I was curious to know what a Northern woman was like: I know now. She is exquisite, but a little monotonous and a little prudish. Certainly she will never compromise me; but then, perhaps, she will never let me compromise myself, and that will be terrible! I am ungrateful; all men are ungrateful; but, then, is it not a little the women's fault? They do keep so very close to one. Now, an angel, you know, becomes tiresome if one never gets out of the shadow of its wings. Here, at Coombe-Bysset, the angel fills the horizon.

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*From the Duchessa dell'Aquila Fulva, Palazzo Fulva, Milano, to the Prince Piero di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset, Luton, Bedfordshire, England.*

*Caro mio Pierino,--*

Are you sure you have an angel? People have a trick of always calling very commonplace women angels. "She is an angel" is a polite way of saying, "She is a bore." I am not sure, either, that I should care to live with a veritable angel. One would see too much of the wings, as you say; and even a guardian angel must be the *terzo incommodo* sometimes. Why *would* you marry an English girl? I dare say she is so good-tempered that she never contradicts you, and you grow peevish out of sheer weariness at having everything your own way. If you had married Nicoletta, as I wanted you to do, she would have flown at you like a little tigress a dozen times a week, and kept you on the *qui vive* to please her. We know what our own men want. I have half a mind to write to your wife and tell her that no Italian is comfortable unless he has his ears boxed twice a day. If your wife would be a little disagreeable, probably you would adore her. But it is a great mistake, *Pierino mio*, to confuse marriage and love. In reality, they have no more to do with one another than a horse-chestnut and a chestnut horse--than the *zuccone* that means a vegetable and the *zuccone* that means a simpleton. I should imagine that your wet English bird's-nest will force you to realize this truth with lamentable rapidity.

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*From the Princess di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset, Luton, Bedfordshire, to Lady Gwendolen Dormer, British Embassy, Vienna.*

DEAREST GWEN,--

I did promise, I know, to write to you at once and tell you everything; and a whole week is gone, and I couldn't do it, I really couldn't; and even now I don't know where to begin. I suppose I am dreadfully *vieux jeu*. I suppose you will only laugh at me, and say "spoons." How glad I am Piero cannot say a word of English, and so I never hear that dreadful jargon, which I do think so ugly and so vulgar, though you are all so fond of it. I ought not to have come to Coombe-Bysset: at least, they all said it was silly. Nessie Fitzgerald was back in London before the week was out, and doing a play. To be sure, she was married in October, and she didn't care a bit about him; and I suppose that made all the difference. To me it seems so much more natural to shut one's self up, and Piero thought so too; but I am half afraid he finds it a little dull now. You see, we knew very little of one another. He came for a month of the London season, and he met me at Ranelagh, and he danced the cotillon with me at a good many houses, and we cared for one another in a week, and were married in a month, as you know. Papa hated it because it wasn't Burlington or Lord Hampshire. But he couldn't really object, because the San Zenone are such a great Roman family, and all the world knows them; and they are Spanish dukes as well as Italian princes. And Piero is such a grand gentleman, and made quite superb settlements,--much more, papa said, than he could have expected, so poor as we are. But what I meant was, meeting like that in the rush of the season, at balls, and dinners, and garden-parties, and luncheons at Hurlingham, and being married to one another just before Ascot, we really knew nothing at all of each other's tastes, or habits, or character. And when, on the first morning at Coombe, we realized that we were together for life, I think we both felt very odd. We adored one another, but we didn't know what to talk about; we never had talked to each other; we never had time. And I am afraid there is something of this feeling with him. I am afraid he is dreadfully bored, and I told him so, and he answered, "*Angelina mia*, your admirable countrymen are not bored in the country because they are always eating. They eat a big breakfast, they eat a big luncheon, they eat a big dinner, they are always eating. Myself, I have not that resource. Give me a little coffee and a little wine, and let me eat only once a day. You never told me I was expected to absorb food like the crocodiles." What would he say if he saw a hunting-breakfast in the shires? I suppose life *is* very material in

England. I think it is why there is so much typhus fever. Do you know, he wasn't going to dress for dinner because we were alone. As if that was any reason! I told him it would look so odd to the servants if he didn't dress, so he has done so since. But he says it is a *seccatura* (this means, I believe, a bore), and he told me we English sacrifice our whole lives to fuss, form, and the outside of things. There is a good deal of truth in this. What numbers of people one knows who are ever so poor, and who yet, for the sake of the look of the thing, get into debt over their ears! And, then, quantities of them go to church for the form of the thing, when they don't *believe* one atom; they will tell you at luncheon that they don't. I fancy Italians are much more honest than we are in this sort of way. Piero says if they are poor they don't mind saying so, and if they have no religion they don't pretend to have any. He declares we English spoil all our lives because we fancy it is our duty to pretend to be something we are not. Now, isn't that really very true? I am sure you would delight in all he says. He is so original, so unconventional. Our people think him ignorant because he doesn't read and doesn't care a straw about politics. But I assure you he is as clever as anything can be; and he doesn't get his ideas out of newspapers, nor repeat like a parrot what his chief of party tells him. I do wish you could have come over and could have seen him. It was so unkind of you to be ill just at the very time of my marriage. You know that it is only to you that I ever say quite what I feel about things. The girls are too young, and mamma doesn't understand. She never could see why I would not marry poor Hampshire. She always said that I should care for him in time. I don't think mamma can ever have been in love with anybody. I wonder what *she* married for: don't you?

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*From the Prince Piero di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset, to the Count Zazzari, Italian Legation, London.*

*Caro Gigi,--*

Pray send me all the French novels you can find, and a case of Turkish cigarettes. I am in Paradise, but Paradise is a little dull, and exceedingly damp, at least in England. Does it always rain in this country? It has rained here without stopping for seventeen days and a half. I produce upon myself the impression of being one of those larks who sit behind wires on a little square of wet grass. I should like to run up to London. I see you have Jeanne Granier and the others; but I suppose it would be against all the unwritten canons of a honeymoon. What a strange institution. A honeymoon! Who first invented it?

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*From the Prince di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset, Luton, Bedfordshire, to the Duchessa dell'Aquila Fulva, Palazzo Fulva, Milano.*

*Cara Teresina,--*

I ought to have written to you long since, but you know I am not fond of writing. I really, also, have nothing to say. Happy the people who have no history. I am like that people. I was made happy two weeks ago; I have been happy ever since. It is slightly monotonous. How can you vary happiness except by quarrelling a little? And then it would not be happiness any longer. It seems to me that happiness is like an omelet, best impromptu. Do not think that I am ungrateful, however, either to fate or to the charming innocent who has become my companion. We have not two ideas in common. She is lovely to look at, to caress, to adore; but what to say to her I confess I have no notion. Love ought never have to find dinner-table conversation. He ought to climb up by a ladder and get over a balcony, and when his ecstasies are ended, he ought to go the same way. I fancy she is cleverer than I am; but, as that would be a discovery fatal to our comfort, I endeavor not to make it. She is extraordinarily sweet-tempered; indeed, so much so that it makes me angry; it gives one no excuse for being impatient. She is divine, exquisite, nymph-like; but, alas, she is a prude! Never was any creature on earth so exquisitely sensitive, so easily shocked. To live with her is to walk upon egg-shells. Of course it is very nice in a wife,--very "proper," as the English say; but it is not amusing. It amused me at first, but now it seems to me a defect. She has brought me down to this terribly damp and very green place, where it rains every day and night. There is a library without novels; there is a cellar without absinthe; there is a *cuisine* without tomatoes, or garlic, or any oil at all; there is an admirably-ordered establishment, so quiet that I fancy I am in a penitentiary. There are some adorably fine horses, and there are acres of glass houses used to grow fruits that we throw in Italy to the pigs. By the way, there are also several of our field-flowers in the conservatories. We eat pretty nearly all day; there is nothing else to do. Outside, the scenery is oppressively green, the green of spinach; there is no variety; there are no ilexes, and there are no olives. I understand now why the English painters give such staring colors; unless the colors scream, you don't see them in this aqueous, dim atmosphere. That is why a benign Providence has made the landscape *aux epinards*. I think the air here, inside and out, must weigh heavily; it lies on one's lungs like a sponge. I once went down in a diving-bell when I was a boy; I have the sensation in this country of being always down in a diving-bell. The

scamp Toniello, whom you may remember as having played Leporello to my Don Giovanni ever since we were lads, amuses himself with making love to all the pretty maidens in the village; but, then, I must not do that--now. They are not very pretty, either. They have very big teeth, and very long upper lips. Their skins, however, are admirable. For a horse's skin and a woman's there is no land comparable to England. It is the country of grooming.

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*From the Princess di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset, to Lady Gwendolen Chichester, British Embassy, St. Petersburg.*

He laughed at me because I went to church yesterday, and really I only went because I thought it *right*. We have been here a fortnight, and I have never been to church at all till yesterday, and you know how very serious dear Aunt Carrie is. To-day, as it is the second Sunday I have been here, I thought I ought to go just once, and I did go; but it was dreadfully pompous and lonely in the big red pew, and the villagers stared so, and all the little girls of the village giggled, and looked at me from under their sun-bonnets. Dear Mr. Coate preached a sermon on Marriage. It was very kind of him; but oh, how I wished he hadn't! When I got back, Piero was playing billiards with his servant. I wondered what Mr. Coate would have thought of him. To be sure, English clergymen have to get used to fast Sundays now, when the country houses are full. It is such a dear little yew walk to the church from the house here, not twenty yards long, and all lined with fuchsia. Do you remember it? Even Piero admits that it is very pretty, only he says it is a vignette prettiness,--which, I suppose, is true. "You can see no horizon, only a green wall," he keeps complaining; and his beautiful, lustrous eyes look as if they were made to gaze through endless fields of light. When I asked him yesterday what he really thought of England, what do you suppose he said? He said, "*Mia cara*, I think it would be a most delightful country if it had one-fifth of its population, one-half of its houses, a tithe of its dinners, a quarter of its machinery, none of its factories, and a wholly different atmosphere!" I suppose this means that he dislikes it. I think him handsomer than ever. I sent you his photograph, but that can give you no idea of him. He is like one of his own marble statues. We came to Coombe-Bysset directly after the ceremony, and we are here still. I could stay on forever. It is so lovely in these Bedfordshire woods in mid-June. But I am afraid--just the very least bit afraid--that Piero may get bored with me--me--me--nothing but me. He is an angel. We ride in the morning, we sing and play in the evening. We adore each other all the twenty-four hours through. I wonder how I could have lived without him. I am longing to see all he tells me about his great marble palaces, and his immense dream-like villas, and his gardens with their multitude of statues, and the wonderful light that is over it all. He protests it is always twilight with us in England. It seems so absurd, when nowadays everybody knows everything about everywhere, that I should never have been to Italy. But we were such country mice down at dear old, dull, green, muddy Ditchworth. Lanciano, the biggest of all their big places, must be like a poem. It is a great house, all of different-colored marbles, set amidst ilex groves on the mountainside, with cascades like Terni, and gardens that were planned by Giulio Romano, and temples that were there in the days of Horace. I long to see it all, and yet I hope he will not want to leave Coombe yet. There is no place like the place where one is *first* happy. And, somehow, I fancy I look better in these homely low rooms of Aunt Carrie's, with their Chippendale furniture and their smell of dry rose-leaves, than I shall do in those enormous palaces which want a Semiramis or a Cleopatra. They were kind enough to make a fuss about me in London, but I never thought much of myself, and I am afraid I must seem rather dull to Piero, who is so brilliant himself and has all kinds of talents. You know I never was clever, and really--really--I haven't an idea what to talk to him about when we don't talk about ourselves. And then the weather provokes him. We have hardly had one fine day since we came; and no doubt it seems very gray and chilly to an Italian. "It cannot be June!" he says, a dozen times a week. And when the whole day is rainy, as it is very often, for our Junes are such wet ones nowadays, I can see he gets impatient. He doesn't care for reading; he is fond of billiards, but I don't play a good enough game to be any amusement to him. And though he sings divinely, as I told you, he sings as the birds do,--just when the mood is on him. He does not care about music as a science in the least. He laughed when I said so. He declared it was no more a science than love is. Perhaps love ought to be a science too, in a way, or else it won't last. There has been a scandal in the village, caused by his servant Toniello. An infuriated father came up to the house this morning about it. He is named John Best: he has one of Aunt Carrie's biggest farms. He was in such a dreadful rage, and I had to talk to him, because, of course, Piero couldn't understand him. Only when I translated what he said, Piero laughed till he cried, and offered him a cigarette, and called him "*figlio mio*," which only made Mr. John Best purple with fury, and he went away in a greater rage than he had been in when he came, swearing he "would do for the Papist." I have sent for the steward. I am afraid Aunt Carrie will be terribly annoyed. It has always been such a model village. Not a public-house near for six miles, and all the girls such demure, quiet little maidens. The terrible Roman valet, with his starry eyes and his mandoline, and his audacities, has been like Mephistopheles in the opera to this secluded and innocent little hamlet. I beg Piero to send him away; but he looks unutterably reproachful, and declares he really cannot live without Toniello; and what can I say?

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*From the Lady Gwendolen Chichester, St. Petersburg, to the Princess di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset.*

You are quite in the wrong, my poor pet. If you were only a little older, and ever so much wiser, you would have telegraphed to the libraries yourself for the French books; you would have laughed at them when he laughed, and, instead of taking Mr. John Best as a tragedy, you would have made him into a little burlesque, which would have amused your husband for five minutes as much as Gyp or Jean Richepin. I begin to think I should have married your Roman prince, and you should have married my good, dull George, whom a perverse destiny has shoved into diplomacy. Your Roman scandalizes you, and my George bores me. Such is marriage, my dear, all the world over. What is the old story? That Jove broke all the walnuts, and each half is always uselessly seeking its fellow.

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*From the Princess di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset, Luton, Bedfordshire, to the Lady Gwendolin Chichester, British Embassy, St. Petersburg.*

But, surely, if he loved me, he would be as perfectly happy with me alone as I am with him alone. I want no other companion, no other interest, no other thought.

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*From the Lady Gwendolen Chichester, British Embassy, St. Petersburg, to the Princess di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset, Luton, Bedfordshire.*

Of course you do not, because you are a woman. San Zenone is your god, your idol, your ideal, your universe. But *you* are only one out of the many women who have pleased him, and attached to the pleasure you afford him is the very uncomfortable conviction that he will never be able to get away from you. My dear child, I have no patience with any woman when she says, "He does not love me." If he does not, it is probably the woman's fault. Probably she has worried him. Love dies directly it is worried, quite naturally. Poor Gladys! You were always such a good child; you were always devoted to your old women, and your queer little orphans, and your pet cripples, and your East End missions. It certainly is hard that you should have fallen into the hands of a soulless Italian, who reads naughty novels all day long and sighs for the flesh-pots of Egypt! But, my child, in reason's name, what did you expect? Did you think that all in a moment he would sigh to hear Canon Farrar or Dean Liddell, take his guitar to a concert in Seven Dials, and teach Italian to Bethnal Green babies? Be reasonable, and let your poor caged bird fly out of Coombe-Bysset, which will certainly be your worst enemy if you shut him up in it much longer.

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*From the Prince di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset, to the Duchessa dell'Aquila Fulva, Palazzo Fulva, Milano.*

I am still in my box of wet moss. I have been in it two weeks, four days, and eleven hours, by the calendar and the clocks. I have read all my novels. I have spelled through my "Figaro," from the title to the printer's address, every morning. I have smoked twenty cigarettes every twenty minutes, and I have yawned as many times. This is Paradise, I know it; I tell myself so; but, still,--I cannot help it,--I yawn. There is a pale, watery sun, which shines fitfully. There is a quantity of soaked hay, which they are going to dry by machinery. There is a great variety of muddy lanes in which to ride. There is a post-office seven miles off, and a telegraph-station fifteen miles farther off. The *ensemble* is not animated. When you go out you see very sleek cattle, very white sheep, very fat children. You may meet at intervals laboring-people, very round-shouldered and very sulky. You also meet, if you are in luck's way, with a traction-engine; and wherever you look you perceive a church-steeple. It is all very harmless, except the traction-engine, but it is not animated, or enlivening. You will not wonder that I soon came to the end of my French novels. The French novels have enabled me to discover that my angel is very easily ruffled. In fact, she is that touchy thing, a saint. I had no idea that she was a saint when I saw her drinking her cup of tea in that garden on the Thames. True, she had her lovely little serene, holy, *noli-me-tangere* air; but I thought that would pass. It does not pass. And when I wanted her to laugh with me at "Autour du Mariage," she blushed up to the eyes, and was offended. What am I to do? I am no saint. I cannot pretend to be one. I am not worse than other men, but I like to amuse myself. I cannot go through life singing a *miserere*. I am afraid we shall quarrel. You think that very wholesome. But there are quarrels and quarrels. Some clear the air like thunderstorms. Ours are little irritating differences, which end in her bursting into tears, and in myself looking ridiculous and feeling a brute. She has cried quite a number of times in the last fortnight. I dare say, if she went into a rage, as you justly say Nicoletta would do, and, you might have added, you have done, it would rouse me, and I should be ready to strike her, and should end in covering her with kisses. But she only turns her eyes on me like a dying fawn,

bursts into tears, and goes out of the room. Then she comes in again--to dinner, perhaps, or to that odd ceremony, five-o'clock tea--with her little sad, stiff, reproachful air as of a martyr, answers meekly, and makes me again feel a brute. The English sulk a long time, I think. We are at daggers drawn one moment, but then we kiss and forget the next. We are more passionate, but we are more amiable. I want to get away, to go to Paris, Homburg, Trouville, anywhere, but I dare not propose it. I only drop adroit hints. If I should die of *ennui*, and be buried under the wet moss forever, weep for me.

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*From the Princess di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset, to Lady Gwendolen Chichester, St. Petersburg.*

Coombe is quite too lovely now. It does rain sometimes, certainly; but between the showers it is so delicious. I asked Piero to come out and hear the nightingale,--there really is one in the home wood,--and he laughed at the idea. He said, "We have hundreds of nightingales shouting all day and all night at Lanciano. We don't think about them; we eat them in *pasta*: they are very good." Fancy eating a nightingale! You might as well eat Romeo and Juliet. Piero has got a number of French books from London, and he lies about on the couches and reads them. He wants me to listen to naughty bits of fun out of them; but I will not, and then he calls me a prude, and gets angry. I don't see why he shouldn't laugh as much as he likes himself without telling me why he laughed. I dislike that sort of thing. I am horribly afraid I shall care for nothing but him all my life; while he--he yawned yesterday. Papa said to me, before we were married, "My dear little girl, San Zenone put on such a lot of steam at first, he'll be obliged to ease his pace after a bit. Don't be vexed if you find the thing cooling!" Now, papa speaks so oddly; always that sort of floundering, bald metaphor: you remember it; but I knew what he meant. Nobody could *go on* being such a lover as Piero was. Ah, dear, it is in the past already! No, I don't quite mean that. He is Romeo still very often, and he sings me the divinest love-songs, lying at my feet on cushions, in the moonlight. But it is not quite the same thing as it was at first. He found fault with one of my gowns this morning, and said I was *fagotee*. *Fagotee!* I am terribly frightened lest Coombe has bored him too much. I would come here. I wanted to be utterly out of the world, and so did he; and I'm sure there isn't a lovers' nest anywhere comparable to Coombe in midsummer. You remember the rose-garden, and the lime-avenues, and the chapel ruins by the little lake? When Aunt Carrie offered it to us for this June I was so delighted; but now I am half afraid the choice of it was a mistake, and that he does not know what to do with himself. He is *depayse*. I cried a little yesterday: it was too silly, but I couldn't help it. He laughed at me, but he got a little angry. "*Enfin que veux-tu?*" he said, impatiently: "*je suis a toi, bien a toi, beaucoup trop a toi!*" He seemed to me to regret being mine. I told him so: he was more angry. It was, I suppose, what you would call a scene. In five minutes he was penitent, and caressed me as only he can do; and the sun came out, and we went into the woods and heard the nightingale; but the remembrance of it alarms me. If he can say as much as this in a month, what can he say in a year? I do not think I am silly. I had two London seasons, and all those country houses show one the world. I know people, when they are married, are always glad to get away from one another; they are always flirting with other people. But I should be miserable if I thought it would ever be like that with Piero and me. I worship his very shadow, and he does--or he did--worship mine. Why should that change? Why should it not go on forever, as it does in poems? If it can't, why doesn't one die?

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*From the Lady Gwendolen Chichester, St. Petersburg, to the Princess di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset.*

What a goose you are, you dearest Gladys! You were always like that. To all you have said I can only reply, "*connu*." When girls are romantic--and you always were, though it was quite gone out ages before our time--they always expect husbands to remain lovers. Now, my pet, you might just as well expect hay to remain grass. Papa was quite right. When there is such a lot of steam on, it must go off by degrees. I am afraid, too, you have begun with the passion, and the rapture, and the mutual adoration, and all the rest of it, which is *quite, quite gone out*. People don't feel in that sort of way nowadays. Nobody cares much: a sort of good-humored liking is the utmost one sees. But you were always such a goose! And now you must marry an Italian, and expect it all to be balconies, and guitars, and moonlight, for ever and ever. I think it quite natural he should want to get to Paris. You should never have taken him to Coombe. I do remember the rose-gardens, and the lime-avenues, and the ruins; and I remember being sent down there when I had too strong a flirtation with Philip Rous, who was in F. O. and had nothing a year. You were a baby then, and I remember that I was bored to the very brink of suicide: I have detested the smell of a lime-tree ever since. I can sympathize with the prince if he longs to get away. There can't be anything for him to do all day long except smoke. The photo of him is wonderfully handsome; but can you live all your life, my dear, on a profile?

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*From the Princess di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset, to the Lady Gwendolen Chichester, St. Petersburg.*

Because almost all Englishmen have snub noses, Englishwomen always think there is something immoral and delusive about a good profile. At all events, you will admit that the latter is the more agreeable object of contemplation. It still rains,--rains dreadfully. The meadows are soaked and they can't get the hay in, and we can't get out of the house. Piero does smoke, and he does yawn. He has been looking in the library for a French novel, but there is nothing except Mrs. Craven's goody-goody books and a boy's tale by Jules Verne. I am afraid you and mamma are right. Coombe, in a wet June, is not the place for a Roman who knows his Paris by heart and doesn't like the country anywhere. We seem to do nothing but eat. I put on an ulster and high boots, and I don't mind the rain a bit; but he screams when he sees me in an ulster. "You have no more figure in that thing than if you were a Bologna sausage," he says to me; and certainly ulsters are very ugly. But I had a delicious fortnight with the duchess in a driving-tour in West-meath. We only took our ulsters with us, and it poured all the time, and we stayed in bed in the little inns while our things dried, and it was immense fun: the duke drove us. But Piero would not like that sort of thing. He is like a cat about rain. He likes to shut the house up early, and have the gas lit, and forget that it is all slop and mist outside. He declares that we have made a mistake in the calendar, and that it is November, not June. I change my gowns three times a day, just as if there were a large house-party; but I feel I look awfully monotonous to him. I am afraid I never was amusing. I always envy those women who are all *chic* and "go," who can make men laugh so at rubbish. They seem to carry about with them a sort of exhilarating ether. I don't think they are the best sort of women; but they do so amuse the men. I would give twenty years of my life if I could amuse Piero. He adores me; but that is another thing. That does not prevent him shaking the barometer and yawning. He seems happiest when he is talking Italian with his servant, Toniello. Toniello is allowed to play billiards with him sometimes. He is a very gay, merry, saucy, beautiful-eyed Roman. He has made all the maids in the house and all the farmers' daughters round Coombe in love with him, and I told you how he had scandalized one of the best tenants, Mr. John Best. The Bedford rustics all vow vengeance against him; but he twangs his mandoline, and sings away at the top of his voice, and doesn't care a straw that the butler loathes him, the house-steward abhors him, the grooms would horsewhip him if they dared, and the young farmers audibly threaten to duck him in the pond. Toniello is very fond of his master, but he does not extend his allegiance to me. Do you remember Mrs. Stevens, Aunt Caroline's model housekeeper? You should see her face when she chances to hear Piero laughing and talking with Toniello. I think she believes that the end of the world has come. Piero calls Toniello "*figliolo mio*" and "*caro mio*," just as if they were cousins or brothers. It appears this is the Italian way. They are very proud in their own fashion, but it isn't our fashion. However, I am glad the man is there when I hear the click of the billiard-balls, and the splash of the rain-drops on the window-panes. We have been here just three weeks. "*Dio!* it seems three years," Piero said, when I reminded him of it, this morning. For me, I don't know whether it is like a single day's dream or a whole eternity. You know what I mean. But I wish--I wish--it seemed either the day's dream or the eternity of Paradise to him! I dare say it is all my fault in coming to these quiet, bay-windowed, Queen-Anne rooms, and the old-fashioned servants, and the dreary lookout over the soaking hay-fields. But the sun does come out sometimes, and then the wet roses smell so sweet, and the wet lime-blossoms glisten in the light, and the larks sing overhead, and the woods are so green and so fresh. Still, I don't think he likes it even then: it is all too moist, too windy, too dim, for him. When I put a rose in his button-hole this morning, it shook the drops over him, and he said, "*Mais quel pays!--meme une fleur c'est une douche d'eau froide!*" Last month, if I had put a dandelion in his coat, he would have sworn it had the odor of the magnolia and the beauty of the orchid. It is just twenty-two days ago since we came here, and the first four or five days he never cared whether it rained or not: he only cared to lie at my feet, really, literally. We were all in all to each other, just like Cupid and Psyche. And now--he will play billiards with Toniello to pass the time, and he is longing for his *petits theatres*. Is it my fault? I torment myself with a thousand self-accusations. Is it possible I can have been tiresome, dull, over-exacting? Is it possible he can be disappointed in me?

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*From the Lady Gwendolen Chichester, St. Petersburg, to the Princess di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset.*

No, it isn't your fault, you dear little donkey: it is only the natural sequence of things. Men are always like that when the woman loves them: when she don't, they behave much better. My dear, this is just what is so annoying about love: the man's is always going slower and slower towards a dead stop, as the woman's is "coaling" and getting steam up. I borrow papa's admirably accurate metaphor: nothing can be truer. It is a great pity, but I suppose the fault is Nature's. *Entre nous*, I don't think Nature ever contemplated marriage, any more than she did crinolettes, pearl powder, or the electric light. There is no doubt that Nature intended to adjust the thing on the butterfly and buttercup system,--on the *je reste, tu t'en vas* principle. And nothing would be easier or nicer, only there are children and property. So the butterfly has to be pinned down by the buttercup. That is why the Communists and Anarchists always abolish Property and Marriage together. The one is evolved out of the other, just as the dear scientists say the horse was evolved out of a bird, which I never can see makes the matter any easier of comprehension; but, still--what was I

saying? Oh, I meant to say this: you are only lamenting, as a special defalcation and disloyalty in San Zenone, what is merely his unconscious and involuntary and perfectly natural alteration from a lover into a husband. The butterfly is beginning to feel the pin which has been run through him to stick him down. It is not your fault, my sweet little girl; it is the fault, if at all, of the world, which has decreed that the butterfly, to flirt legitimately with the buttercup, must suffer the corking-pin. Now, take my advice: the pin is in, don't worry if he writhe on it a little bit! It is only what the beloved scientists again call automatic action. And do try and beat into your little head the fact that a man may love you very dearly, and yet yawn a little for the *petits theatres* in the silent recesses of his manly breast. Of course I know this sort of rough awakening from delightful dreams is harder for you than it is for most, because you began at such tremendous altitudes. You had your Ruy Blas and Petrarca and the mandoline and the moonlight and the love-philtres all mixed up in an intoxicating draught. You have naturally a great deal more disillusion to go through than if you had married a country squire or a Scotch laird, who would never have suggested any romantic delights. One cannot go near heaven without coming down with a crash, like the poor men in the balloons. You have been up in your balloon, and you are now coming down. Ah, my dear, everything depends on *how* you come down! You will think me a monster for saying so, but it will rest so much in your own hands. You won't believe it, but it will. If you come down with tact and good humor, it will all be right afterwards; but if you show temper, as men say of their horses, why, then the balloon will lie prone, a torn, empty, useless bag, that will never again get off the ground. To speak plainly, dear, if you will receive with resignation and sweetness the unpleasant discovery that San Zenone is mortal, you won't be unhappy, and you will soon get used to it; but if you perpetually fret about it you won't alter him, and you will both be miserable; or, if not miserable, you will do something worse; you will each find your amusement in somebody else. I know you so well, my poor, pretty Gladys; you want such an immense quantity of sympathy and affection; but you won't get it, my dear child. I quite understand that the prince looks like a picture, and he has made life an erotic poem for you for a month, and the inevitable reaction which follows seems dull as ditch-water, you would even say as cruel as the grave. But it is *nothing new*. Do try and get that well in your mind. Try, too, and be as light-hearted as you can. Men hate an unamusable woman. Make believe to laugh at the *petits theatres* if you can't really do it: if you don't, dear, he will go to somebody else who will. Why do those *demi-monde* women get such preference over us? Only because they don't bore their men. A man would sooner we flung a champagne-glass at his head than cried for five minutes. We can't fling champagne-glasses: the prejudices of our education are against it. It is an immense loss to us; we must make up for it as much as we can by being as agreeable as we know how to be. We shall always be a dozen lengths behind those others. By the way, you said in one of your earliest notes that you wondered why our mother ever married. I am not sufficiently *au courant* with pre-historic times to be able to tell you why, but I can see what she has done since she did marry. She has always effaced herself in the very wisest and most prudent manner. She has never begrudged papa his Norway fishing or his August yachting, though she knew he could ill afford them. She has never bored him *with* herself, or *about* us. She has constantly urged him to go away and enjoy himself, and when he is down with her in the country she always takes care that all the women he admires and all the men who best amuse him shall be invited in relays, to prevent his being dull or feeling teased for a moment. I am quite sure she has never cared the least about her own wishes, but has only studied his. This is what I call being a clever woman and a good woman. But I fear such women are as rare as blue roses. Try and be like her, my dear. She was quite as young as you are now when she married. But, unfortunately, in truth, you are a terrible little egotist. You want to shut up this poor young man all alone with you in a kind of attitude of perpetual adoration--of yourself. That is what women call affection: you are not alone in your ideas. Some men submit to this sort of demand, and go about forever held tight in a leash, like unslipped pointers. The majority--well, the majority bolt. And I am sure I should if I were one of them. I do not think you could complain if your beautiful Romeo did. I can see you so exactly, with your pretty little grave face, and your eyes that have such a fatal aptitude for tears, and your solemn little views about matrimony and its responsibilities, making yourself quite odious to this mirthful Apollo of yours, and innocently believing all the while that you are pleasing Heaven and saving your own dignity by being so remarkably unpleasant! Are you *very* angry with me? I am afraid so. Myself, I would much sooner have an unfaithful man than a dull one: the one may be bored *by* you, but the other bores *you*, which is immeasurably worse.

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*From the Princess di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset, to the Lady Gwendolen Chichester, St. Petersburg.*

DEAR GWEN,--

How can you *possibly* tell what *mamma* did when she was young? I dare say she fretted dreadfully. Now, of course, she has got used to it,--like all other miserable women. If people marry only to long to be with other people, what is the use of being married at all? I said so to Piero, and he answered, very insolently, "*Il n'y a point! Si on le savait.*" He sent for some more dreadful French books, Gyp's, and Richepin's, and Gui de Maupassant's, and he lies about reading them all day long when he isn't asleep. He is very often asleep in the daytime. He apologizes when he is found out, but he

yawns as he does so. You say I should amuse him; but I *can't* amuse him. He doesn't care for any English news, and he is beginning to get irritable because I cannot talk to him in Italian, and he declares my French detestable, and there is always something dreadful happening. There has been such a terrible scene in the village. Four of the Coombe-Bysset men, two blacksmiths, a carpenter, and a laborer, have ducked Toniello in the village pond on account of his attention to their women-kind; and Toniello, when he staggered out of the weeds and the slime, drew his knife on them and stabbed two very badly. Of course he has been taken up by the constables, and the men he hurt moved to the county hospital. The magistrates are furious and scandalized; and Piero!--Piero has nobody to play billiards with him. When the magistrates interrogated him about Toniello, as, of course, they were obliged to do, he got into a dreadful passion because one of them said that it was just like a cowardly Italian to carry a knife and make use of it. Piero absolutely *hissed* at the solemn old gentleman who mumbled this. "And your people," he cried, "are they so very courageous? Is it better to beat a man into a jelly, or kick a woman with nailed boots, as your English mob does? Where is there anything cowardly? He was one against four. In my country there is not a night that goes without a *rissa* of that sort; but nobody takes any notice. The jealous persons are left to fight it out as best they may. After all, it is the women's fault." And then he said some things that really I cannot repeat; and it was a mercy that, as he spoke in the most rapid and furious French, the old gentleman did not, I think, understand a syllable. But they saw he was in a passion, and that scandalized them, because, you know, English people always think that you should keep your bad temper for your own people at home. Meantime, of course, Toniello is in prison, and I am afraid they won't let us take him out on bail, because he has hurt one of the blacksmiths dreadfully. Aunt Carry's solicitors are doing what they can for him, to please me; but I can see they consider it all *peines perdues* for a rogue who ought to be hanged. "And to think," cries Toniello, "that in my own country I should have all the *populo* with me! The very carabinieri themselves would have been with me! *Accidente a tutti quei grulli!*" which means, "May apoplexy seize these fools!" "They were only the women's husbands," he adds, with scorn: "they are well worth making a fuss about, certainly!" Then Piero consoles him, and gives him cigarettes, and is obliged to leave him sobbing and tearing his hair, and lying face downward on his bed of sacking. I thought Piero would not leave the poor fellow alone in prison, and so I supposed he would give up all idea of going from here; and so I began to say to myself, "*A quelque chose malheur est bon.*" But to-day, at luncheon, Piero said, "*Sai, carina!* It was bad enough with Toniello, but without him, I tell you frankly, I cannot stand any more of it. With Toniello, one could laugh and forget a little. But now--*anima mia*, if you do not wish me to kill somebody, and be lodged beside Toniello by your worthy law-givers, you must really let me go to Trouville." "Alone!" I said; and I believe it is what he did mean, only the horror in my voice frightened him from confessing it. He sighed and got up. "I suppose I shall never be alone any more," he said, impatiently. "If only men knew what they do when they marry, *on ne nous prendrait jamais*. No, no. Of course I meant that you must consent to come away with me somewhere out of this intolerable place, which is made up of fog and green leaves. Let us go to Paris, to begin with: there is not a soul there, and the theatres are *en relache*; but it is always delightful, and then, in a week or so, we will go down to Trouville: all the world is there." I couldn't answer him for crying. Perhaps that was best, for I am sure I should have said something wicked, which might have divided us forever. And then what would people have thought?

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*From the Lady Gwendolen Chichester, St. Petersburg, to the Princess di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset.*

MY POOR LITTLE DEAR,--

Are you already beginning to be miserable about what people will think? Then, indeed, your days of joy are numbered. If I were to write to you fifty times, I could only repeat what I have always written. You are not wise, and you are doing everything you ought not to do. *Of two people who are married, there is always one who has the delusion that he or she is necessary and delightful to the life of the other. The other generally thinks just the contrary.* The result is not peace. This gay, charming, handsome son of Rome has become your entire world; but don't suppose for a moment, my child, that you will ever be his. It is not in reason, not in nature, that you should be. *If you have the intelligence, the tact, and the forbearance required, you may become his friend and counsellor; but I fear you never will have these.* You fret, you weep, and you understand nothing of the masculine temperament. "I see snakes," as the Americans observe; and you will not have either the coolness or the wisdom required to scotch a snake, much less to kill it. Once for all, my poor pet, go cheerfully to Paris, Trouville, and all the pleasure-places in the world. Affect enjoyment if you feel it not, and try to remember, beyond everything, that affection is not to be retained or revived by either coercion or lamentation. Once dead, it is not to be awakened by all the "crooning" of its mourner. It is a corpse for ever and aye. Myself, I fail to see how you could expect a young Italian, who has all the habits of the great world and the memories of his *vie de garcon*, to be cheerful or contented in a wet June in an isolated English country house, with nobody to look at but yourself. Believe me, my dear child, it is the inordinate vanity of a woman which makes her imagine that she can be sufficient for her husband. Nothing but vanity. The cleverer a woman is, the more fully she recognizes her own insufficiency for the amusement of a man, and the more carefully (if she be wise) does she take care that this deficiency

in her shall never be forced upon his observation. Now, if you shut a man up with you in a country house, with the rain raining every day, as in Longfellow's poem, you do force it upon him most conspicuously. If you were not his wife, I dare say he would not tire of you, and he might even prefer a gray sky to a blue one. But as his wife!--oh, my dear, why, why don't you try and understand what a terrible penalty-weight you carry in the race? Write and tell me all about it. I shall be anxious. I am so afraid, my sweet little sister, that you think love is all moonlight and kisses, and forget that there are clouds in the sky and quarrels on earth. May heaven save you from both! P.S.--Do remember that this same love requires just as delicate handling as a cobweb does: if a rough touch break the cobweb, all the artists in the world can't mend it. There is a truth for you. If you prevent his going to Paris now, he will go in six months' time, and perhaps he will go without you. Perhaps he would be happier at Lanciano than at Coombe, and he would have all his own people; but he would want the *petits theatres* all the same. You are not wise, my poor pet; you should make him feel that you are one with his pleasures, not, that you and his pleasures are enemies. But it is no use to instil wisdom into you: you are very young, and very much in love. You look on all the natural distractions which he inclines to as so many rivals. So they may be; but *we don't beat our rivals by abusing them*. The really wise way is to tacitly show that we can be more attractive than they: if we cannot be so, we may sulk or sigh as we will, we shall be vanquished by them. You will think me very preachy-preachy, and perhaps you will throw me in the fire unread; but I must say just this much more. Dear, you are in love with Love, but underneath Love there is a real man, and real men are far from ideal creatures. Now, it is the real man that you want to consider, to humor, to study. If the real man be pleased, Love will take care of himself; whereas, if you bore the real man, Love will fly away. If you had been wise, my poor pet, I repeat, you would have found nothing so delightful as Judic and Chaumont, and you would have declared that the asphalt excelled all the Alps in the world. He does not love you the less because he wants to be *dans le mouvement*, to hear what other men are saying, and to smoke his cigar among his fellow-creatures.

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*From, the Duchessa dell'Aquila Fulva, Hotel des Roches Noires, Trouville, France, to the Principe di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset, Luton, Bedfordshire, England.*

Poor flower, in your box of wet moss, what has become of you? Are you dead, and dried in your wife's *hortus siccus*? She would be quite sure of you *then*, and I dare say much happier than if you were set forth in anybody else's bouquet. I try in vain to imagine you in that "perfectly proper" *milieu* (is not that correct English, "perfectly proper"?). Will you be dreadfully changed when one sees you again? There is a French proverb which says that "the years of joy count double." The days of *ennui* certainly count for years, and give us gray hairs before we are five-and-twenty. But you know I cannot pity you. You *would* marry an English girl because she looked pretty sipping her tea. I told you beforehand that you would be miserable with her, once shut up in the country. The episode of Toniello is enchanting. What people!--to put him in prison for a little bit of *chiasso* like that! You should never have taken his bright eyes and his mandoline to that doleful and damp land of precisians. What will they do with him? And what can you do without him? The weather here is admirable. There are numbers of people one knows. It is really very amusing. I go and dance every night, and then we play,--usually "bac," or roulette. Everybody is very merry. We all talk often of you, and say the *De Profundis* over you, my poor Piero. Why did your cruel destiny make you see a *Sainte-Nitouche* drinking tea under a lime-tree? I suppose *Sainte-Nitouche* would not permit it, else why not exchange the humid greenness of your matrimonial prison for the Rue des Planches and the Casino?

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*From the Prince di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset, to the Duchessa dell'Aquila Fulva, Trouville.*

*Carissima mia,--*

I have set light to the fuse! I have frankly declared that if I do not go out of this watery atmosphere and verdant Bastile I shall perish of sheer inanition and exhaustion. The effect of the declaration was for the moment such that I hoped, actually hoped, that she was going to get into a passion. It would have been so refreshing! After twenty-six days of dumb acquiescence and silent tears, it would have been positively delightful to have had a storm. But no! For an instant she looked at me with unspeakable reproach; the next her dove's eyes filled, she sighed, she left the room! Do they not say that feather beds offer an admirable defence against bullets? I feel like the bullet which has been fired into the feather bed. The feather bed is victorious. I see the Rue des Planches through the perspective of the watery atmosphere; the Casino seems to smile at me from the end of the interminable lime-tree avenue, which is one of the chief beauties of this house; but, alas! they are both as far off as if Trouville were in the moon. What could they do to me if I came alone? Do you know what they could do? I have not the remotest idea, but I imagine something frightful. They shut up their public-houses by force, and their dancing-places. Perhaps they would shut up me. In England they

have a great belief in creating virtue by Act of Parliament. In myself this enforced virtue creates such a revolt that I shall *tirer sur le mors*, and fly before very long. The admired excellence of this beautiful estate is that it lies in a ring-fence. I feel that I shall take a leap over that ring-fence. Do not mistake me, *cara mia Teresina*, I am exceedingly fond of my wife. I think her quite lovely, simple, saintly, and truly woman-like. She is exquisitely pretty, and entirely without vanity, and I am certain she is immeasurably my superior morally, and possibly mentally too. But--there is always such a long and melancholy "but" attached to marriage--she does not amuse me in the least. She is always the same. She is shocked at nearly everything that is natural or diverting. She thinks me unmanly because I dislike rain. She buttons about her a hideous, straight, water-proof garment, and walks out in a deluge. She blushes if I try to make her laugh at "Figaro," and she goes out of the room when I mention Trouville. What am I to do with a woman like this? It is an admirable type, no doubt. Possibly, if she had not shut me up in a country house in a wet June, with the thermometer at 10deg R., and the barometer fixedly at the word *Rainy*, I might have been always charmed with this St. Dorothea-like attitude and never have found out the monotony of it. But, as it is, I yawn till I dislocate my neck. She thinks me a heathen already. I am convinced that very soon she will think me a brute. And I am neither. I only want to get out, like the bird in the cage. It is a worn simile, but it is such a true one.

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*From the Duchessa dell'Aquila Fulva, Roches Noires, Trouville, to the Prince di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset.*

*Piero mio,--*

In marriage, the male bird is always wanting to get out when the female bird does not want him to get out; also, she is forever tightening the wires over his head, and declaring that nothing can be more delightful than the perch which she sits on herself. Come to us here. There are any quantities of birds here who ought to be in their cages, but are not, and manage to enjoy themselves *quand meme*. If only you had married Nicoletta! She might have torn your hair occasionally, but she would never have bored you. There is only one supreme art necessary for a woman: it is to thoroughly understand that she must never be a *seccatura*. A woman may be beautiful, admirable, a paragon of virtue, a marvel of intellect; but if she be a *seccatura--addio!* Whereas, she may be plain, small, nothing to look at in any way, and a very monster of sins, big and little; but if she know how to amuse your dull sex, she is mistress of you all. It is evident that this great art is not studied at Coombe-Bysset.

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*From the Princess di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset, to the Lady Gwendolen Chichester; St. Petersburg.*

OH, MY DEAR GWEN,--

It is too dreadful, and I am so utterly wretched! I cannot tell you what I feel. He is quite determined to go to Trouville by Paris at once, and just now it is such exquisite weather. It has only rained three times this week, and the whole place is literally a bower of roses of every kind. He has been very restless the last few days, and at last, yesterday, after dinner, he said straight out that he had had enough of Coombe, and he thought we might be seen at Homburg or Trouville next week. And he pretended to want every kind of thing that is to be bought at Paris and nowhere else. Paris!--when we have been together just twenty-nine days to-day! Paris!--I don't know why, but I feel as if it would be the end of everything. Paris!--we shall dine at restaurants; we shall stay at the Windsor; we shall go to theatres; he will be at his club, he belongs to the Petit Cercle and the Mirliton; we shall be just like anybody else,--just like all the million-and-one married people who are always in a crowd. To take one's new-born happiness to an hotel! It is as profane as it would be to say your prayers on the top of a drag. To me, it is quite horrible. And it will be put in "Galignani" directly, of course, that the "Prince and Princess San Zenone have arrived at the Hotel Bristol." And then all the pretty women who tried to flirt with him before will laugh and say, "There, you see, she has bored him already!" Everybody will say so, for they all know I wished to spend the whole summer at Coombe. If he would only go to his own country, I would not say a word. I am really longing to see his people, and his palaces, and the wonderful gardens, with their statues and their ilex woods, and the temples that are as old as the days of Augustus, and the fire-flies, and the magnolia-groves, and the peasants who are always singing; but he won't go there. He says it is a *seccatura*. Everything is a *seccatura*. He only likes places where he can meet all the world. "Paris will be a solitude too, never fear," he said, very petulantly; "for there will be all the *petits theatres*, and the open-air concerts, and we can dine in the Bois and down the river, and we can run to Trouville. It will be better than rain, rain, rain, and nothing to look at except your amiable aunt's big horses and big trees. I adore horses, and trees are not bad if they are planted away from the house, but, viewed as eternal companions, one may have too much of them." And I am his eternal companion; but it seems already I don't count! I have not said anything. I know one oughtn't. But Piero saw how it vexed me, and it made him cross. "*Cara mia*," he said, "why did

you not tell me before we married that you intended me to be buried forever in a box under wet leaves, like a rose that is being sent to the market? I should have known what to expect; and I do not like wet leaves." I could not help reminding him that he had been ever, ever so anxious to come to Coombe. Then he laughed; but he was very cross, too. "Could I tell, *anima mia*," he cried, "that Coombe was situated in a succession of lagoons, contains not one single French novel, is fifteen miles asunder from its own railway-station, and is blessed with a population of day-laborers? What man have I seen since I have been here, except your parish priest, who mumbles, wears spectacles, and tries to give me a tract against the Holy Father? In this country you do not know what it is to be warm. You do not know what sunshine is like. You take an umbrella when you go in the garden. You put on a water-proof to go and hear one little, shivering nightingale sing in a wet elder-bush. I tell you I am tired of your country, absolutely tired. You are an angel; no doubt you are an angel; but you cannot console me for the intolerable emptiness of this intolerable life, where there is nothing on earth to do but to eat, drink, and sleep, and drive in a dog-cart." All this he said in one breath, in a flash of forked lightning, as it were. Now that I write it down, it does not seem so very dreadful; but as he, with the most fiery scorn, the most contemptuous passion, said it, I assure you it was terrible. It revealed, just as the flash of lightning would show a gravel-pit, how fearfully bored he has been all the time I thought he was happy.

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*From the Lady Gwendolen Chichester, St. Petersburg, to the Princess di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset.*

Men are very easily bored, my dear, if they have any brains. It is only the dull ones who are not.

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*From the Princess di San Zenone to the Lady Gwendolen Chichester:*

If I believed what your cynical letter says, I should leave him to-morrow. I would never live through a succession of disillusiones and of insults.

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*From the Lady Gwendolen Chichester to the Princess di San Zenone.*

Where are your principles? Where are your duties? My dear little girl, you have married him; you must submit to him as he is. Marriages wouldn't last two days if just because the man yawned the woman ran away. Men always yawn. Hitherto, all San Zenone's faults appear to consist in the very pardonable fact that, being an Italian, he is not alive to the charms of bucolic England in rainy weather, and that, being a young man, he wants to see his Paris again. Neither of these seem to me irreparable crimes. Go to Paris and try to enjoy yourself. After all, if his profile be so beautiful, you ought to be sufficiently happy in gazing at it from the back of a *baignoir*. I grant that it is not the highest amatory ideal,—to rush about the boulevards in a daument, and eat delicious little dinners in the cafes, and laugh at Judic or Chaumont afterwards; but *l'amour peut se nicher* anywhere. And Love won't be any the worse for having his digestion studied by good cooks, and his possible *ennui* exorcised by good players. You see for yourself that the great passion yawns after a time. Turn back to what you call my cynical letter, and re-read my remarks upon Nature. By the way, I entirely deny that they are cynical. On the contrary, I inculcate on you patience, sweetness of temper, and adaptability to circumstances,—three most amiable qualities. If I were a cynic, I should say to you that Marriage is a Mistake, and two capital letters could hardly emphasize this melancholy truth sufficiently. But, as there are men and women, and, as I before observed, property, in the world, nothing better for the consolidation of rents and freeholds has, as yet, been discovered. I dare say Krapotkine in his prison could devise something better; but they are afraid of him. So we all jog on in the old routine, vaguely conscious that we are all blunderers, but indisposed for such a drastic remedy as would alone cure us. Just you remark to any lawyer that marriage is a mistake, as I have said before, and see what answer you will get. He will certainly reply to you that there is no other way of securing the transmission of property safely. I confess that this view of wealth makes me, for one, a most desperate Radical. Only think, if there were no property, we should all be frisking about in our happy valleys as free and as merry as little kids. I shouldn't now be obliged to put on all my war-paint and beads, like a savage, and go out to a dreadful court dinner, four hours long, because George has a "career" and thinks my suffering advances it. Oh, you happy child, to have nothing worse to do than to rattle down the Bois in a *milord*, and sup off a *matelote* by the lake with your Romeo!

*From the Princess di San Zenone, Coombe-Bysset, to the Lady Gwendolen Chichester, St. Petersburg.*

We are to leave for Paris and Trouville to-morrow. I have yielded, as you and mamma seemed to think it was my *duty* to do. But my life is over. I shall say farewell to all happiness when the gates of Coombe-Bysset close upon me. Henceforth we shall be like everybody else. However, you cannot reproach me any longer with being selfish, nor can he. There is a great friend of his, the Duchess of Aquila Fulva, at Trouville. She writes to him very often, I know. He never offers to show me her letters. *I believe the choice of Trouville is her doing.* Write to me at Paris, at The Windsor.

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*From the Lady Gwendolen Chichester, St. Petersburg, to the Princess di San Zenone, Hotel Windsor, Paris.*

MY POOR CHILD!--

Has the green-eyed monster already invaded your gentle soul because he doesn't show you his own letters? My dear, no man who was not born a *our* would show a woman's letters to his wife. Surely you wish your hero to know the A, B, C of gentle manners! I am delighted you are going into the world; but if you only go as "a duty" I am afraid the results won't be sunshiny. "Duty" is such a *very* disagreeable thing. It always rolls itself up like a hedgehog, with all its prickles out, turning forever round and round on the axle of its own self-admiration. If you go to Trouville, and wherever else you do go, *en martyr*, my dear, you will give the mischievous duchess, if she be mischievous, a terrible advantage over you at starting. If you mean to be silent, unpleasant, and enwrapped in a gloomy contemplation of your own merits and wrongs, don't blame *him* if he spend his time at the Casino with his friend, or somebody worse. I am quite sure you *mean* to be unselfish, and you fancy you are so, and all the rest of it, quite honestly; but, in real truth, as I told you before, you are only an egotist. You would rather keep this unhappy Piero on thorns beside you than see him enjoy himself with other people. Now, I call that shockingly selfish; and if you go in that spirit to Trouville he will soon begin to wish, my dear child, that he had never had a fancy to come over to a London season. I can see you so exactly! Too dignified to be cross, too offended to be companionable; silent, reproachful, terrible!

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*From the Lady Mary Bruton, Roches Noires, Trouville, to Mrs. D'Arcy, British Embassy, Berlin.*

July 15th.

... Among the new arrivals here are the San Zenone. You remember my telling you of their marriage some six weeks ago. It was quite *the* marriage of the season. They really were immensely in love with each other, but that stupid month down in the country has done its usual work. In a rainy June, too! Of course any poor Amorina would emerge from his captivity bedraggled, dripping, and disenchanting. She is really very pretty,--quite lovely, indeed,--but she looks fretful and dull; her handsome husband, on the contrary, is as gay as a lark which has found the door of its cage wide open one morning. There is here a great friend of his, a Duchessa dell'Aquila Fulva. *She* is very gay too; she is always perfectly dressed, and chattering from morning to night in shrill Italian or voluble French. She is the cynosure of all eyes as she goes to swim in a rose-colored *maillot*, with an orange-and-gold Eastern burnous flung about her artistically. She has that wonderful Venetian coloring which can stand a contrast and glow of color which would simply kill any other woman. She is very tall, and magnificently made, and yet uncommonly graceful. Last night she was persuaded to dance a *salterello* with San Zenone at the Maison Persane, and it was marvellous. They are both such handsome people, and threw such wonderful *brio*, as they would call it, into the affair. The poor little, pretty princess, looking as fair and as dull as a primrose in a shower, sat looking on dismally. Stupid little thing!--as if *that* would do her any good! A few days ago Lord Hampshire arrived off here in his yacht. He was present at the *salterello*, and as I saw him out in the gardens afterwards with the neglected one, sitting beside her in the moonlight, I presume he was offering her sympathy and consolation. He is a heavy young fellow, but exceedingly good-humored and kind-hearted. *He* would have been in heaven in the wet June at Coombe-Bysset; but she refused him, silly little thing! I am quite angry with her: she has had her own way, and she won't make the best of that. I met her and her rejected admirer riding together this morning towards Villerville, while the beautiful prince was splashing about in the water with his Venetian friend. I see a great many eventual complications ahead. Well, they will all be the fault of that Rainy June!